

HEADQUARTERS PORT OF EMBARKATION  
NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA  
OFFICE OF THE SUPERVISOR OF NON-MILITARY ACTIVITIES  
ROOM 16, SCHMELZ BUILDING

August 30, 1918.

Dear Margaret:

I shall have to be very careful in writing this letter because I am making a carbon copy to send to Gertrude in answer to the letter from her which I am enclosing. So if I seem cold, just remember that this is not one of my regular letters to you, - only just a family letter to tell about the events of the last few days. With these preliminary precautions I shall proceed with my labor-saving experiment.

On Tuesday the Social Hygiene Demonstration became the possessor of a Dodge car. And the same day the Fuel Administrator issued a statement asking the public not to use cars on Sunday, - and that after the staff had planned to rent the car on a mileage basis and to visit Jamestown and Yorktown to see the places where our early history was made. I would like to catch the man who told the F.A. that we had a car. Well, anyway, I have had one lesson in running the thing, and I am almost as proficient in it as I am in teasing the typewriter.

On Tuesday evening I received a telegram from Mrs. Rippin saying that there was a bad state of affairs at Petersburg and wouldn't I please rectify. The report was that the prostitutes who crowded the jail were being marched through the principal street in gangs to the clinic for treatment. How the picture stimulates the imagination! This gave me a good excuse for visiting that very interesting city, although I cannot see just why anyone should think that Petersburg troubles were mine just then. As the trouble was in Miss Brown's territory, I told her about it, and she decided it was time she made an initial visit to the place. I know you will be glad to hear that I had the pleasure of traveling with an interesting young lady,

I did my usual race to go out to my room to pack a bag in five minutes and make the train - the five five in the afternoon. We reached Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy in two hours of riding through the woods. Cool, ferny, damp woods that are probably there because mosquitoes have fought off the settlers for hundreds of years, and have devitalized them with frequent doses of the plasmedia of malaria. At Richmond we took a car between stations intending to check our bags and get something to eat before starting for Petersburg. But just as we approached the station, a priest in a touring car called out and asked me if I was going to Petersburg. We both hopped in and had a delightful trip of twenty-two miles over a highway wet by a recent thundershower. We passed several big places although most of the surrounding country was just woods. One large place had a large dairy herd grazing over a lawn, while nearby under the trees was a herd of elk. We reached Petersburg at 8:30, an hour earlier than we had expected, and had dinner at the hotel. Rooms had been engaged for us by the extra-cantonment lieutenant, Lt. Orcutt. As it was too early for bed and too late to do any business we took in a movie to wind up the day.

When my long-distance phone message <sup>to Lt. Orcutt</sup> arrived, Colonel Carter was around. He evidently was a little deaf, because he protested against reserving two rooms in a crowded town for two officers traveling on expense account. He always shared his room with another officer and took people into the other berth of his stateroom, etc., etc. They finally made him understand that the other officer was a lady and I

suppose he has forgiven me my gross extravagance. Colomela Carter is the Public Health Service man who helped Gergas clean up Panama. He is traveling around blessing the anti-malarial work in the vicinity of the camps.

And the next we did our work. We called promptly at nine at the office of Lt. Orcutt, but like many of the night-working vice hunters he was not yet there. So we left a note and took a look at the town. We found the city hall and went inside, where we found a talkative old janitor, who gave us considerable information, and opened the council chamber for us. The building was not very old, having been built as recently as 1835, or thereabouts. Nevertheless the steeple was a queer thing suggesting eccentricity much greater than its antiquity.

At one side of the city hall was the jail, and the women whose parades had scandalized the community were very much in evidence. They almost bulged out between the bars, seemingly, particularly the black ones. They were engaged in the commendable pastime of washing their clothes and hanging them on the bars to dry. The washings gave the quite a decorative effect. The good old janitor directed us to a park nearby where the soldiers of Petersburg drilled in the war of eighteen twelve. We read the inscriptions, and believed them implicitly. I had however, a lurking doubt as to the authenticity of Pocahontas' washbowl, or whatever they called it. It was a stone thing set up in the park on a little pedestal. I didn't see it close by, so I learned nothing about early Indian systems of plumbing or even of sculpture. It didn't seem just proper to me that she should have had her bathroom in the park.

When we returned to the office we found Lt. Orcutt expecting us and also Miss McCully, Protective worker who is soon to leave Hopewell for the neighboring city of Hopewell, where the DU Pents have their big powder factory. I also saw Miss What's-her-name who would have been Gertrude's superior officer if Gertrude had accepted the position that was offered her. It was at Petersburg that Miss Rippin wanted to station her. We found that things were not as serious as they might have been, and that they could probably be seen greatly improved. The parade was quite an orderly affair, - something like a fashion show, I presume. The main trouble was that the city needed an isolation hospital where it could treat this mob of infected prostitutes in a decent way before putting them to work under supervision or sending them on to one of the prison farms.

During the remainder of the forenoon Miss McCully showed Miss Brown and me the Detention Home, the interior of the jail, and the clinic of the public health service for venereal diseases. The detention home where Gertrude would have slept was an old house which was built when its location was in the fashionable part of town. Lafayette is said to have called there. More recently the neighborhood became less respectable, but the place still has some of the air of its former grandeur. They have only ten girls under observation there.

In the afternoon the health officer of the city took us all in his car and we visited a building at the Fair Grounds and one at the Peer Farm to see if they could be converted into a hospital. But I must skip these foolish details and get out into the country.

I told the doctor that I wanted to see two things if they were easily accessible, the great Petersburg crater and peanuts growing. As we had finished our afternoon's work the doctor devoted the rest of the afternoon showing us some true Southern Hospitality. We went out ~~xxxxxxx~~ east of the city and walked around over the earthworks which the Confederates had used during the twelve months of the siege. Far away over the rolling ground we could see where the Federal troops had their lines from which they threw their cannon balls into the city. Dr. Martin the health Officer kept us interested with a fund of anecdotes not found in the ordinary history. He was one

year old when the siege ended, and his father was shot through the lung during the fighting in front of the city. He says the boys used to watch the shells coming through the air and would shout "That one's mine!" and then would ~~run~~<sup>rush</sup> toward the spot where it fell to pick up the pieces.

We saw the monuments erected to the various Union troops which were engaged in the fighting. As we approached the crater we passed a monument erected to Massachusetts soldiers, and between the monument and the crater was a field of peanuts in full bloom. And for the first time it dawned on me that the peanut was a pea nut because it grew on a pea vine and in a pea pod. I had always supposed that it was merely a matter of resemblance. Here were these neat rows of legumes nicely hilled up, and looking like a field of dwarf beans except that the leaves were more like pea leaves, and the pods were buried in the ground. I did not exclaim like Lt. Orcutt that there were no nuts on the plants as yet. No, I proceeded to dig away the earth and I uncovered the nicest little bunch of baby Peanuts attached to the feet of the stalk by juicy little stems. I picked a few of them and am sending them as souvenirs of the Petersburg crater as well as botanical specimens. If Peggy has reached the collector stage she could mount them on a card with proper label and start the historical section of her museum. For the botanical section I am sending some of the foliage and some of the withered little yellow blossoms. Please ~~me~~ hand them to the curator.

It is a mystery to me how the pods ever were able to work their way down ~~in~~ into the earth so far from the blossoms. It is a still greater mystery how the fertilizing elements of the pollen can travel from the tiny yellow blossoms in the top of the plant down the stem and out to the embryo peanuts. Doesn't that have to happen, Miss Wild-flower Botanist?

After having excavated for peas, we went to the nearby crater. The Confederate battery which was blown up had been located at the point of a salient. The remnants of the earthworks leading from it are still distinct. On the near side of the crater is a little house filled with all sorts of old junk collected from the battle field, such as rifles, bullets, and pieces of exploded shells. The pit itself is overgrown with trees of considerable size, all of which have taken root and grown since the war, giving an idea of the lapse of time. The trees give a quiet beauty to the place which must have been entirely lacking when the fields were disfigured by entrenchments and shot and shell. The grassgrown crater itself has doubtless been partly filled by erosion. I am sending a picture postal - one of the hideous colored variety - which gives an idea of the size of the hole and the age of the trees that have sprung up since the terrible fight. On the banks of the crater were a few wildflowers including goldenrod and a very pretty yellow poppy-like blossom. I am sending a piece of goldenrod from the bank with instructions that you are not to irritate that sensitive nose of yours by smelling of it. I am also sending some of the yellow blossoms that grew on the bank. ~~Some~~ Some more vegetation for Peg's or Gertrude's museum.

The history of the crater as told us by Dr. Martin is very interesting. Pennsylvania miners in the Union forces dug a long tunnel ~~xxxxxx~~ and placed a vast quantity of powder directly under the Confederate battery. It was planned to blow up the battery at daybreak and get through the Confederate lines through the break. Troops were massed for the purpose and the long fuse was lighted, but the charge did not go off. After waiting an hour or two, two men volunteered to crawl through the tunnel and find out what was the matter. They found that the fuse had gone out at a point where it had been spliced, and they lit the fuse and crawled away, of course with great risk to themselves. The charge had been placed with great accuracy under the battery, and when the mine exploded, men, earth, and guns were thrown high in the air with streaks of fire in between. The Federal troops then charged into the crater under the cross fire of ~~the~~ two batteries on the right and left, it being now broad daylight. The Federal troops kept crowding into the hole and became jammed and

helpless. In the meanwhile a detachment of Confederate troops came up and slaughtered many hundred of the struggling men in the pit. The attempt to penetrate the lines was a failure, but later the Union forces broke through and the fall of Richmond was inevitable.

Dr. Martin showed us the perch where Lincoln and Grant saw each other for the last time.

On the way back to town we could see Camp Lee far away on the right. Glimpses of a water tower and of barracks were seen, evidences of the fourth great war involving Petersburg, not counting the Indian wars. A fort was built at or near the site of Petersburg at the falls of the Appomattox way back in 1645 for defence against the Indians. I saw no evidence of the Indians, unless you are willing to accept Pocohomas' washbowl as authentic. I have already mentioned visiting the drill ground where the troops were drilled in the war of 1812. It remained now to see some evidence of the war of the Revolution, for Petersburg was very much in that fight.

In 1781 the British came up the James from Williamsburg and marched up and defeated the American troops under Baron Steuben, who were greatly outnumbered. General Phillips was in command of the British troops. We saw his grave in a very old cemetery around the old Blandford Church which was built in 1735. Dr. Martin took us into the church. It has been restored and stained glass windows have been placed there by the various southern states. It was evident that Dr. Martin felt that the old ruin was more interesting than the restored church, and I do not doubt that he is right. The grave yard has great antiquity. I saw graves dated 1702. Of course there were many interesting stones with lengthy epitaphs. ~~They~~

General Phillips is the General who was taken into a cellar in Petersburg during the fighting with American troops in order to protect him against the bombardment. He was dying of dysentery at the time and he exclaimed that he wished the Americans would let him die in peace. He certainly has a peaceful grave in the quiet old cemetery.

When we got back into town we passed the British American Tobacco Company and were told that all of its product was shipped abroad. You can smell tobacco when walking down the Main street out of sight of any of the factories. It is said that more tobacco is manufactured ~~in~~ in Petersburg than in any other place in the world. There are enormous factories with great round barrels of tobacco in evidence everywhere. How the world does cherish its drug habits!

When we reached the city the Doctor first treated us to sodawater and then invited us to dinner at his house. While his cook was preparing the dinner we sat in his garden and saw his vegetables, including okra. ~~xxxxxx~~ We had a very nice dinner including spoon bread, which seemed very delicious now that corn bread is usually deprived of the good ingredients which make it delicious. I am sure that there were good milk and eggs, etc in the spoonbread, for it was delicious when liberally smeared with butter. After dinner we returned to our work and talked and planned till after midnight about hospitals and jails and social service. Finally we broke up the meeting and I had a few hours sleep before the clerk of the hotel woke me at half past four so that I could get an early train back to Newport News. Miss Brown stayed another day to visit Hopewell where the Du Ponts have their big ~~xxxxxx~~ munitions plant, and to attend a meeting on the hospital in Petersburg the ~~xxxxxx~~ following evening. So much for Petersburg.

I am sending some postal cards, please keep them, so we can paste one or two of them in a scrap book, if we see fit, later.

I am forwarding a nice long letter from Gertrude. I am so glad that Mrs. Rippin offered Gertrude a salary at least equivalent to her Berkeley pay,

if the room and board is taken into consideration. I didn't want to feel responsible for getting her into a position at less salary after assuring her that in all probability she could get the equivalent of her Berkeley salary. So she is now in war work making a hit with shrewd business men instead of working under school principals. I think that she will like it, particularly as she has already made contacts with War Camp Community workers and will doubtless be given a chance to contribute ideas to the whole community experiment.

On the day I returned from Petersburg I received two nice letters from you and was indeed happy to hear from my good old sweetheart- careful, Old Man, careful! remember the carbon copy.-and I was very glad to feel that a definite date had been set for the arrival of my lovely family in Washington, i.e. Friday the thirteenth of September at 7:45 PM. Come ahead, I'll be there and have at least a temporary place for you. That is all I can say now because plans are made and changed so rapidly and I have been able to get no definite dates from Major - excuse me - Colonel Snow. This doubtless because he is waiting for definite orders himself. I think that I can get a leave to meet you if I have not been transferred in time. Any way I am so glad to have a definite date to look forward to, now that the first of September has arrived without you. For I have been writing three evenings on this letter and it is now the first of September. Tm

IT IS ONLY TWELVE DAYS TO SEPTEMBER THIRTEENTH#####THIRTEEN DAYS#####13#13#13#13###

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I don't think much of your differential diagnosis between nostalgia and the "yaller janders" in Kate's case. No wonder she came down with homesickness when her intestine was so inflamed as to shut off her bile duct. I suppose you diagnose jaundice in a colored lady by looking her in the eye.

I trust you will all reprimand Victor severely for putting into his letter military information which had to be deleted by the censor. Oh, joy! And Victor was always so cautious about the regulations and keeping secrets. If you reke him too much his letters will get so short as to lose all news value except as evidence that he is somewhere in France.

Please don't ever write to me on a typewriter. I just love your handwritten letters. May they be long and often whenever I am away from home.

The quartermaster at Washington writes that the claim for damages can wait until I reach Washington and can inspect the furniture.

We gave up our trip to Jamestown Island and Yorktown and Williamsburg for today on account of the Fuel Administrator's order, but we are planning to go to-morrow if the weather is good. It will probably be my last chance if Sundays are barred. Labor Day is all that will save the trip for us. One of the early trips we must make out of Washington is to Mt. Vernon. I hope you will come down to Newport News and Old Point Comfort with me on the boat sometime before the weather gets cold. My, but won't it be fine to have a sweetheart again! And those lovely children! I suppose Ruth has forgotten her father entirely by now. She probably regards the fathers as superfluous anyway.

I hope you will forgive this long book as a substitute for a letter. It is a good thing that you are coming home to release the vast amount of time spent in daily - or almost daily- letter writing. I would rather spend it in visiting with you and romping with the children. Ask Peggy when she is going with me to see the monkey eat his mush with a spoon.

Affectionately,

Wilbur.