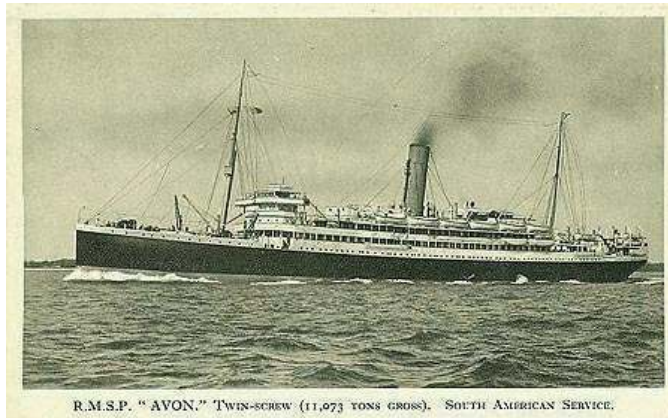


**3<sup>rd</sup> January 1915**

**A rousing Malta send-off for Arthur and the troops – as they leave the island for service on the Western Front. Dollie and her Mother follow them across Europe as they begin their journey back to England:**

*Arthur to Dollie:*

R.M.S.P. "AVON", 11.32am



... I miss you so much I don't know how to begin to write. My heart is sore within me. I feel wretched without you. I didn't know how to leave you yesterday. As I rowed away in that beastly dghaisa from the "Mongolia", I left all that I cared for in life behind me. You darling. I love you so, more than I have ever done before.

But let me give you my news. When I left you I rowed over to the landing place and took a carrozin from there to the Custom's House. I got there about 10.25. The Battalion was there but had only been there a few minutes so that everything was all right. **Frank [Denaro]** was there and **Joe Muscat**, also **Laura [Burns]**, **Marie [Denaro]** and one of the Aunties. **Inez [Cassar]** came on later and also **Mabel** and **Tony [Arrigo]**, who gave us your news and your note. Thanks awfully for it, darling, I loved to get it. I was so pleased to hear that you were well fixed up. The **Colonel** asked what kind of cabin you'd got.

The Battalion embarked in two halves; I was in the second lot to get off. We were taken out to the "Avon" – which lay as you know in the mid harbour – by a tug with a lighter on each side. We got on board about 12.40. She is a very fine ship, about 11000 tons and very comfortably built, though the saloon has been spoilt as it is divided into two with boarding. The smoking room too has been transferred into a Mess for the Serjeants. Several of the men have first class two-berth cabins; temporarily made into four berth cabins.

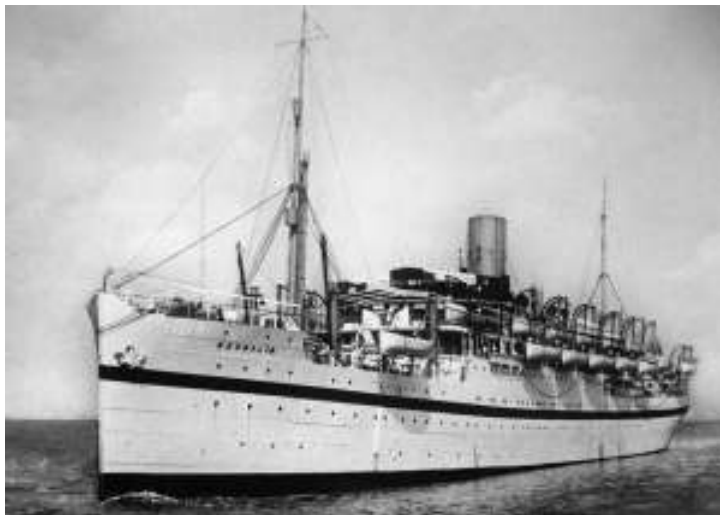
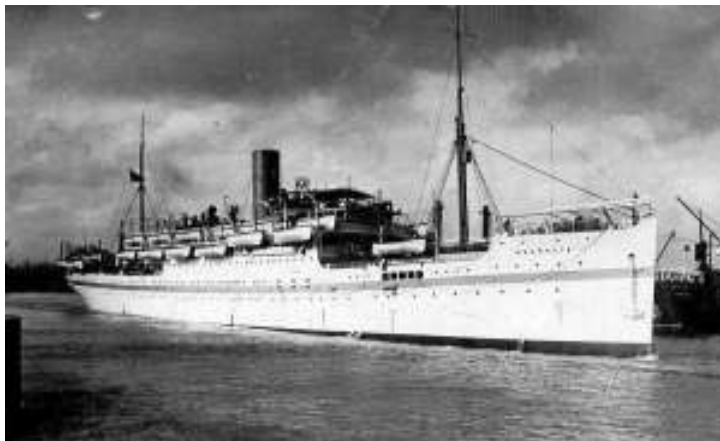
The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion embarked after us. We sailed about 3.30, the "Neuralia" leaving harbour just before us. It was quite an impressive send off. The Barraccas were crowded, everyone cheering. The crew of the French battleship "France" lined up and cheered us as we went by: boats in the harbour hooted and two bands, one on the Lower Barracca and one on Fort St Elmo, played "Auld Lang Syne" as we passed. The girls were at the Lower Barracca – we saw them quite well.

It has been fairly smooth, but I am feeling rather "muzzy" and fled from dinner last night to lie down. About half the Officers did the same. I'm still feeling a bit giddy, so please forgive me darling, if I appear a bit incoherent. I've quite a comfortable cabin – single berth outside cabin on the port side. But I sha'n't enjoy it long. As I daresay you'll see from the post mark we are due to arrive at 8am on

Tuesday morning, so we're steaming quite slow. We are just leaving C. Bon on the North coast of Africa.

Last night I turned in at 7.30 and got up this morning at 8, had a ripping bath, but farked brekker. We had a parade at 10.30 for five minutes and a short church parade at 11, held by **Alfred** [*Agius*].

SS Neuralia



**7<sup>th</sup> January 1915**

**An account of Arthur's train journey across France, with brother Alfred and Dollie's brother, Edouard; Dollie has gone ahead to Paris with the Mater, and should be in the safety of the Continental Hotel by the time this letter reaches her.**

*Arthur to Dollie:*

In the train, 11.10am

... First of all dear, excuse the pencil – it is easier to write. I am writing in the train on a packing case, but first of all let me go back to yesterday, when I left you on the quay [2<sup>nd</sup> January]. Oh darling, how I felt when I had that last embrace! I love you my darling as I've never loved you before. God bless you dear, and keep you, my heart is too full for words.

Well, sweetheart, to go back. Though the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion were already on the Quay and some of ours as well, we were in plenty of time. I went on board and got my things on. **Couch** was ready for me. **Giles** had got me a ripping rucksack (that's the kind of large haversack that one carries on ones back) and I was soon off the ship again and with the Company. We spent a long time getting the men's kit bags together. We left the docks finally at about 4pm and marched off to a station (apparently a goods station) about 20 minutes away. We found there a long train – officers in the front, men afterwards. We went in 3 officers a carriage, that is the 3 Coy officers. But though the carriages are first class there is no corridor and no conveniences, which is rather inconvenient. Behind us comes the **C.O.**'s coach, also 1<sup>st</sup> Class but with a corridor and here live the CO, 2 Majors, Adjutant, Quartermaster, Serj-major and the Interpreter – a Hussars officer called **Milliard** ... Next comes a picquet then the men by Companies, then horses, stores etc and then another picquet (or guard). The men are in those big covered-in vans you see all over the French Railways with "Hommes 40, Chevaux 8" written on the outside. You know the kind I mean, dear. So it's a bit rough for them but they are wonderfully cheery.

Once we'd got settled down, the men had their tea. We Officers divided into 2 relays for dinner ... I came off with the second lot, with **Harry [Pulman]** and **Harold Moore, Alfred [Agius]** and several others. We went to the "Bristol". Do you remember darling where we went to for lunch on Tuesday and where they gave us those little mirrors. We had quite a decent meal, though rather rushed – Hors d'oeuvre, Bouillabaisse (oh!), Jambon aux spinards. **Harry** and I sat next to one another – we drank your health together – he and I in Asti Spumanti (an Italian wine)...

We got back to the station at 8 or soon after. The train finally left about 8.50. We settled own very comfortably. We drew Rations for two days – cheese, bread, jam and bully beef. Besides which each set of Company Officers has a box of foodstuffs – sardines, biscuits, chocolate, etc – as they say that food is difficult to buy in the North. We bought a certain amount of Evian water so we are all right. Last night we slept most comfortably. We arranged 3 bunks round the compartment ... I put the packing case in the gap and a very long cushion over – so was as right as rain. The train doesn't go very fast and stops pretty frequently for 5 minutes at a time. Every time it

stops there is a fearful jolt, as it is braked like a goods train – and you know darling the way a goods train jolts all the way along when it is stopped...

In the daytime we put the seats back to their normal position. We each have a corner and are very comfortable. The fourth corner is our larder. You would laugh to see it. On the rack bread, cheese, bully beef, jam and water. On the seat, bottles of beer and wine, sardines, butter, chocolate and biscuits. And hanging near the window a very moist chicken and some rather warm cheese!

You'd have laughed too to see us wash this morning. Luckily **Edouard** [*Noel*] and I had the sense to pack our canvas buckets in our valises – so we washed in those. We shaved in water in my mess tin, warmed by being put on the chauffage and did our teeth in our cups.

This morning we had brekker of bread, sardines, cheese and beer! They say we are to stop at Macon for an hour. We hope to get lunch then and I to get this letter off. I shall send it to the Continental [Hotel, Paris].

It is a most extraordinary journey – everyone turns out to cheer us. The men are most cheerful. It makes me feel very sad to think that you passed along here early this morning. I do hope you had a decent journey darling. I pray for you continually.

Well dear, I think we'll be soon at Macon. Be of good courage sweetheart. Under God, in whose hands all things lie, all will be well. May he bless you and keep you and comfort you...

**9<sup>th</sup> January, 1915**

**A triumphant journey from Marseilles to Etaples in the north of France; first hand news of the grim fighting at Arras: “The men were within 10 meters of one another in the trenches, fighting with bombs and land-mines”.**

*Arthur to Dollie:*

Saturday 5.10pm

... I'm sorry that I didn't get a letter off to you yesterday – so I must hearken back now to where I left off on Thursday [7<sup>th</sup>]. All seems so strange – all idea of time is lost. One can take no thought of the future. I work in the present; my pleasure is all in our happy, happy past. Please God we will have happier times in the future...

Well, to go back – I think I may tell you safely of our itinerary as you knew it before we left Marseilles. We reached Macon soon after I closed my last letter to you. We stopped there for about 45 minutes – so we dashed into the Buffet and had a young meal: two helpings of steaming omelette, van ordinaire and a café au lait.

For the rest of that afternoon we had a triumphal progress. Everywhere we stopped for a few minutes we had a royal reception: vociferous cheers. The men had presents of wine, fruit and cigarettes showered on them and the donors used to sign their autographs in the men's books. It was rather a wonderful sight.

Every station practically along the line had a small Red Cross Section. We passed hospital trains frequently. The wounded were very cheerful though as one poor fellow told us the fighting where he came from at Arras was very fierce. The men were within 10 meters of one another in the trenches, fighting with bombs and land-mines.

We made a stop of nearly an hour at a place called “Les Laumes Alesia” where we took the opportunity of having a meal in the local inn. Very simple, but very good – milk soup, peas, omelette and beef as 4 separate courses – 2fr 50, washed down by vin ordinaire. The men had hot coffee – over the distribution of which I presided over as Orderly Officer. We left Les Laumes at about 8.10. It was a very cold night and when they changed engines, they forgot to attach the chauffage. However I slept like a rock.

We reached the neighbourhood of Paris next morning. We were at Champigny about 7.15. But **Edouard, Giles** and I were slack and didn't get up – if one can use the term until about 8.30. We changed engines about 9 on the Grand Ceinture and soon after ran on to the Nord line to Calais, at about 10 kilom. from Paris. We had breakfast now – Sardines, butter, bread, jam and beer. For about the next hour we passed many trenches by the line. You must have noticed them too. My heart was full of you darling, whenever I feel dull or depressed the thought of you, dear, always serves to bring me help and comfort. God bless you sweetheart.

When we reached Auteuil we topped for a few minutes to couple on a pilot engine; and we soon discovered the necessity. Just beyond Auteuil there is a river that was once spanned by a high railway bridge. Apparently as the Germans fell back they

destroyed it and pretty thoroughly too. So the French have built a wonderful loop line and temporary bridge. Do you remember crossing it. At Creil the next station the Germans had been a week – they destroyed fifteen houses. The sight of their wreckage made us burn with anger against these hated “Bosches”.

Our next stop was Amiens, but we only stopped there a few minutes. We made a longer stop at Abbeville, where the men had tea, but it wasn't very pleasant as it was pouring with rain and very muddy. After Abbeville, where we first began to see English soldiers and English motor lorries, we came on here. I don't know if I may mention the name but it is the same place that we were told at Marseilles. The mud in the station was indescribable and the night pitch dark. We arrived soon after five. It was showery and one couldn't see more than a few yards in front of one.

We eventually got off and marched through the streets and out beyond to a camp about ½ mile out. All three battalions are here. There are not many tents. The men are sleeping 15 to a tent and we officers 3 a tent by Companies, as we did in the train. We thank our stars we brought our camp kit. The cold is bitter! There is a biting wind from across the sea and it hails with persistent frequency. However we are all of stout heart.

Our meals are rather scratch affairs but we have all we want and more. I'm feeling awfully fat! This morning we went for a sharp walk to get warm – had lunch late. Some of the others went out this afternoon, but I stayed in, darling, as I wanted to get this letter off. I am going out soon with **Harry Pulman** to try and get it posted. Do write darling. I want your news so much for I miss you darling so much. You are all the world to me. I pray for you always, sweetheart. Be of good courage – all will be well...

**11<sup>th</sup> January 1915**

**Arthur settles into life at Etaples camp – along with older brother Alfred and Dollie's brothers, Edouard and Evie Noel. Adventures on the trains and details of everyday life under canvas. A request for warm clothes from home.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

[Etaples] 5.7pm

... So another two days have gone by, dear and I've not very much news to give you. Yesterday was a ripping morning and we hoped to get to church but at the last minute we had to alter Camp as the tents had been badly pitched. So for two or three hours we were striking and re-pitching tents. We got all straight finally. The Camp was a great improvement. Then we changed the Officers lines and got our tents pitched with the tent doors away from the wind, instead of facing it as before. We also had a marquee pitched to feed in.

We arrange for our food separately by companies – eating mainly what the men eat, helped out by what we buy in the town. In the evenings we generally come into the Hotel de la Gare – a little railway inn and have a young diner. Tonight I am writing from it. **Harry** [Pulman] and **Alfred** [Agius] are with me – we are staying on to dinner. Yesterday we went in to one of the cross channel ports – I won't give you the name – but as you know where we are, it won't be difficult for you to guess. It was a miserable evening very wet. We left here at 2.40 but didn't get there till 4.30. The rails got wet and the trains stuck going round a curve – so we had to wait for another engine to come along in the rear. There were about eight of us. **Harry, Alfred, Evie** [Noel], two **Reeves, Davis. Alfred, Davis** and I had lunch in the town before we left. The others met us at the station. We did a little shopping, condensed milk and butter chiefly – then had dinner at a little restaurant – not half bad. Finally an awful sprint to catch a 7.12 train. We very nearly missed it for the woman at the ticket office wouldn't give us tickets until we produced our passports. So we dashed past her without them.

In the train we luckily met a staff office of railways who very kindly stopped the train for us at the Camp which is some little way outside the town. It was a beastly wet night. We jumped out into the dark, found ourselves some way from the camp in a very wet field. I had my arms full with 4 tins of milk and 6 packets of butter. However we struck the road leading to the camp after a few adventures and it was not long before we were back safe and sound.

This morning it was fine again. We stayed in as there were issues of clothing to the men – mufflers, cardigan waistcoats and serge uniform. Some of the mufflers were government pattern, but the greater part had been made privately. Four came from an old lady of 91 in the Orkneys. She sent a card with them, wishing the wearers good luck and safe return. Yours has come in useful darling, as the weather here is bitterly cold, especially at night and in the early morning when it is time to get up and wash. Only cold water available and shaving is not altogether a pleasure. The things the others sent me at Christmas are very useful too especially the air pillow and woolly waistcoat. We hear that we are to revert to the Double Company Organisation,

that I am to get FOUR guns and that we are to be fitted with web equipment so that we shall be very like the men in external appearance.

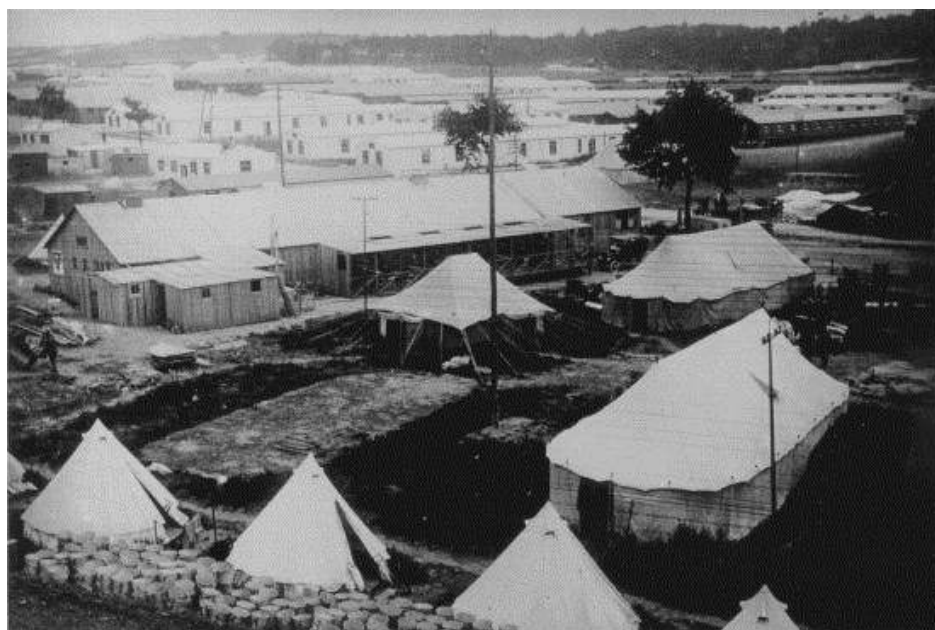
We had lunch to-day with **Guy** and his officers. Very good Irish stew. After lunch we went for a route march for 2 ½ hours. The roads are fine though hard to the feet and the air blowing straight from the sea very exhilarating: so that it was quite pleasant, dear, to get exercise though the enjoyment of it was rather marred by occasional showers of rain and sleet.

**Alfred** and I got a letter from the **Mater** this morning, dear. Not much news save to say that she expected you yesterday and had invited you to stay at No3. I'm so glad and hope you'll be perfectly comfortable, darling, while you're there.

We've just heard that the letters posted here stand a good chance of being delayed a month or two, as all letters addressed to England have to pass through a Censor and unless they go through a special channel, they get very delayed. So I'm feeling very fed up as I wrote a long letter to you on Saturday and as we had no special instructions here, I carried out instructions given us at Marseilles and posted the letter here locally. So perhaps with luck you'll get it before very long – at any rate darling I hope so.

We've no news, at all, as to what we're going to do or when. So we live, dear, literally from day to day, having no idea of the future. You may make up your mind sweet heart, that while we're here, we [are] as safe as we would be if we were back in England with you. So don't worry – you'll know for certain exactly when we move and more or less where, even if you don't know the names of the places where we go to.

Well, sweet darling, I don't think there's much more news. Life is so strange. There's only one thing I want to ask you, by the way, sweetheart, please ask the **Mater** to send my Burberry and things as soon as possible. The weather is beastly and they'll be more than useful...





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

**Dollie is safely home in England; Arthur gives more details of life at Etaples camp; memories of happier days on holiday: “We marched over to where the family stayed two years ago – the Hotel de l’Atlantique – which is now a hospital”.**

*Arthur to Dollie:*

3<sup>rd</sup> Bn. London Regt, In France, Wednesday 2.23pm

... I am so happy, dearest, for I have just received your darling letter from Paris. God bless you sweetheart and thanks so much. I am so relieved to hear that you are well dear. I’m also feeling happier as I managed to get a letter off to you yesterday. We sent our letters in to the Censor at the base here by **Bertie Mathieson** and he passed them.

However let me answer your dear letter first. I am not surprised that **Eugenie and Wuffie** went straight on. **Edouard** [Noel] tells me that **Eugenie** is going home to her folk ... **Harry** [Pulman] is always a pal. We always drink the “silent toast” to you darling, our dear ones. God bless you and thank G. for all her good wishes. I owe her a great debt of gratitude for the comfort and help she has given and both **Harry** and I are so glad to know that she and you, darling, are together. We feel the influence of your prayers and good wishes so much especially when we feel dull and depressed, as we do now rather.

The weather is beastly – pouring rain and damp, a blank sky and little or nothing to do. I miss you so much, my darling. Rumours have it that we shall not see fighting for some time and this appears to be the most likely.

Well ... to return to your letter. The journey was not really bad. I suppose considering all things, it was pleasant, but I feel so dull without you, darling. We are very careful about water – we nearly always drink the van du pays or else beer. Ordinary water we never drink. We keep a bottle of Evian or some other water among the rest of our provisions in case we want it.

Now sweetheart, to return to my news. After I wrote to you the other night, we had dinner. I’m afraid my letter was a bit incoherent. **Harry** and I were writing from the inn – “The Hotel des Voyageurs” and there was a certain amount of noise and distraction. Yesterday was quite fairly fine, but there was a gale blowing. In the morning we went out for a long route march about 3 hours. We marched over to where the family stayed two years ago – the Hotel de l’Atlantique – which is now a hospital. The Duchess of Westminster has a hospital over there too and there is a constant procession of motor ambulances between there and the station here as this is the nearest point on the railway.

In the afternoon I changed into slacks: I had tea with **Harry** in his tent and afterwards we went down into the town for dinner. It takes about half an hour to get in and we have dinner about 6.30. This place is a typical fishing village and there is not much to be said about it. The camp lies about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile outside it. Not a bad situation. In front there is the main road, then a field and the railway from Paris to Calais (you must have passed us as you went through). Beyond is another open stretch of ground and then the opening mouth of the river as it runs out to meet the sea.

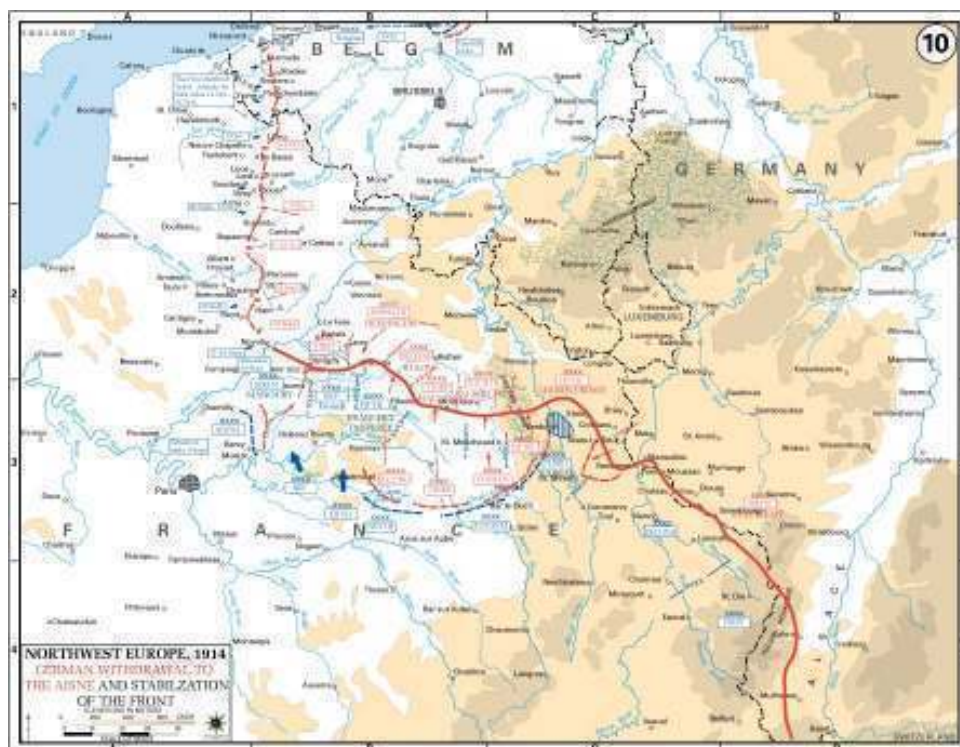
Behind us more open ground that meets a broad belt of fir trees, which in their turn run round between us and the village. Here they widen into a copse or wood enclosing a little country house and farm where lives the Camp Commandant and whence we draw our water for washing.

This morning it was so wet we did not parade beyond an early morning parade of 20 mins for exercise. We have been busy however in transferring once again from the eight Company into the four Company organisation. This time G and H Companies are linked together – that is **Edouard** [Noel] and **Harold Moore**. So that although I have not been given a platoon, I mess with **Harold Moore, Edouard, Bobbie Page, Wilcox** and **Giles**. We are going to have tea here in Camp together (**Johnnie Sutcliffe** and **Bobbie**, who are playing draughts, **Giles** and myself) and are going down to dinner after.

**Harry** went out to lunch or else I would have asked him if **Rosa** [Pulman] sent any news. I saw a letter for him in the same ink that you used so guessed it was from her. We think of you continually night and day, most especially at the hours we fixed on, at 8, 12 and 6...

I had a letter yesterday from **Joe** [Agius], in answer to the letter I wrote him from Marseilles. He promises to do all I ask him, so I feel at rest on that score. He doesn't give much news. They are all working hard and proud of us. But by now you will have had all their news, dear. I am addressing my letters to No3 [Belsize Grove], sweet heart, until I hear of your plans, as the **Mater** said that she was going to ask you there until you were fixed up at Compayne [Gardens].

Well dear heart, this has been a long letter. God knows I wish I had been able to spend the time I've been writing with you...Give my love to all, especially the dear **Mater**...



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

**Arthur's news from a wet France. There is no hope of any home leave in the immediate future. A choppy channel crossing for Dollie and friends. Arthur begins to train his machine gun section – without any guns for the moment.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

Hotel des Voyageurs, Thurs. evening 7.50pm

... In fearful haste – we had all been hoping for leave but the Colonels who put the matter through weren't keen. Facts weren't presented as they might have been and so we are without any leave. But **Harold Moore** who made a special application on business affairs has just been granted 72 hours leave. The rest of us – who are left behind – are very, very sick. However it's no use grumbling and I am embracing this opportunity of getting a note off. We are just at the end of dinner and are writing amidst plates, used silver and bread crumbs.

First dear, thanks awfully for your dear letters. I received two today, one from Paris and the other from London. Forgive me if I don't answer them now in detail. There is a great crowd sitting around – what with the noise and glare writing is more than difficult. My heart bleeds at the thought of your journey – you poor darling. What an awful time you must have had. It must have been bad enough from Marseilles – but from Paris to town – you poor child. I do hope you're feeling better. Take things quietly for a bit, sweet heart.

I'm awfully sorry for poor **Rosa** too. I can realise your sufferings from my personal experience – though I'm not nearly as bad as you. So keep quiet and pick up a bit. I hope you'll decide to stay at No.3 a bit. The others will be so kind to you and help you now at this time when you'll want all help, dear. I want you too to help the dear **Mater**.

We are all very well and well fed. We don't know what we are going to do but most probably will go on the Lines of Communications for some time. The Camp is in a fine situation here at Etaples. Le Touquet is just over the river; we have been there sometimes for a route march. It looks very desolate over there (forgive the ink – my pen was running short so I dipped it in the local ink).

Well, sweet heart, there is not much news. This morning we started working in the 4 Company organisation. I started off with my machine gun section, but we have no guns yet so it is a bit difficult. The weather is warmer but it was very wet this afternoon. Luckily the soil absorbs the wet very quickly – so that although there is a good deal of mud, there is not so much as there might be. We started having afternoon parades today. It was very unpleasant in the rain. So after tea we came down here, **Harry** and I. All the others came along after.

We got a short letter from the **Mater** today. The dear **Mater**, please thank her from the bottom of our hearts. Do all you can to help and comfort her. We pray for her as we do for you always. God bless the **Pater** too. I much appreciated **Joe's** letter. Thank him again, please. He is such a pal.

Tomorrow we do Company in attack. I shall have the machine gun section again. By the way, dearest, if you can remember, with the other things, please try and get some peppermint tablets sent out, but it's not very important...

**15<sup>th</sup> January 1915**

**More news from Etaples. Café life. Arthur has found his ID disc. The Agius brothers plan to leave their valuables (including swords) with the family business agent at Boulogne. Arthur's remarkable faith in God.**

*Arthur to Dollie:*

Café des Voyageurs, 8.20pm

... Today, thank god, I received yet two more of your dear letters, the last one you wrote from Paris and the last one from home. Thanks awfully, dear heart, I simply love to get them and they seem more and more welcome every day. But before I answer them, dear, let me tell you that I've found my identity disc at last and am now wearing it. I put on my old tunic for a change yesterday and found it in a pocket. So you mustn't worry about that any more will you, sweet soul?

As for answering your questions, first of all. I wrote to No. 3 as the **Mater** said when she wrote a few days ago that you were going to stay there. However I'll write to Cricklewood from now onwards until you write to tell me of any change in your movements. Next dear as to tobacco. I generally smoke Fryers Mixture (Broad Cut) but please don't worry about tobacco for me yet, though it's awfully sweet of you, for I have a couple of tins in my valise.

There's not much news – this sounds like a daily occurrence or lack of one, but once we get down to regular routine, one day is very much like another. We do our three parades a day at 7.30 for physical training for 20 minutes, at 9.30 till 12.30 and from 2.30 to 4.30, these two latter for ordinary field training. The weather today has not been very pleasant – very overcast, but thank heaven it didn't rain. Both officers and men are supplied with braziers but they scarcely seem necessary we are rapidly getting acclimatised.

It is so difficult to write. The distractions here are beastly, so you must forgive me for any incoherency. This place is the best of a bad lot. It at any rate supplies light and heat! The atmosphere is suffocating. I want to finish this tonight as I hope to get it posted in England. Young **Reggie Paske** is going over to Sandhurst and I am going to hand it in to him.

... This separation seems almost too hard to bear, but we must make up our minds, dear girl to bear bravely whatever God sends us and to accept it with what cheerfulness we can muster, knowing that he will not send us more than we can bear, under his help... I feel inspired to do my duty by you and my country ... So do I think of you always and pray for you and in my thoughts of you take courage for the future.

We are still where you know we are at Etaples and likely to remain here for some time as we are not nearly fitted out yet. There is not much more to say now, dear. Give my love to the **Mater** and to my dear folks. I feel I can never pay the debt of gratitude I owe them all. By the way, sweet, as to my sword, I'll try to make arrangements to leave our things with our Agent at Boulogne and pick them up when I get leave, if I do **Edgar** will probably be able to have **Alfred's**...

**17<sup>th</sup> January 1915**

**The amazingly rapid postal service – 2 days for a letter to reach France!  
Canadians (and English) officers letting the side down badly. Arthur tries to  
calm Dollie's fears about when they will be moved up to the Front.**

*Arthur to Dollie:*

Café des Voyageurs, Sunday morning 11.40am

... Thanks awfully for your letter of the 14<sup>th</sup> (Thursday) that arrived yesterday. The posts are quite good at any rate this end. It takes about 2 days only for your dear letters to come... The men always give a great cheer, right through the Camp when they hear the bugle go to announce the arrival of the Post Corporal with the mail. How much more excited am I! The mail generally comes in just before lunch about a quarter to one and there's always a great rush to get the letters...

The parcels hav'n't arrived yet. I expect them today, only I'm not sure if there's a mail. As for condensed milk, dear, that is by no means a necessity out here. However now we are messing by double Companies, the messing is much better and we manage to get fresh milk every day. As for the refill for the lighter, one can, I believe get that locally. However we can see about that later on, thanks awfully.

Now, dear, for some of my news. Friday night was a beastly night ... It blew a gale of wind that night. The tents sagged and flapped about, the canvas making a great noise. However the wind gradually decreased as the morning wore on. The morning parade at 9.30 was cancelled as some bigwig was coming round to inspect the Camp. However orders came through later that he didn't want the men in Camp, so we went out for the usual parade at 10.45. I went out with No1 Company (**Harry's**). We got in at 1.30, came down here for lunch and caught the 2.30 train for Boulogne – **Harry, Alfred [Agius], Evie [Noel], Johnnie** and I.

... We reached Boulogne about 3.45. **Alfred** and I paid a visit to the Barber, had some café au lait and wandered about a bit... Boulogne is not very prepossessing – full of the Red Cross and of awful looking objects dressed in British uniform – all “dug-outs” doing odd jobs. The appearance of some make one blush to be an Englishman. There was one fellow in the café, a Canadian, Captain in the RAMC who was violently drunk; in fact he was being sick into his napkin! The waiter told me that he was like that every night! We tried to do the straight thing by him, but he was very aggressive and as we were in a hurry to catch a train, we had to go. We caught the train all right, had a drink of coffee in here while we waited for a fiacre that **Harry** had ordered. But he never came, so we started off walking. However we met a British Red Cross Society motor car due for the Hospital across the river and the driver gave us a most welcome lift to Camp

Today is a wonderfully fine day but the wind is from the north and it is colder than we have had it yet. Washing this morning was a performance. We paraded as Catholics at 10 o'clock dear and marched down to the church, which is fairly close to the Café here. The Mass which was at 10.30 was a Missa Cantata – that is a sung Mass. All the folk joined in the singing. It was very touching and I loved to be able to hear Mass at last ... God bless you, dear, and keep you. I feel, through him, that all

will be well ... They have a couple of quaint customs here. One the distribution of pain benit during Mass. They tell me it is a custom right through the North of France. The other custom is the wearing of a little woollen cape and headdress by the womenfolk. It is made of black wool, very loosely knit, with a black silk bow on top.

After Mass **Alfred** and I came here to write, leaving **Rochford** to take the men back and here we are still darling. We propose to have lunch here and then go over to the Canadian Hospital. One of my machine gun fellows is there for a few days. And I hope to get a bath over there at the same time.

We have no idea where we are going or what we are going to do. I can tell you this much however. First we have not yet got arms or equipment, nor machine guns nor transport. We have not only to get them but we have also to get accustomed to them. Next that with the limited front, we have more troops up than we know what to do with as regards manning the trenches. So as far as we can see, the odds are that we don't come under fire for at the least six weeks...

**17<sup>th</sup> January 1915**

**A short note on a Sunday afternoon regarding local postal and bathing arrangements.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

Hotel Regina, Sunday afternoon 4.20pm

... I didn't get back to Camp today and so couldn't get your letter off. So I'm writing a few lines to put in to it. All letters, you see, dear, have to be in at the Orderly Room (a tent incidentally) by 1 o'clock, so that they may be stamped by a "Passed by Censor" stamp and taken over to the Field Post Office which is situated at the little Chateau near by, the Headquarters of the Camp Commandant.

Well dear, by the time I'd finished writing it was about a quarter to one and it's a 25 mins walk back from the Voyageurs to Camp. So **Alfred** [Agius] and I decided it wasn't worth it and we had lunch at the Voyageurs and go to have our bath after. This we did. On our way we met **Harry** [Pulman] and **Bertie Mathieson**, also looking for a bath. So we joined forces, took the tram across the river and voila. We've just had quite a priceless bath, the first since the boat. The water was rather lukewarm, but enjoyed a wash in a warm atmosphere and the results were quite satisfactory! We are now going to have some tea. **Alfred** missed his bath. There wasn't enough hot water. Rather bad luck, but he had one a few days back.

This place is in the middle of a wood. Very much plaster, white paint and gilt and I daresay ultra smart in the season, but it's not very bright at this time of the year.

So darling, I've come to a stop with my news. I'll leave the letter open so that if I get the chance tomorrow of adding a few lines before the post goes I can do so.

**Harry and Bertie** say a lot more stuff arrived at the Camp today to be issued to the men. Well chere amie, inspirer of my life and all I think and do, once more au revoir...



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

**More wet and windy weather at Etaples. Arthur's machine guns finally arrive. He estimates when they will be ready for action; the great advance could be in two months time. Dollie wants Arthur to burn her letters so no one else will see them.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

Café des Voyageurs, Monday afternoon, 5.7pm

... I received at midday today your dear letter of Friday last. Thanks awfully for it dear... I long for your letters to arrive and read them over and over. Last night after tea we took the tram back: it was very crowded as I believe it generally is. It was a fairly fine night but very windy. We came in here to dinner, found most of the boys here. We had dinner about 7.20, sat round talking and didn't leave until about 10.10. I was feeling rather tired and would have been glad to have got back earlier. But it is a long, dark and in parts, very muddy walk back, so I didn't want to trudge it alone.

This morning [was] very windy again. We paraded at 9.30 as a Battalion to practise a battalion attack. We got in at 12.30 and had lunch. This afternoon I had the machine guns unpacked. They came this morning but only two as yet: a lot of the equipment very new – the greater part of it being quite new. The men drew their rifles and practised folding up of kit. It is still bitterly cold – piercing wind from the north.

We hear rumours that the Government are taking over the English railways for the next fortnight – what's the news? It points as if the preparations are commencing for the great advance, which all say is to come in two months time. It seems most probable that when the Germans have been pushed out of their trenches and have been "on the run" for a couple of hundred miles, that they will completely break. This is only Camp gossip of course, but "many a true word is spoken in jest".

There is not very much news else. We see a lot of the wounded. We saw a lot from north of Soissons. We occasionally see an English officer from the front and eagerly ask for tips. But apparently it is chiefly a matter of organisation and routine during these winter months.

We also hear that we are to form part of the **28<sup>th</sup> Division**. There will be an awful lot of organisation to do in the way of getting together staffs and transport and in concentrating before a move can be made. The weather also will be against the movement of any appreciable bodies of troops for some time. So what I told you last night dear, about our not seeing fire for six weeks seems to err on the shorter side. However we are told, unofficially, that we may move from here to the concentration of the division some time this week, quite probably on Thursday. I don't quite see how we're going to manage it as **the Babe** is still at – well I suppose I better not give you the name – it is where we made our last stop coming up – collecting transport won't be ready for a month! This is probably an exaggeration but it all points the same way and that is that delays are bound to occur even in getting together quite small bodies of troops.

Well, sweet heart, I think that that is about all there is of Camp gossip. After I had overseen the unpacking of the machine guns and had given orders to have them cleaned, **Guy, Alfred** and I came down here. I had a card from **Tancred** [brother, Dom Ambrose], and **Alfred** a letter from the **Mater** (addressed to us both) and one from **Joe** [Agius].

So, darling of my heart, I've spent a long time in talking of my affairs... I am looking forward eagerly to your parcel. You are a generous kid. I am hoping to get the things tomorrow. I shall treasure them, not so much for their intrinsic value and utility as for the inestimable love that lies behind them. Thanks awfully dear. By the way, if you can get the Daily Sketch of today and look inside, you'll find some photos of our Tommies at Camp life here. The photos are on the left hand of the middle sheet.

As for letters darling, I'm writing to the Grove now as I hope you're there for a few days ... Your suggestion to burn your letters to me – Darling! I appreciate how you feel, but I don't feel disposed to do that, and, thank heaven, I don't think it will ever be necessary. I hear that it's difficult to get parcels back otherwise I'd send them. I dare say, however, I'll be able to devise something...

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

**Arthur's much-needed Burberry has arrived – lovingly chosen by Dollie. More news of new kit issue – so Officers present less of a target to the enemy. Their valuables continue to be sent home as they prepare for transfer to billets. The Flying Corp makes an entrance.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

Café des Voyageurs, Tues evening, 6.30pm

... I'm a bit disappointed today that I didn't get a letter from you today, dear. I suppose there's some muddle in the post, but I look forward so eagerly to reading your precious news day by day. I received my new Burberry today – it is simply invaluable, wonderfully good choice and a wonderfully good chooser. Darling, thanks awfully for seeing about having it sent. It is a very practical design and I'm sure to find it invaluable.

... Last night, we had dinner here as usual. **Harry** and some of the others went into Boulogne to draw pay and he got me one of the new service caps that are going about – a mixture of our usual service cap and a poachers cap with flaps for one's ears and another down the back of ones head. Very practical.

Today was very overcast and damp. We had a lot of odd jobs to do. First of all, an aeroplane (British) arrived from Ostend. He came down for petrol and only stopped about an hour or two – quite a decent young chap. The machine – a Farman biplane was painted khaki with rings of blue white and red, and a Union Jack painted underneath the wings and on the body. Next we heard that the **General** was coming down, but he finally never turned up. So we went out for a route march from 10 to 11. As I wrote last night there is some prospect of our moving this week to join in the concentration of our division. So yesterday they made arrangements the forwarding agents here, dear, to get the men's kitbags and a lot of our superfluous kit sent home.

We packed up therefore this morning and spent most of the afternoon getting kits down to the station and getting them packed. We're sending home our tin trunks and our camp kit, the latter because apparently, the troops are always billeted if possible. We're keeping our valises, packed with everything imaginable and they'll be a wonderful sight when rolled ready for transport. We are all going to be equipped like the men exactly as regards belt, haversack, etc but without rifles. The silly part of it is, however, that no-one knows whether our new commander will insist on us wearing Sam Browne belts (our ordinary officer equipment), and so, though this latter contingency is extremely improbable, we have to take our old-fashioned officers kit and swords along with us. We're all hoping, however, sweetheart, to get them sent home before long.

Meanwhile, darling, I'm sending my tin and camp kit home. There's not much of importance in either save your darling photos. It was an awful pang to send them. I loathed it darling, but I had no choice. They were too big to take in one's valise – so I had to send them. However I've got several snapshots always with me, which I treasure and which will always be with me... Today also I got my service revolver, a Colt and quite good. I am very pleased with it.

After a hurried lunch and parade at 1.45 to march to the station and pack kits, we paid the men in Camp. A very long and tedious business as on being paid each man has to present a book to be signed and has also to sign a sheet of paper. So you will readily understand, dearest, the time it takes to pay a double Company of 250 men.

As soon as we'd finished I came down here to write – et voilà... I'm going to stop darling for a bit here. It's 7.25 and just on time to have dinner. So I'll continue later.

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

**Much appreciated parcels from home. No chance of any leave and Arthur misses his family back home. Training with the machine guns. The horses (transport) arrive, so leaving Etaples cannot be too far off. More wet weather.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

Café des Voyageurs, Wednesday evening 6.15pm

Today has been a great day for me, dear, three letters and a parcel from you, sweet, and a letter and a parcel from the **Mater**. I was wonderfully happy as we stood round the Post Corporal and he dug out of his sack and found all that for me ... So darling, my beloved one, once more I bid you courage as you must me, for now as always must we help one another and learn to shoulder our burdens together ...

Thanks awfully, darling for the parcel, which was indeed ... well-packed. All arrived safely D.G. thanks to your care and is very very much appreciated, Helmet, laces, lighter and sweets. It is very thoughtful of you darling, you darling and more than generous. You are a priceless kid ...

I am looking forward eagerly to the locket – just a word of advice, dear, when you do send it, sent it registered post. I shall never be able to thank you for all you're doing sweetheart. You are a brick. Meanwhile I've two identity discs. I found my old one and have had another one made.

Neither **Harry** nor I can understand what **Edouard** [Noel] wrote to **Eugénie** about leave darling. We tried all we could to get it. **Edouard** was one of those who said he didn't want it and didn't think it was a good idea. So we cannot understand his attitude in saying that he is going to try for it. I don't want to disappoint you sweet soul, and therefore was very careful not to raise your hopes. There is absolutely no chance now and there never has been. We did our utmost but without avail. Perhaps later on when we're fitted out and have a proper base etc they'll give us some leave, but that is all in the air and no one knows anything at all about it. So I'm afraid darling, that pro. tem. you must try and put it from your mind. I was awfully disappointed – I was very homesick for the dear little queen of my heart and I wanted to see my dear folk awfully...

I have got the guns and will be in charge of them, as I have written earlier. We expect to be a couple of months before we're called on to do any work, so I hope to get a certain amount of training in.

... I wonder if you've come to any decision yet as to re-opening the house. Mrs White is there isn't she. Oh for the good times we've had there together, toi et moi, petite chérie. It's so strange how certain of them flit through ones mind. The number of times – happy times, when I've hurried home to 45 from the City to meet you, my beloved and all the scheming to meet each other – and how you used to trudge down to Baker Street to meet me, and we wander[ed] home through the park. Happy days. But, please God, far happier ones are in store when I return. Whatever happens, as long as we love each other, my cup of happiness is full. God bless you, my darling.

So for some news from here, dear. There is not much... Last night was the first we spent without beds. We slept in our valises on tent boards and for myself slept very well. This morning early parade as usual at 7.30 for twenty minutes exercise. Then breakfast. Afterwards I had the men on cleaning the guns. Then we paraded from 10 to 12.40. I didn't go far out of Camp as our transport hasn't arrived and the guns are a certain weight. We worked with the guns till 11.30 then I sent the men out reconnoitering.

The weather has been very damp and overcast today and it rained fairly hard this afternoon. At midday I received your darling letters and parcel. Thanks awfully again, sweet girl. I cannot say how much I appreciate and love to get them. I also received a letter from **the Mater** – please thank her. I'll try and write to her tomorrow. Also a very serviceable and practical parcel – underclothes, sweets, handkerchiefs, canole paper (toilet!) and mess tin and fittings – all very useful indeed, especially the mess tin which as you say, is awfully fascinating. I was very pleased to find pepper and salt and sugar and tea inside – the latter especially and I shall keep it as a special ration, blessed by hands from home. I feel like a millionaire, living in the lap of luxury, as we are really.

After lunch we did a battalion attack. It didn't go very well. The country is very difficult. We got back about 5 I think, it was dark. We found **the Babe** back with most of the transport. As far as we could see, very good stuff. Then we came straight down here, **Harry** and I and I've been writing this ever since. I stopped at 7 for dinner and began to write again half an hour ago at 8.15.

So sweetheart you've all my news. We don't know yet when we're actually moving into our concentration – our equipment is not yet complete, but we expect to move about Friday or Saturday. We know nothing for certain about our future movements but we can make a fairly shrewd guess, and what I've told you about the two months concentration is very near the truth. So you're not to worry at all, darling, for some time to come. We're well, well-fed, get exercise – but are very miserable sometimes and heartsick always – for our hearts are in England with our beloved. So we devote ourselves to happy memories and to happier forecastings, doing our job and what we're called upon to do for the sake of our loved ones, doing our duty for the glory of God and for the honour of our name, that we may make it worthy to be borne by the sweetest girl in all the world...

All love to the dear **Mater and Pater**. May God keep them and comfort them. I am awfully grateful to them. All thanks too to **Daisy** and remember me to all at home ...

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

**Arthur contemplates the size of his future machine gun section with some relish. The weather continues to be awful and is bad for general morale. Arthur hopes Dollie is happy staying with his family at No3.**

*Arthur to Dollie:*

Café des Voyageurs, Thursday evening 5.55pm

... So another day has rolled by. No cheering letter today but I understand perfectly, darling. It has been a very uneventful day for us here. Last night when we got back after dinner we found our transport back. It was dark so we didn't see much but this morning revealed a very serviceable equipment and very decent looking horses. At present I have two wagons, four draught horses and 1 riding horse. Later when I get my two extra guns I shall have 4 wagons, 12 draught horses and 1 riding horse – quite a cavalcade, eh, darling?

It began to rain last night and has been raining steadily ever since, with the result that Camp is not a very bright spot and very muddy. The rain prevented us doing anything today, so this morning we did two or three odd things, dear – medical inspection of the men for barbers rash, taking some notes from the Adjutant and one odd thing and another. This afternoon we had nothing to do. The men of the first two companies had a wash – one lot in the fish market – the other lot in the gas works. I came down here about 3.30 with **Edouard** [Noel] and **Major Beresford** – had some café au lait and wrote a letter to the **Mater** – and now here I am writing to you, darling little girl. It's very hot and close in here...

I am looking forward so eagerly to getting a letter from you tomorrow, dear. I want to hear that you are at No.3 and that you're feeling happier. I'm not feeling very bright. The weather is beastly and having had nothing to do, I've had a long time to think. I miss you badly enough, God knows, when I'm busy, but when I've time on my hands, it's very hard to bear. I love to think of the happy days we've had together in the past, darling of my heart and to look forward to the glorious times we're going to have together, please God. I'm feeling happier now that you're at No.3. I want to know exactly how you get on...

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

**Dollie visits Seaford. More thoughts of home and all back at No.3. A glorious ride out with new horse “Ben”.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

Café des Voyageurs, Friday evening 5.40pm

... Today was a great day - two letters from you, dear. I was awfully pleased to get them. Thanks so much darling. I look forward so much each day to getting them: fresh inspiration, source of all my inspiration. God bless you dear.

... I wonder how you're getting on at No3. I hope you're comfortable – how are you sleeping? Tell me what room they've given you. It seems so hard that the first time you're staying at No3, I should not be there...

Thanks very much darling, for the picture from Seaford. I shall keep it as you ask. Please thank the donor very sincerely, if you write to her, and tell her that I shall treasure it – (chiefly because it has come through your hands, dear, but don't tell her that).

As regards leave, darling, I'm afraid that there's nothing more that I can say. I've written about it several times before, sweet – and you can set your mind at rest that **Harry** [Pulman] and I will leave nothing unturned to get leave if there is any chance at all. I hate to disappoint you but really darling, there's absolutely no chance at all at present.

... The story of **Harry's** bed was quite a joke. I burst into his tent one day, as I often do, I think it was to ask him to come down here. At any rate, he wasn't quite ready, so I sat on his bed, a camp bed, just a canvas sheet that fixes on to a wooden framework. There was rather a crack and the bed gave about 6 inches under me. The damage wasn't serious – the loops made to receive a hook on the canvas had broken off. Alls well that ends well and we had a hearty laugh over it...

Now, sweet, for some of my news. Last night we got a lift in an ambulance motor: the night however had cleared up and there was a bit of moon. Today we woke up to a most perfect day, brilliantly fine and almost hot. We had a long sleep as the Company was going to the Fish Market for baths and were therefore excused the 7.30 parade. We had brekker at 8.30. Part of the Machine Gunners were bathing so I went out with **the Babe** and the transport – about 30 horses and a dozen wagons. We rode for about two hours, it was very pleasant. We went across the river and back – it was a glorious morning. I rode my horse “**Ben**”. This afternoon I had a machine gun parade – practised loading and unloading my guns and stores etc in my wagon. Then tea. After I came down here with **Alfred** [Agius].

... There's really not a wonderful amount of fresh news. We do not know yet when we are to move, probably very shortly now. Our interpreter is going to be mounted, also **Harry**, **Harold Moore** and **Gilbert** as the three senior Captains. When we leave I shall probably mess with the **Babe**, **Milliard** – that's the interpreter – and **Brown** the Quartermaster. Rather mixed lot isn't it – but we shall fare very well as



**Brown** as Quartermaster is in charge of stores and **Milliard** as interpreter will come in very useful...

I am in the very best of health D.G. but I wish I was with you darling. I miss you awfully and though the separation hurts, yet I have this consolation beyond the others that my heart is in safe keeping with you, my sweetheart – the sweetest of all girls – and that over there at home is someone comforting me by her prayers and her sweet love, tender and true, the most darling of all girls – that's you, dear ... So courage, darling. Love is indeed a wonderful and glorious thing.

Well darling I want you to remember me and give my love to the dear **Mater** and **Pater** and to all at home. I want to write to your **Mater**. It has been in my mind for some time. I hope she's all right and well. She has indeed been kind to me...

**23<sup>rd</sup> January 1915**

**Arthur rejoices to hear Dollie is staying at the Grove and asks her to cheer up ETA. A discussion about which photo to put in the locket - when it arrives. The shaving water freezes over. Another glorious ride with the horses. Letters from home for brothers Arthur and Alfred.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

Café des Voyageurs, Saturday evening 5.17pm

Thanks, darling, for ... letter dated Thursday which I received today. I'm so glad to hear that you are due at No3 at last; how strange it all seems, as you say dear; I only wish that I could be there to welcome you home, to my home sweet; the next home that we'll have, we'll have together, please God. I do hope you'll be comfortable there darling. I'm sure you'll only have to say what you want, and they will do their best to get it done for you... Do your best to cheer up the dear **Pater**, won't you please darling ... Write and let me know everything ...

First, darling, thanks awfully for your suggestion re the locket. I despair of ever putting a stop to the flow of your dear generosity. I feel I can never thank you enough – thanks awfully dear. As to your suggestion to send on the locket. I have a lot of snapshots of you here with me darling, and I can easily put one in... I'll put in one of the photos I've got. Then if you get a good photo of yourself later on, you can send it to me. Don't you think that best yourself, dear? I advise you to send it by registered post, please, darling, it's much safer. God bless you, dear.

As for the muffler for **Couch**, sweet, he has been issued with one by the Government (incidentally they have also issued 2 sets of underclothing, woollen cap comforter, cardigan, cholera belt, socks, etc.) It's awfully thoughtful of you, dear, you are a darling.

Well, sweet, for my news. Last night we were fortunate in getting a motor ambulance back to Camp. It was very cold and froze quite hard. This morning we got up at 7, went for a run 7.30 – 7.50. It was very cold and when we came in we found that the water which our servants had brought for washing and shaving but a few minutes before, had already begun to freeze! ... However, it turned out a most glorious day. After brekker I rode out with **the Babe** and the transport. It was ripping riding. We were out about 2 ½ hours from 9.30 to 12. After lunch we officers drew equipment like the men's. Then there were one or two things to do, then **Harry** [Pulman], **Harold Moore** and I came down here. **Joe** [Agius] wrote to **Alfred** today, also **Connie** [King nee Agius]. I wrote one to **Joe** and one to **your Mater** – but it's awfully difficult to write in here, I'm afraid darling, there's so much noise.

As for general news, darling, there's very little further today. We don't know when we're going to move – rumour says Monday. I expect we'll know by tomorrow, if we are moving on Monday – they're sure to give us 24 hours notice. For the rest, we've no news of the future.

So, sweet darling, I think that's all. I love your letters – a day without a mail is awfully dull – a day with a mail is a day indeed. So write always dear and write

everything. Tell me everything about yourself. I love to picture you over there at home and to imagine you and what you're doing, day by day, hour by hour. I hope you're comfortable...

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

**Arthur writes in haste as the order to move is imminent and they are standing by, everything packed. Arthur wants Dollie to have his sword.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

Camp, Mon. even. 5.20pm

... Just a very hurried note: as we are in a great state of hustle – the post is going at 6. I couldn't write yesterday – I went into Boulogne to have a bath. Well, darling, this morning we received orders to get all ready and stand by as we were probably going to move at 2 this afternoon. However the orders to move didn't come so we're standing by ready, everything packed. However we don't expect to move till 3 or 4 tomorrow morning.

It has been a very great rush as several things had to be issued, such as rations, equipment, etc and everything had to be packed. We paraded at 9.30, fixing kit, etc and were at work most of the morning. We've been pretty busy too this afternoon. We're sending our swords home. They'll be no mistake about mine as it's carefully labelled. I believe they're going to Edward Street. First. However they ought to turn up at home, as I've labelled mine home – I want you to have it, as we arranged, dear heart. Today I got two ... letters from you from No3. Thanks awfully darling ... I'm so glad you're quite "at home" dear and sleep all right at nights...

Insurance Card – **J.J. Badger** – this is one of **Alfred's** men. I'll make enquiries about him and let you know.

... We don't know where we are going to – but there is no need to worry at all. So darling I'm trusting you to keep your dear courage up and to help me in the future as you have done so nobly in the past, God bless you dear. Don't forget to let me know when you're going to leave the Grove...

Yesterday morning we couldn't get to church as we had a parade all the morning. In the afternoon, **Harry**, **Evie** [Noel], **Johnnie** and I and two or three others went into Boulogne, had a precious bath and dinner and so home. I'm awfully sorry I was unable to get a letter off. Today I got a parcel from the **Mater** – a pair of gloves and socks – also some matches. Please thank her awfully ... As a matter of fact – the scarcity of matches is now over as we draw 2 boxes a week.

Well, my darling, my darling – this will be my last letter from here. We've been here over a fortnight and had quite an easy time. I think of you always and pray for you. Pray for me dear, as I know you do...

**27<sup>th</sup> January 1915**

**An account of the tedious train journey on the way to Tatinghem, where they are now billeted. Arthur and his fellow officers lose no time in setting up the Carlton Palm Lounge to mess in. A plea for more writing paper.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

in Billets, France, Wednesday even. 6.27 pm

... Much has elapsed since my last hurried note of yesterday evening. We are now in billets about 4 kilometres from the General HQ of the British Army in France. We are almost as far from the firing line as we were at Etaples both in point of distance and probability. We are not yet assigned to any Brigade or Division, contrary to what we had been told and are only Army Reserve Troops. There are any number of Territorials and Kitcheners Army here – some have been here for months. We are here apparently to continue training until the advance which people here say is to be in April.

Well sweet darling, let me go back to yesterday evening... We dined that evening in the Mess Tent – a very enjoyable meal too – steak and onions and potatoes, then sausages and finally some pastry all eaten off tin plates (or rather one tin plate) with our folding knives, etc. Then Edouard [Noel] and I made some toasted cheese in a Tommy's mess tin lid over a brazier – it was jolly good.

We went to bed early that night, darling, for Reveille next morning was to be at 3.30. Bed was rather a euphemistic touch, as all our valises were packed. However we unrolled them and turned into our flea-bags in our underclothes. It was very cold, dear, and when we got up at 3.30 next morning we felt it a bit, though it was a beautiful night and just on freezing point. I struggled with a shave of which I feel rather proud considering the hour and the dark and the temperature. We finally paraded at 6.30. There has been quite a lot to do in the meantime and it was not very easy to get all done, in the dark. We finally got clear - after having had quite a decent meal of bread butter cold bacon and tea. We reached the station about 7. The train was due to start at 8.25 though by the time we had packed all our transport, some 13 wagons, I believe, and 58 horses, it was about 8.50 before we got off. We officers were 8 in a carriage – as a matter of fact we were only 7 in ours – **Harold Moore, Edouard, Giles, Page, Wilcox**, the Quartermaster and myself. We got entrained just in time – for we had only been in the train a few minutes when it began to sleet; which finally turned to snow. The carriage was pretty cold.

We went nearly as far as Boulogne, to a place called Hesdigneul, where we were kept nearly two hours waiting for an engine from Boulogne. The line seems like a “Y” reversed. We ran down one arm from Etaples to Hesdigneul, then reversed and ran down the other arm. While waiting at Hesdigneul we made some sort of a meal of bread and cheese, jam and sardines, washed down by a bottle of wine, which our forethought had provided. So you see darling, we weren't too badly off.

The engine finally arrived and we proceeded with an engine at each end. It was pretty slow going for we didn't go fast by any means and made several short stops. The distance to General HQ from Etaples is only 30 or 40 kilometres but we didn't arrive till about half-past two or three. We detrained and paraded in the station

square while the transport was being unshipped, which took some time. In the interval the **General** who is more or less concerned with our training arrived and had a talk with the **Colonel**. The weather had cleared a bit and was warmer.

We moved off finally and marched out to our billets here. It is about 3 miles from the town where we detrained and where General HQ are situated (and where incidentally the **Prince of Wales** is stationed). All the roads are paved for the passage of troops but as they're paved with cobblestones, marching is rather uncomfortable dear... We reached this place after about an hours march, feeling a bit tired – we were wearing men's equipment for the first time. It includes a large haversack or pack, in which the men carry their worldly belongings. It feels a bit heavy on one's back.

... This village [Tatinghem] consists of a very long street I should think a mile and a half long with several offshoots... We were a very long time getting the men into billets – most of them are in barns and very comfortable. The village looks a bit desolate, a lot of the inhabitants have gone. My sleeping quarters are only fairly comfortable. I'm in a large house with **the Babe**, the **Quartermaster**, **Milliard** the Interpreter and lots of odds and ends. The place is also the Quartermasters Stores. I have a large room, which when I arrived had very little furniture. However the owner has since put in a washing cabinet and a chair and a small table. There is a bed of sorts. Hitherto I have been sleeping in my valise on top of the bed. Tonight I believe coarse sheets have been provided which I shall try.

As regards messing, darling, I mess now with **Harry** [Pulman] and **Evie** [Noel]. We searched about for a room, couldn't find one, so seized on a conservatory in the grounds of the house where Battalion HQ are situated. It is a large brick room, about 30' x 20' and about 14' high – tiled floor – walls are whitewashed. It has a fireplace – a fine one a large, open hearth. For furniture a matting carpet, a wooden table, borrowed from a shop and covered with a waterproof sheet, 4 common chairs and any number of small trees in pots. Outside there is a glass house running the length of one side. We have christened it the Carlton Palm Lounge – and are very comfortable in it. We also borrowed a lamp. When we first lit the fire, the place filled with smoke which drove us out. We found that the chimney had been stopped up for years. However they cleaned it for us and we're awfully snug in here now...

... Darling, in your next letter – could you enclose a few sheets of writing paper, please.

**28<sup>th</sup> January 1915**

**Settling in at Tatinghem. The Flying Corps and fleeing nuns. Bitterly cold weather. Arthur's faithful companion, "Ben". News from the Grove.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

Billets [Tatinghem], Thursday evening, 6.15pm

... There was a lot to do settling down. In the afternoon [27<sup>th</sup>] we paraded at 2.30 and went for a route march for a couple of hours. The country is very pleasant – very open. Quite close to us is the HQ of the Royal Flying Corps – we see aeroplanes all day. Just beyond us on a hill in the next village where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion are – was a great convent. The nuns fled a long time ago – it seems such a shame – it must have been a fine place.

Last night I got to bed early – it has been very cold. Last night it froze hard and the ice has remained all day today. Thank Heaven, however, darling it is beautifully fine. This morning I was up at 7.30 – Brekker 8.20. We paraded at 9 and went out and did a Battalion Attack. Pretty satisfactory I believe, though I thought it an awful mess up. The **General** came along and watched us. **Ben** – that's my horse, dear – is getting to know me quite well. He'll follow me about anywhere now.

We got back today about 1.30 – had dinner – this afternoon I overhauled my guns and paid a visit to the billets where the machine gunners are. Then back here for some tea and I've been writing to you since dear.

And now darling, I want to thank you awfully for two ... letters that I got this afternoon, dated Sunday and Monday last. I do love to get them, dear – thanks awfully. I'm awfully glad to think you've got on so well at No3. I told you that you would didn't I darling ... I'm going to try and get a line off to the girls but we're pretty hard at it training. However. About Tommy's kit – it is only their equipment that we wear – not their clothes – so it will be all right about the badges, darling.

Well, my darling little girl, I've been talking about myself. Now what about you, dear. Write and tell me all. I'm so amused to hear that **Joe** [Agius] has been making you laugh. He is an "awful old pal". Some papers and cigars arrived today for **Alfred** [Agius] from him. I've still got some cigars I took to Malta! They are very acceptable.

Please give my love, dear, to the dear **Mater and Pater** and all. I was very sorry to hear about **Daisy** [Agius] – hope she's better. Give my love to **your Mater** too, please darling, and respects to all your family. I only wish you were here, my own darling, to see us, living in a French village. It sounds incredible, but we have shaken down quite comfortably...

**29<sup>th</sup> January 1915**

**Dollie considers being received into the Catholic Church before their wedding. An unpaid mess bill is sorted. Arthur gives a detailed account of their whereabouts in France – censorship is not so strict at this stage in the war.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

Friday, 4.50pm

First a thousand thanks, dear, for two letters that I received from you this afternoon, one of Tuesday and one of Wednesday with an enclosure from the **Mater**. Thanks awfully darling – I love to get them. Did I tell you, darling, some time ago that **Guy** had asked for leave, on business matters, as there was some chance of his being able to get £600 or £700 a year if he could only get home to fix things up. Well, he has just been granted it from 12 midnight tonight. So he is going to take these letters over for us.

So I can tell you, darling, where we are. It is a little village called TATINGHEM, about 3 miles West of St OMER, which (the latter) is the General Headquarters of the British Expeditionary Force. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion are in a Convent at a place called WISQUES about another 2 miles west of us. When we moved we came via DESVRES & LUMBRES.

When we first heard that we were going to move, they told us that we were going to BAILLEUL but that was a myth. However when in future I refer to our village, you'll know that it's TATINGHEM, and when I refer to the Army's General HQ it's St OMER. So, darling now you know where we are, and you'll see how far we are from the firing line, though by listening one can just hear the boom of heavy guns, especially at night.

Now let me answer your news, darling. I am awfully glad, more glad than I can say, to hear that you have spoken to **Mother Superior** and **Sister Adéodat**. I am happy to think that there is a chance of you becoming a Catholic. **Fr Fabian**, I'm sure you'll like immensely. He is an awfully decent sort of chap and very sympathetic. So here's good chance to you, you sweet heart and God bless you.

There is only one other point and that is with regard to my mess bill. I don't want to worry anyone dear, but I thought the **Mater** would be able to find it before Febr. 1<sup>st</sup>. However, I've now asked **Harry** and he'll send home, asking them to send a detailed account to the **Pater**. The bill that I had was only an "a/c rendered £10", so that wouldn't help much. However I hope now that everything will be all right. I'm sorry to trouble you, darling.

... Now, sweet soul, for some of my news. The weather is bitterly cold, but beautifully fine. The ice scarcely thawed yesterday and this morning it was thicker than ever – even my sponge inside my room was frozen.

Last night **Johnnie** came in to dinner – we had a chicken but it was an old cock bird and very like India rubber. How we laughed over it. We had sardines also, jam, toast and toasted cheese, bread and butter, biscuits and chocolate, wine and coffee. Not bad, eh darling? We're very snug in our Palm Court with a roaring fire. I



went down to bed soon after 9. It was a wonderful moonlit night, very cold and clear and every few seconds a dull boom from the heavy guns 30 miles away.

This morning I was up at 7.20. It has been a glorious day. We had brekker at 8; parade at 9. We went out over the same ground as yesterday to practise a new form of attack. It was very muddy going – part of the way over ploughed fields – the top of which had just thawed. I got into a filthy mess. We got in at 1.45 – had a ripping lunch. This afternoon has been quite slack. The **CO** inspected Billets and there were rifle inspections, etc. Tomorrow I hear we are to dig practice trenches. We are also going to be issued with maps. Well darling, I think that that is about the end of my news. I'm awfully well, the machine gun men are well, well-fed, warm and happy. I can scarcely say the latter for I miss you awfully my darling. I want you, want you all for my own, you darling. So here's a great big kiss and heaps of love.

Did I tell you, dear, that the owner of the place where I sleep gave me some sheets yesterday. I slept in them for the first time last night. They are more like bed coverlets than sheets, being very course, but oh for the pleasure of being able to stretch oneself in bed without tearing one's flea bag!

By the way I saw a Daily Sketch of the 28<sup>th</sup> this afternoon. In the centre page on the left hand side are some photos of the troops. The two bottom ones are of us at Etaples. I believe you can see me in both – in the left hand one sitting in the middle, and in the right hand one in the left centre facing the camera. They also say that there are some in the Daily Mirror of that date.

... [Guy] **Livingston** has just gone off without saying anything, so we're left in the lurch! However, I'm risking this...

**31<sup>st</sup> January 1915**

**A little misunderstanding about the purchasing of an electric lamp is cleared up; digging trenches and lying in the snow; good news for Arthur Samut (brother of Maggie Agius); the issuing of useless maps; miracles and an unexpected connection with Downside.**

*Arthur to Dollie*

France [Tatinghem], Sunday even. 7.30pm

... I received two ripping letters from you this afternoon full of news, which more than compensates for yesterday when none arrived... First of all darling, thanks from the bottom of my heart for all sorts of things. I am eagerly awaiting the parcel with muffler and locket and other things. You generous little soul, you know how I appreciate and love them ... God bless you darling; thanks awfully. I quite understand about the parcel not being registered. You did quite right – I only suggested registering it, because I thought that you might send the locket alone in an envelope. I am feeling tremendously excited and long to get it.

Thanks awfully too sweet heart about the electric lamp. Of course darling, I would have written to you first, but the story was this. **Guy and Edouard** and, I think, one or two others had been dilating on the peculiar advantages of this lamp, when **Guy** said he was going to see about getting one – so I understood – he was going to write to **Wuffie** to order it – did anyone else want one; if so, he would ask **Wuffie** to order one too. That is how I came to ask her (or rather **Guy** wrote and asked her). Other wise I should most certainly have asked you. I am sending the **Mater** a cheque on Coxs. Our pay is paid into there now, so that will be all right... About the Mess Bill darling, I've asked **Harry** and he is going to have details sent to the **Pater**.

I am glad to hear about **Arthur Samut** [obtaining a Commission]. Good luck to him – where is he now? Perhaps later on we may come in touch with one another... **Harry** [Pulman] is sitting opposite to me as I write, writing to **Rosa**. We are sitting at a little deal table covered with a waterproof sheet, in our "Palm Court". There is a cheap little lamp between us. **Evie** [Noel] is reading on my left, between me and the fire. **Harry** sends his love to you and thanks you sincerely for your kind messages. He is always talking of when we get back; how he is going to have us all at "Fryth". He is a good pal and we are very cheery together.

... Yesterday was a pretty fine day and we spent the whole day digging trenches just to the East of the village – chiefly as a practice – but I believe if the Germans did assume the offensive and did by some extraordinary and unbelievable mischance get as far as this, these trenches would be improved and used against them. We were out there from 9.15 to 12.30 when we broke off for dinners, but were on the mark again at 2 till about 4.20... We have been issued with a set of eight maps, chiefly odd ones and not very wonderfully useful. Today the weather has been awful – a terrible snowstorm with a racing wind most of the morning and a certain amount of snow and sleet in the early part of this afternoon.

This morning I went to Church just before 8... When I got in I found **Alfred** [Agius] at Confession. The Curé, luckily, speaks a little English. So as I hadn't been for a month, I made an effort with his broken English and my broken French, succeeded in getting Confession and afterwards Communion. So I am feeling happier ... Mass wasn't over till 8.50 then COs orders till 9.5 so I was very late getting brekker. We paraded at 9.30 in the driving snow. The men wore overcoats so I wore my British Warm, your darling muffler and my "dog-snatcher" service cap that I got through **Harry** from the Ordnance Stores at Boulogne. It was awfully difficult moving against the snow and wind and one couldn't lift one's eyes to look ahead. However we were out about 3 hours making a practice attack – very interesting, though I was wet right up to my thighs lying on my stomach in the snow. We got back about 12.40. The weather cleared a bit. We came in here and took our wet things off. I sent my servant down to my bedroom in the Quartermasters Stores to fetch up my dry things and changed up here in front of the fire.

This afternoon we decided to go into the town, partly to see what it was like and partly to let some of the men use our fire to dry their things. We got a kind of cart and drove in about 2.45, **Harry**, **Evie** and I picking up **Harold Moore** on the way. It took about 20 minutes to drive in. They are very particular as to whom they admit and everyone has to have a pass to get in or to get out. However they did not want to see ours. The town is a terribly dismal place. We went in meaning to get a bath if possible, but without success. **Evie** had one but his report on it was so bad that we gave it up as a bad job. We went round the Church which is very old and rather fine. There have been a lot of miracles – we saw the records of some painted on the walls going back to 1210... I saw the tomb of one Stephen Caverel. A Caverel was one of the original founders of Downside at Douai which is fairly near here.

We came back about 5.30 very disgusted with the town – arrived here at 6.5 and had our evening meal at 6.30, ever since when, sweet darling, I have been writing to you. With that, dear, I have come to an end of my news. Tomorrow we are in for a long day, I believe. I hope it is fine.