

Letter from Joe to Rex regarding Peter's death

This letter, found with Joan's letters, received in sympathy over Tony's death, was written by one of her uncles Joe Dibdin from New Orleans, but who normally lived at Farm in Forest Hill, Louisiana, to Rex Dibdin, who was living in Forest Hill, London.

Both had been in World War 1. Rex was invalided out, injured and later very depressed, and Joe who survived, reaching the rank of Major in the Artillery as a machine gunner. Awarded for bravery.

Frederick Joseph Dibdin also known as Joe or Fritz emigrated to America soon after World War 1 and worked in Engineering in the New Orleans area partly on the drainage for the Town. He married Garnett and had a daughter Marion. Joe was the bouncy member of the family with a fun sense of humour and judging from anecdotes it is surprising that he survived the war. He like others in the family will have grieved the many deaths but from a distance. When writing this letter he was unaware of the irony that Peter had died in an accident, nor probably, that Joan was married and had a son.

The reader will note the usual strong Dibdin clannishness in his writing.

Joe and Garnett did visit England sometime before 1933 and Joan remembered him so there is a good chance that he and Peter met.

Joe Dibdin 1888-1956 so about 56 years old when this letter was written.

Rex Dibdin 1883-1957

His exploits in WW1 can be seen at:

<http://www.guise.me.uk/articles/familyatwar/joe.htm>

Letter

306 Baroune Building

New Orleans Lane.

About

Send Mail to Forest Hill Lane.

I have just received from Garnett your letter telling of Peter's death. I am very thankful that you wrote at once as we have been thinking very often about him and wondering in what part of the fight he was, how he was getting along and the many possibilities.

To say that we knew he was in it is superfluous, we know the breed too well. That he fought gallantly goes without saying, we over here know that nothing else was possible to him. But will you tell Joan for me just this. When Lionel and Cecily were lost, I wrote to Peter something of how I felt. In that letter I tried to show him something of the intense pride I felt in having had for a brother such a very gallant gentleman. I wish her to know that I have the same pride in Peter. I know, nobody better, what is the full meaning of "serving the guns" It is something I can never forget and there is no greater test that a man can be put to. So again and so many times gone by I have to count off one more on the score started in 1914, this time the hardest, the last of the direct male line.

Old chap after going through so many risks myself, I wonder "why". But it's a terribly heavy score.

Well, there's just that much more effort to be put into work. We fought last time to give the kids a fair chance to live in decency. Today we survivors owe it to them to make it worth their while, as our old folk made it worth our while.

I expect you see more of American troops and can evaluate them better than I can. But as far as I can gauge the American Civilians, there has been developed in this country an intense and deep-rooted admiration and respect for British courage and effort. For many years after 1918 the feeling in USA was of antipathy and a certain sense of caution towards the old country. This has now disappeared and is replaced by a desire to emulate and characteristically American to excel Britain in every way.

Maybe some of our missionary work over here has taken effect.

Since 1939 I have been continuously at work on construction of training camps, as Sanitary Engineer, first with Geo.P.Rice a local firm and then with the US Engineers. We built seven cantonments or training grounds housing about a quarter of a million men so you know we were busy. Now I am working on industrial housing projects for war workers.

I am ambitious enough to be looking forward to be tackling some of the European reconstruction problems, if I can get the chance. That would be right up my alley. SO as the old Dad would say – I try to do my little bit as big as I can, then somebody will say “well the old horse pulled his best anyway”.

Now to pass from sublimity to absurdity, let me try to give you a portrait of my two “emcumbrances”. Garnett, of course hasn’t changed at all – just the same except for a vast improvement in health with a consequent increase in ambition. She and Marion are living out at Fowler’s farm or rather what farm is left – while I get business straightened out here.

There both go to the same school at Forest Hill (strange coincidence of names) – Garnett teaching and Marion learning – I hope. They really are more like two sisters than mother and daughter, though Garnett can exercise the jolly old parental authority when necessary – far better than I can ! – Marion now 13 years of youth – 5’3” – 117 pounds and a superabundance of the Dibdin sense of independence is really doing excellently and will be ready for a college course in 2 ½ years.

I have just received a letter from her- She says algebra is easy but she does not do so well at sewing but is almost crazy about cooking. I often wonder what our Fiton would have thought of her. Biology fascinates her. She tells me they have got some goldfish and says “they are very pretty. I hope the spawn in the jar so we can see them and the baby fish. Biology is very interesting and and we are studying vertivrates now.”

You can see where the microscope is going to be useful (By the way it has been extremely useful in camp sanitations, as you can imagine in spite of my feeble knowledge of microscopy). Amongst other things Marion has a marked musical Ability – she plays Bach, Medelssohn, Gulman – and for the school recital selected the old Polish National Dance by I forget whom – and rocked the auditorium. But let me warn you – if ever she gets to England and get over her shyness – she’ll treat you like a dog – pull your ears, rumple your hair and tease you to death. Now you can imagine how I get treated. But it’s ok with me.

I am very glad to hear from you old dear. I would have written to you but we lost a whole lot of addresses in our many moves round – yours included so couldn’t get a line to you. We often talk about you and the times we had together. I found a photo of the picnic at Portheand – you with your trousers up to the knees and a fire going on the wehs. Remember! Give my love to Lettie and Marian and all the youngerfolk especially Joan. Of course Garnett sends hers too though she asks me to write for bothof us. I know that you are all more than busy – and we have been a bit anxious about your welfare during raids, wishing we could do something more than just sitting here – work like hell and wait for news.

But drop us a line at times when you feel like breaking loose and busting something –
we'll understand.

Always your loving brother- sister and niece
Joe Garnett and Marion.