Hilton U. Brown, Jr.

One of Three Brothers
in Artillery
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LETTERS AND VERSES

HE FOUGHT 'GAINST GLOOM

Now when I die, which won't be long,
Don't sing a melancholy song,
Or pine and sigh or dim your eye
  With tears that wet your lashes;
And do not wear those clothes so black,
Or let dull sorrow bend your back,
Or rave and swear, or tear your hair,
  Or on your head put ashes.
Just dig for me the welcome grave,
And let a banner o'er me wave,
So grand and free and peacefully,
  But let it all be snappy!
Put on my tomb my humble name,
And let below it words proclaim:
"He fought 'gainst gloom." The fight resume!
Go make some others happy.

[1]
HILTON U. BROWN, JR.

LIFE IN THE OFFICERS' TRAINING SCHOOL

Ft. Benjamin Harrison

Indianapolis, Indiana,

May 29, 1917.

DEAR CHRIS—Work has been getting harder out here as our toughening process goes on. We get up early and do not rest until noon, then they get us out right after noon mess and run us through fantastic and snake-like formations that are presumed to be company lines. This is supposed to cover an hour and a half, but after the period is over it usually takes the best part of another hour to find little squads that have gone astray—thrown off, as it were, by the centrifugal force of the startling company formations. My squad started out as thirteenth in line this morning and ended up some place in a dense thicket far to the south of the drill grounds. We are having combat drill now, which means lying on one's stomach in the wet grass for long intervals, after which we arise and dash over one hundred yards of ground, only to haul ourselves into a fresh mud puddle or a pile of rocks or the remains of a precious picnic.

After butchering up an imaginary foe and our only pair of trousers, we assemble in the squad room and the captain asks us to explain in detail the different movements gone through previously on the parade ground. It is then that the unsophisticated and exhausted "embryo officer" learns what should have been done when he led his innocent squad from its charted place in line to some lonely spot far from madding throngs, and converted it from a well-organized and good-natured unit of eight men in double rank, to a congested, swearing tangle of blood-thirsty ruffians.

DEAR DAD—You will see by this letter head that we are in a New York hotel. It is crowded to the guards with officers and we have to keep saluting constantly. We have traveled all over the big city, in taxies, busses, elevated, subway, surface cars and ferry-boats and have spent money lavishly—that is for Second Lieutenants.

NEW YORK

August 30, 1917.

DEAR DAD—You will see by this letter head that we are in a New York hotel. It is crowded to the guards with officers and we have to keep saluting constantly. We have traveled all over the big city, in taxies, busses, elevated, subway, surface cars and ferry-boats and have spent money lavishly—that is for Second Lieutenants.

NEW YORK, Sept. 1, 1917.

The lifting fog gives sign of breaking day,
The morning wind brings sounds from off the bay,  
Far inland babes awake and start to bray,  
One hour ago, Old Brown just hit the hay.
Dear Jack and Weesa—This is merely a note to let you know you are not forgotten. How is Hilton III? I am enjoying myself in the big city, spending lots of money and getting ready to sail away. If the folks think I am running short on “rocks” please tell them that I got some pay here and that I can get by very nicely. I have bought one of those officers’ caps and now look not unlike an elevator boy.

There is a wonderful huge whiskey sign just opposite my hotel window and I get much inspiration by just looking up from this letter doing “eyes left” as directed in drill regulations (I forget the page and paragraph). As it is time to eat—I mean dine—I must cease. Hoping you are as well as when I left you.

H. U. B. Jr.

RECEIVES SAILING ORDERS

New York City, September 1, 1917.

We have received our sailing orders, date, hour, pier, etc., but of course cannot divulge the facts. We have finished up our jobs of reporting, drawing pay and mileage allowance and have nothing more to do but stay here in New York at $6 or $7 a day on a $4 salary. It is indeed a gay life. “Of course I live beyond my means for I’m Captain in the army.”

I have been going hither and yon at Tow’s dictation for I have seen most of the principal sights here before and am helping him have a good time, his idea of which seems to be to witness as many baseball games as possible. We have seen two already—one a double-header—both very good articles of ball. I shall have time to write again before sailing, so until then will not say “good-bye” but “au reservoir.”

Lovingly,

H. U. B. Jr.

BEFORE LEAVING

Hotel Martinique, New York City,

September 6, 1917.

Dear Dad—I am not breaking faith with state secrets, I think, when I tell you that this will be the last letter you will get from me from this port. I am getting ready to write you at some length and hope it will be a fitting introduction to our renewal of long-distance correspondence. Give my regards to all the folks, and take good care of yourself, Dad, and continue to be the best father in all the world to your big family of sons and daughters. I speak for them all.

H. U. B. Jr.

ON THE WAY

September, 1917.

[Lieut. Brown sailed from New York on the Manchuria, September 7, 1917 stopping at Halifax several days; arriving at Liverpool September 22, and going thence to Southampton and to Le Havre. After three days in a rest camp, he went via Paris to Saumur. All this was learned from a comrade after the war.]

Dear Father—I hope you did not waste time looking through the papers for news of our departure. You will not find it there nor in the “movie shows.” Uncle Sam did not care to make “copy” of our embarkation. Nor was there any ceremony held over our leave-taking. The boat simply left pier with all olive drab clothed passengers securely hidden in their state-rooms. All visions of the ship leaving a pier covered with cheering and weeping people, bands playing, flags waving, moving picture machines clicking, faded away when the ship’s commander announced that everyone would remain in his stateroom until the boat had reached Sandy Hook. Therefore there were no tearful farewells of the Statue of Liberty amid the roar of saluting cannon—only a last glimpse of New
York as seen through the port-hole of the cabin; and yet there was the thrill of leaving the best country in the world to do our bit to keep her honor bright.

The first day all hands aboard were getting acquainted with each other and with the various parts of the vessel. Also, we were waiting with fear and trembling for the first signs of seasickness, either in ourselves or comrades, and so the pleasure of the first day was marred by this "watchful waiting" which was all in vain, as the ship rode too steadily to upset even the most delicate stomach. However all meals for the first day were eaten in a manner indicating that the diner expected to have renewed acquaintance with each morsel later on.

The second day out it rained all morning and the weather grew colder. In the late afternoon the skies cleared and the officers crowded the deck, admiring a wonderful marine sunset and using their new field glasses in an effort to find a hostile or friendly craft on the horizon. The presence of several small sailing vessels indicated that we were not far off shore.

The third day out was one of the most pleasant of our entire voyage. The sun shone brightly all day and we spent the time on deck, either lolling in chairs or strolling about or playing at shuffle-board. About nine o'clock in the morning we were startled out of our calm by the sudden crash of the big (censored) gun at the stern of the boat. A moment later and the guns on the forward deck barked out a salute. Great excitement ensued. Some rushed for lifebelts, others for lifeboats, and some of the more curious seized their field glasses and swept the seas for signs of demolished U-boats. The next volley from our guns pointed out the cause of our alarm and the gunners' mark—just an old barrel used for target practice—and what happened to that barrel made the sun shine more brightly and the sea become even more glossy. No longer did we fear the German subs. I only wish the kaiser could have seen that marksmanship. He would have changed his idea about the success of his submarine policy, I am sure.

During the course of the morning I found out that only about half of the members of the Third Battery assigned for this voyage were on the boat. Paul Ragsdale and Whitney Spiegel are not with us. However there are but few Infantry officers aboard, most of us being Artillery or Medical Corps. From the Third Battery we have First Lieutenants Harry Travelbee and Fred Johnson, and Second Lieutenants John Jordan and Earl (Tow) Bonham.

We from the Ft. Harrison Artillery section are occupying staterooms adjoining one another, three men to a room. Tow and I are with Russel Sayer from South Bend, Indiana.

William E. Gavin, whose father is a close friend of yours, lives just across the corridor from me, and Arthur Braxton, of Paoli, and Lewis Moorehead, a Greenfield native who was on the border with the Purdue Battery, have the next cabin.

Late in the afternoon of the third day out we entered a harbor and we all thought we might get shore leave and have a good time in the town. But we were only taken back into a small bay and allowed to "rest" for several days, during which time we became thoroughly acquainted with the boat, passengers, crew, other boats in the harbor, and the shore of the harbor itself as seen through the field glasses. It was here that we began to get tired of staying cooped up aboard, and were glad we had not chosen the navy as a means of doing our bit.

The service on the boat has been good. The stewards and waiters have all served with army transports before and treat us accordingly. The other troops they have
“shipped with,” however, were enlisted men, and they were not accustomed to the generous tips we have tendered from time to time. Each donation brings out a marvelous increase in speed and “pep” and we are getting “badly” spoiled by such luxuries as the helpings of pie to ice cream, and pitchers of ice water and oranges brought by the room stewards about bed-time. The meals are remarkable—the quantity, quality, and the variety.

A supply of candy was laid in by the ship’s barber but that has been expended. Tobacco is still holding out, as well as soft drinks. We are completely out of current literature though, and have fallen back on such old favorites as “Twice-Told Tales,” “Canterbury Tales,” “Black Beauty,” etc., etc., from the ship’s library.

There were boats from many countries in the harbor, vessels came and went every day, and it was interesting to study the various boats as they passed us. There were several ships with “Belgian Relief” painted on the sides. One of these passed us, and as it was alongside some lieutenant in our boat called across to a member of the relief ship’s crew, who was leaning on the rail—“We are Belgian relief, too, old man!” Cheers from the “Belgian Relief.”

About four steamers came in bearing U. S. soldiers, and we saluted each other with cheers. We found out where each boat was from by means of semaphore arm signalling and many of us held long-distance conversations with some unknown from another boat.

We tried fishing to pass time, but with no success. The only signs of life in the water were gauze-like jelly-fish or Portuguese men-of-war. We finally rigged up a net and caught some of these creatures. Great excitement! The decks were lined with eager landsmen, each giving his bit of advice, but all raising their voices in praise and joy when the first oozy, gelatinous creature was hauled in. We also had life-boat drill, which helped to pass the time. The officers of the boat gave the boat drill as a test to find how long it would take to get from the staterooms to the boats. When the signal was given, every man on board was already at his post, life belt on and ready to spring into the boat! Time for drill—nothing flat.

On the evening of the third day in the harbor, (Halifax), or the sixth day out of New York, we started on our real trip across the Atlantic. All day we had noticed signs of life on the boats around us, and finally, about four o’clock in the afternoon, we slowly steamed out in line. People from the town crowded the docks and waved us a farewell, and when we were passing out to sea we met two big British cruisers lined up to bid us goodbye. The sailors were massed at the bow while their band played “The Star-Spangled Banner.” We answered back with three long cheers, but lumps in our throats kept us from doing ourselves justice. Passing the second cruiser was much less formal. Its band was playing “Good-bye Broadway, Hello France,” and we cheered each other lustily until we were far down the bay. Some officer near me on the deck, expressed my sentiments when he said, “Great Scott, we can’t help from winning when there’s feeling like that between us!” One young officer, just out of college, and in true university style, bellowed out, “Raw! Raw! Raw! Raw! England! England! England!”

After we were clear out of the bay, we headed due east (censored). When we had traveled some distance, and night began to close in, we realized we were really on our way “over there,” and we also realized that we were not playing around just off-shore but were out in the rough water. The ship began an insidious side roll. A slight
dizziness set in, the supper just eaten was lodged about half way down. Nothing for that like exercise, so a brisk walk is begun up and down the deck, but the rolling continues, and even increases, also dizziness. Perhaps lying down is better; no there is just one thing to do, to stagger to the rail, groping blindly—but I draw the curtain over our anguish. Next morning there are many faces missing at the breakfast table, and the room steward has but few bunks to make. But who is that singing on the deck? “This is the life for me! Life, life on the o-o-o-shun waves!” It is none of the passengers, it is a member of the crew, seated on a spar and smoking a foul pipe while his face is flooded with the happiest of smiles. He is back “home.”

I find by my diary that we had been five days out of the harbor before we passed another boat, evidently a freighter. If the captain of the vessel had known how many pairs of field glasses were focused on him, he would probably have been seized with stage fright and retired to the hold of the ship until we had gone over the horizon.

On Sunday we had religious exercises on board, conducted by the purser. In view of the fact that we were in the danger zone, the services were even more impressive than usual. The fourteenth day out of New York was marked (censored here). We are reaching our destination.

H. U. B. Jr.

FIRST LETTER FROM FRANCE

SAUMUR, FALL OF 1917.

Dear Dad—I have neglected writing to you since we disembarked, chiefly for the reason that I was afraid to.

[10]