

8 July 1918

Dearest Father:

For the first and probably the last time in my canteen existence I have an evening off, a real chance to write a decent letter. My! this is luxury! I'm sitting at my window in the cool of the evening looking out on the last of the sunset screened by big quiet trees, and I've a clear conscience about taking the time off. You see I've practically moved out from the village canteen, and I don't open the grove until tomorrow, so there's just this breathing space between. Considering that I've spent the day getting together the materials for 133 gallons of lemonade for the Glorious Fourth, perhaps a breathing space is not altogether unallowable. It's not really lemonade, that's too expensive, it's prune and apple and lemon juice all mixed up together. One of the mess sergeants cooked the fruit for me today, and he scorched the prunes. I'm hoping when it's sufficiently diluted it won't be bad, but I'm awfully sorry about it. I'm counting on 33 gallons of undiluted juice, but I think I have more, some order. You'll all lie right down and die in rows when I tell you what I've just been doing. Teaching French!! You see lots of the men don't even know what "Non, Non" means, and are perfectly helpless when it comes to asking for food or washing or anything. I got a big blackboard (literally a blackboard for it is simply a board painted black) and wrote about three short sentences on it. "Do you take in washing" "This is not my wash" "I would like some potatoes and two eggs" I put the blackboard against a tree and 20 or 30 men gathered around it was the shyest class I've ever taught and the most amusing. I had a grand time, I hope they did. It lasted only about 20 minutes and afterwards I noticed a good many gather around the board (I left it on purpose) and copy the sentences. A lot of them came to me afterwards and asked how to say "Good Night" and "I don't understand French" etc. I do hope it be a go. It is not only that I want to help them with their French, but also it's such a good way of getting them to talk.

I've been here five days now and lots of the men are becoming individuals, but lots and lots have arrived very recently and are still just a mass. It's lots of fun to meet them in the street, I catch so many different expressions. Some stare right ahead unconcernedly but most of them show some cognizance of my passing. Some look shy, but when I smile or speak, a grin flashes out and it's easy to see they've been waiting for it, some look expectant, some curious, some familiar. I'm so afraid of getting a stereotyped smile, but when every man, woman and child in the village tells you "good evening" as well as all the soldiers - and you can't move two steps without meeting somebody - it's difficult not to. Even in these few days it's possible to tell the difference between the old and new men. The old all look friendly, the new shy and curious.

I've been the only American woman in town until tonight, but two more arrived tonight, so we ought to get going in full blast very soon.

I sent my last letter from the Y.M.C.A. Headquarters for this division. I guess I'll go back to that night and tell up.