

DURHAM
AT **WAR**



LETTERS OF JOHN ENGLISH

Letters from Major John English, serving with 9th Battalion, Durham Light Infantry, to his wife

Letters

1 May – 31 May 1915

Durham County Record Office ref. D/DLI 7/1151/1-28



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Bertha dear,

Recd. May 3rd. F.P.O. market May 1911.

Please send the buff coloured draft to Lloyds Bank Ltd, and send a slip with it just the same as you would a cheque & make a note on the counterfoil of the slip as to what the draft is for, and keep the green coloured paper, put it among Holt's papers in first hole of top right hand drawer. Keep your telegram to me dearie for our book. Air planes over head all the time buzzing about another German.

The weather is simply perfect and we are all as dirty & sun burnt as you can the common road tramp on the roads in Durham. I am so longing for letters from you. I know they are coming but our A.S.C. broke down badly, & we could get no food to say nothing of letters but I have done very well all the same. We eat far too much at home. This is not my promised letter. Sent a p.c. this morning. A German & English Airplane overhead now.

Your loving husband
Jack

With Messrs. HOLT & CO'S Compliments,

44, Charing Cross, London, S.W. D/DLI 7/1151/1



1 May 1915 [postmark]

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Received May 3rd, Field Post Office mark May 1st

Berelio dear,

Please send the buff coloured draft to Lloyds Bank Ltd, and send a slip with it, just the same as you would a cheque and make a note on the counterfoil of the slip as to what the draft is for, and keep the green coloured paper, put it away with my papers in first hole of top right hand drawer. Keep your telegram to me dearie for our book. Airplanes over head all the time buzzing about mostly Germans. The weather is simply perfect and we are all as dirty and sunburnt as you can the common road tramp on the roads in Durham. I am so longing for letters from you, I know they are coming but our Army Service Corps broke down badly, and we could get no food to say nothing of letters but I have done very well all the same. We eat far too much at home. This is not my promised letter; I sent a postcard this morning. A German and English airplane overhead now.

Your loving husband,

Jock

~~~~~

**2 May 1915 (1)**

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My darling wife,

I have just received your long letter and very, very welcome it was. I have nothing, I think, to reply to in it as I have told you of all my days but have not mentioned the names of places. We are allowed to mention the places after a week and I can now give you some information in that respect. I cannot do as you say regarding the first letter of first line and so on as the names are so awful to spell and so long many of them. We did our digging last night all night and had only about 20 shells to contend with. It was dark of course. As I was walking about the line of trench I heard a shell coming and jumped into the trench for shelter. I jumped right on to a man's bunk and

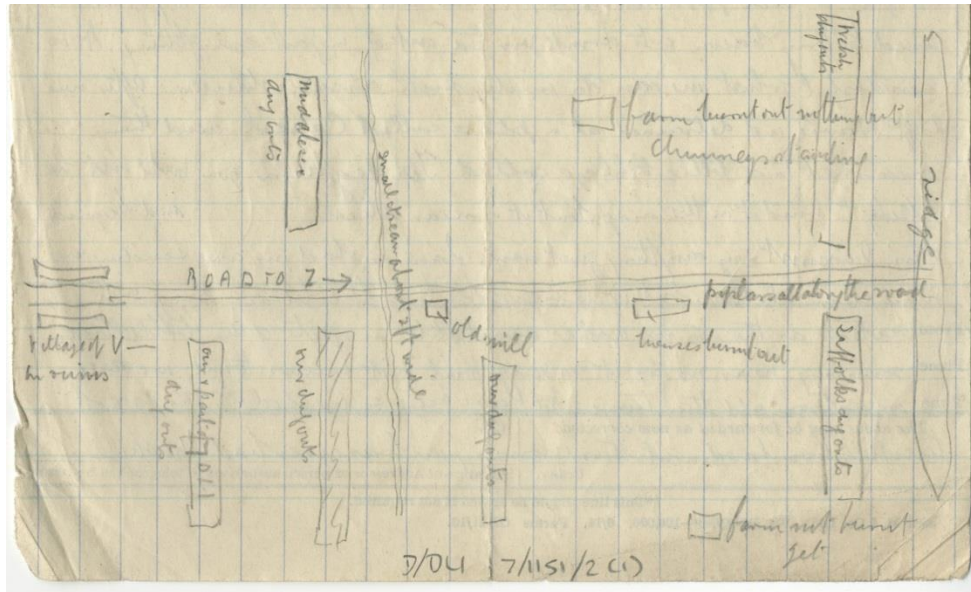


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he thought he was gone poor fellow. I do not think it is any disgrace to take cover from their awful shells in fact I think it is wise to do so as their spreading effect is awful. They make huge holes in the ground about three or four yards across and about four feet deep. We finished our work without any casualties I am glad to say. This position we are entrenching is just about a mile in front of our rabbit warren where we live, and is across the main road to Z-- [Zonnebeke]. The position we lie in is like this



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I hope this may convey to you something, and sometime I shall be able to explain it all. I slept very badly last night owing to the cold, but since breakfast I have had a good sleep. It is now 1.20pm. The old mill by the side of the road is a store for the Suffolk Regiment and I gave the corporal there £1 for himself and a few men he has there, the result is when I go there I can get anything there is going. I had some tea last night when we came in and I had tea and fried bacon with bread and butter and jam this morning for breakfast. I had some grand soup the evening before last so you see, dearie, we are doing quite well. It is the only place I know of where there is a fire and about the only place the Huns have not shelled so far. The cooking is done on an old pail with holes knocked in it and the fire is kept up by charcoal which is an issue along with the rations. I have just had a glass of champagne, or rather a canteen lid full, to wish good health to you and the kid. The canteen lid of course is used to fry bacon and to drink our tea out of, in fact everything. It is wonderful what



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one can do under such circumstances. After we left Havre we detrained at a place called Cassel, and then marched to a little village called Terdeghem you will not be likely to find it on the map, but it is near Steenvoorde and beyond this I cannot say anything just now. I am so glad you are sending me some clean clothes but it is impossible to bathe before going into action as there is no water available in spite of the little stream running near us, as it is very foul and it seems to me we are in action all the time. We have been subjected to the most terrific bombardment this morning we have ever had. The shells

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come from these directions, from both flanks and from the front like this [diagram of a central point with a semi-circle of arrows pointing at it] So you see we are got at through 180 degrees of the circle, it is a blessing they cannot get us in reverse. All officers who have been in the front line trenches say that is the much worse than the front line as they rarely have any bombardments there, but one thing to be thankful for is that there are no rifle bullets. I was just going down to the old mill just now when they started again and seven shells plunked one after another without a seconds interval in the next field. Mind you Berelio, I am not grouching but just letting you know the facts. I am as happy as I can be away from you, but it seems hard to be shot at like this and not being able to reply back but I suppose they, the Huns, are having the same doses from our guns. Things have been pretty quiet today, our guns have not done much firing and there is not the incessant roar. The champagne I had this morning was brought up by the transport officer the other evening, he had got it somewhere in the rear, it was very good of him. Sunday is a great day for fighting but I sincerely hope they leave us in peace today. Major Pollard DSO [Distinguished Service Order], the man I have often spoken of, called to see me last night but I was out at the time. I was very disappointed as he is such a nice fellow and I would like to have had a talk with him. He is the compensation secretary at the Coal Trade Hall when at home and got his DSO out here. Cocheran is very seedy today with muscular rheumatism and one cannot wonder, he has a little temperature and has lain all day in his dug out. I have a lot of letters and parcels for Harry but cannot tell where to send them as we do not



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know where he is, but he will be in a comfortable bed no doubt, probably at Boulogne.

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We have no orders for tonight yet, as it is rather early. I am not at all sure I can send my dirty clothes back to you but I will see what can be done, if I cannot then I must just throw them away as I cannot carry them about. There is some order about our sending our sleeping valises back to England so do not be surprised if mine lands home one of these days, dearie. I can hear a shell firing overhead very high up and presently a big explosion occurs which shakes the earth somewhere, probably about a mile in rear of us. You know what the gardener's hands are like, finger nails and finger tips and all, mine are rapidly getting into the same hard, horned, dirty, never to come clean again condition. It is very dull and cold today and now and again we have just a drop or two of rain. Bye bye my darling wife. God bless you and the kid and keep you safe and well. Your own Jock.

The cylinders are certain to want new piston rings. I know it is awfully good of Cooke to see to things, I will try and write to him today to thank him.

Your Jock.

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/3

2 May 1915 (2)

Page 1

My darling Berelio,

I got your second letter this morning and I sat down and read it right through straight away as I was wanting a little rest at the time, and as I was wanting still more to hear your news. What a lovely letter dear heart. You cannot have so much to write about as I have dearie but just a line a postcard for your hubby will do to buck him up. Give Mrs Greener my congratulations; I am glad she is doing so well. I am very glad indeed you are sending me out a clean change but a change is no good until we can have a bath and that is simply impossible here. I had a wash and shave today, the first wash for two days and the first shave for about a week. We have had a most



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violent bombardment going on all along the line this afternoon, whether we are attacking or the Hun I do not know, but it was one continual roar, it is simply impossible to describe it. At the present moment and for some time now we have been undergoing a bombardment ourselves. The shells are buzzing over about every minute and exploding about a field beyond. Eric Dryden is sitting with me in my dug out. I have improved it very much today. I have made it deeper so that I can sit up in it and opposite the door is a sort of court yard without head cover but with high sod walls on each side, as the shells come from three directions.

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I went to a farm close to today and got some sort of roof felting and have it laid down along the bottom of the sleeping part which keeps the damp from coming through, and we have a blanket to cover ourselves with, but it is cold at nights, the days are very hot except today when it has been a little cloudy and like rain. We are fortunate in not having had any rain. Three whistles have just been given indicating an aeroplane overhead. Bang, bang, bang every second or oftener, you certainly have never heard anything like it. If the men of Tyneside could be here for ten minutes they would go home and work themselves to death to make shells to save these poor brave soldiers. I have the greatest admiration for them, especially the men taking ammunition forward to the guns, they just gallop on and take no notice of anything, every now and then you see one struggling along the road from the front with slight wounds and then you see a motorcyclist rush past with a dispatch heedless of all danger. We have been out digging trenches close to this so called rest camp for two nights now and we are going again tonight. We start at 7.30pm and finish at 12 midnight when we are relieved by another working party. Last night we started at 12 and went on until 3am when we had to clear out before it gets daylight. In spite of the dark we occasionally get a shell over us. Last night before

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we left we had to set fire to a house close to the trenches. It was a most thrilling sight all round us, the day just beginning to break and the red flames of the thatched cottage which we had set fire to lighting up all the ground around, and all round the flare lights which the Germans send up to light up the country to enable them to see,



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and every minute or so the boom of the big guns, and occasionally sharp bursts of musketry fire. I cannot describe it dearie but I can assure you it was very weird and very thrilling. The night before last we had a great surprise. We all heard violent musketry fire on our left rear and it certainly looked as if the Huns had broken through if it was so then we were in a tight place, presently a German airplane came hovering along very close to the ground and he was gradually coming down. This was what the rapid firing was about. Presently he swerved and came gradually down. It was German for sure, the pilot was a man about six foot high, he was shot through the body somewhere and I hear has since died, and the observer was a mere boy, he was hit through the ankle. They could both speak perfect English and I believe are glad to be captured. The engine had been hit, but if the pilot tried he could have reached his own lines by planing down had he not been hit himself. It caused tremendous commotion I can tell you and was most exciting. Then we left our valises. I left everything I had in it as I thought we were for the trenches for two or three days and the result is I have no writing material at all. The bombardment is gradually dying down and they have ceased shelling us. In some cases where they want to blow up a building you plump six Jack Johnsons right with it and a huge cloud springs up about 100 feet into the air and the building is no more. It is a fine sight to

Page 4

watch. Jameson has just come in to my dug out with a huge chunk of bread and a bully beef tin and he is eating it in turn. I received a lb of Rogboro and 50 cigarettes today from Mr Kirkup I think, please phone him and thank him and tell him I will write myself as soon as I can. I can hear a thrush whistling now and again when the roar dies down. It is 6.15pm. Our division has been split up and messed about a lot since we came. We have belonged to three different brigades in three days and are now under a man, General Chapman, who is mad. His eyes are only prevented from falling out by his glasses and he is most cadaverous looking and full of nerves. I wish we could be with our own Brigadier General Martin. We have lost three more of our transport horses today including Harry's charger. They are some distance to the rear but are shelled incessantly as every place is. We hear of them constantly catching spies, one man was six feet in height and had three suits of clothes on, one of them



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being a French Uniform. He was shot. Bye bye my dear heart, God bless and keep you safe and well, both you and the kid. I love you more and more than ever. I am just going to try and get a cup of tea before we go off.

Your loving hubby Jock.

(Have you paid the life insurances yet dearie or are they not due, I forget)

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/4

**3 May 1915**

*Page 1*

My darling wife,

Here we are again after such a march last night. We are now some miles the other side of Y-- [Ypres] now. Yesterday was Sunday and we had a fairly quiet day until about 5 o'clock when suddenly the most violent bombardment commenced, everything we have had up to then was small compared to it. The Germans were attacking at two places and we could see the yellow chlorine fumes of the gas, which the beasts use to suffocate our men, rolling over the country. It keeps quite close to the ground, only high enough to catch the men. It obscured everything, how it made every man want to be at them. So far as we can fathom, it drove our men out of the front line trenches and the Gurkhas or other black troops came up and got into the advancing Germans and made absolute mincemeat of them. We had orders to be ready to march at 7.45pm but the order was cancelled and we had to stand to arms for any emergency. Standing to arms consisted of getting our equipment on and lying in our dugouts ready to get out. It was highly necessary also

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as, in our little patch where we were dug in, 130 shells fell in  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour and no damage was done to any of our men, but I believe the 7th had two men killed. At 10pm we were fallen in and marched off, the whole Brigade, or what was left of it, that night march I shall never forget, nor will any of ours. We lost eight killed and several wounded. We arrived in this place about 2am and found wooden huts for the men to sleep in. Chalons had some tea ready for us and we had a good feed and then got into our little hut. I got five blankets and some straw and was soon fast asleep, the



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guns booming all round. I have never had such a sleep since I came into France. It was a lovely sleep. I got up about 8.30 and had bacon, eggs and tea and jam, and now I am sitting in the sun feeling as happy as can be away from you, dear heart. We are all as jolly as sand boys. I had a good wash and shave this morning too, which is worth a good deal, and Jock is like himself again after the nightmare march. We move away from here tonight after dark, away to the rear for a rest and I am thankful. I shall be able to get hold of my valise and get some things out I want badly. I got your parcel of clean clothes this morning, dear heart, but not the letter. I expect it was the one I got yesterday which you mentioned in the parcel. I have not put on any clean clothes yet as I am not clean enough myself but will see what tomorrow brings. The handkerchiefs were most welcome. This is a lovely spot, the field we are in is all surrounded by tall poplar trees, away on the left about 300 yards away

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is a beautiful chateau surrounded by copper beeches and tall poplars. Away to the left rear we can see what has been the beautiful town of Y-- [Ypres], away on our right front is another pretty place with a church spire standing up above the houses. It is a lovely spot, but I am glad you are not here dearie. Someday, please God, I will bring you round to see all these wonderful places. I have not got the mattress etc. yet dearie but I hear it is about somewhere and will get it tomorrow if I am lucky. I have a lot of letters and a parcel for Harry and I do not know what to do with them. I am going to open the parcel and make use of the contents as that is what is supposed to be done with parcels, but I believe there are ways and means of getting the letters sent to him but we have not found the way yet. I wish we knew where he is, how he is going on. Cochran poor chap had to be taken away yesterday afternoon just before the shelling started suffering from pleurisy or pneumonia. He was in great pain poor chap but I hope will pull through all right.

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Please send me a weekly supply of nut chocolate dear lassie, I would say about 3/6d worth. I leave it to you to send the most you can for the least postage. If it proves too much I will let you know. It may not be necessary where we are going to, but one never knows for a moment where we shall be next, and yesterday I wanted



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some badly as I had nothing to eat after breakfast except a cup of Bovril or Oxo made from your cubes and two biscuits, until we got in here this morning. The mill by the road side which I spoke of in my former letter was knocked to smithereens yesterday so that source of food supply was cut off. I had just started to boil the water for my Bovril which I was going to share with Eric Dryden when the shelling started. I got it boiled however and had my Oxo in spite of the shells. Dryden went to see his Captain and could not get back so his portion got cold but he drank it about two hours later all the same.

I saw Friday's Daily Mail today which seems that we have done fairly well at the Dardanelles, and we have heard that Italy has come in, we have heard such a lot of rumours about Italy at times that I am waiting until I see it in the papers. I sincerely hope it is true. Bye bye my darling wife, this will not be posted until tomorrow as no letters are going out today, I hear. All my love to you, my all in all, and to our boy. God bless and keep you both safe.

Your own Jock.

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/5

4 May 1915

Page 1

I expect to get my valise today and all my belongings

My darling Berelio,

Once more I sit down to write you these few lines hoping you are all well as it leaves me at present. This is how the men always begin their letters and not a bad way either. Now dearie, I am safe from the shell fire, well away back in the rear, and I am thankful, we all are thankful. Last night we started from our rest camp at 8.30pm and marched until about 2am when we found ourselves near Watou. We are billeted all around in farms among the funniest old farm people, you never see a young man, all old men and many women, this house seems full of them. We lay down ten officers in one room on a tile floor and there we slept as soundly as tops until about 8am then we had two boiled eggs and coffee and got ready to meet General French. It



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was raining when we arrived here but this morning it was very hot. The 6th and 9th were drawn up ready in a field by the side of the road and the 7th and 8th were drawn up somewhere at the other end of the village or another village near where they were billeted. There were about 20 red hats present and the little sunburnt man with white moustache walked quickly through the gate into the middle of the three sided square, took the salute, and commenced his speech. He said as Commander in Chief he wished to thank every officer and NCO [non-commissioned officer] and man personally for the manner in which they had behaved under such an emergency. He said troops that first came out were always given sometime to settle down and find their feet before being sent forward, but on this occasion owing to the dastardly acts of our enemies who call themselves soldiers in spraying our troops with poisonous gases they succeeded in denting our line, it had

Page 2

been necessary to send up the Northumbrian Division to help to drive them back, and that we had done very well indeed and he congratulated us, and we had every reason to congratulate ourselves. The 6th he said had lost three officers killed and 11 wounded and men 80 or so, the exact numbers I forget. This he said was a very serious loss but they had done their duty. The 9th he said had not lost so heavily but he had heard excellent accounts of the steadiness of the men under shell fire, as there was nothing which tried a soldier more than to be under shell fire as he had experienced it. Then he congratulated us and said we had every reason to be proud of ourselves. He went on to say that he admired our spirit in coming out to fight for our country, as there was no reason for us to do so except the love of our country. As territorials we were for home defence but we had volunteered our services for foreign service for no other reason than patriotism and he admired us very much, especially as men had given up good appointments for the purpose. He said we would be down resting for some time and he hoped that when next it was necessary to send us up, one would behave in the same gallant manner.

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In fact dear heart he could not have said more. We lay for eight solid days and nights too under violent shell fire and believe me, of all the most nerve racking things this is



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the limit, as one can do nothing to retaliate. Then heard yesterday that the day following, our dug outs, they were all blown to smithereens by Jack Johnsons. I am glad we got out when we did or I expect our casualties would have been heavy. We shall be here until Friday when we move to better billets further back and the longer the rest the better, as every officer and man feels he has had enough for the present. One chap who had been a great grouser in Gateshead was heard to say after lying under shell fire in the open for about an hour, that he had no fault to find with Shipcote Schools. Now I marched the whole of the way back last night and my old stiff leg did get beans but it is not so bad this morning. The road we came last night was very bad indeed as we came [along] some byroads to escape a town the Germans shelled occasionally. Now let me tell you from the beginning where we have been. We got off the train at Cassel and marched to Terdeghem where we stayed for two days then we were rushed up to the front and marched one day through Steenvoorde on through Poperinghe to Vlamertinghe. This latter place is where I caught up the battalion if you remember my telling you of my long ride. We stayed the next day until evening there and then marched through Ypres to a small place called Potijze where we spent the wet night in the wood, the next day I was struck in the leg and that morning Harry was missing. The battalion marched out that afternoon

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to a place called Verlorenhoek, or rather beyond it, and made an attack to relieve a brigade which was in difficulties. After this was done they were told to retire and they did so the same night and dug themselves in by the side of the stream which I have told you about in my other letters. I could not march out with the battalion on account of my leg and spent three nights at Potijze, then I hobbled out and joined them where we have been until we were brought back to rest. We started back the night before last and skirted Ypres as they pour shells into it constantly as it was, we lost eight men killed and four wounded with one shell, and stayed at a rest camp somewhere between Ypres and Vlamertinghe, and then last night marched in through Poperinghe to Sint-Jan-ter-Biezen near Watou, where we are now. The awful night march I described to you some time ago was that one through Ypres and the march back again was even worse, however that part of the game is over and we are not



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much the worse for it. Bye bye my darling lassie. God bless and keep you safe. Cash the enclosed and put it in the kid's money box, I changed it for a man and it is no use to me out here. Please take this letter to mother and read it to her dearie

Your loving hubby

Jock

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D/DLI 7/1151/6

**5 May 1915**

*Page 1*

My darling Berelio

I got my valise last night and slept in it and had a cold bath and a clean change and put on slacks. My leg was swollen yesterday with the march the night before, but I expect this rest will put it right. I got your parcel my darling containing the mattress, pillow, matches, cigarettes, and shaving tackle for which many thanks. I was surprised you had not had many letters from me dearie but I expect you have had them by this. There was a few days when I did not write as I had nothing to tell you, at least nothing then, but you have heard all now. I had a nice letter from Jake, will you thank him for it, I will probably write to him while we are resting. We have just finished breakfast of bacon and eggs and marmalade and butter so we have done well this morning, and it is high time. We are all feeling very tired but I expect it is reaction. We can hear a violent cannonade on our left front somewhere in the neighbourhood of Poperinghe I believe, but we are some miles behind the danger zone now dearie so you need not worry.

*Page 2*

I have not much to say to you today dear heart except that I love you and you would love this country. It is like a huge market garden with high poles stuck up, made into a kind of frame work with wire on which one can see the hops beginning to climb. There are very few hedges. I am sending all Harry's letters to father and asking him to send them to Harry, as I do not know where he is except that you said that he was in London. I enclose a cutting from the Morning Post which I came across this morning for you to read, and as soon as I can I will send you a map so that you can



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follow all our movements, and by the way I forgot the 2/- postal order so I enclose it now. Bye bye my dear sweetheart, what I would give for a big hug just now from you and the kid at the same time. God bless and keep you my darling,

Your loving hubby

Jock.

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/7

6 May 1915

Page 1

My darling lassie,

It is 11.30am on a lovely hot morning and I am lying on a blanket in a beautiful green grass field all dotted with dandelion and a herd of cows grazing all round. I am sitting under the shade of a tree with chocolate to eat and papers to read and nothing to do. This is the strenuous life I like and if you had only been here. We are always wishing for something to drink. I never drank their water as I am suspicious about it, now, just at this moment, a man and his wife have come into the field shouting oranges. What luck and what yells of delight. I must resume after having eaten four. What fun it is trying to beat these hawkers down. He charged 1d each for them. We asked him why he was not a soldier and he produced his papers, he is exempt on account of a lamed leg. The men of D Company are in the next field separated by a wire fence and it is dotted with fruit trees in full bloom. They have washing hanging up everywhere and bivouacs erected and really the scene is quite a

Page 2

pretty and peaceful one, still we can hear the guns booming in the distance and as for aeroplanes we have ceased to take any notice of them. There was a terrific bombardment last night and it appears the Germans bombarded Poperinghe and set it on fire. They did a lot of damage I hear. I have got my bivouac valise erected in this field and intend to sleep out tonight. I did not last night as it was threatening to rain heavily, however it blew over. A Royal Army Medical Corps sergeant brought Harry's revolver to me last night and said he was conscious when he was at Steenvoorde in the hospital there. I cannot understand why he did not write or get someone to write



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to me or the regiment for him before this. He has not done so yet. I have not much to say today my darling as we are leading such a simple life, but just to have a little chat to you. I am longing for your loving chatty letters and they seem so far between. They aren't really, I have had four from you, but the post is most erratic. There was no post last night and none has arrived so far this morning. I do wish they would hurry up as I am longing for yours darling. I hear when we have rested we are going to a very cushy place in the line, but it is only hearsay and possibly the authorities do not know themselves where we will go. I notice some officer of ours has had a letter in the Newcastle evening paper. Everybody is very much annoyed about it here. It was some officer of Hebron's company. It is a slack company. Bye bye my darling girl. God bless and keep you safe and our son.

Your Jock.

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/8

**7 May 1915**

*Page 1*

My darling Berelio,

It is another glorious day and we are all lying basking in the sun. I slept outside last night but it was so hot I could not go to sleep for ever so long and I was thinking of you so much, and our dear kid. Oh what I would give for a hug from you now, dear heart. I went for a ride with the colonel this morning through a lovely wood just behind us and eventually we fetched up at Brigade Headquarters where we saw WB Little. He has got Carpenter's job and Carpenter has gone back to his regiment. We heard there that we were to be ready to move in two hours and that we were reserve to somebody or other, which looks as if we were going forward. One can never tell however, but in case we do, I may not be able to write for a bit so do not be alarmed, my darling, if you do not get any letters for a few days. I will write whenever I can, you know that, dear heart. Send me a bottle of

*Page 2*

eucalyptus not a big bottle but a handy one for me to store away in my pocket to douche my hanky with. I do not think there is anything else I want, my darling, but



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your constant prayers. I was riding the new grey horse this morning which I got at Southampton. He is gradually getting better. My old chestnut horse was killed and my saddle badly cut to bits by a shell. We have lost 14 horses and are drawing others today, I believe. We have got two officers out from home this morning, Wilks and Edgar, the tales they have been told has not encouraged with much. Hobson said the other day, when we were in the dug outs, that the shells were labelled 9th Durham. The mail has just arrived and everybody has run away to see, so I must go also. I will finish this afterwards. The mail was a huge one, but there were no letters for me. I had one from you yesterday, dearie, so I am not disappointed but surely I have some friends to write to me. I have written to everybody I can think of since I came out I should think. Everybody is so happy with the mail coming in. Mr Jones has something to do sorting the parcels and letters. Bye bye my own darling. God bless and keep you safe.  
Your loving hubby Jock.

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/9

8 May 1915

Page 1

My darling the post has just arrived containing one letter for me and that was from you, the only one I wanted. It was dated May 2nd. I know by this you must have had a lot of letters telling you all about ourselves from me, unless the censor has stopped any of them. It was a nice long letter, dearie. Yes the 9th did fairly well and were pretty steady. An artillery officer who saw them deploy for the attack said it was splendidly done, and evidently General French must have heard about it. However, there was no such thing as capturing the position, all we were told to do, we did, and that was done to relieve a brigade in difficulties and when we had gone on about a mile or more we were told to withdraw. It was evidently a demonstration to draw fire and relieve somebody else, but we don't know whom or anything about it

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but it was evidently successful. I see by the papers, just arrived, May 4th edition, that the Germans claim to have had a great victory over the Russians and also there is a



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long casualty list in, of officers in the Dardanelles Force. I notice Major CWT Grimshaw, Dublin Fusiliers among the killed. Is that the man you knew so well. I suppose it is. The Germans are no doubt making a great fight of it, they are not beaten yet or anything like it. I hope the Russian news will improve and I hope they will get through the Dardanelles soon so as to replenish Russian supplies. You say this letter I have received today is the 6th, well, I believe I have received them all but I am not quite sure of one. I burn them as soon as I have read them twice as I have such a lot of things to carry with me, dearie, I know you will understand. I have your photo with me constantly. Bye bye again my sweetheart.

Your Jock.

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/10

**9 May 1915**

*Page 1*

My own darling,

I write to you so often these days, sometimes twice a day, that I really do not know whether I wrote to you yesterday or not. I do not think I did. However I got your lovely long letter yesterday so I am sure I have not replied to it. I love your letters dearie, yesterday your letter gave me such a full heart, oh I did want to hug you and I did in my mind. I am sitting in the kitchen of the farm at present waiting until some water boils to fill my water bottle as I am running no risks with respect to the water. The people of the farm drink it but they must be immune from all diseases I think. I slept in the house last night as it was cold and rain threatened. The booming of the guns was very heavy all night and again this morning. We went down into the village to Holy Communion at 8.30pm which our own Chaplain, that is the Brigade Chaplain, administered. It was held in a little place about 10 feet wide and 20 feet long. On one side was a joiners bench covered with bread, bacon and all kinds of food.

*Page 2*

Under the bench, all along one side, thick straw was laid for men to sleep on and hanging all round the walls were rifles and equipment of all sorts. At one end behind



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the Chaplain was the telephone orderly with his instrument beside him connecting him up to Brigade Head Quarters. The altar was a bacon box standing on two pieces of wood acting as legs, it was covered with a clean serviette and a blanket was laid down in front of it for the priest to kneel on. The chancel rail where we knelt to receive sacrament consisted of three bacon boxes laid lengthwise across the floor and covered with clean serviettes. The floor was common brick worn into holes in many places, and there you saw officers, non-commissioned officers and men kneeling in all sorts of attitudes. During the service the place was full and many outside. When a person received communion he had to pass away to the back beside the door to allow others to come forward. It was a most impressive service and I thought of you dear heart. We hurried back to breakfast and then had a service for our Battalion in the field here. Now it is over and I have nothing else to do. We got orders this morning to be ready to move at one hour's notice

*Page 3*

but I do not suppose that means much. I went to Watou yesterday afternoon to try to get my tooth put right but the doctor dentist had not time and asked me to come back today, but I am not going as I am sure he can do nothing with it. He said there was a good man at Hazebrouck so I may get there someday. I heard where we are going to but I am not at liberty to say, but it is quite a safe place dearie and some distance back so do not fret my darling. I am in the pink of condition, the only thing worrying me is the leg is very stiff and painful and I cannot do much on it. The ten mile march the other night did not improve it. The news I have from the colonel about Harry is very strange. He saw some of the hospital people and they told him he had been found wandering about and arrested by the Provost Marshall and that he was off his head. They had certified him to be suffering from concussion due to an explosion just to make the best of it for him, but the strain had quite unhinged his mind. The colonel and all his own company officers had noticed the strangeness of his manner which became worse as we went along the Ypres road. I saw him

*Page 4*

about 3 or 3.30am the next morning doing something silly with his company and I remarked to the colonel about it. I never came across him at close quarters so could



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not notice anything about it. The matter has not been made public in any way, as it is gone forth that he was suffering from concussion. He will never be fit for any more service, and I hope it will not affect him permanently. This comes of this silly, mooney love-sick business of his I expect. The night march through Ypres was bad enough but nothing to unHINGE a man to such an extent and it was noticed before we left Vlamertinghe before we came under shell fire at all. I am only telling you all this dear heart and would not breathe it to anyone else. I suppose now he is back home his girl will cling still closer and it may result in him getting married in the excitement. I sincerely hope not. He has never written to me or let me know anything about himself at all which is a strange thing. I have his revolver. You must have got many letters from me, long ere this, lassie, unless they have been held up by the censor.

*Page 5*

I had a nice letter from Fred Kirkup yesterday and also one from Mr Bracken. The latter has not got anything to do yet and is most anxious to be serving. It does seem a pity he cannot get into something. Mr Kirkup said the pit was doing well and they are now getting up to 1300 tons a day, I also see by the papers that the price of coal is keeping up. I wonder what trouble Craig is having with the engine, is it with the timing I wonder, at all events you know who to apply to for help. I wish he had it finished as you must need it very much, dearie. You do not say much about yourself. Have you good night's sleep? Are you working yourself to death still as you have no one to check you now? Do take care of your dear self, darling, for my sake and for the sake of our kid. God bless him and tell him his daddy loves him and would like to hug him and have his little hands patting my face, oh how I should love it. I feel very home sick at times, not because I am

*Page 6*

tired of this but for sheer want of you, my darling. We have only just had our baptism and have a lot to do yet no doubt but I question if we shall ever be in a hotter place than we were at Verlorenhoek. The Colonel was reading from the Journal that the bombardment was the heaviest the world has ever known and I can well believe it. I refer to the Sunday when the Germans made two attacks with gas, that was the night we left to come back. The Germans are still bombarding Poperinghe, as we



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can hear the shells bursting in it, I believe they have killed a lot of civilians. Bye bye my darling wife the mail is not in yet. I got the parcel, dear heart, containing towel etc. I will keep this letter until the mail comes in as it cannot go before tomorrow morning. We have just got word we are to move after dinner. In case I have no time to finish I will do so now my darling. Bye bye and God bless and keep you safe. A big hug and kiss for you my sweetheart and our son.

Your own Jock.

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/11

10 May 1915

Page 1

My darling Berlio

This is Monday. We moved from the so called rest camp yesterday about 3.30pm and came forward through P-- [Poperinghe] and we are a little beyond now. Motor lorries carried the men's packs to enable them to get on quicker. We arrived here before dark and were sent into a wood, spread about and told to make the best of things, no fires to be lighted after 6.30pm. We built a kind of arbour of branches and there we lay down and slept. I am afraid I did not sleep much as I had a headache which went on all night. I was very sick this morning. I have had a little snooze since but the pain has moved over to the right side now but it is not really one of my bad ones. This wood consists almost entirely of young oak trees but very small, not more than about six inches to twelve inches diameter, with very thick undergrowth of shoots from other kinds of trees, beech etc.

Page 2

and the birds are whistling and singing all round. The sun is shining brightly and the bombardment is very mild. We are supposed to be in reserve to somebody here. We have a big 9.2 gun in front of us about 400 yards and when this thing fires off it shakes the whole earth. He has been quiet this morning I am glad to say. Some guns near here 4.7 battery are firing at a range of about 5½ miles. I hear the battle of Ypres is supposed to be over, but I do not know. We are pushing in other places I believe, but that I do not know either. The information we get is very meagre, in fact



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you get none. Poor Cochran is suffering from pneumonia and wrote to the commanding officer for Boulogne. Daniel was lying in the next bed to him wounded in the leg, he was at Hill 60. I got a nice long letter from you yesterday, dearie, and also two parcels, one from Dick Sunfield and another from London. I never opened them as we were just moving off, they were put in a wagon and have gone astray but I expect we will get them today or tomorrow. Bye bye my darling, God bless and keep you safe. Excuse more just now.
Your own hubby Jock.

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/12

**11 May 1915**

*Page 1*

My darling sweetheart

Your letter arrived last night just at dark, I could barely see to read it but have just taken it out of my pocket to look at again. It is 6.15am and we are all lying in our little cosy dug out. The Colonel is on my right, writing to Tizard who is with the Dardanelles Force, and Dryden is on my left, and next to Dryden is Gibbon, who is acting as adjutant. We are all closely packed into this dug out which is about 18 inches deep with all the silt throughout on one side, overhead and round each side is all the brush wood we erected the first night, but what makes it so cosy is the straw we have in the bottom. I have had a very good night's sleep. The guns have been booming away a little all night and are doing so this morning, but apparently only long range guns. Yesterday was a quiet day comparatively speaking, I think we have been doing a little better lately and I hear the French have been doing good work also. It does seem a shame

*Page 2*

that Germans should be allowed to use gas and I think our Government will probably do so too very soon as it is such a one sided business. We have not got respirators yet dearie, I have one however, but expect them any day. The solution to put on them arrived yesterday so they must be coming soon so you need not worry about that. I thought you would have had more letters from me dearie as I wrote such a lot



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from the dug outs we were in, and also from the rest camps nearly first thing every day. We left the dugouts on 2nd May and your letter to me is addressed the 6th May. Do tell me darling if my narrative in the letter fits in, in case any letters have gone astray. I got a box of cigarettes yesterday, I do not know how many but quite a lot of cocktail kind, I wonder if Jake sent them, you might ask him and if so thank him for me. The whole Division is around here somewhere, and are all dug in. It is really lovely and just like picnicking, the weather is perfect, and it is so nice to think that

*Page 3*

we have to sleep here and begin the picnic all over again the next day. We can have fires on which makes life worth living. We are going to have porridge for breakfast this morning, made in our canteen tins. Mrs Dryden sent the porridge. I was very interested to hear about Mrs le Marchant and am very glad you hung on to her and did not give the house up. In any case she would not have paid enough for our house furnished, as my idea of what we should have in such a case is a very high one, but you were not soft hearted and give in to her. I am so glad darling, as I should like our baby to be born in our own lovely home and I am sure you will do much better yourself. You will find the soldiers and their camp all very amusing I know and so will Pat, the dear soul. My servant has just brought my boots cleaned, and as I have nothing to say more just now I will get up and make myself pretty.

*Page 4*

Our aeroplanes are now reconnoitring over the German lines and one can see puffs of smoke suddenly appear in the neighbourhood of the plane where the shrapnel from the aircraft gun bursts. The sky becomes all dotted with these puffs, it is highly exciting to watch some so very close and no doubt some hit the machine but it is seldom they bring down one of our machines. Someone told us we had brought 13 of their machines down lately but it is only hear say. Bye bye for the nowie darling. I have just had a very good breakfast, porridge, cold boiled bacon and bread, tea with cream, chocolate and almonds and raisins. What do you think of that? What a picnic and I am so happy and feeling so well. I know how glad you will be to hear this dear lassie. I wish you would tell me all about your own self Berelio dear. It is a rotten job for the folks who stay at home and for you especially dear lassie, but I am coming



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through this all right dearie you need not worry. The names of three transport drivers, two stretcher bearers and our doctor have been sent up. We have just had a visit from the Brigadier and Clayton. There is no news they say. I got these flags out of the cigarettes boxes, keep them dearie. Put those bills with the mess papers. Bye bye my own dear heart. God bless and keep you well.

Your Jock

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/13

Thursday [13 May 1915]

Page 1

My darling, I am very well and very muddy and wet but fit. We are having a rough time of it, but expect to be out of it soon. Give me all your prayers dear lass

Your own

Jock

Will write fully soon. I asked Stafford to send a post card it will not be signed by me so do not be alarmed.

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/14

**15 May 1915**

*Page 1*

My own darling,

Just a line as a wee chat to you. I received two letters from you last night, one a wee short one in which you promised me a long one, and the other the long one itself, you are a dear, a dear, a dear and I love you. They were particularly welcome as I did not get them until I got in about 2.30am with my digging party. I had 500 men digging communication trenches for the cavalry in the front line. We had a lively time of which I will tell you later. I got in feeling very, very tired and the dugout was anything but inviting, but your letters were my darling. Two nights ago when we were out digging I found the 11th Hussars in the trench just 35 yards in front so I went up and found Hugh Poole right there. I had a short talk with him. He was very fit, but



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tired of the trenches, they had been four

*Page 2*

days. The trenches in this position are the limit. We expected to be relieved tonight but it appears we are to hang on for some time, so we must just hang on and stick it. I am very well, in spite of the wet and mud. Today we have had a beautiful day and have got our boots dried and the mud dried up a bit. I have not a change of socks with me but took them off and wrapped my feet in paper and then put them on again quite a good dodge. I got the chocolate and cake dear heart and never tasted either as an attack was imminent and we had orders to move down the trenches to fill up a gap which did not exist. I went down to the left to get a move on and was away some time ordering and

*Page 3*

counter ordering, it was raining hard all the time and I had no coat or rather discarded it. I got wet through. We had to move back to the same positions and when I got back I found our dugout full of men and absolutely nothing left. All the food and cakes and other delicacies which we had had been taken. Send me some more chocolate like that dearie and another cake, also three boxes of sardines. I am always making my mind up to ask you to send things and then when I come to write I forget what I want. Apples are always acceptable also. Oh how I wonder how you are my dear heart. I heard a nightingale singing beautifully when going through the wood at P-- [Potijze] and thought of you. How happy I feel that you have Mrs Kelly and kid with you, they must be a boon just now. I note all you say about the camp dearie. Excuse more just now darling as we have just got orders to go out to dig again. We hoped we were going to be free tonight and get a night's rest. Bye bye my own darling and God bless and keep you safe and well also our darling boy.  
Your own Jock.

~~~~~



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16 May 1915

Page 1

We have only heard of Cochran once and do not know where he is now.

My darling Berelio,

I am sending you the eyewitnesses report cut out of the paper of 13th. This tells you all about it and you can follow the places on the map of which I will tell you presently, that is, in another letter. We are now attached to a Cavalry Force commanded by General Bingham. The 6th and the 8th have been sent back for a rest and the 7th and ourselves are still here. We have no idea how long we will be here but I think it cannot be much longer before they move us. I took 500 men out digging last night some distance away and had rather a nervy time. There were no end of stray bullets about but we were very fortunate as usual, as we had only one man wounded, I was looking round the work after we had got them

Page 2

placed and came across the Royal Scots in a brick kiln. I had a cigarette with them and a wee talk. Their trenches are only 30 yards from the Germans, occupied by Saxons, and I believe they chaff each other very much and are quite good friends but do a good deal of scrapping all the same. I was very glad when I got all the men out safely. We got back at about 1.30pm and there I found your letter of the 11th dearie. What a welcome to come to the dugout tired and find your letter awaiting me. I immediately read it by candle light and lay down and went to sleep thinking about it. When we lie down we put on a coat and woolly cap just as if you were going out for a walk. In your letter dearie you ask about the parcels. I have got everything which you have sent, up to the present. I had a parcel and letter from Fry the last night containing 100 Abdulla

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cigarettes and box of lovely chocolates from Amy. I had some chocks at once, in fact a good tuck out and while I am writing now I am munching them. I have written to Amy thanking her. I slept until 6am this morning and then was too cold so went out



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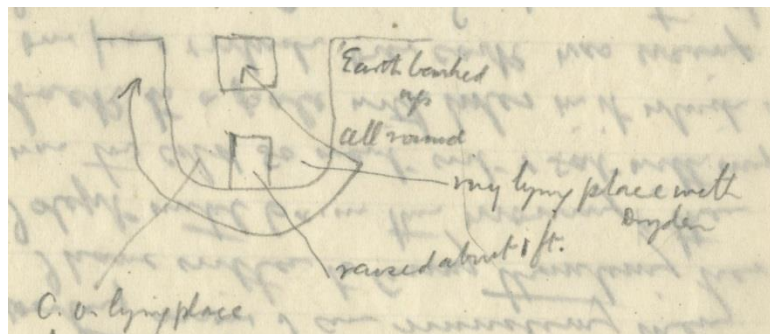
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and sat with my back to a pale with holes in it which is our fire and which our cook was using. I had a cup of cocoa. Send me a tin of Savory and Moore's peptonized cocoa please, dearie. We did not have our proper breakfast until after 8am and then I sat out in the sun, it is a lovely day. Presently one of our very big guns started firing over our heads and we watched the shells bursting on the German trenches, presently the enemy started doing the same to our trenches and we promptly took cover and curled up in the back of our dugouts. One of our aeroplanes is flying back and forward glistening in the sun and I think must be directing the fire

Page 4

of our big gun. Just in front of me now there is a little spider hanging down from the roof, how I love the little chap. This dug out is only about four feet high and is covered over with two cross oak beams and five running at right angles to them. These are got by splitting an oak tree. On top of this is laid brush wood and on top of that a foot of soil. It is about four yards square inside and had a raised portion about a foot high in the middle which serves as a table. The plan of it is like this, that is if you could lift the roof off and look down on it.



I will write you very fully as soon as I get down again, dearie, in the meantime this is just a short note. I expect they will

Page 5

not keep us here much longer as the men are getting very tired as they get no proper rest and not enough proper food. Some of their letters are very pathetic and fill one's heart. I very seldom read them but one cannot help seeing some of their remarks. I heard a man say the other day, but first of all I must tell you that for change here you get English, French and Belgian coins all mixed up and many of them are nickel coins of little value. He said, that is the man, I had fifteen bob in my pocket of tanners



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and threepenny bits and found it was only ten pence halfpenny. There are some cheery ones, in fact most of them are, but some are very nervy now, and several of the officers also. Baister's nerve is absolutely gone, he was out with the company last night and was awful, he is no good at all and effects other officers and men also. I was fed up with him last night and will not let him go with me if we have to go out again tonight. It is a lovely morning, the sun is hot and it is such a welcome change as we have had it very

Page 6

cold and wet this last few days. We had one man wounded today by one of our own anti-aircraft guns firing from behind us somewhere. We are having a quiet time just now after a half an hour's shelling. I hope it will continue all day and all night for several days. The German troops in front of us I am told are very poor, merely boys I believe. I heard last night the French had continued their success and had surrounded a large force of Germans and taken a lot of prisoners. I hope this may be true. Do you remember a man called Anderson who lay in a bed opposite me in hospital with a broken leg and who was engaged to be married. He is married now and has his howitzers just near us. When we came up I saw a man as I was bringing the battalion off the railway and said who are you – so and so - is that Major English and he was Anderson. Bye bye my darling lassie, this is all about myself and nothing about you. I am so glad you are taking care of yourself. When does the nurse come dearie. Mrs Kelly is going to remain over the time I hope. God bless and keep you safe my darling, Your own Jock.

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/16

**17 May 1915**

*Page 1*

My Darling Berelio,

I received your letter this morning, but it came last night, but was in the wrong mail bag, so it was not there for me to read when I got in, however it turned up this morning. It is dated the 12th, dearie, and it should have arrived on the 16th so that means four days. Mine apparently get to you in two days now or is it three. It is



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raining this morning slightly, not so bad but it makes the place frightfully muddy and every time anyone goes out and comes in again he brings tons of mud in with him and treads it on our blankets, coats, newspapers, and the result is that we sit in it, eat it and are plastered all over with it in a few hours. We had an interesting time last night, we were out between our front line trench and the Germans for the purpose of filling in an old trench. As soon as I told the men where they were, they hurried up and filled it in in record time, then when we finished we had to come back a little further and fill in some dug outs. We buried all sorts of equipment and things. I got a German rifle and brought it back.

*Page 2*

I hope I may be able to get it home, but the Authorities will not allow us to send any souvenirs or any clothing home, so that means I cannot send my dirty clothes home but I shall get them washed, I have already got one lot washed. We lost one killed and six wounded yesterday. The morning is dull and the result is that things are quiet. We were in front of the Scots Greys last night, as I came back I called into their trench and had a cigarette. I met a Major Weir of the 3rd Dragoon Guards yesterday, do you know him? I expect we shall have to go out and dig tonight again. I wish it was all done and we were back for a rest. I promised a cutting yesterday but enclose it today, dearie. I am awfully glad to hear about Geoffrey Blackett. I had a talk two or three days ago with Tommy Bradford and he told me he thought Nelson Rogers was nearly pegged out when they had to clear out of the trench, then I said to him it was just possible he might be taken by the Germans and brought round after all, and it has just happened so. I am awfully pleased about him especially as he is such a nice boy. I have had a shave this morning, the first for six days, I will have a wash presently also.

*Page 3*

Dryden and I have cleaned out our side of our dug out this morning and we must try to find some fresh clean straw to put in the bottom again. While we were busy we had a visit from two officers of the 4th Hussars. They are in the trench vacated by the 8th Durham Light Infantry on our left. I am going to fix a bed up now and try to have a little snooze. It is very dull and drizzling outside still and an artillery duel is going on.



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We seem to have more guns than they have at present but it is difficult to say. Bye  
bye my own darling lassie. My love to you sweetheart and to the sweet kid of ours  
and big hug. God bless and keep you safe and well.

Your own Jock.

*Page 4*

Word has just come to move back to night

Jock

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/17

18 May 1915

Page 1

My Darling

We are now back at a so called rest camp for a few days, possibly only two, I do not
know. It is the same place in huts where we called for one night on our way back to
Watou the last time. The ground is one mass of mud as we have had a lot of rain,
and everything is pretty miserable. We are expecting our valises up today when it will
enable me to bathe and have a clean change which I need badly. I got your letter
this morning, dearie, dated the 13th I think, I also had one from Mr Anderson for
which please thank him, one from Mrs Kirkup, let her know I have got it, and one
from your Mother, a very nice long letter. I am going to try to write to her before we
leave. I got a parcel from Mrs Southern for which I was very thankful. Thank her for
me and tell her the things were just what I wanted at the right time. I put on a pair

Page 2

of the socks at once as mine were unfit. I have plenty of socks but one cannot
always have them handy. The next time you send me anything dearie include a
pair of old pyjamas, which I will keep in my valance and use whenever we get a
rest, as it is such a relief to get all one's clothes off, a thing which has not happened
to me since I came out, except when I bathe of course. I hear this morning that
another of the 8th Division's officers has turned up as a wounded prisoner of war, his
name is Coulson. I have always intend writing you a full account of our doings from



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the time we left the wood where we were dug in. We got orders to move in 2 hours and then to move at once. It was about 6pm when we moved out onto the road and it was not yet dark. There were two battalions of us the 6th and the 9th. We were leading and at the very start the 6th moved forward

Page 3

to run into this narrow road through the wood and blocked our machine guns and transport. This was upsetting and had to be put right at the first opportunity and when the road was wide enough to allow it. We marched out on to the Vlametinghe to Ypres road and just before entering Ypres we turned to the right and skirted round the south of Ypres until we got on to the railway, after which we stuck to the railway, that is the line which runs from Ypres to Zonnebeke. Ypres itself was burning fiercely and the red flame lighted up the whole place. The railway was a bad place to march on, the men had to march in file instead of fours. In places the railway runs along an embankment, at other places through a cutting just like all railways. Every here and there telephone wires were lying across the road over which the men all tripped up and it was full of shell holes, rails torn up and lying across the road. All this interfered

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with the column getting along. The head of the column could more or less see what was coming but all these interruptions strung out the column to a great extent until big gaps existed and they lost touch. At the rear end of the column it was awful, we would move along about three yards and then halt and then move a few more yards and then halt and so on, then we would come to a shell out or some other obstruction which was the cause of all the delay and when we got over that we would find the battalion strung out in single file and great breaks in the line. Just at one of these places a battery of ours opened fire on our left and was replied to by a German one so we had a bad time for a bit. My job at the rear of the battalion was, and always is, a rotten one on these night marches as I keep running up and down the column to try and keep things together a bit, the platoon commanders and captains don't look after their men sufficiently. It was all very weird, the gaunt and broken telegraph poles standing up silhouetted



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against the red glare on our left front. Men were carrying a big load and were tired and nervous, it was a perfect nightmare. In the end there was a long halt. I made my way forward to the head of the battalion to find out what was the matter and I found that the Commanding Officer had gone away to find out where the trenches were which we had to occupy. While I was there waiting I met Captain Anderson who was lying in a bed at Armstrong College opposite to me with a broken leg and of which I told you. It is most extraordinary the people you run up against like this, on a pitch dark night in a most extraordinary situation. After waiting $\frac{3}{4}$ hour the Commanding Officer turned up. The guide he had knew nothing about the lines and as it turned out had only seen them in daylight from the railway. The result was we had come too far and had to scramble down one at a time off the embankment over the gutter and through the hedge. The bank was steep and the only bridge over the gutter was one narrow plank, to bring a battalion through that on a black dark night was awful. Many of them came scrambling down the bank, flopped into the ditch which was full of water, floundered in it until they found the gap in the hedge, all this mind you with a heavy pack and equipment on and a rifle in hand. There were several phone wires lying along the embankment which tripped the men up. They were getting on so slowly that I went on to the bank

and stood there directing every man down and we got on a little quicker, then when they did get down and into the field they went right with this Howitzer battery and got mixed up with limbers, horses, harness etc and lost the man in front of them so that they were wandering all over the place trying to find each other. This was the condition I found the battalion when I got off the railway. We eventually got them together again and found the trenches and by that time it was getting on to daybreak when we had to stand to arms. We found ourselves extended from Potijze to the railway line south. The 6th were on our right and some Cavalry on our left. This was the morning of the 12th and we left last night at midnight, the 17th -18th. The next day the Germans shelled us a bit, but not much and we thought we had a cushy spot, but Wednesday and Thursday we knew all about it. They started an attack in the early morning about 4am and shelled the line all day. The shelling was so fierce



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on the front line trenches which were held by the Cavalry that they had a clear out in two places and the line was absolutely open to the Germans if they had come on, fortunately they did not and the Royal Horse Guards and 1st Life Guards

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made good the line again in the afternoon, and commenced in a trench a little further back from the one they had held. We watched the shells bursting over the front line, it was simply appalling there was one continuous line of bursting shells all the time and all along the line, then they turned their attention to us and gave us beans, we lost 37 men that day and 41 the next. One shell came through the roof of our dug out and burst. The base of the shell went 15 inches into the traverse behind. Jameson was sitting at my feet and he was wounded in the head, the telephone operator was slightly wounded, the Colonel had a slight scratch and I was simply covered with dust. It was a marvellous providence which kept us safe and I was thankful. I am only telling you of these things, dear heart, and would not like them talked about too much. There were many very narrow escapes and we were very lucky not to have lost more. Each night we had to go out and dig, so eventually we came to be known as the battalion which was shelled all day and dug all night. The first night the Commanding Officer went out with the digging party but no more and quite wisely too I think. I get all the work to do, still, Major Muir should take his share, he is an old man and

Page 8

does his best and I admire him for coming out, still at the same time he does not take his share of the work and remains in his dug out all the night. He was only out one night and I was glad when I got him back again as he cannot flounder about in trenches and shell holes like a young man. As I told you we got quite a reputation for digging. The night before last we had a rotten job, that was to fill in an old trench about 400 yards in front of our own first line trench, between the Germans and our trench that is to say. 200 yards further on was a trench filled with German dead and our dead and where I might have got a German helmet. I started off to go forward to get a helmet and I thought I had promised you not to run unnecessary risk so I turned back and did without. I got a German rifle and have got it with me now but



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whether I shall ever be able to bring it home I cannot say. There are always any number of bullets whizzing past and I don't think we went out a

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single night unless losing some men hit by bullets. The Hun appears to have rifles laid to shoot along the roads, and now and again they catch a man. We got word to move last night, and later we got word to find a digging party of 400 men. I took them out and met Case who was at Ponteland you remember, he started them on the work with my help, and I gave them all instructions to stop work at 11pm and come back to enable us to march back to where we are now. One company either did not stop at 11pm or were further away and did not arrive back until 12.10am. It was a pitch dark night and raining in torrents. The battalion, less the company lost, stood a solid hour on the road waiting of the other company. I went back and found an old man sitting in his dug out not knowing what to do. I helped him out of his difficulties and eventually the company turned up and we commenced another nightmare march through Ypres. The town

Page 10

itself is now more a ruin than ever. We marched along the Ypres – Menin Road. There are lovely tall trees along each side of the road flanked on each side by beautiful chateaux. The great trees are cut down, torn up by the roots, broken off short and lying in all sorts of fantastic ways, the houses themselves are wrecked in most cases, nothing but the walls left, and in all this one hears a nightingale singing. Every now and then an ammunition train gallops along the paved way making an awful din and we meet a fleet of red cross vans, then a great gun will suddenly boom out just on the other side of the fence and nearly scare one out of one's skin, then presently the German reply and one sees the flash and burst in the air and then a deafening roar of the explosion of a shrapnel shell and one can hear the bullets clipping through the branches of the trees and splashing on the paved road making sparks fly, then

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the message comes down the column, 'Pass the word for the stretcher bearers and



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doctors'. Last night luckily we had no casualties I am thankful to say. The 6th and the 8th have now gone up to relieve us and I believe are going to take turns in the trenches about one platoon at a time. I hope this is what they do, so as to get them accustomed to the work, as really the battalion has suffered so far as their nerves are concerned with lying under all this shell fire. We have had very good news from other parts of the front and hear also that the Germans have all their troops fighting now. We received a message from the General yesterday to say that the Germans have poisoned the water supply round about Ypres with arsenic. I wonder what else they can do and will do. Personally I think the war will not last much longer and I don't think it will hold over another winter.

Page 12

This epistle has run into quite a long one, dearie, and I am not at all sure that I do the right thing in putting all this down for your perusal in your present state of health, but look at it in this way, dearie, that it will not make any difference either way so far as I am concerned. I feel I am being guarded by the Almighty and that I will come through all right, if not, then it will be for the best I have no doubt, in some way which we cannot understand. My nerves are quite all right but I feel a little change will do me good, as shells get very boring in the end, in fact it is an overrated pastime. Dearie, will you ask Mrs Coulson how her husband is and let me know, dearie. I hear from everyone how well you are sticking it but I know the anxious mind, dearie, under your calm and pray to God to bless you and give you strength. Bye bye my dear heart, my all in all, my loved one. May God give you his richest blessing.

Your own Jock

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/18

**19 May 1915**

*Page 1*

My Darling

I got another letter from you last night when the rations arrived, your letters have been teeming in. I know I did not write for a day or two dear heart but I have commenced again long since, so I expect you are not anxious. You must not be



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anxious if I do not write for a day or two now and again my darling, you can be sure I will do so whenever I can. I have commenced this letter dated 19th but I am not sure whether this is Wednesday or Thursday really, but I think it is Wednesday, however that is a detail except that it shows how one forgets all that sort of thing out here. I guarantee nine men out of every ten would not know the day of the week. Our valises came about 7 o'clock last night and I immediately laid mine out, put my boots off and got into it, so did the Colonel. We had

*Page 2*

just got ourselves comfy when whizz came a great shell from the Germans and burst away to our left about 500 yards. We got up at once and put our boots on in case they found the camp. They fired about ten shots but did no harm and then we had some tea and turned in at 8.30pm. I slept on right through until 6.30am before waking properly, a glorious sleep. Then I got up and had some chocolate and shortbread biscuits which Mrs Southern kindly sent me and turned in again until 8.30am when breakfast was ready. I have done no washing or anything so far, but my servant is just now trying to get some water boiled and I am going to have a bath and change of clothes. We are attached to the 6th Cavalry Brigade and are under orders to be ready to move

*Page 3*

on an hour's notice. This holds good until midnight tonight. I am hoping there will be no occasion to move. The day again is wet and miserable but I am quite well. I have a slight cold in my head but it is really nothing. My boots and clothes are wet, the first night we slept in our wet clothes and wet blankets with wet socks on and really I am as fit as can be, never better in fact. It is extraordinary what one can do in the fresh air. Some of our boys walked back to Ypres last night to see the Cathedral and Cloth Hall. I enclose a piece of stained glass got from Ypres Cathedral which take great care of, dearie, please. I got some baccy and cigarettes from Fred Kirkup yesterday and also some cigarettes from Tate, I believe as they are his particular brand. Ask everyone



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not to send me any more smoking material for a bit, until I ask for it at any rate, as I have so much I can just get it carted about. The difficulty is when one moves on short notice. I am so glad your time is so short now and am looking forward so much to your letters again, dear lassie. After your event, somebody must write at once and let me know all particulars as you will not be able to write for some time. My darling, I wish I could be with you and kiss you, especially at a time like this. God bless and keep you well. All my love to you my own darling and a big hug to the kid. We hear on good authority that the Germans have got their last man in the field now. I hope so and that it will soon be over. You own Jock

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/19

20 May 1915

Page 1

My darling

It is a glorious day today I am thankful to say and we are getting things dried again. I got your letter last night again, dearie, in which you say you have not received any letter for a few days, they must all arrive together I expect. One of our fellows said five of his letters had arrived at once so the same may happen to you. I did miss a day or two I know, but that is more than a week ago now. We are still here under orders to move in half an hour but if nothing unforeseen happens they may keep us here for a few days or send us further down. I hope they may do the latter to buck us up a bit as we need it, the men have got a shattering with all this shell fire. I want to write to your mother today as I did not manage it yesterday. I wrote to Mrs Southern thanking her for the parcel.

Page 2

I am counting the days now, dear, until the time when I get my telegram. I do hope and pray that it may be soon over, dear heart, and you are quite fit again. There is a goat just outside my hut eating a newspaper and one of the men is chasing it. Unfortunately it does not give milk. I told you of the herd of cows near the trenches, and it was quite a common sight to see men milking the cows under shell fire. It is



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marvellous how these cows have escaped. I shot four pigs one day up there, the poor things were starving so we thought it better to finish them off. I cannot understand why the authorities do not collect all the animals and take them down country as they just roam about and starve and eventually get hit and have to be buried which is a great nuisance. I had a bit of a headache last night but had a very good night's sleep, I am thankful to say, and I felt alright this morning. All my love to you my own darling wife, and to our boy. God bless and keep you and strengthen you.

Your own Jock

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/20

**21 May 1915**

*Page 1*

Any news from Frank?

What does the kid say about all the soldiers?

My Darling Berelio,

How I am wondering how you are. I do hope you are feeling well and cheerful dearie and that you have got some letters from me by this. The post is very slow at times, there was no post in last night, so I expect I shall get two letters from you today. We have had another good night's rest in these huts. The Germans started shelling some batteries (French) close to us as usual last night about 7pm and went on for two hours or so. We watched this going on, The Commanding Officer and I walked over this morning to see what damage they had done and they had done none, the nearest shell was about 400 to 500 yards away so we were quite safe. Yesterday about tea time things were rather merry on our left, aeroplanes were trying to locate the French guns. The Germans fired one big shell over in their direction and the aeroplane hovered over to watch, after the shell dropped the aeroplane went back to the German lines presumably to give them information.



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The French anti-aircraft guns were popping off at the aeroplane all the time. Presently the German flying man came back and the French anti-aircraft guns started popping off at him again, and the third shot burst just under the aeroplane. We watched the whole performance, the aeroplane commenced to come down nose first and gradually turned until he was coming down at terrific speed head first. Before he touched the ground however, the machine arched away level towards the German lines low down. He got gradually lower and lower and actually fell apparently in a wood. It fairly made my heart stop to see that poor fellow coming head first to the ground and I could not help feeling glad when he righted himself in spite of him being a German. I have not heard whether he got to his own lines or not, but he must have been badly hit I am afraid. We sent a different party out last night 400 strong to dig somewhere up in the front line. The Commanding Officer did not send me. I spoke to him about my having to go out every night and running unnecessary risk, as there is nothing for me to do. The party is always split

up into 50s and is scattered about all over the place and each party is under an officer and an engineer officer with each, so that there is nothing for me to do and I told him it was up to him to take as much care of himself and his officers as he possibly could for the battalion's sake and I think he must have seen it in that light. Old Moor never goes out on these digging shows. I do not mind in the least if it is necessary, but it was a waste of time and running risk for no good purpose. I should hate to shirk anything which was really necessary but I do not consider this is, and moreover, no other senior major goes out from any of the other battalions. We are going to have chicken, pigeons and mutton all boiled up together today with rice and compressed vegetables, so that ought to make a nice stew. Water is the thing we want more than anything, it is so scarce. The farms round now refuse to give it to us, and they charge exorbitantly for everything we buy. 1 franc for a loaf, two eggs for 3½ pence and so on in proportion. I believe the French can get eggs at two for 1½ pence. I hear of great happenings in the English Parliament and Admiralty



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and sincerely hope the changes are for the best. We hear also that Italy have joined in with us but I am not going to believe that until I see it in print as official, as it has been so often said. I wrote to your mother yesterday, also to Mrs Greener telling her that Martin was very fit. It is looking a bit dull and like rain this morning but is quite warm and the thrushes are whistling all round so I hope the rain keeps off as the ground is just getting dried up again. The place the Commanding Officer and I sleep in is just the size of the wood house which used to stand behind the motor garage at Chopwell. The door is a piece of canvas which hangs down with a piece of wood attached to the bottom and when we want the door opened the canvas is rolled up from the bottom and the roll put on two big nails above the door where it rests. Windows the same. It is an excellent idea. When we want to shut the door we simply knock the roll off the two nails at the top and the roll unrolls itself and there you are, the door is shut. Eric Dryden was returned wounded but he only had a small piece of skin knocked off his elbow and was rather annoyed that it was reported because of alarming his mother. He is a nice boy. Bye bye my own darling wife. God bless and keep you safe and well and our boy.

Your own hubby Jock

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/21

22 May 1915

Page 1

My Darling Berelio,

Here we are again in the same trenches near P-- [Potijze]. We marched up last night and took over about midnight. I am in the big dug out, or rather built up, with the Commanding Officer, Dryden, and Gibbon who is acting Adjutant. The inside is lined with chunks of oak, sides and top, and the whole is covered over with sods and earth and so is fairly safe against shell fire, there is a chimney built up through the roof which always affords ventilation. It is dry also as it is not dug below the ground level. We find working parties, night and day, improving these trenches. Mr Case, who was at Ponteland you remember, is living in a dug out just behind us, and has charge of



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the engineering of a section of this line. I am glad he is here as he has his head screwed on the right way and is making a

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good job of it. We may be here for four days or so and then back for a good rest, but we can never say. We are to send a party each night up to the first line trench to learn the routine which is a very good thing indeed. I did not get much sleep last night as I got very hot on the march and then got cold afterwards, and I have a slight headache this morning but not much and hardly worth mentioning. There is a little shell fire going on but that is not worth mentioning either. They did not trouble us in coming through Ypres last night. I do hope you have my letters, dearie. The only consolation I have is that Haughton's wife got none for a week and then got about seven in one day, probably the same has happened today. The regiments we have on either flank I will mention later on when it does not matter. Bye bye my darling lassie, I am thinking so much of you and waiting for your wire soon. God bless you my wife and keep you well.

Your own hubby Jock

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/22

**23 May 1915**

*Page 1*

My Darling Berilio,

I had two letters from you with last night's post but did not get them until this morning and I lay in my dug out munching a biscuit and reading them. One was dated 17th and the other the 18th. They were lovely, newsy letters, dearie, I sometimes wonder how you can find anything to say in your letters as you are not having the exciting time we are having. Boysie is sweet, give my biggest hug to the dear little chap. Only two days now for you dear heart. I am anxiously waiting for news. I am glad you have commenced to get letters again. The delay seems to be with our own people at this end. I will inquire about it. We had orders to move last night away to the right of the same line. It did seem a mad thing to do, however we did it and found we had to go into some rotten trenches



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not properly made and then we could not get all the battalion in. We expect to go up to the first line trenches tonight for 48 hours and then back, but as I said before, one can never tell. It was lightning vividly as we marched along the road and presently it commenced to rain a thorough rain storm and wet us all through. My knees were wet, and boots, otherwise I did not take much harm. There was very little shelter for the men, in some places none, so altogether the night was not a great success. However the sun is out hot now and that puts all things right. The Commanding Officer and I occupied one dug out, there is only room for the two of us. There are two old doors laid on the bottom and on these we lie but our bones are getting used to it now. They have been firing shells filled with gas this morning, but we all have our respirators so will not take much harm. I had a nice letter from Jake, tell him I will reply to it in a day or two. Bye bye my darling wife, all my love to you. God bless and keep you well.

Your own Jock

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/23

24 May 1915

Page 1

My darling lassie

This is Empire Day and Whit Monday, and just in case we should forget it the Huns started with their gas this morning at 2.50am. There has been a great fight going on all day and it is now 8pm. I am quite well and not feeling the effects of the gas very much, it just makes me cough. We all had our respirators I am glad to say. I expect the transport will be up tonight but there is no certainty and I may not get this off.

Excuse more post now, my darling lassie, it was just a little chat to say I am all right.

Bye bye my darling wife and God bless you and keep you well

Your own Jock

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**25 May 1915**

*Page 1*

I got the apples, eucalyptus etc all right, dear, for which many thanks. I thought I had mentioned it.

My darling Berelio

I have not much to say today except to send you all my love, dearie, and wish you the best luck, for this is the day you said, but these days are never right and you spoke yesterday in your letter of the 26th when the nurse was coming. I am glad you like her, dearie, it makes such a difference when you get a good impression of your nurse in the first instance, I think you will know her sooner. I am thinking about you such a lot, dear heart. We have had, comparatively speaking, a quiet day today. I had a look through the wood where the Commanding Officer and I spent the wet night

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which I told you of. The wood is so different, trees lying about everywhere uprooted and cut off, the ground is all dug up with shell holes, and dug outs. The garden, vinery, stables, and every other building in the place is shattered, there is one small building, which seems to have been an observatory, which is still standing, all the glass is broken and it is filled up with sand bags. Another building, which appears to have been a shrine, the roof has been covered with old china plates, some of which are still there. The Colonel and I thought of getting a ladder and getting them down but I did not care to do it. Underneath it is a sort of cellar with a stove in it. We thought of making a dug out of it but there

*Page 3*

was a forequarter and hindquarter of beef lying just inside which had been there a bit. There are rifles, ammunition, great coats, equipment, bully beef and all manner of other war equipment lying all over the place and here and there a grave with a rough wooden cross put on it and amidst all this was lying an umbrella, expanded, with a hole through the cover which had evidently been caused by a bit of shell. I



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went into the chateau to see the Doctor and had breakfast with him. The chateau has suffered really very little, considering. It is used as a dressing station. While I was there a man of the 2nd Northumberland Fusiliers came in wounded, with a tale that his battalion had been wiped out, but they always think things are much worse than they are, but I believe

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the attack failed all the same. We hear now officially that Italy has joined in against Austria, I am very glad as this ought to relieve the pressure here a bit. The Germans and Austrians seem to be making progress against the Russians. I wish we had the Dardanelles opened, it is going to be a long job I am afraid. I see the Lancashire Territorials have been in it out there. It is a glorious day today and we are feeling much better than yesterday, but we are coughing, one against another. We have four officers gassed, Alf Rayne, Innes, Heads, and Gatheral. Heads and Gatheral were no worse than most of us, but the other two were very bad. I must tell you all about this later when I can write my official narrative. Bye bye, my darling lassie. God bless and keep you safe and well. Your loving Jock

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/25

26 May 1915

Page 1

My Darling Berelio

Just a short line to tell you I am quite well, have had a good breakfast, and a bath in a pail, from top to toe in some water with carbolic in it, so I feel nice and clean. Please send me a clean vest, shirt and pants, dear lassie, and also a clean body belt, one of the ordinary kind, not one of those patent ones with pieces to go round the legs to prevent it slipping up as I find it slips down and not up and have cut off those pieces in the one I have. We are now in a dug out in the wood, only the HQ Lieutenants, and we still have two companies in the first line, they are going on very well and are delighted to have had a slap at the Huns. Things are humming a bit in this neighbourhood again, but I think they will quieten down soon. There is no sign of our going back yet, nor are we likely until this blows over. We expected gas last



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night again but it did not come off I am thankful to say. I have a lot to tell you but will wait a bit. The Commanding Officer has been wounded again in the back with a bit of shell, but is quite all right and on duty. Our coughs are improving, I am thankful to say. The parcel has not arrived yet, dear lassie, but may do tonight. I am thinking

Page 2

a lot about you dear heart and hope you will have a good time and it will soon be over, I feel certain it will be. Bye bye my darling lassie. God bless and keep you well.

All my love to you, my own darling.

Your own Jock

~~~~~

D/DLI 7/1151/26

**27 May 1915**

*Page 1*

My Darling Lassie

Your very welcome, oh so welcome letter arrived last night just about 9pm, something nice to sleep on, how I do look forward to them, dear heart, and am looking forward, still more, to the future ones after your day. I love you my lassie more and more and more. I hope you are all well as it leaves me at present, this is how the Tommies start their letters & a very good way too, so that you know at once how I am. I also got your lovely big parcel, what a boon. I had a go at the cake at once and the apples were tackled also, we always share round the four of us. I got up this morning at 3am and had a cup of cafe au lait with cake with a Major Baker of the Royal Fusiliers whose dug out is quite close to us, and then we finished the tea for breakfast. Do not send any more Oxo, dearie, as we get enough, it is issued sometimes as a ration, but we will make use of this all right, my darling. Now, about the cap, dearie, it was very sweet of you to send it to me, but now I try it on it is too small. I wish you would tell Downie, dearie, and I will try ways and means of sending it back, or it may fit some of the other fellows, I will see

[no further pages]

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29 May 1915*Page 1*

My Darling Berelio

My congratulations to you my darling. Both doing well, that is so good, and I hope and pray both continue to do well. How pleased and how thankful and proud I am my sweetheart. Oh, that you may go on well and soon be your own sweet self again. I got Mrs Kelly's wire last night, the 28th, just before we left Potijze for down country and it is such an awful march through Ypres, I took it for a very good augury, and as a matter of fact it was just a quiet midnight moonlight stroll without anything happening. I am anxious to hear from Mrs Kelly every day as she very kindly promised to write to me and tell me how you were every day. I have not written to her yet, so please thank her for her letter in case I have not time to write today. I must tell you all about our visit up to the front now that it is over, all is well. You remember me in huts near Brielen until 21st. We left at 8.30pm and joined up with 2nd East Surreys and others and marched to Potijze, the same old spot, where we relieved the 8th and the 6th Durhams in the GHQ trenches. It was another nightmare march. Stopping and starting and going at terrific speed. We were either halted or else running and at the back of the column as I always am, it is terrible. When we got near Potijze we were halted several times for 15 or 20 mins and the men lay down by the side of the road, then we had to move again and the men would get up and the column would move about ten yards then another long halt and then another short move. It was rotten. Then eventually we halted for, I should say, over an hour. This on a road which is constantly shelled by the Germans at all hours and there is no cover to be had. They sent three shells over, two of which burst just beyond the tail of the column, then a message came down the column "anybody hit?" I sent one back, "No". I was thankful when it was over and we were in our trenches. When we get near Potijze we begin to hear the rifle bullets zip zipping about the place. Presently we got into our dug out which, as I told you, was a very comfy one, it was rather built up. We were there all the next day and were just going to settle down for the night or rather, send working parties out, when a message came that

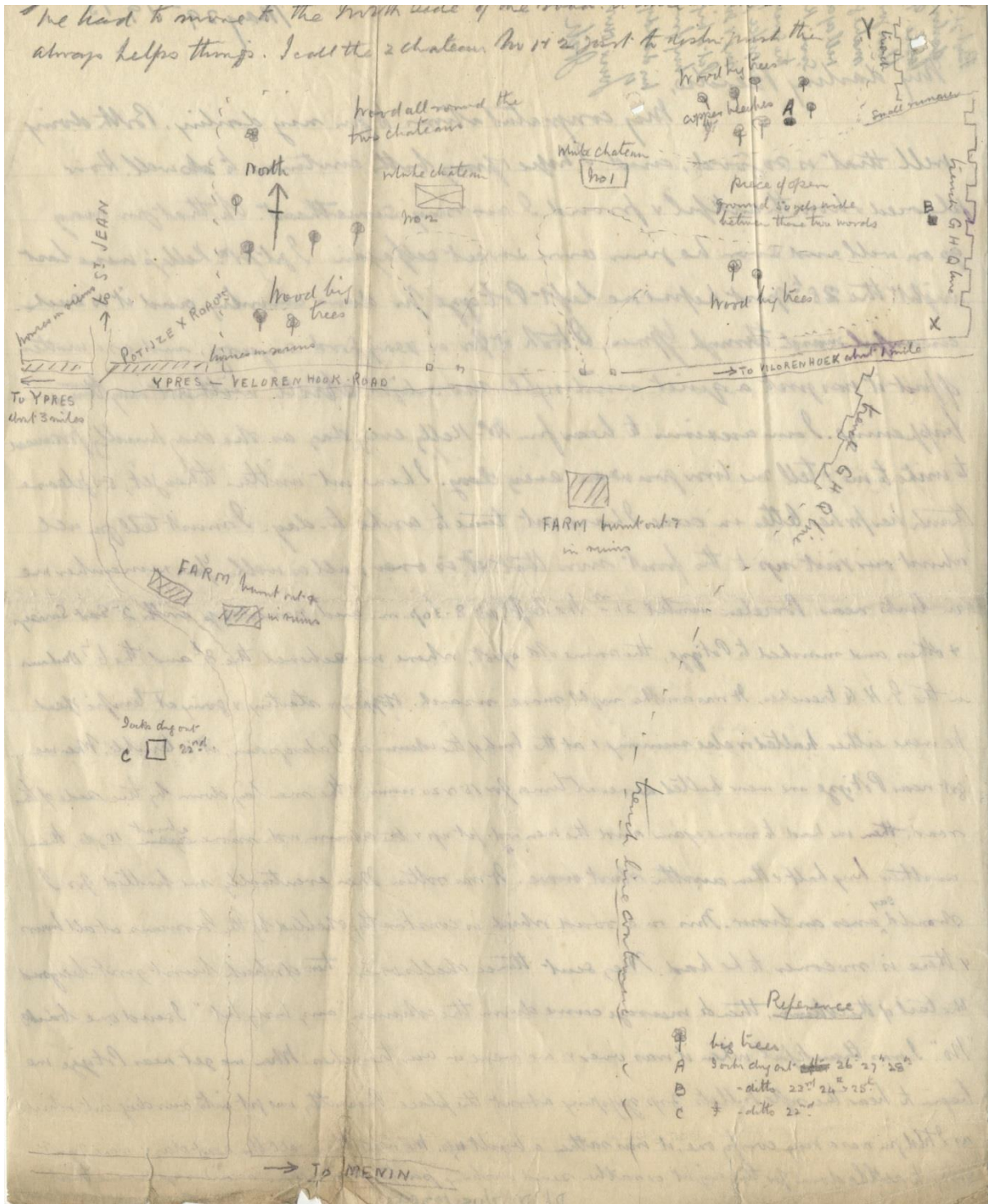


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we had to move to the North side of the road. A little sketch, as I have said before, always helps things. I call the two chateaux No 1 and 2 just to distinguish them.



We started after dark and marched along the road beside my dug out marked C to the cross roads and then turned to the right up the road. The enemy have them and the woods marked and shell them often night and day. When the head of the column got to X it started filing into the trench. The road at that point is a dangerous place for snipers. When I got there the order was passed down to load, which I thought was extraordinary. Then we moved forward a little further and, as things were going very slowly, I went forward to see what was the trouble and a message was passed down "about turn, double". We turned about but I would not let them double as there might have been a panic. As the order had been given to load, I wondered what on earth could be happening. At last I halted them and went forward to see what was wrong and found it was simply the fact that we could not all get into the trenches. Then we had to take a company back into the wood and find dug outs for them. While we were coming up the road we could see the sky in front being slit by vivid streaks of lightning and presently it commenced to rain in torrents, a tremendous thunder shower. The lightning and thunder came right overhead and before we got into our dug out we were drenched. I had a cyclist's cape on which I found a few days before and I slit holes for the arms at each side, my arms were wet, and from my knees downwards, and like this, we lay down to sleep and slept until about 4am when I got up feeling chilled to the bone. These experiences are all together most nerve racking and, still not fighting, but it does take it out of everybody. The orders we get from the brigade we are attached to have been, all along, most confusing and we never know where we are. They have pushed us about so much and can never get settled down at all and get any work done in improving the trenches. I found the order to load and double were not issued at all but were all a mistake on some officer, officers' or men's part and it is only for home consumption, dear heart, you understand. The next morning we found the trenches very bad and not at all safe.

I was troubled a good deal these days with diarrhoea and made use of the chlorodyne you gave me dearie. It was thoughtful of you my lassie. I have treated several of our officers. The next morning 24th I was out at 2.50am when a most violent rapid fire commenced and the bullets were flying over my head. I lay flat on



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my face and crawled back to my dug out. I felt my eyes smarting very much and I immediately thought of gas. I groped about for the CO and found he was not there, then I got my respirator out and put it on, but I had got a good dose before I got this done, and went out to the trench. There I found the CO and we got the men out to man the trench. The gas was coming then in great style. Then the shelling started at about 3am. It was absolutely terrific. The CO was hit a glancing blow in the back but hung on and would not be attended to. We had to get down to get out of the way of the bursting shells overhead and we had to get up to get out of the thick gas which lies in the bottom of the trench and we had to keep a look out over the trench in case the front line broke, so you can imagine we had a merry time. It was Whit Monday and Empire Day and the hottest Whit Monday I ever put in. Orders are very difficult to give when one has one's mouth and nose covered. After a few hours the rifle fire got weaker, but they kept the shell fire up for 13 solid hours. I felt I was losing the use of my arms, but it went off after a while when we got some fresh air, but the chest irritation still exists but is getting better. We had four officers and 51 men gassed and had to go to hospital, in fact we might all have gone to hospital. The front line held except in one or two places, one on our right and another on our left. I was watching the right through my field glasses and I saw a party streaming down a field apparently dragging something and carrying a Red Cross flag. I thought it might have been a red cross party of ours, but it was the Germans dragging two machine guns after them and protecting themselves by using a Red Cross flag.

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I must tell you however, we had sent up C and D Companies into the front line trench along with the 2nd East Surreys to learn trench warfare. We were very anxious about them indeed. Later on however we heard they had given a very good account of themselves and had very few gassed. As a matter of fact, when the Germans attacked they fought their ailments with the gas and fairly pumped lead into the advancing Germans. They drove them back and then they came on again and were driven back, they never got nearer than about 150 to 200 yards. Later they streamed away across to the right and they fired at them at 700 yards range for four hours. I believe our artillery did tremendous execution among them. On the right front line two companies of the 7th under Major Spain broke and lost very heavily indeed.



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There were only three officers and 100 men left, Major Spain being one of them. So far as I can make out they never should have cleared and it never pays to retire under any circumstances because as soon as you do they catch you in the open and you are bound to lose heavily and if you hang on you always can retaliate with rifle fire and you have the protection of the trench and moreover when support comes up in the shape of a counter attack, the men left in the trench render them very material support. It is really the old Zulu [?] over again. If we get back we die and if we go forward we die, therefore let us go forward. If they go back they die and if they remain in the trench they have a chance and even at the worst can only die or be taken prisoner. Of course it is all very well talking on paper but takes a bit of doing when one has to do it, but never the less it is the only common sense thing to do and moreover there is a general order saying that no one must retire unless under a written order. We were like Wellington at the battle of Waterloo.

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We were glad when night came. The next day there was some shelling but we thought nothing of it. On the 26th we moved over two companies just over the road into the trenches on the south side and we went into a dug out marked A in the wood. There were many tall beech and other trees all round, but what a mess they were in, broken and lying about all over the place. There was a beautiful copper beech just behind our dugout which had been hit about ten feet from the ground and shattered, it was still standing erect and later on in the week when the wind got up it began to groan and creak and we expected it coming down any minute. Several others which were hit fell during the day making a great crash. I found Colonel Turnbull and Colonel Vaux in a big dug out close to. I was sitting talking to them just outside their dug out when a shell burst close to and Turnbull said we had better get inside. We were just going in when another one hit a tree just behind the door and down came the tree on top of the dug out but it just caught the corner. It caused great amusement. I heard that Jack Ritson (not the major) but the Inspector of Mines and international rugby man, a cousin of the Major had done very good work. He is our 8th officer. Major Baker of the Royal Fusiliers told me and as he was in charge, he ought to know. He said he gave Ritson a very nasty job to do, that was to reinforce a trench. The Buffs tried twice and failed and then Ritson took it on and by



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sheer good leading he got there without losing a man, I expect he will get some recognition. Welsh of the 6th has got the Military Cross but he is done for, poor fellow, so far as his nerve is concerned, and has had to be sent to England. They shelled the wood very heavily that day, but the other days were fairly quiet. At about 2am the first morning in the wood, we were awakened by Major Baker asking about dug outs. He had just arrived with about 300 men and three officers, all that was left of the battalion. I got up and showed him all through the wood and hunted out the dug outs. He was very ratty and rather inclined to be so with me also, in spite of what I was doing, but I knew he was tired and anxious and, as we had had to find dugouts ourselves in the dark, I knew his feelings. I had a tommy's great coat on and he did not know who I was. When it became daylight, which it did before we were finished, he saw what my rank was and he was full of apologies and was extremely nice. One of the officers produced a bottle of champagne and we drank it at 4am then I went back and had a sleep.

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The other days were more or less uneventful. We could not move about much during the day. We simply lived for the post at night and for news of our front line companies. They had the time of their lives, I believe, and were sniping at Germans all day. They worked all night improving their trenches. They got very little shell fire as the shells were always 20 yards beyond them. Our guns made splendid practice of the German trenches, part of which we could see from our dug out. On one occasion we plumped four high explosive shells right in the trench and the earth shot up 100 feet into the air. When the smoke cleared away there was no parapet to be seen and the Germans were running like mad when crack, crack, crack burst our shrapnel right over them. It is all very dreadful but it is just what they try to do with us, but I could not help feeling for the poor beggars. One of the Chopwell men, Turnbull, was killed in the front trench. He was a tall clean open faced boy and used to be a servant in the officers mess at Ravensworth. He was out in an advanced post with others for the purpose of sniping. They were in a house and he incautiously stood up for a second at the window, poor fellow that was quite enough. The men from the trenches have many exciting things to tell. The same two companies were in the front line all the time. I do wish they had changed them and put A and B



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Companies in for a spell. At last the order came to move down. We were to be relieved by the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers and the Commanding Officer told me I had to take A and B Companies down as soon as they were relieved in the GHQ line or trenches. Before they were relieved part of C Company turned up from the trenches. I collected them on the Ypres side of the Potijze cross roads and marched off. I had had so much of this night march that I determined I would try and make them march at such a pace so that there would not be this stopping and bustling that there usually is. It was a lovely moonlight night and I simply strolled along at a pace which we could have kept up and the result was that everybody kept up and there was no confusion. Coming through Ypres in the moonlight was a great and sorry sight.

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Just after entering the market square on the left is a great gaunt building all windows and of course no roof. The windows are not there now but the spaces are left as the whole place has been on fire, this building, with the moon behind it, is just like the Coliseum at Rome, pictures of which you have often seen. On the other side of the market square the road takes us alongside the Cloth Hall. At the end of this long, and what has been a beautiful building with the tower in middle, we turned to the right along the end of the Cloth Hall. There you can see what remains of the state carriage or mayor's carriage. Then you come to the Cathedral which is next to the Cloth Hall. The tower has great lumps knocked off it everywhere. I am trying to get postcards of it to send to you. The street here is twice the width of Grainger Street or more. The houses on the left are in ruins, scarcely one stone standing on another, the bricks and stones lying right out half way over the street. Just here are two great holes into the canal. It appears the canal is arched over and runs through under the town. There were two great holes through this arch with the canal about 30 feet wide, they looked black and forbidding. Further on we turned to the left into a narrow street, which was burning at each side and the bricks of broken down houses were strewn right across the street. We soaked hankies in your eucalyptus before we came to Ypres and it was refreshing. A little further on stands the Water Tower with a great shell hole through it and then out of the town and I was thankful, we had not a single shell all night. We marched straight on to Vlamertinghe and beyond half way



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to Poperinghe and then turned to the right at Brandhoek and we arrived in this wood, the same one we were in before, that is after we came up from our first rest at Sint-Jan-ter-Biezen,. It was not quite light, but became daylight before we got settled down. We had a fire going in no time and had some cocoa and then slept. Next day we had breakfast at 10.30am It is lovely in here but I would rather be further back and more comfortable, it would do the men more good. We are going to have a church service this morning and communion afterwards. It is rather cold today and threatening rain. I am very fit dear heart. I expected a letter last night from Mrs Kelly but there was no mail in, unfortunately. It will come today. I am anxious for particulars. Bye bye my darling lassie. God bless you and make you well again soon. Kiss the sweet girlie for me and give Pat a big hug from his daddy.
Your own Jock

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**31 May 1915**

*Page 1*

My darling sweetheart

Oh how I wonder how you are, I think I can see you laying in bed with the wee one beside now, how I wish I could snuggle my head down beside you now, just for a moment or two, how I long to see you and my children. What a darling son Pat is and how I love him, do tell me what he says about the baby. I can see him standing on his tip toes looking into the cot and touching her face so gently with his fat hands. Give him a very big hug from his daddy. Many thanks for the preparation dearie. I am returning it for

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you to keep. I see Simpson is a colonel. I would not be surprised if he gets a CB [Companion of the Order of the Bath] for raising three battalions as the King was told about it especially. It seems to me that the officers who stay at home get all the kudos, they certainly get all the promotion and extra pay from it. I had a lovely hot bath in a pail last evening and had some permanganate in it. We got our valises up last night so I have all my belongings by me and I had a good sleep in my flea bag,



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the pyjamas have not arrived yet. There was a tremendous bombardment going on all night somewhere near here. I think it must have been a French attack  
[no further pages]



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