

1st May 1915

A quiet night in the trench; Arthur thanks God for his survival after a terrible daylight bombardment; thankfully the casualties are relatively light and an attack did not follow the shelling.

Arthur to Dollie

in my dug-out, Saturday 6.50 pm.

... Thanks awfully for your dear letter of Tuesday which came up last night with the ration party. I was pleased to get it dear.

To-day we have had an awful experience. I want you to say an extra prayer & thank God that I am alive. Last night was very quiet. I was pretty busy making gun positions. This morning I got up about 3.15 & went round to visit my guns. I went down to the right first & had a cup of cocoa with **Molesworth** of the 2/8th who is in charge of this bit of trench.

We had scarcely drunk our cocoa when a big German high explosive shell came over. As it was still whistling in the air, three more followed. It was just about 4am – a very fine morning. The Germans began a terrible bombardment of our bit of the line & that held by the Leicesters on our right. It lasted between $\frac{3}{4}$ hour & one hour & I honestly admit I was frightened. After about 20 minutes our guns began to reply & our aeroplanes came up. We lay as doggo as we could crouched up against the parapet. I had a lucky escape for I had only just changed my position a bit farther up the trench when my original position was blown in by a high explosive. We all thought that we were in for an attack but nothing came of it DG.

Since then we have been shelled a bit but nothing very bad & this afternoon has been quite calm comparatively. We have been pretty fairly busy, improving the trench & I have a lot to do to-night.

Our casualties this morning were extraordinarily few. There were about a dozen wounded. The Leicesters lost one officer & two men killed & about 18 wounded. I sha'n't be very sorry to be relieved, little darling, though the men were rather bucked on the whole.

Well, darling, here are the ration party, so I must hurry to a close. You'll understand I'm sure won't you little darling...

2nd May 1915

Arthur's birthday cake arrives from Dollie; Arthur calms her fear about the battalion being at Ypres; no news of Gerald Pulman; the sound of fierce gunfire on the wind; a request for help from the Ladies Association.

Arthur to Dollie

in my dug-out, 5.30 pm Sunday

... I've a lot of things to thank you for to-day. First for two dear letters of Wednesday & Thursday, also a priceless cake (from a dear little soul called "Dollie") which have arrived safely. Thanks awfully dear. I can never thank you enough for your thoughtfulness & your generosity. I also want to thank you in advance for what you write to say that you have got for me. You darling little soul, you are a dear thoughtful little comrade – God bless you.

So let me answer your letters darling. As I told you, I found an excuse to go to **Harry's** grave again the other night. I kept a wee bit of the heather in the mauve paper. The ribbon came off my Easter egg.

I have not heard any further, dear about young **Gerald Pulman**. The battalion are back in reserve & so I get little or no "local" news. As of course you know by now, dear, we are not at Ypres DG. So you're not to worry, darling.

There is a very fierce cannonade going on up north somewhere. The guns have been rumbling for over an hour. We can just hear the dull thunder – the wind is blowing from that direction...

To-day has been very quiet, really. I had very little sleep last night as I was busy working until 1.30. I slept until 2.45, up at 3. However I have had a couple of hours sleep this afternoon. This morning I had a shave & wash. They shelled us a bit with the "pimpsqueak" but it did no harm, beyond breaking in the parapet in one place. (I'm afraid dear that my pen is running dry). Tonight I shall be busy working again, I expect (pen dry!) [*Arthur continues in pencil*]

It has turned quite cold tonight, darling. Luckily I've an abundance of warm clothing. Well darling I think that that is all. It's awfully hard to write in a trench. I don't know why. One's letters seem to hang fire & that must make rotten reading, but you understand, dear, I'm sure & appreciate how things are. You must read a lot between the lines, darling & supply my deficiencies out of what you know I feel.

I want you to give my love to your **Mater** dear & to thank **Evie** for his good wishes. Remember me to all & ask **Amy** after **Dudley** [*Dollie's young nephew*] will you please little girl...

PS: ... Darling I just want to ask you to do a favour for me please. One of my men **Pte House** has had trouble at home. His wife & children are ill and he is very upset. I wish you'd ask **Daisy** to try and do something for them at the Ladies Association. He is an awfully good fellow and an ex-sailor. Thanks in advance & God bless you dear.

3rd May 1915

A favourably dark night yesterday for the working parties so Arthur held off firing his machine guns; a cold but bright day; inspection of the line by the General and Brigade Major; an uncertain night ahead as the British guns intend to fire on the front line; Arthur needs some more tobacco.

Arthur to Dollie

in my dug-out , Monday 5.30pm

... So another day has come & gone, another 24 hours nearer to our union once more. How I long and pray for that happy day dear. To-day has been pretty peaceful as yet, but to-night at 6.30 our gunners are going to shell the German front line. I expect that we'll be pretty heavily shelled back. However, there's no use looking on the dark side.

Last night I intended to fire – but the night was very dark so our working parties were out most of the time. Accordingly I couldn't fire. I turned in fairly early slept until about 1, then on again until 3. It was bitterly cold last night. Luckily **Sammy** sent me up an extra blanket. I had lent it to him when I was relieved in the Rue du Bois trenches. But there was a cold wind & it was very chilly when I got up at 3. I went round my guns in the usual course of events & then had a cup of chocolate & some toast with **Chesney** – a Captain of the 2/8th – who holds the left part of the line. I turned in again about 5 & slept until 8, when I had brekker.

The General & **Stewart**, the Brigade Major, came round this morning & I went down my bit of the line with them. For the rest of the day we have not been doing much – odd jobs here and there. **Molesworth** and his Company are going back into the support trenches to-night & **Chesney** & his Company to-morrow night.

To-day the weather has continued cold, though the sun has been out most of the time & it is extraordinary the difference a wind makes on the atmosphere, dear. You see, dear heart, we have little news. I sha'n't be sorry to get back out of fire for a bit. With the exception of 2 days I have been in since the 19th – 15 days.

I am longing to be with you once again, dear little soul. I just love to hold you in my thoughts, then I am happy...Please give my love to your **Mater**, darling & remember me to **Evie**, **Marjorie** & all. Was **Rosa** [Pulman] pleased to get the sketch?

I've got such a lot of letters to write, but it's awfully difficult in a trench dear. I'm afraid my letters must be disconnected. One has always to be on the alert at a second's notice. One is almost afraid to snatch an hour or two for sleep. So you must forgive much, won't you dear...

... Darling, more trouble! Would you please order me ¼ lb tobacco. Fryers Mixture Original Cut...

4th May 1915

A welcome parcel and a photo of Dollie; Arthur's thoughts are all awirl with the idea they may be married some day; a wet night and muddy morning in the trenches, followed by scorching heat and a thunderstorm; the British bombardment last night produced no return fire by the enemy; no news of when Arthur and the machine guns will be relieved.

Arthur to Dollie

in my dug-out, Tuesday afternoon 5.15

... More & more to thank you for – I don't know how to express my gratitude, you are a darling. First for the card-case which is priceless! & in full use. I'm trying all your dear photos in it. At present there is one of you standing outside **Rosa's** [Pulman] door at Imtarfa [*Malta*], do you remember? When was the photo taken that you put in, dear. I can't recognise the place.

With the card-case came the air-pillow. That has already proved awfully welcome, some sweets and **Harry's** flea-bag [Officers sleeping bag]. You are a generous little personage dear. Much too generous. It seems impossible to put a stop to your generosity, you darling little rogue. God bless your dear heart...

Thanks ever so much, dear, for your letter of Friday. You wrote something about marriage (a propos of **Elsie & Clive**) that turned my head awirl & made my heart beat faster – when (you said) “the **Mater** wished that we were married”. The mere thought of you & I as real husband & real little wife fills me with a supreme ecstasy. Jove, how I wish we were...

I have been awfully concerned darling to hear that you hav'n't been altogether yourself. I hate to think of you as otherwise than perfectly well & happy. I do hope you really are all right again. Do take care of yourself, little girl, please. I pray that by now you are absolutely fit again.

... The weather also has broken. Last night it rained. I did some work, but turned in fairly early – about 10. I awoke at 2 & 3 but didn't turn out until 5. It was a beastly morning, drizzling & the trench very slippery & up to one's ankles in mud & water. However later on in the morning it cleared & today has been scorching hot, which helped to dry things up a bit. However, as luck would have it, it began to thunder about an hour ago & we are at the tail end of a thunderstorm – real summer weather. It is very hot & moist & raining hard.

We have had quite a quiet day today, darling DG. Last night about 6.30 our big guns shelled the German trenches to our left & right, so when it grew dark I fired some rounds from one of my guns. We expected them to retaliate but they didn't DG. I am awfully fit DG. No news yet of our being relieved. I'm afraid too, that I have no battalion news. They are still back in reserve. No news either I'm afraid of **Gerald Pulman**, but we may take it for granted that no news is good news. If it was bad I should have heard...

7th May 1915

Back at last in Billets [Croix Barbie] after a hot, wet and muddy time of it; Arthur's account of leaving the trench after well over two weeks on the machine guns; the relief officer and troops cause him needless trouble; prior warning of another British attack on the front [battle of Aubers Ridge]; an exhortation to Dollie to keep a stiff upper lip.

Arthur to Dollie

in a billet, Friday 10 am

... Well darling, it is now 2.20. We have just had lunch. As you see from my heading we are back in a billet. We reached here – a place called Croix Barbie – at 4am yesterday morning. Wednesday night (Tuesday night & Wed. morning) was rather wet so the trenches were in a beastly state, ankle deep in mud, varied by pools of water. It was a very moist humid day.

In the morning we got news that we were going to be relieved. The relieving officer came up in the morning and I shewed him round. He wasn't sure of his way back to the HQ of our section of line where the 2/8 Ghurkas were. So I trudged back with him – about 1100 yards of muddy trench. It was hot. I had lunch there, darling, with **Molesworth** & then tramped back.

I spent the remainder of the afternoon (which wasn't much) getting everything ready. I had a meal at 6.30 & moved to Section HQ at 7.45, got there about 8.30. We waited until about half-past nine for our reliefs to come up, then a weary way back to the trench. The new men hav'n't been in a trench before & kept on getting lost. It was an awful slow business & a very hot damp night. Finally we got our reliefs through & I got my guns & impedimenta to section HQ. Next thing was to find our limbers. After a lot of searching they were found & we loaded up & set off, though we hadn't far to go DG. it was just on 4am before we were in. I was tired.

Well darling, we are in for a big thing again, but this time instead of being in front we are at the other end & in reserve. No-one knows when it is to be but most probably to-morrow. At any rate we have been very busy these last two days & everything is practically ready.

You are not to worry. That sounds silly, doesn't it, darling mine. You know what I mean. Everything will be well DV. I'll try to get you news as early & as often as I can. So pray hard, little girl, for strength. May God comfort you. I expect that by the time you read this we shall be through D.V. and safe again from risk...

And now little sweetheart au revoir. Keep a stiff upper lip, though I know you will, for your pluck against the dull things of life is wonderful. Try & bear with hardness & unkindness that you may meet. It is hard, how I know, it's hard but let's conquer this together dear. I am with you at your side always, helping you all I can – as I love to think you are too...

8th May 1915

An agonising delay - waiting in billets - for the weather to improve before moving up to reserve trenches; a meeting with the brothers before action begins – both are well; spring beauty and stark, dead trees; reassurances to Dollie that they are not in the front line.

Arthur to Dollie

in billets, 5pm Satur.

... You see we are still in billets, waiting. But we have not much longer to wait, for in the catch-phrase “To-night’s the Night”, we move into our battle-stations some time to-night, and by this time to-morrow, God willing, we shall be on our way to Lille. Everyone is a little bit nervy dear. To-morrow’s show promises to be pretty big.

We expected it to be to-day but last night it commenced to drizzle, so apparently, it was postponed. We turned in pretty early after dinner. We have little beside what we stand up in, just a burberry & spare food, in addition to our fighting gear. However, I slept well. This morning we had breakfast at 9.30. Afterward I went up to see the boys. They are both quite well, dear. They were busy improving the newly dug trenches in which they are to be just up the road here & a long way back from the front – nearly 3 miles. I stayed with **Edgar** [Agius] most of the morning & had lunch with him.

After lunch darling I came back here. There was a certain amount to be done. We had tea at half past four. The weather is much more pleasant to-day. It is cooler & healthier – bright sun & cool breeze. The country is looking ripping in its new green. Up in front most of the trees are dead but back here they are all wonderfully green – no harsh silhouette but a beautiful softness that seems almost to merge into the sky.

It is now half past 6 dear – a ripping evening. How I wish we could spend it together, just you and I, perfectly happy in each other’s company. I wonder what you’re doing at home now & where you are, little comrade. It seems years since I was with you. The time is so heavy when I am away from you, dear heart. May we be soon re-united.

We move from here to-night dear, or rather to-morrow morning at 3am. Brrr. Keep a stout heart, little girl. I shall be all right D.V. & will get news off to you as soon as I can. The preparations are wonderful, we’re a divisional reserve. We are not in the front line this time - everyone is pretty sanguine.



A current view of Aubers Ridge

10th May 1915

Arthur sends a Field Service Post Card to Dollie. He is well and has received her letter dated Thursday 6th May. He hopes to write soon.

12th May 1915

Following the disastrous attack on Sunday 9th, Arthur is employed in holding the Front line; he longs for a bath!

Arthur to Dollie

6.30pm, Wed

... Just a line in awful haste. I've received all your dear letters – many thanks and a ... parcel. God bless your heart. I must answer all your news later. I am awfully busy. The whole of the First Army made an attack on Sunday. Our Corps got very badly punished. Thank God, our fellows weren't in it. Meanwhile we have just been holding the line. We came in on Sunday night. I've spent the time since then building & rebuilding gun positions according to 4 different schemes. Two more plans are in the wind now & I am very busy – it's awfully hot.

There's no need to worry dear heart. Apparently if the push is going to be made, we shall be the last troops called upon.

Meanwhile I'm feeling awfully dirty – haven't had a wash since Saturday or a bath since I left England! It's horrid. I'm longing for time to write you a decent letter too... So cheero – a thousand kisses & all my love.

13th May 1915

Living under continuous shell fire since Sunday; brothers Edgar and Arthur are safe with Arthur for the moment; devastating enemy machine gun fire; a no holes barred account of the horrendous state of the trenches - full of mud, blood and the dead; total casualties in the Division number some 2000 so far.

Arthur to Dollie

Thursday, 5.40 pm.

Thanks awfully for a ... letter & parcel. I got them both last night – you are a priceless darling. I utterly despair of putting an end to your generosity. I have now your dear letters up to Sunday 9th. I don't know when I shall be able to answer them – for I think I'd better give you my news first. The weather has been very fine DG except to-day. I began to drizzle last night & it is now rotten! However.

Last Sunday night was chosen for a general move. We left Croix Barbee at 1.45 in the night of Saturday & marched carrying our guns to a reserve trench near the Rue des Berceaux, very close to where it was at the beginning of Neuve Chapelle. We got there about 5. I went down to Brigade HQ to report our arrival.

At 5 o'clock dear our guns began the fight. The shelling which then began has scarcely ceased. At present we are indulging in a fierce bombardment of the German line 100 yards away. It has been going on all the afternoon, darling. The noise & concussion of the air is awful. Writing is a bit difficult. I am sitting with **Edgar** [Agius] in his dug-out.

... Our first attack in front here (at the Orchard) could not be pressed, owing to the large number of enemy machine guns. A second attack was launched about 4, but likewise without success. On our left the 4th Corps got in but on our right the 1st Corps as ourselves were hung up.

We spent the day back in our reserve trench. The Battalion had been moved up from behind us into some support trenches. Our brigade did not come into action. About 6, we of the machine guns moved up into the front line to hold it. The rest of the brigade followed. It was like an inferno, darling. The line we had to occupy was the one in front of the Orchard & 96 Piccadilly. We struggled on up communication trenches, packed with people going up, people going out & crowds of wounded. We didn't get into the trench till about 9. The trench was in an awful state – lined with dead in front, piled inside with wounded & equipment mud & blood. Some of the wounds were horrible.

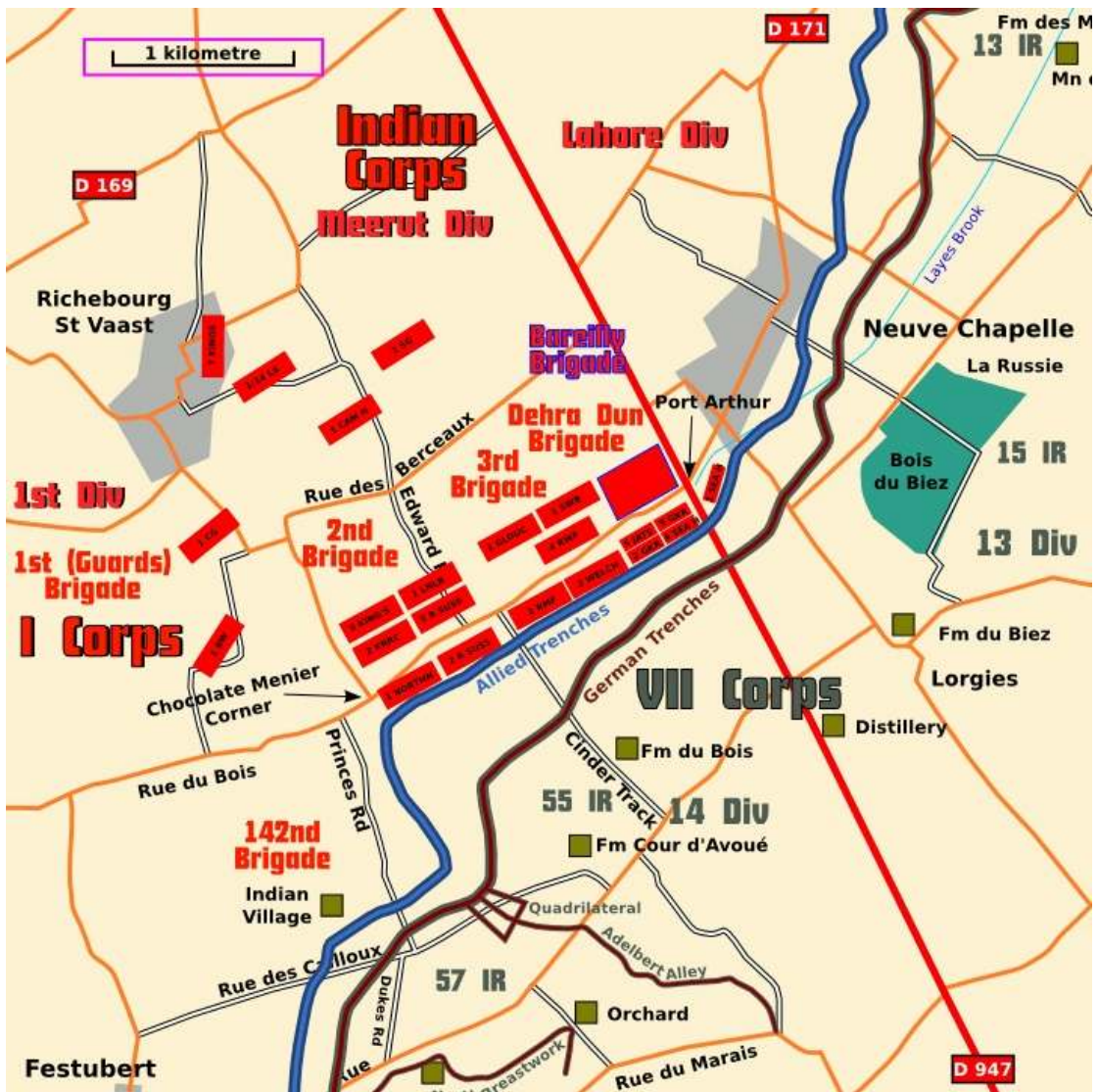
However I managed to struggle through & get my guns in position. Since then I have had to move them 4 or 5 times, making new emplacements each time. We have not had a minute's peace scarcely darling little soul. All day the guns have been crashing. At night we are continually on the alert, to prevent the enemy from repairing the gaps in his parapet, which means they have to be kept under machine gun fire on & off all night.

I got a letter from **Rosa** [Pulman] with some lily of the valley & ribbon for **Harry**'s cross which I don't think has arrived yet. Of course it may be with our 1st Line Transport until things are quiet.

At present, **Alfred & Edgar** are both up here with me. They have been moved backwards & forwards several times & are going back again to-night. No however news yet as to my movements.

The Battalion lost about 50 the other day chiefly wounded. Some of the regiments in the attack lost 700, 400, 300 & several 100 – 150. Total casualties in our division about 2000 I think...

Well, darling mine, I'm afraid I shall have to stop to catch the ration party. God bless you & keep you. Remember me to all. I'll send **Rosa**'s letters as soon as I've been able to answer them...





15th May 1915

Arthur sends Dollie a Field Service Post Card dated 15th May 1915 (post-marked 18th May 1915). He lets Dollie know that he has received her latest letter and parcel.

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

I am quite well. ✓

I have been admitted into hospital
{ *wie* } *and am going on well*
{ *wounded* } *and hope to be discharged soon.*

I am being sent down to the base.

I have received your { *letter dated* _____
 { *telegram* " _____
 { *parcel* " _____

Letter follows at first opportunity. ▼

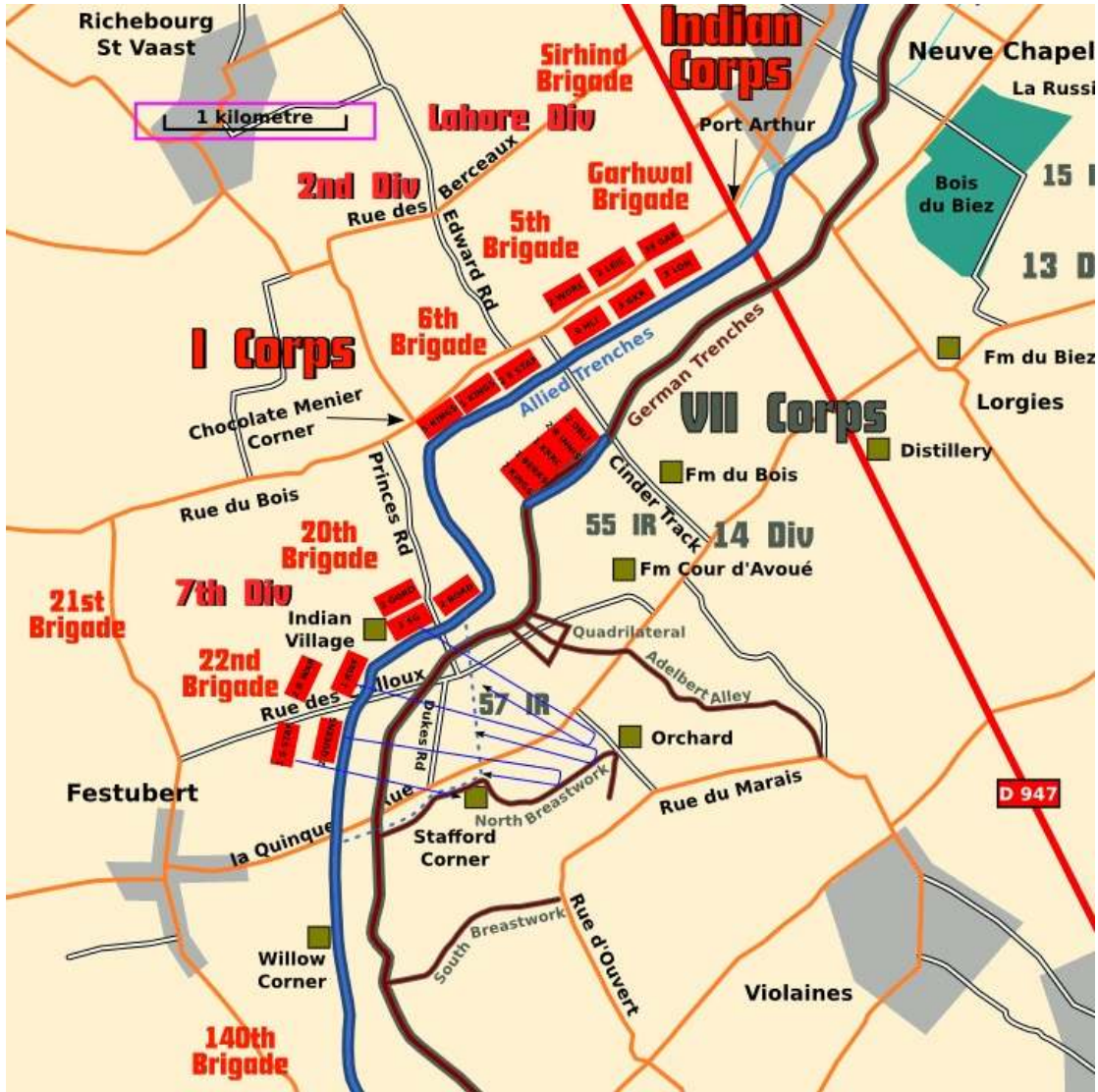
I have received no letter from you
{ *lately.*
{ *for a long time.*

Signature }
only. } *Arthur.*

Date 15.5.15

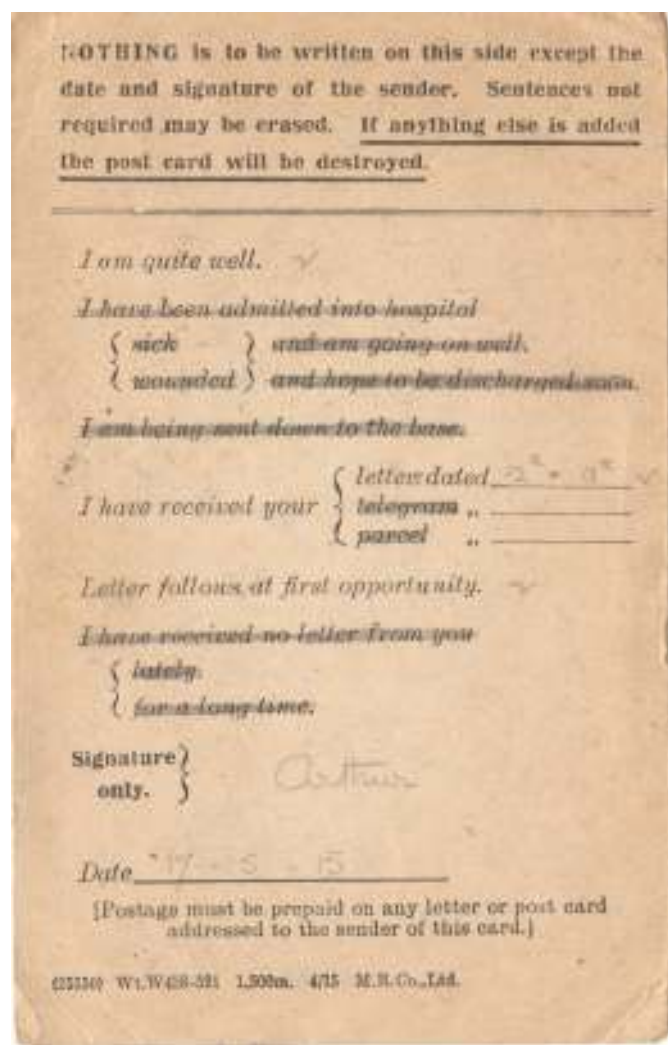
[Postage must be prepaid on any letter or post card addressed to the sender of this card.]

©1915 W. W. & S. 1, 300m, 4/11 M.R. Co., Ltd.



17th May 1915

Arthur sends Dollie a Field Service Post Card dated 17th May 1915 (post-marked 19th May 1915). He lets Dollie know that he has received her letters dated 12th & 13th [May].



19th May 1915

A detailed report of the last 10 days of fighting; a pretty rotten time for all; Alfred is safe despite going over the parapet twice with his men; Edgar was wounded on 16th and should be on his way home now; Arthur is tired of being shelled; a narrow squeak or two; the cross has arrived for friend Harry Pulman's grave.

Arthur to Dollie

Wednesday, 11.45 am.

... At last an opportunity of writing to you dear & to thank you for all your dear and welcome letters. We have had a pretty stiff time of it, sweetheart. For after being continuously in the trenches from the 19th of April we have more or less been fighting since May 9th. The attack that was made that morning was not pressed, but was repeated in the afternoon by another brigade. This attack met with the same fate as the earlier one. Our casualties were very heavy.

Luckily our brigade was in reserve & so was not called on to attack. We sat in reserve trenches until evening when we moved into the front line. I have already written about that dear & of the confusion of getting in. We stayed in those trenches until 15th, & had a pretty rotten time of it, for we had to keep on building new gun positions & moving from one to another. In addition our guns bombarded the enemy's line continuously day & night; the enemy replied & we had shells coming from both sides in the trench, a lot of ours falling short.

McIntyre the Machine Gun Officer of the Leicesters & I had a narrow squeak once. Two German field gun shells pitched about 5 yards away from us & blew me over & over into a little dugout. Not hurt DG.

On the night of the 15th another attack took place, by the whole of the 1st Army. Our brigade led the attack of the Indian Corps. The Leicesters & Garhwals led off at 11.30pm. I was with the Leicesters but didn't leave the trench as they couldn't get on. The attack was repeated at 3.15am in daylight by the 2 / 3 Ghurkas & our battalion, A & B Companies. This likewise was unable to get on.

Alfred they say was fine. He went out over the parapet twice with his Company & got back without a scratch. On our right our fellows got in & are still pushing forwards. We have given the enemy a nasty knock.

The rest of Sunday dear we spent in the trenches. The battalion had a few men up where I was in the front line, the remainder were back in support. On that day **Edgar** was wounded – I didn't see him – but it is only a slight wound, they say, a shrapnel bullet in the chin. Lucky beggar!

On Sunday night we got in our wounded from in front, including **Hammerton**, a subaltern of A Company, wounded in the thigh. That night we were relieved & came back to Croix Barbee.

Next day however I went up again with **Ryall** of the 2 / 8 Ghurkas – had an awful journey for we were shelled all the way up. I got up into the support trenches

safely however darling DG. While there however, a German High explosive shell burst 4 or 5 yards off me; gave me an awful shock. The 3 men nearest me got a fright too & one is temporarily blind.

Ryall took 3 guns up into the front line. I stayed in support with 2. Next day as I wasn't wanted, I got orders to come back – that's yesterday - & I am here now at Croix Barbee, but with every prospect of going up again in the immediate future. For this move of ours is apparently a big push.

I am very well DG but a bit tired of being shelled. The Germans have shelled us for about 10 days now. A lot of them have run over & surrendered, absolutely demoralised. They are Bavarians apparently somewhere in this neighbourhood. But I dare say, little darling, that you have read about our advance in the papers.

The weather unfortunately has been very unpleasant the last day or two – raining & cold & very muddy. Thank God I am very fit & so is **Alfred. Edgar** too will be all right, but he is in luck to get away. For the rest dear, I'm glad to hear that things are better with you & that **Elsie** is coming in **Marjorie's** place.

I got the cross for poor **Harry's** grave. At least I found it here when I came. I'll get up on the first opportunity & put it up & then I'll write & let dear **Rosa** know.

I feel an awful pig for not having written to you dear heart, or indeed to anyone lately, but things have been moving so fast, we've been on the go the whole time. I got a parcel from **Joe** [Agius] & **Maggie** the other day, cake, chocolate & sweets – very welcome.

Well darling, how are you getting on? Not feeling very grand I suppose these few days. Buck up, little girl ...

21st May 1915

Arthur is now in charge of “D” Company after a difference of opinion with the Brigade Machine Gun Officer; waiting in muddy reserve trenches to move forward again; a request for more writing paper, copying pencils and a decent pen knife.

Arthur to Dollie

in a dugout, 6pm, Friday

... Thanks awfully for your dear letters of the 16th & 17th which arrived safely, thank heaven. I do love to hear from you, little comrade, your letters help so much.

I've a certain amount of news for you dear. I've been given charge of D Company in place of **Harold Moore & Taylor** has been sent to take charge of the machine guns. It is rather difficult to describe how this has happened or how I feel on the subject.

Lodwick who is the Brigade Machine Gun Officer has “had a down” on me for some time past. If ever there was fault to be found, it was my fault. The nervous strain of the past ten days precipitated matters & finally Lodwick applied through the Brigade to have **Sutcliffe** in my place. The **C.O.** when he heard this went to the **General** & did the straight thing by me & told the **General** that he had known me for years & that if there was any blame, it was at least as much as **Lodwick's**.

However things weren't tolerable in these circumstances, so the **C.O.** although having me back, has been awfully decent & told me repeatedly that he has every confidence in me & that I was to have charge of D Coy. He has been very decent ever since as indeed has everyone in the regiment. Still I am feeling a bit sore that one man's animosity – and he a comparative stranger – should balance against the confidence of those with whom I have lived for years & should rob me of the fruits of 3 years work.

However, dear, it can't be helped & I have been awfully touched to feel that everyone who knows me is for me & that I have been given charge of D Company. A draft arrived the other day, so my company is now 108 strong. I have **Wilcox** & a fellow called **Rice** under me. **Jones** is back – he is in **Rochford's** company.

The battalion has moved up & is holding part of the line – an old familiar bit, being the purlieu of the Orchard & 96 Piccadilly. At present **Alfred** & I are in the Orchard – about 60 yards back from the front line, but I move up tonight to relieve **Rochford**. But I don't think we'll be up long dear. I hear rumours of our going right back on Sunday. Pray Heaven its true. I am awfully fit but feel I'd like a wash and a change – but we all feel rather like that...

Affairs are going well for us here & on our immediate right we are giving the Germans a bit of a dig in the ribs. We have captured a lot of prisoners – they seem very demoralised. Unfortunately the weather has been very overcast & wet; in this country a few minutes rain turns the country into a sea of mud, trenches, dug-outs & shell holes rapidly turn into miniature rivers & lakes & it is very difficult to keep

things dry or clean. This evening it has cleared up rather & if to-morrow proves fine we should be dry again.

I've been thinking a lot about the photo, dear girl. I've forgotten how many he took of me. So if you write & say the number, I'll ask the **Mater** how much he charges & have some more done. What do you think darling?

Well, dear little wife-to-be I think that's about all my news. The French have been gunning all day away on our right, South of La Bassee. I should be awfully grateful for some more notepaper darling, about this size, if you could get me some, & some copying ink pencils. Also please a penknife – a good one – with a tin opener. Don't mind if it is a bit dear - only this time you **must** let me pay, promise me, little darling. Otherwise I shall never be able to ask for things... Remember me to all, dear, your **Mater, Evie, Rosa, Elsie** & all. Take care of yourself ...

23rd May 1915

Arthur is glad to hear they are going back to reserve trenches tonight after some nasty clearing up work; the present of a pipe from brother Joe; Alfred has a fever; description of flooding after stormy weather.

Arthur to Dollie

in my dugout, Whit Sunday 5pm

As you see, I am still up & we are still without news of a relief dear. Last night we were pretty busy repairing the trench, collecting rifles from in front, burying dead &c. As the night drew on, the moon gradually grew shadowed, a great white cloud rolled slowly up from the South against the wind until the whole sky was overcast. Behind it the lightning flashed repeatedly. As the cloud overhung us, the rain began quietly yet insisntently – it quickly turned into a regular downpour – the thunder crashed above us. Though it only lasted about half an hour, it flooded the bottom of the trench & prevented further work, except drainage.

Since the storm, however, darling the weather has been glorious. It is a shame to have to spend it here away from you. I have slept most of to-day I'm afraid – French life when there's nothing on, is most indolent.

Last night **Alfred** gave me a pipe that **Joe** apparently sent out for my birthday [27th April]... **Alfred**, I'm sorry to say, little girl, has "gone sick" to-day, with a bit of a temperature but it's nothing much & he'll be back soon DV.

There is very little news, I'm afraid dear. One's routine is much the same. At 7.30 in the evening we "stand to" for an hour. It is the hour of dusk, when it is getting too dark to see well, and yet us too light to send out patrols.

At 8.30 the night sentries come on. We officers have something to eat & then to work. I generally keep awake all night until we "stand to" again at 2.30. We have something to drink hot & then I sleep from about 4 till 6. At 6 I have to send in a report and another at 8. After that breakfast. Nothing really for the rest of the day except to clear up & do such work as is possible in the trench. Lunch at 1, tea at 4.30 & two more reports form the skeleton of the rest of the day.

Well, dear, I've just heard that we are to go back into reserve trenches to-night being relieved by "A" Coy. So I'm going along in a minute for details...

24th May 1915

Relatively safe in reserve trenches and the weather has improved; time for some bird watching in the Orchard; musing on happier times and country walks with Dollie; cheery news of Edgar recovering at home but nothing new to report on Alfred's fever.

Arthur to Dollie

Whit Monday 5.45pm

Well, darling, another day has gone by. Thank heaven last night I received a dear letter from you. I am so sorry you're so anxious. If only I could get news to you at once, my sweetheart. I've felt so much closer to you to-day than ever before. God bless your brave little soul.

Let me give you my news first dear. Last night I was relieved by A Coy (**Johnnie Sutcliffe**). That is to say he has gone up into the front trenches & I've come back into some reserve trenches, just behind the Rue du Bois, known as the "Gridiron". We got settled down all right & had a sleep until about 9 this morning – though I'm afraid one's habits are difficult to break and I woke early about 5. For the rest of to-day we have just lazed. The weather has been perfectly glorious. It's an awful shame to have to spend it away from you. If I could only be with you I'd be perfectly happy.

We live in a little trench we three, **Wilcox, Rice** & myself, about 4 foot high in front. The back is open save where a wall of sandbags has been made. The top is roofed with corrugated iron, earth covered. So the part we sleep in is really a tunnel about 20 feet long 4 high & about 2 ½ broad. The trench is situated in an orchard. In a tree just in front of me there is a birds nest. I've been watching the birds come & go, a perfect picture framed by the blue of the sky & the young green of the leaves.

What a wonderful thing nature is. I think of the happy days we've spent together. Do you remember our ambitious schemes of country walks. How I'd plan & say yes we'll take the train to this point & then walk to that point via this route and so home... So we'd sally forth, but the day would be hot, or the footpath closed ... Please God, we'll spend far happier days in future.

To-night we're being relieved temporarily by the 2/3 Ghurkas & are going back to Croix Barbee, but only for a few days, perhaps only 3 or 4. We are going to live in trenches there – so it won't be much of a rest.

... I've heard news of **Edgar** from **Sammy**. Apparently his sister has been to see **Ed**. What a lucky chap he is to be home. Bid him cheero & good luck. I'm hoping to have news of **Alfred** soon. I don't think there's much wrong with him beyond a temperature. I don't think there's much news else, darling mine...

25th May 1915

Gruesome description of the death of a fellow machine gun officer; an account of their current billets at Croix Barbee; the priceless joy of finally (after nearly 2 months) having a bath and a shave; the delights of lying amidst undamaged trees and grass; night work ahead for Arthur and his men.

Arthur to Dollie

In an Orchard, 7pm

... I was pleased to get a letter from you this afternoon. You seem to be less worried too – thank heaven for that. Yes, it's quite true about **Mankelow**, poor chap. He had just gone to lie down in his dug-out when a "pipsqueak" entered it & carried most of his head off. He was a good fellow. I was very cut up about it.

As you see, I'm now back for a bit of a rest at Croix Barbee. We left the front last night about 8.45 & marched straight back here without casualty. We are still well in the shelling area so the men are living in a line of partially covered trenches & we are still on half an hour's notice. However.

When we got in last night we saw the men settled down, then turned into our billet. The **Col., Algy & Sammy** live down the road at H.Q. We – the other officers have a ripping little cottage, white-walled, red-roofed with long eaves, built in a square as all French farms are - a ripping orchard behind ... Each company has a room so **Wilcox, Rice & I** are together, sleeping on the floor, of course.

However to-day they brought us up our valises – so we've all had a priceless tub and a change. The first bath I've had since home at the beginning of April! What supreme joy! I feel a different being now, dear.

The weather is glorious – the country back here, ripping. The orchard I'm lying in is alas an orchard in name only, all the trees bar one or two have been cut down to afford a field of fire for the gunners. But the grass is green & cool after the heat of the day. The sun has just caught the straw-topped trenches in front of me, colouring them a dull gold. Beyond that a noble line of trees, thick foliaged, about the dim blue sky, flecked with bursting shells. The German "Archibalds" [*anti aircraft guns*] are trying for our aircraft.

To-night I am taking up a working party of 250 men at 9. I hope they don't keep us all night. To-morrow we start ordinary work. I want to get into Fosse to get some cash for the men. They hav'n't been paid for some time.

Thank God, dear, I'm feeling awfully fit. No news yet of a permanent or at any rate, a durable rest. But we are all thankful to have been able to get a wash.

Well, darling, I'm going to say au revoir until to-morrow. There are two or three things that require settling up to-night & we are having supper at 7.30 (it's now 7.26)...

May 26th 1915

Arthur and his working party repair a communicating trench at night; a busy day in the hot weather; a letter from brother Edgar; Alfred is still sick and now at Boulogne; the push continues at Festubert.

Arthur to Dollie

in billets, Wednesday even: 7.15 pm

... I was awfully pleased to get your letter of Sunday – thanks awfully. To-day has been a very busy day. It began last night (that's rather a bull, isn't it?). I had charge of a working party of 250 – nearly all the battalion with **Rice & Brady** under me. We paraded at a quarter to ten & marched a few hundred yards down the road to the R.E. store.

Here we loaded up with boards &c for the bottom of a trench & so on, under the guidance of a Pioneer Officer. We went down Edward Road, past Windy Corner, past a burning cottage & on to the Rue du Bois. Once on the Rue du Bois, we turned off to the right, down past the "Arcade" & over our old communicating trench into our old trench line.

Our objective was a communicating trench being made from this – our old line – to the German trench, captured a few days ago by the 2nd division. We passed up alongside this communicating trench – it was partially filled with water – until the head of our long column was at its top end. Then we halted, laid the boards down & came back. We got in soon after 1 this morning.

It was a wonderful, warm moonlight night – though our enjoyment was marred one or twice by shrapnel bursting over us in the open. However by God's grace we had no casualties.

We got in & slept till 7.50 this morning. Then up in a hurry, brekker & off to COs orders at 9. Back again & on parade till 11.

Various odd things till lunch. After that I went to see the Adjutant. He wanted OC Companies at 3, on to parade again at 4.30 till 5.30. More work again at 6. There is a great deal to do reorganising &c. So you see, dear, I'm kept pretty busy.

The weather is wonderfully fine – but equally hot. Much hotter than is pleasant! Our troops are still pushing on to the South of here, at Festubert. Canadians & the 2nd London Division are in now.

I was very pleased to get the news of **Edgar** – he wrote me a letter too & seems pretty fit. No news yet of **Alfred**. I hope he's getting on all right – he has got as far as Boulogne.

Still rumours of our going back, but alas! Nothing more than rumours. However, here's hoping...

27th May 1915

The normal routine of billets life; Arthur longs for a proper rest from trench life, especially after a few narrow shaves; a letter from brother Edgar recuperating back in England; still no news of Alfred; Arthur misses his brothers and muses on how lucky he is to be alive; a chair, a table - a tumble.

Arthur to Dollie

in billets, Thursday 6.10 pm

... Last night I turned in early. We were "inlying battalion" so we slept with our clothes on. This morning brekker about a quarter past eight. I had to see some NCOs I've promoted at 8.45 & then on to parade 9 – 11. This afternoon I sent the Company off bathing by platoons to a pool near here. Tea about 4.30. I've been clearing up old papers.

You see there is not much news. Our routine is reveille 5.30, short parade 6.30, parade again 9 – 11 & 4.30 – 5.30. The intervals are pretty well filled up with the thousand and one details that always require attention if the company machine is to work smoothly.

To-day, dear, the weather though fine, is ever so much cooler – there is a very fresh wind blowing. I am very fit DG. still feel I'd like to get back for a real rest – as indeed we all do – but when? The everlasting question.

To-night **Johnnie Sutcliffe** comes out of the Orchard – where he is in support to the 2/3 Ghurkas & **Lloyd** with B (**Alfred's**) Company takes his place.

I had a letter from **Ed** to-day. No news yet of **Alfred**. I miss the boys very much as I expect you'll realise – especially now when I am back in the battalion & if they were here we'd all be living together. But still we just grin and worry through. If we could only get some of our young bloods out here to do their whack. I've been at half-an-hours notice since April 10th - 48 days, of which I've spent about 34 in the trenches – including a heavy bombardment on May 1st, two or three attacks & a week's heavy shelling, not the usual daily shelling & sniping that one takes as a matter of course. God & Our Lady have been wonderfully good; I've had some awfully narrow shaves, but here I am DG. Very much alive & kicking, if a bit fretful. Still it's all in the days work & I'm not going to grumble.

I'm sitting in the centre courtyard of our little billet, writing on a table that consists of the upper part of a stable door on a tub! **Bobbie** is just near me, dear. He was trying to sit on a broken chair & send you his love when he fell over. He is very well.

Every moment I miss you more & more. All my time I think of you, my beloved at home, of the happy days we have spent, of the happier ones, please God, that we shall spend together...

29th May 1915

A concert party in a local field – making the most of a lovely spring evening; cycling into Fosse for the payroll – the men haven't been paid since April 7th; a parcel from No3; the boys are home and Arthur, understandably envious, just longs to see Dollie.

Arthur to Dollie

in billets, Saturday even. 6.25 pm

... Let me give you my news, dear comrade. Yesterday the weather continued cool. We followed our usual round. Both the **C.O. & Algy** came round while we were on parade in the morning, in rather jovial mood. In the afternoon we paraded again 4.30 – 5.30. At 6 we had an impromptu concert in a field at the back, organised by **Tea Leaves** & one of my Serjeants. Lot of quite good local talent, both of ours & the Leicesters. We sat out there until half-past eight, dear, when we came in to mess. It was a wonderfully picturesque evening. Just a spring evening with a cold touch in the air, the circle of men in all attitudes with the officers in a group on one side, in the middle a soldier singing, comic or tragic, both eagerly appreciated. Around the cool green grass & thick-foliaged orchards; no harsh shadows, but every colour merging in the soft light of the sunset. Then above a long drone – one of our monoplanes, out for a last look before dark & its resting place.

Today has been another glorious day. How I grudge these days apart from you, little queen. I didn't go on parade to-day for I bicycled into Fosse to draw pay for my company – they hav'n't had any since April 7th; though they don't really need it, for they've nothing to spend it on. It was a perfect morning – the countryside was glorious – though flat – it's an awfully pretty country. A real "beau pays" – wonderfully fertile & though alas much has been left untilled, wonderfully green. An abundance of trees & hedgerows prevails. Water too though the ditches have shrunk from 4 & 5 feet broad to only a foot, and everywhere red roofs & white walls peeping out of the green.

I reached Fosse about 11 – the roads are bad for bicycling! Drew the pay all right – 2500 francs – also some money for **Tea Leaves & Johnnie Sutcliffe**, & rode back. I stopped outside where **Lyell, Ball & Tabor** are billeted & had some lemonade there. They were all very cheery & pleased to see me. The atmosphere there has changed since **Lodwick's** departure to hospital with a bad toe! I got back here about 12.15, we had lunch at 1, & I paid off at 4.30. Then tea & voila.

They started to shell the cross roads here again, but none very near us. We are inlying battalion again to-night, dear. To-morrow being Sunday, I hope to get two or three letters off. I had a parcel from home to-day, foodstuffs & a pair of goggles – very compact and useful (also a pair for **Alfred**), very much appreciated. We'd love to see a magazine out here, the *Wide World & Strand*, for example – any distraction. I must write home and ask them.

Our separation seems to grow more unendurable day by day. It's awfully hard not to complain. I envy the boys being back home. I'd just give anything to be with you, little wife-to-be. God bless you and keep you...



3rd (City of London) Battalion, The London Regiment (Royal Fusiliers).

Lieutenant Arthur J. P. Agius to be temporary Captain. Dated 30th April, 1915.

Henry Newbolt Lyster to be Second Lieutenant. Dated 26th May, 1915.

David Lewis to be Second Lieutenant. Dated 29th May, 1915.

30th May 1915

Arthur fears his tobacco may have been “lost” in the post; Arthur has been promoted to temporary Captain; a photo call at HQ for the surviving Officers of the 3rd Londons; rumours of a weeks rest further back in the lines before moving up to the front again.

Arthur to Dollie

in billets, Sunday 4 pm

... Thanks most awfully for your dear letter of Thursday and a parcel, especially many thanks for the pencils, which are everything I required & more, so much so that I couldn't refrain from using one to write with. I'm glad to hear you're fit and well, little sweetheart but I can't understand how it is you have no news of me. I hope by now that you've had my letters.

The parcel was awfully useful, but I'm afraid that the last one hasn't turned up yet. I am very sick about it – but hope that I'll see it soon. I think perhaps, dear heart, that it would be wiser not to write the contents on the outside, at any rate when it is tobacco, unless the Post Office insist, but to put a list inside that I may check it. Perhaps it will be less of an “inducement” or “temptation” to any one handling it on the way! The postal service is pretty good but “accidents” have been known to happen. However, dear, I'm hoping that in this case your parcel has only been “delayed temporarily”.

You generous little darling, of course I understand about the knife. You are a ripping helpmate. I am awfully grateful! I had a letter to-day from the **Mater**, & also roped in a parcel addressed to **Alfred** that luckily had some “baccy” in it – so I am very well off just now!

I saw in the Gazette to-day that I had been promoted temporary Captain with date April 30th - fearful buck, eh!

To-day is another glorious day. But unfortunately we are “inlying battalion” at quarter of an hours notice & it is impossible to get to church for miles. So I sat outside and read the Mass. Then we went to HQ & had a photo taken of the original members of the 3rd – **C.O., Algy, Sammy, Rochford, Johnnie Sutcliffe, Bobbie Page** & myself. Poor old 3rd! What gaps there are. You may wonder how we managed to get hold of a camera – apparently now every **C.O.** is allowed one, no-one else. At present the **C.O.** is lame – a splinter of wood or thorn in his heel. I am awfully fit myself DG.

Stronger rumours of our move back, dear, but only for a week & not further than Vieille Chapelle! Then up again to hold & improve some German trenches that the 2nd Division took opposite the “Ritz”. However half a loaf is better than [no] bread & I'm out for all the rest I can, dear.

It is now ten past five, dear. I've just had tea and am now sitting on a blanket in front of our little cottage writing on a ration biscuit tin. The sun is shining, there is a little front garden before me, very green, but an awful lot of nettles & weeds have sprung up. Beyond is an evergreen hedge, then a little country road leading to Richebourg. Beyond that again to my right a priceless little orchard. The country is

very beautiful. I would we could only be together, my darling, to enjoy the spring sun & the “goodly things of earth”...

I want you dear to thank your **Mater** for her share of the parcel. We shall think of her as we devour it. Please remember me to all, sweet heart, **Rosa & Elsie, Evie**, all I know...