

1st March 1915

Arthur is safely back in Billets – with a mountain of letters to answer from Dollie; a stray shell causes great shock; welcome parcels from home; at last, a chance for a shave; Dollie's luggage from Malta has finally turned up; Arthur is homesick [he was last at the Grove in early September 1914].

Arthur to Dollie

In Billets, Monday 2.20pm

... So here I am back in rest billets once more safe & sound DG thanks to your dear prayers. I've some news of yours ... & two generous parcels of yours to thank you for. But first I want to give you my news of the last two days.

Saturday was a cold day & rather quiet. They shelled us but only for a short time. We expected to be busy. A scheme had already been arranged. The gunners were to blow in part of the German lines. Three machine guns were to be laid on the gap & when the Germans came out at night to mend it, were to open fire on it from 3 different directions. However the gunners weren't very successful so our instructions were cancelled. They fired a few shells down the road that night, expecting the relief to turn up – but they were disappointed, for they were a night too soon. The night was pretty quiet. I had a good sleep.

Sunday morning dawned a beautiful day. We had rather a shock. About 8 o'clock in the morning a single chance shell struck the barricade across the road about 20 yards from where we were & laid out the men manning it – 3 killed, 1 seriously wounded, 1 wounded & another slightly cut. The 3 wounded made a dash into the house & we managed to bind them up all right, & we got them away & the bodies last night. Yesterday they shelled us quite a lot – luckily without any further damage. We were relieved last night, marched back to Brigade Machine Gun Headquarters, limbered up there & marched off here about five miles away. We were relieved by a Brigade that contained inter alia a Guards Battalion, the Camerons, London Scottish & two other Battalions. It was a wonderful moonlight night, the moon was nearly full, too bright to be comfortable for the first part of our relief, for to get away we had to cross a 100 yards stretch of muddy field including a brook. All this only 200-300 yards away from the Germans. However we got away without a casualty DG.

The march here was rather picturesque. The wonderful moon, and a road that turned and twisted past farms surrounded by tall trees & across streams lined with willows. It seemed so strange that one should be able to move about freely and without the continual zip - zip of bullets. We reached here about 11. Took a little time getting shaken in to billets. We've got quite a comfortable mess room where we live and eat, about ½ mile from Battalion HQ. Five of us sleep together a few yards down the road – one in a bed, the rest on about 2 foot of straw, which is wonderfully comfortable. We turned in about 12 & slept till after 8pm – then drowsed until close on 10.

We did look a lot of ruffians most of us with a week's beard and dirt. I'm afraid I wasn't very prepossessing! However, although we couldn't get a bath this morning, dear, we had a priceless wash & shave. Brekker about 11. Afterwards **Johnnie Sutcliffe** & I went up to our Battalion HQ to enquire about letters, get a map,

&c. Then we went on to see **Harry** [Pulman] & **Evie** [Noel]. They are both very well & fit DG & very comfortable in a large farm. We stayed till just past one, then came back here to lunch. Today it is very showery and a strong westerly wind. But it doesn't affect one a bit for we've a comfortable room and a stove. As a matter of fact it has just begun to snow a bit & has got quite dark.

Edouard [Noel] I hav'n't seen for some days. I believe he did have water on the knee & was sent back "to hospital". Young **J.T. Reeves** just missed going into the trenches. He had a slight attack of jaundice & has been cleared off too. They only keep those who are absolutely fit with their regiments. The others are promptly "evacuated" & sent off & it is difficult to trace where they are sent. By the way **Serj. Fusedale**, I'm sorry to say, who was with **Johnnie** over on the left, got a bullet wound in the head, so he's away from the section now. We've just heard that though the machine guns are going to remain brigaded we are going to have charge of our own detachments and are not going to keep the detachments mixed. We are going to be here for at least 8 days. Those are the arrangements as far as we know.

Well, sweet darling, I think that's all the news *pro tem*. Now I want to thank you for your dear letters, sweetheart, & ... I also have two parcels to thank you for. You are a generous little soul, dear. I am more than grateful, but I want you to let me pay for the waterproof cap cover at least. So you'll let me know the cost of it won't you darling please!

Your dear letters have been pouring in upon me all day, whilst I've been writing. I've waited a bit as they hav'n't all come in order. But now I've your dear letters of Tues 16th, Tues 23rd, Wed 24th, Thurs 25th & Fri 26th by me ...

To answer you ... *Vieille Chapelle*, where we were before we went to the trenches, is 3 or 4 miles behind the front line. We went up for a week from Sunday 21st to 28th & are now back about 5-6 miles from the trenches. **Couch** is very fit & chirpy – he was never bad enough to go "sick" officially. As for the waders, dear, you are a generous little soul, to spend so much time & thought over my comfort. I really don't think I want them, thanks awfully all the same. I'll talk to **Harry** & see how his go, and if I decide to get a pair, will ask you to get them for me, please. I'll let you know darling.

I'm so glad that your boxes arrived at last safely & that our plate from the Union Club [*in Malta*] has kept the signatures – what memories that recalls... Yes please, I want you to keep my jewellery till I come home again. I shall be happier to know that it's in your sweet custody.

I got a parcel from home this morning - handkerchiefs, candle, soap, pencils & writing block, another useful parcel, which is very much appreciated. I'm longing to come home once more... It's awfully hard to bear this separation... I don't mind the hardships or bullets – it is being away from you that I hate ...

2nd March 1915

Arthur calms Dollie's fears about the safety of her brothers; no chance of home leave in the near future; Sir John French hints at an invention that will revolutionise the war; Arthur loses his prized field glasses – a present from brother Joe; the machine gun section is to be re-organised, much to Arthur's relief.

Arthur to Dollie

In Billets, Tuesday 3.50pm

... Thanks awfully for your dear letter of Saturday last which I have just received – you darling. It is impossible to thank you as much as I want to – I live for your dear news.

I can understand what a shock you must have had about **Evie** [Noel]. Of course, as I dare say you know by now, he is perfectly all right. The Brigade held the line for a week. I was up the whole time, dear, from Sunday to Sunday, as the guns were brigaded. **Harold Moore**, on the flank where I was and **Sammy** on the other, were up till Thursday when they were relieved by **Harry [Pulman] & Guy Livingston** respectively. So you see **E.V.** was up for the last three days. We were shelled in the usual course of events, & a few went into a building about 30 yards from his breastwork, but no-one with him was hurt. **Edouard** [Noel] had, I believe, water on the knee as a result of his fall & they “evacuated” him to Boulogne, as one is continually on the move, and, apparently does not as a rule return to the same billets. But nonetheless it must have been an awful shock, you poor darling.

Well, now I've given you the explanation dear, which I hope will make things clear even after the lapse of time... As for leave, dear, we scarcely know how we stand, and I am rather chary of bringing the question up for fear of disappointing you without need. All I can say is that *pro tem*, leave is out of the question. On the one side is the (reported) fact that leave is stopped as from March 1st – that's yesterday. On the other hand, **Johnnie** [Sutcliffe] tells me that a document was issued from the Orderly Room which said that leave would be given in exceptional circumstances. I asked **Algy** this morning – he said that at present time there was no leave. On the other hand, we are in reserve here for a few days & it may be that that is preventing us. So you see, darling, it is very difficult which side to believe – which story to credit. **Sir John French** was down here yesterday & is reputed to have said that we had made an invention that is going to stagger the world and revolutionise the war! I only wish it would put an end to it!

Our billets here are scattered over a very wide area. Battalion HQ are further than I thought and are nearly a mile away. **Harry** is about ½ mile beyond that. **Alfred** [Agius] is nearly 1 mile in the other direction. I hav'n't seen him since we've been out.

I am feeling rather vexed, as I lost my field glasses while we were up. I shall see if I can get a pair from the Ordnance – but haven't much hope. It is a nuisance, though the pair I had – a present from **Joe** [Agius] – were a bit old.

We are all very fit here DG. I am awfully well, but feel very homesick at times, especially in the morning before I get up. One feels like a schoolboy, coming home for the holidays & finding his folks away. The relief of being out & being able to walk about freely produces exactly the same impression that one used to get home for the holidays. The weather is breezy & glorious. If I were only with you, it would be perfect, darling...

Yesterday we had a touch of storm for a short time – thunder, lightening & snow, but only for quite a little time. After tea **Johnnie** & I went up to **Harry** again. He is very well DG. Then back here again to dinner at 7.30. We sat round after talking & reading. We went to bed fairly early. I slept awfully well. This morning I dozed for about an hour before getting up ... I got up about 8.30 & came down here to brekker at 9. We have spent a very easy day. We went along to the others this morning but they were all out for a route march. Lunch soon after 1. This afternoon I have been arranging details of my organisation: for though we are to remain brigaded, we are to have our own detachments under us & not a mixed one. Really I think it will work better so, for it was very awkward with Ghurkas & Garhwals under one who didn't understand a word of English save for a few technical terms.

Well, my own darling, I think that's all the news. I miss you far more than I can say ... Thank your **Mother** awfully once more dear, it's awfully sweet of her ...

3rd March 1915

Arthur admires the photographs sent out by Dollie; a request for more tobacco and newspapers; time at the Front has made the machine gunners into copious letter writers and Arthur is busy censoring their output; a rare game of bridge; more officers kit to be sent home; Arthur misses his parents and hopes for home leave soon.

Arthur to Dollie

In Billets, Wednes. 4.40

... I have just received a long letter from you, darling mine, thanks awfully for it. Also 3 photos, which I must confess ar'n't wonderfully good. But I'm sure they'll please **Harry** [Pulman] when he sees them. The third, no photo ever could do justice to that subject, dear, for it's of you; & none are ever good enough, or could ever be good enough to portray your sweet charm ... I treasure it. God bless you dear.

Thanks so much, dear, for your kind offers... Washing things I have and enough, thanks darling. Tobacco I shall want very soon, but feel in rather a fix about that... So darling, if you see the **Mater**, please I want some Fryers Mixture – a Rosary – some opium tablets (you can get a glass tube of these for 1/- from a chemist in Wigmore Street – **Rosa** knows – she and **Harry** got some). [NB: Opium tablets were legally obtainable over the counter for pain relief at this time.] Papers, dear, we get daily papers one day old, when we're out of the trenches. Up there we don't get anything unless it's sent from home. **Lyell** with whom I was used to get a "Times" sent out to him. But if dear the others could send an illustrated paper occasionally after they have seen it, it would be very welcome.

I hope the plate from the Union Club [in Malta] turns out a success. It has quite historic memories for you & me hasn't it dear. I want to get along to **Evie** [Noel] to see the photos. I remember the one in the "Palm Court" at Tatinghem so well. Our days are indeed full days. **Johnnie** has just gone along to see him, but I wanted to finish my letter so have come in here.

Last night after tea four of us had a rubber of bridge. It seemed so strange, for it's an awful time since I've played. I had a lot of censors work. The gun section now numbers 48 & the 3 days of trench life have inspired them to write copiously. After dinner we discussed things relating to machine guns till about 10 when we went to bed. This morning we woke up a bit late to a beastly morning of rain. Brekker was at 9.15 after which we stood by. The guns were overhauled by a serjeant of ordnance. This afternoon the rain has stopped so I had a parade from 2.45 till 4. Then tea. Last night we had a sudden order hurled at our heads. Officers kits to be reduced to 35 lbs, mounted officers to 50. I believe this occasionally happens but doesn't concern anyone very much as the kits always mount up again. However I've just been up to get rid of a few things and am sending home my slacks, a pair of brown shoes, a cork mattress, some papers, a Sam Browne Strap, suspenders & I think a shirt.

I got a letter from the **Mater** today – dear **Mater & Pater**. I do want to see them, and only hope & pray for the chance of some leave soon... Well, dear I think you've all my news now. There's a rumour we're going further back for more rest – I

hope so – for though it's awfully interesting being up, well ... Thank God I am in the best of health... **Harry** is very fit ...

5th March 1915

Dollie is worried about sending Arthur some German-made soup; an abundance of toilet paper and candles etc; Harry Pulman embroiders Arthur's recent efforts on the machine guns; Arthur is very fed up with the lack of home leave; tea and gourmet dinner with brother Alfred; the fig marmalade is a roaring success.

Arthur to Dollie

In billets, 3.30pm Friday

I have an overwhelming pile to thank you and your dear **Mater** for. 3 letters & 2 parcels, feast for one's mind & body! Thanks darling little girl, thanks awfully. Please thank your **Mater** too ... I now live in an abundance of writing paper, toilet paper, candles, matches, and food. The soups promise well and, dear, I don't think you need worry about the make – if they were German it would not be possible to obtain them. I think they are Italian or Swiss! At any rate, darling, there's no need to worry: thanks awfully for everything darling: I am so happy & proud of the thought that prompted them.

So let me answer your dear letters. I'm afraid you must discount **Harry's** praise. The story of the 40 Germans isn't true at all, and I don't know who started it... Out here one is just trying to do one's job and we are only too pleased if we get a good chance.

Abbott, whose name I saw in the casualty lists the other day, was one of our new Officers. He was attached to **Harold Moore's** Company & was up on the same flank that I was. They say his wound is slighter than at first appeared ...

Doesn't it seem strange that both **Edgar** [Agius] & **Clive** should be taking over Machine Gun Sections. I was so sorry to hear of **Elsie's** tonsillitis. I expect by now she will have shaken it off ...

I can't quite understand this leave business. To tell you the honest truth I am rather "fed up" with the way in which they have humbugged us about since we reached Etaples at the beginning of January – just two months ago. I am simply longing to see you, darling mine. I wish I could get a month's leave! That of course is just a façon de parler – but I'd give anything for two minutes with you, dear, let alone a week! So I hope and pray and worry the Orderly Room with my questions. To tell you the truth, all of us out here want it – we have been on the job for over 7 months without any leave, while others who have only been out since October or November have all had a least a week, many of them more...

I'm awfully sorry, dear, that I didn't get a letter off to you yesterday. I was firing on a small range we've made here yesterday afternoon when, just as we were finishing **Alfred** [Agius] turned up and wanted me to go along with him to tea & dinner! I hadn't seen him since Vieille Chapelle about a fortnight ago – so I went up with him. He is in very comfortable billets with **Sammy** who is commanding his Company. He gave me a lot of news & some old letters. He seems to have had a quiet time where he was when up in the trenches. We had a wonderful dinner. Pot au feu,

Roast Chicken & Fried Potatoes & Omelette au Rhum, Coffee & Cigars! **Alfred** had had 200 Cigarettes sent to him by **Harry** – he gave me some. **Gilbert** came in during the evening. He and **Wilcox** came back yesterday afternoon. He gave me your news and a message. Thank you, darling. I did envy him having seen you, my queen. Lucky dog. **Sammy** also asked most kindly after you.

Our routine here is much the same day by day. Tea before we get up at 8, up at 8.30, Brekker 9.10. Parade at 10 till lunch at 1. Generally another parade; then tea at 4.30, Dinner at 7.30, Bed 10. The weather has been cloudy the last two or three days, thought it has not rained. The mud is awful, but we laugh at it.

... Just stopped for tea. We had the fig marmalade – which was a roaring success, and awfully appreciated. I'm to send a message to the "unknown donor": full of thanks & appreciation.

Well, darling of my heart, I think that that is all my news. Our days pass very much like one another – one almost feels life is a mechanical thing at times. There is a great aching in one's heart for the dear one at home. May God bless you and keep you my darling – in his Almighty Care I feel proud to leave you...

6th March 1915

Depressingly wet weather; Arthur writes to the Pater for his birthday [on 11th March – Edward will be 66]; rumours of a move – no one knows if it is up to the front or further back for a rest, but Dollie is not to worry.

Arthur to Dollie

In Billets, N. of France., Saturday 5.5pm

To-day alas! No welcome letter from my sweet heart. So I look forward with all the greater eagerness to to-morrow, hoping to get two. You see how greedy I am, dear, of your news for your news comes from you, my darling, of whom or from whom I can never hear too much.

To-day, dear, has been a dull day here. This morning it poured with rain & though the rain stopped about lunch time the weather hasn't cleared at all & is very windy & cloudy and rather colder.

Last night we had another game of bridge beyond dinner – 2 rubbers in both of which I won. After dinner we talked and read finally going to bed about 9.30.

This morning dear we were up a bit earlier than usual and arrived down here for brekker at 8.40. This morning as it was raining so hard we didn't have a parade. **Johnnie**, I and the Machine Gun Officer of the 1 / 39th Garhwals called **Mankelow** (who incidentally is an RC) went into the Divisional Office to try and get some ready money from the Field Cashier, as he was due to turn up there this morning. But he didn't put in an appearance so we made our way back in time for lunch.

This afternoon dear I wrote to the **Pater** for his birthday. The men were employed cleaning up as there are rumours again of a move. Up to the front or back we don't know, darling, but as far as one can see probably up again. There's nothing like work is there? ... Don't worry though sweetheart even if we do go up. I have told you that it is a "rumour" and that is all it is – and I told you that it existed, so that if we do move and I cannot get a letter off to you dear for a day or two, you'll know and understand.

You are a darling, ar'n't you dear. I miss you more than I can say. I'm feeling a bit "fuggy" to-day for I've been in most of the day & find it difficult to write as I would wish to. You must read more than I write. I know you will, for you know me, and all the love I bear towards you. God bless you dear and keep you safe. I long for your dear news to-morrow. Until then, light of my eyes, my "Love's Inspiration" au revoir...

7th March 1915

Arthur is sorry to hear Dollie's dog Pluto is unwell – fond memories of their walks together with the dogs on Hampstead Heath; an unpleasant recce to the Front in wind and rain - in case of being sent forward; news of in-law Arthur Samut on a machine gun course at St Omer; hopes for an end to the beastly war.

Arthur to Dollie

In billets, N. of France, Sunday 5.40 pm.

... Thanks for the two sweet letters of Thursday and Friday last. My expectations you see, dear, were fulfilled and I have received the two letters I hoped for. Thanks darling I love to get your letters ... The very sight of your handwriting is a source of joy, God bless you dear.

I am awfully sorry to hear about Pluto. Poor faithful friend I hope he's going to live for a long time yet. I can almost hear the sound of his bark as one used to come up the front garden – then the ring – and a few tremulous moments before I saw my dainty little queen. How clear it is all burnt deep into my memory, happy days – seven and three quarter months ago. May they soon return... Do you remember the hours we used to spend on the Heath with Pluto and Jerry & how if ever Jerry got ahead of him, chasing after a stone, Pluto would put on an air of offended dignity and stalk off, the very picture of injured innocence...

Last night we played bridge again, but none of us playing were very inspired. After dinner we discussed things generally, all talking "shop".

To-day has been another day of wind and showers, darling. This morning I hoped to get to Mass, but was unable. I have told you already I think, dear, that the Brigade are in reserve here. This morning we went up to the "front" to see where we should have to go "in case". We got up about 7, Breakfast 7.30. We left just before 8 on horseback, the Brigade Machine Gun Officer, a Staff Captain, **Johnnie**, myself and 3 grooms 2 British & 1 native. We rode hard: left our horses some way back and made our way up on foot via a communication breastwork & trench. Very uncomfortable going – one had to stoop the whole way. There was an abundance of mud & in some places nearly a foot of water.

We spent a little time in front reconnoitring then back again the same way. We finally got back here at 12 noon. I went along to our sleeping billet, changed my wet things & had a good wash. I then returned here for lunch but we weren't expected and none was ready. So **John** and I went to **Harry** [Pulman], found there in addition to his Company Officers, **Harold Moore and Wilcox** – so we were quite a party. They are all very fit DG. **Evie** [Noel] is surprised to hear that you've sent his photos (the set including that of us three in the "Palm Court") as they hav'n't reached him yet.

After lunch we came back here. I got your two dear letters about tea-time, also one from **Mabel** [Arrigo nee Agius] dated February 16th and one from **Maggie** [Agius nee Samut]. She says inter alia that her brother [**Arthur**] has gone to St Omer to do a machine gun course!

Well, darling, there I think you have the news. I am awfully well. I am longing to see you once more – but I'm afraid, *pro tem* at any rate, that leave is out of the question. I am hoping with all hope for an early termination of this beastly war ...

8th March 1915

On 10th March 1915 Arthur takes part in his first major battle at Neuve Chapelle. We have no letters from Arthur to Dollie Noel in the archive for at least a month. They may have been destroyed, or stored in the Imperial War Museum by a third party.

However we do have a long letter written by Arthur to his mother Marie Concetta, sent on 17th March 1915, describing the battle period 7th – 17th March in great detail. Starting today, we will publish a section a day from that letter to “the Grove”, as well as to our letter blog at www.agiusww1.com

Arthur to Marie Concetta Agius [begun 17th March 1915] – part 1:

... We are back here again after a pretty strenuous week. For some time past rumours of an impending attack were current. About ten days ago we were officially informed of it and of the part that we were to play. In front of our lines there was a village called Neuve Chapelle, situated at some rather important cross roads. The place was strongly held by the Germans – incidentally, as we discovered later, it was a German ammunition depot. This was to be the centre of the attack.

The 4th Corps was to be on the left of the attack, the Indian Corps the centre, and I believe the 1st Corps on the right. To the Indian Corps fell the most difficult part of the attack – a line most strongly held by the Germans at the point where they were nearest us (60 yard away), and opposite to a redoubt of ours called Port Arthur. Our brigade led the attack with the 3rd Battalion in support. Half the machine guns of the brigade went up with their regiments, the other half, including my two, supported the attack with fire from the left flank of the brigade.

On Sunday morning, [7th March], we rode up and made a reconnaissance. On Monday evening at 6 pm. I, in charge of the supporting guns, moved from billets here at Les Lobes to La Couture. We arrived there at 9 pm., found a rotten little farm for the men, nothing for us officers, but it didn't matter much as at 10.20 we moved up to the front to build our gun positions. The interval between 9 & 10.20 we spent getting a pair of horses and a wagon out of a ditch at the side of the road into which the driver in the darkness had driven it. It was about 4 foot deep and fearfully muddy, so it wasn't a pleasant job.

At 10.20 we marched up to the front about 2-3 miles away, and spent the night making gun positions. It was beastly cold, snow and frost...

9th March 1915

Arthur to Marie Concetta Agius [begun 17th March 1915] – part 2:

... At 10.20 we marched up to the front about 2-3 miles away, and spent the night making gun positions. It was beastly cold, snow and frost. We got back to La Couture in broad daylight dead tired [9th]. We got the men settled down in their billet, then wandered into La Couture to try and find the Battalion and somewhere to rest.

Finally we found one of their billets and were so tired that we fell asleep sitting on a table for a couple of hours. At 8.30 they gave us breakfast, we slept again till one, had some lunch, then returned to our men. We spent the afternoon overhauling gear, etc, and at 5 moved off again to the front to occupy our gun positions. It was bitterly cold again that night and froze...

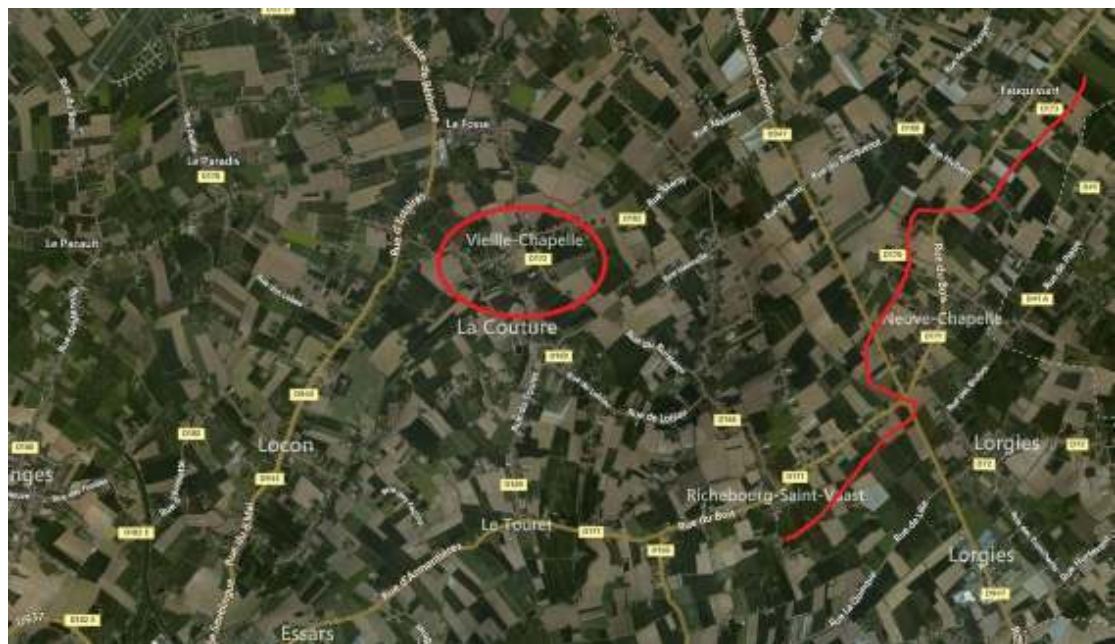
10th March 1915

Arthur to Marie Concetta Agius [begun 17th March 1915] – part 3:

... The attack was for the next morning (Wednesday) [10th]. At 7.30 our artillery fire began. It was one of the most wonderful of experiences – 420 guns including four “Mothers” (9.2in) fired 31,000 rounds that day. The whole of our front was a mass of flame and smoke. The big shells throw a pillar of smoke & debris 60-80 feet in the air. The noise was extraordinary. We co-operated with machine gun fire. Soon after 8 the attack was launched, the artillery turned off on to Neuve Chapelle which was apparently blotted out. As soon as the left attack joined up with the right attack we ceased fire and remained inactive for the rest of the day.

On the right the enemy’s defence was very stubborn & it was here that the 3rd [Londons] did well. **We lost heavily though. “A” Company lost Harry Pulman, Mathieson & Stephens killed and Evie Noel wounded. “B” Company (in which Alfred [Agius] is) only lost Reeves – suffering from shock. “C” Company lost “Mabel” Crichton killed and Sorley wounded. “D” Company, Edouard Noel wounded. In addition we had about 170 casualties.** This first day I had one man wounded by a shell that ought to have killed all of us. It burst through the parapet a yard from one of my guns, smashed the whole parapet in and covered everything with earth.

On Wednesday night [10th] we moved down into Neuve Chapelle & spent the rest of that night in a ruined house dodging shells...

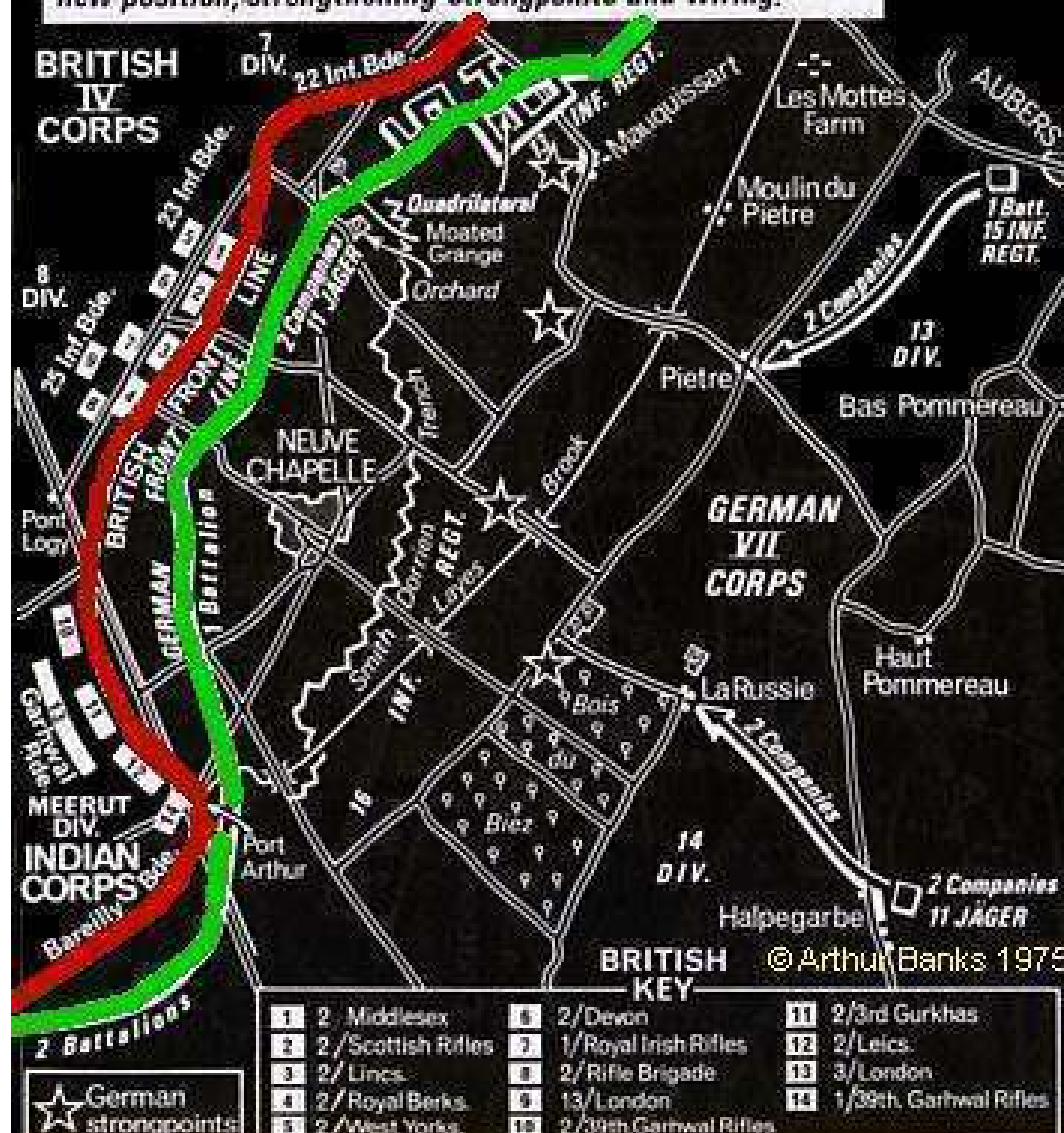


1 10 March–The Opening Attack

0 500
Yards

0730 hours 10 March, a British artillery bombardment commenced along the whole front. At 0805 hours the range was lengthened some 300 yards to include Neuve Chapelle, and the infantry commenced their advance which continued until dusk. The Germans began rapid consolidation of their new position, strengthening strongpoints and wiring.

The British employed some 300 guns which was thought to be a huge concentration at the time.

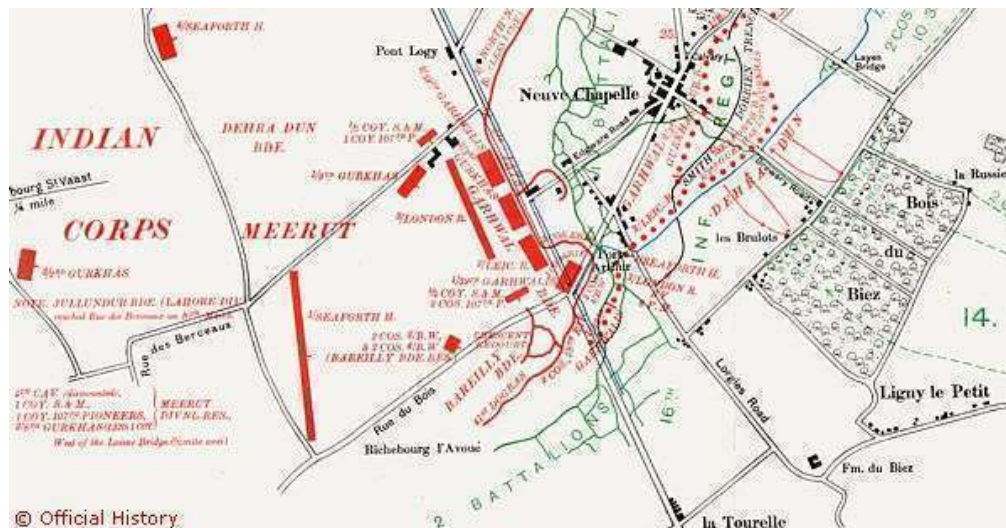


11th March 1915

Arthur to Marie Concetta Agius [begun 17th March 1915] – part 4:

... On Wednesday night [10th] we moved down into Neuve Chapelle & spent the rest of that night in a ruined house dodging shells. Next morning [11th] I had my first experience of the big German 8.2 inch shell, the “Jack Johnson”, “Black Maria” etc which haven’t been seen here for months. They shelled some houses in Neuve Chapelle about 100 yards down the road from us.

About 11 that morning we were moved into the front line trench where **Harold Moore & Livingstone** were. We were on the right of the line and in rather a crucial spot. We were holding the enemy’s trench which at the right end was entirely unconnected with our lines. In front was a network of German trenches up which they could approach to within 20 or 30 yards of us. On my right there was the remnants of an Indian battalion...

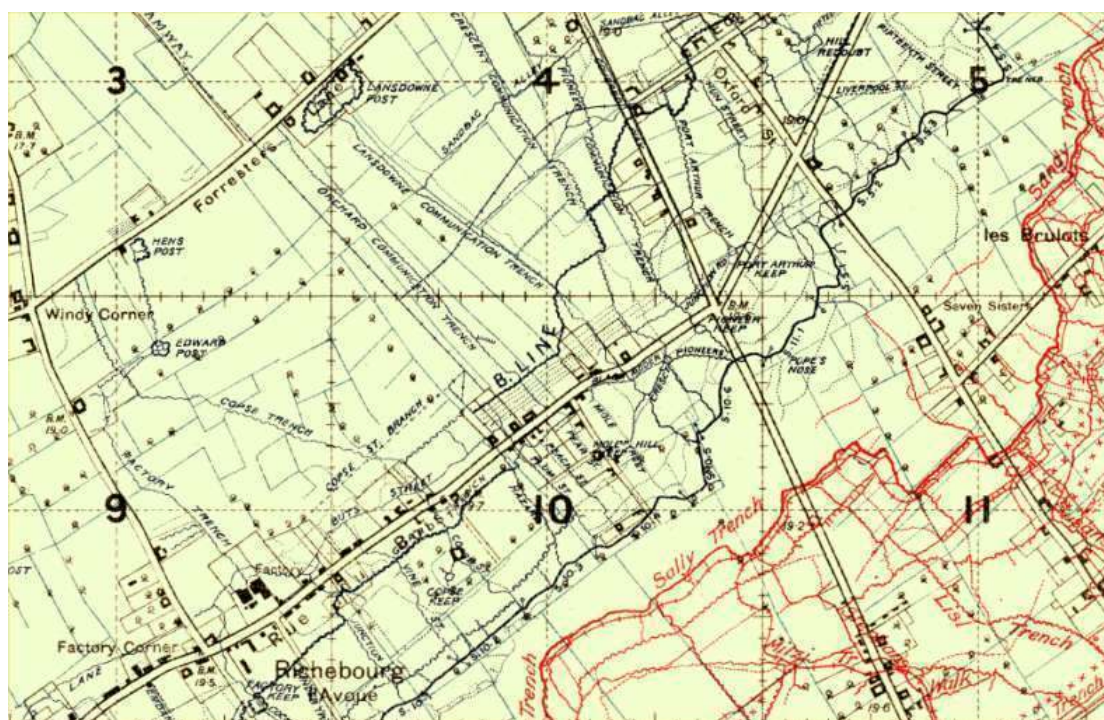


12th March 1915

Arthur to Marie Concetta Agius [begun 17th March 1915] – part 5:

... Just as the darkness was beginning to lift on Friday morning [12th], the Germans worked up their old trenches & attempted to rush us in great numbers. We killed 500-600 just in front of us by machine gun fire chiefly and the majority by my guns. I paid part of the reckoning there. Then they tried to drive in our right flank. They enfiladed us & bombed us heavily & bombs are damnable. The Indian Battalion lost heavily and horribly, but finally our counter bombing & steady fire drove 'em back.

Later on that day the Indians were relieved by the Seaforths & **Harold Moore's** Company was withdrawn. They shelled us hard for the rest of the time we were up there. I had two lucky escapes; a bullet came through the parapet within a few inches of my face and covered me with earth. Another time one of my men was wounded with shrapnel within 3 feet of me. I had two wounded altogether up there...



13th – 14th March 1915

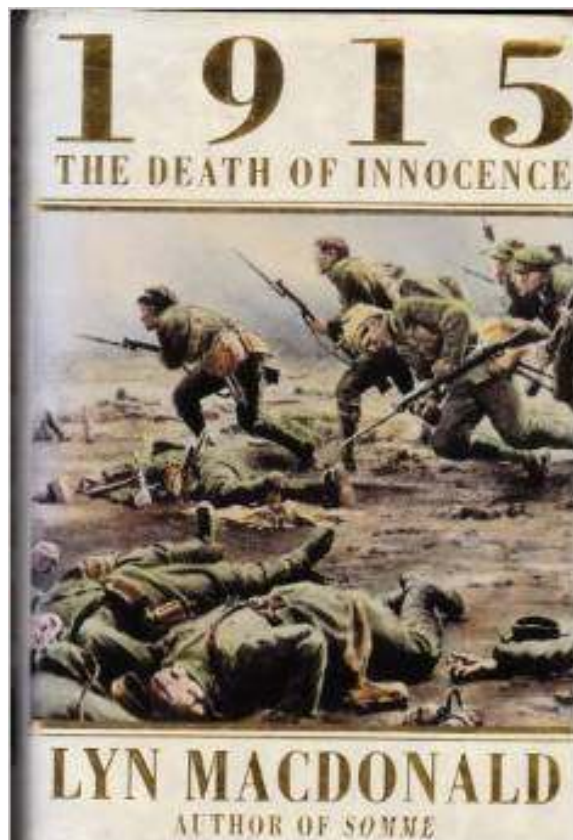
Arthur to Marie Concetta Agius [begun 17th March 1915] – part 6:

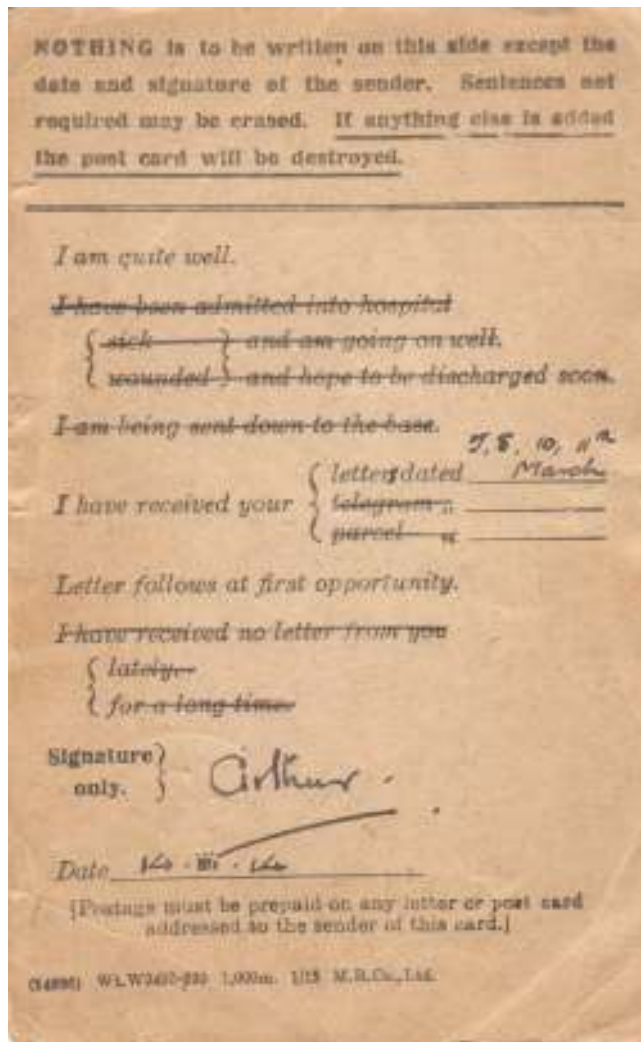
... We were relieved at midnight on Saturday [13th] and got back here after miles of water & muddy trenches about 6 am on Sunday, only to find our old billet occupied, so we had something to eat & rejoined our regiments. I am now where **Harry Pulman** used to be & very comfortable.

The Germans opposite us were Prussians. 7 Corps 14 Division 16 Regt 3rd Battalion 10 Company. The fellow whose dugout I occupied was a young fellow of 21 from Dusseldorf. I found his pay-book. We captured a lot of prisoners, machine guns and ammunition. Some of the prisoners were very young, two I saw only about 16. Two German officers were shot for carrying dum dum bullets. Poor **“Mabel”** [Crichton] was killed by one...

“1915: The Death of Innocence” (Lyn Macdonald, 1993) includes a photograph of the memorial erected to Arthur’s comrade Cyril Crichton at “Port Arthur”, Neuve Chapelle.

The memorial inscription contains the words **“In ever loving memory of Cyril Alfred William Crichton, 2nd Lieut 3rd Battalion London Regiment, Royal Fusiliers who died here on Mars 10th 1915”** and concludes **“Let those who come after see to it that his name be not forgotten”**.





15th March 1915

Arthur to Marie Concetta Agius [begun 17th March 1915] – part 7:

... The German trench we were in wasn't at all bad. The dugouts were very good and well built with wooden floors and all had furniture (tables, chairs, stores, crockery etc) looted from French farms. They also get a very good ration of cocoa that they left behind & which we enjoyed.

The trenches were full of war material & equipment, rifles, bayonets, ammunition and every kind of clothing... The sights up there baffle description – at any rate they are best not described for they were horrible. Thank God **Alfred** [Agius] and I came out unscathed...

17th March 1915

Arthur to Marie Concetta Agius [begun 17th March 1915] – part 8:

... Well Mummie dear we're back here resting now. We have received all kinds of congratulations – everyone is awfully bucked. Yesterday [16th] our divisional GOC inspected us and today [17th] our Corps Commander is going to.

It is now 12.10. **General Willcocks** has just inspected us and added more words of praise, e.g. “You have fought gloriously” ... “You have taken part in a first class charge”...



18th March 1915

Arthur to Marie Concetta Agius [begun 17th March 1915] – part 9:

... It is an extraordinary country here – very flat and the whole land is cut into squares by roads and brooks, not just a chessboard pattern, but every few fields, every farm is surrounded by water and often a country road, so that the country almost appears enclosed and the straight roads are few. Villages and farms abound, they say this is the richest farming country in Europe. The first few days of spring are upon us, the sun is beginning to shine, the birds to sing.

How I have grown to hate those Germans. There is something horribly incongruous in the music of the lark and an 8 inch gun. The peace of this country must be wonderful, it seems right out of things. Then one comes up hard against ruin and blood and mutilated limbs, dead cattle stinking in the fields, and desolate homes, showing a fragment of torn wallpaper to the air, or in a dung heap a sewing machine, a baby's pram...

19th March 1915

Arthur to Marie Concetta Agius [begun 17th March 1915] – part 10:

... It doesn't do to dwell on these things. The mind instinctively tries to shut out the horrid memories, but it is impossible to forget, even in prayer, though in prayer alone can one find peace.

Oh, well, Mummie dear, I mustn't horrify you, but we must wipe these Germans off the face of the earth, this is indeed a crusade we are engaged in...

20th March 1915

Arthur to Marie Concetta Agius [begun 17th March 1915] – part 11:

... I love to get all your dear news. God bless you and the dear **Pater**. I hope things are going well now, please God. I pray for you always. Remember me to all at home. I wish I could get home again to see you all.

Well, **Mummie**, au revoir, and heaps of love, Cheeroh,

Arthur

21st March 1915

Arthur to Marie Concetta Agius [begun 17th March 1915] – a final PS:

Dear **Mummie**, could you please get me a knife, fork and spoon if possible a combination one, also some Colgate's tooth paste, please. Just received a parcel, cake, tobacco, handkerchiefs, rosary. Thanks awfully,

A.

31st March 1915:

Notes by Arthur on the reverse of a Pullman Company "Passengers Check" :

Lieut. A.J. Agius, coming home on leave. Wednesday , March 31st 1915.

Left MERVILLE in a Hospital Train, 1.30

Arr. BOULOGNE 8 (Tuesday).

Left by S.S. ONWARD 10.30

Arr Victoria 2.53

31st March 1915

Telegram from Arthur to Dollie Noel from Folkestone

To: Ms Noel 45 Compayne Gdns

Text: Due Victoria 3 this
afternoon, Arthur