

28, Priory Avenue,
Harlow, Essex
12/4/61

Dear Tom,

You will no doubt be surprised to hear from me, Eric Wallingford.

How it happens that I have your address is: My Aunt (M^{rs} J.W. News of Leeds) who is the sister of my father Sydney Wallingford, corresponds with an old friend in Springfield Mass. by the name of M^{rs} Ross who enjoyed reading one of your books and she wrote to you.

The letter you sent back to her mentioned The School of Musketry, Hythe, Kent, and boyhood friends, myself and George Smith and names of men who were on the Staff at the School, most of whose names are familiar to me

Your letter was forwarded on to my Aunt by M^{rs} Ross who knew of her Wallingford connection and my Aunt who knew my address wrote to me and sent your letter to me, which I have in front of me now.

That is how you have word of a boyhood friend of those early days, I hope you can understand my explanation of the chain of events.

Having got over your surprise I will now ask you, how are you getting on? I expect you would like to ask me a lot of questions which I would gladly answer at any time.

Regarding George Smith the last I heard about 9 yrs ago was that he and his wife were managing an hotel at Dalby near Brisbane. George's mother died about 10 yrs ago not long after the youngest daughter, Margery who was an invalid had died. The older daughter, Eileen I have lost touch with.

My father's brother, who was a year older, was Jess Wallingford and he and his family went to New Zealand where he had a commission in the New Zealand Army. He died 10 yrs ago.

A bit about myself, I am married,
no family and am living at Harlow
Essex and doing engineering work.

Harlow by the way is one of the
New Towns near London built to take
part of the overflow of population
from East London.

My brother Cyril is living at
Croydon, Surrey, and has two boys
26 yrs and 22 yrs and one girl 24 yrs

The girl Pauline lives in Texas as
she married an American Air Force
man and has three children.

Mother and Father died about 8 yrs
ago and I still miss them. Is
your mother still alive? and I
believe you had two sisters, I forget
their names, are they still with you?

What is the name of your book that
M^{rs} Ross read as perhaps I can get
it over here. All best wishes

Sincerely Yours
Eric



Mr Thomas H. Raddall,
Liverpool,
Nova Scotia,
Canada.

← Second fold here →

Sender's name and address:

E. Wallingford,
28, Priory Avenue,
Harlow, Essex,
England.

AN AIR LETTER SHOULD NOT CONTAIN ANY
ENCLOSURE ; IF IT DOES IT WILL BE SURCHARGED
OR SENT BY ORDINARY MAIL.

Eric Wallingford,
28 Priory Avenue,
Harlow Essex,
England

April 17, 1961

Dear Eric,

Your letter was indeed a surprise, and a very pleasant one. It's now nearly half a century since we last saw each other, and (as the saying goes) a lot of water has gone over the old mill dam since then. As I mentioned to Mrs. Ross, the only one of my boyhood chums in Hythe whom I ever saw again was George Smith.

You ask about myself. As you know, my Dad got a transfer^s to the Canadian army in 1913, and away we went. Dad made his home in Halifax N.S., where he was attached to the garrison staff; but in the summers he and other instructors traveled across Canada, giving courses in rifle and machine-gun operation. He was in the West on one of these tours ~~where~~ when War One broke out, and went overseas with the 1st Canadian Division in September '14. He was wounded at Ypres in the spring of '15, and we saw him briefly that summer, when he came home on convalescent leave. He went back to the same regiment (Winnipeg Rifles), was wounded again near Vimy in '17, received the command of the regiment that winter, and was killed in the dash through the German lines at Amiens in August '18.

Meanwhile things had been happening in Halifax, notably a terrific explosion in the harbour in December '17, which wrecked the northern half of the city and killed about 2,000 people. My school became the emergency morgue. Our home was badly shattered -- no doors or windows, and all the plaster shaken off the walls -- but like other survivors we had to make it do through the winter weather. My mother was cut by flying glass, and so was I; my Hythe-born sisters Nellie and Winnie got off without a mark, and so did the baby Hilda, born in Halifax in '14.

There was no school for months; and by the time school opened again I was too restless for anything like that. I was in my 15th year, so I enlisted for sea service, giving my age as 18. Took a course in wireless telegraphy and made one or two voyages in transports in the North Atlantic. Got my discharge in the summer of '19, and went into the Canadian merchant service. On a voyage to London in '20 I looked up George Smith, his mother and sisters Aileen and Margery. George and I had some fun together in theatres and pubs, and parted late one night in Trafalgar Square -- my ship was lying at Woolwich and sailing about daylight.

George was then working in a London bank, and hating it. Soon afterwards he went to Australia. We corresponded in a fitful manner over the years. I still have an account of his wedding and a photo of himself and his Australian wife. I haven't heard from him for many years now.

After some sea service I spent a year or two on Canadian coastal wireless stations, mostly in isolated spots like Sable Island (which long afterwards I called "Marina Island" in a novel, "The Nymph and The Lamp".) By that time I'd "had it" as far as telegraphy was concerned. I chucked it, returned to Halifax, and took a course in business accounting. The times were tough, and the only job I could get was in a small wood-pulp mill in the backwoods of western Nova Scotia. I intended to stay a year or so, to get some experience in this new line before trying again for a job in Halifax.

However, things didn't work out that way. I'd never been in the bush before, and I took to it like a duck to water. In those days the hunting and fishing were marvellous in these parts -- plenty of salmon and trout, moose, deer, wild ducks and geese, partridges, hares and so on. I spent most of my week-ends and vacations roving about the Mersey River bushland, on foot and by canoe. I married a Nova Scotia girl in '27 and (like all husbands) soon discovered that two (not to mention three or four) cannot live as a cheap as one.

I got a somewhat better job with a new paper mill at the river mouth (Liverpool, where I still live) but you know what the 1930's were like everywhere. I had to increase my income somehow, so I began to write short stories, using my experiences at sea and in the woods, and my hobby of Canadian history. I soon found that it was a tough game, with a small market and lots of competition. Also I had a lot to learn. After a time my tales began to appear fairly regularly in Blackwood's Magazine and one or two of the leading Canadian and American magazines. John Buchan (afterwards Lord Tweedsmuir) noticed them, encouraged me to bring out a book of short stories, and wrote a foreword for it. This was 1939 -- my first book.

By that time another war was upon us. I was still on the sunny side of forty and in good physical condition, but when I applied for service in the Canadian Navy (quoting my old W/T experience) the recruiting staff looked at my bald dome and grey fringe -- and turned me down. Eventually I turned to the army and got a commission in a reserve battalion of the West Nova Scotia Regiment, which had a battalion on active service overseas. However I couldn't get across the water, and served my time commanding a rifle platoon on coastal patrols and training duties, a very dull business.

This gave me some spare time for writing, and I pegged away at it whenever I got a chance. After army discharge I went at it full time, and -- to cut a long story short -- I've done quite well as a novelist and historian. Have published sixteen books ~~shortly~~ altogether, in addition to a good many magazine articles and tales. My son, Tom Jr., is a dentist, and is setting up a new practice here in Liverpool this summer. My daughter Frances is the wife of a doctor who has just taken over a practice in Moncton, New Brunswick. My wife and I seldom find ourselves alone for long, what with visits from children and grand-children. My sisters Winnie and Hilda are living in Halifax. Nellie is the wife of a mining engineer in Alabama. My mother died a few years ago.

In '58 my wife and I took a trip to England and the continent. Stayed some days in Hythe (at the old White Hart in High Street) exploring the place and calling up old memories. The School of Musketry seemed pretty much the way I remembered it, although the old married quarters where I was born vanished long ago. The old Lecture Hall (where, if you'll remember, we used to have concerts and pantomimes) is now a chapel. There is a small museum where I think the medical quarters used to be; the caretaker hunted amongst a lot of old staff photos and came up with one showing my Dad and some others, taken in 1908.

St. Leonard's School looked very familiar, and I met Gilbert Molyneux, son of the head master in my time there. Unfortunately he'd suffered head injuries in a motor accident some years before, and couldn't remember much of his school days. I found Dad's name on the Hythe war memorial beside the canal. Incidentally the canal, a noble stream in my boyhood memories, didn't look half as

big in 1958! -- and just beyond the School of Musketry it dwindled into a mere ditch in the marshes. I suppose in the course of nearly fifty years it must have filled in a lot. I went by the narrow-gauge railway to Dymchurch, where the S. of M. families used to go by char-a-bancs on summer picnics. But nothing there looked familiar -- new summer bungalows and caravans all over the place. And of course the little railway itself had been built since the Raddalls left Hythe for Canada.

As I walked about Hythe I found that a lot of forgotten things and scenes came back very clearly. Thus I was able to go to the place on Dymchurch Road and again on Fort Road where my family lived at various times after leaving the old married quarters in the School. I traveled the old path from the end of Fort Road across the Green to St. Leonard's School, found a bunch of small boys playing football (any one of whom might have been you or me at that age) on the Green, under the supervision of a master. I struck up a chat with the master. He staid almost at once, "You're a Canadian, and from your accent I'd say from Nova Scotia". I was astonished until he explained that during War Two he'd been posted for a time to an R.A.F. training camp in Nova Scotia.

The old Gate and Duke's Head and Red Lion pubs looked as I'd remembered them. We used to buy sweets from a confectioner named Keeler, across the canal bridge from the Red Lion; and now I found a Keeler still doing business at the old stand. Do you remember a man named "Twiggy" Blackman who used to push a fish barrow about the streets, crying his wares? I noticed a sign, "A. Blackman & Co., Wholesale & Retail Fish Merchants", and I presume this was Twiggy and/or his descendants.

One thing I've been trying to get straight in my mind. In the summer of 1911 or '12 we were living in what was then called the New Married Quarters, a block of small apartments, covered outside with a cream-coloured stucco, on the Dymchurch Road. There were open fields, dotted here and there with trees, behind these quarters, and beyond them the bald shingle of the rifle ranges. That summer a large party of R.E.'s put up a tent camp in the fields. They were a balloon company, and they proceeded to inflate two or three in the middle of the camp. Later one of them rose high above the rifle ranges, dangling a target at a considerable distance below. The target was either a miniature aeroplane or a large canvas frame with an aeroplane painted on it. The troops on the range were instructed to fire at the "aeroplane". It was the British Army's first attempt at anti-aircraft fire, although that phrase hadn't been invented yet. The whole thing was a farce, and I remember my Dad laughing about it. In the first place, firing at a motionless object in mid-air was the worst possible training for infantry hoping to cope with moving aircraft. In the second place there was the soldiers' sense of humour -- sooner or late someone was bound to shift his aim to that nice fat balloon; and he did. The R.E.'s patched the balloon and sent it up again, but the same thing happened, and after a time the engineers packed up and went back to Farnborough.

Can you remember this affair, or/talk of your parents about it?

Another thing I remember, but can't find a date for, was a flight of aeroplanes at Westenhanger. My parents took me there, and there was a great crowd for the show. I can still see the planes skimming about, barely above the tree tops, and one of them falling, and the pilot jumping out (sans parachute). Do you

recall anything about this?

Tom

(1)

28, Priory Avenue,
Harlow,

Essex, 14 May
1961.

Dear Tom,

Thank you for your letter of 17th April which brought back a number of memories of Hythe days. You have more memories of Hythe than I have, but I certainly remember St. Leonards School and the Green and Fort Road.

When my wife and I were on holiday at Folkestone, about five years ago, we did have an afternoon at Hythe and I remembered quite a number places there, one of which was the view of the Rifle Ranges, from the back of the churchyard, which was on the side of a hill overlooking the sea shore and the town itself.

Another place I remember was The Square where the horse tram depot used to be. The same building was still there with the letters of the Tram Company still on it but was ^{now} a furniture storage place.

The horse trams were drawn by two or four horses and were on rails that ran along the sea front

to Sandgate and I believe to the boundary of Folkestone, do you remember those trams? (2)

I did see the School of Musketry from the outside and it seemed very small to what I thought it used to be. I have an old picture card of the School of M. and I can plainly see the entrance to the Sergeants Mess where our fathers must have spent many happy hours.

The small railway station with the small trains that ran through the Marshes to Dungeness looked very inviting but I did not have time to go for a ride, I hope to go at some future time when I have a holiday at Folkestone again.

Your memories of the balloon and the target it carried ~~eludes me~~ for anti-aircraft practice eludes me, but the place where it took place I do remember as the place where a Scots regiment in kilts being in camp there and the cook gave me a ^{cup} of smoky tea he had just made over the camp fire and it nearly took the skin off my tongue besides making tears shoot out of my eyes it was so scalding hot.

(3)

When Dad left Hythe he had a job in Stratford, London, and we lived in Leyton which was close by and Mother and Father lived there for the rest of their lives.

In the first World War Dad joined up again as a musketry instructor and he was doing this in various places of South East England until the war ended and he ^{then} went back to the job he was in before, which was an accumulator inspector.

I left school in 1919 and after having various jobs I was apprenticed to a firm of Machine Tool Manufacturers that made precision lathes.

After my apprenticeship I thought I would have a go in the Army because Dad was always keen on the Army. I joined the Royal Engineers at Bhatnagar and served 6 years with the Colours from 1924-1930 and then came out as I did not see a future in it for me.

After coming out of the Army in the 1930's I was in and out of jobs, too long out mostly, I eventually got taken on by the firm I had been an apprentice

(4)

with. After a few months the firm asked me to go to a new factory they were building at Harlow Essex as a machine operator which I did and I am still here. I married my wife, who lived locally, in 1937 and though we have no family we are both very well.

In the last war I was in a reserved occupation and did not get roped in for the Services.

Mother and Father in London during the whole of the War had a lot of War Damage but came through unhurt but it shook them up a lot.

After the War and in 1948 a new town, near Harlow, was started and ^{it} is still being built. What was originally all countryside is getting all bricks and mortar and concrete. When Harlow New Town is completed it is expected to have a population of 80,000 people most of whom will work in the industrial estate in the new Town.

I am glad to hear you are doing well as a writer, Dad read one of your books, a story about Romney Marshes, he was always telling his pals about it and how he knew you as a kid. Well no more Tom this is your lot, all best wishes
Eric.