

5th November 1915

Arthur has been sending Dollie postcards for the last few days – this is his first chance to write since 30th October. Arthur's leave has been cancelled due to reorganisation of the Divisions; a long, wet march back to the safety of Calonne; stories of the horrendously muddy conditions endured by some of the troops; a chance for a clean up after being in mud for 23 days; Arthur and his Company are no longer in the Meerut Division, but now part of the 46th (North Midland) Division – a Territorial Division and are moved on to Vieille Chapelle; a farewell from General Jacobs.

Arthur to Dollie

Fortified House, Friday morn 8am

... It seems years since I last wrote to you & I've heaps of letters to thank you for, little sweetheart, & heaps of news to tell. When I wrote last I was at Chocolate Post, in the Garhwal Brigade, Meerut Division, due for leave which had been applied for, for the 1st. Now I am at Fortified House – another post – but much more comfortable & much further back.

On Monday we changed over posts with No1 Coy. They held posts further back & rather less uncomfortable. I then heard that my leave was cancelled, and that we were to be relieved the following day Tuesday. I tried to find out why my leave was “off” and was told that the Meerut & Lahore Divisions were leaving France but that their Territorial battalions were remaining behind. So that they were giving leave in preference to those who were going from France.

The next day the relief took place. We were relieved by the Dehra Dun Brigade. We then marched back to Calonne, miles back, where we arrived about 7, dead beat, wet through & very cold, for the weather had been consistently wet & miserable & some of the men were up to their waists in mud. Indeed one of the Leicesters was recovered suffering from exposure after having been in mud to his shoulders all night – unable to move. Some of No1 Coy didn't arrive until the afternoon of the next day – Wednesday! (The relief was due to take place midday Tuesday!)

That night, dear, Tuesday we slept at Calonne. We made preparations to get clean – for we've been in since the beginning of October & have just had 23 days in the trenches – the greater part of that time in mud to my knees.

We heard on Wednesday that the following day the Brigade was moving further back. They didn't know what we were going to do. That night at 2am a message came through that we were to go with the Brigade – at 3 am another message ordering us to move back to Vieille Chapelle at 9. Here we are.

On the way back General Jacobs said good-bye to us and told us we were being attached to the 11th Corps (that includes the Guards Division), to the 46th or North Midland Division – a Territorial Division. So in future dear please address my letters not Meerut but 46th North Midland Division!

Well dear, the Corporal is waiting for the post. I hope this letter will catch it. Everything is topsy-turvey & disconnected for a bit. I am awfully well, dying to see your dear face again. I hope as soon as we're settled down to get leave DV. So au revoir.

6th November 1915

The first frost of the year; Arthur is trying desperately to answer all of Dollie's welcome letters; the reorganisation of the Division still means leave is uncertain; Arthur has hopes that now they are part of a British division life will be more definite and regular.

Arthur to Dollie

Fortified House, 8.30am

Good morning... To-day is a wonderful day – for the sun is shining. Last night we had our first frost Brrr.

Thanks awfully, sweet heart, for your dear letter of Tuesday. I've got such heaps of your letters to answer that I'm going to try and steal an uninterrupted hour to-day, just to answer them. God bless your loving heart, dear. I do appreciate your letters awfully. If you knew how they and your sweet memory help & comfort me.

There is little or no news dear yet. We are not at present attached to the 139th Infantry Brigade – chiefly Sherwood Foresters. I did my rounds yesterday – it took about 2 hours even with short cuts.

I'm pressing all I can for leave. I hope once we get settled into this Division that we shall get it more regularly. One of the advantages of being in a British as opposed to an Indian Division is that everything is more definite & regular. One knows when & for how long one is due for the trenches, how long out &c. A great blessing. Beresford was round yesterday, but had no news.

7th November 1915

Arthur despairs of finding the time to write to Dollie; yesterday was spent pulling up barbed wire; the fine weather has turned to mist; still no definite news of leave.

Arthur to Dollie

Fortified House, Sun. 8.30am

Thanks awfully for your letter of Wednesday, dear. I love to hear your news. I'd hoped to get an hour spare & free from interruptions yesterday to answer all your dear letters, but it was not to be. We were busy all day pulling up barbed wire. Beresford came round. Rice came back from a machine gun school, so I'm having him up here. Ainsworth is also back but is in charge of the guns until Tabor takes over.

The weather yesterday dear, that started so fine, rather clouded over and grew very damp & misty so that one could only see a few hundred yards. To-day I'm afraid promises to be much the same.

Darling mine, I'm dying to see you. No news yet about leave, but DV as soon as we settle down in this Division it should go through quickly.

8th November 1915

Arthur is kept busy showing the Commanding Officers of the Sherwood Foresters round the posts he is currently in command of; the Londons are relieved but there is a scramble to find them billets locally; still no news of the much anticipated leave.

Arthur to Dollie

Fortified House, Monday 8.45am

Yesterday- bad luck – the mails were hung up in the transfer of Divisions, and I had to go without your dear letter. I missed it awfully.

Yesterday I did my rounds. Rice came with me. Soon after I got back, the Major turned up. I walked down to HQ with him & stayed there a few minutes. Just before lunch he turned up again with the Adjutant, the GOC the 139th Infantry (T.F. Sherwood Foresters) Brigade – to which we are attached – and his Brigade Major. The General's name is Shipley – an old Fusilier – he seems a very decent sort of fellow. The brigade Major's name is Neilson. They went round this place with me – I shewed him over it.

In the afternoon I dozed for a bit. Was woken up by a message to go to HQ at once. Found that the 5th Sherwood Foresters were to relieve some of my posts. Would I go & show them round &c. So I dashed off to their HQ to find the relief practically completed. Came back here & found that HQ had been unable to find room for the relieved troops at Vieille Chapelle – so I had to try & find room near here *pro. tem.* and get them settled down, render various reports, etc. So that I didn't turn in till 9.30.

That dear little one is all my news. I'm longing for the day when I hear that leave is clear again ...

25th November 1915

Arthur is writing in the train on his way to the boat at Southampton, after 10 days of home leave; he is at a loss to know what to say to Dollie – he is still in a daze after their recent parting.

Arthur to Dollie

In the train, 2pm

... Sweet darling mine. I don't know what to say – or how to say it. The full measure of my loss has not yet broken in upon me, and I am as one stunned & dazed, not knowing where to turn...

Be brave little brave heart. Be true to yourself and all will be well. Keep the home fire burning against the hour of my return.

And now my darling au revoir. I'll do my utmost to get you a line from Boulogne. May God bless you & keep you safe & happy. I am with you always dear heart of mine ...

25th November 1915

A second letter from Arthur – his boat from Folkestone has been delayed until 9.50pm so he and a few friends are dining at The Royal Pavilion Hotel.

Arthur to Dollie

Royal Pavilion Hotel, Folkestone, 6.25pm

My own darling,

I'm sure you'll be awfully surprised to find me writing from here. The explanation is simple. The boat is not sailing till 9.50. We had a good journey down, lunch not bad – and were on board by 3. They kept us there till six. The only movement we did was to change our berth to make way for the incoming mail boat.

At six, dear, they decided to let us on shore – voila. We made a beeline for this place – feeling quite hungry. They've promised us dinner at 7 – which we're looking forward to. I am with Bobby Page & Morley – the Padre whom I met at Victoria. That little one is all my news.

I am wondering where you are, dear & what you're doing ... God bless you. But we must be brave, dear, as I know you are. I am longing for your next letter, I am longing for your news. I've written in the train & given it to the Pullman man to post. I'll try & write from Boulogne but there's sure to be an awful scrimmage & darkness. So you'll know that "no news is good news". God bless you once more & remember me to all...

26th November 1915

Arthur is stuck at Boulogne and is wild with annoyance – he could have had another 24 hours at home; a clear moonlit crossing; no trains are available until the evening, so after brekker they have lunch in town at the Café Mony – where they used to dine when based at Etaples; the weather is now changeable with light snow in the morning.

Arthur to Dollie

Hotel Louvre, Boulogne-sur-Mer, Friday afternoon, 2.22

More delays! We do not go on till this evening. I am wild: they might easily have given us this 24 hours at home. But let me give you the news. I wrote last night from the hotel at Folkestone, telling you, dear, of our delay there. After I had written we went in and had dinner – not very good. Then coffee & so on to the boat. We had to be on board by nine though the boat didn't leave for about an hour.

We had a good crossing. The wind was from the NE & freshening a bit so that the waves were already shewing white and to-day it's quite rough. Near England it was a bit foggy, but further out it cleared. It was a wonderful moonlight night. They swung the boats out after leaving harbour & all of us officers wore lifebelts, which served to keep us warm.

We reached here after about an hour & a half: only to be told that there weren't any trains till to-night. So we came along here – though it's a dirty place – as it lies between the quay & the station & is very handy. We got to sleep about half-past one this morning & though we awoke at 7, we slept again & weren't down for brekker until ten to eleven.

After brekker, sweet heart, we went across into the town then swung to our left & out to the end of the eastern end of the two piers that mark the entrance into the harbour. It was cold but the air was glorious, blowing straight from you at home – God bless you. So back again to lunch at the Café Mony in the town – where we always go - & used to when we were at Etaples. The weather is very windy & stormy with glorious intervals of sun. It snowed a bit this morning.

I feel so dull & lonely, dear without you – without your dear news. I am hungry for you, sweet heart of mine. May God bless you & keep you, dear...

27th November 1915

Arthur is finally settled in new billets at Burbure after a slow and freezing evening journey from Boulogne to Lillers, changing trains at Berguette in the middle of the night. The returning officers found welcome shelter in offices, sentry boxes and various cafes along the way. Now Arthur is feeling more human after a wash and shave, and a hair cut in Lillers – with a great batch of Dollie's letters to answer.

Arthur to Dollie

Flanders, Saturday 6.40pm

...You see I have arrived at last, safe & sound DG. We had dinner last night at the Louvre, Boulogne at 6 then over to the station. We found that the 47th Division were supposed to go via Havre. However we could get to Lillers by changing at Berguette.

We left at 7.30 & after a slow & comfortless journey reached Berguette about half-past one. There we got out. Our connection left at 3.30. It was a wonderful moon light night but bitterly cold & freezing hard. We took refuge in a corner of the RTO's office which was fairly warm & there slept on the floor. I was very thankful that I had lugged my old blanket along with me.

The train came in punctually at 3.30. There was only one station before Lillers – Ham, where we were in February. We reached Lillers at 4. Here we could find no accommodation beyond that of a sentry's shelter. Here then, dear, we sat before a brazier till 6. It was cold.

The one café opened. In we went & sat before the fire there drinking hot coffee. At 7.30 the café reserved for officers opened: so we migrated there & had brekker. The next difficulty was to find Burbure – where the Battalion is – and once found, to get there. However by about 9.30 we managed to get hold of a car and were out here in a few minutes for it is less than 2 miles out.

I reported to the CO dear, and then came over & had a wash & a shave. After lunch Wilcox & I went round the men's billets. Then walked into Lillers, had a haircut there & tea. So back again in the crisp dark. That little lover has been my day; what of yours?

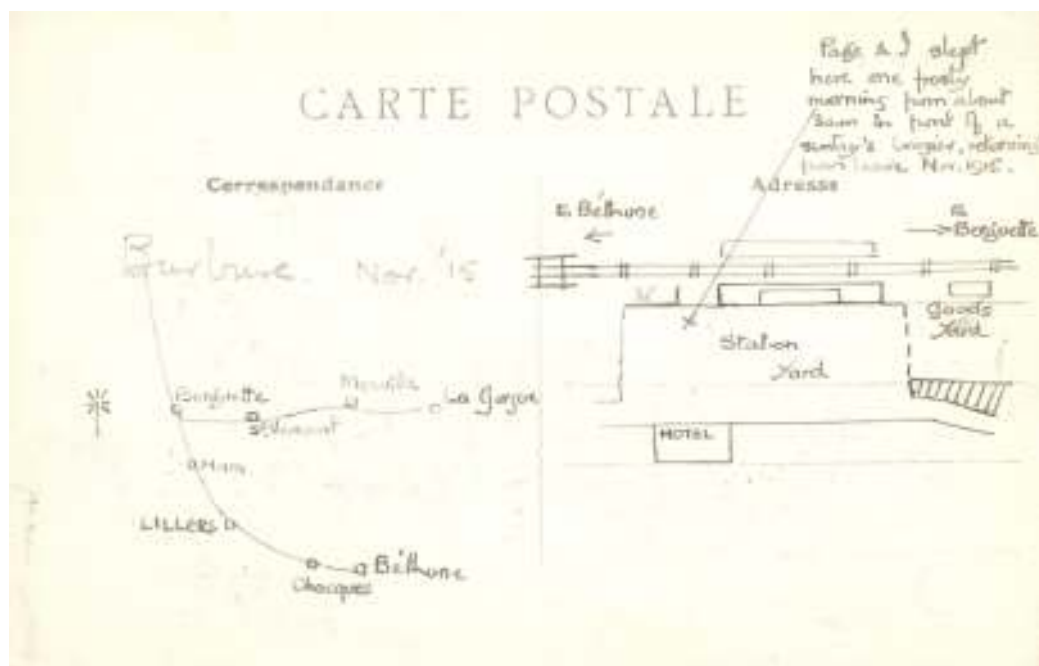
This place is fairly high up set oblong shape on an open muddy place. We've a fairly decent mess room, with a room for me leading off. Quite fairly comfortable. Apparently the new Brigade the 142nd are not popular with us. They certainly don't look up to much & are very stingy as regards leave & very supercilious in other things. They'll soon tame down. Tomorrow we are being reviewed by the Divisional General. The battalion was inspected the other day by the new Brigadier, and again by French.

I am very fit, dear, to-night, but very sleepy. I've got a great batch of your letters to read again & answer. God bless you little one. I'm going to say au revoir, dear ...

B. M., édité. - 603. - BOULOGNE-sur-MER
Hôtel du Louvre - Place de la République









28th November 1915

Arthur makes the effort to get up early for Mass but finds no one at the church; later he attends a requiem for a 13 year old girl; Arthur is now attached to the 47th Division; an inspection by the Divisional Commander – who leaves the men waiting in the bitter cold for his arrival; a divisional route march is planned for Tuesday – Friday; there is a hard frost every night but the days are fine.

Arthur to Dollie

Billets, Sunday even: 9.50pm

... I've been fairly busy to-day, and its very late now but I could not go to bed without thanking you for your two dear letters of Thursday & Friday. God bless you, sweet darling. I was longing to hear from you ...

Yes dear, *pro tem* "47th Division" is right as the address – but perhaps you had better write "attached 47th Division"...

This morning I was virtuous and got up at 7 – brekker at 8, to go to church at 9. However when I got down there, there was nothing doing, so I had to come back & go again at 10.30. Sung Mass. Incidentally too a Requiem Mass for it was the burial of a girl of 13. On my way back I met Lloyd & Ochs. I went with them to draw some money both for myself & the Company.

Lunch was at 12.30. Lloyds brother, who is a gunner in the Division, came along. Quite a decent sort of chap. We paraded at 1.15 for an inspection by Major General Barter, the Divisional Commander. He didn't turn up till 2.30. It was very cold waiting. He seems a good fellow, unlike the Brigadier – who is the reverse. The GOC spoke a few words after the inspection, welcoming us to the Division. After parade I paid out the Company.

There are a lot of company matters that have been taking up my time. I am also anxious to go through my kit – which I hope to do to-morrow! No other news, little one save that we are doing a divisional route march from Tuesday to Friday. Continuous schools of instruction in various things are going on. Wilcox, my second in command, had his name forward for promotion to Captaincy. The weather is bitterly cold & fine. It freezes hard every night...

30th November 1915

A short note today; a change in the weather means all parades have been cancelled – and the Divisional route march postponed until tomorrow.

Arthur to Dollie

Billets, Tues. 8.25am

Thanks awfully, dear, for your letter – Saturday's – that came yesterday. I was so bucked to get it.

Yesterday the weather broke – horribly – it blew very strong from the SW & rained ugh – so that except for a kit inspection in the morning there were no parades. I went to COs orders at 9, held my own at 12. We were all expecting the Divisional trek this morning, but owing to the wet it has been postponed till to-morrow.

Yesterday afternoon we all had a lecture from Beresford – a very stale subject – Advanced & Rear Guards. This from 3 – 4. After it the CO took me into HQ for tea. Then I came back up here. We weren't sure whether the trek was "on" or not, so that there was a certain amount to be done. Tabor & Newton went of on leave last night. Lloyd goes next Saturday. To-day DG it is much finer.

That, little lover is all my news. I was very sorry to hear from you about poor old Tom. Have you any details yet? The Post Corporal is waiting so you must forgive this short note this morning dear...