



LETTERS FROM THE FRONT
TO THE
CHELTENHAM LADIES' COLLEGE
1914—15

1915

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LETTERS FROM THE FRONT TO THE C.L.C.

November, 1914—March, 1915.

THE following are extracts from letters which have been received from the Front in acknowledgment of the Comfort Boxes which College girls have been sending out week by week since October, 1914. The classes have taken it in turn to send, and the boxes have contained all kinds of warm "woollies," tobacco, pipes, electric torches, tinder lighters, cake, chocolate, musical instruments, etc., etc., and more recently periscopes. Gifts have been sent to various regiments in the British Expeditionary Force, to the Navy, to the Mine-sweepers, to the Belgians and to the French. The letters have been written by men of all ranks, from Commanding Officers to privates, so that we may feel that, taken altogether, they give us a fairly comprehensive idea of life in the trenches.

IN THE FIELD.

November 15th, 1914.

MY DEAR MISS FAITHFULL,

I have just received one parcel of comforts for the men from the Cheltenham [Ladies'] College, with a note in it that thirty such parcels are on the way to me. I can say on behalf of the men and myself that we are most grateful to you and to your girls and to all kind friends who remember us at home, and send us comforts as tokens, as we know they are, of their faith in us, and of their affection for us. And we do require the things, everything we can get to alleviate the conditions of things in the trenches. No one who has not seen it can realise what it is that the regimental officers and men of the Infantry, R.E., and Cavalry (who have been fighting dismounted in the trenches as infantry) have been through, and must continue to go through, in this war.

Modern conditions have made this a war of entrenchments, in which there is little scope for generalship, brilliant attacks, and dashing charges; it has become purely a soldiers' war, in which no living thing can remain above ground on account of the appalling shell fire, and in which therefore both sides have to burrow underground and live in narrow wet clay ditches, unable to stand upright or to look over the top of the trench even by day, and having to be ready to attack or to repel an attack at any moment of the night, and all the time and most of the time, under a terrible shell fire. Hitherto we have been assigned so much ground to defend that in most Battalions every man has had to be in the firing line, and it has been impossible to withdraw any for rest and food, sometimes for weeks at a time. Reinforcements however are arriving, and so we hope that things will soon improve sufficiently to enable us to relieve men in turn from the trenches; the weather however will not improve, and so the need for warm things increases.

I hope however that you won't think I am grumbling, or that I take a pessimistic view of things generally. I certainly do not do that, but I felt I must tell you, for the whole of England ought to know it, just what our regimental officers and men are doing. You all know *how* they have been doing it, and as to their spirits, I was talking this morning to an Infantry Brigadier, who told me that when he felt a bit down on his luck he went down to the trenches to talk to the men and get cheered up a bit!

By the way, the parcel of comforts that has come was from the dear little Kindergarten with their love,—do give them all our love in return, and thanks for their thoughts of us to them and to you all.

Ever yours sincerely,

DEAR MISS FAITHFULL,

I was most agreeably surprised yesterday to receive from you a parcel of comforts for the men, the forerunner of others on the way; . . . there will be great competition for them all. Will you please thank the kind donors for their kind thought. I am sure they will be pleased to know that the men of all arms of the service are doing magnificently. Our losses have been heavy, but the German losses are appalling, and it is an awful thing to think of so many good lives being squandered for no really sound reason. The author of this war will have a lot to answer for one day. When the history of the war comes to be written, I am sure it will be found that the British Army has excelled itself from start to finish. My admiration for the Infantryman grows every day. They are having an awful time in

the trenches, cold and wet, under shell fire all day, vigorously attacked night after night, they come up smiling every time. As regards my men (the Engineers) they have not had a day's rest since we began the war and on several occasions they have greatly distinguished themselves. Over and over again we have worked three days, night and day, without cessation. At night most of the work is between our trenches and those of the enemy, and these are sometimes only two hundred yards apart, so you can imagine it is not a peaceful spot! We have had ten officers mentioned in despatches, seven who have received various grades of the Legion of Honour, one D.S.O., and the Honours List still to come, so that we have not done badly so far. I am sure a special Providence has been looking after my men, as our losses are extraordinarily small. On one occasion our company had twelve shells into its billet in a quarter of an hour. The house was knocked down (two officers had just left before), all the bicycles were destroyed, eight horses killed, and only *one* man was hit! Several other similar instances have occurred. . . .

Before closing this I must again thank you and the College for the comforts, and I hope you will let everybody know how grateful we are, and how cheered the men are to feel that so many kind people are thinking of them.

Very sincerely yours,

I ought to say I opened the parcel and the contents showed how carefully our necessities had been thought of. Just the things the men want.

ON ACTIVE SERVICE,
THE DO-DO FARM, BELGIUM.

November 26th, 1914.

DEAR DIVISION II. CLASS 5A.

We don't know how to thank you enough for your A 1 parcel. We fight much better when we know everyone is being so kind and sending us out such good things from home. We are "living" in a place called the Do-do farm now but it is beastly weather. We had snow and frost but we didn't mind that, now we have a thaw and everything is feet deep in mud. I don't think the "Allemongs" can be feeling very happy now, do you? We hope to be doing a fine goose step in Berlin soon. We all send our love from

TOMMY ATKINS, *Royal Engineers.* . . .

IN THE FIELD

(From the same officer as the first letter).

DEAR MISS FAITHFULL,

. . . I am afraid that my letter of the other day to you may have been a bit pessimistic, I hope not, but my wife discovered from my letters of about that time that I was very anxious, though I had no idea myself that I had given that fact away! The truth is we were desperately anxious; no one at home had any idea how very touch and go that heavy fighting at Ypres and south of it early this month was. We had no reserves, not a man, our line was broken in several places, and God knows how we restored it, but I think if the German troops had been quite the same quality as we met at first, our line would have been rolled up. The Prussian Guard Corps was good enough, but short of officers. One of our regiments engaged came out with the Quartermaster and seventy-five men out of over thirty officers and one thousand men.

However, that is past, we have had reinforcements, and shortened up our front, and have actually been able to get a large share of our troops into reserve, and wash them and clothe them afresh, and some of the regimental officers have even been given a few days' leave! So you can realise there is a lull.

Well, I'm afraid I have been gossiping and have almost forgotten to thank you and all your girls for thinking of us. Do thank them from us all, and tell them that they can have no idea how the men value things sent them from home, and the kind thoughts for them that prompt the gifts. . .

Yours sincerely

A LITTLE FARM IN BELGIUM.

November 28th, 1914.

DEAR MADAME,

. . . The little electric torches have just come at the nick of time as our supply of candles has run out and there is a candle famine in our nearest town. Thank you ever so much for all you have sent. Now that the wet weather has begun, life in the trenches is not so pleasant. It is very hard to keep them dry, and as the soil is clay you may imagine we usually look as though we had been rolling in Thames mud. Your butler would indignantly slam the door in our faces, if we could come and pay you a

visit ! still we are quite cheerful and confident of the end. The war consists of trying to be as unkind as possible in every way to some other wretched soldiers we have never seen before. With many thanks from us all,

Believe me,

Yours gratefully,

——— (Major R.E.)

November 30th, 1914.

DEAR MISS FAITHFULL,

Please accept our best thanks for the box of gifts, which came last night for the men of my brigade. The men are most grateful for the delightfully chosen gifts. I have ventured to pin up your letter on the door of the barn where the men sleep, so that they shall know exactly from whom their latest comforts come. The pipe was such a good one, I was tempted to keep it myself. We are resting now and refitting. This is a necessary operation as endless little stores are lost and also the men have to be re-clothed. You can imagine that although out of the sound of the guns we are still very busy. . . . We all appreciate so much the kind thoughts which prompt the sending of parcels such as yours, and it cheers the men up wonderfully. I am glad to say they are all in great heart.

With renewed thanks,

——— (Lt.-Col. R.F.A.)

November 28th, 1914.

DEAR MADAM,

I am writing to thank you on behalf of my company. . . . Strange to say, at this present moment we are billeted in a girls' school, I may not say where, but perhaps the papers have enlightened you. The men sleep in the class-rooms and are very comfortable indeed compared to some billets. I do not know where the pupils are, but they must be quite small. We only hope that we may not be disturbed for some days in our present abode. Again very many thanks.

Yours truly,

——— (Major R.E.)

ARMY SERVICE CORPS,

November 29th, 1914.

DEAR MADAM,

Your extremely nice box of comforts for the men arrived yesterday. . . . I am glad to say that the men in the trenches of this brigade are having a quieter time at present than they have been accustomed to. The brigade has been right through all the fighting from the beginning. One of the regiments, about a fortnight ago, had sixty-one shells drop on the parapets of their trenches during one morning. In this regiment one officer was buried three times in one night by the trench being blown in with "Jack Johnsons." It is really extraordinary how cheery the men keep under the most trying conditions—he seems to be most cheerful when he has most reason not to be.

Again very many thanks.

Yours truly,

——— (Captain).

19TH INFANTRY BRIGADE CO., FRANCE.

December, 1914.

DEAR PRINCIPAL,

On behalf of those who have received your gifts, I wish to tender our heartfelt thanks. The note which accompanied the gift I had the honour of reading to our men, the last portion referring to the contributions of the children affected not a few, as I might inform you that many of our men have children. Without going into details I would simply ask you, what would be the prevalent thoughts of those men, knowing those little luxuries were provided for out of children's pocket money. No one better than a man of your position could possibly conjecture the situation and feeling on hearing of their origin.

It is indeed a glorious spirit with which our race is being inspired, they in their turn will learn of that which we have attempted (we hope to finish it) and then imbued with that glorious traditional spirit they will maintain the prestige of our race. Apart from all this I would like you to tell all concerned how we appreciate all. At present we have had a quiet time, but it has been a hard journey so far, our depleted ranks are silent proof of what has happened, but, never daunted, we still persevere, doing what after all is a Briton's duty. Despite all the obstacles we feel assured that we are fighting for the right and the right must win. I do not propose

to tell you any harrowing reminiscences of the war as that can be gained from the Press, but I do earnestly ask you to convey our heartfelt thanks for their gifts. . . .

Yours sincerely,
——— (Sergt.-Major).

As show of hands decides that the Children's Prayers for us are most acceptable.

December 2nd, 1914.

DEAR MISS FAITHFULL,

I ought to have written two days ago to tell you that the two boxes containing the parcels of comforts had safely arrived. I sent them to my two companies, and I hear from the commanding officers that the men are delighted with the contents and there was great competition over several of the articles. Since writing to you last one of my officers has been awarded the V.C. and two others the D.S.O. and both the companies have been in the fighting at Ypres and have distinguished themselves greatly. We are all looking forward to a visit to-morrow from his Majesty the King. He will get a great reception. Again thanking you for all your kindness in sending us such nice things.

I remain, yours very sincerely,
———

TO PRINCIPAL AND STUDENTS,

I now have great pleasure in writing you these few lines thanking you for your kind gifts of Tobacco and Cigarettes, Socks, etc., which I can assure you the Boys were very pleased to receive them. We are enjoying the very best of health considering the weather we are facing at present, which I think we owe chiefly to the kind folks at home for supplying us with a good amount of warm things such as you sent us for warding off the cold, thus assisting us to keep our health which means everything to us out here, wishing you all have the very best of health and once again I send my humble thanks for myself and my comrades,

I remain,

Yours respectfully,

A SOLDIER BOY,———(Cpl., Royal Horse Artillery).

December 12th, 1914.

DEAR MISS,

Just a few lines to thank you for your kindness—I was going to send you a post-card to thank you but I could not express myself enough on such a small piece of card. So I have taken the liberty of thanking you by letter. The box which was sent by you arrived quite safe and after a series of guessing by seventy-six of us I became the possessor of it. I am very much obliged to you for it, I wish I could express myself more fully: but been rather *shy* I suppose as something to do with it. So I hope these few lines will convey to you my very best thanks. I am sure no better gift has been sent since the war began everything was excellent and just the things I required, and the flash light was a gem to me as I have a lot of night work to do, and by having the experience I know when to use it. You see if some one had got possession of it and got to using it the wrong time, it might bring a shower of Bullets over on us. Not because we mind bullets so much but prevention is better than cure, so we work without a light if possible.

Just a few words about ourselves. To begin with here we are bobbing up and down, and most every time we bobs up it means a German down for good. We have all got little mud castles of our own, until a shell or the rain causes them to fall down of course we have to dig another one the digging been mixed with a few German Compliments which I am sure they would not like. We have been rather handicaped lately with the rain, but I think we shall have a Xmas box for them which I am sure they will not like. I do not know wheter it is Madam or Miss but I will chance a little sentence of French—For the parcel *Merci bien*. For yourself, *Joyeux Noël Bonne année*. I could tell you a few stories of Tommy, airing his knowledge of French, perhaps another time, I had better send this and make sure you get thanks for your kindness, as one never know of tomorrow. We have a new name now, Mud larks. We are all Happy as them, and I am proud to say their is not a lad amongst our Grand Old Corp who is not willing to step forward as soon as the advance is given. We have lost a terrible lot and we shall loose a lot more, but we are ready to smash them up as soon as the word is given. We all hope to be home soon and it won't be long before the German Suasage is cooked. I have been out here since the beginning of the war and except a few minor injuries and numerous escapes I am allright and I am hoping to be on ten days leave next month.

There is no need to tell you any war news, as the daily paper gives a fairly Good account of it day by day, only the news you read in the papers is

gleaned from behind the firing line, not exactly what is in the Trenches in front. Well goodbye for present. Hoping this will find all the Ladies at the Colledge In the very Best of health. My Very Best thanks for your kindness.

I remain,

Yours respectively,

——— (Sergeant),—*Expeditionary Force.*

H.M.S. IRON DUKE.

December 12th, 1914.

DEAR MADAM,

Admiral Sir John Jellicoe directs me to thank you most sincerely on behalf of the ships' companies of the Grand Fleet, for the most welcome gift sent from the Ladies' College, Cheltenham. . . . The articles have been distributed to the crew of a cruiser who, owing to special circumstances, happened to be in exceptional need of such comforts. They have been highly appreciated, and much gratitude was expressed for them, and for the kind thought of the senders. The gift was all the more appreciated as coming from so famous an institution as the Ladies' College, Cheltenham.

I remain,

Yours faithfully,

——— (Lt.).

35, ENNISMORE GARDENS, S.W.

December 17th, 1914.

DEAR MADAM,

I thank you and the ladies of Cheltenham College for their splendid gift of warm clothing for our brave troops who are in urgent need of it. We feel very grateful to those kind contributors who by their practical sympathy thus help to relieve the hardships of our gallant soldiers who fight so valiantly to defend our dear countries.

Yours faithfully,

VICOMTESSE DE LA PANOUSE.

R.H.A., 2ND CAVALRY DIVISION.

January 10th, 1915.

. . . As I unpacked the cases and saw one thing after another appearing, it absolutely took my breath away. You have thought of simply everything, and every single thing you have sent is most useful. The woollen things are beautifully knitted and gloriously warm, and the pipes, tobacco, cigarettes and lighters are what the men all crave for. The electric torches are great luxuries and invaluable for night marches, and the little writing-cases and housewives are the Tommy's ideal. . . We have been out in this country since 16th August and were at Mons, Le Cateau, the Marne, the Aisne, and this last great battle for Ypres—so we have seen most of the fun! During the fighting round Ypres we were holding the line Mollebetre-Wytschaete-Messines where the fighting was so fierce and our cavalry held up two fresh complete German corps for forty-eight hours. Sir John French promised a special despatch about it, but it has not been published yet. I've never imagined anything like it, our brigade was in action night and day for ten days on end before the French came up and helped us. Things are going fairly well now, but if it depends on purely military considerations, which I suppose it doesn't, it will be many a long month before the war is over. The German is a thundering fine fighting man and as brave as they make 'em. . . .

R.H.A. AMMUNITION COLUMN. . .

January 12th, 1915.

DEAR MISS (II. 5A),

Just a few lines to thank you. You will see by my address that we are Artillery and don't visit the trenches, but we have done some good work out here. You asked about the Indians, well they have done some very good work, in fact the Germans are terrified of our Black Boys. . . .

1ST ROYAL BERKS REGT.

DEAR MISS ——? CLASS II.A,

In your letter you asked what sort of weather we were having out here. Well, I am sorry to say it is simply awful, rain from morning to night, day in and day out, and even as I sit and write these few lines, it is a night never to be forgotten, as it is Snowing fast and already four inches deep, at the same time there is a fierce Battle raging and the roar of the

heavy Guns can be distinctly heard sending its Messengers of death to some unknown destination, while on the road away in the distance one can see the Field Ambulance slowly passing along, some going up "empty," to do their duty under cover of darkness, others returning "Loaded," with not a glimmer of a Light except for the flash of a gun, and the occasional glare of one of the Enemies Search Lights across the Sky, in its vain Search for our Air Craft, and so the Battle continues, and one often hears the challenge, "Halt, who goes there?" with the reply, "Friend," and again the reply, "Pass friend, all's well," but one often wonders, is all well? for one never knows what's in store for us in this Great Struggle. But believe Me, not one of the Boys are the least down hearted and they seem to glory in the Mud and water, and never appear to be happier than when in the trenches for they recognise what is at stake, and it's a Job they VOLUNTEERED for.

.

Sergeant.

1ST BRIGADE, R.F.A.

February 27th, 1915.

. . . The country we are in at present is extremely dreary and desolate, owing to the long continued warlike operations just about here which are more or less at a standstill on account of the weather. The whole country is waterlogged and if it were not for the Pavés I don't think either side would be able to get supplies up at all. As it is, we are well supplied with the necessities of life, but at the same time we are very grateful for such extra luxuries as you have so very kindly sent us. . . .

——— (*Lt.-Col.*).

—— BATTERY, R.F.A.

March, 1915.

. . . This being a new Battery and composed of Non-commissioned Officers and men sent from India, very few comforts, etc., find their way here, so you may imagine that your gift was greatly appreciated by Tommy. The mouth-organs were on the go nearly all night. It seemed quite a change to get a little music. We are doing our level best to scare the Germans back to Berlin, but I'm afraid that we shall require more men yet. . . . You may, however, depend upon us doing our level best to bring this war to a successful finish. . . .

——— (*Quartermaster Sergeant*).