

1st December 1915

Arthur's busy schedule means he has been unable to write to Dollie; a trip into Lillers to stock up on stationary and winter clothing; watching the Guard there brings back happy memories of Malta; a welcome chance to change from boots into slippers is cut short by the issuing of orders; an early start in the pouring rain for the Division route march, ending at temporarily near Ham.

Arthur to Dollie

Wednes. even: 6.40pm

...I'm awfully sorry I couldn't get a letter off last night. Owing to to-day's trek, the Post Corporal came round last night and I had only time to write a field service postcard. Yesterday was quite fine. We had the usual parades after breakfast i.e. from 9.30 – 12. At first – that is until 10 – owing to various duties, there were only 18 of my Company (or rather half-battalion) on parade!

After lunch Wilcox & I rode into Lilliers. I wanted to buy a writing block. I bought this; it has a wonderful bright green cover intitled [sic] IMPRIMERIE / CALLIERET-RENAULT/ LILLERS: BLOC: CORRESPONDANCE MILITAIRES. And it is now proving its use. I also bought some postcards, and Wilcox, some gloves. We watched the guard mount in the Grand Place. There are some 4 battalions that furnish guards each of about 40 men. "Retreat" is blown & a band plays the Evening Hymn. It reminded me so much of Malta, dear, & the happy days we two spent there together in each other's company.

Wilcox & I then had tea. We met Rice there & Henri & the Doc. After we rode back in the dark & got in just before six. I found a message there from the CO "would I go over to HQ". I went over and found that some of to-days orders for the trek were in, & that the CO wanted me to help him with the map. I was there till about 7: then made my way back across the "green" (a sea of mud) to our mess room. I changed my boots & put on slippers; but in a few minutes a message came from the Orderly Room. I went down & found John back from the Brigade. He gave me a short resume of what the orders were. By the time I got back to the Mess it was dinner time. After dinner dear, I was busy getting my kit together & the Post Corporal rather surprised me – for I thought he'd be coming in the morning in the usual way.

This morning up at half past 6 – it was a most depressing morning, pouring with rain. However later on it cleared DG. & turned into a ripping day. Valises were packed & loaded by 7. We left most of the heavy stuff behind under charge of one of the servants. Breakfast at 7.20. Parade at 8.45.

The 'starting point' of the Brigade was on the road in front of the billets. Brigade HQ filed past at 9.33, we followed on, then behind us the remainder of the Brigade. The other two Brigades of the Division were ahead of us. Our Brigade HQ leading us tried to catch them up: we went off at an awful pace, & finally did catch them up. But the rest of the Brigade couldn't keep up & dropped to about a mile behind us. So we had to wait for them. After that the pace was a little better. At half-past 11 we halted for an hour in a place called Norrent-Fontes. Soon after we passed the GOC Division. We branched off after leaving Norrent & cut across a long ridge

running down S. of Aire. Further down was Ham where we stayed on our way up in February & from where Harry [Pulman] had his leave...

3rd December 1915

A detailed account of the recent twelve and a half mile route march undertaken by the entire Division; the bedding was late arriving and fresh orders weren't forthcoming until 3.30am the next morning; however the Divisional Commander was complimentary about the standard of marching! Arthur has been "pottering about" with the machine guns; the rains move in - thankfully after the divisional exercise was over; a sad little story of a supposed spy.

A letter from brother Dick in Gallipoli has taken almost a month to reach Arthur; reports of the disastrous flooding at Suvla Bay (26th November) have apparently yet to reach him in the trenches.

Arthur to Dollie:

Billets, Friday 8.30am

This is just a short note to wish you Good Morning – to send you all my love & a huge kiss. I'm writing a long letter about our trek & in answer to your dear letters – but I haven't finished it yet & don't want to miss the post...

Fri 5.15pm

... We wound our way down the ridge, across a branch railway, into the outskirts of a little village. Here we halted & here the remainder of the Brigade were billeted for that night. Our billeting area was in the next village to the West. Jones & 3 or 4 men had gone on ahead from Norrent to fix things up & they had nearly finished as we got in. We soon settled down & had a meal. The arrangements as to our baggage were rotten – to put it politely & rations weren't in until after 8. The valises & blankets about 9.20 – an hour later. No orders were forthcoming for the next day and HQ were waiting up till 3.30am for them.

I had been given a room in the school house – a bed very clean & nice. But I chose to sleep in our mess room in my valise, in case orders turned up for a sudden move. Lloyd did the same and it was just as well for next morning orders came at 7.30 for a move at 8.10. We had a bit of a rush to get things packed & a very hasty shave & a soldiers breakfast – standing.

The morning was cold & threatening, but luck was with us & instead of rain the sky cleared & the sun shone gloriously. We marched back another way. It was half past one before we were in & I reckon we covered about 12 ½ miles. We passed both the Divisional General & the Corps Commander on the way & were complimented on our marching! We had a late lunch when we got in & afterwards I'm afraid I slept till tea. After tea some Company matters to attend to & after dinner an early bed.

To-day dear has been a beast of a day; very very wet. I was up early this morning COs orders at 9: Company business most of the morning. I also started to teach some of my Subs the machine gun. This afternoon I've been pottering about with the machine gun & then tea which we just finished. Lloyd is off on leave tomorrow – Lucky chap. I wish I was coming home with him. Davis has gone again,

sick: & Bateman, one of my subs is down at an ambulance near here, also sick – neurasthenia, if you please. I expect he'll be evacuated too. I wonder how they manage it! The CO is very affable & has asked after you. Sammy has also asked after you, twice – and Beresford. Sammy is still loafing round HQ, doing nothing.

The French people reported a supposed spy the other day. We went out after him – found he was a deserter from the Loyal North Lincs – quite young, poor chap. He's been living in a copse near here for about two months. Ben, my old war horse, is in quite good form. I had a letter from Dick yesterday – dated about November 5th. He is quite cheery & says things are very quiet out there. But that living isn't exactly comfortable.

I also had a note from Bailey. He was in a hospital at Kensington; suffering chiefly from sciatica & frozen feet. He seemed keen on getting back to us out here – also wanted 100 francs he said the Mess owed him. So we've sent him a cheque.

All the battalions in this Division appear to have bands of some sort – either bugle or drum & fife. It sounds so strange to hear them, as we do sometime on the march. It seems years since we left such luxuries behind...

4th December 1915

Wet and windy weather limits Company activity; Arthur is asked by the CO to draw plans for the new outpost, to be located south of their current location; football for the men and training for the junior officers; the new Divisional leave allocation is “fearfully stingy”; Dollie is organising miniature portraits of Arthur and herself – Arthur thinks a metal frame would be more durable than a leather one.

Arthur to Dollie

Billets, Saturday even 7.40pm

... I've heaps of letters to answer, and a heap of things I feel I want to say, my darling, for you're not very fit ... I hate the thought of you being dull or suffering in the slightest little bit... I wonder if you've had anything to disagree with you, or whether its just “sympathy” because I wasn't well...

Let me give you my news, dear, now, such as it is before I answer the rest of your letters. To-day has been a day of wind & rain & we have been confined to kit and rifle inspections. I went over to CO's orders at 9 this morning. He told me that on Monday there was to be a staff tour a few miles S. of here, to put out an outpost position: - 3 Officers and four NCOs per Company. So that most of to-day I have spent drawing a map.

This afternoon I asked off the CO for the men to play football. So No2 Coy played No1 & beat them 4-3. I went down with Lloyd & Rice & Herepath (another of my Subs – quite a decent young chap) to watch. To-morrow Wilcox & Rice go away for a week doing Divisional Schools, one on bombs the other on the Lewis machine gun.

That, little one, is all the news I think . Oh, there's leave. The new lot are fearfully stingy as regard our leave though we've been here twice as long as they have. However they finally agreed to lend us leave vacancies for 2 officers & 6 men a week (though each of their battalions is sending 20 a week!) Accordingly Lloyd & Brown – the Quartermaster - & 6 men were to have gone to-night. But there's been some trouble & the warrants aren't through. So they'll have to wait till next week!

Everyone was very impressed by our marching the other day! Fearful buck. To-night the ASC Follies are “on” in Allouagne (about 3 miles away). Wilcox & Rice have gone but I felt lazy & it's a brute of a night – so here I am. Thanks awfully, dear, for the reminder about the Mater's feast. You are a darling. I was awfully sorry to hear of her chill. I hope she's all right again now. I was very upset, dear, to hear about poor Tom. Poor chap – I could hardly believe it. Please tell his Mother & Chris, if you see them, that I'm awfully sorry.

Darling, about the miniature case – don't you think a metal case would be safer than a leather one? ...I got the parcel to-day with the boots & refills. About the other things don't send them until I write, dear, please. I shall be very careful of course & *pro tem* have packed it away amongst my things, addressed to you....

6th December 1915

Mass and Confession the previous day and full time preparations for the building of the new outpost; a wet day in the field, riding through mud; Arthur bemoans the lack of crumpets at tea; the CO lends Arthur his canvas bath; news of a move into the trenches before Christmas.

Arthur to Dollie

Billets, Monday morning 7.50

... Your dear letter of Friday came yesterday afternoon. Thanks awfully for it; you are a dear to write, even when you're not fit. I'm immeasurably glad to hear you're better ...

Yesterday dear I had a fairly full day. Mass at 9.15. The Chaplain said it & heard our Confessions after. I was very pleased to be able to go. After Mass I came back up here, dear, & then went for a ride till 1. We are supposed to be doing a Staff Ride this morning, an Outpost Scheme. I rode over to look at the ground. It's 2 or 3 miles from here.

After lunch slacked a bit: then paid out the Company - & gave a pow-wow to some of my officers & NCOs that are coming this morning. And after that, dinner & an early bed...

Monday even 8.50pm

... Thanks awfully for your dear letter of the 4th: I'm annoyed my letters are turning up so irregularly & cannot understand it, for yours thank heaven come nearly always day by day & it is not very often that a day goes without one. My letters seem to take such an age to get across. I suppose the delay arises in the organisation of the mail in the field, while yours, being done at home, gets a good start.

To-day, dear, we've been out on this outpost scheme. We rode off about 11. It was luckily fine then, but about 2 it absolutely poured. We were riding on a hill, fearfully muddy... We got in soon after 4 & had tea & toast (no crumpets!) Then I lay down till 7. I was feeling awfully lazy. To-night I am going to have a bath. The CO has lent me his canvas one. He is in great form.

We are probably going up in about a weeks time, dear, but no one seems to know definitely yet. I shall be sorry to leave here.

7th December 1915

Dollie's letters are late and Arthur is missing them; practising bomb-throwing in the rain – with stones and earth; a football match for the men in the rain at Lozingham with a very unlucky win for the opposition; tea in Lillers and a dozen Oysters; Arthur is sorry to lose 2 of his subs to the 22nd, but there is nothing that can be done – not even by the CO; all Arthur wants for Christmas is to see Dollie – but meanwhile a new cigarette case would be “rather a good thing”!; an early start tomorrow on Brigade business.

Arthur to Dollie

In billets, Tuesday even. 9.20pm

A day of wind & rain again to-day & alas, no letter from you, sweet lover mine. I do hope that it's the Postal Service alone that is to blame for it. I do miss your dear news. God bless you...

This morning was fine; and after COs orders at 9 I took the Company up on a great rolling down that lies behind the village & there we practised bomb-throwing (with stones and clods of earth!) About lunch time it grew overcast & began to rain. Nevertheless the Company was playing a Company of the 23rd at Lozingham – about half-an-hour's ride from here. So Lloyd & I put on our waterproofs & rode over. It was a replay of a draw last Sunday in a Brigade competition. At close of time to-day the score was 1-1: they played an extra 10 minutes – no result. Again an extra 10: & this time by ill-luck the ball slipped off one of our backs through a corner of the goal – 2-1 against us.

Lloyd & I then rode into Lillers – had tea, also a dozen oysters. I met some of the 57th who were up with us in Lonely Post. Then home in the dark & wet – we were in about 7. To-night Thomas & Herepath, two of my Subs, have left me. They have been transferred to the 22nd together with 2 others. They are “general service”. I was sorry to lose them & so is the CO but he cannot help himself. To-morrow I have to get up early to go off on a Brigade scheme – imaginary outposts. Lloyd is off to a Serjeants shooting Competition – another Brigade show.

Re Christmas presents, dear: you asked me what I wanted... Can you guess? For its just yourself darling, light of my eyes & your great wonderful love. With that I am more than happy, more than content: my heart is full to overflowing.

For the rest, dear, as regards other folk – I enclose a cutting of a cigarette case that looks rather a good thing. Don't you think so?

WAR DIARY

Army Form C. 2118

Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in F. S. Regs. Part II and the Staff Manual respectively. This page will be prepared in manuscript.

~~INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY~~

S. Conig.

(Error heading not required.)

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendix
BURBURE	12th Dec.	8th.	9.15am. Commanding Officer inspected Battalion. Inspection followed by route march up to 1.0pm. Brigade Shooting Competition in which all Sergeants and Warrant Officers of the Brigade took part, held at the range, CHAMP DE TIR (D.S.S. Sheet 1/40000, 56.B.). Of the three events of the competition, the Sergeants of this Battalion succeeded in winning one, viz. "The Rapid Fire Competition"	
*	8th.		Morning devoted to wiring practice.	
*	10th.		-do-	
*	11th.		-do-	
*	13th.		Divine Service for G. of K. in the Recreation Room at 11.30am, followed by Holy Communion. Roman Catholic 11.15am at BURBURE PARISH CHURCH.	
*	13th.	10.0am.	Lecture by Brigade Major to Officers and senior N.C.O.s in the Theatre, ALLOUAGNE on "FRENCH ROUTINE." 3 N.C.O.s and 2 men attached to the Royal Welsh Fus: for duties in three posts	
*	14th.	9.0am.	Battalion paraded on the green and marched to LILLES station, where it entrained for BOUXE LES MINES. On arrival, it marched to VAUDRICOURT and billeted for the night. Transport proceeded by road under orders of Lieut. Eastwood, 43rd London Regt. Rev. G.A. Barclay attached to Battalion as Chaplain.	
VAUDRICOURT	10.45am.	15th.	Battalion paraded on ALASK POST and marched to BAILLY LABOISE, reaching here about noon.	

Catalogue Reference WO/95/2949

Reference: 425

9th December 1915

Dollie is currently staying with Elsie Davidson in Eastbourne; a busy time for Arthur, his mapping skills are constantly in use; Rosa [Pulman] has furnished Arthur with a good supply of much-needed writing paper; a discussion on what to buy the family at home for Christmas and if Daisy should be asked to help; the men are practising putting out wire in the rain; Arthur and Ainsworth spend some time examining a new machine gun; leave is suddenly open for some of the officers but the remainder of the Company will be going up to the trenches in a few days – not a pleasant prospect in the vile weather.

Arthur mentions organising a Christmas gift for the girls in Malta – and one for brother Dick (in Gallipoli) . News has obviously not reached home of the great loss of life in the recent floods at Suvla bay. The government decided on 7th December that it was a lost cause and to evacuate all the troops (now based around Suvla, Anzac and Helles). The order arrived in Gallipoli on the 8th and the evacuation started on the 9th and by 19th December most of the troops had been pulled off the beaches. A small corps remained into January. The evacuation was done in secret, under the very noses of the Turks, and with very little loss of life. This part of the operation was seen as a great success much like Dunkirk in WW2.

We believe that Dickie had already been sent to the field hospital on Mudros (an island off the Gallipoli peninsula) by this date to recover from his severe frostbite. (We hope to confirm this from the records in the archive at Kew),

Arthur to Dollie

Billets, Thurs. am. 8.30

This can only be a short note to thank you for your dear letters of Sunday & Monday & to wish you Good-morning. I was very busy yesterday – out on a staff ride till 2: then I had to draw a sketch map & make out a report – also attend a lecture. After dinner we had the mess accounts to get out – so I had little or no time to myself...

Rosa sent me out the writing blocks. They turned up yesterday. This is one of them. Also the envelopes. I shall write & thank her – what is her address at Hendon. I hope your Mater is fit & cheery. Remember me to all at home, please, ...

Thurs even. 5.50pm

Thanks awfully for your three letters of Sunday, Monday & Tuesday. I'm glad to hear you're feeling more fit. By now, DV. you'll be absolutely yourself again, your own dear self. I hope you enjoy yourself at Eastbourne, dear. Remember me to Elsie & the pere et mere (what of my French!) How's Clive & the play. I hope it's a success. Sure to be, eh dear, with Elsie in it?

Yes, dear, about the miniature, you're right about the size & about the case. That is the same size as yours & a case like Rosa's. You darling, its fearfully generous of you – thanks awfully.

I want to ask you something, dear. I want your advice. I want to get something for my folk at Christmas – that's the Pater & Mater, Daisy, the boys & Joe & Maggie. Also for your dear Mater. I rather want to give the things as coming from us two. Would you rather I sent a cheque to you to get what you think, or would you rather I asked Daisy to do it. Just tell me frankly what you feel, dear. I shall know and understand. At any rate I should like you to choose something for your Mater ...

To-day has been a day of rain. We paraded as usual this morning & practised putting out wire. Our fellows are pretty adept at it & so at 11 I got permission to dismiss. This afternoon I have been going over a new machine gun with Ainsworth.

Davis is back again. We are getting a new doc. 4 Officers & 12 men got leave last night quite suddenly. Lloyd went & Rice, Brown – the Quartermaster - & Ochs. We are probably going up in two or three days time. Brrrr – the prospect isn't pleasant for the weather's vile!

I sha'n't forget about Dick dear, or the girls at Malta. That dear, is all the news...

10th December 1915

A boxing tournament at Allouagne interferes with Arthur's letter writing schedule; afterwards his war horse, Ben, is keen to make it back home to his shed; a test firing of the new Lewis gun – which is “rather neat and accurate”; Officers from the other Battalions in the Brigade have gone up to the front – Arthur expects to be in reserve trenches; fond memories of their time in a house in Citta Vecchia (Malta 1914).

Dollie and her mother were at 5 Str San Paulo, Notabile in early December 1914; their next address was 8, St Augustines Avenue, Rabato – and were presumably resident there until returning to England at the beginning of January 1915.

Arthur to Dollie

Billets, Friday even. 5pm

... Thanks awfully for your letter of Wednesday, dear. I loved to get it. I also had one from the Mater enclosing a postcard from Tancred. I'm writing now, for there's a Brigade Boxing Tournament on at Allouagne to-night and we're all going over.

To-day was another day of wind & rain. This morning I lectured both the Company & my NCOs; this afternoon we've been firing the Lewis gun which is a new machine gun. Rather neat & accurate...

10.5pm

...Just back, little one ... We're now having something to eat, Ainsworth & I. We rode over & so got back quickly. In fact, Ben, whom I was riding, thought he'd like to get back quicker and to get going down the road. He's been stabled in a shed lately & is a bit fresh in consequence.

The boxing was very good, as boxing. But the men were game. The 22nd Battalion won all five shows. The fellow who got up the competition happens to be of the 22nd & had been training his men for weeks. Dirty business.

10.30pm

Officers from the other Battalions of the Brigade went up to the front to-day in buses with a view to taking over. We didn't send any and I hear that we are going to be in reserve, at any rate to begin with – DG...

Do you remember the house at Citta Vecchia, the last one you were in & our week-ends. Happy days. Please God, there are many happier in store...

11th December 1915

A short letter from Arthur – he exhausted from parade and map work for the CO; he is looking forward to the arrival of the miniature from Dollie.

Arthur to Dollie

Billets, Satur. Even. 9.30pm

... Thanks awfully for your dear letter of Thursday. I'm feeling tired to-night. On parade all the morning; this afternoon I hoped for a rest. I had also planned to write to Rosa [Pulman] & to Dick [Agius]. But just before lunch the CO sent for me – wanted me to go into the Brigade to make a copy of a map. So I went in after lunch & have been on it ever since.

You are a darling to worry about the parcel & the miniature. You generous little soul ... I've felt closer than ever to you to-day dear ...

12th December 1915

Heavy rain and snow, but Arthur makes it to church for Mass, after a lazy breakfast; a wet end to the Brigade football Tournament; a note to Alphonse that last week's London papers [The Sphere, Illustrated London News & Graphic] did not arrive!

Arthur to Dollie

Billets, Sun. even 9.30

... Your dear letter of Friday afternoon came to-day. I was awfully pleased to get it: for I always want to hear from you & can never be satisfied. Thanks awfully. There is not very much of interest from here to-day. The weather started by being very fine & cold: but this afternoon it rained heavily & even snowed a bit.

I was very lazy this morning, dear, & didn't have brekker till half-past nine. Afterwards I finished off the map I was doing for the CO. Then took it across to him. He was very pleased with it. I went straight on from HQ down into the village, & drew some money; then on to the Church.

After Mass I came up here again & paid off some men who were going on a bombing course. Brady was taking them to the Divisional school. He came back on Friday afternoon, after 6 weeks leave – Lucky beggar!

This afternoon we went into L----- to see the finals of the Brigade Football Competition. No1 Coy v. the Brigade Machine Gun Coy. The latter won fairly easily by six goals to one. The Brigadier turned up to watch, and the band of the 21st played before the match. It was very wet & we were glad to get in to tea. Wilcox came back to-day from his bombing course. By the way if you see Alfonse tell him that this week the Sphere &c arrived all right, but that last week the Sphere, Illustrated London News & Graphic did not turn up, will you dear, & thank him for me.

Davis came in to dinner to-night. To-morrow morning we are off to a lecture by the Brigade Major at 10.

13th December 1915

Confusion about Dollie's current whereabouts [Eastbourne] – the redirected letters are taking a while to get through; a lecture by Brigade Major Pope on "Trench Discipline" – an old friend from Arthur's Garhwal days; news of Christmas presents for the men and money for the Officers; orders for a Brigade move into trenches for the next eight days – Arthur has hopes they will be out before Christmas day.

Arthur to Dollie

Billets, Monday 5.10 pm

Thanks awfully for your letter of Friday ... I was so glad to get your news. I am sorry that you hav'n't heard since Monday last – the post homewards seems absurd, for the outward mail is generally very good. Darling in your letter you say apropos of the parcel "I shall have to try & send it off from Eastbourne, as I hear it must go before the 17th". I'm in rather a doubt where to address my letters: I think it best to send them now to 45. I thought you were only going to be at Eastbourne over the weekend, say about Tuesday or Wednesday!

The weather to-day, dear, has been very fine but very cold. This morning we went over to A----- for a lecture by the Brigade Major in "Trench Discipline". Very sound. He was Signalling Officer in the Garhwal Brigade so we are old friends. His name is Pope.

When I came in I had "orders" & after lunch went over to HQ for the COs orders. The CP shewed me a letter from Harold. They have apparently collected enough money in the 4/3 to send a parcel to every man in the 2/3 & £50 to us...

Since 3, I have been going over my papers, getting things straight. Reveille to-morrow is at 5: breakfast at 6. We go down to L-ll-rs to entrain at 9. To-morrow night we sleep at a village about in line with Bethune; another stage next day to where Battalion & Brigade HQ will be, then into our allotted position. The Brigade is "in", but we luckily will not be in the trenches. The Brigade is due to be up about 8 days then back for a few. So DV we will not actually be "in" on Christmas Day...

15th December 1915

Description of the two-day journey to their current position; an early start and memories of an earlier train journey [from Etaples] – before the brigade first saw action; a long cold search for the Officers for any warmth and food, after settling the men for the night - the locals are churlish and offensive; a morning march to Vermelles, via Saily, and Arthur is now camping in a bitterly cold cellar (borrowed from the Gunners) – the place has almost been destroyed during fighting between the French and Germans; they are now just about a couple of miles from the front, Hohenzollern & Fosse 8 – a landscape of railways, mines and huge conical slag heaps – so different from the eternal flatness of the country further north.

Despite their numerous moves and the state of the country – the army postal system is doing a wonderful job! Arthur praises their efficiency – but wonders about what is going on at the home end as Dollie is not getting his letters regularly.

Arthur to Dollie

On the March, near Battalion HQ, Wednes. 3.25pm.

It seems years since I wrote to you last, dear. The time has gone quickly, but we're not very comfortable, and I've longed, as I do long now, to be by your side. Let me give you my news first, before I answer your dear letter of Saturday.

Tuesday DG was very fine. We were up soon after 5: for although we were doing the first stage by train, the transport was going to march. Parade was at 8.45: & then we marched off the village green, down the hill through the village & so into L-. Here, after a wait of nearly an hour, we entrained together with the 23rd. It seems strange to think that the last [time] the battalion was entrained was last January, when we came up from Etaples to St Omer "unblooded".

After about an hour in the train, that is to say, soon after 12 we arrived at N-. Here we got out & marched N.W. a couple of miles to a village called V-. Here we met the transport & here we were to stay the night. We shared the village with the 23rd & a Divisional HQ that were there for the day. The result was that we were very hard put to it to find room for the men - accommodation for the officers was nil. After much searching, the CO & HQ had to clear off to the next village. We managed to find a loft in V- but it was bitterly cold. We had had nothing to eat since 6 in the morning & there were no possibilities of obtaining food or warmth. So we then trudged the village, trying nearly every house to find (a) a room with a fire where we could sit & eat (b) sleeping room or at least (c) a place where they could give us coffee & something to eat. But the local inhabitants were singularly churlish & offensive. Finally we routed out the Maire of D. (the village where the CO was) & after one false effort succeeded in getting a bed each but what was more important, permission to use his kitchen. Here, at last, dear, was warmth & a place to eat: & here, then we had our meal. Oh, the joy of it.

In a Cellar, Vermelles, 9.15pm

... I had to finish off, dear, for it was time for parade. We are now in our allotted position where we shall be for a week. But let me continue, little one, from where I left off. We didn't stay up late last night, and turned in soon after 8. Wilcox & I shared a room together. Nearly all the cottages had electric light from Br—y: the folk also told us that B- supplies light to Paris.

This morning, dear, we were up for breakfast about a quarter to nine. Parade was at half-past ten. We marched here or rather to a place called Saily, getting there about 12.15. There we halted till 4.15 when we came on here. The CO stayed at Saily. Here at Vermelles we are all lodged in cellars. The gunners have pinched all the best ones – as usual, but we managed to borrow one off them. It was very bare – but we've found a table & one chair, minus a seat, also a packing case. Besides that we've fixed up a fire & rigged up a screen over the entrance so that it's fairly snug, but bitterly cold. We have our valises up here & the men their blankets.

There was fearful fighting in the streets of this place, when the French wrested it from the Germans, especially in the Chateau. From what one could see in the dusk, the place has been "strafed" to bits.

The country is extraordinary here – it rolls a bit & there is not the eternal flatness of the country further north. But trees are few, hedges nil, & mines & railways abound. The slag heaps, unlike those at home are nearly all pyramid in shape, & raise their great bulk to a great height. We are now just about a couple of miles from the front, Hohenzollern & Fosse 8.

And now, dear, I've two dear letters to thank you for – for another letter reached me up here to-night. God bless you – you do help & comfort me beyond all expression. I cannot understand how it is that you have not heard from me. It's absurd – the posts seem all at odds & ends homewards – outwards they're wonderful.

WAR DIARY

Army Form C. 2118.

Instructions regarding War Diaries and Intelligence Summaries are contained in P. S. Regs. Part II and the Staff Manual respectively. These pages will be prepared in manuscript.

INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY

(Form heading not required.)

I. Contd.

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	References and references to Appendix
ROUÏE.	1918 Dec. 15th. 4.0pm.		under Capt. A. J. Agius. Nos. 1 & 2 Coys. / proceeded to VERMELLES. Hours. Machine Gun Section, 1st Line Trans, port billeted in SAILLY LABOSSE. 1st and 2nd Brigades took over section 'B' of front from 45th Brigade, 15th Division. The Brigade Reserve consisting of our Battalion, and one company each of the 21st, 22nd, 23rd and 24th Battalions, The London Regt., placed under the command of O. G. 3rd London Regt. 2. Lieut. D. Lewis rejoined us from 19th Bde. 48th Div. Major F. D. Smeat placed in charge of the Brigade Sharpshooters. (15 men).	
SAILLY.	17th. 8.0pm.		Working party of 80 detailed for repairing front line fire stepping under supervision of R. I. Officer.	
"	19th.		Nos. 1 & 2 Coy. under Capt. Agius attached to 33rd London Regiment, and in future will be termed 'The Service Company'.	
"	23rd 9.30am.		Depot party paraded to proceed to VAUDRICOURT. 2nd Lt. D. W. L. Jones and 2nd Lt. Henri admitted to Hospital sick. Depot party (about 100 including transport) formed the 47th (London) Div. Infantry Training School, for training any drafts for this Division arriving from the Base.	
VAUDRICOURT.	24th. 8.0pm.		Party of 25 other ranks arrived as draft for 20th London Regt.	
"	25th. "		Draft of 88 other ranks for 4th Royal Welsh Fusiliers.	
"	26th. "		Draft of 88 other ranks for 24th London Regt.	

Catalogue Reference WO/95/2949

Image Reference 425

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16th December 1915

Arthur has decided to ask sister Daisy to help Dollie with shopping for the Agius family Christmas presents; the Officers are sleeping on a cold, stone floor in a cellar about 2 miles from the front line; the cellar is gradually being made more homely by the addition of some dilapidated furniture; Arthur has little enthusiasm for tonight's proposed working party; the reconnoitred communication trenches are in reasonable condition though, as they have been dug through chalk.

Arthur to Dollie

In our Cellar, Thurs. even. 5.30pm

... A thousand thanks for your letter of Monday last. I was glad to see that at last my letters had reached you. Of course, little one, I understand about the Christmas presents. I felt that it would be difficult for you to choose things for them all. So I'll write to Daisy. As regards your Mater, dear, I haven't anything in mind & feel more than content to leave the choice to you. Perhaps you already know of something that she wants.

I'm very bucked to hear the photos are good. I'm afraid you'll find me hard to please, for nothing is good enough, Light of my eyes, you are all the world to me. As for my news, dear, I am fit and well. To-day has been very dull & cold; but we are settling down. Slept pretty well last night, though the stone floor isn't by any means too soft! We've found a table, a trio of chairs – one, smashed, from the remains of the church, two, minus the seat & the third, an iron garden chair. We've also built up a fireplace & hung a mackintosh sheet over the door – so are fairly snug.

This morning Bobby & the Doc came up – also Sammy, who is in charge of the Brigade snipers, the CO & Beresford. This afternoon we have been finding our way & reconnoitring various communication trenches that run from here two miles to the front line. They are all pretty good; for the soil is nearly all chalk.

The country is very open, bleak and desolate. This village in particular, which was the scene of fearful fighting last October when the French drove out the enemy inch by inch, is sadly woebegorn (sic) & destroyed.

To-night there is to be a working party but no details are through. So that we don't know when we are to go out or what we are to do. I'm feeling very lazy & not very inclined to turn out. Still one has to justify one's pay! ...

17th December 1915

Arthur is practically in command of all working parties in their section; a very wet day to be out; he has sketched the site of fierce fighting around the local Chateau – graves abound, with glimpses of Hun boots or French red trousers; some graves were marked 15th August 1914.

Arthur to Dollie

In my Cellar, Friday even. 9.35

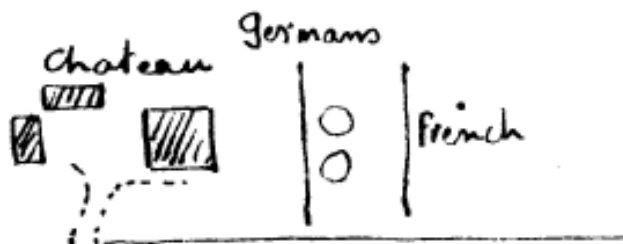
I was lucky to-day for I had two dear letter from you ... To-day dear has been a brute of a day: very wet. But our cellar is very snug and warm. We have had working parties out nearly all day & one is still out under Jones & Wilcox. It is awfully funny being practically in command up here.

This morning I went down the road to where the ruins of the chateau lie. The fighting in the village, & especially at the chateau, was terrible when the French drove out the Germans in Oct-Nov 1914. Here's a plan

[insert drawing of battlefield]

The French were behind a wall about 40 yards from the Germans who held the Chateau. The trenches are still definable, & 2 mine craters, dug by the French (marked O): I suppose each one is 40-50 feet across & about 12-16 feet deep. Graves abound (some we saw of August 15 – 1914!) & an occasional pair of Hun boots or the French red trousers.

Well, little lover mine, I think that's all the news. I'm going to leave the letter open, in case I have a chance to wish you Good-morning! So now Good-night, God be with you.





18th December 1915

A very short note; Arthur has had a ROTTEN day; he is writing from his fleabag in the cellar; tomorrow morning at 3am they move up to the front line.

Arthur to Dollie

In my fleabag, & also in the cellar, 10pm

Just a short note, dear, for I'm awfully weary & to-day has been a ROTTEN day. At any rate we go up to-morrow at 3am. I must write to explain all when I get up there. Thank God, I am fit. Please heaven dear, you're feeling the same.

Well, dear, I'm going to say Goodnight. I can't keep my eyes open, so with all my love ...

19th December 1915

Arthur explains to Dollie the trauma of their recent re-assignment to the 23rd Londons; they are now at the front, instead of further back, in the support trenches: Arthur has command of a pretty big front – “about 4-500 yards including part of the Hohenzollern Redoubt & Little Willie”; conditions have been pretty quiet so far – they have shot one sniper, & the Germans dropped a bomb on to one of their machine gunners; with luck they hope to be out by Wednesday or Thursday, in time for Christmas.

Arthur to Dollie

In a dug-out, Sunday aft. 2.30pm

I've lots of news for you, dear, & beastly news too.... About a week or ten days ago the CO despairing of ever getting a draft, wrote in to the War Office, suggesting that the Battalion was at its minimum strength. Lewis, the Brigadier, realising this too, forwarded the letter in the usual way. But when it reached the Division, they were seized with a fear that they might lose us & like an angry child, did two things. One they most unjustifiably refused to send on the letter and quickly sought to put into action something that might thwart any more. At a moment's notice, while performing the ordinary routine of the brigade, a message was sent through that a company was to be formed out of our few numbers; HQ & the transport were to go back to form a Divisional School!

I was summoned back to HQ yesterday morning from Vermelles. The CO told me the news. I was to have the company, with Wilcox, Lloyd, Brady, Lewis & Ochs. We were to be attached to the 23rd Londons, who were coming up to-morrow (that is, to-day).

The CO is mad with anger & in a dangerous mood. He has taken steps at home to make things unhappy for the people responsible. It's a damned shame & all feel it from the CO downwards. Feeling is very bitter, too bitter for words. Meanwhile dear I am in command of what's left of the 3rd *pro tem*. Poor old 3rd s. It's hard, dear, awfully hard after all these years. Please God it is only temporary & someone will have to pay! Till then we must just endure.

Wilcox, who [had] a slight touch of the flu, made no attempt to get well & has gone in. Lloyd won't be back till Tuesday. So Abbott & Henri are up with me in their places. Brady joins me either to-day or to-morrow.

I was very busy last night for a lot of reorganising had to be done. This morning we were up at 3, paraded at 5 & got up here about 7.30. It was a beautiful morning. I've a pretty big front – about 4-500 yards including part of the Hohenzollern Redoubt & Little Willie. Today DG pretty quiet so far. We have shot one sniper, & they've dropped a bomb on to a machine gunner of ours.

We go out on Wednesday or Thursday DV. So we'll have Christmas out, please God. Well dear, I think that's about all the news. We're all feeling very blue, so write & buck me up – as you can always.

20th December 1915

Arthur is tired – it has been a long day; their section of the front was strafed in the afternoon, leaving 2 wounded; Arthur is cheered by the arrival of a letter from Dollie and a visit from his old CO, Beresford & Sammy (of the 1/3rd Londons) – it still rankles deeply that he is now attached to the 23rd Londons, despite their understanding CO; tomorrow they hope to go back to the reserve trenches.

Arthur to Dollie

In a dug-out, Monday 4.30pm

I had a letter from you to-day, dear. I was bucked to get it – it was Thursday's. It's been a long, long day since yesterday. I haven't slept much. This morning DG was fairly quiet. But this afternoon they "strafed" us a bit. The trenches, except for this dug-out & one or two others, are not good. We had 2 casualties, wounded. Lieut. Henri has gone sick & Abbott who is not very fit, is going in to-night. To-morrow we go back early into reserve lines.

This morning the CO, Beresford & Sammy came up. The CO was awfully decent – it was a treat to see old faces again. The CO of the 23rd to whom we are attached is an ex-regular & therefore understands. But it's awfully bitter "to eat another's salt, & climb another stairs".

Well, little lover, its nearly time for the rations to go. God bless you & keep you safe & happy...

21st December 1915

Arthur is now back in reserve trenches after days with little sleep; the weather has been very wet; last night there was an alarm, as a British mining officer said the Hun were undermining part of their trench and Arthur had to take the necessary precautions; two bombing shows failed to materialise; news of moving further back in time for Christmas.

Arthur to Dollie

Tues. 4.45pm, In a reserve trench

... This morning early I moved out of the front line & leaving 2 platoons under Brady & Ochs up in the support line, came back here with the other two & Rice & Lewis. We came back about 5.30am.

Last night & to-day have been very wet & beastly. We were on the qui vive, especially last night for a little mining officer rushed in in great alarm, saying that the Huns were undermining part of our line. So I had to take the necessary precautions.

There were supposed to be two local bombing shows of ours last night, dear, but nothing seemed to materialise. We go back I think on Thursday, for 4 days.

I'm afraid, dear, this is an awfully sort letter, but I'm awfully tired & have hardly slept since we came up. With the result that I fell asleep this afternoon, when I meant to write. Tomorrow DV I'll write you by Christmas letter. So remember me to all...

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22nd December 1915

Arthur writes his Christmas letter to Dollie, full of wishes that they could be together; the Hun gunners are very active, despite the season; there has been shelling all day, but thankfully no casualties; hopes of leaving the front line early tomorrow; Arthur has been busy and unable to write his Christmas letters “in this pesky little hole in the earth”.

Arthur to Dollie

In my dug-out, Wednes. 3.30pm

I'm hoping that this will reach you on the 25th. My darling, what shall I say, how can I express all that I feel and want to say... Happy Christmas, dear, best of all wishes – I only wish that I could be with you ... I am with you always dear in thought – and as each day our love grows stronger & more wonderful ... So imagine me by your side, dear – so I will picture you & let us talk together in the silent communion of our hearts, not needing words, but rejoicing in the wonder of our love. God bless you, dear, & keep you always happy.

I've asked Daisy, dear, to get something for you from me. It's a photo frame with our crest & colours. I hope it has arrived in time.

Now, dear, I've a parcel to thank you for & four letters, Thursday, Friday & two of Saturday. Thanks awfully, dear, you are a generous little soul. Thanks awfully for the letters. Things are beastly dull & rotten out here, especially now ... Christmas is coming, this Division have wronged us shamefully, the Hun gunners are beastly active. Your dear little letters are a veritable ray of sunlight for they come from the sunshine of your dear presence to the gloom of life without you. God bless you. I'm going to keep your dear Christmas letter ... to read on Christmas Day...

Last night was a night of unrest for we made a bombing attack on the left and things were pretty busy for a bit. To-day too there has been a lot of shelling all day. Luckily DG no casualties. We are to be relived early tomorrow morning.

Darling mine, please wish your dear Mater a thousand good wishes - & all I know. I'll try & write to her, but I'm very busy and its awfully hard to write in this pesky little hole in the earth. I've written home & to Rosa...

24th December 1915

Arthur thanks Dollie for all her letters and parcels; he is still upset he and his men are with the 23rd Londons in Saily – and on half an hour's notice to move back to the front line; champagne and a turkey from his old CO of the 1/3rds and champagne from his new CO of the 23rds; Arthur is busy sourcing Christmas provisions for the men – including roast pork; Christmas mail from the family, including the Pater, and sisters Mabel [Arrigo] and Connie [King]; last night the British blew up a counter-mine in the Hohenzollern, & all were afraid lest the Germans pushed forward; the Germans shelled the outskirts of Saily in the morning & again in the afternoon.

Arthur to Dollie

In billets, Christmas Eve 10pm

I've lots of things to say that I find difficult to express, & lots to thank you for. I've letters of the 19th & 20th & altogether three parcels, of which two by their labels came from you, dear. One came a few days ago, another to-night, with a pudding &c and the note case from your Mater, God bless her. It has arrived very opportunely, for the ribbon of the other broke to-day. A third parcel also came with a box of crackers & a Buszard cake. [Famous London manufacturers of wedding cake], who from I don't know! Anyway thanks awfully dear heart of mine; you are awfully generous...

Let me give you my news, little one. Yesterday we were relieved by the London Irish – the 18th Londons – in the morning. Each platoon marched back independently. I myself reached here, at Saily, at 11: just in time to see the last of our HQ go off to Vaudricourt. We had a little difficulty settling down, finding billets. However, we've got a fairly decent mess room. I have a bed in the same house. We are at half-an-hours readiness to move off. In the afternoon Rice & I drove over to Vaudricourt. There were several things I wanted to see the CO about. The weather broke & the drive, in an open cart, wasn't very bright.

However, I found them all very fit & cheery over there – Lucky beggars to be out of it all. The CO was awfully kind. The other day, when he came round the trenches, he saw I wasn't feeling very fit, so he sent up two bottles of champagne.

On getting back last night there were your two dear letters of the 19th & 20th also letters from the Pater, Connie [King] & Mabel [Arrigo] & a postcard from Lloyd. He should have returned last night, but the mails have been very irregular for the last day or two. For instance there was no mail to-day and it looks as if the Channel crossing had been interrupted.

Last night we were kept in a state of readiness. We blew up a counter-mine in the Hohenzollern, & they were rather afraid lest the Germans pushed forward. However, dear, the Germans seemed more apprehensive even than we were. They shelled the outskirts of this place this morning & again this afternoon.

We have been busy to-day trying to fix up something for the men to-morrow, buying pigs (as pork) & all manner of provisions. For ourselves, the CO tried to have

us all together, but we are too close to the Hun to be spare from here. So he has sent us a turkey & six bottle of fizz – very decent of him.

I had hoped to get to Midnight Mass to-night, dear. It appeared in Orders, but some time ago I got a note to say it was off. Mass is at 9am to-morrow at La Bourse about 1 ½ miles away. You may be sure that I shall have a big place for you, dear, in my prayers. Do you remember last year – Mass in the Cathedral at Citta Vecchia!

25th December 1915

A busy day for Arthur – serving at Christmas morning Mass then doing the rounds of all his platoons – to cheer the men up; finally - Christmas dinner in the officers mess; Arthur has been overwhelmed with parcels from home – but he'd gladly trade them all for one glimpse of Dollie; his Christmas wish – “Please God, the time will pass swiftly for this war to end...”

Arthur to Dollie

In billets, Christmas Day 1915, 9.45pm

The day has come, and nearly gone – and I miss you terribly, little lover mine. May God bless you always. To-night a great post came, a heap of letters, your dear ones & one from Elsie, a card from Alfonse, a letter from Maggie [Agius], another from your dear Mater. Three parcels – one I think from home and your dear parcel with your photo in it. Darling I love it – you are priceless...

This morning I was up soon after 7 and into Labourse for Mass at 9. I served: went to Communion. My thoughts were so full of you, dear. After that I came back to some brekker here at 11. Then went into Col. Newman of the 23rd, stayed there till nearly 1 & back to lunch. Davis had ridden over to lunch. He was very fit.

This afternoon I went to see one or two men who are at posts near here to cheer them up, then did the rounds of my Platoons at their dinners to say a few words to them. It reminded me so much of last year & the happy Christmas I spent in your loved company. Tea was sandwiched in between my rounds for it was about six before I had finished. Then I slept for an hour: after that our dinner et voila.

I am absolutely over laden with good things ... You've been awfully generous. God bless your heart & the others have followed suit. So that my head is aw whirl with how many parcels I have received & from whom one of them has come. But I'd give them all up for a glimpse of you, dear heart. Please God, the time will pass swiftly for this war to end...



FRANCE
XMAS. 1915.



C. Barber
25th 07

Our Christmas tree — this year!

BEST OF LUCK FROM THE
23RD LONDON REG^T

France
Xmas. 1915.



C. Barber. 25th 07.

Best Wishes
from the
23rd London Reg^t

27th December 1915

Christmas is over, for Arthur and his men have moved and are now in “reserve” - in wooden huts, a mile and a half nearer the front than their previous billets in Saily; the weather is miserable – stormy, with wind and rain; an encouraging Christmas letter from the CO of the 23rd Londons. Back home, friend Elsie and her beau are no longer an item.

Arthur to Dollie

Billets (of sorts), Mon. even. 9pm

We have moved again for we are now supposed to be “in” again. However for two or three days we shall be in reserve. I am just a wee bit anxious about you, lover mine, for I haven’t had a letter from you the past two days, but I expect that the Christmas rush & the wild weather are responsible for that. Rosa sent a thing of Kiplings: “If”, also a booklet. I must write & thank her.

Yesterday I was a bit busy. I went to Mass at 11, at 12 the CO of the 23rd had a pow-wow. Sammy & Abbott came – Lloyd also turned up & Lewis went off. They have found some job for him. Then we had to fix things up for our move this morning. We left this morning just before 9. We are only about a mile & a half nearer up. We marched here independently, dear, got the men settled down into huts. We have a room in a house near the church. The church & most of the village are pretty well battered about. Ochs has gone off in charge of a working party.

The weather is very boisterous, very stormy with wind & rain. That, little one, is all my news, I think ... First, dear heart, I enclose an old photo that Rice has just given me – of the summer days, Lewis, Rice, Lloyd & myself. Rather a characteristic attitude, isn’t it, dear. Next, a letter from the CO to me. I wrote in & wished him a happy Christmas. This was his answer!

I was awfully sorry to hear about Elsie. We know what a glorious & unspeakable joy love is, don’t we, dear. My heart goes out in sympathy for those who have never known it, & especially for her, poor girl, who loves & has lost...

28th December 1915

Arthur is overwhelmed by the amount of Christmas post finally catching up with him and despairs of finding the opportunity to write back; a recce of the front line trenches [the Breslau & the Goeben] that they are to move up to in a few days time; no news just yet of Arthur and his 1/3rds being re-united with the their old HQ.

Arthur to Dollie

Tues. even. 5.10pm

A big budget came in to-day. I don't know how I shall be able to answer that all till we come out again. First of all, & prized beyond all were two dear letters of yours of the 23rd & 24th – and a postcard from the “Troc” [Trocadero Club]. God bless you, dear. Everything would be fearfully dull, if it wasn't for your dear letters and the news they bring of you, my sweetheart. Then there were letters from Evie & Edgar, & Nannie & a Christmas card from Connie and Harry [King].

To-day has been quite fairly fine. This morning I went up to see our new bit of line that we shall be moving into in a few days time. It is part that was won in the September push & my bit embraces two old German communication trenches named after the Breslau & the Goeben! One goes up through miles of communication trenches from Vermelles. They were “pipsqueaking” a bit when I was up there but no damage done. I got back to lunch at 2. Then slept for an hour and a half.

No news yet of our rejoining our HQ but I hear things are beginning to move at home. Please God, they may move quickly. We leave here to-morrow about 4am! & move up into Vermelles.

Let me answer your dear letters. First of all, about my address. The address is the same, little one, i.e. 1 / 3rd London Regt, T.F. British Expeditionary Force (or just BEF) France. They don't want the Division put in now. For the rest, although we are separated from HQ who are back at Vaudricourt, teaching drafts, and although we are under the CO of the 23rd for orders – we are the 3rd and it will not be long DV before we shall rejoin HQ and the Divisional Commander will get the d-g he deserves for messing us about...

I'm glad, dear, you were able to find something for your dear Mater from me. I was more than content to leave matters to your choice & feel more than satisfied as to its result! Thanks awfully! ...

29th December 1915

Arthur and his Company left their billets at 4am and are now in their new position in the front line - he is writing in a small and uncomfortable cellar; one of Arthur's trusty Subs (Ochs) has been invalided out sick.

Arthur to Dollie

In a cellar, Wednes. 6.20pm

There is not very much news to-day, dear. I am looking forward eagerly to tomorrow's mail for no dear letter came from you to-day. That should men two tomorrow DV.

This morning we moved up here early – up soon after 3. We left Noyelles at half past four and are now up at V- again. Only this time we are not nearly so comfortable as we were last time we were up here. We have a cellar that just takes the 3 of us, myself, Lloyd & Rice.

There's a mine near here that must have just been completed when war broke out. It is very completely fitted up – every [thing] brand new but smashed to bits!

This afternoon Sammy & Lewis came in. Sammy is in charge of the Brigade snipers – a ridiculous job for a fellow of his age & experience. Sammy told me that Ochs (another of my Subs – who was off on permanent working party these few days) was evacuated sick this morning. I expected it sooner or later for he's not a strong 'un though a plucky little fellow. I've just heard that Hammerton has turned up & is to take his place. He joins me tomorrow.

30th December 1915

Arthur to Dollie

9am

Only just woken up, dear; so I'm afraid I'll only just have time to give you an enormous hug & wish you Good-morning, dear, to catch the post. So au revoir. Remember me to all. I'll write as soon as I can find time...

31st December 1915

An explosive end to the old year for Arthur as the Germans blow up a mine and seize the head of a double sap; a muddled time under bombardment, with trenches being flattened and several dead require burial; in all the chaos Arthur manages to lose and find his fountain pen; Arthur's fervent New Year wish is that he will be able to have more home leave - he has only seen Dollie for 3 weeks this year; and a final request – for some new nail scissors.

Arthur to Dollie

New Years Eve, Friday 8.30pm

The last two days have indeed been days of alarms & fatigue for us here. Yesterday we were more or less comfortably settled in Vermelles. Relief was to take place about midnight last night.

Everything was pretty quiet when just at dusk, about twenty minutes past 4, the Germans blew up a mine and seized the head of a double sap of ours. At the same time, they bombarded our trenches heavily in the neighbourhood. Our gunners replied for all they were worth and for a bit there was quite a young scrap. Our brigade casualties were pretty heavy. We stood too in Vermelles for about a couple of hours, then stood by & carried rations up for the Companies in front. (Hurray! I thought I'd lost my fountain pen – but it has been found!)

To continue – As a lot of companies & C had gone up to reinforce, the brigade cancelled the relief. Then finding that one battalion had suffered rather & was a bit shaky, asked the 23rd (including us) to relieve them. So about 3am we started up to try & find our way. Fearful maze of trenches, however we managed to get up to our places in support – though it wasn't until after 8 that we managed to settle down. Even so dear, things were very muddled and there was no shelter for the men. Lloyd & I are sharing a dug-out with the MO & Signalling Officer. They shelled us intermittently all the way up & all day long. Yesterday they absolutely flattened the trench in parts & there are several dead that require burial.

But away with all this. I want to wish you, darling, an awfully HAPPY New Year. This last year, dearest, we hav'n't seen much of one another, have we? Please God, next year, it will be reversed & instead of my only having had 3 weeks at home & 49 at the front – I shall have only 3 weeks here & 49 with you. But that, alas, is much too good to be true! Anyway, dear heart, you know I love you, more & more always. God bless you & keep you always happy.

Well, little lover, its nearly 10 & I haven't slept for a long time.... I wonder, dear if you would get me a pair of nail scissors, please not a folding pair necessarily as long as they have a cover for the point...