

FROM INSTRUCTOR ALLDRITT.

W. A. Aldritt, formerly a physical instructor with the Winnipeg Y. M. C. A., has written the following letter from Salisbury Plains to General Secretary T. D. Patton.

He describes the excitement of the Canadian troops on the eve of their departure to the front and mentions the dangers of his own position with the machine gun section, known as the "Suicide Squad." In his letter he says:

"I am writing to you what may be the last letter you will get from W.A.A. for a long time. Well at last we are actually getting ready to go to the front. Yesterday we were inspected by the King and Lord Kitchener and last night our kit bags were taken into the base. So now we are all cleared for action. Ammunition has been served out and our last rations drawn so we leave during the next three days.

"We are rather excited at the prospect of soon being in the fighting line and yet we rather dread the actual losses which must take place in our ranks (not personal, but collective).

"I am on the machine gun squad and like the work very well indeed, although everyone calls us the 'Suicide Squad' as we are the most dangerous arm of the service. The enemy accordingly treat us with special care and a few 'coal buckets' soon put us out of business. Of course we are trained to hide our guns very carefully. I am now an expert section foreman and can surely secure a job on the C.P.R. My gang can certainly use picks and shovels and strange as it may seem it is as important as being able to shoot with a machine gun. My position in the firing line will be somewhat as follows: As a rule we have four machine guns to our battalion, which are manned by 24 men, 1 corporal, 2 sergeants, and 1 officer when in battle. The machine guns are more often used on the flanks, though much depends of course on the manoeuvre or whether we are working in brigades. Well, the officer generally supervises his four guns as much as possible, but the sergeant has charge of two guns; he takes them into action, hides their position, sees that the men are properly entrenched, that the ammunition supply is always kept up, puts in new men for casualties, etc. Besides being the range finder and target indicator, he must know what is a suitable target, husband his ammunition, give the fire orders, and must if possible keep alive because machine gun men are specialists and hard to replace.

"Well you can see what a job I have. The sole and only corporal sees that the belts are filled at the limber and sent up to the line. That may give you an idea of my duties, but there are barrels more I have to do which I cannot spare the time to tell you. So you see I shall not die of ennui at least. I have been very fortunate in getting with a splendid officer, Lieut. Raddall, a man of fine training and from the permanent force. He is a man of whom the men would follow if it led to the gates of hell, and then some, and he has a wife and four little children at home. Well, I'll take care of him if he will only give me a chance and not kick.

"Really, I am having a whale of a good time at present. The mud is very, very deep. I am always dirty around the legs, but the work is very interesting. I am studying hard at the book end of my business, training myself and squad to shoot and numerous other jobs. Well, we shall soon be away from Muddy England and I suppose into a much muddier France or Belgium. Well, we should worry. Remember me to all the boys, and don't think I am dead until six months after they all say so."