

Letter No. 28

31st December 1918 to
2nd January 1919

Dearest Family:

Where did I leave off? Just when I came home from Tours wasn't it? I'll go on from there anyway. That is, I will if I can straighten it all out - the next five days were so jammed that they're more or less a confused whirl in my mind.

As I wrote, my test of whether to put on the whole Christmas programme or not was how F.T. had got on during my absence. Well, I came home to find a very amusing state of affairs. On the steamer coming over, she had met a man - also Y - who had made the trip a pretty exciting one for her. They'd played together in Paris too, and then he was sent to Italy and she here. How he ever worked it I don't know, but the morning before I left a knock came at the door and there he was! He'd come for a day but when I got back he was still here, and so anxious to help (so's to be allowed to stay I think) that everything had gone swimmingly. F.T. has lots of good sense. She was awfully glad to see him, personally, but couldn't quite get over his lying down on his own job just to see her, so I've an idea he put his own chances of getting her considerably back by coming. However, we kept him over - Christmas, and he was a great help. He took the principal part in my play and made himself generally useful.-----

Interrupted just there by a hurry call from the tent. A soldier, just over the flu, who wouldn't admit he felt badly because he was afraid of being left behind when the Division moves out, took an eight mile hike this morning and collapsed in front of the tent. I gave him brandy and sent to the hospital for help. Word came back they couldn't be bothered. Gosh! I'm sorry if you don't like "Gosh" but nothing else expresses it. I went up to the hospital as fast as I could put it and found the Captain in charge. He said he'd received the message but didn't think it necessary to do anything. Well - I'm not sure quite what I said, but anyway I said it. It's the third instance of rank neglect I've known of from this same doctor. His whole attitude is that a sick soldier is faking - unless he happens to die. I didn't say a whole lot that I wanted to, but I guess I got off enough to make myself pretty unpopular. However the doctor came at once to the Y. He said he had no place for the man in the hospital. I remarked that pretty nearly any room would be better than an unheated tent. He said there was no way of getting him there. I gently suggested that the table upon which he was lying would make an excellent stretcher. Finally the poor fellow got to the hospital - how he'll be treated I don't know. Anyhow I feel better! The boys can't demonstrate, the officers don't. I guess I rather took advantage of my sex. I hope it did him good.

Now I'll come back to my muttons - my A.W.O.L. black sheep. When I found everything going so well I decided to throw the throttle to full steam ahead, and go to it. I took an evening off and finished the play. Captain Grant had it type-written for me and I got the cast working on the first scene a whole day before I had any idea just how the second was going to end. It was difficult to get the cast. Almost anyone will be willing to make a fool of himself, but mighty few want to stand up before their fellow men in a serious part. I fell back on my Bible class. Two of them were keen about it. And I scraped up another shepherd from the Post Office. After I'd chosen my men their captains relieved them from duty and detailed them to me. It'd tickle my sense of humor to have soldiers detailed to act a Christmas play!

And oh my! how poor those rehearsals were. I coached and coached, interpreted parts, showed actions, tried to give them the feel of it all, but it was discouraging work. On the morning of the 24th two of them still didn't know their lines and one couldn't pronounce properly even those he did know. When you have to choose your actors because of their religious convictions rather than any histrionic ability - well! they may be good to their mothers, but it's hard on the coach. The play itself was very simple - it took only twenty minutes to act. Two scenes - the conventional ones - the hillside with the shepherds and the angel, and the stable at Bethlehem. You can easily imagine it. I wasn't making an effort to be startling, all I wanted was to give the boys both sides of Christmas - Santa Claus and hurrah boys in the afternoon and the Bible story at night.