26

Reclaration Day 1918.
At the hangers at a school
of gunnery in Southern France.
6:15 am.

Dear Cousin Frank,

I shall use the time while waiting my turn at the targets in writing you of my recent experiences. It is quite windy here and every time a machine is started a cloud of dust covers me and this letter and it looks like I am writing on sand paper.

After practically finishing my course of instruction at T. I was sent here for instruction in aerial gunnery. Our own school for this purpose hasn't yet been completed and so we are using the French school. It is a very large institution - of course it has to be quite extensive for this sort of work. The course is most interesting and I wish that I could go into detail and tell you of all the interesting things that I am doing, but it is not permitted. Just imagine all the conceivable methods of giving instruction for aerial gunnery - shooting from the ground at a moving target. Shooting at a fixed target while you are moving,

and shooting when both you and the target are moving. The camp is located only a few miles from a most attractive sea resort where we are permitted to spend the "week-ends". Through a mutual friend, another American officer, I have met a most delightful French family who have been very kind and hospitable. They are from Paris, and have a cottage in the pines near the sea where they are refugeeing from the summer heat of Paris and that long distance Hun gun. And, yes Sir, they have a charming daughter, Mlle. Germaine Hussabuan, she very atheletic, very pretty, and quite quite American and speaks ~~French~~ English perfectly. ~~Together~~ We have had sails and horseback rides together. On one of the latter occasions I actually had an English speaking horse, one from Canada. He was about the size of Governor and his gaits were very similar except that he lacked Governor's single foot and it made me homesick for a ride around the reservoir with you (however I must confess that for the moment I would hardly have swapped partners).

I went to church with her last Sunday morning. It was a Catholic church and communion service. The church is fairly old, quite large, not very attractive

outside but very handsome inside: the vaulting and the window tracery were beautiful. The service was very formal and elaborate with many candles, gay rich robes, the jingling of bells and lots of standing up and sitting down and this change of posture would always take place while I was engrossed in the study of the window tracery or something of the kind and I would be brought too by a yank on my coat tail by Madamoiselle to find myself standing as conspicous as a lone tree in a desert. I couldn't help thinking through this elaborate service in this pompus church that God was just as near us in ~~a~~ our simple little unpretencious church in Bronxville as is here - that after all the real church is in the heart of a man and not in his handiwork.

The Americans are making a very creditable showing here in their shooting. My score so far is five times the average for the school. I hope that it is that superior to the German average - at any rate you may depend upon it - that if we are ever equipped the Huns will know that we are ~~ha~~ not only in the war but in the air.

I finish my training here tomorrow or next day

and I will probably be sent back to T.. to resume my training there which is within a week of completion. I have no way of telling what to expect after that - I hope, however, that it will be action of some kind for I am getting very impatient.

I am constantly interrupted in writing this by getting up to watch the Frenchmen land; they are having a great number of smashes recently and they are rotten on landings.

One of our men ran into an eight foot target balloon yesterday filled with hydrogen - that is the balloon was. It was exploded by the engine exhaust and tore most of the cloth off the fuselage - The didnt catch fire fortunately and he was able to land without wrecking but it singed his hair and clothes and gave him a good jolt.

At T.. one of my friends went out on his cross country trip. Furnished with a map and compass the trip is quite simple. As a matter of fact as soon as you reach 1500 metres altitude you can see the town on a clear day. Well - my friend was very confident and endeavored to make the trip without referring to ~~his~~ either his compass or his map. He had been told that the aviation

field where he was to land was quite large and one of its most conspicuous features was a large red water tower. Off he goes, and after traveling along for some time he looks about for the large aviation camp with the large red water tower. Yes - there it was off to the left. He made for it, landed and had started for the office to get his paper signed when he recognised it as the field which he had just left, his own field. In answer to a question from the Chief de Piste, he said that he had had a bit of engine trouble and thought he had better return and have the mechanics give it the once over. He got back in the machine and made the trip successfully, but you may depend upon it - he used his map. It wasn't until several days later that he had the courage to tell us about this incident and I imagine he's been regretting it ever since.

Another chap got lost and he stayed up so long looking around for a familiar bit of landscape (as a matter of fact, he had run off his map) till his gasoline supply was exhausted and he was compelled to make a forced landing. He selected six or seven

possible fields and he had sufficient altitude to make any one of them possible. But he changed his choice frequently and finally didn't land in any one of them; instead he undershot his field - knocked a chimney off of a house with his running gear and the machine kept going - He went between two trees which stripped ~~the~~ both wings and the fusilage kept going - hit a stone wall and the fusilage stopped and he kept going and landed on his face in a newly plowed field - without any personal damage except a few minor scratches.

There is quite a strong wind blowing this morning which makes "taxing" a machine on the ground very difficult. A few days ago a Frenchman got started around in a circle and couldn't stop. A lone mechanic ran to his assistance and chased around and around after the machine trying to grab hold of one of the struts to steady the machines course. It was a tight race. The strut was always just a wee bit out of reach. After making the circle about four times the race was terminated by the Frenchman giving the machine more gas - the tail of the machine struck the mechanic just back of the knees making him sit down very suddenly and with great force on the back of his lap.

The Frenchman continued merrily on ~~his~~ with his "chavel de bois" and wound up on his nose. It is not a funny thing to narate but it was sidesplitting to witness. I picked up a piece of his broken propeller and have carved a paper knife out of it with my pocket knife, during odd moments while waiting to fly. It is similar to one I once made for Aunt Margie - You will find it more serviceable than it appears for it is made of mahogany and is quite strong. I hope that you will use it. On one side you will notice a bas relief - you would never guess it so I had better tell you that it is supposed to be you. Not that I have forgotten you one bit but my hand lacks the cunning to reproduce in such small miniture. I drew this sketch a few minutes ago to show one of my friends whose likeness I was trying to carve.

The view here from a high altitude is most beautiful How I wish you could see it - and Cousin Kate for she has always wanted to ride in an aeroplane. The whole landscape seems shaped like a shallow saucer. There are great stretches of dark green pine forests, tiny villages off in the distance, roads running white through the forests and the lighter green fields. There are three good size lakes and the great ocean beyond. I saw a convoy of ships off the coast a few days ago, and

it was a great temptation to swoop down and play with them but if the motor ever went wrong while out of gliding distance of the field you are distinctly "out of luck" and these motors are not as dependable as might be. It gives me a sense of nearness to home to look at that ocean and to realize that right on the other side of it America lies that the same water wash both shores.

I received a note from Chas. H. a few days ago. he enclosed some B'ville Reviews which I enjoyed. I shall endeavor to go over to see him when I return to T.. which is within easy flying distance of his town. I should like very much to have a get together with him.

It is quite warm here and the schedule of work is arranged accordingly. We report to the flying field, 1 mile away, at 6 am., fly until 11, lunch at 11.45 then nothing to do until 4-30, flying again until 8-30 pm - dinner at 9-15. We use most of the noon period for a siesta and part for a swim in the lake.

It is all very nice except for the mess and it is impossible, we manage to make out by suplimenting jamb pickles etc from the canteen American and by gorging when we go to town.

I know how busy you have been, but it has been several months since I have received a letter from you - a note would do me lots of good.

With a great deal of love,

Penrose.