Newport News, July 5, 1918.

Dear Margaret:

I have written no letter for three whole days. I call that self-restraint. I am not trying to break the habit, but merely demonstrating that it can be curbed — temporarily. And then, too, I felt that my recent letters must have been so disappointing, for there was nothing in them of news value, just the same eternal futile attempts to express my love for you. But things have happened in the last few days and they are sufficient excuse for putting another long letter before you. Yes, it is true that I spent much time in writing which might have been used otherwise to add to the success of my work, but I want to talk with you.

I have again reverted to the old habit of sending some silly flowers. So you will find in the envelope some trumpet vine blossoms. The same kind that used to grow in the yard at College Park. Wild trumpet vine-flowers growing in a thicket with woodbine and poison ivy, — a beautiful clump of vine-draped brakes. And these blossoms were gathered on a nice long walk which I took alone, from the office to my sleeping place on the boulevard by the sea. I don't mean that I slept in the road, but

rather in a fine house in fine environment. So I walked out last Wednesday, the day before the fourth, through the back streets and across the marsh, and down by the broad James River. A big white naval aeroplane was flying about above the masts of the shipping, and the young people were swimming around an abandoned pier. I had neither a bathing suit nor ambition to swim alone, so I took my bath by proxy and retired to an early bed.

And the next day was the fourth of July. A historic fourth marking the transition between a struggle to get really started in the big fight and the gaining in a good stride. In Newport News three torpedo boat destroyers were launched, and actually sent off the ways ahead of time, just as the shipments overseas are in advance of the schedule. The country has waked up and may yet be in time to turn the tide in the interminable struggle on the other side of the water, — or, more correctly, throughout the whole world.

I arose early and was in the shipyard at 8 a.m. The first boat had just been launched when I arrived on the scene depending on a delay of at least two minutes in a launching. But the two minutes was on the other side of eight o'clock, and the boat was already moored at one side of the ways to make room for the next one. The next ship was born at 8.15, just 15 minutes ahead of schedule. There was no foolish breaking of bottle over the bow. A crowd had gathered at the side, but was not very demonstrative. The only real signs of life were the shouts of the negroes who pounded the blocks under the boat when the signal was given and then scattered to safety for commands just before the boat was cast loose. Then there were the cheers of thousands of sailors on the naval vessels anchored close by and the blowing of whistles and sirens. The boat, on her greased ways, steadily, with increasing momentum,

moved into the water and was born. Her name was determined in advance, which could be done with certainty — as there was no danger that she might turn out to be a boy. But nevertheless her name, "Abbott" sounds masculine to me, but you can never tell in these days whether a name belongs to a male or a female from its sound. For instance how could you place the name of one of the colored stevedores who recently embarked as "United States Columbus."

I didn't wait for the third launching but struck out for the officers mess, walking to town with St. Smith of our staff, Miss Dougherty of the Camp Community Service, and Mr. O'Hara, Song leader (and joke-smith) for the soldiers. I think he is a worthy successor of the fun-makers who were kept in court to amuse the warriors of old. Only his audience is larger, and the enlisted men get the prepared fun rather than the officers.

After breakfast at the officers mess I had a few minutes in the

office, — a prissy detail inserted to show that I never never beef anything from you even if you are not interested in it. Then I went to see the people in the other office (Smith's or Miss Wells') and then (here ends the prose) I went to see the first parade. I placed myself opposite the reviewing stand so I could learn how to behave in case I should ever find myself in the predicament of being a general — or passing one in review. I might be a general in my dreams, you know. (A rear admiral was there too with two aides weighted down with big gold cords on their shoulders, and all dressed in white. It was a lovely day.

An aeroplane, — not a sea bird, but an eagle from Camp Morrison — kept flying back and forth above the parade as it passed through the main streets. It flew just above the buildings and often up the street over the marching men, drowning the rhythmic tread with the roar of the engine.

(over)

The markings on the machine were plain;— one could even read the number on the side of the body of the machine. He flew so low that one man on the street with a good imagination assured me that the plane bumped a housetop. He knew because he heard it bump.

The first part of the parade was soldiers and more soldiers. There were ~~aviators,~~ men from the aviation service, machine gun men with mules drawing the little machine guns, one for each gun, and one for the box of ammunition following it. Then there were just plain soldiers with guns marching by platoons and turning their eyes toward the reviewing stand as the officers saluted. And there were companies of stevedore and labor batallions. Black men without guns, but trained to march as soldiers and enlisted to ~~do~~ play one of the most important parts of the war.

Then came ~~three those~~ a couple of those

sailors dressed in their white summer uniforms and carrying rifles. In the navy the officers still carry swords and they add to the spectacle. There was also cavalry in the line. Men with sabres drawn riding on spirited horses. And lastly came the civilian organizations. Everything from the girls patriotic league to the camouflage painters. The riveters pounded redhot rivets into an ~~steel~~ iron frame. Uncle Sam & John Bull and the rest appeared over and over again. Italian sailors from the ships were there with their blue clothes and caps with red balls of yarn on the top. Of course the red cross ladies had their floats, and finally came the Red Cross Canteen service pulling and pushing their rubber-tired carts of hot coffee to feed the marching sailors.

The march ended ~~of~~ at the auditorium — A relic of a series of revivals à la Billy Sunday, but by an imitation of the real Billy. The sailors

stacked their rifles in a long line across the field and marched into the tabernacle where they occupied the whole center of the building. I sat on the side with the public. In the ~~[illegible]~~ (ha-ha, what spelling) choir sat ~~the~~ ~~[illegible]~~ naval band of 130 pieces trained by Sousa. — And overhead, — a relic of the revivals — there still remained a giant sign "Jesus Saves."

Well, the band played, and the men sang under the direction of their song leaders, and ladies representing various nations came on the stage, bearing flags, at various times, more or less appropriate. And the men grew hungry and shouted "navy beans." And Mr. O'Hara sang "When do we go from here, boys" and played funny sketches and told stories. And the sailors sang most of the songs ~~in~~ their repertoire. And the band played some more, and it grew hot, and they sent the civilians home, and fed the hungry sailors coffee and buns.

I am sending you a copy of the songs used at the "sing". You can learn the words of all the war songs to date. You know the tunes. Yours

will probably be singing some of them before the war is over, — while Gertrude will give an intermittent ~~an~~ accompaniment.

Thus ended the morning. In the afternoon ~~the~~ the black soldiers had a ~~the~~ parade of 5000 men of the stevedore and labor regiments. The officers of these regiments are white men. They had negro bands ~~in~~ There were many very large men among ~~them~~ them.

At four o'clock the Soldier's and Sailor's Club of the Camp Community Service was opened. They have a fine two story building with auditorium upstairs and pool-tables, game tables, cafeteria, kitchen, and social room downstairs. The upper floor had rest-rooms for ladies ~~in~~ ~~there~~ The auditorium could be used as basket ball room, and there were showers, etc. The building was paid for ~~to~~ in part by subscriptions among the local people, and in part by ~~nat~~ funds raised in the National Campaign of a year ago. I know because I looked up the facts for the use of the General in preparing his speech. And guess what the genial general did. After the chairman had said as much as he wished, and the admiral ~~which~~ was

with his white hair and white uniform and gold decorations had told of ~~his~~ the hardships that the soldiers suffer on the water, and the General had made some frank remarks on various subjects, and the head of the Camp Community Service, Mr. Crosby, had explained why he was not in the army and expressed loving sentiments for the soldier and the community, the General began pointing in my general direction and beckoning. I was down in the audience and began preparing to move as soon as certain that I was wanted. Not so with a gray haired man ahead me. He got up and proceeded to hasten to the stage, but the General was not satisfied; he ~~was~~ evidently wanted some one with no hair at all. So up I jumped and overtook the man on the stairs. He gracefully withdrew in my favor and I went up and sat beside the General who introduced "The bald-headed man on my right", Major Sawyer, as a man who had been sent by the Secretary of War, at his.

request, to represent him in dealing with all the 28 non-military organizations in the Port of Embarkation. So I made a little speech and the meeting closed. After that we went down stairs and had some grape-fruit-ade. ~~Out~~ Mr. Cisby then took Miss Needham, who is organizing the ~~detention~~ home, Mrs. Hill who is a "cafeteria expert" for the new Soldiers and Sailors Club, and me, the chief coordinator and peacemaker ~~[illegible]~~ ~~to~~ to the King, to ~~lunch~~ supper at his Braiding House.

The speeches of the afternoon were quite interesting. The admiral told how the men were crowded in the ships, and how the extension of submarine activity to the whole ocean compelled putting out the lights, except a few blue lights inside the boat. All of which added to the gloom. His theme was the need for cheer for the men before embarkation. The navy apparently has considerable respect for the giant new submarines of the Germans. He said they could come over in

bringing their own supplies and operate a month and then go back without a base over here.

The General spoke of the big parade of Stevedores. He said they were going over to build the railroads and docks and to do the vast amount of labor in sending forward the supplies. He said a special General had been put in charge of this work and a vast organization was being built up, which would equal the wonderful organization of General Ludendorff (?) who supplies the German army.

Mr. Crosby's speech had a pathos for which his cold in the head was largely responsible. There is nothing which gives ~~that expression~~ the effect of being overcome by emotion quite as well as a real big fresh cold in the head. It is not enough to overcome a speaker with real emotion to have such a cold. Then too he spoke of sentimental generalities.

Dear Margaret, just look how much I have written! Here is the 13th page already. And I haven't yet started to tell you how much I miss you, etc, etc, etc, etc, etc, etc, etc, etc, etc, etc, etc! But then, that would spoil the letter so you can't read it out loud if you want to. So I will return to a less exalted theme.

My present office overlooks the water and as I write I can hear the throbbing of motor-boats in the bay, and the building is shaken by heavy army-trucks passing back and forth. Out in the stream lies a fleet of vessels getting ready to load and return to France and other allied countries. Just opposite lies a big ship wonderfully camouflaged. It looks as though the pattern and coloring had been copied from one of those unbelievable Hawaiian fishes that we saw at the fair in San Francisco. The boat has a big blue patch behind the gills and wonderful, black, white and blue bands in strong contrast.

Near by, lies other ships also camouflaged, and a few which still prefer plain gray. They are the quakers in the fleet. One ~~of the~~ of the vessels is in the steam an old-fashioned sailing ship, with its great masts. These boats have again come into their own, and sometimes make very good time. I wonder if they will let me go across before the war is over! I want to come back to my family with a foreign service record, so that ~~you~~ we can all feel that we have had a real part in the war, even over there. But then, we can only wait. There is a certain degree of fascination in the very uncertainty. In the meanwhile I am indeed fortunate that I have plenty of interesting work to do, and that I have (well, you know what's coming) the nicest little wife on earth, and that she's a real sport and makes life worth living for all of us. What can we do to reciprocate, Old Darling? We just can't love you more than we do now, and we can't tell you about it without a fresh and bigger vocabulary.

I hope the children will be well by the time this reaches you, and that your worries about the measles will be over. Don't worry about me. Everything seems serene here. I think I have been a little slow, but the relationships to the Spaces and civilians seem very happy so far. It seems to depend on me alone as to whether the demonstration will be a success. For the good name of the family I shall have to write fewer and shorter letters and spend more of my evenings in thinking and writing of the project here. I feel quite rested from the writing of the C.C.M.C. paper and the strenuous days between my return and my new post.

Sweetheart, please drop me a little extra letter when you get this. I just love to hear from you, and I want to know often about the children.

I am sending a copy of Harper's. Miss Seymour wrote to me to see the article by Miss Margaret Deland entitled "Beads". It is a very clever expression of the doubts and ~~unreality~~ feeling of unreality which come over sensitive natures when they are under new conditions,—

when their roots are torn up, and their world is not systematized and is no longer regular. One sometimes feels a wee bit that way when his Margaret Sawyer is far away and there are new jobs to tackle and no sweetheart to receive reports and give suggestions.

I don't feel that way now, though, I can count the days — 57 of them — (Oh, Heinz, they are 57 pickles!) ~~because they separate me from the pleasure of our reunion~~) before September! I shall need all those days to get the work here in shape and to justify my assignment. Then too I want oh so much to have you respect the work when we meet, and to have it in good shape so we can relax after a job completed, ~~but~~ and have a good time together and get settled before starting the next round.

Sweet, sweet, Margaret, are my letters foolish and long. Tell me if you like them, and please tell me that you love me. I know it, but it ~~allw~~ always is beautiful to hear.

Lovingly, Wilbur.

There's a thunder storm to night. I hope you are sleeping peacefully in
Michigan, Dear Love. Wal.