Letter 1

Dear Mother,

…the Allies are the victors, and the world is a garden of joy, but what has been the cost. Besides the towers that are nicely injured, a thousand of them in France and Belgium are in desolation and ruins, some of them merely the cornerstones standing, worse than any ancient ruins in existence. Thousands and thousands homeless, orphans, penniless. Many and many a time as I have passed through these places I have said to myself “Poor, poor France, may her day of victory be near. I hope that after this war no man will dare to call himself a German with pride. England, France, Belgium, Italy, the Central Powers, America, and many others have lost the flower of their youth, for what?

The Argonne will always live in the memory of our boys, these many a poor sammie lies mouldering away. I have heard that all American dead are to be taken home in the course of time. I hope it’s true. I will close, Ans soon,

From your loving son,

Alfred(dated November 14, 1918, sent from Base Hospital 114, Bordeaux, France to Crandull, Tennessee)

Letter 2

Dear Bert,

Just a few lines to let you know I am alright, hoping you are the same… At the present time we are in dugouts. The weather is simply awful, raining day after day and especially night after night…To tell you the truth, while writing this letter I am wet through to the skin and not a dry thing for a change. We have got our winter fur coats and gum boots, but the latter cause more curses than you can imagine, for instance last night I was sent off to select dugouts for our platoon, which is number 37. It was pitch dark, no light allowed and in a strange place, well honestly I fell over at least 20 times got smothered in mud from head to feet and on the top of that wet though for it rained in torrents. On a round of inspection this morning to see if all were ‘comfortable’ I was ‘blinded’ up hill and down dale, ‘Sergeant this’ and ‘Sergeant that’.

How can you expect men to live in this, and then to put a dampener on the lot, was the language from the occupiers who unfortunately were in a residence that fell in during the night. They took shelter under a tree from 2am after looking for me for half an hour or so, but they could not find me, for the only thing that would shift me, after settling down, if I may call it that, would be a ‘Jack Johnson’ and then I would have no option.

While in the trenches last week John and I were up to our knees in water and got our gum boots half full. The line is a bit quiet lately and only now and again do we get a shelling, but one gets used to it. That, to give you an idea, is like sitting at Paddington and hearing the engines screech.

After our stretch this time I shall be looking forward for a short leave for I have been here nearly three months now and we stand a good chance. Well I must now conclude…Yours sincerely

Jack Symons

P.S. Every other home down near the rest camp is an Estaminet (small French café) where they sell what they call ‘beer’, and as much as I like a drop of good beer I have given the stuff out here ‘best’ for is awful muck.