

Transcript by Mary Ruth Brooke of letter Rupert Brooke wrote to Russell Loines, 25 December 1914.

King's College, Cambridge. The Papers of Rupert Chawner Brooke. RCB/L/8/26/4

{L 8.26.4}

Hood Battalion
2nd Naval Brigade
Blandford

December 25.1914

{1914.98}

Dear Loines

It's more hopeful for us to wish you a Happy New Year than you us, with our daily casualty lists and Khaki population. Still, your wishes may do more good. I started a long letter to you in August and September, in my scraps of time; a valuable letter, full of information about the war & the state of mind of pacifists and others. The Germans have it now- It went in my luggage to Antwerp, and there was left. Whether it was burnt or captured I can't be sure. But it was in a tin box, with- damn it!- a lot of my manuscript. And it was fairly heavily shelled. I don't know if you'd heard of my trip to Antwerp. I entered this show (Sub-lieutenant R. Brooke R.N.D at your service) in September and by the end of the month was in a trench hearing the shrapnel go screaming fatously over me through a cloudless sky. A queer pic-nic- They say we saved the Belgian Army + most of the valuable things in Antwerp-stores + ammunition I mean. With luck we might have kept the line fifty miles forward

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of where it is. However, we at least got away, most of us. It really was a very mild experience; except the thirty mile march out through the night and the blazing city. Antwerp that night was like several different kinds of hell. The broken houses and dead horses lit up by an infernal glare. Once we passed by a shelled station where the locomotives and signals had been taken up and twisted + rolled up in the

in lines

railway lines as if by a child. ~~un-lines~~. The lowlands by the Scheldt were one sea of blazing oil, the flames leaping up higher than a Cathedral, + above everything a black pall. Under that we marched along, English & Belgians & transport + refugees. The refugees were the worst sight. The German policy of frightfulness had succeeded so well, that out of that city of half a million, when it was decided to surrender Antwerp, not ten thousand would stay. They put their goods on carts, barrows, perambulators, anything. Often the carts had no horses + they just stayed there in the street, waiting for a miracle.

There were all the country refugees too, from the villages who had been coming through our lines all day + half the night. I'll never forget that white faced endless procession in the night, pressed aside to let the military- us -pass, crawling

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forward at some hundred yards an hour, quite hopeless, the old men crying, + the women with hard drawn faces. What a crime!- and I gather they've announced their intention of keeping Belgium if they can. England is remarkable. I wish I had the time to describe it to you. But this job keeps one so darned tired, and so stupid that I haven't the words. There are a few people who've been so anti-war before, or so suspicious of diplomacy, that they feel rather out of the national feeling. But it's astonishing to see how the "intellectuals" have taken on new jobs.* Masefield drills hard in Hampstead & told me with some pride, a month ago, that he was a Corporal + thought he was going to be promoted to Sergeant soon. Cornford is no longer the best Greek scholar in Cambridge. He recalled that he was a very good shot in his youth and is a Sergeant- Instructor of Musketry. I'm here. My brother is a 2nd Lieutenant in the Post-Office Rifles. He was one of three great friends at Kings. The second is Intelligence Officer on H.M.S Vengeance, Channel Patrol. The third is buried near Cambrai. Gilbert Murray + Walter Raleigh rise at six every day to line hedgerows in the dark + "advance in rushes" across the

*No, not astonishing : but impressive.

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Oxford Meadows. Among the other officers in this Division are two young Asquiths, an Australian professional pianist who twice won the Diamond Sculls, a New Zealander who was fighting in Mexico + walked 300 miles to the coast to get a boat when he heard of the war, a friend of mine Denis Browne-Cambridge-who is one of the best young English musicians + an extremely brilliant critic, a youth lately through Eton + Balliol who is the most brilliant man they've had in Oxford for ten years, a young and very charming american called John Bigelow ~~Dodge~~ Dodge who turned up to fight "for the right"- I could extend the list. It's all a terrible thing. And yet, in its details, it's great fun. And- apart from the tragedy-I've never felt happier or better in my life than in those days in Belgium. And now I've the feeling of anger at a seen wrong- Belgium -to make me happier + more resolved in my work. I know that whatever happens I'll be doing

some good, fighting to prevent that –And I've a lot of friends
in Germany: good people. That's bitter. It's rather indefinite
when we go out again-Perhaps at the end of January.
Or we may be kept back for less complete parts of the

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Division. The new Armies are shaping marvellously, I gather.
We'll have great things to do in the Spring. But it may be a
long job. Love to you both + Barbara. Will you be in England
soon? Come down here for a day. I'd like to see you.

Good luck
R.B.'