



**6<sup>th</sup> April 1915**

**A heartfelt letter from Arthur to Dollie – now on the train for Folkestone - after an all too short Easter leave at home in Hampstead.**

*Arthur to Dollie:*

In the train, Tues afternoon 2.25pm

... It's so hard to write – my thoughts are all awlirl. I just can't think – but in my mind there is a vivid photograph of a darling little figure in a navy blue coat & skirt – awfully sweet & altogether lovable ... there is such an awful lot I feel I want to tell you – it's so difficult to express in a letter. God bless you, dear...

We are now just past Orpington. My thoughts are full of you ... I am already longing for your next letter ... I wonder what you are doing, dear. I've been so happy with you these few days that GOD has given us together...

I am using the dear pen you gave me, but you are not to judge it's merits from my writing – the train is shaking awfully ... You are a generous darling – my old pen was quite unfit for use.

You are to cheer up, darling – please – DG. I am awfully well – as yet – in spite of the méringue glacée. Don't worry too much about the servant question, darling, even if things are trying. Just try & stick it. Well, my darling, au revoir. God bless you...

7<sup>th</sup> April 1915

Back in billets; memories of a bitter parting at Victoria; a long, cold, wet journey with brother Alfred; Edgar has collected their post whilst on leave; useful parcels and a wonderful Easter egg; Dollie is to take care of Arthur's written account of the battle [Neuve Chapelle]; the three brothers have tea together.

*Arthur to Dollie*

In billets, 10.22 am Wednesday.

At last I have arrived. We are back in our old billets as before. I miss you more than ever, more than I can tell... I cannot speak of the bitterness of that parting at Victoria. I watched for you out of the carriage window. When at last the crowd cut you off from view, it was as though the sun of my life had passed behind a cloud. I felt utterly miserable...



We had quite a good journey down as far as Folkestone. Our ship was the "Onward", the same boat that brought us over – how happy I was then in the knowledge that I should soon see you. We got on board all right, got chairs. **Barry Rochford & his wife** came down to see **Rochford** off but I didn't see them. We left soon after 4 o'clock & though I held out for about half an hour – I was violently sick for the rest of the voyage, even right up to the mouth of the Boulogne Harbour.

It was very windy & cold on the boat & rather wet. It was raining at Boulogne when we arrived, just before 6 o'clock. We had to report to the Officer here. He was a doddering old fellow & it wasn't until close on 7.30 that he supplied us with a guide to take us to the Railway Transport Officer. His office was right along the Quays under the cliffs, nearly a mile away. The rain & wind were beating in our faces & our packs felt very heavy. However we at last were shewn our train. We were allotted seats – 4 to a compartment where we left our packs & were told to report again there at 9.30. So we went off to find something to eat. After walking for about 25 minutes we reached the "Louvre", the hotel on the quay where we put up for the night when we came across. After some discussion we went in there – but the food was bad and the service ditto.

We secured a crazy old cab to take us back, but it couldn't get along the quay the whole way, so we had to walk again. It was a beastly night. Finally, dear, we got to our carriage, found two strange valises in it & found also that **Alfred's** pack was missing. However we sat tight, & found finally that the 2 extra valises belonged to some very young gunners of K's Army. We sat tight & finally they restored **Alfred** his pack from where they had put it & cleared off with their traps. We settled down & dozed off. Luckily I had my air pillow and balaclava cap. They shunted us all over the place – though we came back to where we had been originally & I really don't think that we got properly started until about midnight.

We travelled all night, dear, I dozed at intervals. I remember waking about 1 o'clock & two & again about 5. We arrived at Aire about 5.20, Berguette about 6.30 & at Lillers about 7.10. At each place we stopped & were shunted backwards & forwards, apparently in order to amuse the engine drivers. At Lillers, which is quite close to Ham, we disembarked. From there we were to complete the journey in the motor lorries of the supply column. They did not start until 7.45 so we had time to get a cup of coffee at a little estaminet & **Alfred** produced some chocolate. **Alfred** and I came along on the same lorry. The journey was really without incident – except once when the lorry in front of us ran in to the side of the road, trying to avoid a French cart – and sank down to its axle. However after some delay, it was towed out & we came on.

We reported to **Sammy** at HQ. **Algy** isn't back & on leave are the **CO, the Babe, Bobbie, Johnny Sutcliffe, Quartermaster and Harold Moore**. After reporting to **Sammy**, who is very fit, I came straight on here to my billet & had something to eat, 2 eggs, some brawn, tea. I didn't go up to see **Edgar** [Agius] – he was on parade. **Alfred** has to go into a village 6 miles away to draw pay for his Company. I wanted to write at once.

It is 5.25pm. This morning I left off writing until I should have heard from **Edgar**. So I went over the road to my billet, dear ... [the] same one as before – and had a wash and shave. Meanwhile I had sent a note in to **Edgar** & he came along. He has four of your precious letters of Saturday, Sunday, Monday & Tuesday. I simply love to get them – though we have talked over most of what we had to discuss. I have been so happy these last few days, for I have spent them with you, thank God. **Edgar** also brought two packages containing most of the contents of two parcels – he had eaten what was perishable... Everything was there, especially useful was the refill for

my lamp, darling, for the old battery became exhausted last night. Also the ink – which has already proved useful, too. The Easter Egg arrived. How it tore my heart to see it, for it called back the happy, happy memories of the past few days...

**Edgar** stayed on to lunch with me at our Brigade Machine Gun mess. We are rather few as two of our fellows from here are on leave. We had curry for lunch cooked by our native khitmagar. After lunch I went down with **Edgar**, saw **Rochford** & went on to **Alfred**'s billet, where **Edgar** has been staying. **Alfred** was back, but went off after a few minutes to pay his men. **Edgar** is moving into a billet nearer to mine. Afterwards **Edgar** & I went up towards the Quartermaster's stores. On the way I met **Sammy** who informed me that I has 2 more machine guns. So I went up to see about transport for them. Then I went back to **Alfred**'s billet with **Edgar** & when **Alfred** came back from paying his Company we had tea together. After tea I came up here to write. There is little or no news here. They had a very good "cinema" show the other evening, so **Edgar** says.

By the way, sweet heart, I want you to do something for me, will you, please. You remember the account of Neuve Chapelle that I began to write – I left all the papers together, I think in the morning room. I want you to take them, dear, please and keep them safe as there are some sketches of value amongst them. Also please, you'll find with them a printed map of BETHUNE 1:40.000 – will you let me have it at once, as I want it badly - please.

It is now close on six. I wonder what you are doing, dear. I wonder what you are wearing & where you are. My thoughts are always of you, my darling I feel indeed that without you life would indeed not be worth living...

**8<sup>th</sup> April 1915**

**Back into the old routine; overhauling the new guns; preparing for the General's inspection; brother Edgar will be with Arthur and Alfred for the foreseeable future.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

In billets, 6.15 Thurs. afternoon

... I didn't begin to write earlier, for I had been hoping an almost impossible hope – that I might hear from you to-day. Alas, no welcome letter came. I long for to-morrow and news from you.

Let me give you my news, such as it is. Last night I went to bed soon after dinner and slept like a log. This morning up about 8.40, breakfast at 9. After breakfast we had a parade. I spent most of the day overhauling guns, especially the new ones, & getting ammunition packed in the belts. After I had organised the section again, I left affairs in the hands of the NCOs. We had lunch soon after one. This afternoon there were one or two matters that wanted fixing up, then I sent my servant to see if there was any news from you, my darling. No luck, so about 3.30 I went down to **Rochford's** billet to see if **Edgar** was there – he is in **Rochford's** company pro. tem. I found **Rochford** there alone. He said **Edgar** had gone out riding with **Alfred**. **Abbott** came in after a bit. He had been exercising the bomb throwers. We had tea together, dear. **Edgar** came in soon after; he looks very fit DG.

We went down to **Alfred's** billet and I am only just back. We three are going to play bridge with **Rochford** after dinner. For the rest, dear heart, the weather is very very windy, fine generally with occasional & very heavy shower of rain.

**General French** is going to inspect the Brigade to-morrow about half-past two, so I expect to spend the morning cleaning up.

It's awfully hard to settle down again. I simply long for something to happen to put an end to this beastly war. I live in sweet memories of you, my darling. Life is impossible without you. You are always in my thoughts. I am always thinking of you, picturing you in my mind, wondering what you are doing, wearing, saying...

The Easter egg ... only hope you didn't spend a lot on it. You are a generous little soul, God bless you. I have the ribbon in my pocket... The pen is a great success. I use it always. I am using it now – fresh proof of your sweet generosity.

Well, darling little girl, I'm afraid my news is very scanty. Life is awfully hard without you. I ... can get no comfort, except in sweet memories of you, in your dear photos, your letters, anything that reminds me of you & in prayer always. I just want to be with you always – my mind and heart are full of you.

So, my sweet heart, be brave – as I know you are. Write always – as I know you will.

8<sup>th</sup> / 9<sup>th</sup> April 1915

**Dollie's letters begin to arrive again after home leave; an urgent request for his map of Bethune; a game of Bridge and tea with Edgar and Alfred; on the move tomorrow to temporary billets at Les Lobes; Sir John French fails to turn up for the promised inspection.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

In billets 6.15 Thurs. afternoon

... At last! News from you ... God bless you. I read your letter over and over again. A wonderful thrill and feeling of exultation runs through me when I read the words that you have written & drink in the sweet phrases that you have penned. Thanks awfully, dear little wife to be...

The postcard too arrived safely – thanks awfully & the boys got theirs – many thanks. We weren't crowded at all in the train. I was able to write, as you know by now, that's why I didn't wire.

The story of our journey, too, you know by now – so I need not tell you of that. Maps – I've written about those also, sweet darling. I hope that I made it sufficiently clear that I wanted the one with the red squares, the printed one called BETHUNE 1:40,000 as soon as it is possible, please, darling. The others, please, will you keep. I hope someone is taking care of my trophies...

I am awfully sorry to hear you've had a "head". I can sympathise with you, can't I dear ... It is more an affliction of "heart" than "head"...

For my news, dear, there is not very much. Last night after dinner, I went round to where **Edgar & Rochford** are. **Alfred** came in & we played bridge.

9pm:

I have had continual interruptions, dear. **Lodwick** the Brigade Machine Gun Officer came, with the news that we were to be on the move to-morrow. I was to report at the Brigade Office at 7pm, & that as I might have to move early, I'd better get my kit more or less together to-night. So I went over the road to my room, dear, & did as he advised. Thence straight to Brigade HQ. We had to wait there till after 8 as the Staff Captain, who had gone about new billets, was late coming back. After we had our instructions, I came back here & had something to eat & so voilà.

We are moving to-morrow to our old billets at L-s L---s [Les Lobes]. We stay there two or three days, after that I understand we are to be the Brigade in Reserve – so you see, sweet darling, there is no need at all for you to worry. To-morrow I have to be off fairly early – as I have to report at 10am. Breakfast is at 8.

To-day, dear, has been a day of sun & wind & rain. We did nothing this morning, for **Sir John French** was to inspect us about 2.15. Lunch was at 12.30 & we paraded at 1. Just before lunch we had a short but fierce little storm, rain & sleet, lightening & thunder. Just as we paraded, orders came that the inspection was

cancelled! I rode off to try and find **Edgar** – and, as luck would have it met him on the road. We went on to **Alfred**'s. We decided to try & go for a ride, but one thing after another intervened. The afternoon slipped away & we finally stayed in to tea with **Alfred**...

After tea I went with **Alfred & Edgar** round to **Alfred**'s sleeping billet, then came back here to write, little dreaming I was to be so interrupted. I saw **Tealeaves** this afternoon, dear, about **Evie**'s things. First about the keys, dear, **Eteson**, **Evie**'s servant is at present in hospital. **Tealeaves** will look after the keys as soon as he can get hold of **Eteson**.

**10<sup>th</sup> April 1915**

**Back in old billets with sad memories of the time before Neuve Chapelle; a Rosary and a rose; “The Tatler” arrives; Dollie’s annoyance with the servants; Arthur reluctantly returns Dollie’s Easter letters, for safe keeping.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

Saturday afternoon, 4.5pm.

I’ve just had a fairly busy day, dear. Last night everyone cleared off to bed. It was late so I turned in too. This morning I was up about 7.40, breakfast at 8.10. After breakfast I bicycled off here. I didn’t ride as I thought a bike more convenient & **Lodwick** lent me his. It was a fine morning & the wind, which was quite fresh was at my back most of the time. So it was quite pleasant – but the roads are pretty bad. The Brigade HQ are at the same place where they were when we were down here just a month ago. I was there early, received my instructions about 10am. & got our billets fixed up. We – the Brigade Machine Guns – are in the same place as before. Last time we were here it was before Neuve Chapelle – it seems so strange. We are sitting in the same old room where we used to Mess. There is still a little of our debris here – an empty revolver case.

The Brigade didn’t arrive here until 12. I spent the interval between 10.15 & 12 in a field behind the billet – saying my Rosary – “your” Rosary. What sweet memories, my darling.

We had some lunch at 1.30. Afterwards I had a sleep & then came in here to write. No tea was forthcoming. Our mess stuff has been left behind with some other stores for a second journey & has only just arrived 6.0pm so we are going to have dinner early.

I have just got your darling letter of Wednesday – you darling, thanks awfully. Everything seems different when I get your letters – the whole atmosphere changes. It is like lighting a candle in a dark room. I get a fresh store of comfort & energy – you can’t imagine all they are to me ... I also received the Tatler from your dear hands – a thousand thanks, darling – it is awfully appreciated.

Let me answer your letter, dear – your little pink flower is safe in my breast pocket, next to my heart. I shall treasure it, for you have worn it my treasure. I am awfully sorry to hear about the servants, for I know what trouble in that part of the household leads to, don’t I, dear. Try & put up with it, darling, though its awfully hard and irritating. Remember that I am always by your side, always with you, doing all I can for you, in thought ...

I remembered **Sister Adeodat’s** parcel, but couldn’t post it in Boulogne. However it was posted as soon as I got to Calonne, so it should go all right.

Yes, dear as to writing the full address on my letters. I don’t think that you need worry to do that. Your letters never take more than three days to come, & occasionally by some chance they come in two. The fuller address won’t expedite the delivery & as its so long, I’d just go on as you have been doing. Thanks for the



thought. I am sending you back, darling, the letters that you wrote before Easter – thanks awfully again – they are sweet messages of hope.

For the rest, life is much the same, the same awful vacancy & yet in a way my life is ever so much fuller than any one else's – for I always have you by my side ...

11<sup>th</sup> April 1915

**Mass at Locon & remembering hopes for home leave at Easter; more friends return from leave, with a letter from Dollie; news of brothers Alfred & Edgar; fond memories of a recently deceased comrade, Bertie [Mathieson]; the Brigade is on the move again.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

In Billets, Sunday afternoon 5.10pm

... Thanks awfully for your letter of Thursday last. I got it this afternoon safe & sound. I almost seem to see you here before my eyes in "a white blouse and black and white skirt" in the morning room at 45 [Compayne Gardens] – a glad picture for eyes weary with longing...

Last night we went to bed early. We are sleeping on the floor again, but quite comfortable – save for the almost continuous whining & crying of a young child in the house.

To-day has been the perfect day. This morning we got up for breakfast at 9. Afterwards I set off for Church at Locon. Mass at 10. How I thought of you, darling. Last time I went to church at Locon it was three weeks ago. I remember coming back with **Alfred** & we talked about leave & how glorious it would be, especially if we could get home for Easter. And today, full of happy memories of the happy days I spent with you, source of my happiness. It took me a good half hour to get to the church, but I was so pleased to be able to hear Mass.

I got back to my billets just before 12 and found **Johnny Sutcliffe** just back from leave. Apparently they did not have so long as we did, for they got home on Easter Monday & left on Saturday (that's yesterday). He was looking very fit & said that he had seen you at Victoria. He had also seen **Evie** [Noel] & **Goff Giles**. He says that the latter is very bad & won't be fit for 4 or 5 months! Poor **Goff** – he was in the same trench that my gun was at House "B". After lunch **John** and I walked up to the Battalion who are billeted rather over a mile away. **Hobbs** – our old Doctor from Malta – was there. He is in a hospital at Hazelbrouck & hearing that we were in this part of the world came over to look us up. He is very hale & hearty.

**Harold Moore** was back, **Bobbie & the Babe** – but the two latter I did not see. **Harold** said you were looking very smart – you darling - & that you had given him a letter for me – but that he had given it to **Alfred** to pass on. I went to **Alfred's** billet but he wasn't there. He has been sitting in on a court-martial, so I must wait until to-morrow. I saw **Edgar**. He is very fit. I wanted to see the **C.O.** who is also back – & tell him about his watch - but he was asleep. I walked about a bit with **Edgar** & then came back here just before 4. I went down the road to the Brigade Office to see about some things & then returned here to tea.

Since then I have been writing. There is a photo of poor **Bertie** in yesterday's "Daily Mail" & an account of how he died. Incidentally it mentions **Bertie's** good heart and narrates how on one occasion he carried a man's rifle for him & how on another occasion he spent an extra hour in the trenches looking for a friend's field-

glasses. I was the friend & the field glasses were mine. In the breastwork in front of House "A" was a machine gun pit. We had discarded it in favour of an emplacement a few feet to the left that is the South side of it. However as it had a roof! **Bertie and Tea Leaves** used to sleep there. One afternoon **Lyell** and I had been there discussing a line of fire & when soon after, I missed my glasses, I thought that I had dropped them there. **Bertie** spent some time in looking for them but, as you know, without success. Poor old **Bertie** – he was a good chap. I'm glad **Mrs Mathieson** got some of the details she sought to know.

To-morrow dear, we trek again, but scarcely any distance. Our Brigade is in reserve to the Division & the other two brigades are holding the line. So we are all still out of any risk, thank God...

**12<sup>th</sup> April 1915**

**Arthur's gold chain arrives so he can wear Dollie's locket again; a meeting with the former Garhwals Machine Gun Officer; on the move to La Couture and problems with billets**

*Arthur to Dollie*

in Billets, Monday evening 6.20pm.

Hurray – for to-day two dear letters came to me, Saturday's by hand, Friday's by post. Thanks awfully, your sweet news is so welcome. I am sorry that you have had no further news from [me], even as late as Saturday & cannot understand the delay. I hope & expected that that has all been remedied by now. I did not wire from Boulogne, as what with the censoring & delay, it would have taken almost as long as a letter.

My gold chain came too – I am awfully pleased for now I can wear your dear locket again. Thanks awfully – I am proud to wear it. I think I had better give you my new before I answer your sweet letters in detail.

Last night after dinner **Mankelow** came round. He was the Machine Gun Officer of the 12/39<sup>th</sup> Garhwals & was with me in the front trench on the Thursday, Friday & Saturday of Neuve Chapelle. After that show they joined the 1/39 & 2/39 into one battalion & made **Mankelow** Brigade Bomb Officer. He is quite a decent chap & a Catholic. We talked of old times a bit – then walked down the road with him to his billet. We finally got to bed about 11.

Today we were to move at 12. I went down to the brigade Office about billets & **Reed**, the staff Captain, said that he had marked down a big place for us, but that for to-day & to-night we would have to do what we could. I bicycled on & found a fairly decent place, rather a squash. Apparently the place assigned to us is now occupied by a Company of Sappers.

The Machine Gun Section had to leave Les Lobes at 10.30 instead of 12 so they reached here earlier than arranged. I didn't have long to wait for them. This afternoon I went into the Brigade to find out about the post. We got back here to tea at 4.30.

This evening we went up the road to see some people going up their trenches. The battalion are billeted quite close to us here. We are back at L-c--t-re [La Couture]. We are in divisional reserve.

Well, darling, I think that's about all our news. It is nearly dinner time so I think I'll close for the time being.

**13<sup>th</sup> April 1915**

**Making the best of a bad billet; a rotten day and more confusion over accommodation for the men; Arthur tries to calm Dollie's fears about a move to the front – his brigade are "in reserve" but he doesn't expect to move up.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

Tues morning 9.45

... After dinner last night we had to clear out & to clear out most of the furniture too, in order to make room for the five of us to lie down. Our servants put some straw down so we were quite comfortable. This morning we were up at 8 & last night's performance had to be repeated in reverse order so that we didn't get brekker until 9.20.

The post leaves the Brigade office at 11, so I shall take this letter over there. It is nearly half an hour's walk away – so I'm afraid I shall have to come to an end before I want to & write a continuation this afternoon.

We are going to try & change our billets to-day as these are so small. God bless you darling. I can scarcely realise that I was with you a week ago. It seems ages – the time goes so slowly when I am away from you & so fast when I am in your darling Company. So dear wife-to-be, au revoir till this afternoon...

6.25pm. Tuesday

... To-day has been rather a rotten day. The weather has been glorious, but we've had more difficulty about billets. First of all, I had to cut short my letter to you dear, for I had to get to the Brigade to post it. Whilst there I had to find out what billets were allotted to us and had to be back at our last night's one at La Couture by 11. As the Brigade Office was about half an hour's walk away I borrowed a bike and rode in.

I found that the place allotted to us – a big farm called Cour St Vaast – was still occupied by a company of Engineers of the first Division – so we were given billets further back – between La Couture and V. Ch-pelle [Vieille Chapelle]. There were two farms for the men & the officers were to fit in as best they could. There were two or three rooms in an estaminet near Brigade HQ.

**Lodwick, Lyell & Ryall** of the 2 / 8 Ghurkas went up to the trenches this morning to reconnoitre (Let me explain, dear, - our brigade is in reserve, but one battalion of it & 5 machine guns are in the trenches, & half a battalion & 1 machine gun are about 1000 yards in rear in a place called A1 fort. **McIntyre** of the 2/Leicesters & **Bold** of the 2 / 3 Ghurkas (machine gun officers) are up at present. They are going to be relieved by **Lyell & Ryall**, who accordingly went to have a look this morning. There is a very good chance that I won't have to go up at all.)

**14<sup>th</sup> April 1915**

**Arthur encounters Indian cuisine in the lines; trouble with the landlady; Arthur bemoans the standard of his letters over the past few days - due to the frequent moves.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

Wednesday morning, 9.45 am

... Good morning, darling ... I left off last night as dinner was coming along & after dinner I went to bed pretty early. So let me go on from where I left off last night. As these other three went up to have a look at the trench line, I was left in charge. We left our old billet about 11.30 & reached our new ones in about 20 minutes. It didn't take long to get settled down, though we are rather a cavalcade, 2 wagons with 4 horses, 2 with two, 6 riding horses & about 64 mules. Our encampment is quite a picture – lines of mules & stores & the native troops sitting round cooking chupatties (sic), a kind of oval cake, very flat – rather like a combination of a biscuit & a pancake.

When we had got the men & horses in, we came along & had a look at our allotted quarters at the estaminet. We have two rooms upstairs, a fairly big one looking over the canal towards La Couture and a smaller one at the back. In the latter **Lodwick & Lyell** sleep. In the larger one, the remainder of us in the big one. There was a room downstairs where we thought of messing. But it is the inhabitants' kitchen, so we finally arranged to mess in the larger of the two upstairs rooms – our cooking would be done below.

**Sutcliffe** and I then went into the Battalion saw A Company (**Tea Leaves**) and D Company (**Harold Moore**). We then returned to the estaminet. **Lodwick** and the others came back at two. We had a certain amount of trouble with the patronne – apparently the last lot billeted here had left her with a bad impression. However everything was finally settled amicably.

We had lunch about 4.30! No tea but dinner soon after 7. This morning up as usual about a quarter past eight, brekker at 9. I'm afraid, darling, that my letters of the past two days have been ROTTEN. We have been on the move so much & awfully unsettled. You must forgive me, darling. I feel like a lion in a cage. I long for a really quiet two hours to write to you & chafe awfully at having to write a bit now & then wait before I can finish. I feel there is such a lot I want to say & it is so difficult to express...

15<sup>th</sup> April 1915

**Dollie's mother is ill and [lack of] the servants are a problem again; Evie Noel has been posted away from their battalion; unfounded rumours of a "show" earlier in the week; Arthur meets up with his brothers again; death of a local sniper.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

in Billets, Thursday morning 9.50 am.

... Thanks awfully for your welcome letter of Sunday – which came yesterday. I love to get them, for they come from you, my darling. Everything seems to brighten up when one comes.

I have been rather concerned at the news you have been giving me of your **Mater**, dear. I hope that it is not serious – all the same, it is always an anxiety. I am so sorry to hear that in spite of all your efforts, the question of servants is still unsettled. Poor little girl, you have your hands full. Take courage. I hope by now you will have been able to find at least one.

As you know by now, there was no "show" on Tuesday or Wednesday. Where did you get the rumour from, darling. Things are very quiet on our front now, and we are having a very easy time of it. I heard last night that **Evie** [Noel] was not coming back to us. I expect I shall hear from you as to the truth of that before long.

Yesterday was a wonderful day of wind & sun & rain. We did little or nothing all day, as we are in a state of constant readiness, i.e. we have to be ready to move at half-an-hour's notice, if necessary. But with things as quiet as they are, I don't think that "*if*" will materialise. However we have to be ready all the same. It means keeping near one's billet & sleeping in one's clothes.

Yesterday afternoon, **Alfred & Edgar** came up here to tea. Just before they came **Lyell, Ryall** & I went for a short stroll. The boys were both looking very fit. After tea I walked back into La Couture with them. **Alfred** went in to pay his men. I went on with **Edgar** – his billet is just near the church. We went into the churchyard. There is a sniper's grave there. They caught him, put him against the wall of the churchyard & shot him. He is buried where he fell. They broke his rifle & stuck it at the head of his grave as a tombstone. This was in October. There are a few traces of shell fire. The church is intact, one or two graves have been destroyed. A shell also entered the church. These are all old shells. The Germans have been trying to hit the church again since Neuve Chapelle but without success. A lot of their shells have been "blind" too, that is darling, they have failed to explode. I came back about 6... It is a blazing hot day to-day, quite a glare.

Life is awfully dull without you, darling. I live for the day when I shall see you again...

... Dear heart, could you do a favour for me & get me a strop for my autostrop razor. I got one at Selfridge's but it was left at my last billet. Thanks awfully, darling.

**16th April 1915**

**Unseasonably hot weather; a half-hearted game of football and a cycle trip to the trenches; Arthur views the German shell damage at Richebourg; dinner with Edgar; precious little news to tell; back home in England both Maters are under the weather.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

in Billets, 9.50 am Friday

... Thanks awfully, dear, for your welcome letter of Monday. It came yesterday afternoon. I was so pleased to get it. You are a darling to have thought of chocolate for me at Victoria – of course I understand how it slipped your memory in the rush. I hope you didn't worry your dear little head about it. **Alfred** had some, so it was all right, you see, dear. Thanks awfully.

I have already sent your letters back, dear. I now have three of yours, Saturday, Sunday & Monday – welcome messages of love & hope. The Easter egg was priceless – we enjoyed it awfully.

The weather here is perfectly glorious – awfully hot. The sun is simply scorching. Yesterday we got hold of a football & kicked it about for a wee bit; it was so hot. In the afternoon we had a game for about 20 minutes. **Lyell & I v. Johnny Sutcliffe & Ryall**. We won easily – it was awfully hot. We had tea at 4. At 5 **Lyell & Ryall** set off to relieve **McIntyre & Bald** in the trenches. I took a bicycle and went along with them for a couple of miles as far as Richebourg.



The last time I saw Richebourg was before Neuve Chapelle. The German guns have made a mess of the place since then. The spire of the church is gone & several houses are missing that I saw there before. I left the others at Richebourg & came back to find **Edgar**. He wasn't there. I climbed up the spire & on my way down met both him & **Alfred**. **Alfred** went on up, but **Edgar** came back with me. We went into



his billet. **Rochford** was there & Abbott. I stayed there until 7 when I went across the road to the **C.O.** & eventually recovered my map. **Sammy** was in with him. **Algy** came in later. He is looking rather thin.

I then went back to **Edgar**'s to dinner. Afterwards I came back up here again – found **Bald & McIntyre** back. They have had a pretty quiet time of it.

This morning we were later than usual, dear. The weather is again glorious but awfully hot. There is very little news I'm afraid, from one day to another. Things are all very quiet & peaceful. Even the newspapers have very little news. We are all awfully fit, getting very fat!

I just live for your dear news, sweet darling & love to think of you always. I was sorry to hear that the weather has been unpleasant. I wish we could give you some of ours. We hav'n't had news from home for a day or two. I hope the dear **Mater** is better. I also want to hear that your **Mother**, dearest, has shaken off her cold, for her sake & yours too. Remember me dear to all I know...

17<sup>th</sup> April 1915

**Back in Hampstead Dollie is still having trouble finding appropriate servants & her brother Evie is home; waiting for photographs taken on leave to arrive; the scorching hot weather continues and the Front is quiet; a stroll along the canal bank; General French's analysis of Neuve Chapelle.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

in Billets, Saturday 8.40 a.m.

... Ever so many thanks for your welcome letter of Tuesday, which arrived safe & sound yesterday afternoon. I am awfully sorry to hear that you are still without servants. Poor darling. I hope that by now you will have been successful in finding some, for I can realise a bit what it means to be without them – among other things that you do more work than you ought to. Do be careful, darling & don't overdo things, promise – if you can avoid it.

Where did the rumour come from about the attack? Everything is very peaceful here & has been for the last week. I do envy **Evie** [Noel] and **Gilbert** their leave – lucky beggars – especially **Evie**, for I suppose he'll be with you. I'd give anything to be with you, darling ... light of my eyes, sweet wife-to-be.

Have the photos turned up yet? I don't suppose they'll be much good. Nonetheless I feel rather curious to see the result. Of course, darling, if you want a copy of each, you shall have them. You must write & tell me if you have any difficulty. I don't think that you will be able to get separate copies from Lafayette, if I hear that they're good. I'd better write to the **Mater** & ask her to let you have a copy of each.

The cigarettes that **Auguste** [Noel] bought me so kindly were Virginian, but I enjoyed them nonetheless & they were very popular in our little mess. I have not forgotten about writing to him – thanks awfully, darling, all the same for your sweet thoughtfulness.

The weather here is still glorious – awfully hot and sunny – almost too hot. We had another lazy day yesterday. I remained at the billets the whole day. After tea I went out for three-quarters of an hour, along the canal bank. It was a wonderful evening – a real summer's evening – a wonderful air of peace brooded over everything. It was awfully hard to realise that within a few miles there was a war.

This morning I got up a bit earlier than usual & went out. It is a beautiful morning. With you at my side I would have been perfectly happy. I'd give anything to be with you, darling.

We read **French's** despatches in the Daily Telegraph yesterday – about Neuve Chapelle. You'll see it was as I said the delay of the 8<sup>th</sup> Division held us all up...

**18<sup>th</sup> April 1915**

**Dollie gives her advice on Bridge and gambling; a bicycle trip to recce the Front line – the 3<sup>rd</sup> Londons are to go up in a day or so and Arthur expects to be with brother Alfred; shot at by snipers; a lengthy description of the local terrain; Mass at La Couture; the hot weather continues.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

in Billets, Sunday morning 9.23

Thanks awfully for your dear letter of Wednesday, which I got yesterday. You darling & your advice on “Bridge”. I very rarely play, to tell the truth. I hav’n’t played since that time at Calonne until last night, when we had a game. I was lucky enough to win again 2 fcs 80. I’m quite safe from the “gambling” habit...

Yesterday was another glorious day. In the morning I bicycled over to the Field Cashier at F-sse about a couple of miles away & drew some cash. I got there about half past ten. The Cashier didn’t turn up until 11 so it wasn’t until close on 12 that I got back. After lunch I went up with **Lodwick** to the trenches, as I am probably going up for a few days in a day or two. We bicycled along through La C—t-re [La Couture] & on by a road called King George Road to Windy Corner. From there we had to proceed on foot. (The last time I was at Windy Corner was after Neuve Chapelle, pitch black night, mud & confusion everywhere. Yesterday it was a perfect day). At Windy Corner we left our bicycles and went down a road called Edward Road until we reached a barricade. Just beyond that was the Rue du Bois with Port Arthur away on our left. From beyond the Rue du Bois was our line & about 100 yards beyond that the Germans.

At the barricade we turned into the fields on our left & walked parallel to the Rue du Bois, on this side of it, i.e. the side furthest away from the enemy. The whole road is bordered with cottages on both sides, all ruined and desolate. We went on for some distance, past the “factory” – a great spinning factory, full of rusting & broken machinery. Finally we turned in to the right & walked up the Rue du Bois for about 80 yards then to the right again down by a ruined estaminet into a communicating trench that led through an orchard, strongly entrenched and fortified. We followed the communicating trench on through the orchard and out beyond about 40 yards to our front line. This was our original trench, abandoned because it was flooded & lately reclaimed. **Lyell** was here asleep. We routed him out & went along the line where he has his guns. It is quite a decent line. Then we went to see a position where the Officer in charge of the line wants a gun. To get to it we had to get past a stretch of unfinished trench only 3 – 4 feet high. You’d have laughed, dear, to see us waddling past. The German snipers were rather alert here & had a shot or two at our periscopes.

It is quite a fair trench & it is a comfort being able to get up in daylight. Solves most of the question about water, for instance & a thousand other things. The 3<sup>rd</sup> are going up in a day or two & **Alfred** tells me that he & I will probably be together. I am glad.

We got back yesterday about 4.30 – had tea. It was very hot. We played bridge after tea – one rubber. I went to bed fairly early after dinner. Today darling is another

perfect day, very hot & sunny. I got up early & bicycled into L- C—t-re to church at 7.30. **Alfred** was there as he is going up to look at the trenches this morning. We both heard Mass & went to Communion together, then I bicycled back to brekker et voila.

So darling another day has passed & I am one day the nearer to my being with you again...

**19<sup>th</sup> April 1915**

**A short letter today as Arthur prepares for moving up; Dollie is under the weather and hopes for a short break at friend Elsie's; tea with brothers Alfred and Edgar; more viewing of the shell damage to Richebourg; rumours of a move right back after being in the trenches – Arthur is sceptical.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

in Billets, Monday morning 10.10am

... I'm afraid you must be content with a short letter this mail & forgive me if I seem a bit rushed. This afternoon I am going up to the trenches for a few days. **Alfred's** Company is in the same trench so he & I will be together. Luck isn't it darling.

Meanwhile there is a certain amount of things that have to be done this morning & the post leaves at 11. So you'll understand, won't you, little comrade. First I want to thank you, sweet heart for your dear letter of Thursday. It came yesterday. Many, many thanks – I love to get them. I hope you were able to get down to **Elsie**, for I'm sure that the change would do you good. Do you remember Easter Monday – you darling, how sweet memories are...

Yesterday afternoon **Edgar** came round so I went back with him & we had tea with **Alfred**. Afterwards **Alfred** and I went round to the **C.O.** for a few minutes. **Major Beresford** is back & looking very fit. Then we picked up **Edgar** and walked into Richebourg. The damage done to the church is something awful. The place looks as if it has been through an earthquake. There [are] some shell holes in the churchyard about 21 feet in diameter & 8 feet deep.

We got back about 7. It was a wonderful evening & gave promise of another glorious day to-day, a promise that has been amply fulfilled – it is very hot and sunny.

Another 24 hours gone. There are rumours that we are going right back after our few days up in the trenches, but I don't know how much to believe of it. Past experience is apt to make one very sceptical! But if hoping does any good.....

Well, darling & how's things. I suppose when you get this, you'll be feeling a bit better...

**20<sup>th</sup> April 1915**

**A long hot trek up to the trenches; Alfred is in the front line and Edgar in reserve trenches; Arthur settles his men in with their machine guns; no direct bombing on the Londons during the first night; news of a fatality to the Gloucesters on their immediate right;**

*Arthur to Dollie*

In the trenches, 4.50 pm Tuesday

... Once more in the fray &c. We arrived up here yesterday afternoon. So we've spent nearly 24 hours up here.

Let me go back. We paraded yesterday afternoon at 4.45 - **Bald** & 3 teams of the 2 / 3 Ghurkas, **Johnnie Sutcliffe** to give him a hand & myself, dear with 4 teams. It's a fairly long trek up & we got awfully hot, for the sun was very strong & it was a glorious afternoon. We reached Windy Corner just before 6. Here **Bald** & I separated. He went straight on to his part of the front line, but I had first of all to put some men into a strong redoubt some way in the rear. This done I made my way back to Windy Corner & the rest of my men. Thence I followed on in **Bald's** footsteps up to the Rue du Bois. We are on the S. side of the road to the west of Port Arthur.

**Bald** is on the left where **Harold Moore & Rochford (with Edgar)** are occupying some reserve trenches. I am on the right. **Alfred** has the front line & **Sammy** a line about 100 yards back in a place called the "Orchard". A bit further back, along the road is "96 Piccadilly", our HQ.

I got into the trench about twenty to seven & took over from **Lyell**. Everything was in due order. I met **Mankelaw** here. He is up for a day or two as Brigade Bomb gun Officer & is sharing my dug out and my food.

The regiment didn't get in until twenty to nine & took a little time to get in. Last night I was fairly busy, seeing things were shipshape until about half-past eleven. Fortunately I have not much to do in way of making emplacements, as **McIntyre & Lyell** have both been up here before me, so I have spent to-day getting the men comfortable.

It was a wonderful night last night & there was not very much sniping. The Germans discharged 3 or 4 bombs on our right where there is another division holding the line. This morning we "stood to" at 3.30am. The morning was calm but cloudy. It cleared up wonderfully this afternoon & it is very warm & sunny.

This morning the men dug on their dug-outs. I visited my guns then went down on the right where there is a trench howitzer battery in charge of some gunners, then back & over to the left where I saw **Harold & Edgar, Bald & Johnnie Sutcliffe**. Later on in the morning there was a very fierce bomb duel on our immediate right. The Gloucesters lost one man killed & 3 wounded. The unfortunate man killed was blown right out of the trench. But our fellows were the superior.

I had brekker with **Sammy** & lunch with **Alfred**. This afternoon I slept for a couple of hours & since then have been making tours of inspection. I had tea with **Tealeaves** in the Orchard. It must have been a wonderfully pretty place darling. It is surrounded by a single row of tall trees, many now broken off short by shell fire. The grass – where the trenches have left any grass is wonderfully green. The fruit trees are just beginning to bud. It is a shame that everything should be so spoiled and destroyed.

Several of our aeroplanes have been over this afternoon & the Germans have been trying very ineffectively to hit them.

Well darling, I think that's all the news. It is a bit difficult to write. At present I am in a recess **Alfred** had cut in the back of the trench. My dug-out is away on the right, near one of my guns, very short & low, so that it is impossible to lie flat in it or to sit in it upright. However I am going to have that remedied now, dear – I have just told the Corporal.

I am longing to get a letter from you to-day, darling. I am hoping to get it with rations to-night. You are always in my thoughts, my darling & I am never so happy or encouraged as when I think of you. I long to see you & be with you again, darling, for you are my love, my life, my inspiration. God bless you & keep you – be of good heart darling. With God's help, all is well...

Just a line, dear, to answer your sweet letter from Pinner. First of all darling, about the fleabag. It's awfully sweet of you to have thought of it, you darling. God bless you. I think, dear, please, you had better order one as my blankets are awfully ragged. But it will be too much for you to spend on me, darling, so I want you to let me know how much it come to & I'll send a cheque & you can get me some little thing, just as a souvenir of that darling love of yours, that I know and treasure so much...

**21<sup>st</sup> April 1915**

**A cold, uneasy night in the trenches - with numerous “scares”; early morning bombing of the German trenches cancelled; drizzly weather; a visit to brother Edgar in his trench; Alfred and men are to be relieved by the Leicesters tonight; a slight casualty amongst Arthur’s men; thoughts of happier times, before Easter leave.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

on the step of my dug-out, Wednesday 5.15pm

... Thanks awfully for your letter of Saturday last. The ration party brought it up last night, a welcome gift. To-day I have been pretty fairly busy, so in case I cannot get this letter off, I’ve written a Field Service post-card to let you know that I am very much alive & kicking.

Last night I sent my letter back by the ration party & then had something to eat – soup, cocoa, bread, butter & marmalade. **Mankelow** shared it with me & we appreciated it awfully, for it gets quite cold when the sun goes down - your thoughtful gift that I have been saving up against the time we should be in the trenches. They are awfully welcome, thanks so much, little darling.

I visited rounds &c last night & turned in about half past ten. The night apparently was full of scares. I was awakened at 1 & again at 2.30. About 3 this morning we were going to “stand to” as the gunner fellow said that he was going to bomb the Germans trenches at that hour. Luckily the morning was cloudy & dark. We didn’t stand too until half-past three & happily the gunner didn’t turn up. I did the rounds – it wasn’t a pleasant morning – it drizzled nearly all the morning. This afternoon however, darling, it has cleared up wonderfully.

This morning after breakfast – bacon, cold boiled eggs, tea, bread & butter & marmalade – I went right round to see **Bald & Sutcliffe**. I saw **Edgar**. He was very fit **DG & Harold Moore** & his Officers. On our right the Gloucesters were again bombed pretty heavily & behind us they put some shells into the Orchard, but without any casualties, DG. So we were lucky not to have had anything into us. After lunch – more soup, cold meat, potatoes, bread, butter, cheese & tea – I went with **Alfred** back over the fields to A1 Fort. **Alfred** is going back there to-night. He is being relieved by a company of Leicesters.

We got back about 4.30 & had tea with the **C.O.** & so on here. I have had one man grazed to-day. He was back in the Orchard. A bullet hit the roof of a cottage & turning down knocked off a splinter of corrugated iron which just grazed his leg, very lightly.

There is not very much news else. When we are relieved we are going back to C-I-nne [Calonne] again, hurray! Last time we were there it was Monday of Holy Week, two days before that happy day when I saw you once more. My hands are very cold. I am writing on my knee – not altogether easy... God bless you & keep you. I send you all my love ...





NOTHING is to be written on this side except the date and signature of the sender. Sentences not required may be erased. If anything else is added the post card will be destroyed.

*I am quite well. ✓*

*I have been admitted into hospital—*

*{ sick } and am going on well.—*  
*{ wounded } and hope to be discharged soon.*

*I am being sent down to the base—*

*I have received your { letter dated Sat. 17.4.15 } ✓*  
*{ telegram „ } \_\_\_\_\_*  
*{ parcel „ } \_\_\_\_\_*

*Letter follows at first opportunity.*

*I have received no letter from you—*  
*{ lately.*  
*{ for a long time.*

*Signature } \_\_\_\_\_*  
*only. } *A. Hunt**

*Date 21.4.15*

[Postage must be prepaid on any letter or post card addressed to the sender of this card.]

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**22<sup>nd</sup> April 1915**

**Dollie has taken to smoking! The Tatler arrives and Alfred returns to billets; Arthur and his men spend the night improving their defences; a visit to the old trench, now crumbling away; a freezing, uneasy night - followed by a cold, bright day; Bavarian snipers; the Leicesters take a pot shot at the German cook house opposite; an aerial display by the flying corps; Arthur is a little deflated!**

*Arthur to Dollie*

in my Dug-out, Thurs afternoon 4.15pm

... Hurray for your dear letter of Sunday that came up with my rations yesterday afternoon. I was awfully bucked to get it. You little rogue "smoking a lot". God bless you, darling. How well can I imagine you, in your red silk dress, "puffing" away with your darling air of assumed nonchalance. My heart aches to be with you – how bitter sweet these memories are...

Yesterday after I had written, the ration party came along & brought me your dear letter & also the "Tatler" which was awfully appreciated. It is kind & thoughtful of you, you are a dear little soul. The rest of the evening **Alfred** spent in readiness to move out. He was to be relieved about half past eight. I did my rounds two or three times, then came in and had "dinner" – soup, cold boiled bacon, potatoes, bread & butter & jam & cocoa. **Alfred** moved out while I was feeding.

After dinner we worked until half-past twelve, improving our defences. They sniped occasionally & threw two bombs at the left part of our trench – luckily without damage. Incidentally last night we worked our way into our old trench in front – which we occupied in March. It has largely fallen in. I tried to salve some sandbags, but they were rotten & like blotting paper. However we managed to get a lot of beams & timber so I pulled my dug-out to bits, enlarged it & rebuilt the roof. Before it was only about 5 foot and a half by five & about 2 ½ - 3 feet high. Now it is nearly 7 foot long & between 4 ½ & 5 high, which is a great improvement. Then I slept till 3.20 when we "stood to". It was bitterly cold & froze!

On our left there was an awful rumpus. The Germans were either very scared or we were making a little push, for they sent up flares by the dozen and fired hard. I don't think it was anything serious for there was little or no gun fire. I slept again from 4.15 till 7.30 when I had breakfast. Afterwards I sat talking to the Leicester Officers; **Bobbie Page** came along too. I came back to my dug-out at 10 & slept on & off till 2 when I had lunch. Since then I've been doing rounds &c.

The weather this morning was dull, but this afternoon it has cleared & the sun is shining brightly, though there is a breeze & it is rather cold. We have had a very quiet day today, though the enemy opposite us – who are Bavarians I believe – are very skilful snipers. Early this morning the Leicesters on our left luckily managed to get a rifle grenade on to a German cookhouse opposite us. There is no definite news as to when we are going to be relieved ... I believe on Saturday.

There is an aeroplane of ours flying overhead, dear. They are wonderfully daring. One of them yesterday flew some way in, over the German lines. They fired

about sixty shells at him in five or ten minutes – without bringing him down & assailed him with rifle fire all along the line.

My air pillow is beginning to fail. When I wake up it is generally pretty flat. I must write & ask the **Mater** to send me one.

**24<sup>th</sup> April 1915**

No letter today – Arthur sends a field post card to Dollie – letting her know he has received her letter of Monday 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1915.

**25<sup>th</sup> April 1915**

**Arthur is safely back in billets; a bonanza of letters from Dollie and a welcome parcel – finally Arthur can have a shave; an account of the last few days – immediate departure from the trenches cancelled following news of trouble north of Ypres; the Germans lay more barbed wire in the night; a detailed and very emotional account of a visit back to “Port Arthur” – where Harry Pulman, Cyril Crichton and Bertie Mathieson are buried.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

in Billets, Sunday afternoon 2.40pm

... At last I have an opportunity to write to you, to thank you for your dear & welcome letters of Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday & to give you my news of the past few days. First to answer your letters, dear. I am pleased to get them – sweet messages of hope & comfort. God bless you darling.

The identity disc & strop have arrived safely. I think the disc is topping & have it on as you asked, dear. The strop also has proved its utility in helping to get rid of a week's beard. Of course, I understand that you asked **Daisy** to include it in your parcel. I want to thank you too, little sweetheart in advance for the cake which you say you are sending. Darling thanks awfully.

Your letters have brought more welcome news about the servant question. I only hope that the question will be now more or less permanently settled. I am glad to hear that the photos were a success. Let me know how things shape as to your getting a copy of each won't you dear & we'll see what can be done.

I was very sorry to hear that poor **Rosa** was in bed [widow of Harry Pulman]. I hope by now that she is better. **Gerald Pulman** [Harry's nephew] is very fit. He is with **Sammy** in A Company. They were in a reserve redoubt behind me.

So now for some of my news. The weather has been fine, but rather cloudy & colder lately. On Thursday night late, or rather on Friday morning at about 1.45, I was woken up in my dug-out with a message from **Lodwick** that we were going to be relieved that evening (Friday) & were to march back to Calonne whither the remainder of the brigade, (i.e. those not in the trenches) were going. The day passed the usual round & we had quite a quiet time. I made preparations that evening to move off. Everything was ready when we got the news that the relief was indefinitely cancelled – this because of some trouble north of Ypres. The division that was going to relieve us was being held in readiness to be moved north & our brigade was coming back to Vieille Chapelle next morning (Saturday). Imagine our disappointment. We were awfully “fed up”.

That night I was awakened about 2 – someone wanted me on the phone – about 200 yards away. I went stumbling along the trench – pitch dark – feeling only half awake, to find when I arrived that I wasn't wanted, after all. However I found everyone in a state of “wind up” the Tommies slang for a state varying from “nervous tension” to “blue funk”, expecting a German attack. However our flares showed the

Germans to be even more alarmed, for they were very busy putting fresh lines of barbed wire in front of their line.

That morning after breakfast, I went in to 96 Piccadilly – the ruins of an estaminet & battalion headquarters. **Major Beresford** had been up to Port Arthur the day before to tend our fellows graves & to put proper crosses up. I asked him to take me along to shew me where they were. And so after he had shaved & washed, we went along.

It was a beautiful morning. We went up behind the Rue du Bois and into Port Arthur. It is an awful scene of desolation: it is like a great ant-heap of bricks and bits of buildings, sandbags, hurdles, bully beef tins, timber & war material & through it all, winding in and out & all over the place are trenches and dug-outs. We came to **Mabel's** [Crichton] grave first. It is in a grassy little corner of Port Arthur – very peaceful and quiet – but we scarcely stopped. I was anxious to go on.

We clambered up over the parapet & walked over towards the spot where poor **Harry & Bertie** lie, an occasional shot whistling by us. Here was the end of my pilgrimage. We were scarcely 45 yards from Port Arthur – I suppose anything between 80 – 100 [yards] from where **Harry** began his first & last charge. Behind us was Port Arthur & our old line. On our right, a few feet away, an old German sap – later made into a communication trench. In front of us the old German trench 12 yards off, behind that more trenches & the two buildings or rather, a few bricks & ruins, where the Germans stuck – the two houses that **Harry** was to clear.

**Harry's** grave was at our feet; two or three feet beyond & to our right, lay **Bertie**. The ground where they lie is just brown soil. Behind & nearer to Port Arthur last years corn is just beginning to sprout, but here it is bare. They lie with their feet to the north. Their graves are marked at head & foot by crosses of wood & a few bricks. At the head a wooden cross with a stamped tin plate. At the foot a smaller and ruder cross, that was put up at the time they were buried, with the name pencilled on it. Perfect simplicity as befits our heroes who gave their lives simply, in a noble cause. No fitter burial place than the ground that they have consecrated with their blood.

I wanted to put something on **Harry's** grave. The cross at his foot has his cap on it, ripped & torn where a bullet went through it. So I took out the sprig of white heather that he had brought back from you & tied it in front of the cross at his head with a piece of red ribbon I had. White for the purity of his cause, red for the blood he shed for it.

I sat down to make a sketch of it. **Beresford** went as he had to get back. I am enclosing the sketches I made or rather copies of them. They are very rough. I am no artist. But cameras are forbidden, so I've done my best. **Rosa** perhaps would like them.

I made a sketch of **Bertie's** grave too: if you would, please send it to **Mrs Mathieson**, dear. There are two sheets of **Harry's** & one of **Bertie's** grave...

**26<sup>th</sup> April 1915**

**Continuation of the letter begun on 25<sup>th</sup>: Back from the visit to Port Arthur and the trenches are bombarded; tending the casualties; the relief arrives and Arthur is back in his old billets by the canal; brother Dickie sends a postcard from Port Said; uncertainty as to where they will go next – the recovering troops are on half an hour's notice to leave billets.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

... That afternoon they bombed us & shelled us a shell burst about 10 yards from one of my guns. It hit the house that the gun was in but did no damage. A shell also injured two of **Sammy's** men. But bombs are far the worst of all things. They are about a foot long, cylindrical & about 2 inches in diameter. You can see them coming – so you spread your men out as evenly as possible. When you see the bomb sailing through the air you cry “Bomb right” (or left as the case may be) & immediately everyone sprints as fast as they can in the opposite direction, stumbling over equipment & braziers, pushing past the narrow places & round the traverses. Then there will be a terrific crash & even 40 or 50 yards off you will be blown over by the concussion, unless you are stooping under shelter. One of my men was hit slightly & 3 of the Leicesters. I tied one up and got in an awful mess, though he wasn't hit badly, he was bleeding somewhat.

I made my way over to **Alfred** that evening to see about replacing the casualty. I started to write from there, when I heard that I was going to be relieved & that my relief had arrived. So I dashed back & handed over to **McIntyre** of the Leicesters who was relieving me. I sent my teams back separately to Windy Corner & followed them up. We marched from there via Richebourg & got in about 9. Very very pleased to get back too I assure you darling. We are in our old billets in the inn by the Canal.

Future movements, darling, are still very uncertain. A great deal depends on what happens up north. There is even a prospect of our going in again on the left i.e. to the north of Port Arthur. However I'm hoping for a bit of a rest. This morning we were very late getting up and as we are on half-an-hours notice, I didn't get in to La Couture to church. I was very disappointed, however...

For the rest, darling, I don't think I have any more to tell you. We are all very well DG. I hope your **Mater** is quite all right again now. I had a letter from my **Mater** to-day and a parcel last night – very much appreciated.

**Dick** [Agius] sent me a post-card to-day from Port Said – just saying Cheero. I'm afraid they will find it a bit on the warm side.

I miss you more and more every day, my darling. I wish we'd get to an end of this beastly war. For I want to be back with you my love. Time does drag without you. I love to dream of the happy days we are going to spend together DV...

27<sup>th</sup> April 1915

**Arthur looks forward to Dollie's cake arriving; the machine gunners prepare for moving up to the front again; news of friends maimed by snipers bullets; hot and windy weather for cycling; it is Arthur's 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday tomorrow and they have to return to the trenches; a slight outbreak of German measles amongst the young officers.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

in Billets, Tues. 9.15am

Very many thanks for Friday's letter. I love to get them. I am looking forward awfully to the cake – it's ripping of you to send it, you are a darling & I'm longing to eat it.

Yesterday was a fairly full day. In the morning I had to go up to our Quartermaster's Store to see about some things... After lunch I had to go up to see some trenches. The division that was going to relieve us was sent north where there was trouble – so we have been in for a few days longer. If the division is not back to relieve us in a few days – our brigade which only has a short front is going to change over with the Brigade on our left, which has a longer front. In that case, all of us machine gunners will be in. No-one knows anything definite, but in case we do go up, we have each been allocated a sector of trench. So yesterday I went up to see mine. I went up via Windy Corner and "98 Piccadilly" – our Battalion Headquarters – saw the **C.O. & Algy**. Did I tell you dear that poor little **Beresford** got a wound in the foot walking up and down the Rue du Bois, taking his evening stroll. I got another unpleasant piece of information. Poor **Gerald Pulman** got a stray bullet in the lower part of his stomach, just above his right thigh, while superintending some men filling sandbags. Rotten luck isn't it, darling? He is getting on all right DG.

I then went on down through the Orchard... I saw the Leicesters then went on down the trench & saw **Harold Moore & Edgar** [Agius]. Then on again through the old trenches that I was in the last three days of Neuve Chapelle & so on through to my bit of trench. Here the machine gun officer shewed me round. I then made my way back – it was very hot. I had tea with **Lyell** who is in **Rochford's** trench. I then went into HQ for a bit & on down the Rue du Bois & back. It was very hot & a beastly contrary wind, so that bicycling wasn't very pleasant.

I hadn't been back long before there was a great fusillade. We thought we were in for a false alarm – but they were only the Germans potting at two of our aeroplanes. Last night we went to bed fairly early & up again this morning at the usual time. The weather is colder to-day. Well, darling little girl, I think that that is about all the news. It is awfully difficult to realise that tomorrow is my birthday. It seems years since my 21<sup>st</sup> in Malta last year. It's rotten luck that we shouldn't be able to spend the day together – still, it's no use grouching. This separation is beastly. My thoughts are full of you, my own darling, & will be in an especial manner (if possible) to-morrow...

Tuesday afternoon 3.37 pm

... My news is this, dear, that I & **Bald** are going in again, tonight, up to where I went yesterday, as the division that was going to relieve us has gone north



after all. A bit of a bore – still. Just where I am the Germans are about 500 yards away, so please God we sha’n’t be bombed or mined!

It is now 6 o’clock. I wonder what you are doing, sweet inspiration. It is a beautiful evening – the guns thundering in the distance. I wonder where you are, what you are doing ...

**Johnnie Sutcliffe** has gone back to duty with the Regiment – with little **Beresford & young Pulman** hors de combat, officers are too short to spare two for the guns. About the measles, little darling, **Edwards, Abbott & young Sturge** (a new, a very new Officer) are down with a slight attack of the German variety. I think they picked it up in their last billets or those previous. It is not in any way serious & hasn’t spread at all. So it is scarcely an incident. I believe **the Babe** has a touch of it too. **Davis**, of course, I told you about – had an attack of jaundice a long time ago. For the rest we are all very fit, and getting fatter & fatter!

We parade tonight at 7.30 so we are all going to have something to eat at 6.45. We march for about a couple of hours, then unloading our wagons carry our stuff on, meeting our guides a little way down the road.

Well, dear heart, I’ll try and write to-morrow as usual: I want to write to your **Mater** too to thank her for her generosity & the chocolates. She is a dear old soul, God bless her...

28<sup>th</sup> April 1915

[Arthur's 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday] At the front again – Arthur has a capacious dug-out in a pleasant orchard; the Germans are 500 yards away; a description of spring, with beauty to be found even amongst the dead trees; account of a rotten, muddy, long and danger-filled journey up to the trenches on the previous night.

*Arthur to Dollie*

in my dug-out, 5.20 pm

... Once again I write to you from the trenches – quite good trenches & a large and palatial dug-out, about 12 foot long & 6 feet broad and 4 high. Two officers used to sleep in it before – they only had two guns each. As I have four I have taken over the whole of their bit & so possess their dug-out to myself.

The line here is quite good, dear, & rather pleasant, as part of it runs through an orchard. In front there is an open space, watered by small streams. Beyond & about 500 yards away from here is the German line, built along some houses that fringe the Bois de Biez – a veritable wood.

The weather is wonderful, the country is wonderful, very very green with deep grass & sproutings of last years corn. The trees are a bit backward – many are dead. The rest are just beginning to shew enough leaf & bud to hide the outline of their branches. The fruit trees are in blossom. It is a ripping picture. This is a beautiful country, darling, though it bears sad scars of Germany's heavy hand. Neuve Chapelle lies behind me, an extraordinary ruin, piles of tumbled bricks & queer gaunt frameworks of wood.

We had a rotten journey in last night. The first part of it was quiet pleasant. We paraded at 7.30 & marched through the warmth of the spring evening, through a pleasant countryside of white cottages & white blossom that gleamed in the darkness. We marched until we struck the La Basse road about 9. We left our transport at the corner & carried our guns & stores from there onwards. It was a wearisome journey – for everyone was overburdened & it was a long and difficult tramp. We went down the road as far as the point where I was at the beginning of Neuve Chapelle; then into the trench & on past our old gun positions. The trench was under water in parts.

We went some way down until we came to the salient. Here **Bald** & I separated. I turned to the left along the road, past the house where we spent the night of Wednesday March 10<sup>th</sup> & turned into an orchard on the right. Here we entered a communication trench – very long, winding in & out, very narrow and awfully muddy – in places up to ones knees. To avoid the mud, planks had been laid down in places, but as the majority of them were only 4 inches broad, always on a tilt & very slippery. You'll understand dear what a job it was to get along. To add to our joys the enemy opened rapid fire – the shots whizzed overhead, striking the trees & in places the side of the trench, all about us. One bullet in fact knocked some mud down my neck. However. We got the relief through at last though it was past 12 before I had finished settling people in. It was a glorious night, the moon very nearly at the full. I turned in about 1 & slept till a quarter to six.

The sun was shining brightly when I awoke darling, I had a cup of cocoa then did my rounds. I went round to see **Bald** after that – he is on my right...

7.15pm

... I had breakfast with him while I was there, darling & then came back. I have spent the day doing rounds & reconnoitring a bit. The rest of the time I've lain on my back & thought of you my queen, my comrade...

Please remember me, dear, to your **Mater** & all. Have you any news of **Rosa** – of **Elsie**? I am awfully well & happy. God bless you

**30<sup>th</sup> April 1915**

**A relatively quiet time in the trenches then German shelling scuppers Arthur's plans to write home; a dangerous visit to tend friend Harry Pulman's grave; the General inspects the trenches; an MC for colleague Mankelow after the action at Neuve Chapelle; the weather heats up and the battlefield begins to smell; a request for more reading material, a new air pillow and soup.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

in my dug-out, 7.5pm Fri.

... Thanks awfully dear for your sweet letter of Sunday. I had hoped to do a lot of writing to-day, but have had little or no time. This morning **the General** came round. We were on the qui vive the whole time. This afternoon & this evening we have been most horribly shelled, so our nerves are all a bit on edge. To-night I have a new gun position to build & two to improve. I am rather annoyed as I wanted to write to **Rosa & your Mater & Elsie** & heaps of people. However. We've had it pretty quiet till to-day so I suppose that I can scarcely complain, can I dear. I was awfully touched by **Rosa's** letter & her offer. It is awfully sweet of her DV. I shall write to-morrow & thank her awfully.

Last night I took an orderly & went to see poor **Harry's** grave again – making as an excuse for being away from my line a search for a gun position. I wasn't very comfortable for the Germans were sniping hard. However I managed to line in the outline of his grave with bricks & to lay bricks in the form of a cross on his grave. Poor fellow. I wish I could do more for his last resting place, but I couldn't be away from my post long. If I get another opportunity I shall go again & see if I cannot do something else.

Last night, dear, the people holding this part of the line were relieved by the 2/8 Ghurkas. I slept long last night, so that after I had done my rounds &c it wasn't before 9 that my breakfast was ready. We then got things cleared up a bit for the **General**, but he didn't turn up until after eleven. I went down my bit of the line with him. I heard this morning that two of our machine gunners are in the honours list. **Lodwick**, our Brigade Officer has the D.S.O. & **Mankelow** – with whom I was during the counter-attack – has the Military Cross. I am awfully pleased.

This afternoon we were shelled, as I've said. It was perfectly beastly, darling. They fell all along our line, "pimpsqueaks" which are field gun shells & a big high explosive type of shell too. Six of the natives were wounded, but with one exception not very seriously.

Today has been a real scorcher & in the places where the dead lie, awful smells are beginning. There are two German corpses just in the back part of the trench, but I think that they are going to have them removed.

The Tatler arrived safely – thanks very much indeed, sweet heart, you are a thoughtful little soul. I wish you would do me two big favours would you, little darling. God bless your heart. One to get me an air pillow, if possible with a case & two to send me out a magazine sometimes. In a way I hate to trouble you & yet in

another I love to get anything from your hands. You know how I feel, don't you – little comrade mine...

P.S. There's just one more trouble, darling, would you please get me another dozen soups as I'm rather short...