

1st February 1915

Dollie leaves No.3; Arthur is very angry about his machine gun section missing their dinner whilst on manoeuvres; a nice cup of Oxo; writing by candle light.

Arthur to Dollie

7.45pm. Mon.

... Another darling letter from you came this afternoon – thanks awfully dear. I do love to get them. I am sorry you were two or three days without my news. I can't understand it dear girl. I think I write pretty regularly – however I suppose that it is all right by now and that you know where I am. I am so sorry that you are leaving No.3. I feel so much more “comfortable” when I know you are there, for you really do seem to be much happier there, and your letters too have seemed happier from there.

... I gave your message to the **two Holloway boys** – they were fearfully bucked – they're good lads and work hard.

Today we've had a long day and I've been very angry. That sounds cheery, doesn't it darling. Luckily the weather has been very fine. I got up to brekker at 8 up here; afterwards COs orders at 8.45, parade at 9.30. Most of the transport paraded too as we were going to have dinners in the field. I had **Ben** my horse, once more after several days. We went out 3 or 4 miles; then halted and started to make an attack homewards again. For the attack of course we were dismounted and it was very heavy going, about 3000 or 4000 yards up and down over heavy ploughed ground. The soil stuck in great heavy clods to our feet and it was pretty warm. However we had one advantage; as it was so muddy we didn't have to lie down.

... At the end of the attack about 12.45 the Battalion marched back to where the wagons were, and where we were to have dinners. We had to wait about three quarters of an hour for our wagon to come up to pack up our guns before we could start off with the rest of the battalion. However, dear, we finally got packed up and reached the Battalion at their dinner about 2.45. The first thing that made me angry was that orders had been given that all men were to have dinner with their Companies – result no dinners for the machine gun section. However I made an awful row and managed to get some scraped together. However I had scarcely managed to get that done, darling, when orders were given for the Battalion to be ready to move at 3. That meant getting equipment on about five to three – which in its turn meant that my men had just about time to get a couple of mouthfuls. I really was angry for dinner is the men's big meal of the day. However I found a couple of packets of chocolate which I gave them and got them something when they came in. Of course we've been having an easy time, comparatively, but it made me wild. However.

We got in about 4 and got some tea. I made myself a cup of oxo and have quite a decent meal at 7, so I'm all right. Tomorrow we [are] going to be out again all day but as we're only going to dig it will be all right.

Well, darling, that's about an end of today's news. It's a bit difficult to write – I'm in the “Palm Court” but as the table is littered with remnants of supper I'm sitting on some straw on the floor, writing on a stool by the light of a candle. So if you'll forgive me sweet darling, I'll say “Good-night” and will add a note tomorrow.

2nd February 1915

Trench digging interrupted by rain; the locket arrives to gladden Arthur's heart; the muffler made by Dollie is a great success; a hearty feast in the "Palm Court"; censoring the letters home.

Arthur to Dollie

8.28am Tues.

... Good morning, sweet darling. It's a beastly morning – pouring with rain – so we've just had orders to "stand by". I'm sitting in front of the fire, writing on my knee. We've just had brekker – two boiled eggs – which were very good indeed. I wonder what you are doing darling. I love to sit and think about you – it's not often I get the leisure to sit and think, but I'm always thinking of you and praying for you. God bless you, darling.

Well, sweet heart, it's getting on for COs orders so I must end off. Remember me most kindly to all, darling...

Tuesday evening 8pm

... Tonight I have a pleasant task, of renewing my gratitude and my thanks to you ... for everything and in particular for a parcel that arrived for me this afternoon. Everything was intact, God bless you darling. I am indeed proud and happy tonight, for around my neck there hangs a lock of your darling hair... God bless you, sweet heart.

Many thanks also for the muffler, darling, most acceptable tonight especially for it is a wild night of beating rain and wind. I have used it already and winding it around me, thought of the nimble fingers that made it and the sweet love that guided them ... Thanks too, darling mine, for the peppermints and cocoa: I have put some into my mess tin – that some day when in need of them I may bless the sweet heart that sent them, thoughtful and kind. Please thank the folks too for the chocolate, if you get the opportunity – it is very acceptable. **Emile** [*aka Evie*] is very pleased too with the button – many thanks.

Well darling, now for some news. Today has been a wretched day: pouring with rain and very windy. We were supposed to be digging trenches again – but the weather was so bad that we were told to "stand by". However at 10.45 we made a start, stopped at 12.45 for dinner till 2.30 – then on again until 4.45. The digging was very difficult for the soil is extraordinarily heavy and the rain most certainly did not improve matters. However we struggled on and made a fair job of it. At 4.45 we stopped. I made my way up here - the Palm Court – and got a cup of tea. From then until dinner at 7, spent most of my time censoring letters. All the men's letters have to be read and signed by an officer, both the letter itself and the envelope... I only read the letters of my section – they're good fellows. I told you, didn't I dear, that I spoke to **Holloway** about you're visiting his Mother and how that he was so pleased – a broad grin all over his face ... he promised to tell his brother too.

Evie went down to **Harold Moore's** this evening and stayed there to eat. So **Harry** [Pulman] and I had our meal together alone. We had quite a feast tonight dear

for **Harry** had been into town about a remount – ham, galantine, sardines, stilton cheese, bread, butter, greengage jam, red wine, coffee and a cigar – a wonderful combination isn't it darling. We drank "The Silent Toast" – his and mine – that's to you, my darling and **Rosa** – our loved ones at home.

3rd February 1915

More of a PS to yesterday's letter; a long day ahead in the field now the rain and wind have stopped.

Arthur to Dollie

Wed. 8.23am

... Good morning sweetheart. Last night as I was ending the last page, **Harry** went off to bed, and as the servants sleep on some straw in here and wanted to come in, I went down to my billet. It was a beastly night, but today it has cleared up and is quite warm and fine, though wet underfoot. We've just had brekker. Today I believe we're in for a long day in the field...

4th February 1915

Payday interrupts Arthur's letter writing; an unexpected delay in his news reaching Dollie; Dollie is unimpressed by "Our Boys"; Guy loses his pistol in the field.

Arthur to Dollie

Thursday, 8.25 am

Many thanks for ... letter, received last night. I wanted to answer you then but **Harry** was paying his Company in here – and there was a great medley; I suppose he paid about 220 men and as he had to sign each man's pay-book and each man has to sign a roll, it took some time.

I can't understand darling how it is that you are without my news as I have been writing regularly. I hope by now of course, you will have received quite a sheaf of news. There is nothing physically the matter with me, nor has there been; but the only thing that is wrong is that we're not together, darling heart.

As of course you know by now, **Harry, Evie** [Noel] and I are messing together – in the "Palm Court". **Harry and Evie** sleep together over the way at the Curés house. I sleep in the same house as the **Babe**, the **Quartermaster** and the **Interpreter**, which is a little way down the road.

I'm sorry you didn't enjoy "Our Boys" much. It is an old-fashioned play. I remember we had it at Downside at the end of one term – of course livened up considerably by topical allusions.

I'm afraid, darling, this is going to be rather a short note as it is now 8.40 and I have to be with the **C.O.** at 8.55. I'll write you a long note to-night – and give you all my news. Yesterday we had a long day – luckily it was quite a pleasant day, darling, mild and fine. We went out at the usual time 9.30 and made another attack over about 5000 yards. We ended about 1.30 – had dinner in the field at 2.30. Then the Battalion marched back; **Guy** and I however rode over the ground of the morning's attack as **Guy** had dropped his pistol – which we found about 4 o'clock. We then rode into the village – **found** Harry paying his men...

5th February 1915

Dollie visits Douai [Abbey]; she also wants to help the battalion at home – but Arthur has his reservations; the weather improves; reading French maps; a detailed description of General Bethune's inspection.

Arthur to Dollie

The "Palm Court", Friday even. 8.30pm

... Thanks awfully, darling, for a letter and postcard of Tuesday last. I meant to get you off a long letter last night, but we had an awfully long day – as you'll see, sweet darling when I tell you the news. But first, dear, let me answer your news. I am sorry darling that you didn't have a nice day at Douai. I was very touched to hear that [nephew] **Cecil** had put up candles for us – dear little chap. If you write to him, please thank him for me, will you dearest.

Of course, darling, go to Headquarters. I only said that I wasn't very keen on your visiting, for it was bound to make you depressed – but darling, use your discretion, please – and it is a good idea for you to go to these meetings, for you may learn of some way in which you can help the battalion. For example, by making a muffler. (The one you sent me is a beauty – I use it always – thanks awfully once more, darling).

Well, darling, as for our news. Yesterday morning we had several parades, that is the 4 Companies and myself all paraded separately at 9.15 and worked separately until 1. It was a glorious day, a cloudless sky and warm sun. In the afternoon we had a lecture from the Adjutant on reading the French maps, also on some night work that we were to do that night. The lecture was at 2.45, by 3.30 the whole Battalion had to be on parade at the bottom of the village, something over a mile way, as at 3.45 we were to be ready for an inspection by **General Bethune**. It was a perfect day. The Battalion was drawn up on mass in a field where we had been digging trenches on the North of the road. I and the Machine Gun section were on the road itself, as the wagon that carries the guns, stores, etc was there. Behind us stretched up the road back into the village the 1st Line Transport that is the Water carts, Cooks wagon, Tools wagon, ammunition carts etc. Two or three aeroplanes were in the air above the HQ of the Royal Flying Corps.

The **General** turned up about 4 walked round the Battalion and inspected the transport. We got back into our billet at 4.50. We had orders to do a march of 3-4 miles by the Companies separately, rendezvous at a fixed point, thence we were to open out into a loose formation and gradually developing an attack formation, were to move across country on a compass bearing. Finally we were to halt and start to entrench ourselves with our entrenching tools.

Well, sweetheart ... I am now due for C.O.s Orders. I shall have to rush. I hate breaking off like this but the post goes at 10 and we go on parade immediately after COs orders and it's better you get even a short letter than none at all, isn't it darling...

6th February 1915

Arthur reluctantly makes arrangements to send Dollie's letters back home; the relative merits of various army boots; night work for the Company; Dollie's brother Edouard has a narrow escape on his horse; a quiet night in for Arthur.

Arthur to Dollie

The "Palm Court", Saturday 6.50pm

... To-night at least I hope to get enough time to myself to write and give you my news. But first darling I want to thank you for two dear letters and a postcard which I found waiting for me when I got back this afternoon. Both **Harry** [Pulman] and I were "awfully bucked" with our cards – you darling, it was a sweet idea, many thanks. I am expecting **Daisy**'s parcel tomorrow. Do you know to whom it was addressed darling? If it was to **Alfred** [Agius], he may have received it this afternoon. I hav'n't seem him today.

... About your dear letters; sweet – it appeared in orders some time ago that no parcels were to be sent home. So **Harry** and I were in rather a quandary, for we had talked over among ourselves the advantages of sending our love letters to you and **Rosa** for safe keeping. However that order has lately been rescinded as regards Officers – so we are going to see about it. I think it is the only way out, much as I hate to part with them; but you'll understand won't you, sweet love and realise the difficulties of keeping safely any papers in the field. I want to thank you too darling for sending the notepaper. It is a pleasant change to have a decent surface to write on. My notebook, which I had been using before, is beastly for ink, that is why, dear, in the last letter that I wrote in my notebook I wrote in pencil.

I am glad that my tin and camp kit has turned up safely. I sent my riding boots back darling as boots weigh so much and ordinary boots and puttees are supposed to be better. Campaigning field boots weigh a lot and take a few minutes to get on and off. So I kept two pairs of marching boots (not those I had made in Malta) which are stout and strong and wear them always with puttees.

The night before last ... after our inspection we went out for night work. Each Company had about 1 ½ hours march along different roads to meet at a concentration point. I went with No1 Company, that is **Harry**'s and guided him. We went across a lot of country lanes. I had a couple of rather fractious beasts in my wagon, and as it was very dark, though wonderfully fine, it was rather fun – no lights of course. We reached the rendezvous at 7.20, ten minutes before time, but all to the good.

Thence we moved off for about 300 yards as a Battalion to another point on the road. I sent my wagon ... for hence we were going cross-country on a compass bearing. We seemed to be going on for hours, but though the going was heavy it wasn't monotonous – for we had to go down a steep bank about 20 feet high and up another, past a very deep chalk quarry and up and down innumerable small banks varying from 2 to 4 feet. We gradually extended out, finally coming into two long lines. Then we began to entrench – an awful rag, as it was pitch dark. Luckily the earth was soft and we got down 1 ft to 2 ft in quite a short time then we stopped. The

men put on their kits again and we marched 3 or 4 miles home. We got in some time after 11pm; had some supper; then to bed at 12.20, very tired.

Yesterday was another wonderful day. We dug trenches again all day, from about 9.15 till 1 when the men had a break until 1.30 for dinner cooked out there where we were. Then on again until 4.15.

Last night **Harry** and I had some hot water brought in here and washed our feet – great joy. We went to bed fairly early. Poor **Couch** has a touch of the “flu” so I’ve got another of the boys looking after me today.

Edouard [Noel] had a very lucky escape yesterday. He rode into St Omer to draw pay. Coming back he had reached the end of the village here when his horse bolted, dashed up the whole length of the village, and in crossing the cobbled pavé up at the top end near the church came down on its near shoulder. Luckily **Edouard** was apparently thrown quite clear and by a miraculous chance escaped without any injury at all, save for a few scratches. What makes it all the more extraordinary darling, is that he had his glasses on and had a pipe in his mouth. Both I hear were completely destroyed. **Edouard** is perfectly all right – the horse had a bad cut but that is all.

Today I have had a long day on my own with the gun section. We were out from 9 till 3.50. I marched all the morning – had lunch al fresco – and did field training all the afternoon working homewards. It has been quite a pleasant day, except for one or two showers. But tonight the weather has broken and it is pouring with rain. To-night **Harry** and **Evie** [Noel] went to St Omer to dine; but I was feeling rather tired dear as I’ve been in the saddle all day and I wanted to write to you; so I’ve stayed in and had my supper alone. Except for the fact that I have been unable to change my boots, I am very comfortable here in front of the fire ...

8th February 1915

Arthur sends a lock of hair home; Dollie's visit to the London HQ is a disappointment; the London Territorials are on the move - to join forces with the Leicesters, Ghurkas and Gharwals in a village called Ham – 12 miles from the Front.

Arthur to Dollie

The "Palm Court", Monday 5.50pm

... First to thank you, sweet, for two dear letters, received yesterday and today and dated Friday and Saturday. Thanks awfully darling, your news is always welcome – I long for your daily letters.

I am sending a piece of my hair, cut with a pretty blunt pair of scissors. I hav'n't tied a bit of cotton round it darling. I couldn't find a piece when I cut it off, so I have put it straight into a separate envelope with a threepenny bit. I hope it will arrive all right. An awfully sweet idea of yours, dear. I am so proud to think that you should wear a lock of my hair. You are a priceless little soul. I do love you and am so proud and happy that you love me as you do. God bless you, sweet darling.

I mess with **Harry** [Pulman] and **Evie** [Noel]; its like this darling – the first day we arrived here, I found that **Babe** and I hadn't a room to feed in. When I went to COs orders next morning I heard **Harry** and **Evie**, in the same plight, asking for a room for themselves. So I suggested joining forces – very willing but **Babe** cried off. We found a room and so Voilà.

... I'm sorry H.Q. was such a rotten affair. What was it all about dear? I'm not surprised that **Clermont** got on your nerves, and I admire you for being able to make an early escape.

... I'm awfully pleased about the lamp. I only wish that it had come a few days earlier, for well, I've a certain amount of news to tell you darling and must do my best to tell you for there's an awful din going on in here: **Harry, Evie, Bertie and Johnnie**.

Well, sweet darling here's for the news. We are to trek once more to join a mixed brigade – 1 Battalion of the Leicesters, 1 of Ghurkas, and 1 of Gharwals – somewhere behind the line. We leave here tomorrow at 9am and march 10 miles to a place called Wittes. We stay there tomorrow night; leave next morning for about 7 miles to a place called Ham – where we await further orders. We may go further towards the front, or not. We don't know yet, quite probably not as the Brigade we are going to join is I believe coming back to rest.

So you see, darling of my heart, once more uncertainty – if we stop at HAM we shall be, we reckon, about 12 miles from the front. By the way, darling mine, if ever you don't receive my news, please ring up **Rosa** and ask her, for **Harry** is always going to give her news of me. I have promised to do the same for him, as he may not be able to write when I can. So if **Rosa** rings up and asks you, you are to say that he is very well indeed, but misses her awfully.

10th February 1915

Arthur is on the move. A cold, wet, march followed by a hunt for a bed. Arthur is not impressed by the village Mayor – or a bounder from the RAMC. More comfortable billets and a close encounter with the 4th Division French Cavalry. They come to a muddy end.

Arthur to Dollie

Wednesday afternoon, 4.12pm

... Yesterday darling we were under orders to move ... I got up at 6 – it was very dark; got my things packed up, as the wagons had to be loaded by 7.30. Then I went over to see how my men were getting on at their billet, for there were several things to be done, cleaning up, packing up blankets, waterproof sheets, etc. Then I went up to brekker. Parade was at 9 – it sounds plenty of time, and the men were ready but the transport wasn't so we didn't move off until about 9.20. It was a very threatening morning, cloudy and very windy, with a fierce yellow sky that foreboding [sic] more wind. Our expectations were fully justified, for soon after we started it came on to rain and hail and the wind, which blew across from our right front, grew stronger. We made a march of about 10 – 12 miles as we had been foretold. It was a beastly march, dear, but everyone stuck it very cheerily though wet through. Being mounted I had started with my British Warm on – as the rain grew worse, I slipped on my Burberry ... so although my feet were bitterly cold I kept quite fairly warm up above.

We got in to our village about 1.45 ... We were to billet there. **Bertie Mathieson** had ridden ahead on a bike with some orderlies to fix things up. We were kept waiting some time in the street, but finally I got my men and my horse settled down pretty comfortable. They made friends with the local folk and got permission to dry their things in the farm.

Then I found that **Bertie Mathieson** had been unable to find a billet for the **Babe** and I. We went to the Maire – an awful looking ruffian – found him out, but found the **C.O.** installed there. He asked us what we wanted and on learning what it was, immediately said that I had better billet there, so I did. The **C.O.** had a bedroom upstairs. Downstairs there were two rooms leading one out of the other. The outer one had a stone floor but was otherwise comfortably furnished. Here we sat and ate. The inner room, with a board floor and apparently the “salon” was the living room of two other officers – a Territorial Captain of Engineers and an RAMC man. The later was a bounder. In this inner room **Algy** and I slept on our valises.

I said that this RAMC man was a bounder: for example we went to “bed” at about 8.45. We told him that we were going to bed and politely hinted that if he read in his bedroom instead of where we were, we should be much obliged. But nothing of the sort and he sat in there reading until about 10 o'clock, naturally keeping us awake. At any rate, darling, we soon fell asleep and slept soundly until about 6.50... We got up and had a ripping wash and shave, brekker about 7.45. We paraded about 9.15 and marched off at 9.30. Luckily it has been a glorious clear day with a sun that was almost hot. Last night there was a touch of frost. We marched to-day through the HQ of the 1st Army, to which we are to belong...

We reached here about 1, and as usual were some time in finding our billets; for this village is not a very big or clean one. I got my men in fairly comfortable, ditto **Ben** – my horse – who is not very happy today. I think he has a sore shoulder. Then I found that **Bertie** hadn't been able to find a very decent one for me (inter alia) many of the others wanted settling down. However, after many expedients, I asked **Harry** if I could put my valise in his room. He is living with **Evie** [Noel] – he said yes. Finally however I found in the same cottage another room, about 14ft x 10 feet and about 10-12 high, red-tiled floor. One couple here – an old fellow who fought in '71 and his wife are both simply priceless. I've got a bed in one corner – about a foot of straw – then a straw mattress, then my valise. The old lady has got me a couple of clean sheets and a couple of pillows and lit the stove in the room. Curtains are on the window. They are ... very old, but full of vigour and spirit and absolutely cannot do enough for us. They gave us an omelette, bread and butter, home made jam, beer and coffee. So we're living like princes.

.... The Brigade we are to join comes out of the trenches either tomorrow or the day after for a rest. So we shall probably be here for at least a fortnight. Everyone is very cheerful about the position of affairs and say that the Germans feel they are done for. We are in a superior position here, as I believe we are all along the line; apart from that, they tell us that the trenches are greatly improved and better drained. So that's all right isn't it, darling?

This afternoon we have spent settling down. Lot of the men had sore feet – for over 500 were wearing new boots – which always want breaking in. I lost my Corporal who was sent back to England on grounds of health and another of my men sent to Base at Rouen.

... On Sunday morning **Alfred** [Agius] and I went to Mass, Confession and Communion at 8. It was the day ordered by the Pope for Peace and as the Curé put it, Peace indeed but victory first. Afterwards COs orders, brekker and then parade at 9.30 for a march – which had many funny incidents – chief of which was that it never was a march for after going a short distance we came to some cross roads and going across our front was the 4th Division of French Cavalry, riding back from where they have been at the front. Wonderful fellows too, very hard bitten and seasoned. There was a regiment of Cuirassiers in the line, looking strangely picturesque in their cuirasses which they still wear and their helmets, though the latter are covered with blue cloth and they wear a blue cloth waistcoat which can be used to cover the former. The column, the head of which had already crossed our front took, I suppose dear, about an hour and a half to pass – a delay which saved us 4 ½ miles of march – for we were due in about 1.

Another rather humorous incident was that **Major Beresford** in charge of the Battalion pro tem, and who had already been given a route, missed his way and led us by a cart track that grew muddier and muddier and ended in a long slope of mud and soft cultivated land leading on to the high road. Of course the transport which was with us had an awful time trying to get through, another factor that spelt delay. **Ben** was being shod that day, so I rode another pony, a little beast that **Sammy** thought he'd rather like. He finally had her, changing with **Harry** who was to have had her. I don't believe **Sammy** is quite so keen on her now, darling; in fact I think he rather wishes he hadn't insisted on having her.

11th February 1915

The Territorials are now part of the Indian Army. Their first inspection by General Willcocks. Formal introductions are made. Arthur is to train a lot more men on the machine guns.

Arthur to Dollie

Thurs. 5.7pm

... We have been very disappointed today as our mails hav'n't arrived. So I have been without your dear news since your letter of Saturday last. I miss your news so much, darling and am hoping that your letters, which I prize so much, will arrive tomorrow.

Last night ... we turned in early. I slept very well. The old lady here absolutely mothers us, even in the most domestic of domestic details. She is a dear. This morning up at 7.30. She had the fire lit in my stove for me to dress and hot water for a shave and wash. We had breakfast at 8.15; COs orders at 9.

It has been a glorious day. We paraded at 10.45 for an inspection by **General Willcocks** G.O.C. the Indian Army Corps. He rode up at about 11.30, made a short speech welcoming us into the Indian Army, and then had all the Officers and Serjeants out and was introduced to the former. He is a fine looking fellow, with rows and rows of medal ribbons. After the inspection we marched past in column of fours. He then rode off, came up to Battalion HQ and stayed some time with the CO. We had lunch at 1.30 and since then have not been doing much. **Harry** [Pulman] has stayed in bed all day to-day again – he is much better but the Doctor told him not to get up as it is a touch of the 'flu that he has got.

I've just been called over to the Orderly Room dear and heard that I am to train a lot more men for machine gun work so that in all, I shall have under me 1 Officer 9 NCOs and 36 men, plus 2 servants – quite a crowd eh darling – its going to mean a lot of hard work. To-morrow I believe there is to be another inspection. I hope it will be fine.

I'm afraid, darling, that this is indeed a strange letter: but you must forgive me, dear. It is not always easy to write – interruptions are many and it is difficult sometimes to pick up the thread. I miss you so much, darling and would to Heaven that we were together once more but we've just got to grin and bear things and try to do our duty by God and our Country. It is the thought and certain knowledge of you my beloved at home that sustains and comforts me – God bless you, darling... So dear soul, I'm afraid I must come to a close for I have to do a lot of work to-night... Please give my love to your **Mater** and to my people when you see them. Remember me too most kindly to **Rosa ...**

12th February 1915

Dollie is worried about Arthur's proximity to the Front; trouble with the servants – and the “noodles” that are gasmen and plumbers; Dollie's luggage is still missing after their return from Malta – nearly a month and a half ago; more General inspections and a game of footer.

Arthur to Dollie

In Billets, France, Friday 3.53pm

At last – part of the mail has arrived – just a small part, but containing two dear letters. The rest – about 27 sacks – is due in this afternoon some time. I'd wait for it, darling but we are on duty again at 5.10 this afternoon and I wish to make sure of writing...

As to our move, well darling, you know now all about that, but you are not to worry darling, not in the slightest little bit. We are still more than 20 miles from the front. So cheer up, darling be brave, as you are brave. Pray to God for help; He will give you all you want.

I hope that by the time you get this, dear, you will have got your servants all right. I have lively recollection of the trouble and inconvenience being without them must cause – and don't like to think of your being without them, for you're such a good little housewife that I always dread your overworking yourself... Sorry about the broken pipe, spoilt wallpaper and the plumbers. But perhaps all men aren't such “noodles”... I know what you mean and really think that plumbers, gasfitters and painters the most exasperating of household necessities ...

Of course send a card to **Alfred** [Agius] for his birthday, dear, it is very sweet and thoughtful of you. I shall not forget the **Pater**'s birthday – thanks for the reminder dear all the same.

... I am very surprised to hear that you hav'n't your luggage yet darling. I understood from **Harry** [Pulman] that it had arrived – evidently I didn't quite catch what he said. I only hope that by now you have it safe and sound - you darling and your darling frocks and frills.

Harry, Evie [Noel] and I are very comfortable here and really absurdly well looked after, so you mustn't worry your dear head, but try and cheer up a bit. Truly nowadays “sufficient for the day” etc and we have more than sufficient.

To-day has been quite fine again. This morning we were again inspected – by a **Brigadier General**. Rather a curious inspection for it was done in detail. Machine Guns, Stretcher Bearers and Cyclists at 10.30, A Coy 10.45 and so on. We were on parade at 9.30 and after the inspection overhauled guns etc. until 12.25. Then back here for lunch. This afternoon **Evie** and I went to see the beginnings of a footer match between ourselves and the Gunners. Then came back to write. **Harold Moore's** Coy has been digging trenches most of the day. Well, dear, it's now ten to five and there's not much time to get a bite in then off on parade...

13th February 1915

Dollie wears a contentious hat to the theatre; still no chance of home leave for Arthur – they could be in the trenches within 10 days; the machine gun section is shaping up; Arthur has a hair cut.

Arthur to Dollie

In Billets, Satur. evening 6.8pm

... It's awfully generous and sweet of you to have sent the parcel, darling; everything therein is most ...useful. You are a sweet little soul and a thoughtful one too. God bless you.

Well dear, let me answer your letters. I'm sorry there was a bit of a fracas about your hat at the theatre. Of course you were perfectly right, but the girl was evidently a fool and was trying to carry out the letter and not the spirit of her instructions. I'm glad the cockade's a success. I wish I could see you in your little black hat once more dear. I've a photo of you at Malta with it on, in your new biscuit coat and skirt ...

Now darling as to the question of Kitchener's speech about leave. **Harry** [Pulman] has received a copy of the Times with it in, but has only had time to skip through it ... But I don't think there's much chance of getting leave yet, darling. I hate to have to disappoint your dear hopes – but it is far better that leave, if it comes at all should come as a joyful surprise, rather than the refusal of it be a heavy disappointment.

At any rate, darling, you'll know all about our movements by now – and you'll know for certain that we are not going into the trenches for 10 days or a fortnight. Most probably the later for the Brigade we are going to join only comes out of the trenches to-day I believe and is due for at least a fortnight's rest. So you're not to worry, please darling. You are a dear to try and cheer me up when you're feeling "blue". Well you know for certain that I'm well and sound but miss you awfully...

Today has been a beast of a day, on the whole, from the weather point of view. Alternate rain and sun – chiefly the former – so all parades were cancelled. However, as I had my new Machine Gunners 'on the card' – I put in 1 ½ hours work with them in a leaky shed, bitterly cold; but it was a very profitable hour and a half. That was from 9.30 – 11. Then I made my way back here, read your dear letters and opened the eagerly awaited parcel – Cheero!

This afternoon **Bertie Mathieson** and I went in to a neighbouring little town – an awful little place – but it contained a good barber which I wanted badly as my hair was getting very long. We walked in and back – it's about 3 kilometres not very inspiring. However. We passed a Battalion of Ghurkas on the way ...

To-night we are having a great "beano" in honour of **Evie's** birthday. All in here to supper about 11 of us. I'll tell you all about it tomorrow...

14th February 1915

Valentine's Day; the weather is beastly; Arthur & Co have got the "hump" – as they were not chosen for some unexpected leave; Arthur sends his photos home to the family; a shopping list for Dollie; Arthur contrives to send Dollie's letters back to her – although he is sick at heart with having to part from them.

Arthur to Dollie

In Billets, Sunday 2.22pm

I received your dear letter of Thursday this morning; thanks awfully darling. I am so sorry to hear that you've been so upset about **Alfred's** letter. We are all very vexed with him here and mean to have it out with him. Of course, it is all right now as you know where we are and how we're situated. So, please Heaven, by now you are more at ease in your mind, darling.

Happy Valentine Darling... I received your dear letter of Thursday this morning; thanks awfully darling... Well, dear soul, to-day we've all fairly got the "hump". It's a perfect beast of a day, pouring rain and driving wind. To add to that we had a lecture on lots of things concerning trenches etc. At the end the **C.O.** announced that leave for six days might be given to 4 Officers and 2 NCOs. He, the Adjutant and **Major Beresford** weren't going to avail themselves of it. For the rest lots would be drawn to allow 1 Officer per Coy to go. The lots were duly drawn. "**Tea Leaves**", **Edwards**, "**Mabel**" and **Giles** are the lucky ones. Of course all the rest of us are perfectly fed up. **Harry** [Pulman] and **Evie** [Noel] are in here writing with me, and we are all like bears with sore heads. The weather is too beastly to admit one working off ones feelings by a walk... Still I suppose its no use grumbling: it's all the luck of the thing. But we don't feel very philosophical. Oh well.

So I am asking one of them to take my parcel of letters across to England. I've enclosed the remainder of my photos, as I thought it safest. Will you please, darling, let my **Mater** have them. I want **Maggie** [Agius] to have one and **Daisy** [Agius] one also; please. I hope that you'll get them safely.

Last night we had quite a feast in here [**Evie, Edouard, Arthur, Alfred, Johnnie, Harold, Bobby, Harry, Giles, Babe, Bertie**]. I had my bed moved out for the night. We got a table rigged up on a couple of trestles and the old lady here supplied us with linen and crockery galore. A tablecloth and serviettes for each of us – we sat down 11... For food – hors d'oeuvres – sardines and a paste of sorts – soup – a thick warming village soup. Then a priceless omelette and two fowls with fried potatoes and gravy. We ended up with birthday cake and that was about as much as anyone of us could manage. We had wine, red and white, to drink and liqueurs and coffee to finish off with. Then we sang choruses. Finally a speech from **Harry** and **Harold Moore** and an answering one from **Evie**. The **two Reeves** and **Stephens** came in after. We went to bed about 11.

... this morning I got up at 7.15 so as to get to 8 o'clock Mass. The Church is just within a few minutes of here. I managed to get to Communion which was a great comfort. Afterwards we had brekker about 9.10. I inspected my men's rifles and feet

(queer combination, eh darling?) at 9.40. I arrived back here about 10.10. We had the lecture on at 11.

Evie hasn't received his parcel yet darling, but expects it tomorrow. So thanks in anticipation for the biscuits which are going to be very much appreciated... By the way dear I want you to do me a commission please. **Harry** is writing today for a waterproof cap-cover. He is asking **Rosa** to get it – I think from some people Anderson & Anderson - who have a place I know in Queen Victoria St. in the City. I wish you would get me one too please darling. I shall be awfully grateful. It is a cover for the cap with a flap behind and I think costs about 5 / 6. But if you can get hold of **Rosa**, you will be able to get them together. Promise me though, darling, that you will let me know how much it costs. One other thing darling and I think that it is the end of the list – could you please also send me out some raisins...

When have you any hope of getting your luggage, darling – it seems extraordinary that it has been so long and it must be awfully inconvenient for you. I thought you had it already when you said that it was at Tilbury, but apparently it isn't so. Poor darling – what a shame. I hope **George Pulman** will be getting on the move again about it...

Just a footnote. I've handed my packet of your dear letters to Harry's Serjeant Major – who is one of the two NCOs due for leave. He will take great care of them I know and I suppose it's for the best but I don't like letting them go from me... The Serjeant Major whose name is **Frame** is going to **Rosa** on Wednesday morning at Hendon, and will hand her the precious packet for delivery to you, darling! ...

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15th February 1915

More water than ink in the trenches; Arthur's good friend Harry [Pulman] has been granted leave – Arthur hopes he will see Dollie and return some of her letters; the terror of hiring servants; orders arrive to move again – this time to join their new Brigade at Vieille Chapelle.

Arthur to Dollie

In Billets, Mon. 4pm

... Thanks awfully dear for your letter of Friday and ... bag of biscuits, both of which arrived today and both awfully appreciated. Forgive the pencil – ink is not over-plentiful, and it's much easier to write in pencil. So it's not because anything's wrong that I'm not writing in ink.

I am awfully sorry you were still without my news when you wrote. There was an awful muddle over the mails when we moved here – both outgoing and incoming. Even so it's difficult to understand and it worries me to think that you are anxious, as you must be. So darling please in future I want you to try and cheer up and know for certain that no news is GOOD news, for we are all agreed that if anything should by chance happen to any of us, our pals will see that the news gets home at once. So Harry and I are always going to write home news of each other...

... As for your dear letters – as you know by now, darling, I've sent them home with **Harry's** Serjeant Major, who is going to give them to **Rosa**. One which was among my things I am enclosing in this letter, also the dear one that I received today. I hate to part with them, but I suppose I must make a virtue of necessity, darling.

I hope that by now, dear, you'll have got your servants. They are a nuisance and always fill me with a sense of terror. I don't know how you face them!

... It is now 7.45pm we have just had some supper. I have a lot of news again today, sweet darling. First of all **Harry** has got 6 days leave and is taking this letter over. The **C.O.** went to see about it last night and got permission for one more. **Harry** and **Sammy** tossed for it. **Harry** was in a fearful state until it was decided and as you may imagine – in a more excitable one after. Lucky fellow. He leaves tonight and is going to Berkhamsted. I hope you'll see him – he is going to give us all our news. I'm looking forward eagerly to my turn.

... Tomorrow we trek again to join our Brigade – but you're not to worry as it is in reserve and has just come back from the trenches. We are going to a place called Vieille Chapelle – the Brigade HQ (Garwhali Brigade). We now belong to the Garwhali Brigade of the Meerut Division (HQ Locon) of the Indian Corps (HQ St Venant) of the First Army (HQ – Aire). **Harry** however will give you the news if I've forgotten any (which I don't think I have). We are to go by easy stages, making a short trek tomorrow to St Venant only...you're not to worry or be anxious for we are not in for anything that need cause a moment's anxiety.

Today, darling, was fairly fine. We started this morning practising relieving some Ghurkas (2nd Bn of the 8th Ghurkas who are near here at Manqueville) in some

practise trenches. But when we got into the field where they are, we found the trenches had 1 foot 6 inches of water in them so we just had a look round – then I took hold of my new machine gun fellows and taught them till close on one. After lunch we had news of our move. First of all they said that we were going to Vieille Chapelle in one move. But this was afterwards changed. However I don't know what sort of postal arrangements if any will be made for us for these next two days. I hate it, for a day passed without your dear news, my beloved, is a day of darkness... However one must just grin and bear it and look forward with all the more eagerness to the joyful day when one gets the mails again! ...

Take care of yourself. Thank **Harry** when you see him. Tell **Rosa** he has been an awful pal. I've got a very soft corner in my heart for him.

Love too to your dear Mater. I'll write to her again soon as I can...

16th February 1915

Friend Harry is away on leave; the Londons are on the march to their new Brigade HQ; some hot sunshine for once; Arthur tries for a hair cut – but the barber is ill; the Indian Cavalry are a fine sight.

Arthur to Dollie

In Billets, Tuesday even. 6.25pm

... We are halted here for the night for as I wrote last night we began to trek this morning. Last night **Harry** left just before 9pm. The lucky dog! How we envied his luck. Still I suppose that the longer we have to wait for it, the more we are going to appreciate it. We went to bed after he left. I slept in his bed last night as I had packed my valise.

This morning we were up about 6.45; breakfast 7.30. We paraded at 9 for 9.30am. Luckily it has been a most glorious day, brilliant sun which has been really hot! We only had a march of about 5 miles, so we got here quite early about 11.30 I think dear and soon got shaken down. The billets both for Officers and men are good. I've got a little room to myself near Battalion HQ. **Johnny Sutcliffe** and I are having our meals with **Evie** [Noel] and the rest of his Company, **Stephens** – who jars on one's nerves, for he's fearfully commoner - & **Bags (E. J. Reeves)**. **Bertie Mathieson** has gone on ahead to fix up billets for us. Tomorrow we are off again at 8.30am for the second part of our trek – about 11 miles – from the Indian Army Corps HQ just in front of us here to our Brigade HQ.

This afternoon we had nothing to do so several of us walked into the HQ to look for a barber – but he was ill, so we came back. It is only about 1 ½ kilometres there and back. **Evie** took a photo of us on the way back. Write and tell me, darling, how all these photos of **Evie's** come out. He is sending some more back with **Harry**. **Evie** and I went up to **Harold Moore and Edouard** [Noel] for tea. Since tea we have had one or two odd jobs to do. The **C.O.** had some instructions to give Company Commanders, at which I attended. Then we came back here and I began to write to you, my darling, my loved one...

This morning we saw a mounted Brigade ride through, a regiment of English horse, a battery of Horse Artillery and two Indian Cavalry Regiments. They are training now all the time – fine fellows they looked and very well mounted.

...Can you please send me another writing block – any cheap one will do fine....

20th February 1915

No letters in or out for three days; a very muddy march for Arthur, in the bitter cold; communication problems with the Ghurka and Garhwal machine gunners; knife admiration; Arthur meets the real Blackader at the Front; rats in the bedding; Arthur's first real experience of the Front and being under shell fire; "Dead Cow Farm".

Arthur to Dollie

Saturday 4.10pm

... Well, darling it is indeed a long time since I wrote last and I daren't think how anxious you must be. I can only hope that you have taken to heart what I told you that NO news is GOOD news. The last few days, we have been so much on the rush that I literally haven't had time to write.

Let me go back and explain dear. On Tuesday night I messed with **Evie** and the others of "A" Coy but I went to bed early – had quite a comfortable bed. I hoped for a letter from you and to be able to get this letter off; but though some parcels arrived, there were no letters in or out.

On Wednesday morning we were on trek again. It was a perfectly beastly morning – very cold with a bitter wind and rain. We started at 8.30 and were on the march in the bitter weather, along awful roads, ankle deep in mud over the central 12 feet, then about 4 foot of mud each side about 2 foot deep then a broad water ditch and rows of pollarded willows – very dull country – so it was a rotten march dear.

We were on the march for about 4 hours before we got here. Got something to eat about 2; **Johnnie Sutcliffe** and I were together as Machine Gunners. We had a loft together in a little farm – not very comfortable. We fed with **Alfred** [Agius] who has a fairly comfortable room. I was busy till about 4.30 getting settled down then I got a message from the Brigade Machine Gun Officer, asking me to report to him at 5. So I set off at once as it was about 2 miles walk. I found the place and found that the Machine Guns of the Brigade were going to be brigaded permanently. There are 5 Battalions in this Brigade, 2nd Bn of the Leicesters, 3rd Ghurkas and two Battalions of the 39th Garhwals and our Battalion. Each section from each Battalion is going to have 4 guns – so there will be a total of 20 guns. We all live and mess together, Brigade Officer, 5 Brigade Officers, a Captain who is in charge of the Bombers and a Doctor Captain. All the men are mixed up in 5 Groups of 32 men each. So I have a Group of 32 men under me, of which 22 are Ghurkas and Garhwals. It's a bit difficult trying to teach them, as I don't know a word of Hindustani and beyond a few technical terms they don't know a word of English. But they are awful good fellows ... armed with a wonderful knife in addition to their other arms.

... We had an inspection by our new Brigadier – **Blackader** is his name – at 11.20 and then had to move off down to our billets here, near the Brigade Machine Gun Officer. I had an awful rush, had to get all the men together, with all their things, rations, blankets, waterproof sheets etc, fodder for the horses etc. However darling, we got everything straight and after the inspection moved down here. First we got the men billeted in their new billets – got them told off in Groups and squads – did some drill with the gun – then lunch. Afterwards more work on the guns – Tea – then some

more to do, had several odd things to arrange – which lasted till dinner – just petty things that took a long time, such as getting straw for the men, rations for the next day and so on.

After dinner the Brigade Officer wanted to see us all to discuss organisation and several other things, so that we were late to bed. **John** and I have new billets nearer to our new Mess. Not a bad place – we sleep on the floor (a stone floor) in our valises – it's pretty hard. For the first night we didn't have any straw – and not altogether pleasant, for there are several rats! But we are beyond being troubled by that.

Friday we were up for brekker at 9; parade 10-12.30; lunch at 1. After lunch we were on parade again most of the afternoon. After tea I had to go up to our Orderly Room – to see about some things and to borrow some bicycles... This morning we had brekker at 8.30 then we Officers bicycled over to the front... Tomorrow night this Brigade is going to relieve a Brigade in the front and we are to do our share. So that by the time you get this, darling, I shall have been literally at the “front”. However we are only going up for 4 days, then, as far as I can make out we come back for 3 days and go up again for 6. After that the Division is going back to rest for a fortnight or three weeks, so I expect we'll go with them and I hope to get leave... The Trenches are not held now. Some time ago they got flooded. In fact, if you dig 6 inches, you find water here. So the trenches were evacuated and the line is now made of breastworks 7 – 8 feet high. So one keeps dry at any rate.

As we are relieving these people tomorrow night, we bicycled up this morning to reconnoitre... Our front is divided into two sections. So after a bit we divided into two parties – the officers who were taking over the right section turned off ... I and another bicycled on up the road till we came to the HQ of the left Section; we left our bicycles there and pushed on on foot across some very muddy fields to a ruined farm – appropriately called “Dead Cow Farm” – where the others were to meet us. We found **Sammy** there – he is taking over the left part of the left section for the first two days and is going to be relieved by **Harry**. **Harold Moore** is going on the right and is going to be relieved by **Guy**. **Sammy and Harold** were in the trenches last night to see what it was like.

We reached Dead Cow Farm about 11.45. The others came up about 12.20. We talked over things and finally made our way back. It was very interesting, for we were under fire most of the time – chiefly shellfire – though occasionally a rifle bullet made a nasty zip. At one time we thought they were going to shell the farm for they dropped a lot all round.

Everything for a long way back is marked by shellfire. There are two main roads bordered by houses. The houses are all in ruins. Some are fearfully knocked about, especially round about two cross roads. The fields are full of big holes, two or three trees are down, cut in two by shells.

It seems quite quiet back here by comparison – though we hear an occasional shell from our heavy guns ... which are all about us. The Germans were in the village last November and were shelled out by our fellows – who in doing so destroyed the Church.

It is now 5.50pm. I looked at my watch for we have just been out for a few minutes to listen to a sharp fight – rifles and machine guns are going hard – field guns up in front and near us the heavy guns are making the house shake... Tomorrow I expect we shall just get things ready. We are moving in tomorrow evening. The weather has been moderately fine. It is rare that we get a day without a heavy shower. The country is rather wooded – not woods but an abundance of trees...

21st February 1915

A short note today, as Arthur and Company prepare to move up to the Front tonight; an attack was made last night on the Germans at Givenchy.

Arthur to Dollie

In Billets, Sunday 3.25pm

... I have a few minutes to spare before parade and so have taken the opportunity to start a letter dear. For although I'm afraid a letter written in fits and starts must be rather disjointed, yet one must make a virtue of necessity and do what one can...

I had to finish my letter yesterday in time to catch the post at 7 at Battalion Headquarters, a mile or two up the road. There were some orders to attend to after. Then we had dinner. Finally we went up to bed.

There was a certain amount of firing last night as I wrote. Apparently they were making an attack on the Germans away on our right at GIVENCHY. It was a beautiful night – a 'young moon' – wonderful stars. This morning we were up late. Brekker at 9.20. We were pretty busy till 11.30, arranging for our move in to the front to-night.

22nd February 1915

Arthur has spent his first night at the Front – living in “luxury” in a ruined farm. The German trenches are only 200 yards away but he still receives a parcel from home.

Arthur to Dollie

Monday 22nd 5.30pm

Well, darling, I am up at the front properly at last and have been for 24 hours. I had to stop short yesterday and can only just add a few lines now. I am very fit, very safe and altogether all right! The front is quite a comfortable sort of place. I am in a ruined farm about 200 yds from the Germans. I'll write fully tomorrow and give you all my news. I got a dear letter of yours today up here – also a parcel from home!

Well, dear one its very dark and we can't show a light. Besides the orderlies are just going back with the mail. So I can't write at length. I am awfully well ... and awfully in love with you also...

Daily Malta Chronicle

**A century ago, *Daily Malta Chronicle*
Monday, February 22, 1915**

Miscellaneous

- Our countryman, Mr Hector Maistre, son of the late Ettore Maistre, has been engaged as a Military Interpreter with the French Army and posted to the Headquarters of the 4th Zouaves.
- The battalions of the Territorials, who left Malta for the front, have received their baptism of fire and have suffered some casualties.
- Lectures on Military Sanitation will be held at the Valletta Military Gymnasium.
- Capt A. Galea, Revenue Officer, has resigned in order to take over charge of a steamer which has been purchased by a well-known firm.
- His Grace Rev. Mgr Maurus Caruana OSB, GCOSJ, Bishop of Malta and Titular Archbishop of Rhodes, is expected here.

23rd February 1915

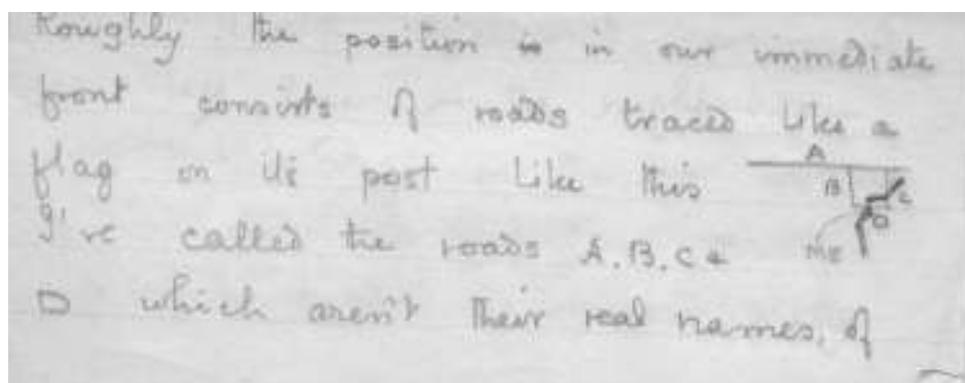
A long letter to Dollie describing in vivid detail the conditions at the Front and how close they are to the German trenches. It is bitterly cold and muddy and Arthur is wearing all his kit. They work by night and sleep by day.

Arthur to Dollie

In the Trenches, Tuesday 3.15pm

Thanks dear for your sweet letter of Thursday last which came up here after dark with the rations. Thanks awfully dear girl for the muscatels and cap cover. I haven't had them yet but expect – if **Harry** [Pulman] brought them over – to get them tonight. I shall tell **Evie** [Noel] about his mess tin as soon as I get the opportunity which I don't think will be for a few days. I'm glad dear that you got the letters all right. I'm sending some more home with this, as I'm afraid I have nowhere to keep them, much as I dislike to part with them.

Well, darling, I'm awfully sorry I had to end so abruptly yesterday. Today I hardly know where to begin. Perhaps if I start from Sunday afternoon. We paraded at 4.15 and got our men, British and Native, together in their groups and sections. We then marched off, a long straggling procession of mules and men and carts. Our way lay through a village adjacent to where we were billeted – and out beyond for some way. Roughly the position in our immediate front consists of roads traced like a flag on its post like this:



I've called the roads A, B, C and D ... The trench lines which are between 100 and 200 yards apart run across the "flag" as I've shewn. Just where I am they are rather close. As a matter of fact the lines no longer consist of trenches. They are all breastworks built up 7-9 feet high, of sandbags.

The Germans broke in just before Christmas at the point where C and D meet and though driven back they still have that corner. Our breastworks are just behind our old trenches. The country is very flat but very rich. Trees abound and there are innumerable water ditches lined with willows. The 2 main roads are A and B. Our Brigade HQ are behind B. The headquarters of the Brigade Machine Guns is about the junction of A & B.

At present I am up road D with one gun and with Capt Lyell of the 2/39th Garhwals and 2 guns. **Harold Moore** is also here with his Company. Where our lines run across the road there are two groups of houses one on each side of the road. Most of them are blown to bits, literally. But **Harold, Lyell** and I have found an HQ here in the right house with **Bobbie Page** in the line 20 yards to our front and **Giles** on the left of the road. We are pretty comfortable – managed to find some straw, but it is bitterly cold, no doors or windows and not much roof - walls full of bullet and shell holes. However we stop up all the cracks and holes as we can, so as to be able to use lights – which we shield in boxes. We have been able to get fires going for the men but have to be awfully careful not to shew flame or glow by night or smoke by day!

We never get out of our clothes and equipment. But this morning we managed to get a shave and a bit of a wash. You would laugh to see them all including myself. I'm wearing your dear presents all about me – I have on a Balaclava cap (inside of a cap. They are ordered to be worn by all as it is considered safer – then I'm wearing your short muffler instead of a collar (Forgive my slips dear I can hardly keep my eyes open). Also a Burberry, equipment, 3 pairs of socks and gum boots. When I go out I put on your long muffler – they are invaluable. As for food dear – our rations arrive every night and we supplement them with what we may have had sent out – sardines, potted meat, etc. The nut chocolate you sent me is awfully good. We drink cocoa all hours of the day. I had a tin of bivouac cocoa and **Lyell** has some too. While we are up here these little parcels of luxuries are simply invaluable. Handkerchiefs I have enough, thanks to the dear folks at home – but eatables, toilet paper, candles and anything to read are awfully appreciated. My electric torch has proved indispensable thanks awfully dear for getting it for me.

... We arrived at the HQ of the Brigade machine guns at the junction of roads A & B about 6 on Sunday evening. We stopped in a field near there for some little time, making preparations for our move in. It is about 1 ½ miles back, but well in the area of shell fire and lately has been regularly shelled. From there we split up in two parties ... [we] proceeded along B and then turned up D. My men were carrying their gun etc but the Indian troops brought theirs on their mules up D to within a couple of hundred yards of our position here. Pretty risky as the Germans snipe down D regularly. From here we unloaded the mules on D, we marched along some fields by the side of the road, going in single file. It was a beautiful night, as the last two nights have been, but it got very misty later. We finally got here and relieved the H.L.I. (Highland Light Infantry).

The rest of the night we worked building emplacements and alternative positions, one in a barricade on the road. It is pretty safe, though both sides fire a fair amount every night and send up star shells – which are rockets that give off a very bright light – during the continuance of which one crouches down. Apart from that at night and during the mists of the morning one walks about with the utmost insouciance – or tries to through the mud – which is awful. In the daytime it is not safe to move about and one has to be very careful. It is perfectly absurd to see the German lines only 150 yards off and at night hear them working, whistling sometimes and putting up barbed wire with which the front of both lines is protected.

Our hours are wonderfully irregular – we are night birds literally. We begin to work as soon as it gets dark and go on till about 2.30 or 3am working and

reconnoitring. Then we try and sleep till just before light when we go on our round once more for the last time. All rations are brought up by night and have to be distributed in the dark. Working parties come up too to improve the lines. By night [day?] we eat and sleep and write reports etc. One can't do very much.

Both Sunday night and last night which were very misty, though there was a bright moon, were fairly quiet. We were very busy and worked hard. Yesterday also was very misty and the artillery was unable to fire. But this afternoon we had a bit of an artillery duel. Well, darling mine I'm afraid I must stop. I can't see what I am writing. So I'll continue tomorrow...

24th February 1915

[See Arthur's map of the trenches from 23/2/1915]. A freezing night; hearty fare in the trenches; British superiority in the air; Arthur is shelled; a few domestic notes; a beastly night of snow, rain and coping with casualties; white heather from home.

Arthur to Dollie

... 6am ... It was very cold out and must have frozen from about 2am. We soon got some hot cocoa after which we indeed felt like "giants refreshed". Then we went out to see the new gun emplacement which **Lyell** had had built last night, on the left of the picquet line "A" just to the right of the old "Dug-out" gun pit: apparently in the night owing to a misconstruction of some orders, **Harold's** Serjeant major had removed some of the sandbags. However one of **Lyell's** Corporals, **Corporal Badger** had built it up again and got No.2 gun (formerly in the barricade on the road) mounted in it. We came back just before 8 for brekker which was ready about 8.40. Bacon and onions fried together by **Pte Hunt** formed the staple dish. Then a hard boiled egg apiece, toast, butter, "plum" (forgive the name) jam, potted turkey and tongue, washed down with tea for a change.

We lazed after brekker, but were roused soon before 10. Two monoplanes of ours and a biplane were continually over the German lines, apparently directing the fire of one of our big guns. The Germans fired at them incessantly with anti-aircraft shells. I counted about 50 bursts myself. It is very fascinating to watch. You see the aeroplane 2000 or 3000 feet up humming along serenely. Then all of a sudden you see a little puff of dark smoke, with sometimes a flash and a few seconds after a bang. Then another and another. The aeroplane just buzzes on serenely generally flying back over our lines till the shells cease, when it will calmly wheel round again over the enemy. We apparently have got the Germans scotched in the air. They have scarcely seen a German aircraft since November.

At 10 we had the unpleasant experience of being shelled. It lasted about an hour; it wasn't very comfortable, though I believe it was only the 12-pounder – the "pimpsqueak" we call her. We sent some men into the dug-out but it only holds 8. The remainder we got into a room at the back of the building. **Lyell** and I sat behind a rear wall. They didn't hit our house but they plumped 3 shells through the house just across the road. Luckily the men inside had cleared out into their dug-out, and as the house is pretty well wrecked already, the shells didn't do very much damage.

We spent what was left of the morning beautifying (!) our den...it's awfully draughty. We rigged blankets and waterproof sheets over the doors, which help to exclude the draught a bit. At night we have to screen our window and use light boxes – which are ordinary wooden boxes with a paper or bit of sacking over the front leaving a little slit at the bottom for the light to come out. I've made a couple in here, one by where **Lyell** sleeps and one over on my side.

After lunch at 1 of soup, made from a MAGGI tablet, bully beef and potatoes, bread, butter, toasted cheese, toast and potted meat with cocoa as a drink – we had various odds and ends to do and I slept a bit. I started a letter to you dear but it got darker quicker than I thought, so I wrote off a postcard.

After dark we were just going out when a L/Corporal arrived from the picquet furthest on our right about 350 yds away to say that **Abbott** who is in charge there had been shot in the face. It was a beastly night we had had snow at first but it developed into rain. I routed out some stretcher bearers and took them just outside the building to shew them the way. Then I went forward to **Harold** who was in the breastworks to report. I then came back to the house and found the Corporal with a wound through his arm. He had got it the minute after I left him. Bit of luck eh, dear! It was a wonderfully clean wound – we dressed it and bound it up. We then waited for **Abbott** but the mud was so bad that the stretcher bearers couldn't get along. So we sent out some more and they took him straight to the rear. So we sent the Corporal back too. Then we went out and worked, made another gun pit. A lot of Sappers were up improving the works. I got to bed early about 11.30 and read the paper for a bit before sleeping. I got a dear letter from you dated Tues 16!...

PS: I want another writing block badly. Send me 3 or 4, please darling if you can also some soup tablets MAGGI. **Rosa** knows and let me know the price, PLEASE dear... I want to thank you awfully for the 4 ...letters and a bunch of white heather that I got up here by the ration party last night.

25th February 1915

Heavy snow and another casualty; more shelling from the Germans in the morning and afternoon; Arthur expects to be in the trenches for another 3 days; friend Harry [Pulman] is back from leave and Arthur can't wait for first hand news of Dollie; he hopes for leave when the Brigade go back; meanwhile - no waders required!

Arthur to Dollie

Last night was very cold and we woke up at 6 to find the ground covered in snow and the snow falling heavily. But it stopped later on and now (8.45) the sun is shining brightly. I went across at 6 to see my gun across the road. They were all right, so I came back and had a cup of cocoa. At 7.30 a man came across from the right to report another casualty. A fellow was fool enough to try and cross an open stretch between 2 picquets in the daylight with a snowy background – got a bullet in the shoulder. They hauled him in to one of the breastworks and tied him up. The Corporal in charge is a 1st Aid man. It is impossible to get him back by daylight so he'll have to wait until this afternoon when it gets dark.

We had brekker about 8 as usual bacon and onions fried, toast and butter, potted salmon and shrimp – tea. Since then I've been writing.

... The Germans began to shell earlier this morning, at 9.15am. They plunked their second shell straight into an observation post behind us, but stopped without worrying us up here. I made a couple of sketch maps of our position which took a little time. By the way, dear did I tell you that last night **Major Beresford** came up. He said that the Brigade was going to be up till Sunday. That means I shall be up here till then. Tonight **Harry Pulman's** Company is coming up to relieve **Harold Moore's**. So **Harry, Evie** [Noel] and I will be together once more and I shall be able to shew them round. Incidentally **Major Beresford** said that one of the men in support behind had received a shrapnel bullet in his stomach. We had lunch at 1.30 today. Veal chop each, sauté potatoes and potatoes in their jackets, bread butter cheese and tea, as cocoa is running a bit short.

At this minute our gunners are “ferreting” – a heavy gun from way back fires a high explosive shell on to the German breastwork, and as it bursts and the enemy scatter, they follow it up with shrapnel. A sniper has been worrying **Harold's** people this morning. I think he is the same fellow that shot the Lance-Corp last night. The fellows have to cross a bit of open to get to their trench. Just where they cross a bridge the fellow fires. So we are going to make a new place for **Harry**. One fellow today had his little fingernail removed by a bullet there.

... I had to stop darling, as the Germans began to shell us. We had to clear out in a hurry and stand behind the rear wall of the house. They began about 3.30 and went on for about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour. They fired about 23 shells – “pimpsqeaks” – but sufficiently unpleasant. 3 burst with[in] 25 yards of us. We got splashed with mud but nothing more. I wasn't very pleased – as it gets late and difficult to write. However our gunners did some good work.

We've just had some tea. **Bobbie Page** who has the defence just in front of this house is in here. He says the Germans have been signalling the results of his shooting! They're a pretty quiet lot in front of us here. Saxons I think.

5.45pm : **Harold** is very busy preparing to go back. Great confusion. I am looking forward to seeing **Harry**, for he has just seen you – LUCKY FELLOW!

... Well dear, as for leave – I'm fearfully keen on getting back to see you and it will be priceless if you are in the house. No one knows the arrangements. The latest is that we stay here till Sunday then the brigade will go back for 18 days! I don't know if that's true, but if so it means that the rest of us will get leave I hope. However as yet we can't do more than hope and pray can we, sweet darling.

About waders, darling, I sha'n't need these, thanks very much darling. All trenches have been evacuated and both sides are living behind breastworks – a shallow trench of about 1 foot deep only is dug and in front is built up a breastwork of earth and sandbags. So there is no longer any question of standing waist deep in water. I stood in a trench the other day just to see – the mud and water came up to my knee but as I had gumboots on I kept pretty dry. So thanks once more dear it is sweet of you to have thought of it.

I'm afraid dear I hav'n't given you much news of the first two days up here. They were both very quiet as it was very misty and we had little or no shelling. On the nights we were very busy especially on Sunday night.

Well, my darling, I hope you [are] well and fit as I am DG. I love to think of you, and picture you at home. I simply long to be with you again, my own darling. God bless you and keep you well. Pray for me – as I indeed and know and feel you do. For your prayers and the knowledge that you are praying for me give me great help and comfort...

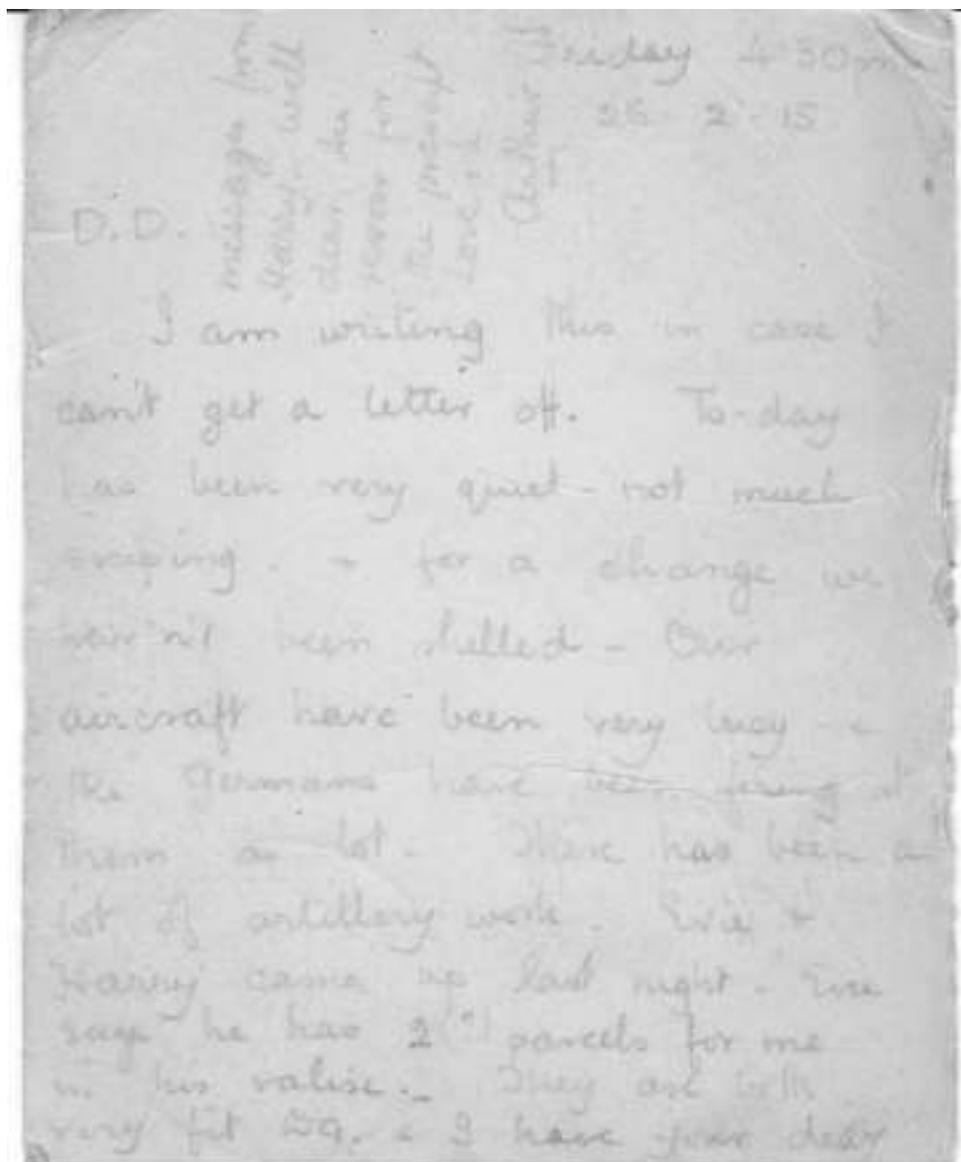
26th February 1915

A brief postcard today from Arthur; his section of the trench is quiet but the Artillery have been busy firing at the British aircraft; Harry and Evie are now at the front - with news of 2 parcels for Arthur.

Arthur to Dollie

Friday 4.50pm

... I am writing this in case I can't get a letter off. Today has been very quiet – not much sniping and for a change we hav'n't been shelled. Our aircraft have been very busy and the Germans have been firing at them a lot. There has been a lot of artillery work. **Evie** [Noel] and **Harry** [Pulman] came up last night. **Evie** says he has 2 parcels for me in his valise. They are both very fit DG and I have your dear messages from **Harry**. Well dear, Au revoir for the present...



27th February 1915

Arthur's close encounter with a rat; news from brother Edgar; the experience of being shelled; a poetic view of the aircraft flying overhead; frosty nights in the trenches.

Arthur to Dollie

In the Trenches, Satur 2.7pm

... Nearly two days have passed since I wrote you my last letter, dear and there is not much news to give you. I am very well except for a slight cold. I haven't received a letter from you for these past two days but I hope awfully to get one tonight. I had one from **Edgar** [Agius] on Thursday – which I was very pleased to get.

On Thursday evening **Harry** [Pulman] and his Company relieved **Harold Moore** up here. The relief was completed about 8 o'clock. I went around with **Harry** to shew him everything and gave him a sketch that I had made. It was a wonderful moonlight night. I hadn't much to do that night improving the line, so I went to sleep about 11.30pm. However I was woken up about 3 by a rat that I felt crawling up my body. So I got up and went over the road to visit the sentry on my gun. Then I came back and slept till 6 when I paid him another call. It was quite misty yesterday DG but later it cleared and turned out a brilliant sunny day.

The gunners on both sides were pretty busy all the day. Thank heaven however they left us alone. Being shelled is a beastly experience all of a sudden one hears a great rushing whistling through the air – everyone promptly crouches down. Then there is a terrific explosion, and if, as most often happens the shell hits earth, there is a rain of mud over a diameter of 50 yards for about 5-10 secs. All day long we hear the whistle of the shells overhead but unless they come close, one doesn't mind a bit.

Yesterday too our aeroplanes were very busy. Three of them were continually overhead and it was a fine sight to watch the Germans trying to bring them down with anti-aircraft guns and with maxims. The aeroplanes looked like golden birds in the blue sky. The shells from the German guns burst all round them like little puffs of smoke: a weird screeching noise these anti-aircraft guns make, but our aeroplanes wheeled over the German lines undismayed, without being hit.

Yesterday evening we were pretty busy working on our defences. It was a wonderfully clear moonlight night with a touch of frost.

It is now 6.55. I had to stop as we were shelled for a bit but without effect. I'm afraid I shall have to leave today's news until tomorrow dear as the ration party who take our letters back will be up in a few minutes.

Thank heaven I am well and getting very fat – with no exercise or very little! The cold is bitter especially at night. But night has its advantages in that one can move about pretty freely...