

BILL & IVY FURLONG'S WAR TIME LETTERS

Michael Furlong

BOOK TWO-1941

Acknowledgments.

I would not have been able to consider tackling such a large & complex project without the help & support of my dear wife Lesley. Her major contribution to this effort was sorting through the many sacks of letters retrieved from my deceased mother's loft, then collating the content of those sacks, putting them in date order and stapling & labelling them before filing them in boxes for safe storage. I also appreciate her patience during the many hours, weeks & months I have since spent in typing & re-typing large parts of my original endeavours.

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Michael Furlong

April 2023



WAR TIME



LETTERS BOOK TWO 1941

A TRANSCRIPT OF CORRESPONDENCE

BY MICHAEL FURLONG.

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INTRODUCTION

In the early part of the Second World War the south of the United Kingdom was plagued with air raids. Over 40,000 people died due to German bombing during the war and nearly half of them were in London, but the effects were felt across the neighbouring counties especially during the Blitz of 1940 & 1941 as collateral damage was common due to missed targets and mistaken geographic locations by German airman at night. Every man and woman who could do so took part in the war effort and Britain's total mobilisation during this period proved to be successful in winning the war, by maintaining strong support from public opinion. The war was a "people's war" that enlarged democratic aspirations and produced promises of a better Britain after the war

Bill and Ivy Furlong who married in June 1938, had their house built on a plot of land purchased in the village of Waterford, close to the county town of Hertford, 20 miles north of London. Waterford is an idyllic parish, on the main road to Stevenage. At that time it had a church, pub & post office and the River Beane meandered slowly through the flood plain that was popular with picnickers & walkers during the summer. The Hertford North Station is a mere 1.7 miles from the house and this provides a regular service to London, Kings Cross Station. It was the perfect place for a young couple to settle and bring up a family in the peace and tranquillity of the countryside.

Bill was a Bookbinder by trade, working at Stephen Austin, printers in Hertford and Ivy worked in Longmores, the local solicitors in Castle Street, Hertford. When she left school she got a job in the local Co-op shop (where they first met) so mention of staff and premises is a regular feature. Their early romantic days were disrupted when Bill was called up in July 1940.

The National Service (Armed Forces) Act imposed conscription on all males aged between 18 and 41 who had to register for service. Those medically unfit were exempted, so due to Bill's long time high blood pressure, he was considered "Grade 2 on enlistment and subsequently classed as "B1", thus deemed unfit for a fighting unit. There were, however many other areas where men were needed and, due to Germany's escalating bombing campaign, the biggest manpower need by far was Anti- Aircraft Command; at its peak during World War II, it was the largest single formation in the British Army, so Bill was swept up with many thousands of other men and packed off for basic training at the start of his service in the army.

As in Book One, the communication between Bill and Ivy continues to be an interesting one. It paints a picture of everyday life throughout the Second World War and how the people of Britain got on with their lives in between the disruptions of the air raids. From Bill's very first hair raising car-driving experience in snowy conditions to the hours of utter boredom with headphones on listening to nothing, the contrast of humour and brain-numbing army life is plain. They also provide an insight into conversational dialogue and colloquialisms, using phrases and expressions that have since been lost or forgotten.

Bill Furlong idolised his wife, Ivy, perhaps to an unhealthy degree and he plainly experienced a feeling of insecurity brought about in part by their enforced separation. This second batch of letters continues to demonstrate not only the hardships of army training, but of home sickness and loss, which Bill doubtless felt more than Ivy. This is clear in the letters, which sometimes segued from descriptions of army life into pages and pages of adoration. As before, I realised that much of the communication between them was not only very personal, but detracted from the thrust of the story. While it is important to understand the psychological pressures Bill was going through, I have spared the reader much of the sentimentality for the sake of pace. [...] This symbol denotes where I have skipped the unnecessary script.

This second batch of correspondence comprises of approximately 34 letters from Ivy to Bill, from January 1941 to December 1941. Unfortunately there appear to be about 6 months of her letters missing between April & October 1941, and although Bill's letters help to fill in some of the gaps, it often leaves some intriguing unanswered questions that we will never know the answer to. As in Book One (1) each letter varies greatly in length, usually 2 or 3 pages but occasionally longer, often written on both sides. Most spelling errors and lack of full stops or commas have been transcribed as written.

Bill's letters number some 154 from January to December 1941. During 1941 he was moved about several times as well as attending courses, so there are at least 8 different addresses given. When on night duty rosters he often wrote more than once in the same 24 hours and this confused some of his date keeping. Additionally many of his letters only have the day on (say Sunday) or maybe the date (say 24) but no month or year. Sorting them into a logical sequence using content means the letters have been transcribed in chronological order to the best of my abilities. On one day in January he wrote 3 separate letters totalling 21 pages. Many of his letters are 9 or

more pages and on one occasion he tries to break the record for the longest sentence by typing more than one side of a foolscap sheet, describing his fraught 127 mile journey from home back to barracks using buses, coal lorry, trams, cars, vans and much walking, often in the wrong direction.

The letters are a mix of typed and hand-written, both in pen and pencil, depending upon what was to hand at the time. I have included scans of the original letters as appropriate throughout.

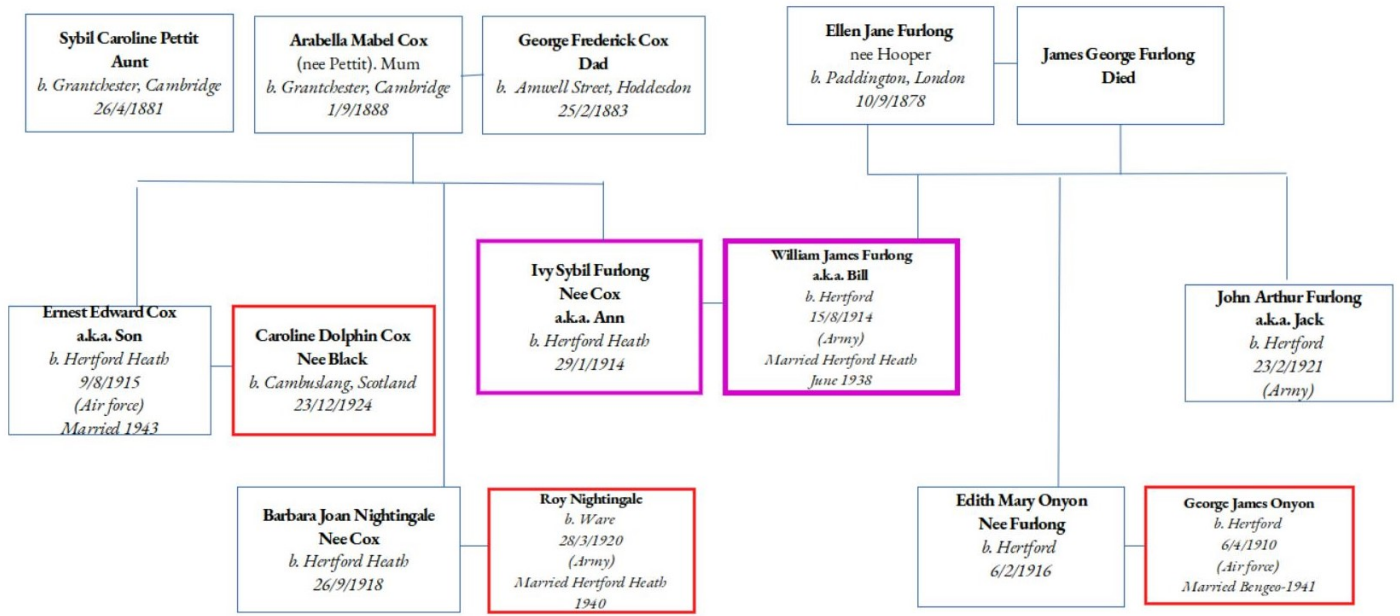
In this second batch we see Ivy looking to improve her lot by applying for a job at the local hospital (Hertford County Hospital) which was considerably nearer to Four Winds, and speculating on what Bill would be doing when the war ends in less than 12 months! We also are given an insight into life on the home front with shortages mentioned and the regular raffles being held to raise funds for the troops; such prizes as 3lbs of onions or a pair of stockings proving tempting enough to try for.

Bill attends various courses, gets moved around a lot but also earns his much coveted first stripe. This seems to stabilise his position somewhat and gives him more incentive to carry on, although the talk of leave appears with monotonous regularity. He has his first taste of driving a car.

From Bill's letters we learn more about WWII searchlights, which formed part of a system of aircraft detection linking locator devices, searchlights, and anti-aircraft (AA) guns. The locators sent electronic information to the lights and guns, which in turn tracked the target. Once a locator had "locked on" to an enemy aerial target, the concept was for both lights and guns to be trained on the target so it could be nearly simultaneously illuminated and then destroyed. For this system to work successfully it required a whole network of searchlights and AA batteries across the country. As the Luftwaffe changed targets, causing attacks to occur in differing parts of the country, AA sites were often moved for strategic reasons to better protect vulnerable factories, towns & cities.

As before air-raids feature, with some descriptive accounts of bombings, dog-fights and fires. I have therefore used this symbol ➤ to denote mention of air-raid warning, bombing or aerial combat.

CAST OF CHARACTERS FROM THE FAMILY



Ivy Sybil Furlong nee Cox a.k.a. Ann b. Hertford Heath 29/1/1914

William James Furlong a.k.a. Bill b. Hertford 15/8/1914 (Army)

Both the above were living at "Four Winds" Waterford, Nr. Hertford.

Mum: Arabella Mabel Cox nee Pettit. b. Grantchester, Cambridge, 1/9/1888

Dad: George Frederick Cox. b. Amwell Street, Hoddesdon, 25/2/1883

Ernest Edward Cox, a.k.a. Son (brother of Ivy) b. Hertford Heath, 9/8/1915
(Airforce)

Barbara Joan Nightingale nee Cox (sister of Ivy) b. Hertford 26/9/1918

*The above four were living at the "Two Brewers" pub in Hertford Heath although
"Ernie" was already posted to Scotland with the R.A.F.*

Mother: a.k.a. Little Gran. Ellen Jane Furlong nee Hooper, b. Notting Hill, London
10/9/1878

Edith Mary Onyon nee Furlong (sister of Bill) b. Hertford -6/2/1916

John Arthur Furlong a.k.a. Jack, (brother of Bill) b. Hertford 23/2/1921

The above three were living at 11, Gas House Lane, Hertford (now re-named as Marshgate Drive, Hertford).

Sybil Caroline Pettit (sister of Arabella Mabel) b. Grantchester, Cambridge 26/4/1881

Living at "Four Winds" with her companion Ellen (Nell) Barker during war time.

Roy Reginald Nightingale (married Barbara in 1940) b. Ware, 28/3/1920 (Army)

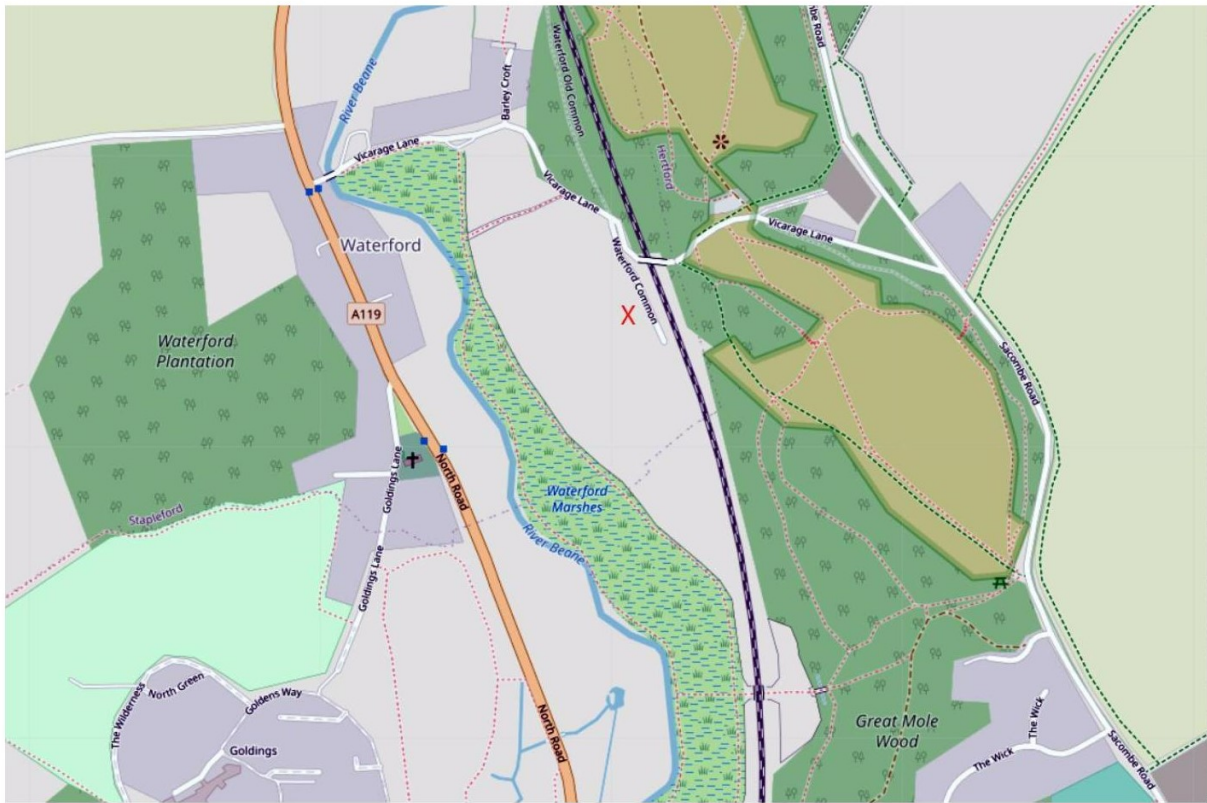
George James Onyon (married Edith in 1941) b. probably Hertford-6/4/1910

(Airforce)

Caroline Dolphin Cox nee Black (married Ernest in 1943) b. Cambuslang 23/12/1924

WATERFORD MARSHES

Bill and Ivy lived off Vicarage Lane to the east of Waterford, next to the railway line to Kings Cross, London. It looks west onto the Waterford Marshes. The unmade road that ran behind the houses and adjacent to the railway was later named Waterford Common.



This small community of houses played host to a number of characters mentioned in the letters.



Looking east across the marshes, circa 1950

1. Entering from the left off Vicarage Lane Robert & Alice Matthews lived at "Hillside".
2. Daisy & her daughter Marjorie Smith (who became a Bolton), known as the MacSmiths, lived at "Little Croft".
3. Alan and Evelyn George, and Alan's sister Ruth, lived at "Rylstone" next to "Four Winds".
4. Bill and Ivy's home, Four Winds.
5. Edith and Daisy Smith, sisters, lived at "Hopecroft". Edith was a headmistress who owned all the land and sold the individual plots for building.

INFLATION AND THE COST OF LIVING

To understand expenditure referenced in the letters it is worth noting that £1 in 1940 is equivalent in purchasing power to about £64.70 in 2022, an increase of £63.70 over 82 years. The pound had an average inflation rate of 5.22% per year between 1940 and 2022, producing a cumulative price increase of 6,369.86%. Interestingly, the inflation rate in 1940 was 16.76%, whereas the inflation rate in 2022 was 10.70%.

This means that today's prices are 64.70 times higher than average prices since 1940¹. A packet of 20 cigarettes in 1940 cost about 1/- (5p) whereas today a packet costs between £10 to almost £13, depending on brand. Cigarettes are a running theme throughout this correspondence!

Of course these letters were written before decimalisation. If you are unfamiliar with pre-decimalisation, here are some examples of costs mentioned in the letters:

3d-this is three old pennies or about 1 ½ p.

6d-half a shilling (a “tanner”) or 2 ½ p. In 1940 this would buy a coffee & sandwich and Bill lost this in one evening playing cards.

2/- two shillings (a “florin”) or 10p (sent to Bill by Ivy). This would buy two packets of cigarettes. Today’s equivalent is £6.50

2/6 – or 12 ½ p referred to as “two and six”, or “half a crown”, which was 1/8th of a pound, equivalent today to about £8.00.

10/- ten shilling (or ten bob) –half a £1.00 or 50p. Ivy found a note in the road, today it would be worth about £32.50.

¹ Office for National Statistics composite price index

CHAPTER ONE

*1617342 Gnr.Furlong
No. 4 Troop H.Q.
Horsley Camp
Nr.Derby
2 January 1941*

My Darling,

What a long time it seems since I last saw you, so many changes take place here in the course of a week, that it seems ages since I was last able to hold you & whisper in your ear [...] if fortune favours us, I should be able to do this again next weekend, so keep smiling my angel, & pray hard for it to hold good, because I have a nasty feeling that leave will soon be cancelled, & I want to get as much in as I possibly can before that happens.

And now my chief item of news for the weekend, I drove the car yesterday, the sergeant took me out, & let me take over for a while, & what with hills & traffic, I got a very comprehensive lesson in driving this morning. He let me have full control after only a few minutes explaining, & I think about two more lessons like that will make me a driver (3rd class though). I did enjoy myself, & we had some hair raising scrapes, in fact I was a typical army driver, but I'm going to learn if I can, as soon as possible. The officer has been on leave all the weekend you see, & goes tomorrow to Newark, & the sergeant has been in charge, you've no idea how much nicer army life can be without officers to worry about, I've had a fine time, & yesterday morning he marched into the office & said we're going out, he had arranged for someone else to be here for the phone, & we just took the car & went for a spin, combining business with pleasure, & I think I have a few more kinks in my brain now.

It has been snowing again tonight, the roads are just like glass, frost & cold winds, with snow seems to be the sum total of our weather just now, but I hope it clears up soon, or I shall have to find the train fare home next week, the scenery looks wonderful this way, we can see miles of countryside, & with the snow, it is really a wonderful sight, but I have no-one with whom to share it, because nobody here seems

to appreciate beauty, I wonder why, all they seem to think about is pleasure, in the form of booze, & I have to see these wonderful things in silence, & keep any happy thoughts to myself, when I hear a snatch of beautiful music I want to cry, & it does all sorts of alarming things to me, & really altogether, I feel quite alone here, because up till now I have found no-one with whom to discuss & share the beautiful moments which are still to be gleaned from this awful existence. Ah well, you must excuse me for that little lapse, I have tried hard to fit into the scheme of things, but I'm still very much an individual at heart, & they will never kill my appreciation of beauty, & the only thing that keeps me really happy is the knowledge that in you, I can find all I want [.....] [*Half page of adoration*]

I am on night duty [...], it is now 03.30 in the morning, & I can just see you as you lie in bed [...] I went out this evening to my friends in the village, but it seemed to me, a rather dull evening, & for once I was not so contented there, I think it reminds me so much of what I have left at home, & I felt very miserable when I got back here, but I shall go again in a day or so, because this mood is bound to wear off.

Tonight, the Duty N.C.O. & myself have spent 4 hours polishing my boots, but it has been worth the effort, they look like patent leather now. I'll give you the recipe. First of all we smeared thick layers of blacking all over, & then set light to it, after this we covered them in spit, & boned them all over, this was followed by alternative spit & polish & boning for four hours, & I think I'll come home in them just to show you the result, & it certainly has passed the time away. The weather is absolutely vile, I do hope it clears up soon, because I've had about enough of it, but it's snowing again now, & already all the bare spots are covered, so I expect by morning everywhere will be under again, it certainly is a lot more severe this way, & to me this is something new & quite interesting because I know you have it quite mild your way, & all the snow has gone, which is just as well, it's bad enough with a war on, without having tons of snow everywhere. We have just made a little fire, & it's roaring like anything, but even this doesn't entirely keep out the cold tonight, & it is inclined to be chilly away from the fire.

Everyone is wondering what the new officer is going to be like, but if he's as nice as he's supposed to be, we should be fairly well off, & perhaps he'll do something about getting my stripes for me, I hope so anyway. Our dance is next Friday, & I shall have to be there again, but I should be with you the next day, so I won't let it worry me too much. We had 250 tickets printed, & over 200 are already out, & we hope to clear about £10 this time. I hope we're lucky, because there are

still lots of things to be bought, & that darling is all the news for today, but I'm on tonight again (it's morning now) so I shall be writing again with a full first impression of the new officer, so until then [...] I must say Goodnight [...] I'll be with you soon, Your Bill always.

Four Winds
Thursday 2 January 1941



Darling Bill,

I hav' nt (sic) really got any news for you, nor any questions to answer, not having heard from you today, but I thought I would start a letter to you even if I don't finish it 'till tomorrow. I know you like to hear from me even if there is nothing of importance to say to you.

I am wondering if you are getting the same kind of weather as we are here. If so, you must be glad to have an indoor job. It is bitterly cold here, with an east wind that blows the snow alone in fine drifts, and yet it seems to cold to snow properly. It's the sort of weather that makes you positively hate the thought of the ride to and from work. However when I got in this morning I made the fire up to a beautiful size and we are all cosily sitting in front of it, and I am warm for the first time today. I only wish you were here to share it darling, but I hope your little office isn't too cold.

How's the little dog you are looking after. I do hope he's getting better. By the way you didn't tell me if you had to do a "turn" at the Boxing Day guest party. Did you? and if so what did you do?

Jerry is hovering arround (sic) tonight and we can hear the guns for the first time for weeks. Here he comes now, very low I should think he's well loaded I suppose he's making for London.

Sorry for the blots I have just made. Auntie tells me to confess I have just sworn over it.

Darling it's three weeks today to your leave. That time will soon go, wont it, Don't let it get postponed will you, because I'm counting the days, and I would like to havve (sic) to add instead of subtract.

I am hoping for a letter tomorrow. You know, with only tooo (sic) letters in over a fortnight- yes that's all since you came home-I feel I have lost touch with you. There must be lots & lots of things you have to tell me.

Its 10pm now sweetheart and I must stop to turn Penny out for her walk. I know she won't go very willingly as it is so cold, so for tonight darling, Goodbye I'll write some more tomorrow. God bless you we are just going to make some toast over the fire for supper. Will you have a piece. No? all right I'll eat your piece for you. 'Night darling, I love you.

Friday 9.45pm (H. Heath)

Dear Darling

Did you ever know so much weather. As Aunt Nell frequently remarks " Just? about freeze the hairs off a brass monkey".

I am at the Heath, you will be surprised to learn. Mum is not well, being, I think, thoroughly run down with a touch of flu as well, so Dad 'phoned me this morning to come up dinner time to get some food, and I returned this evening and shall stay for the week end. First however I had to go to Waterford to get my night things and to try to do something about our tank in the roof which is frozen, in the end, after braving those broken steps, which I thought you told me you had mended, I left the bowl fire alight in the roof shining on the pipe which feeds the tank, which by the way was empty but for four inches of water We had been using it for some time before we realized we were frozen up. However I left strict instructions that the H.W. pipes were not to be used till the tank refilled, so I don't think we shall have any trouble. All the same (**next page missing**)

*Horsley Camp
3 January 1941*

Beloved,

Another day is over, & I am now back in the office, & all sorts of things to see to, but they have all got to wait while I write to you, [... .]

First of all, the little bit of news our new officer arrived tonight, & he really is a jolly decent sort, I think things are going to be just fine from now onwards. He has a dog, the loveliest little black puppy you could wish to see, it's a cross between a spaniel & something I think, but it's really a beauty & the fur is the softest I have ever felt, you've no idea how soft it feels, & it's a playful little devil too, I think we shall be good friends, because we have already had a decent game together, it has just one drawback to its appearance, & that is that its tail should have been clipped, a long tail doesn't suit the animal, but it's too late now anyway so we shall have to endure that. Mr. Floyd left us this morning, he said goodbye to all the men, & I think he was genuinely upset at having to go, but he's at Newark now, & I expect we have seen the last of him, although he will try to get over to the Dance on Friday, but I doubt if I shall see him again. Well, having got rid of him, there is nothing left to do but make quick friends with the new one, & that doesn't appear to be very difficult, so wish me luck, & here is something else too, you can really pray hard for my stripe, I'm hoping to take another exam on Thursday, & this time I intend to win, so start thinking of me about 11 o'clock Thursday morning, having interviews with various officers, & keep your fingers crossed darling, & perhaps I can come home at last with my coveted stripe, I do so want to have three, but I must start in a small way first, that's why I'm so keen on getting the first, & I'll keep on trying.

I took a gas lecture this afternoon, & learnt a hell of a lot, so much, that I have fears for your dear people at home, you must study up all you know on Gases, & put into effect everything which will help you defeat it, you are dearer than life to me, & if anything happens to you, I'm sure by telling me you have taken all reasonable precautions by preparing as well as you are able, against the most dreadful of all weapons.

You will be sad to hear that my cold is still with me, in fact I think I have caught a fresh one today, the night work runs me down, & I fall an easy victim to colds, but perhaps I can shake it off by the weekend, I hope so anyway. I'm afraid sleep is too limited in this job, I'm glad I don't get so much night work now, because I'm sure this winter would have killed me long ago had that been the case.

Tomorrow is another big inspection day, it seems to me that every day brings an inspection of some kind to us, I shall contrive to be asleep when it comes off I think, so that I avoid it all, I hate them they always mean that everyone gets in a bad temper until it's all over, but by this time tomorrow it will be all over, so why should I worry. My pen has just given up the ghost & I shall have to get a new nib I'm afraid, & now

I'm using an ordinary pen having to dip in a bottle all the time, you've no idea how annoying it is to have to do this after a fountain pen, I feel very cross with whoever put so much weight on mine so as to break the nib, but if I recommission it, I'll see that nobody else uses it again.

And now [...] I have told you all there is to tell for now [...]

*Horsley Camp
3 January 1941
Second letter (Typed-often faint)*

My very own darling,

Please forgive me for being so slack with my letters since Christmas, but I have really had so much to do, that, although I still write to you, I have not the time to finish them off, and so I have to save them all up until I am on a spell of nights like I am at the moment, and then send them all off together, so I'm hoping that the fact that you receive two or more letters the same time will help you not to be too hard on me.

Well, darling, having made my excuses [...] We have been parted six months now, and it seems to be ages ago since that awful day when I waved to you from the train, I was not too worried about it then, but had I known what I know now, I should not have gone at all, because the time has dragged and although I still get pretty decent leave, it will not be enough to satisfy my longing to be with you [...] until that time , I can only be happy for the time we are together [....]

I shall now tell you all the things that have happened to me since the last letter. First of all Les is at last taken from the office, and is now on a detachment, they said he was not pulling his weight, although I pretended not to know anything about it. Secondly, I have Charlie with me again from Farnah Green and so we are three again and the other fellow who never did work except during the night? has been found out, and sent to another battery so we have now got three hard workers in the office, and life is a lot easier than it used to be. Charlie has gone home on 48 hours leave, he has another daughter, that makes 3 and he is only my age, what do you think of that, and all girls too, he is very disappointed as he wanted a boy, but I told him to have another try, and I wouldn't be surprised if he doesn't one of these times. This

afternoon I went out with the rest of the boys in the snow, and did some digging to make me feel a bit fitter than I have of late, and we had to work all through the blizzard for three hours, I enjoyed it because I was doing it from choice, but the boys who have to do it always, I felt sorry for, and it made me realise how lucky I am even if I don't get promotion, I think it is worth it to be in the warm, but I shall have another go soon, it makes me feel a lot happier, because I relax, and you've no idea what a relief it is to work and not to have to think, I have blisters on my hands, but I still think it is worth it, I has(sic) to dig a sump hole for waste water, and during the afternoon I worked all the time without stopping even for a smoke, and succeeded in making such a terrific hole, that everyone is amazed at the size of it for an afternoons work, but I told them that the office staff could do a job as well as they could, and now I have proved it. I feel a bit tired now, but I know I should be able to sleep alright tomorrow, and that is everything, as I found it very difficult the last time I was on nights. There is tons of work here in the office now, and I have already typed out the orders for tomorrow, but I have decided to leave the rest for John in the morning, as he has very little to do, and I find that he is not very keen on work if he can get out of it, so it will do him good. I ought to tell you that our wretched officer has been trying to get the 48 hours leave stopped altogether, as it delays his work, needless to say he has his own wife here with him now and it's a case of you I'm alright, I don't suppose he will be successful, but he has already stopped us from having the passes early in the morning, so I guess he would stop it all if he had the chance, he is very unpopular now, and no one would hesitate to shoot him if they thought they could get away with it, all he wants is credit for other people's work at any cost so long as it doesn't affect his running about, his very last consideration is for his men and everyone knows it too, and there is much murmuring against him. Fortunately, he cannot do anything much about it, but he will do his best I do know, he can't touch the seven days so that is something to be thankful for, and we hope he will not be allowed to do anything about the other. You must excuse me for a second, as I have just finished making the best cup of the tea ever made, and with a nice piece of toast I shall feel a lot better than I did before, but my poor old stomach can't take it these days, and I'm afraid that I am going to feel bad again soon, and I have no McLean's either.

I mentioned snow quite casually, have you had any yet we have about 2 inches at least here, and the country looks marvellous now, the hills lend themselves for this beauty of scenery, and I should love you to see it all, I have been to one or two places, but this is my by far the prettiest scenery I have seen for a long time, and I wish we could share it together. We are going to hold a dance here at the camp in a

week's time, I don't yet know whether I shall go to it or not, I shall only be a wallflower if I do, although my pal the machinist sergeant is very keen for me to go, and has given me a lot of work to do connected with it, I expect I shall go, if only to see what sort of a success they make of it.

I had a letter from Ron yesterday, and he gave me the news that he is soon to get married, I hope he can be as happy as we have been, although that is wishing for rather a lot, as we are very different from all the rest of the world, and no- one in the whole world knows love as we do. I also received a letter from you with the silhouette, I think it looks a very babyish profile don't you, I don't know whether to keep it or not, but I shall hang on to the two shillings that came with it, and thank you very much too, I was very glad of it as after Christmas I was the same as everyone else, nearly broke, but that will just carry me over now to the payday, even the sergeant is broke this week and had to scrounge a cigarette for me. I think this poor old machine has seen its best days, the space thing seems to have slipped again, and I expect you have noticed how some lines begin before the others, but anyway we are going to lose it soon, and then I shall have to write everything by hand I think, as we certainly have not enough funds to buy one for ourselves, I shall miss her very much but will make the best of it.

Well darling, just three more weeks isn't that just wonderful, I can hardly wait that long [.....]

I'm afraid that there is very little else to tell you this time, but I shall be writing again soon, I know that I have been very slack lately but it is not entirely my fault, it is because I just don't get the opportunity these days, do you know, I had to wait for two hours with your letter in my pocket yesterday before I had a chance to open it, that will show you how busy we are kept, these clusters are certainly making a lot of extra work for us, but at least it stops us from pining so much for the simple reason that we don't get the time to think of anyone but those dearest to us, and the time will fly I think to the next leave I have to come, so please forgive me if you have thought I was neglecting you because you must know by now that no-one in the whole world can love you as much as I do and that no- one in the whole world will ever take your place [....]

*Horsley Camp
5 January 1941
Faintly typed letter*

My very own Darling,

Sunday, and I have had so much to do, that I have not had time to feel my usual fit of depression, but now it has worked off a bit, and I have time to think of you and all that I have missed this weekend by not being with you, but I can find consolation in the thought that I shall soon be spending a lovely seven days at home with the only woman in the whole world who means anything to me, and I am looking forward to it now it is so close, I don't know how I could wait so long for it to happen, and the last few weeks will seem like an eternity to me, I know.

I have had a lot of work to do with the dance that is being held at this H.Q. next week, and I'm utterly fed up with it all, because I know that you won't be there, and what was typing out invitations to the various officers concerned, I've about had all I want of the Dance and I shall be very surprised if I go to it, unless I click for the job of taking money at the door, in that case I shall be there, although if I feel like I do at present, I shall more than likely go to bed, I have the rottenest cold and feel terribly unfit for work, but then everyone else has a cold too, and so I am not alone, and when I come home to you, I shall be able to convalesce, as I believe you suggested in your last letter to me. By the way, I don't do much night work now as we all share it equally, and it works out to one night in three, which you will agree is not too bad after what we have had to do, and we are allowed to take all the time off we are likely to require in the case of evenings off, or anything like that. Last night I went for a very long walk in the snow, and I was all by myself to whole time but I enjoyed it, and slept like a top all night. The night before I went to the local pub to see my friend the mechanical Sergeant off, he is now no longer one of us, and I'm afraid that I got as near tipsy as I like to be by drinking more beer than I should have done but it didn't cost me much, and I felt happy for the time anyway, so that was everything for me, and today I went out again during the morning with two or three fellows unofficially and I had a pretty good time, and now I'm going to quote a poem I have just acquired and which I think is very suitable for us.

When a man's in love like I am
 With a girl like the girl I love
 He loves her all through
 From the toe of her shoe
 To the tip of her dainty glove
 You tell me there are others
 With Beauty and Brains and Birth
 So there may be to you
 But from my point of view
 There is only one girl on earth.
 I've lost my heart to dozens
 For a day, or a week maybe
 I've flirted perhaps
 Like the rest of the chaps
 But it never meant much to me
 But now it's a different story
 For all that I have to give
 Is my Lady's always
 Not for weeks or for days
 But as long as we both shall live

Her eyes are only eyes I suppose
 But they're stars to me
 Her mouth isn't really a crimson rose
 But it ought to be
 To you she's the best
 And most charmingly dressed
 Of three or four or five
 But can't you see what she is to me
 She's the only girl alive

What do you think of it, I'm afraid that the typing is not all it should be, but at least it is readable, and I think very applicable to my love for you [.....].

I'm afraid that there is very little to write about this time, and I must tell you that Arthur is back again, but he's been put on the other site, and that means that he might as well be where he has been for the last two months for all that I shall see of him, but he is on the R.T. there and I can talk to him now and again, and perhaps we shall be able to get out together on a Bath Parade once a week.

I have left this letter for today, and now it is Monday again, and I have received a letter from you to say that I haven't written for a fortnight, well you know that is all wrong, I know I don't write every day now because I don't get the time, but I have written at least twice a week, and if you haven't heard from me it is because the post is to blame, if a letter is posted in this village I understand that it hangs about for a day or more before it goes out from the Post Office, and the same thing happens with those we should receive, so please don't reproach me tooo (sic) much will you, I have written this little bit because Mum sent me a short note as well this morning ticking me off for not writing, she says you are quite worried, well, I guess you must be if you really have not heard from me for over a fortnight, I'm sorry darling, but really it is not my fault, and to try to remedy it I shall Express this one in the hope that you get it quickly.

I hope your mother is better by the time you do get this and I promise to try to send enough letters in future to cover all the deficiencies of the post, and so my darling please try to understand how it is, I am now typing this when I have tons of work to see to, I have to go out soon to do some shopping for the Troop fund, we are going to buy some china plates, and so I shall be able to get this letter off at the real post office, and feel confident that you will get it as soon as it is really possible for it to get to you.

And now my sweet, I must close, the atmosphere is not very conducive to letter writing at this particular moment, I have the officer here and the sergeant, and they are all looking at me as though I should not be doing it at all, so goodbye dearest, and I'll write again tomorrow, God Bless You [...]

*Horsley Camp
6 January 1941
(9 page letter)*

My darling,

I'm so terribly sorry if I have caused you any unnecessary worry through not writing to you as often as I used to, but really darling, it's not so bad as Mum made out surely, I got a letter from her this morning, just six lines, telling me to write you straight away as you hadn't heard for a fortnight, that is absurd of course, because I have written several times since Xmas, & if you haven't received them we must blame the post, & talking of mail shortage, I've had very little news from you lately, only three letters since Xmas, is that all you have written, or are we both victims of the same lousy postal arrangements from this end, because I'm sure that's where it all is. This morning, as you should know by my last letter, I had to go out with the sergeant, we went to a town called Heanor, to buy china plates instead of the tin ones we now have, & I especially went to the post office to get that letter expressed to you, so I sincerely hope you got it in time to make the effort worth while. John left us this morning, and I am all on my own here now, as Charlie is doing nights, but I sincerely hope we get John back at the end of the week, because life here is unbearable now for just one man, it's nothing but one worry after another, & I often don't know which way to turn, from 8 in the morning till midnight is the day shift, & we are kept going every minute of that time, & the night worker has often enough things to do to keep him going all the time, & I think you can understand what it is like for just one on the job, I've had the sergeant with me most of the day to help me out.

Well, having had a really good moan, I must now say that I have actually caught up with all my work for the time being, except the dance arrangements, & I'm letting them go to hang until I have finished this letter to you, I have of course got the inevitable ear phones on even now, & any minute might get a message through to take me right away for hours from this letter, but I'll hope for a quiet evening, & perhaps I'll get one. My cold is terrible, can hardly breathe, & my throat is sore, I really should stay at home if I were in civvy life, but in the army----work's the cure for all ills, & so I am here as usual, at everyone's beck & call, here to be moaned at by everyone if things don't go right, in fact, the biggest blasted fool in the British Army for doing more work than the officer himself & getting nothing back, if it

wasn't for the really terrible conditions in the field now, I should gladly go out & let someone else do the thinking for a change, but after an afternoons digging all through a blizzard, I was glad to get back to my own little cubbyhole despite it's worries, but I'm beginning to wonder if it's really worth it.

I expect when you read this next bit you will say it is worth being on the office. The officer has forbidden anyone to take a 48 hr. leave the same month as the seven days, so I've managed, by dint of careful wrangling, to bring my seven days nearer by one week, I shall now be coming home, providing nothing awful happens, on the 17th, so you can knock off seven whole days from you long count, & I shall do all the wrangling in my power to keep it at this date, so keep smiling my sweetest, & I'll be seeing you. By the way, don't be disappointed because I can't get home for your birthday, as I'm sure now, that the best policy in the army is to take leave when you can get it, & if you know as much as I do, you would agree.

Tomorrow, we should be on the phone, & not before time either, six weeks or more has this camp been here now, & we've had to rely on R.T. transmission all that time, no wonder we're all nearly potty. I will let you have the number as soon as I know it, & then we shan't feel so cut off from each other.

Everyone in the camp is out tonight, at a party given at the local pub specially for us, they have arranged for a half of the camp up till 9 o'clock, it's that nearly now, & the other half will follow on, I am the only one who will not be there at all, I've had enough booze to last for a whole year, & so I let Charlie have the whole evening down there, he likes a drink more than I do, so I feel my effort is not in vain.

And now I must give you more details of our shopping expedition, you see, we sell our pig swill now, & instead of the cooks getting the money, we take it & put it to a fund, & in a fortnight we accumulated 22/- (£1.10), so this morning as I have told you, the sergeant & myself commandeered a whole lorry, and sallied forth in search of china plates, we feel that the old metal ones are rather primitive, & never look really clean & nice, & we bought thirty plain white soup plates, nice & deep, fairly substantial with just a plain raised pattern round the edge, at 7 1/2d each, this took 18/9d away from the fund, & we have ordered thirty white breakfast cups & saucers for next week on the strength of next week's proceeds, & we hope to get white table cloths too, so you see by the end of a few weeks, we shall be absolutely the poshest army in the country, I'll let you know how we progress week by week. I am the treasurer, the sergeant said he didn't dare hold the money, & the officer wouldn't either, & so poor muggins fell for it again, but I don't mind this one so much, as later on, I might manage a few fags out of it, the sergeant takes the cash, & he feels the

same as I do, so I shouldn't be surprised if we don't click as soon as we can get a comfortable surplus, & considering the good we're doing, I think it's worth it. . Just had to blow my nose again, this letter has been punctuated by nose blowing right through, I hope it dries up a bit tomorrow, or I shall be browned right off, & it won't take much to do that I can tell you.

I think you know all there is to tell now, I had a go at the sergeant earlier today about my stripe, he says that no-one could have a better recommendation than I had, & if I was anywhere but in the office, I should easily have it by now, I asked him if he couldn't do something about it for me, & he said he couldn't do much, but he'd have a try, anyhow, promotion in the office is not so rapid as it's made out to be, however conscientious one is, & I'm beginning to wonder if any is available at all in a searchlight office, but so long as I can wangle a leave or two I suppose I should be thankful, so here's hoping for something better soon.

Well [...] I hope you will be happier when you have read this far, I have managed to steer clear of work so far, & for this I am very grateful, & will continue to write until interrupted. You can guess how I'm looking forward to getting home again, it seems ages & ages since the wonderful 18th, & all I shall do now, is to watch each day go by until the 17th come along. I know it is a bad policy to count too much on a fixed date, but at least it is something tangible to hold on to, & if it is within my power to keep it there, after wangling it here, well, need you ask any more, [...]

I have just had to go outside to see to one or two little things, & I am glad that I'm not in the field, it's snowing again, & as slippery as it could be, & more than ever I am glad of this beautifully warm office, we have improved our fireplace so that it doesn't smoke any more, & it gets red hot, so you can guess how beautifully warm we do get in here, & why we hate to leave it even for messages. I've just had to put a frost warning through to our other site, Arthur is up there, & feeling about as browned off as I am, it's a great pity we can't be together, we could make so much difference to each other's lives in the army, but if John doesn't come back, I shall try my hardest to get him here with me again, he wants to come, & I want him here too, so perhaps in the course of time something can be arranged. I've just done Les a little favour, I'm sorry for him really, he's had his leave put back a lot, & so I altered it on my own responsibility, I hope we can get away with it, I think I shall, & it will have done for him what I might like done for me one day, & anyhow, after all is said and done, I don't really care a lot if I do get into trouble, because a number of men are being treated very unjustly, & only because I'm on the spot do I get what I'm entitle to, all the officer thinks of, is how his work is suffering. & he blames the leave for it all, &

so trys (sic) to stop as much as he dares, all the leave possible. Well, sweetheart, I guess you will think it's a moany letter, but at least you should have something to read, & I hope to be able to manage some more tomorrow, I shall try to keep on top of my work & keep the evening free again for writing to you, so keep your chin up [...] I could not bear to face this life without you to turn to, Goodnight [...]

*Horsley Camp
9 January 1941
(7 page letter)*

Dearest love,

Please forgive this letter if it seems a bit dirty, but we have been moved from our nice little office, & shifted to another hut which is nearer the gate, so of course we had another fire to put right, & you would have laughed like anything to have seen my antics with pieces of chimney those last few days. To begin with, the first day we moved I spent on changing the chimney, but it didn't work, & I successfully smoked out the Major when he visited us, so effectively that he asked me what caused it to smoke like that, I told him the chimney needed sweeping, but really it was more than that, it was because there were too many bends in it, & tonight, after enduring two whole days of groping through a thick fog of smoke, I decided to have a real go at it, & I shall never forget it, do you think I could stop it? No , & in desperation I took the whole fireplace out, fire as well, & dumped it outside, I then exchanged it for another fireplace, but after I had completed the new innovation it was no better, & in the meantime everything was getting covered in soot, as you can see by the front sheet of this letter, but eventually, after almost giving up in despair, I hit on a brainwave which eliminated all curves, & lo & behold, the fire is now another monument to my capabilities, & I think I have earned the privilege of sitting down quietly to write of my exploits to you.

So much for the fire, now to tell you that the reason for our change of abode is that very soon we shall be on the phone now, & it will be laid on to this hut. You will be as delighted as I am to know also that we are soon to have electric lighting, that is something we need very badly, as these old hurricane lamps are beginning to get everybody down a bit.

You will probably gather from my remarks that I am again on night duty, this is so that we shall not have too much of it at any one time, I do three nights, & Charlie the rest, & so tonight I went out to my friends in the village, I spent a pleasant, if quiet evening, by the fire, & had eggs on toast for supper, & believe me it was a welcome change to be able to relax in a comfortable chair & just sit & chat all evening. These particular friends have two evacuated little girls from Southend? With them, they are very nice people, fairly well off, the husband being a builder, his own business of course, they have quite a big family, all married except one daughter, she is the living image of my sister Edie, & she says she's not getting married until she can find someone who can give her even more luxury than she has now, I tried to tell her how real love can compensate for wealth, but she has her own views on the subject & so that's that, but her parents are the nicest couple I have met, they seem to have taken quite a liking to me, & I have an open house whenever I care to go, the father was in the last war R.E.'S, & never tires of telling me of his exploits, I enjoy listening to them & feel very small because sweeping chimneys is the best I can offer in exchange, but I get along fairly well, although I'm afraid I feel a little bit out of it in spite of their efforts to make me at home, & I shall be glad when I can really feel at home in my own home again. I met them at a little Whist Drive I went to last week, I went with several of the boys, & the lady was there with the person I had Xmas tea with, so I clicked for a supper engagement on Saturday last, & another tonight, doing well aren't I? & I have to go to tea at another strangers house on Sunday, the little boy I asked if his mother could accommodate you, has been up to the camp for me today, & says, I must come to tea on Sunday, I accepted, but don't know if I should go or not, as they are complete strangers to me, & all I know is their son, a kid of about 12 years age, but if I do go, I'll let you know all about it soon. I hope you won't mind me going out occasionally to civvie houses, it certainly helps to make me a lot happier, & you know how I love to talk to married women, preferably middle aged, it saves me going into pubs, a habit I have still not acquired, & I can assure you that the people here are so friendly that it would break their hearts if we refused, so please let me know how you feel about it all when you next write.

I have just had to sweep out the chimney again, that piece of pipe will not behave until all the tar is burnt out from inside, but it's going well again at the moment.

I did not receive a letter from you yesterday morning, I wonder if I shall be luckier today, I sincerely hope so, as letters from you have become very scarce of late, it seems we have both got very slack since Xmas, a state of affairs I am hastening to remedy. I expect by the time you are reading this letter you will have got

over the surprise of my leave coming earlier, but it is by no means settled yet, John should come back on Sunday or Monday, but if he don't, well I think I shall have a tough time getting off, but I'm doing my best, & you can trust me to look after that side of my own affairs, because all I live for is to hold you once again in my arms [...]

I hope your Mother is better by the time you get this note, & I quite agree with you that it must be pretty awful to be as helpless as your Dad is, I'm glad I'm not quite as bad.

You enquired after the poor little dog I was nursing several times, well, soon after I last mentioned it, I insisted on its being taken to a Vets, who gave it condition powders, & treatment for cankered ear, it was then placed under the care of a sergeant at our other site, as he was a great friend of the dogs owner, & I'm glad to say that the dog showed a remarkable change as soon as he saw his new home, but here is the anti climax----- last week the sergeant went home for 7 days leave, & the dog was left in the care of some other person, & yesterday we had a call from Belper Police, to tell us that the dog was there, having been allowed to stray, & that if we did not collect it straight away it would be destroyed, we informed the other site, but no-one seemed to know just who was responsible for it, so I'm still waiting to hear what the end was, & if it is still alive. [...]

And now my dearest, much as I should love to keep on writing, the night has flown, it is now 6 a.m., so I'll say good morning, & watch you in your sleep [...] For ever

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
9 January 1941
(Ten pages)*

Dearest love,

No doubt you are feeling very gloomy today, as I have, but perhaps this leave business will start again soon, at least that is what we are all hoping, & I don't think I'm going to tell you any more when to expect me because I believe this is the first

time I have ever done so, & consequently the last, because it didn't work out. I hope my telegram didn't upset you too much, but perhaps you guessed it's (sic) contents anyway, I thought it much better to let you know, rather than to let you expect me all day, so please try to keep smiling, & I'll do the same, & as soon as I can get away to you I will.

I don't know if I gave you the reason for all leave being cancelled or not, but we are forming a new Battery at Chester, & everything has been held over while new men are picked to form the nucleus, but you'll be glad to know that I am not one of them, so we shall remain here for a little longer at least, although they have had 12 of our Troop for this business already, but I think that's about all they will take, & the few of us remaining here live to see a few more weeks off, & I'm glad too, because Chester I believe is a long way from home, & apart from that it would mean a lot of hard work.

Well, I think that's enough about leave being cancelled, it's a gloomy old subject, and I have a feeling that it won't be for long, so we'll just drop the subject, & hope for the best. Have you noticed that I am back on the job with a pen now, it's a different one though, I couldn't get a nib to fit the old one, & I had a chance to buy this Blackbird stud filler for 5/- (25p) & I grabbed at it. It's a good pen, but the nib is a hard one, & doesn't suit me really, although beggars can't be choosers, & I am learning to use it despite this. If I hold it up to the light, I can see how much ink there is in it, you've probably seen the kind before, & when I do come home, I will show it to you. It's

left me a bit broke though, so if your love is worth 5/- darling, I should appreciate the money very much this week, especially as to console myself I went to the pictures at Heanor last night with one or two of the boys, & spent up all we had. The picture was a good one, called Dark Command, & was all about the good old days in early America, the days of slave dealing etc. We quite enjoyed ourselves, but we had to walk home, a distance of 4 miles, I felt very sad as we passed different peoples houses, just like ours, & couldn't help thinking that I should be in precisely the same kind of home with the girl I adore, & every time we passed a courting couple I felt waves of jealousy & sadness passing over me, I was glad when I got in & went to bed, but I didn't sleep much, & here it is Sunday now, the day I should be spending with you, the only consolation I can find is that it would now be nearly over, & I should be thinking about the Monday morning, whereas now we still have it to look forward to in the very near future, & anticipation is as sweet at least, so perhaps it has its good points. I didn't get a letter from you yesterday, or the previous day, I suppose you were much the same as I, & didn't worry too much about writing as we thought we should soon be able to spend all we wanted, but that was not to be, & now we have to catch up on our mail, so please try to let me have a few letters again, & don't forget to mention your love will you darling.

I managed to get out to a Bath Parade last Friday, & Arthur came along too, we had a pretty good time, & I enjoyed my first bath since my leave, & was it good? I changed the water after having scrubbed all the dirt off, & then had a real soak, I think we were in there for about an hour, & by the time we were finished I felt fit & fine, it seemed to take away the very last traces of my Flu' attack, I feel really fit again now, & I'll try to keep that way until we meet again, because I don't want to give you a cold, & that might easily have happened this time.

Our new officer really is a brick, he buys us drinks, shares his cigarettes, & laughs & jokes with the boys, & today (Sunday) everyone has had the afternoon off, the first since we came here, so of course what with one thing and another he has become very popular, & you've no idea how light he has made our work in this office, no more worry, he does all that, no more of any of the things that used to be, all we have now, is just what we're told to do, & that's where it ends, but strange as it seems, I rather feel lost now, & wish he didn't take all the work out of my hands, but perhaps to be free for a while will help me along, & the change will do me good at least.

I had a letter from Jack last week, in which he says he will not be home any more until Easter, so it seems to me that he gets less real leave than I do, but there, he gets more money for less work, so it cuts both ways doesn't it. Our Dance last Friday night was a roaring success, we made £7² profit this time, it was a terrific crush, but that didn't bother us much. We were making the cash, & that's all that really mattered, so of course everyone was very happy about things. The thing which brought it up as much as anything was a raffle for 50 cigarettes, do you know, we raised 37/6³ (£1.88p) on that alone, it's a real swindle isn't it, & yet we have no scruples, & continue to scrounge anything & everything we can lay our hands on. I forgot to tell you that while we were in Derby on Friday, I had my hair cut by a Greek, & when he had finished guess what he did, he suddenly noticed my moustache, & whipped out his scissors & trimmed it for me, it tickled me to think that at last someone had noticed it enough to do something about it, & now it looks really posh having been trimmed by an expert.

It's pouring with rain here today, what sort of weather are you getting your way, I expect it's much the same, but it's better than the snow, & at least has the advantage of being much better for travelling, although at the moment it doesn't matter much does it. Have our photos been finished yet? if so, what do they look like, do you think they are good, bad or indifferent, I should like to see them as soon as I may, although I expect you would have sent them on anyway. It's nearly tea time now, & I'm looking forward to the usual tea here (jam & bread) but the cup of tea which goes with it, is something worth having, & Charlie has just gone to see what there is. The officer is asleep, he said he was going to have a lay down, as we have some new lights coming out today, & when they arrive he's going to be very very busy, so he's making the best of his rest period. I too, have had a busy day doing nothing, in fact, so far, all I have done today, is to scrub the tables, clean the floor, & write this letter, so for once I have been able to get a letter off to you undisturbed, & so I'm going to keep on writing away till circumstances stop me, I have to stay here till about 11 tonight. So I should have plenty of time in which to finish it, & also cope with any work which may crop up. Twenty men have just at this very moment arrived back from a course, they have been away a fortnight, & now they are back, some of the poor boys who were left will at last be able to have a little well earned leisure, they are kicking up a hell of a row, now, it seems they are very pleased to get back with their old pals-----pause while I have my tea & a few hectic moments with the phone.

² £450 in 2023

³ £122 in 2023

I have quite a lot of fun with the officer's little dog, it seems to have adopted me, although actually it was adopted itself, being a mongrel stray, on which the officer took pity, it's a bitch, & has been christened "Blitz", a very suitable name too, she's, as black as night, & as full of mischief, talk about Penny, she's every bit as playful & mischievous, & I should say just about the same age. We also have another little stray with us, the sergeant has adopted this one, it looks exactly like the little dog near Mum's home, which you took a strong fancy to before we had our own dog, do you remember it?, well I've got one like it for company nearly all the time now, because both of the little devils come into the office to play, but they brighten life up considerably for me.

I should love you to get me that little portable wireless you promised me, because the owner of our old & battered set has been taken away to the new battery, & we are now without music of any kind, & I really do miss it too, because even though I don't often hear music, the little snatches I used to get, were very cheering, & until the old thing disappeared, I didn't know how much I had listened to it.

When I get home again, I have a brand new cap badge for you, it's much shinier than the one you now have, so if you like to give the one you now wear, to your office boy, I can promise you that I will replace it as soon as I am home, I have two spares now, so I can afford to give one away, & as I know those I have are infinitely better than the one you wear, which always seems to be so dull, I'm sure you won't mind parting with it, & in the meantime I'll try to get an even better shine on the new ones, so that you may choose which you please. The officer has all his meals in here with us, & often answers the phone, in fact you'd think he was the clerk at times, but at least that's how he should be, in fact the truth is, we've had so many dud officers with us since we started, that now we have a proper one, but at least he's worth it. He's sitting here now, reading a novel & drinking soup with us, yes it's supper time already, it's quite nice soup but rather over done with curry powder however, we are all mopping it up, & asking for more, so it can't be so bad. We've got a fine old man for our M.O., he's a captain, & he's so far sent everyone to bed for a couple of days who has reported with a cold, he's the first wise man we've had, because in the long run it's best, & prevents epidemic. I have been wondering whether to try out my B.P. on him to see if I can wangle some sick leave, what do you think of the idea?

So far, I have received no answers to all the letters I wrote to Ron, Len & Ted, so I shan't send any more until I do get replies (sic), I think they might have stretched

a point for me, but still, perhaps this week will see more results, & mind you don't become one of the defaulters, or else I shan't come home next weekend. (that gives you something to think about). Well, darling I have been writing for a considerable time now, & still I haven't said I love you [... ..] while I think of it dearest will you please let me have my other writing pad out here I have nearly run out of paper again, & if I write many letters like this I shall need it too, so try to get some out soon [..] I must say Goodnight [...]

Horsley Camp H.Q.
9 January 1941 (later on)
 ➔

My Darling,

Here it is 6.30 at night again, I have had a lovely day's sleep today, the best for a long time, & as Charlie has to get two teeth pulled out tomorrow, I have come on duty early & he will take over at midnight, which will allow him to see the dentist in the morning, before he goes to sleep.

We both help each other, but it often means long hours of work with very little rest in between, however we manage pretty well, and apart from this rotten cold I still have, I'm keeping very fit, and you will be pleased to know that I am not eating quite so much, although I'm still putting on weight I'm afraid. Talking of dentists, I'm still waiting for my appointment, & it seems to me that I shall have to get it done when I have my seven days, it will be the expense that worries me, but I suppose it's worth it, because it seems to me that unless one has a tooth that needs extracting, they don't bother very much.

My fire is burning beautifully now, the top of the stove is red hot, & I can feel it's (sic) heat on my back even though I'm across the other side of the hut. The electrician fitter has been in camp today, & we are now rigged up with all electrical fittings & just waiting for the juice, which I understand may be some time before we get it. We are going to have two lights in here, with an A.R.P. switch on the door which switches off the light as it opens. The main switch for the whole camp will also be in here, so that we just switch of (sic) when it's time for lights out, I shall be glad

when it comes, as it is about time we had some decent lights. The phone is still not fixed up, we have the wires all in place & all we wait for is the receiver, but they always seem to rush like anything to start with, & then slack off leaving an indefinite period for waiting, I suppose by the time it's all installed, we shall be moved again, that's the army all over. I have just been outside to see a very pretty array of parachute flares, there are five of them all in a row, & they do look pretty, but we have an air raid warning on here at the moment, so I expect they mean danger. Things have been pretty quiet up here lately, & I'm wondering how things are down your way, I hope nothing terrible is happening.

The old R.T. is going strong tonight, nothing but a jumble of noises, it's terrible the way everyone seems to be talking at once, and extremely difficult to know who is calling us & who isn't, but we seem to manage some how. I'm keeping pretty busy as I write this letter, it's funny the way everyone comes to me for all they want to know, but at the same time very annoying when I'm trying to mix business with pleasure.

My other letter I wrote during the night is still here, it's the most difficult thing in the world to get a letter posted from this place, so I guess you'll receive two together when they do come out.

I had your two letters of Monday & Tuesdays date, & I was very surprised to learn that you had not then received my express letter, as I sent it on Monday & it should have reached you by then, however I guess you have had it & read it by now, so I will hope for the best. I haven't really got a lot to write about this time, having said it all in my last letter, but [...] I'm keeping my fingers crossed for my early leave, & so long as John returns next week everything will be O.K. , so here's hoping, [...] include it in your prayers, because I know they will be answered.

... I have written to you during the period you said you received nothing from me, & all I can think of is that the letters have been lost, or seriously delayed, but you must understand that I can never get out to post my own, & have to rely on other people, so that might be a possible solution. I think I shall enclose this letter with the other one now, & hope they get off some time tomorrow, & now I must say Goodnight darling, & God Bless You, [...]

Four Winds
Thursday 9th January 1941
Typed letter with added header

Friday morning Just received your letter with the marvellous news that you will be home a week from today!!!!

My dearest darling,

I received your expressed letter yesterday, It was very nice of you to send it so, but you needn't have worried. Of course I was anxious to hear from you to know how you are getting on but I want'st (sic) really worried about you, as I realised that you probably had'nt (sic) had much time for writing, or that you couldn't get out to post your letters.

I went round to see your mother last night and she told me that she a written you a "snotty" letter telling you off for not writing to me. She and Edith have repapered the kitchen (sic) and I must say it looks very nice indeed. This is in preparation for the wedding. George will be home for seven days next week and they are going to get the wedding ring, so it looks as if things are really happening at last, and, of course, this pleases your mother.

It is only a fortnight to your own leave, so the time will go very quickly now, won't it? Are you hitch hiking home, or do you get a free pass? I expect it will be dark before you get here, but perhaps you will be able to let me know what time you expect to arrive. Have you heard any more about the 48 hour passes? Has your officer been able to anything more to stop them? Also, darling I would like to know how the little dog is.

Hand written – 8 p.m.

Here I am home again, and I am just hearing "all the things that you are "being played on the wireless on a mouth organ. Isn't it a lovely tune. I started this letter at work this morning, but needless to say, wasn't allowed to get far with it.

I am sitting alone except, of course for my Penny, as Aunt N is washing her hair and Auntie S is still up at the Heath, where she went on Monday. I didn't get a letter from the County ⁴ this morning, although I didn't really expect one till

⁴ Probably Hertford County Hospital

tomorrow. I have go over my stage fright of a new job, and rather hope I get this new position.

I'm sorry darling, I just can't think of any news for you. Only one thought is in my mind, and it seems to crowd out all other thoughts, and that is, of course, that in a fortnight you will be home with me. I want to tell you how I feel about it but I just can't find the words. I suppose it could be described as an awful longing which I try to push into the background as much as possible and keep as patient as I can. Still, as nothing can stop time marching on this next fortnight will pass I suppose, even as this nightmare war will pass to-at any rate, it is marvellous to hear our troop's successes in the east, and I feel sure that we are making headway now. The war will be over in another year you see! Then the burning question will be, what are you going to do for a living. Do you feel you can go back to Austins? Or, if not have you any nucleus? Plans of what you would like to take up We could so easily let the house you know.

O, I meant to thank you for the very nice poem you wrote in your last letter. Do you know who composed it? Its flattering, even if I'm not exactly the "only girl alive" to you

Now darling I will say goodnight and if I write again tomorrow I should be able to tell you by then whether I'll be changing my job or not [...] P.S am enclosing 2/6 as the remainder of your cigarette money for Xmas.

Four Winds
Friday 10 January 1941

My dear darling,

Thank you for the lovely long letter received today, containing the lovely news that you will be home a week from today. Just think, this time next week (8pm) you will be sitting in front of our fire, sharing the same armchair— isn't it lovely!

I hope you won't be shy. You always seem to be somewhat when you come home. Is it because the Aunts are here? You needn't worry about them! Of course, it would have been nice to have you home on my birthday, but that doesn't matter and I

agree with you that the best plan is to get your leave in at the earliest date possible and make sure of it. Anyway, you will be home the same time as George. He comes home this Monday for seven days. So we shall all be able to meet next weekend, perhaps, at your mothers. That will please her I know.

I do sincerely hope you get rid of your cold before you come home. I have almost got rid of my cough now, so I don't really want to catch another if I can help it.

By the way, I meant to tell you before that I was very relieved to hear that you had not been foolish and put your name down for the R.A.F. Please, dearest, don't entertain that mad idea for one minute. Its bad enough to have you away from home— but flying-----no the idea is impossible, so please don't, whatever else you may do, entertain the idea any more. If you want a change, put your name down for a commission, the next chance you get.

Its nice to hear you have been able to collect funds for a few comforts for the camp. China plates & cups are a fine idea and will make the food look much nicer. If any soldier breaks his, he should be made to replace it or revert to his old tin one. Auntie Sybil recommends White American cloth for your tables instead of materials. It would look nice & clean and can be just washed down with a damp cloth, better, I think, than half dirty table cloths, and no laundry bills. An hour has passed and I have been listening to Anne Zeigler & Webster Booth. It was a very good programme. Now it is 10 pm so I suppose I must close and get ready for supper & bed. Goodbye for now, darling, -Arnt you happy. I am. Next Friday is so beautifully near, and I do love you so-----

Saturday 9 pm.

Darling Bill, I am afraid you will think I am naughty because I didn't post yesterdays letter so I am afraid it will have to wait till tomorrow when I post this. There are only five complete days now before you will be home. I only pray nothing happens now to stop you coming because I am afraid I am banking so much on this date. Its like waiting for your summer holiday---when there are only a few more days to go, you wonder how you can possibly live through them.

Please darling, can you give me any idea of what time you are leaving Camp. If I hav'nt (sic) any idea of when to expect you, I shall be keyed up all day, expecting you, and not be able to do any work.

Went to the pictures this afternoon to see "Foreign Correspondent" --- a very good film. I also called on your mother to tell her the good news that you will be home next week. She tells me that George has had a move--so that it may mean that he won't be home next week after all.

How do you get on for food now.

Things are very difficult here All this last week we have had no meat except one very small chop each Tuesday. Yesterday I had potatoes & swede for my dinner & today 3d of chips. Your mother says that they hav'nt had a good meal this last week either. All her butcher will allow her is 9d a week for meat, and as you know that will just buy one chop. I am hoping things will improve soon as when breakfast, tea & supper usually consist of toast, a substantial dinner is very necessary.

However the butcher has sent us a bit of meat for tomorrow (Sunday) thought I'm afraid it won't be

enough for Monday though. Don't forget to bring your ration card home will you. We can get fish occasionally but when haddock is 2/4 lb as against 6d lb pre war price,⁵ you can understand why we don't have it often.

But that's enough of housekeeping problems. I'm sure you don't want to be bothered with them. I hav'nt heard from the County yet, but the job is still open as Wheeler phoned this morning—so I am still waiting and hoping (though not with much confidence now).

I forgot to tell you that Mildred has got your gardening book now for you I was supposed to bring it home with me the other night but I forgot, but as you will have to pop up and see her you could bring it away yourself, couldn't you.

⁵ A 366% increase in the price of Haddock

Did you get my letter I posted on Friday enclosing the half-crown? I am always a bit dubious about sending money through the post---

I am reading a novel this evening, and when the hero & heroine get married they start the first day of their honeymoon by the boy bathing & dressing his bride—reminds me of the 24th June 1938! Still I'm not a bit jealous of them—not now my own lover is coming home in five days' time.

Well, darling I think I'll finish now, and read on to see what happens during the remainder of the honeymoon, although truth will, I know be stranger (or more exciting) than fiction.

Goodnight my love [...] Ivy xxx

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
11 January 1941
(Typed letter)*

Darling,

Here I am back at it again, in fact I never seem to be away from it, morning noon & night, all the day & all the night. This spell I have had three hours sleep out of forty eight, the main reason being that Charlie had to play football this afternoon, & so I had to get up and relieve him after only three hours in bed, and he has not yet returned, it is now ten o'clock, and I have just about had enough. I also learned today that John is not likely to be coming back to us, so it looks as if we shall have to find someone else again, it seems to me that no-one ever stays here except me, and it makes things very awkward for the two who are left. However I managed to get out last night for four hours to go to the dance as assistant M.C. and all I seemed to do was sell raffle tickets & count money, but it was a roaring success, they made over five pounds clear profit, and you know how well it must have been supported to raise that much money. After I got back, just before midnight, I had to go straight on to work, and you can guess how I felt, and I nearly went to sleep, but I am still going to put my name down for leave next week, although I haven't had a letter from you for over four days now, so I don't know if you want me home or not, but I'm coming anyway, because as I have said before that it pays to have what you can get while it is going, and even now I may be stopped for some reason or other, so keep hoping for me, and I'll try to do the rest, I am about fed up with all this work, and feeling

properly Browned Off, I feel that I should like to shoot some one, the officer for reference, and I know I should not have far to look for aid from every quarter. One of our fellows here two days ago, Shot himself in the hand, the general opinion seems to be that he was trying to get out of the army, anyhow, he will have to lose two fingers over it, and of course there is going to be a big enquiry about it all. Things are still very quiet up this way, and I do hope that they are as quiet with you, but I'm afraid that that is too much to hope for, as I read as paper occasionally, and find that London as usual is going through the mill, I do hope you are safe, and more than that, I hope to get a letter from you on Monday, I look for them you know, and when they don't come, I begin to feel that you are forgetting me, because I'm sure that you don't have all your time as well filled up as mine is, and that you could find the time to write if you wanted to, can it be that you are a little bit cross with me for not writing as often as I used to, because if you are, you are being very unreasonable, you've no idea how much there is to do, and I have been without a bath for a fortnight owing to the fact we can't get out. I still have a terrible cough, the inside of my chest is really sore with continual coughing, and my throat aches too, I feel pretty awful sometimes, and wish that I could die, but then I think of you, and know that soon, I shall be seeing you again, and I don't feel quite so bad, and it looks to me that you will have an invalid on your hands after all. One of the boys have just brought me in the best thing I have had today yet, guess what ----- a bottle of BEER, and it makes me feel that life isn't so bad after all, but my pocket is very low, and I don't quite know how I will survive the week.

By the way, have you got the other job you seemd (sic) so keen on getting, or has it all fallen through, I should like you to be successful, although it will stop you from getting any time off to see me when I come home and that won't be so good will it. But still we have the nights to look for, those wonderful nights that we alone know anything about, it seems such a shame that everyone in the world cannot know about the lovely time we have. [...] I shall hitch hike or not if I am lucky, but expect me when you see me, and I hope it will be nice and early. Now [...] tell me in your reply to this letter How your mother is, and how Penny is behaving these days, I love to know all about the little things that are happening at home, they make you all seem so much nearer to me, and I don't feel so far away from you all. I'm afraid I shall never take to this life, and all I want to do is get it over with, and come back home to you again, [...] I hope you will forgive the many mistakes I must have made in this letter, but that pint of beer has made me feel that I don't care, so long as you can read it and understand [...] I have lost interest in this work now, there is nothing attached to it, I'm sure that my recommendation has been overlooked and that nothing will ever

come of it, so I just don't care about it any more, and anyway, the work is simple as pie now, so I don't have to worry about it, it is just that it is long hours and certainly not worth worrying over, so I have come to the conclusion that since there is nothing to be gained from it. I shan't let it worry me any more. I sincerely hope that you won't be shocked at this attitude I have taken up, but even if you are surprised, I know too, that you will sympathise with me, [...] I seem to have said all there is to say today,I have been gradually getting more & more fed up every day, and as the work keeps growing, so does my discontent, until I have come to the decision that if they don't worry about me, I shall not worry about them. I think I shall have another go at the officer soon, but he has become very difficult, and extremely hard, as you already know, for instance he stopped fellows leave yesterday, a new fellow too, because he caught him having a pea (sic) against one of the huts, a thing he would just as likely be doing himself if he didn't have to have a jerry. These things make life very difficult, and he is becoming very unpopular with the boys, so much so, that he is likely to have a mutiny on his hands soon. Last night he ordered two or three to dance at our affair last night, and threatened them that he would stop their next leave if they didn't dance, and tomorrow he has prepared a programme that would make your hair curl, work all day and Sunday too, I tell you that the fellows won't stand for it much more, and already I have decided to refuse to do any scrubbing tomorrow if he tells me that I should do some. We are overworked now, and very understaffed, and I shall tell him that, so I hope he don't ask me, and anyway, I want get out for a bath in the morning if I can. now [...] I have really said all there is to sayI shall say goodnight [...] Your loving adoring husband,

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
11 January 1941*

My darling,

This letter is destined to be a very short one, but I really have had so much to do today, that only a few minutes remain before midnight, & I've been here since 8 typing and answering questions all day, I'm afraid I am very short tempered, & my nerves are on edge, I've flown at several inoffensive people tonight who came pestering me for leave, but after they've gone I fixed them up. Yesterday I spent the whole day with the boys in the field digging & we did very well, but I've had to make up for it today. Today I approached the new officer about getting out to a number 6,s

job, & I got permission to do it until the sergeant got a spoke in my wheel & stopped me, but they have agreed to allow me to understudy & snoop around, whenever anything is to be learned, & will send me on one or two courses, & promised me certain promotion, but it's going to be a long job I'm, afraid, never mind, I can't get out of it now, I'm too good. [...] I shall have to end soon, ...perhaps more tomorrow, ... I hope the leave will soon start again, & then I shall have the joy of telling you all about it...no-one is certain of what's to happen,as I'm to stay in the office that will be pretty easy, so keep your lovely legs crossed (sorry, finger crossed)keep smiling as you alone know how, Goodnight darling,

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
12 January 1941*

My very own darling,

Sunday again, and the thought that I shall be with you next Sunday is enough too dispel, my usual fit of depression, so for a change, I feel rather happy, especially as we are having another man in here next week, & I am on top of my work again into the bargain, so everything is as nice as I could wish for at the moment, except for the fact that my old stripe is just as far away as ever.

Well my sweet, nothing has happened since I wrote yesterday, but at least I have had a nights rest, & that counts a lot these days. I feel much better for it too, although my cough is worse, I do hope I can lose it by next Friday though, because it's likely to spoil my holiday a bit, but I shan't worry too much, because you will be there to nurse me back to something like my usual self. I wonder if you are looking forward to next week as much as I am, I do hope that you were pleasantly surprised when you learned of my wangling, I have taken great pains over it, & I think it will come off too, anyway I have sent in my name today for leave with the rest of the men, & I told the officer we should need another man soon, so I think it should be successful after all.I can hardly wait [.....]

We have just finished a nice feed of toast, & we made some tea too. I have eaten four slices & could still go on with it, but it's too much trouble now, and anyway we are going to make ourselves some baked beans on toast later on. One of the lance corporals has a tin of beans, & he's coming in at 11 so that we there can

make ourselves a tasty supper. I am on days for the next few times, & will change over gain on Tuesday, but we shall be better off when the other fellow comes in, & things will be a lot better for us all. It's surprising how work has increased since clusters were formed, but it's just as well, because we don't have the time to worry about being away from our loved ones.

I have so very little to say today, I am properly stumped for news, I have only one thing I must tell you [...] I had better tell you now, that I don't think I shall be home very early, as the passes are not issued until the actual morning, & then it's usually about 10 or 11 before we can get away with it, but who cares so long as I can get home by bed time, after all, we shall have to count it by nights, [...] At the moment I have 1 pound of margarine in hand ⁶, & hope to acquire more by Friday, you see, the cook is also coming home on that day, & we are going to hike it together, so we have got friendly again, & now & then I can scrounge a bit of stuff to wangle in my suit case. I wonder how much I can accumulate by Friday? It will be interesting to see won't it. Tomorrow, the phone will be officially installed, & I shall feel at last, in touch with you again, it will relieve a lot of worries too, because although phones are a real curse, R.T. is even worse, & as soon as the phone is here, we shan't have to send everything by the other roundabout means.

I hope I shall get a letter from you in the morning, it's about time I had one anyway, & I am doing my level best to make up for all those I missed just after Xmas, so I'm hoping you will try to do the same. It is now 10 oclock, I have been having a friendly game of crib with the fellow who is providing the beans for supper, he's a really fine sort, & definitely the best man in the camp as an N.C.O., popular with everyone, he is a manager at a Co-op stores, reminds me of the old times, do you recall those times, the way I used to wait outside for you, & even if it meant waiting all night I should still have been there, [...] without you I should be left to drift aimlessly through life, with no-one to love & wanting no other. [...] and now I am going to end this very short letter, & say Goodnight my love, till tomorrow, God Bless You [...]

⁶ During rationing in WW2 one person's allowance for a week was 4 oz or one quarter of a pound of margarine

Four Winds
Monday 13 January 1941

My darling Bill,

I receiv'd today your two long letters written Thursday. You are certainly making up for the lack of letters by the length of those you are writing.

I am glad you are getting your office improved—sorry you had such trouble with your chimney---the electric light will be expecially (sic) welcome. I know---it will make your little office a little more like home.

I am going to post this letter early tomorrow morning so that you should get it before you leave for home on Friday—Don't those last five words sound lovely to you? I shall not write again as, if you do manage to get home, any letters sent after tomorrow probably wouldn't reach you. So now of course I'm keeping my fingers crossed, so that nothing happens to stop you coming home.

This morning when I woke up I couldn't remember whether it was Sunday or Monday, and for the first time I can ever remember, I was glad to find it was Monday---it meant one day nearer Friday.

Edie was sitting at home tonight when I called waiting for George to arrive, so I hope he manages to turn up. I took your mother some of my pickled eggs round, to help out the shortage of meat this week.

I am glad to hear that your little dog recovered. Penny is just fine, she will want you to take her out next week I expect. There are as usual several jobs waiting for you. One of them first being the steps to be mended. I have to risk my neck on them each time a visit to the loft is necessary.

I am very glad to hear that you visit the houses in the village now. It makes a very essential break for you and I do hope you will continue the practice and make it a regular one. Alas you mustn't miss any concerts or dances that are going in the camp. I know it doesn't do you any good at all to do nothing but work & sleep, so I hope you manage to make one or two friends outside the camp to create a new interest. I haven't heard any more about the new job, but I am not worrying. Did I tell you I had a shorthand test at the interview at 100 words a minute. I think I could do more than this on familiar work. So you see I have improved considerably, although I don't think I should ever have stuck it if you hadn't helped me in the early days. Remember how cross I used to get over it.

The Aunts have just said that the water is lovely & hot, and you can have a bath if you like shall I come up and wash your back darling? Well I will be able to do so in four days time.

I am afraid my letter will not be nearly as long as yours, but I 'spect I'll have plenty to say when you come home, so darling I am going to say goodbye now till we meet!! Please get home as soon as you can. Your mother won't expect you till she sees you as I said you might not call for your bike if there was a convenient bus to Waterford.

God bless you, my darling and grant you a safe journey home.....Ivy

P.S Can you possibly bring with you another badge. One of the boys at work would very much like one.

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
13 January 1941
(Blue lined paper)*

My very own darling,

I received your letter this morning partly typed & partly written, & like you, now I know we shall soon be with each other again,

Firstly you are still enquiring about the poor little dog, well, I have mentioned him several times recently, & now he has been rescued from Belper Police Station, & is back here with us again. He is much better in health, but still moping for his master, & you would not recognise it as the same animal, he has no life in him & yet it used to be more playful than our Penny, it seems such a shame that it frets so over his master, because there are two or three of us here who would gladly take him over, but at least he has got over his ear trouble, & it's a great relief to see that he is no longer in pain. I shall be able to give you the full story next week, while we're in bed perhaps.[...] Our officer's little dog is lost, he told me this morning that he thought someone had pinched it, & he has inserted adverts for several weeks in the local papers, but so far with no success, he thinks it has followed some soldiers & has gone to another camp, as it had a soft spot for Khaki, anyway, he hopes to trace it soon, & I'll let you know if he does.

Charlie & myself were both deploring the fact this afternoon that we are getting so terribly fat, I have a definite double chin now, & worry like anything over it, while Charlie has a proper little corp & he too is quite concerned, we both feel it is

about time we had a change, & yet are very loathe to leave this rather comfortable little billet, I really don't know what to do about it yet.

I got a letter from Mum too, & she tells me that George is likely to be home next week too, so it looks to me as if we shall have to fling a bit of a party one night, & I have asked my Brother Jack to try to arrange for a weekend at home too, I haven't heard from him since, but although its hoping for a lot, I wish he could get off at the same time, I should love to see him again. That is something this war has achieved for me, I now know what real family affection is, & I know that I think as much of my people as anyone does now, [...]

I hope you will have a nice hot bath for me next Friday, I need it, as I haven't yet managed one for nearly a fortnight, having been anchored to this place all the time. As you requested, I have allowed my hair to grow longer, & at this time I am sadly off for the want of a trim up, but I'm leaving it now, until I get home, especially for your pleasure. We had some fun in here last night, Charlie & myself with a couple of Lance Corporals & the new sergeant (yes we have another one) had beans on toast for supper at 11, & then I was off duty, but we stayed up yarning & laughing till long past midnight, I'm sure we kept the officer awake, as he sleeps next to our office, & I could hear them when I had to go out for water, right at the other end of the camp, but we don't care, after all it isn't often we get a chance to have a good laugh these days, so why shouldn't we take what what (sic) we can get while we may, & anyway, the N.C.O. 's are a good crowd, & we all get on jolly well with them.

We now have company when we're on night duty, as a new system has developed which compels one N.C.O to be on duty all night, to see that sentries are awake etc., & of course he has to make our office his headquarters, & we play "crib" or dominoes all night, but I think soon, we shall be taking it in turns to sleep for a spell, & it's a good idea too. I think I have quite a nice few blackheads etc. for you this time, as what with chimneys etc., it is a terrific job to keep properly clean. Talking of chimneys, mine behaves very well now, but requires sweeping almost daily, & as I seem to be the only one who dares to tackle the job, you can guess what I look like sometimes, but it's worth it to keep warm, & it can be said that the office is the cosiest place in camp outside of bed.

I thank you for the 2/6 you enclosed today, but grieve to tell you that after buying three bits of chocolate, & twenty cigarettes, it is now only 5d, so now you can see why I'm nearly always flat broke, but who cares, so long as I can get to you next

week I shan't worry. How much that means to us (seven short days) but what a lovely glimpse of heaven we can have in that time, [...]

The phone is still not connected up, & I understand that even when it is, we shall be in direct contact with Battery H.Q. only, that means that no-one else can be got at from this office, I'm hoping this won't be true, & if it is, well we shall just have to make the most of it. Our electricity is still very far away too, and these old lamps are about the limit I am writing this with the lamps almost on top of the letter, but I'm managing, & next week I shall be telling you instead of having to write it all, & who knows, when I get back they may even have the juice on. Anyhow, who cares, so long as I come home to you on Friday, that is all I want [...]

I have the sergeant here with me now, he's mucking about with his lamp, putting new wick in it, you'd be surprised at the things people do in my office, & the way we are allowed to behave too. The officer came in this morning in the middle of my shave, & said good morning, & I was dodging about for him with half lather on my face, but he didn't take any notice, or say anything about it at all, & yet later on in the day he gave a fellow a terrific ticking off for not standing up & saluting as soon as he walked in, so you can see we must be very privileged indeed to be able to get away with all we do, but we still take it for granted, & after all really believe we earn it, so I shall continue to get up exactly one hour later than the officer, & shave in the office as usual.

My cold is still with me, & I feel my glands are coming down a bit, but I mustn't go sick now, or I should probably succeed in upsetting my leave, I'll leave it till I get back again.

And now my sweetheart, the D.R. ⁷has just returned with some more work, for me, so I must say once more, [...] Goodnight my love, devoted Bill.

⁷ Despatch Rider

*Horsley Camp,
14 January 1941*

Dearest love,

By the time you receive this letter I shall probably be on my way to you, & what a wonderful thought that is, [...]. I want to tell you now, that I don't expect to be home very early, but I hope to manage it by tea time, & will do all in my power to get to you by then, so don't expect me before then will you, & then if I do come early it will be a nice surprise for both of us, but most of all, don't forget my bath, because that is also very important to me, as I don't expect to get one before the honeymoon.

I haven't much to write about again, but I have been out to a pub tonight with the cook, we had a game or two of darts, & crib, but outside it was a filthy evening, snowing like anything, & we were wet through, but now I understand why soldiers like a pub now & again, because on such a night, the fire they had was a welcome sight, & we spent a cheap, & fairly nice evening. One customer had a dog with him, a Welsh collie I think he said it was, & it was such a beauty, about the size of Penny, & very intelligent, I completely forgot about pubs & army life, & had a good game with it, & I found that like Penny, one has only to mention Biscuits & it was all excited, so in the end I had to buy some, & taught it to sit up & wait for them, it was so refreshingwe two, neither of us had any right inside a pub, & we made a good pair, & a good evening out of nothing. We lost two games of darts out of three, & had to pay for drinks, but the thought of seven days leave eliminated all financial worries & made them seem very small indeed, so that we didn't mind paying in the least.

I am now on duty of course, I should have rested during my period off, having worked all day, but it was too noisy, so I decided to go out, & come straight back on duty, & I know it will be quiet, so I shan't worry too much. I have a sergeant here with me tonight as duty N.C.O., & he is fast asleep, we shall have a turn each I think, & he, like I has had quite enough to drink tonight, but we're all good pals together so who cares, & anyway, until I get home to you on Friday there is nothing else to live for, [..]. I have something to really shout about.

My little store of commodities has grown little since I last mentioned them, but I hope to improve on it before the end of the week, but I don't think you'll worry much if I don't, so long as we have each other, [...]

Things are so quiet up here, that it's hard to believe that you are still having raids etc. down that way, I do hope you manage to get more sleep now than you did the last time I was home, because you probably know there will be very little for either of us next week, [...]

The sergeant is snoring now quite loudly, I hope more of the sentries come in & see him, because they will be very cross if they find him asleep when he should be looking after them, however, I shall wake him again soon, & he will have to change over guards again at 1 pm. or should I say a.m. anyhow it's the morning of Wednesday, which means just two whole working days more, & very little else between us & love, [...]

I had a letter from Jack today, he even thinks he might be able to get off next week some time, if only he could, that would be wonderful, & we would have a real family gathering then, & I do hope George will still be able to manage his, although I understand he has been moved & that this might upset his leave, & it most probably will if the R.A.F is anything like the army, but if I could see Jack it would mean a lot to me, & what about Len? Does he get home for weekends, I hope so, & then we'll go & look him out too, in fact you had better ask him & Kitty round to Mums for Sat. or Sun. tea with Ron too if possible, because I know that would be the finest treat we could give to Mum, she needs company, & the change would do her good. Well darling [...],

*Horsley Camp
24 January 1941
(Evening)*

BILL RETURNS FROM LEAVE

My very own darling,

I don't know whether to cry or not yet, but things here are so terribly dirty & miserable, that I must let off steam somehow. To start with, there is a foot of snow, & about 6 inches of mud on all the paths, and when you add a dreary fog to that, & gaze upon the really filthy, sooty interiors of the huts, you need not wonder why I feel so depressed. I am on duty, have been, ever since I returned, & I'm due to stay here till midnight, then I've got to sort out my kit before I can make my bed, perhaps you can realize now why I didn't want to go back, but I guess two or three days will be sufficient to harden me off again.

First of all I must tell you about my journey home, needless to say, the train was late, & I had to change at Luton, & again at Nottingham, arriving in Derby at 2.30, but I met 2 of our boys on the train, & we spent the rest of the afternoon in Derby, knowing full well that we were all due for work as soon as we got back, so we had a good meal at the services, egg, chips & tomatoes for 10d (*about 4p*) with tea & bread & butter, not bad was it? We then had a stroll round, & found that our lorry was in with a Bath Parade, so of course we hung about for the return journey & piled in with the rest of the crowd, arriving here at five, just in time for tea, & work.

We are still not on the phone, but things have altered dramatically since I left. The officer is now supposed to be pretty decent to the fellows, it appears that he had a stiff talking to, & so he consulted our popular one striper, you know the one I told you about, the manager of a co-op. Well anyway, he told the officer that he could lead the men better than drive them, & I believe he is at last becoming liked, so that's one good thing.

Next comes food. As you know, last week, the cook was due to come home with me, well, I got out pretty early, and missed what happened afterwards, The cook was just about to leave for seven days, & the sergeant made him undo his case, apparently having been warned of what he would find, he found inside, 35/- worth of food, (*About £95 in 2022*) so of course that meant no leave for cook, & he was put on a charge & is now doing 28 days field punishment, & will not come back here any more. The result of that little affair has now caused a menu to be made up each day to be submitted to the officer, & if he doesn't approve, they have to find something else. According to one fellow I know, he says the only complaint now is too much, & too hot, so that's another alteration for the better, & all tables now have cloths on, & are laid out separately, each seating about six men, so that eating is more of a pleasure now rather than a necessity. Another thing that is happening here now is that a canteen is now being built, a real blessing if ever there was, & I understand there will be beer for sale (what an expense). And lastly, but greatest of all, all chimneys in the camp now go straight through the roof, & there is no more smoking fires or cleaning chimneys, so I *might* be able to keep a bit cleaner. I forgot to tell you that Les is now gone for good, he left today for the officers cadet training place, so at last he has what he wanted, I wish I could go too, because I've had enough of this already, my head aches, & I've done nothing but work so far, & tomorrow I shall have to have a real clean up in here, it's awful the way the two other boys, have

allowed the dirt to accumulate, but I think they have had a lot to do, so I can't grumble too much about them.

You will be glad to know that I have just been to sort out some of my kit, & I have made my bed, I took a chance & deserted my post for ten minutes, but everything is now O.K., & I can just slip into bed now when I finish, but I know I shall miss you tonight [..], & I'm wondering if I shall sleep at all, but I know that if I do, I shall dream of you.

It's pouring with rain now, absolutely pelting down, but that also means goodbye to the snow, although there will be mud until well into the summer I should think, but at least it's a little better than snow is, & a lot warmer, so I expect it's a blessing in a queer way.

Well, my darling, I expect you miss me too, but at least my next leave still holds I think, so we have that to dream of even if it will be only a very brief one, so we must be brave, & manage somehow, [...] I think I have told you about all there is to tell this time, remember that we can laugh at wars & all they try to do to us, & now I must write a few lines to Mildred & Frank, ..once again Goodnight....[...], ever.

Horsley Camp
25 January 1941

Dearest love,

I have exactly one hour in which to write this letter, having been working all day since 7 this morning, & it's now 10 at night. It's been snowing here all day, & we now have another foot or more to cope with. Some of the roads are impassable, & two or three of the sites have had to resort to their reserve rations owing to the fact that they can't be got at, however, our site is still get attable, even though we are snow-bound.

Today has been an eventful one for the office, we have had a huge new notice board installed, which occupies half the walls of the hut, the idea being that as we have no real filing system, everything is to be hung up under different headings, & I think it's going to look good too. Best of all though, is the very latest in army ideas, I now have lino on the floor, it's exactly the same colour & pattern as our bathroom, &

we are going to lay it tomorrow. There will be a foot margin all round it which is to be painted so as to set it off, & we also have a brand new doormat, I can tell you, things are really looking up in the old place, & it will easily be the best & smartest hut in the whole regiment when finished, & I should think, a pleasure to work in, because it will be so much easier to clean.

I expect this news will please you as much as it does me, because I know you want me to be as comfortable as possible, & I shall be much happier too. The officer has gone properly keen of his own accord on seeing it looking its best, & he's been in & out all day to watch proceedings, you've no idea how he has altered for the best since his rather nasty jolts from several people all at once, but it's done him good, & he's worth knowing again now. One thing you'll be glad to hear, & that is that I am not allowed to have meals in here now, & I am properly relieved at each meal time so that I can have them in peace.

And now darling, I don't suppose you'll get this until your birthday card, so I must tell you [.....] I wish you a very happy birthday, although I cannot be there to make you perfectly happy, at least I can send my heart to you in the shape of the birthday card, I hope you like it, as it was the best I could find in Derby, [...]

I typed out our menu today, & laid it out as per hotel style, it looked good too, & when I showed it to Floyd he said, Jolly nice, we shall be having it in french next, well, if I can find out how to do it, I'm going to put it in french one of these times, just to show him what's what, but of course he was only joking. By the way, the fellow who got his leave stopped for p....ing against the wall was allowed to go home after all, just another sign of how things are these days, I intend to follow this up at the earliest opportunity, & ask about my stripe again, but I'll let you know as soon as I do.

We ate the treacle tart today, because the juice started to run out of it, & mucked up the tail of one of my vests in the case, so it had to be quickly dispatched, a job which was easily accomplished with the aid of two friends, & you can thank Aunties for a really wonderful feed. I've still got a few biscuits left to help me through the mornings, & I always manage to scrounge a cup of tea now about 10, so I expect you'll picture me as a proper office worker, & I am definitely boss, because I alone know the routine, so I find consolation in this thought.

I've covered all the news in these few lines, & my time is nearly up, so I'm just going to say goodnight [...] God Bless You,

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
27 January 1941*

My own darling wife,

I have just had a look at your picture, [...]

I have had a gruelling day, & I've just got back from part of the promotion day exam, & if I do as poorly in tomorrow's half as I have done today, you'll have to wait a little longer for my rise, as this exam has nothing on the last one held. For a start, I have been asked the same questions as full corporals & lance jacks, & being at the disadvantage straight away of a clerk, I have been severely handicapped. First of all, we had a 20 miles lorry journey to the examination centre, a site somewhere near Mansfield, & they've still got 6 inches of snow there, & add to that a miserable, windy, rainy & cold day, you can guess we had our tails down to start with, then straight away we got Manning Drill, a thing I didn't expect, & knew nothing about, & the only consolation I could find was that most of the others knew very little more. After that we got some absolutely 100% technical questions about the guts of a car, & generators, & once again my knowledge was very elementary, although it was a sergeant I know pretty well asking those riddles, & he might give me a few extra marks on those grounds. Then best of all, we were given a squad of men to drill, first with rifles & then without, & we had to instruct them at the same time, well this was a little better for me, & I think I got pretty good marks on that subject, because nearly all the others forgot the movements when their turn came, & though they were supposed to be teaching us, they couldn't do it to show us, one lance jack got all tangled up, & said I beg your pardon gentlemen, well, you can guess what a storm he provoked from the sergeant major examining us, & another said excuse me, & altogether I think I was about one of the top scorers in that field but tomorrow is worse, we have got to know about all sorts of things, & I know I shan't be able to

swot it all up in one go, but I'm going to have a good try, & we'll see what happens, our own sergeants are taking us in one subject & have promised me good marks so that will help my average up, but I shall be pleasantly surprised if anything comes of it all, because the last exam was easy knowing what I do now, whereas this one is highly technical, & really more than I can tackle, however, I won't get my tail down till I know the result, which should be through in a few days, please pray for me darling, I do so want to get on for your sake, as well as my own satisfaction. By the way, we got no dinner today, 7 of us were given a loaf & a half of bread & 1 tin of herrings between us, what do you think of that for a good dinner? but we didn't care much, I think we were all pretty browned off, & anyway it was a day out for me, so who cares.

It is teatime now darling, & I must go & get something to eat, or I shan't have anything at all, so I'll continue afterwards, so goodbye for a while [...]-----here I am again, eating as I write, I have a whole, & real pork pie to get though, & it's a nice one too, & compensates me for having no dinner, of course we have the inevitable bread & jam, but even that is better than nowt. Things are pretty hectic for me this week, because as you know, Charlie is on a P.T. course, leaving me here all on my own, & all I want now is another honeymoon with you [...] I am going to end this because Charlie Bowman, recently discharged from hospital is going home tonight to Barnet, & I want him to post this letter for me when he gets there, in the hope that you will receive it sooner, [...]

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
27 January 1941
(Typed letter)*

To the loveliest woman in the world,

[...] at least I am comfortable, and that is more than I can say for the other fellows on this site. Outside the snow is blowing in a real blizzard, and very soon now we shall be cut off from everything, even now we cannot be sure of getting our rations for tomorrow, so whether we shall get the mail regularly is something to get worried about, although I received your letter safely this morning, and though there was no news in it, it was very very welcome and I'm hoping to get a longer one in the morning if there is a delivery. I have had a very easy day today and have managed to knock off a letter to Ron, and also to Len, so you can see I have been very busy letter

writing and very little else except of course for the oilcloth we now have on the floor, and I have been following everyone round all day with a rag mopping up all the foot marks, but at least it looks cleaner than the floorboards were, and it is a lot easier to keep clean, so that's something to be thankful for. You ought to see our office now, it's a real treat to behold, and everyone is saying how nice it looks, the fire is no longer any trouble to me, and we are smoke-free, and soot free, so I should be able to keep a little cleaner in future, I know you'll be pleased to hear that.

We had to have a good laugh this morning, as you know we should be out of bed by seven at the latest in the mornings, but of course no-one ever is in the winter, the usual time being about eight, well, this morning the Officer had to get up early, and was fully dressed at seven thirty, the first time in his army career, and he came out and caught us all in bed, you should have heard him go for us, he came and pulled the clothes off two or three, and shone his torch in our faces, and said that if he caught any more of us, he would put us on a charge, we all laughed like anything after he'd gone, but all the same I expect he thought we were a lazy lot, but I don't really care because he is never out himself as a rule, so who cares?

I have asked Ron to write to Horace about getting me with him, as I have found out that he may if he wishes, apply for a transfer for me, and if that is true, I do hope you can manage it, as I should love to be able to work under someone I know, and who would help me to get on, and apart from that, it might possibly help me in life after this war is won, so please include me in your prayers tonight my angel, and I hope it comes off. I have been looking at the leave rota for our next seven days, and I think I shall be able to manage alright if I am still here, and if not, well, I shall have to see what can be done where I go to next, anyway, all we can do is to hope for the best. Our Sergeant has just got back from his leave, and he says he don't mind coming back to it, so I told him that he must be very fond of the army life, and he said he is, so that explains that, but I shall never become very fond of it I'm afraid, it takes me too far away from the beauty of my wife and home, and I for one will be glad when all this is over and done with.

I went out last night with the N.C.O.s and had a real boozy night, I almost got drunk, but you can't really blame me, and I hope you won't reproach me for breaking out sometimes, anyhow, I was pinished (sic) for it, because I felt quite bad when I got back, and I was ever so glad that I had no duty to get to, because I'm sure that I should not have managed to keep my mind on things, as it was, the bed started to go round with me, and I had to roll over on my tummy, and go to sleep that way, and this

morning I had a beautiful hangover for about three hours, so you see there is no reason for you to be cross with me, and I promise I won't do it anymore for a little while.

I'm wondering if you will get this letter in time for your birthday ⁸ or whether you'll get it the next day, it all depends on whether I can get it posted outside the village by some kind person. When you answer this one, don't forget to let me know what you thought of the card will you, I liked it very much, and I sincerely hope that you do too, the red rose is the emblem of love as you know, but it meant more than that to me when I sent it, and I want you to know that it means you are all the world to me.[...] I can hear the snow driving against the window outside, I think we shall be under it by morning, but inside here it is lovely, and I have brought enough coal to last for some time, so all is well except for the fact that we have run out of paraffin, and I only have one light, but very soon now I hope to see the electric light installed, and then I can get some letters done without straining my eyes too much. [.....]

I'm afraid darling, that there is very little news for you to have except for the weather, I wonder if you are having the same as we are, there is more snow here now, than I've ever seen, and it coming down so hard now, that it sounds like rain, in fact I swore it was rain until I went outside to look for myself, so perhaps you can get some idea from this, what it's like although I don't think I could give you an accurate description however hard I tried, but if you laid in bed and listened to the rain on the window, and then think of that being snow instead of rain, you can form some idea of what it will be like if it goes on at this rate as it has been doing for the last two or three hours.

I forgot to tell you that since the cookhouse scare, we get supper four times a week, and I have just had a lovely mug of hot cocoa, and a sausage sandwich, so I shall be alright till the morning at least, and last night we had CHEESE?, lots of it, so you see we do still have some in England after all, and I enjoyed it too, but this was before we went out on the booze, I know I could not have tackled it after I got back. There are very few men left on this site now, as twenty of them were sent out yesterday on a course and they won't be back till Sunday at least, and that leaves us with about fifteen here, but it makes things very hard for the fellows who are left, they have to do guard duty nearly all the time, and I think the N.C.O.s, have got to turn out tonight, which doesn't please them very much I can tell you, but it will do them good to have a sample of what the others have to put up with. This is the best

⁸ Ivy's birthday was 29th January

part though, only myself and the Officer have an unbroken night's rest, I'm wondering how long that will last for me, but I still think I have enough duty without doing anything else, so while I can get away with it I shall do so. The old Major came round again today, but he seemd (sic) to be rather worried about our welfare this time, and asked if we had anything to complain about, but the Lance Jack in-charge said no, and he seemd (sic) to be satisfied with that and went out to the other site, so I think his surprise visit didn't raise much dust this time [.....] I think I have about finished all the little bits of news I can find now and all that remains to be said is that[.....]
Your own always and forever,

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
28 January 1941*

Beloved,

Tuesday, & what a day too, we have been very busy everywhere today because the Major paid us another visit, and all the morning I was bringing the notice board up to date, & then I had to get the floor cleaned up, ready for the visit, & you should take a look inside now, it would do your darling heart good to see the place I work in. We have disposed of the old forms we used to sit on, & now have three golden chairs, given to us by some kind hearted soul, & they look pretty nice against our green lino too. Altogether I am now quite happy with my work, because it has become such a nice place to be in, in fact, the nicest place in the camp easily.

The officer will probably be going soon, at least so it is rumoured, it seems that his change of character has come too late, & I'm rather sorry really, because I am getting along pretty well now, but still, perhaps rumour is not true, & he will remain after all. The weather has been misbehaving again, you remember I was trying to describe the snow to you last night, well it turned to rained all night, & it has rained all day too, so you can guess what a mess there is now, just imagine a nights rain on about a foot of snow, & add to that a few inches of mud, & you can tell what a sticky mess we have here, I have had to paddle almost every time I went out, & I shan't be sorry to see the last of it either.

Last night I wrote six letters, the best day I've had at this job since I have lived here, the lucky people were, you darling, Mum, Jack, Ron, Len, & Ted, and they were all pretty long ones too, but the old typewriter stood me in good stead, & I got them off in record time, & I feel a lot easier to know that they are off my chest. When I get

some more time I shall send one to Bob & Reg Webb, but they will have to wait until the opportunity presents itself. Things are pretty quiet here at present, & I shall have great difficulty in filling up this sheet, but here is one cheering thought darling, my weekend will come on Feb. 8th, now, isn't that lovely, just two more weeks from now, & when you get this it will be one week away [...] I am looking forward very much to it,

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
30 January 1941
(Water damaged letter)*

My darling,

One week has passed since we last met, & already it seems years ago since we parted, and I am pining for another glimpse of home. But fortunately it won't be long to wait for the next one, and you have no idea how I'm looking forward to that wonderful day, [...]

Well [...] I did not receive a letter from you this morning, & I have been so busy today that I doubt if I should have had time to read it, what with the telephone, typewriter, & Sergeant & Officers, I have been nearly off my head, but I'm nearly up to date again now, so I've packed up for the day unless something very urgent crops up. This afternoon we all had to wear our respirators, for half an hour we were in these things, I carried on working too, managed to answer the phone, & work the R.T. with it on, so it wasn't too bad, & I was able to breathe quite freely after a little while, so it isn't so bad after all. We've got to do this three times a week in future, so we've got something to look forward to.

I went out last night to my second home, & they were ever so pleased to see me, they thought I wasn't coming any more, & said it seemed a lot longer than a week since I left them, I enjoyed a nice quiet evening, & got back just after eleven after stumbling through a foot of muddy snow to do it. It is freezing up here now, & the snow has reached that stage when it is half gone, & the frost makes it hang about, you can guess what it's like now. Yesterday morning I went into Belper to get some tickets printed for our next Dance, & the ration lorry failed to pick me up to take me back, so I had to walk it 4 ½ miles in slush & snow, I didn't mind so very much as I

had the army's boots on, but it was annoying after waiting 25 minutes to be passed by because they weren't looking for me, but I got back O.K., & the walk did me good I'm sure. The dance is next Friday 7th Feb. & Floyd wants to make £10 on this one, I'm wondering if he will, anyhow he's had 250 tickets printed, & hopes to sell them all, I hope he's lucky.

My poor old pen is getting a bit the worse for wear now, some kind persons have been using a lot of weight on it, & its been bent away from the feed, but after mucking about with it for a little while I was at least able to put it into commission again, & I don't think I shall lend it to anyone else.

Thank goodness Charlie gets back tomorrow, the other fellow is alright, but he's afraid of work, & doesn't like to get his hands dirty, I don't know why because his face & neck are always black, but he really doesn't like work such a lot, & is at the moment not a great deal of use in here, I hope to improve him as time goes on.

There is no doubt in anyone's mind now that our officer has improved, he is a 100% man's man now, & everyone likes him more & more, but we're all afraid we shall lose him now, just as he's becoming likeable, but perhaps he will manage to cling to us, I hope so anyhow, because none of us like getting used to new officers. How is Penny? I noted your remarks concerning her tricks with the biscuits for her supper, & I hope we shan't give her a nervous breakdown by trying to teach her so much at one time, but I doubt the possibility of this, & I hope she can do the trick when I come home next Friday or Sat, so do your best, & I'll be the judge darling. Are you looking forward to our weekend as much as I am? I guess you must be, & it can't come too soon for me either [...] keep on smiling darling till I come again [...] I must end this note as its getting very late, so I'll just say goodnight

Four Winds
Friday 31 January 1941

My beloved Bill,

I am just going to start this letter this evening, but I shall finish it tomorrow, as it won't reach you till after the weekend anyway. I have just got such a pain in my tummy that I don't really feel like doing anything. It is only 7.30 but I am already very very tired. I suppose it is the extra pressure at work beginning to tell. I shall be

glad when everyone is back at work again & things are more normal. I have got two committee meetings and the Council Meetings to attend tomorrow morning, as Wheeler is not back yet. The first is at 10.20. Ron's wedding is at 10 so it will a tight squeeze to fit everything in. But I do want to see them married if I can. There will be no-one else except Freda's mother I believe, so I think they rather want me to be there.

During the last week I have taken well over £2,000 in rates (*exceeds £129,000 in 2023*) which I still have to balance with my Rate Book before banking. When you consider that most of this is taken in small amounts of a pound or two, and that this is only one of the week's jobs, you will see why I moan about the work (specially when there is a tummy ache to contend with as well).

I am glad to hear that you like your work more now. It is amazing what a few comforts in the office will do.

The best news of all in your letter today, however, was that you expect to be home next week end. That is a week sooner than I expected you. Will you come on the Saturday as you said you would? What a lovely long time we can stay in bed on Sunday morning if you do.

I called for my bike today, but instead of just a puncture to pay for I had to buy a new tyre, as the other had perished.

Well darling, this isn't a very long letter I know, but I will add more to it tomorrow. I would like to go to bed now, if you don't mind. I really feel too tired to stay up any longer. Goodnight my darling, all my love,

P.S *written in pencil*. Am sending this off after all, will write another letter this evening.

31 January 1941
Horsley camp H.Q.

My very own darling,

Another day has passed, & for me quite a slack one really, because after scrubbing the floor, & doing a bit of typing, I was able to sit back, & admire my handiwork, but another big batch of work came in tonight, which, if I cared to start it,

could keep me busy for some hours, but after dealing with the urgent stuff, I have tucked it away until tomorrow, & started this letter. Charlie is back, & he has gone out for the evening at the pub, I thought I'd let him go, because I know how I felt last week having to come straight in here after leave, & I didn't want him to feel the same, so out he's gone till closing time, when he will come back for night duty.

Our poor old officer is on 48 hours leave for the weekend, & then he's getting the sack, being transferred to another Battery, He is very upset about it, & doesn't want to go, & strangely enough, we don't want him to go now, so we're feeling a bit sad tonight, but everyone says the new one who's coming here is a really fine man, his name is Douglas, & he's Scotch, he has been some other Troops officer all this time, & I believe quite popular, so perhaps things might improve for me too, I hope so anyway, but by our honeymoon time, I shall be able to let you know just what he is like, & I sincerely hope he's as good as they say.

You will be sad to know that poor old muggins had to sweep the chimney this morning, it started smoking again, & so in desperation, I took it all to bits & gave it a thorough clean, I got covered in soot, but it was worth the effort, & I shall try to wangle a bath sometime tomorrow, so perhaps, it isn't too bad after all. I have found, I think, a real friend at last, he is a school teacher from Gloucester, & one of the nicest fellows I've met here, got one stripe, was called up with our last bunch of intakes, I should say he is about thirty, & has one little boy, he is headmaster of a village school, with 78 children attending, & as keen as I am on gardening, has the R.H.S., for it, so he's better than I at it. We have just been having a heart to heart talk about the army life, & the people we have to mix with, & as he has been installed here for good now as a storekeeper, & his work calls for cooperation with me, I'm sure we are going to be really good pals, & if ever you meet him, I'm sure you'll approve of my choice. I think that's enough for you to be able to see what he's like, so I'll try to think up something else to tell you about. I got your letter this morning, & I'm very glad to know that you loved my birthday card. I intended it to convey to you [...] I agree with your suggestion that you write to me daily, you know I love to be able to look for letters each morning, knowing they will be there, [...]

My poor old pen is about done I think, I am having to write on the back of it, all the time, because the nib is really broken, but perhaps I might be able to get another nib for it somewhere, & then it will be O.K. again, and then I won't lend it to anyone else, I see you made rapid use of yours, I hope you will use it to write terrific letters to me, [...]

Has it occurred to you that the second weekend into Feb., falls on the 8th? That is our date, and we are going to keep it I hope, although my name has gone in today for a Plotter course, & that might cause complications, however, we shall see by the time next weekend gets here, & in the meantime, keep on hoping for it to hold out, ...while we can, we'll take all we can squeeze from this old army. [...] (*a half page of adoration*)

Well, my angel, I have just had an excellent supper of chips, which I sent the car out for, knowing the officer was not here, and on reading through I find there is very little news for you [...]. Give my love to Penny & the Aunts, & before you have finished doing this I'll be in your arms again, so Goodnight [...] Your loving husband always,

Four Winds
Saturday 1 February 1941



Dear Darling,

I am wondering today if you are “snowed up” as you thought you might be as I did not have a letter today. It is exceedingly cold here although we have no snow at present. I should not, however, be surprised to find some in the morning. We heard from Barbara that she had been snowed up for a whole week in the village where she is at present staying. She said they were down to almost starvation diet by the time the army cut a road through to them. She is coming home on Tuesday. I have got her an interview for a job at the hospital on Wednesday. I think she stands a good chance of getting it. I said she would want 50/- (£2.50) so I hope it comes off for her sake as Dad will look down his nose if she is at home for long.

I have vague recollections of writing you last night that I was very tired & was going to bed early. Well, you will be pleased to know I feel a little more normal today. I put in a good morning's work but had a half day this afternoon.

I saw Ron & Freda safely married at 10 a.m.⁹ It took exactly five minutes. I was glad I could go, however, just to represent the old gang. Ron changed the time expecially (sic) for me as I could not manage 10.30 so he made it 10 instead. I had to rush off to the Finance Committee meeting at the Shire Hall (*Fore Street, Hertford*) immediately afterwards. Ron says they will spend their two days honeymoon putting their flat in order. He has not been able to do much to it yet. we have had a number of day raids lately which probably did not help him at all. His new address is now:

37 Lincoln Court
London Rd. Enfield

Will you make a note of this in your note book darling. I expect you will want to wish them happiness. They deserve it.

I went to see your mother this afternoon. She is very relieved to hear from Jack that he will not be joining the RAF after all, he cannot as he has be told he holds a "key" position and would not be released She has been worrying a good deal about this & I am glad that Jack has told her this. Edie I am afraid, did not get her new job as depot clerk.

I expect you are hearing the same as we are down here that an invasion is imminent. It is all very disturbing & worrying I am so glad that you are coming home next week, because if any trouble starts you won't get your leave, so it is best, I think, to have all you can as soon as possible. I only hope that if things do come to a head, that we will still be able to get letters to one another It would be simply terrible not to know what was happening to one another
I suppose it isn't much use worrying about these things before they happen but I can't help thinking of them sometimes. If only we could be together---but we are not the only couple---even if we are more in love than anyone else----

Well sweetheart, it is 10.30, and therefore, bedtime. I will finish this letter tomorrow and let you know if my prediction of snow turns out to be correct but in the meantime, beloved, I do love you, so very much Goodnight.....P.T.O

Sunday morning.

'morning Sweetheart

My fears for snow were unfounded as it is a most beautiful day with a blue sky & bright sunshine. The best day we have had for weeks. The sunshine tempted Edie

⁹ Ronald H.W. Dempster married Freda K.S. Castle

& George to walk over here this morning & pay us a short visit Like you he is tired of seeing snow which he says is four feet deep in places (*1.2m*). He has to get out of bed at any hour of the night, sometimes 3 or 3 oclock to help wind in the balloon (*barrage*). He says that the cable is always thick with ice and they sometimes have to dig the wynch (sic) out of the snow before they can begin I am telling you this to make you realize your own good fortune

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
6 February 1941
(Letter in pencil)*

My Darling,

In your letter this morning you said you would hate to have my letters in pencil, well, I'm afraid this one will have to be, because my pen is still out of commission, but I hope to get it repaired tomorrow if I can get into Derby, because I intend to have a bath if possible. And now having made my apologies, I shall have to explain why I shall not (or did not) get home this weekend. You see, up to the time of posting, all leave has been cancelled, I don't know for quite how long, but it may only be for a day or so, in which case I shall be with you next weekend, but I need not tell you how terribly miserable & upset I feel over it, but just think of the 8 men we actually have passes, ration cars, & railway warrants for, & we have had orders to hold them until further instructions, so you see, I'm not the hardest hit, even now, we might hear something more cheerful tomorrow or Saturday. I have not written to you for 3 days because I was hoping to get home for the weekend, but mainly because my cold developed into 'flu, & tho' I have carried on working, I have been nearly out all the time, & it's been all night duty, although that perhaps was an advantage, because I slept most of the time, but I'm a lot better now, especially the aches & pains I had all over, you know what it feels like, & all I have left is a tail end of a head cold, & a slight soreness all over. This complaint has been all over the camp, & only about 3 escaped, the terrible thing being that if one man gets anything, it's bound to go right through the hut, & at the moment we have five men in our hut alone, down with the same complaint I am just getting over, so you see darling, what with one thing & another, life hasn't been too easy for me these last two or three days, & the leave cancellation has just about put the tin hat on it, although I'm clinging to the hope that it will be resumed in time for next weekend, I'll let you know as soon as I can, ;;;;this is the first time you have known exactly when to expect me, & it's gone

wrong, so now you see the wisdom in my not telling you when to expect me, so that you needn't be upset if I don't come. I do wish it hadn't happened this time though, it was the one bright spot, & all I had to look to, now that's gone, all my aches are returning, & I feel like reporting sick, I have carefully avoided doing that for fear of being taken to hospital & spoiling the weekend, & now it seems to me that I should have been best off, however, that's life all over nowadays. & you wonder why I get so "browned off" & to cap all this, the promotion exam was also cancelled, as if one of those evils weren't bad enough.

And now, having explained as well as I can [...] I will tell you that we had a lovely fall of snow again yesterday, another foot easily, & just as the other had pretty well gone, so today we had a jolly good snowball fight, to give vent to some of our feelings, but it's been pouring with rain all night, & I think (& hope) all the snow will be gone by morning, we've had enough here to last me for life, you've no idea how awful it is to live in a quagmire of freezing, sloppy, muddy snow, & to have wet feet every time you venture outside, by the way, I went out tonight especially to get quinine & to have a whiskey, please note I have finished with beer, I should hate to do anything you so heartily dislike, & I thank you for your advice.

Our Officer is a real man's man, he says & does all sorts of things to make us like him, told us tonight not to keep bobbing up & down when he walks in, & he stays & chats with me every night although I think he's a real worker, & I shan't have half so much to worry about now. I really think I shall try to get onto something different soon, as I feel the urge to get on, & at the same time have a job with a definite knocking off time the same as the other boys get, so don't be surprised at anything I do in the near future.... I hope you have been able to read all this, I'm afraid I have rather scribbled it, but that's just how I feel, & I know you will understand me sweetheart, because out of all this horrible unkind world, you are the only darling who can help me to survive, [...] I am able at least to tolerate this life we are at present leading, & I can feel happy in the knowledge that I'm in this bloody awful mess for you, & I hope I shall have to prove one day how much I'm prepared to do because of my love for you, I entered this war to protect you, & that's just what I'm going to do [...] I would gladly die for you if I had to, although we could be so much happier if I manage to survive,

And now [...] it is four thirty in the morning, & I'm beginning to feel a bit tired, so perhaps you'll forgive me if I don't write any more tonight [...] who knows I might still get home this weekend, so here's hoping & praying [...]

Horsley Camp H. Q.
19 February 1941

Dearest love,

It is Wednesday night already, and it seems a long time since I last saw you, & already I find myself longing for another glimpse of your lovely face [...] I don't think I will be able to wangle a weekend this time, but I'll do my best to change with someone, although the chances are very remote up till now, but we'll keep hoping, & I'll soon be with you again. [...]

I have been pretty busy today, having been left alone in the office & more or less in command, but Charlie has taken over now, & so I took advantage of it, and am now sitting in bed writing on my knees, but at least I am out of the way, you see, I find that if I stay in the office to write to you, so many people keep piling work on to me, that I never get an evening off, hence my sudden taking to bed.

We've had some rotten weather here today, I awoke this morning to find in snowing again, & it's been doing it all day now & still is, but fortunately it isn't settling, although it's making a pretty mess all the same, & it's bitterly cold outside. I'm afraid I have very little news for you this time [...] Arthur is going into hospital again next week, got some more trouble with his stomach, I hope it's not ulcers, but he had an X-ray yesterday, & I wouldn't be surprised, he says it's indigestion. I still haven't heard from Len or Ted, I don't think much of their promises to keep up a regular correspondence with me, but perhaps I shall get some news of them later on. Up till now there haven't been any more courses held here, so I have not been able to learn any more yet, but I'm being primed up all the time by my sergeant, & when the time comes for me to show up, I think I ought to come out with flying colours, the only thing that worries me is that I've got to start with just one stripe, & I'd like to be able to kick off with two, however, I mustn't be greedy, must I? but I do so want to show you that I 'm getting on according to my abilities. Little Blitz is on the bed next to me, she's tied up, & keeps on stretching just like Penny does, she certainly keeps me in touch with home...[...] the memories little Blitzie brings, keeps me closer to you than anything else could..... Cyril, the boy whose wife you spent the night with at Peterboro', is busy polishing all his buttons, he's going home tomorrow, & he's broke the same as everyone else (except me), so I told him to see the officer, which

he has done, & this is how good our officers is, he said of course, & handed him his weeks wages which he took from his own pocket of course, but that's not the first time he's done such a thing, & these little favours make him very popular with the men.

I was looking through his private book yesterday in which he makes all his observations, & he's written about me that I wish to learn No. 6's duties, so it looks as if something is going to be done about it after all. I hope so anyway, & leave is now worked out well in advance, right up to May, so that will be all right, but I shan't make the mistake of telling you when to expect me this time, only for 7 days, in case something goes wrong again, so look for me next, about 2 weeks into March, & you won't be disappointed if I don't come exactly when you expect me. Of course you realise that if I'm sent on a course of any kind my leave will be effectively squashed, but in that case it should be worth the sacrifice.

I hope to receive our photo's some time this week as I'm very anxious to display it over my bed, especially as I don't sleep on the top shelf any more, I changed over some time ago, & it's much nicer too, I don't take half as long to make the bed each night. Tomorrow, we should have our electricity finished, but I'm so tired of being told that it's coming on such & such a day, that I'll believe it when it comes, but at least all the fittings & everything else are installed & finished, so perhaps it will come tomorrow after all, anyhow. It's not so urgently needed now, because we have those paraffin pressure lamps, & they give as good a light as gas, it's a real treat to be able to see properly again.

We have had no more trouble with the chimneys since I last told you about them, so it's fairly safe to assume that them days as gorn, & I can't say I'm sorry either. [...] (*a whole page of endearment*)-goodnight, God bless you & keep you,

Four Winds
Thursday 20 February 1941

My dearest,

I received your letter this morning and it was nice to hear that you had such a good journey home I am sure that you must have been jolly relieved to have been able to avoid the unpleasant task of hailing cars all along the route. I waited for your bus to pass my office on Monday morning I stood on the office steps but I'm afraid you

didn't see me no-one questioned my absence from work till 9.30 so I didn't have to make any excuses. I do hope that the white heather holds good and brings you good luck in the forthcoming promotion examination. I am, of course very anxious for you to make progress, and I know darling, that if the opportunity came along you will take it. Besides, being better from the financial point of view, and giving you a new interest in your work, promotion and responsibility will, I believe, give you added confidence and self-reliability which should help you very much in your work after the war

I was, as you know, to have spent this night at the Heath so that Mum could stay here at Waterford. I went up to the Heath after work and found that she hadn't bothered to go over. Naturally I was very annoyed, 'specially as they were expecting her at Waterford. So, now I have come back home, to be warm & comfortable, but it caused me a long & cold journey in the dark quite unnecessarily----- still you know what Mum is. I also called for our photos this evening but they will not be ready 'till tomorrow, which is a pity as I wanted to send yours off this evening so that you had something to console you over the weekend.

I went to Esme's 21st yesterday. We had the most marvellous spread. Things I never dreamed existed in these days of war. Talk about the schoolboy's dream. I bought Esme a "Mrs Beeton" at her request. She is very keen on cooking, expecially (sic) fancy cooking and she certainly excelled herself yesterday.

It is now Friday morning I stopped writing last night because with the wireless on and everyone talking I just couldn't think of what I wanted to say to you.

As you know I am going to spend the week end with Ron & Freda in company with Len & Kitty. If only you could be there the party could be complete, and I wouldn't be odd man (or girl) out Never mind darling, when you come home I'm afraid there is no time to go visiting.

Now the weather is at last improving (or should be) I am beginning to think of paying your part of the country a visit I think it would be rather nice when spring really comes. That is if you are not moved away by then. I do hope you don't have to go still further north, but, of course, if it means progress, you would have to go. Anyway I'm not going to worry about it as things always seem to work out all right for us.

Now darling I am just going out to the bank so I will post this letter on my way. Goodbye.....Keep smiling.....

Horsley Camp H.Q.
21 February 1941

Dearest love,

A week has already passed out of the time we were to wait for each other, & if the rest of the period goes as quickly, it will not be long before we can have another wonderful honeymoon. These little interludes, brief though they are, provide the only bright spot in an otherwise lonely existence, because if you were taken away, my life would be empty [...]

Work is pretty slack today, I have done a little typing, but actually there is very little to do, & the officer is going on leave this weekend, so things are likely to be quiet, & I am taking advantage of these things to write you a short note which I hope to be able to post in Derby later on, because I'm going to take the afternoon off, & have a bath all by myself; there won't be a proper bath parade until Sunday, & Charlie is going on a P.T. course after he's had a weekend at home, so if I don't take this opportunity, I shall have to wait a considerable time before I get another chance, & I hope you will forgive me under these circumstance if my letter seems a short one.

Talking of short letters, I had one from you this morning, & short though it was, you were quite right when you said you had better send it, because I was looking for it, & should have been disappointed if it had not been there. I hope you enjoyed (& behaved) your self at Esme's party, & also sincerely hope you spared a thought for me. A Parcel came from Mum today containing the cake & a few sweets, both of which are very welcome, & I shall sample the cake tonight at supper time, I'm going to have tea in Derby I think, so if you go to Mum's before she gets a letter from me, please tell her I received it O.K. & convey my warmest thanks.

We now have electricity in the camp, & it's wonderful to be able to really see at nights, everyone appreciates it to the full, & add to that the fact that we have several wirelasses in the camp now, & intend to install loudspeakers in every hut, we soon shan't have anything to moan about, although I still want a wireless of my own, because as I was saying to someone yesterday, there are wirelasses all over the camp and we can never hear them, but I 'spect that's just one of the things I'll have to put up with. What sort of weather are you getting now, we had some snow about the same time that you did I think, & ours is still hanging about, & last night was a terribly

sharp frost, we were all cold in bed, & for once it was no real hardship to get out of it, I find myself thinking of our own bed at home [...]

We still have had no further instruction on the V.I.E., (*Could be Visual Indicating Equipment on Searchlights as many thousands of detectors were constructed & the VIE played a significant role in the air defence of Great Britain*) but I haven't given up hope of some more courses being held in the near future, & I shall be on them all, & I think I mentioned a promotion exam too, well, I shall let you know more about that later on, so until then, I'll say goodbye darling,

22 February 1941
Horsley Camp H.Q.
(12 page letter)

Dearest Love,

This time I hope to be able to get a decent letter written to you, as the officer is still on a weekend leave, & the Sergeant believes in giving us a fair amount of freedom, so every thing is quiet, and work is at a temporary standstill. I wrote to you yesterday in a hurry telling you that I was going to have a bath, but in the end I went out in the car with the sergeant, and we had a good afternoon out, we paid a visit to B.H.Q. and various other business calls, but it was quite an outing for me, and I enjoyed it, and then today he arranged for another man to come in while I had a bath this morning. I went to Derby, had a really good scrub, and then half an hours swim, after this I went to Jerome's? and enclose a picture which was taken as I waited, and I'm afraid under the influence of the boys with me I had 3 glasses of beer, but it's the first for a long long time, and as I'm not likely to be out for some time to come, I don't think it will matter, anyway I had a pretty enjoyable morning, and now I'm back in the office with nothing to do except write to you, a state of affairs I have long awaited, and I am taking fullest advantage of it. The boys have a football match on this afternoon, it's a comic one, and I should have liked to have had a look at them, they're playing a ladies team of some repute round this way, and the only stipulation is that the men must not run, they have to walk, I think it will be very funny, especially as one of the corporals has obtained a lipstick from somewhere, and they

have all daubed themselves with this, and blacked their eyebrows, they look good I can tell you, I'm wondering who will win.

I do feel tired now, the swim is unusual exercise for me these days, and I'm afraid I feel it rather, but I'm sure it's done me good and I'd like another chance, but I guess I'll have to wait more than a week for the next chance to come, but it's a lovely feeling to feel clean all over, you'd appreciate a bath if you could only get it here and there, I never knew how much I should care to want one as I find I do these days, it's a real luxury. Well, darling I won't tire you with my views on baths, so let's get on with something else nice. I shall try to save up a few bits of chocolate for my next visit to you, I wonder if I'll be able to get it, because even we are severely rationed these days, and only a strict amount is allowed to each man, so I wonder all the time if I'll get some for you, I'll try at any rate and if I succeed I hope you'll love me more for it when we next meet. Up to now your white heather has stood me in jolly good stead, I hope it continues to do so and then life is worth living, because if I can be fairly lucky things don't seem so bad. Arthur has had his x-ray, but won't know the result until Wednesday next, it must be a bit of a worry for him, although he seems cheerful enough, perhaps he's thinking about another 28 days sick leave, I guess that is worth a bit of suffering.

I haven't been round to my family in the village for nearly a fortnight, I find I'm wrapping myself up more and more in my work again, and I haven't been out in the evening since I got back, but I'm not very worried about that..... it is now 6 o'clock, and I thought I was going to get a peaceful afternoon, a fool's paradise what with Sergeant on the football field, and officer on leave, I was the only one left to deal with things, and they've been rolling in thick and fast so my dream of an undisturbed letter was unrealised.

Things have quieted down now a bit though, the football is finished and we won 4-1 so even if we did have to walk, we were still fast enough for the ladies. I now have a wireless in the office, an all electric one which was given to the camp, I rigged it up while it was left in here, and I think with luck that it might stay here, because the sergeants (3 of them) have taken an extension from it to their hut with a loudspeaker, and we'll probably do the same for other huts, so might have the pleasure of being broadcast controller soon, but it's nice to be able to have a little snatch of music now and again, & I feel much better for it, I'm afraid the war was killing my appreciation of the finer things (except you of course darling, and nothing would kill that) but to be able to have music now and again makes all the difference

in the world to my mental health. We now have four dogs in the camp, one is the officer's which you already know about, then there is the sergeant's which is very like an Alsatian, & a nice friendly and good looking dog, her name is Molly and now another Sergeant has brought his dog into the picture, it's a great big Samoyed, a terrific dog, but a pure bred, & ever so very friendly, I have two in here with me now, the big one's name is Con, why I don't know, and last but not least is a nasty tempered little terrier owned by one of the corporals, her name is Biddie, and she snaps at everyone, so I guess she'll get shot before long if she upsets anyone, but altogether we have a proper menagerie here now, but they all make good companions and I'm growing very fond of them all (except Biddie) but I might even manage to be good friends with her yet, actually she hasn't had much to do with me yet, so I shouldn't criticize her too much, but from what I've seen of her she's all I said. Well, now you know why I don't bother much about going out at nights, the music, dogs, & electricity are keeping me more & more to the camp, & only one thing tempts me out apart from my long looked for leaves, & that's a really good bath. The boy who came home with me last weekend and went on to London, arrived back here today, he had his house bombed, and got an extension on his 48 leave, & as you can see, he made 7 days out of it, but he told me before he left that he would find an excuse somehow, and I know his people were evacuated to Braintree, and the house had probably caught a packet sometime ago, but he's got away with it, so good luck to him-----
 -- another two hectic hours have sped by, you can see how my work comes and goes, the boys are now having a good time out in the field, practicing with their beams, and you should hear them swear, but they have to do it however they feel, so it's not much useful them to swear about it. They are starting a saving scheme in the army, and I'm allowing them to take off a week from my pittance for the good of the country, I don't know how I shall manage but I'm going to have a go, and see how I get on with it, I know you'll be pleased to hear about this sudden steadying up of my part, but believe me when I say that I'm an angel compared to the other fellows (just imagine playing nap with 6ds instead of 1/2ds and note that I never indulge) so you ought to be very pleased with me darling, if I survive the terrific strain on my finance. I am listening to Geraldo¹⁰ now on the wireless, they're playing "room 504", do you remember me asking you about when I was last home, it brings back lovely memories, and it certainly has very romantic words, but my love for you is something terrific, it's smashing, I love you so, I could almost pack up everything and break camp and come to you tonight, but I know you won't approve, so I'm just sticking here, and if I turn out as good as I think I'll have a stripe to show you soon.[...] it's no use trying to

¹⁰ Gerald Walcan Bright better known as Geraldo, was an English bandleader. He adopted the name "Geraldo" in 1930, and became one of the most popular British dance band leaders

get any more written now I've had nothing but interruptions so I shall pack up for now, I'm overwhelmed with complications about savings, everyone is coming to me for particulars, & I can't get any peace, [...] it's now 10 oclock, believe it or not, I will ...write more tomorrow, (if possible). I love you always,

Sunday 23 February 1941.

Hello darling, I have managed to get through all the odds & ends of work which had accumulated since yesterday, including the scrubbing of tables & floor, & I must say it looks better for it, & I'm quite proud of the cleanliness. Our officer is due back today, just think how hard done by he is, his home is Scotland, & he says 48 hrs is not enough to get home with, & so he spends all his fortyeights in Nottingham with friends, & only sees home about twice a year, so we have nothing to moan about really have we?

I made a lovely cup of tea about an hour ago, one of the best I've had, and a bit of mum's cake made the morning lunch was complete, so I still manage to have my elevenses you see, how do you fare these days? I think of you as I drink mine, and wonder if you are doing the same, I do hope you manage to keep up the fine old English office custom.

Things are pretty quiet here today, nothing has happened of any consequence, except that we are going to grow vegetables, & I have to find out how much seed we require for spring sowings, I'm wondering what our efforts are likely to produce on this soil, because it's pure clay for about 2-feet down, and coal dust after that, but I guess we'll manage to raise something for the cooks, at least we'll have a good try. We have a nice lot of cars on the site now, the officer has his own private one as well as the army one, and one of the sergeants has one, and a bombardier possesses his own, making four in all, so we should be alright with outings now and again, in fact the officer has already used his to take the boys out to dances etc., & having set this example, the others are sure to follow with cinema expeditions etc., I'm wondering how I can wangle an outing now and again, they never seem to be going out when I have an evening off, but perhaps I can strike lucky soon, I'll let you know if I do, and where we go to.

I have already dashed a letter off to Mum, and Jack on the typewriter, but they won't get posted till tomorrow, because I only have one stamp, & you know who that is being saved for don't you [...] it's such a lovely morning just perfect for a walk

with you and Penny, or a potter about in the garden, either of these things would be a wonderful treat for me just now, & as I write, I find myself longing more and more for the pleasure of your lovely company [.....] (*a whole page of adoration here*)

I haven't had the wireless on this morning, I've been doing all the work with the object of having a quiet day later on in which to listen to that, but first of all I had to continue this letter to you because undoubtedly you are the most important thing in my life.[....]. Bill the Maypole manager has just been in to see me, & I have told him to get me some more tea as soon as he can so that Mum can have some the next time I'm home, because I'm sure she must have a job to make hers go round. We have another dance coming off in March, I have the job as usual of arranging for the printing etc., but if I can get out of it, I don't want to go this one, they're only a bore to me, and the hall is very small and gets terribly crowded, so I shan't miss much, but I'll tell you if I do have to go, selling raffle tickets, etc., I know I can't enjoy dancing, I never did like it a lot when we used to go together, so you can be sure I like it even less out here on my own, but there, we only run them for profit, & we don't do so badly, so I guess my efforts are never wasted. Well darling, it's dinner time now so I'll stop writing for a while and have what I can find in the way of eats what it is when I get it [...] goodbye I'll write again after dinner (*another whole page of adoration*) ----

Well it wasn't too bad, beef, a bit tough, Yorkshire pudding, greens, potatoes and gravy, no sweet, so I had a bit more of Mum's cake, but I scrounged a nice cup of tea from the cookhouse, which I am having now with my after dinner cigarette, so now and again I leave off writing to have a sip and a draw, & it's jolly nice too, I've got the wireless on now, some kind of variety, but it's not very exciting, but the sergeants might like it so I'm putting up with it. I really can't understand why I'm so lucky today, do you know the phone hasn't gone half a dozen times since I came on this morning, something really must be wrong, but I'm making hay while the sun shines aren't I?

I forgot to tell you that I packed up work last night at 12 (midnight) and then when I got into our hut I found that someone had let the fire go out, so I toured the camp and found some wood, borrowed the guards bayonet to chop it up, and built a roaring good fire before I went to bed, and you'd be surprised what a difference it made to the frosty atmosphere, so nice in fact that I was last out of the bed this morning (as usual) and didn't get in here till nearly 9, but I was late being relieved

last night, so I didn't worry much about that. ¹¹Hutch is singing now, he's lousy, I don't like him a bit, but the piano accompaniment is not too bad, and the words of all his romantic songs make me feel nearer to you, so I won't send in a protest to the BBC. I haven't very much else to write now... except that Hutch is now singing my favourite song "How deep is the night" and for once I'm enjoying his singing, I wonder if you are listening to him too, I do hope you are, because I'm picturing you by the fireside with your knitting or perhaps a book, and I can put myself beside you and there we are, listening to it together.

And now [...] I could go on and on telling you how deep is my love for you, but I have just had some orders about a parachutist practice this afternoon, which means no more peace till at least this evening, so [...] as I have given you all the news there is to tell, nothing more remains but to repeat over and over again, that I love you [...]

P.S. I would gladly die for you.

¹¹ Leslie Arthur Julien Hutchinson, known as "Hutch" was a Grenada-born singer and musician who was one of the biggest cabaret stars in the world

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
25 February 1941*

My darling,

I'm sorry I didn't write yesterday, but various things happening during the day prevented me from doing so, first of all the phone went wrong, and continued to give trouble all day long, and then all sorts of little jobs cropped up. I was on my own you

see, and therefore had a lot more to keep me busy than I normally should, but this morning I have a little spell in which to write to my sweetheart. But first of all I am us to tell you what has already happened this morning, Charlie and myself have been having a Blitz in the office, floor & tables scrubbed white, lino polished grate black leaded, dusting done and everything in apple pie order, and all over camp great activity is going on, men digging, men scrubbing, men doing everything, in fact the camp has never never seen such activity or cleanliness before since it was born, the reason being that 2 majors 2 captains & one or two hangers-on have just inspected the site, and tomorrow we're going even one better and having a terrific Big Pot here from Divisional H.Q., so we shall have to scrub harder still, but we got highly complimented on our office, they said it was very neatly laid out, and clean, and we were able to lay our hands on everything that was asked for, so they think we're pretty efficient. Talking of efficiency, I think the promotion exam is off again until about Friday. It should have been tomorrow, but owing to visits and inspections, has once again being postponed, so I don't know for sure when it will come off, but I'm learning all the time. Last night I had a session with the officers and several N.C.O.'s on maps, we were at it for 2 ½ hours and I discovered how much more there is in ordinary survey maps than geographical ones, you've no idea how much there is to it, but I've managed to master what we did go over, and now know all there is to know about bearings, scales etc. Tonight I think we shall get on to actually making maps by compass and various other means, so you can see there is more and it than meets the eye, frankly I'm dumbfounded but willing to learn.

We have another dog now a real beauty, very like a red setter, but a lot smaller, & with a black muzzle, he followed one of our boys from Derby (about 8 miles), the fellow had lost the last bus and had to walk it, & now we have Jock, christened so by our officer, he's friendly and clean, and when we have nursed him back to health (he was starved and had been knocked about) the officer is going to give him to his girlfriend, she nearly kept Blitz over the weekend, and this new one has just come in time to make amends. He has a charming habit of walking on his hind legs for a little tit bit of food, & he can, on being tempted stand quite still on his two back legs for as long as you like to keep him there, in short he's a lovable old dog, and though we've only had him here for two days, we shall be very sorry to lose him. He makes up our complement of dogs to 6 so we really can't afford to have him here, because already we have too many----- I'm going to have my dinner now so goodbye for a little while, it looks pretty good, meat as usual, spuds, gravy and greens with stewed fruit and custard, to follow on, and we hope to scrounge a mug of tea later on to finish off with.

Well, we finished our dinner and I feel a lot less hungry than I did, but Charlie has been unable to get us any tea, so it looks as if we've got to wait till teatime, a real hardship in these days of luxury? Thank you for the lovely photograph, it's the best picture I've had of you, and now I can just bring out my pay book, which is next to my heart, and open it and see you in all your loveliness [.....]..

And now my sweet, I have used up all my news for today, & there is little else to write about, except that one of the captains is still here, he's almost reading as I write, so I mustn't put anything too bad about him here, but he looks a decent sort, so perhaps you won't mind too much if he is reading with me [.....] I must close down until perhaps tomorrow.... Goodbye for now and God bless you...

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
1 March 1941*

To the woman I adore,

[...] just think, only another fortnight or so before we are each others again, but I'm afraid it cannot be a weekend this time,

I really haven't a lot of news, but I'll try to tell you all I can remember of the last two or three days. They have been hectic ones for me, we had the G.O.C. in chief visiting us last week, Sir Geoffrey Pile, he is in command of all the Anti Aircraft guns and searchlights in England, and he spoke to me, and very nearly shook hands with me, but just remembered in time that I was

only a gunner, anyway he said goodbye, and altogether proved himself a really good sort, but he caused us hell of a lot of work, and our major nearly drove us crazy fidgeting about all the morning, but that day I had the honour of having 2 generals / General Officer Commanding in chief, 2 Majors and a couple of A.D.C.s, who were Lt. Colonels thrown in for good measure, all in my little office, and they all said how

neat and clean it was, and admired everything, we got 100% for the inspection and have reason to be proud.

The next day I had half of the promotion exam, it has worn me down to nothing, and may me almost ill with worry, and even now my head is seething with facts about all sorts of things I should never worry about. We don't yet know the result, but my interview with the Major didn't go off too well, I answered all these questions correctly, but he says I'm a fine fellow, but too quiet to be a good N.C.O., it made me so mad, to think I had slaved through an exam which apparently counted for nothing, to find that promotion depended on what he thought. Anyway, when I got back I went for our officer, and said the whole business was a farce, and that I shouldn't go in for any more, and when my sergeant heard about it he went mad, because it appears that out of 40 gunners, I stand about 1st or 2nd, and scored extremely good marks, so of course the officer began to smell a rat, and last night he had a go at the major about it, & it turned out that he hadn't seen the results even then, so if he wants to save his prestige with this troop, he's got to stick to results, I'm wondering how I really fared, I guess you shall know in a day or so, but if I don't get through on my merits, I hardly feel like trying again, because to have failed because I am not a natural bully doesn't appeal to me a bit, if I can't be an N.C.O., without being a bully, I won't be one, I mean that.

Well that's off my chest, my sergeant is home on leave this weekend, but I'm on jolly good terms with the officer, so I'm not without a friend, and gosh how he talks, he keeps us up till midnight every night, just talking about nothing in particular but he's a good sort, and well liked by everyone. I have just managed to scrounge a mug of tea, it's lovely because I had given up hope of getting any this afternoon, however I shall enjoy it it's more because it was a surprise. Things have quietened down a bit now as you can guess by my writing this letter during the day and I hope they stay quiet for a spell I'm tired of all this worry and bustle, it's wearing me down properly, in fact I seriously thought about reporting sick today, but I managed to stay away after all.

We had a bit of a "do" here this morning, one of the fellows was cleaning the Lewis Gun, & accidentally fired it, two bullets came out, & didn't even damage the hut, they both went through a crack in the floor, well, of course there was a stink, & the fellow had to come into the office to make a statement, but I've saved him from a court of enquiry, by telling the officer I know who has some live rounds to make up for the two that were fired, & on the promise he has let the man off, so I guess

perhaps I wouldn't make a good N.C.O. I'm too easy. One of the questions I was asked yesterday, if you were D.C., & you found a man had polished his respirator brasses contrary to orders, what would you do. I said I would severely reprimand him, of course I was wrong, apparently he should be put on charge for breaking standing order No. so & so, but in my estimation that's all eyewash, anyhow I still wouldn't put a man on charge for that, it's too silly for words, & yet typically army.

I had your parcel safely the other day, & aren't you a darling you filled it with all the things you know I like, [...] it is those little things which makes my love for you what it is. [...] it's a pretty tough job in the army of today, but still if we get a chance to scrap, I can die fighting for you, a thing I would gladly do if necessity demanded it. Yesterday was so windy that we had 14 Barrage Balloons broken loose around Derby, & we had orders to shoot them down, but more came our way, I'm wondering how George is getting on with his baby, & old Son, I bet they have a tough time with winds like we're getting here now March is certainly coming in like a lion. I'm glad & flattered that my picture adorns your desk, I can now feel that I am with you in spirit at least, all the time, & thank you for putting me in a Royal Artillery frame, I'm very flattered, & will do my best to be worthy of it, I have shown the picture you sent me to nearly everyone I know, & they're all very impressed with it, so you see, you are a beauty in spite of all you think about yourself, I told you so didn't I?

This morning I had a letter from Ron, in which he invites us to his place on my next seven days, we shall have to see if that can't be wangled somehow, I should love to see this wonderful home you were raving about when you wrote from there, & I too, felt very sad to think of you being the only one without a partner [...] at least I am doing my bit for the country, & you should be compensated with the thought that our love is greater than any of theirs [...] (*half page of adoration*) I sincerely hope we are still here in April because I've been informed that we might be moving in May, & that will probably mean a suspension of leave, which would be pretty awful if it happens to fall on my seven days date, so keep your fingers crossed....won't you. I'm just having my tea now, sausages & mash, but I didn't fancy the mash much, so I'm having sausage & bread, & these old army sausages are tough, but I'm going to finish up with my favourite paste in a moment, & I shall feel quite at home again. It's pouring with rain here, in fact the weather is positively lousy, but I saw the crocuses coming out yesterday, it was a lovely sight, & cheered me up no end, how are ours coming along? are they showing any colour yet? There is a new fellow out here, he's just arrived, & apparently is either going to work with me, or in the store, but he

seems a decent sort, & was one of the July intakes, so we ought to get along pretty well, I'll let you have more details later, but right now I have some work coming on [...] so I'll have to love you & say goodbye again, [...] Goodbye for now darling.....

3 March 1941
Horsley Camp H.Q.
Typed letter

My Darling,

I expect you will be getting a little worried because I have not written to you lately, but I have been learning a lot about searchlights now, trying to make up for all the time wasted in this office, and I've got a job on too, but on the whole I'm not doing too badly. I am going on the exam result which came out the other day, and I missed going up by 7 ½ marks, too bad wasn't it, and mainly because the Major said I was too quiet at p[p] present to make a good N.C.O. so I'm having voice training exercises on the site every time they have a practice, and I'm not doing too badly, in fact I really did very well in the exam according to marks, you will be pleased to know that although I knew nothing about searchlights on the partial side, I managed to come seventh in twenty seven, and if the major had marked me as high as the others I should have got through, but I shall bob up at the next exam which is to be held in the near future, so keep hoping darling, and I shall be able to earn that rise for you yet.

I have very little to tell you about...I will try.....First of all, I had your letter containing the stamps and needless to say they were very welcome, I am almost broke already and have three more days to get through, but I guess I shall manage somehow, and if I don't well that's just too bad, and I don't suppose it will kill me.

I went out for a walk with Bob, the new fellow I was telling you about, or have I told you, anyway he came out on Saturday, from Battery, and he's ever such a decent sort, and really the only one I have taken to quite so much since I lost Arthur, that is because he was called up with our crowd, and they all seem to be pretty decent fellows, altogether different from the rest of them, so I think I shall have a better time here now, especially as this boy is sensible and can take over the office whenever I want to get out on detachment, and in that way I can still hold my job here, and at the same time learn all I want to by going out whenever there is something to learn, and

there is plenty I can tell you, but I shall be all ready for the third time of asking I bet. Our officer is going on a course in two days time, and he will be away for about two or three weeks, and in that time I hope to get in some more driving lessons, and a lot more stuff that will be useful to me in the near future.

Have you stopped to think that it will soon be time for me to come to you again, I shall not be able to get home during the weekend this time, but never mind, darling [...] I remember you saying that if I did not tell you when I was coming home, you would not get the time off, well, if you really think that you could manage a day off, let me know at once and I will tell you when the date is, but until I know that, I will not tell you because the last time I dared to do that we were both disappointed, and I don't want that to happen again, [...] goodnight my love....

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
6 March 1941
(Partially typed letter)*

My darling,

Another day nearer to holding you in my arms, [...]

Thank you for the lovely long note of ten pages you sent, I took nearly five whole minutes to read it, but it told me all that I love to know, [...] Things are pretty quiet here today, the Sergeant has been out nearly all day, and I have been left pretty well alone although I have one or two teasers to sort out soon, but I'm leaving them till after tea, and in the meantime I am writing lots of letters all round, one to Jack, one to Mum, and one to Son, I have not bothered to send one to Len, he didn't answer my last, The sergeant has just arrived back here, and I think I shall ask him for more suggestions, he is looking over my shoulder now, so if a few lines creep in that you know I wouldn't write the explanation is already there. We have had a wonderful spring day here today, the sun has been shining all day, and the birds are beginning to wake up and sing, in short spring is in the air again. I've had to give up the machine because the other fellow is taking a message on the phone, & one cannot hear a thing when the typewriter is going, so until he's finished doing that, I shall continue to write, in fact I think I'll keep on writing, as I haven't so very much more time before the D.R. goes out, & I want him to post this for me tonight, so perhaps you'll forgive me if this letter is no longer than yours of ten pages. I really have very little of

interest today, [...] I've been typing all day off & on, but actually nothing important has happened to plain Gunner Furlong. I'm tired of being called by everyone though, & although I'm becoming a byword in Battery I get nothing out of it, & the novelty is wearing off for me, & my tail is rather lower than it was this time last week, but I guess I'll get over it alright, & then everything will be plain sailing again, My knowledge is growing fast, & there will be no holding me when I do get going, so keep hoping [...] I haven't given up yet. I shall be hitch hiking again next week of course, so cannot say exactly when I shall arrive home, although I guess it will be round about tea time, & I think I shall go to Mums until it's time to take you home, so apart from just letting you know I'm home, I shall not waste any time, but get my visits over for the day, & then we can have a lovey evening in together, & I can go to bed early & have a lovely hot bath, although I did manage to get one yesterday [...] *(Nearly half page of adoration)* And now [...] I shall have to end it now if it is to be posted tonight [...] I'll say goodnight [...]

*Horsley Camp
9 March 1941
(Ten page letter)*

My own darling,

By the time you receive this I should be on my way to you (I hope) or perhaps this might by strange chance get to you first, but this will be my last letter to you before Wednesday, so you'll have to make it last darling until I get there, and then all our dreams can be realised.

I have just finished cleaning my office and it does look nice, the lino looks green instead of a dirty muddy colour, and the tables are beautifully white, and now I've locked the door so that people cannot keep wandering in and out as they like, so it might by some strange chance remain clean for a while. I have another Sergeant here now, I've still got the old one, but this new one is an addition, and he's got one of those tiny portables, not quite as big as this sheet of paper to look at, but it's a lovely little thing, and I'm hearing organ music as I write this, & it's nice to listen to a wireless again, they took my other one away to put in the mess hut, & I suppose this one will go the same way, but I'm hoping the sergeant will leave it here, as they already have a set in their hut. All the men from the site have gone to a P.T. demonstration today, leaving 6 men and myself with a new Sergeant, so we have

everything under control at the moment, although how long this happy state of affairs will persist I do not know.

Our poor old D.R. (*Despatch Rider*) the boy who came home with me last time as far as Watton, got knocked over by a car the other night, he was walking, it being his evening off, and going to the dance, which was being held in the village, he remembers is waking up in the house of the man who knocked him over, anyway, when I came in, I found him lying on a stretcher in my office, & unconscious, he looked pretty badly hurt, to wait three hours solid for the ambulance to get out to him, & then they brought him round and made him stand up, and eventually decided he need not go to hospital, so the poor old boy spent the night on a stretcher, & we moved him to his bed in the morning, & then the M.O. came to see him, and decided he ought to go to hospital, and we waited all day for something to come and take him there. He got pretty well knocked about on his head, and they cut all his hair off, and yesterday morning after he regained consciousness, he ruefully felt his head, & straightaway went to his case, got out a bottle of hair oil and gave it to Charlie, & said it'll be a B.....long time before I need that again.

He took it all pretty well I thought, because as soon as he could stand up he was walking about the camp again, but I still fear for a fractured skull, he certainly had a huge lump out of his head, and he says his legs hurt him too, but I think that's only bruises, and anyway he's in hospital now, & should receive plenty of attention, and I guess he'll soon be out and about again.

Our dance was a success again, but we didn't turn over quite so much money as we usually do, which means that there wasn't such a crowd, & this made it better for the dancers, I had two or three goes round this time having had a couple of whiskies, but I didn't do so good really, and I could have made a much better job of it had you been with me, but at least it was an experience for me, and made a bit of a change. I still haven't got any real friends here, you know what I mean by that, I have of course plenty of friends, in fact I don't think there's anyone who dislikes me now, perhaps the cooks because I keep the officer chasing them up, but even they gave me a cup of tea this morning, so things are pretty even all round, & I guess I'm as happy as I could be under the present circs, but of course I still long to be back in civvie street, and then I need worry about no-one again except me. It's a funny thing this, but I was filling a bucket of coal yesterday, and I couldn't remember having spent any other kind of life, as it feels as if I've been in the army all my life, and I didn't like the thought a bit, I do hope this old war will hurry up and finish, then I can start all over

and forget the rotten old existence, I'm getting very fed up with it all, and the only bright spots are the short spells I get with you, & although very generous, are still far too few for my liking.

How's Penny?, has she learned any more tricks yet?, & I hope you have partly trained her to keep off the garden, because if the weather is fine, I must turn some more over for you when I next come home, & really I think it's a good job it will be in the week, because I shall have no lovely wife to keep me holding her in my arms, & I can get straight on with the garden, or have had the marvellous luck to get some time off? I hope you have [...] we ought to manage a bit of "weeding". [...] (*Nearly two pages of adoration*) for two days I shall be with you, in fact if it could be afforded, I might even wangle to come home the night before, but it would mean a journey by train, & I fear my purse is very slender owing to savings schemes, & I am in debt, but these are trivial things really, & one can always scrape through somehow [...]

It's a pretty miserable sort of day here, pouring with rain, and terribly cold, even my fire isn't really keeping me warm today, so you can guess what it's like, but I'm better off than those outside, and I can't really complain, but I hope your sample isn't the same, or I can picture you sitting by the fire with your knitting this afternoon, and picturing you only makes me more and more want to be with you, so let's hope the sun is shining down south. You will probably not be surprised to know that I very seldom go out now, the dance was the first time in a week, and I really don't want to be bothered, I'd much rather work, or have a read, so on the whole I am a pretty good boy, but I smoke a lot, and cigarettes have been very difficult to get this week, I have had to scrounge off different boys for the last day or two, and even now, all I have in is

three “Tenners” in a bent packet, ¹² & they’re vile things, normally, but I’m glad to have them at the moment, and from this you will deduce that things are in a bad way, I hope they soon mend, because pernicious though the habit is, it’s all I have in the way of pleasure now, and I must have something to keep me alive while I’m away from you.

I got your letter in two halves the other day, and very fortunately they came together, so I was able to continue uninterrupted except for opening the envelope when I found the letter incomplete, I remember you doing it once before and I never did get the other pages, but you’ve probably forgotten that occasion, it was while I was at Sherwood Lodge,.....

This old pen is not such as good as the one I left with you, I’ve had to fill it three times during this letter and it looks as if a fourth is soon needed so here goes. I have just switched on the wireless and it’s exactly 13:40, and what do you think they are playing? I do hope you are listening, Valse Triste, I feel right beside you now, listening to our record....., Now it’s over and I find it was the BBC Salon Orchestra.....

I think it is nearly time for dinner now, my stomach feels very empty, and it’s gone on a good bit, so I’ll go and see what I can find, and then continue for a little longer with this letter afterwards.

Well, it was quite nice, Roast Beef, Yorkshire Pudding, with Potatoes and Swedes. But there was no sweet, so I had to eat a bit of the chocolate I was saving for you, I do hope you will forgive me darling, and then I managed to scrounge another cup of tea, so I have managed a fairish meal, and the empty feeling in my stomach is partly gone. Arthur Askey & Stinker are on the air now, they’re blacking out their flat, & very funny as usual, I do hope you are listening in as well, it’s so nice to have something mutual to bind us together. The little dog that was so ill and then got lost, you remember it?, you asked about it often enough, well it’s back here again, and very lively & healthy once again, and it’s a treat to see him running about, but still seems to be pining for his old master a little bit, but at least it’s got over the worst of it. He makes six dogs on the site, and they are bit of a nuisance at times too, the other day when we had that big inspection by all the Generals, we had to hide them somehow because the G.O.C. hates dogs, so they did the funniest thing, all the dogs were collected and tied together on one long piece of electric wire, and sent the Batman out for a walk with them, he was gone the whole afternoon and came back

¹² Churchman’s Tenner Cigarettes

very tired, I understand he had a hectic time with 6 dogs on a string, but at least it served its purpose and that was everything, so all went well as I have already told you. The P.T. boys have just got back, poor devils, they've had to do exercises out in the pouring rain with just their vests and shorts on, and then a nasty cold ride in an open lorry, it's enough to give them all pneumonia, & I'm jolly glad I'm not a P.T. wallah. Well I think I've managed to give you a fairish amount of news, and as I am overwhelmed in my office now by N.C.O.s, whom I have no power to keep out, I had better just end here, because it's pretty obvious that my peace for the rest of the day is vanished, I have, I fear, just made myself rather unpopular by going for two or three people who rambled in here without any reason for doing so, & I must confess they made me very cross, but I guess I'll get over it, and now I must really end my darling, so until Wednesday I must say goodbye[.....].

CHAPTER TWO

*Horsley Camp
Saturday 15th (probably March 1941)
Typed letter*



PROMOTION!

My Darling,

Here I am back again, and it looks as if this will be the last letter you will get from this address for some time, because when I got back yesterday I found I have been promoted to a one striper, and I am to go on a course for three weeks at Tuxford, which is a tough proposition I'm told, but the main object is to train me up to the standard required to be an N.C.O. I shall not be paid for this stripe until I have passed the course, so you must just keep your fingers crossed for me until it is all over, and then when I come home on my seven days I shall be at least a L/Bdr. (Lance Bombardier) which is what we have both been waiting for. I am due to go away next Wednesday, and my address will be as follows :-

Tactical and N.C.O. Wing,
2nd A.A. Div. School,
Militia Camp,
TUXFORD,
Notts.

I think it will be best for you to wait for me to write to you first, in case this address is not quite right, and then we shall have no letters going astray, but I think it is right and if it is, it is the worst place I could go to be for a tough course, and I should come out of it feeling quite a man, and certainly fitted to be a good N.C.O. one of the type that pleases the old boy, but actually I owe this chance to him, so he must have noticed me after all, and I should not have run him down quite so much, but I'll not let him down if I can help it, so I shall be able to make amends for all harsh things I have said about him.

Well, darling, I had a rough time getting back, I started off well enough, but things went wrong after I had done the first 50 miles, I'll try to reconstruct the

journey. You will remember that it was very warm especially with my overcoat on, and I found it extra warm after a while. I got to St. Albans OK and signalled a lorry which did not stop, but a car did and in it were two ladies who asked me where I wanted to get to, and after I told them, they said they were going 100 miles up the Watling Street, so I jumped in as far as Stoney Stratford, which was where my road left the main one, they turned out to be an officer of the A.T.S. and a lady press reporter, and they went like the wind, which was a fine start, but when I got to Stoney, that was the beginning of all my troubles, and after walking about 2 miles along the road and nothing passed me, I decided to go back onto the Watling Street and get as far as Towcester and have a try to get to Northampton from there, so back I went another 2 miles, and managed to get a lift to Towcester easily enough and started walking along the Northampton road from there, and this time I reckon I walked about 3 miles, and all the time I was getting Hotter and Hotter, and then a coal wagon came along, and I climbed on board and went as far as Northampton with a load of coal, from that point I took a bus out of the town, and walked as far as the road branched off to Leicester, a distance of about 1 more mile, and got a lift to Leicester, and the driver of this lift was very kind and took me right out of the town so that I could pick up a lift more easily, and without much trouble I got to Loughborough alright, but that place is the worst one on earth to get out of, and I was there for about an hour I think, walking all the time to get out of the town, there are no buses to Derby, they only run two or three times a day apparently, and only because of a kindhearted old lady who happened to be passing by did I get out of the town at all, and she went out of her way to do it, she said she had just finished a days billeting of evacuees, and she had not had a dinner then and it was five, so I don't know when she would get it, but she left me in a remote little village between Loughborough and Derby, and there I decided to wait until something did come along, I had had enough of walking, and after about a quarter of an hour I managed to stop a little van which turned out to be the chap who had stopped for me the day I came home, and he took me to the outskirts of Derby, for which I was truly thankful, for from that point I was bound to get a tram, which took me to the centre of the town, and after a quarter of an hour's wait I was able to get a bus to the camp, but I did not get here until seven, so you can guess what a harassing day I had, and now my left foot is hurting like anything, I think all of the walking I did has caused my arch to fall, anyway it's damn painful, and I do not want to repeat the experience, but even though I still think it was worth it, to be with you is worth anything in the world to me, and I will do it again tomorrow if I got the chance, but I feel that I have lots more in front of me before that time comes round again, but I shall at least have the evenings off on this coming course, and shall be able to write you pretty regularly, so

cheer up darling, and don't forget that when you next write I am no longer Gnr. but L/Bdr. and although it is only a local rank at the moment, as soon as I have finished this course, it will be a paid one, and I feel very sure of myself as far as getting through is concerned, but it's going to be a very strenuous one, because I have to get a doctor's certificate to prove that I am fit to take the course, which means that I have got to be tough, but I'm sure that it can't be much worse than our training, and I should survive, and I will let you have all the grisly details, but please tell Barbara and Roy that I now hold a stripe won't you, I'm sure that old Roy will pull his socks up when he hears of it, and I bet you'll be pleased that I have taken the first step upwards, I am very mystified about it all, because all I know is that when I got back, I went straight to draw my pay and as the officer paid me, he said , you've got to put a stripe up, and you are going on a course, I was very pleased and surprised although not in a fit condition to really appreciate it, and so I said how did it come about, and who was I to thank, but he said that he had nothing to do with it, and that if I get by I am to thank the Major, so I have a friend after all, and I am very surprised, but I'm not going to let anyone down, and all the sergeants and the officer tell me that it is a good course, and one in which I shall learn all sorts of things, so it will be very useful to me in more ways than one, and I am very flattered to think that I show the qualities required to go on this particular course.

And now I expect you have got fed up with me and my stripe, so I'll say no more about it, and I might lose it anyway if I don't come up to scratch, so we'll just forget it if that's possible when everyone in the camp addresses me as Bombardier now, but we will go onto something more interesting now. We had a terrific raid here last night, and I think Nottingham caught it a lot, and the guns were bursting overhead all night, but so far as I know, no damage has been reported to enemy on (sic) friend yet, but the noise was too much for me to sleep, and I was tired out, so you can guess what we had, and the boys were out in it all, and the all clear went about two o'clock this morning, the worst raid we've had this way since we've been here, but that all helps us to feel that we are at last in the war, and while the bombs are falling this way they're not falling on you, which is a comforting thought [.....] until April 11th, and we shall be together again, and now I really must end dearest, so until you hear from me again, I'll say goodbye [.....] and please behave yourself at the dance even if even it is a war weapons week, an ungodly affair if ever there was (don't take offence at this, you know how I feel about the war and killing)....

Four Winds
Monday 16 March 1941

My dear darling,

Thank you a thousand times for the lovely daffodils. Cycling back to the office after seeing you off on the train, I was wondering whatever it could be you had sent me & it suddenly struck me----ah flowers! and so it was. They were waiting for me when I got back. Joan said "Well, thats the way to manage things married nearly four years, and he still sends you flowers" I hope you arrived back safely, darling. I was glad to think that you were not having a heartbreaking time trying to get lifts from selfish motorists. Perhaps you will arrive back feeling not too tired. I hope so anyway. I bought you five certificates this afternoon, so you are richer by 75/- (£3.45) than you were this morning

Mother let me have another half score of eggs this dinnertime so I hope to get enough to keep you well supplied when you come home on leave, though I hope you don't get too much vitamin E from them !!

How quickly the weekend went, didn't it, but, never mind, only a month to wait till your next seven days. That's a cheering thought, isn't it and I expect you'll have plenty of work (& worry) in the meantime to keep you occupied. Well my sweet, I haven't much more news ...

Horsley Camp H.Q.
16 March 1941
Typed letter

Dearest Love,

Once again it's Sunday and as usual I feel pretty blue, so I'm giving up a little time to write you a letter in an effort to cheer myself up, because every time I write you as you already know it makes me feel so much nearer to you [...]

I have been making some enquiries into the facts around my course, and I find that I have been selected out of all the Bty to attend this affair, and if I do make a job of it, my chances of getting on have no limit, it all depends now whether I can shout enough to make men jump about, but, as I've already been told, I'm going to a place where I am not known, and I can make a fresh start, so I guess I sure have to try hard to do this. I sewed my stripes on last night, it took me two solid hours to just put on

two pairs, and they cost me two shillings too, so I am feeling the strain of being someone important, and as for the feel of stripes on my arms, I simply can't get used to it, they seem to be always in my way and every time I look right or left, all I can see is my stripe until I begin to wonder what it feels like to have three there instead of one, but perhaps I shall be able to find out soon, and then things will have to hum, because I have made up my mind to be like sergeant Warden, and if I could succeed I should be getting somewhere.

Well, I expect you have heard enough about that again, so I'll give it a rest until tomorrow, but perhaps I shall have more work to see to, already there are one or two things which require attention, but so far I have been able to make them wait, and until I have finished this to you they will have to keep on waiting. I have cleaned the floor and scrubbed the tables in spite of the fact that I need not do so now, and the office looks as it should always do, I think the other two who were left here when I was with yoo (sic) must have neglected the work very much as there seems to be a lot of dirt about although I can't really blame them, but I couldn't manage to work in dirt, so I have to get down to it every morning, but that will only be for a little while longer now, I shall be off to Tuxford early Wednesday morning, and a new life, but I guess it will be a worry for a while, and far from the placid existence we have here. I had a grand sewing evening last night, and all together I put on four stripes, ten buttons and cleaned and pressed two pairs of trousers, don't you think I was industrious? it took me all evening to do it, and I went to bed at half past twelve, but it was worth it, and I feel much smarter now, but there are still about four more buttons to go on when I get the chance to do it. I'm wondering now if I shall have the opportunity to send my tunic to the cleaners, as I shall be away for a long time, but I hope to get the chance somewhere in the dim future, and if not well, I shall have to be scruffy for the wedding that's all. I saw Arthur this morning, and he was going to have a bath, he was very surprised to see that I had one up, but took it pretty well really, and said that I should not be able to see him when he passed me, but we shall see about that, because I mean to keep on going now if I possibly can, he is going to hospital again next week, so that means another long spell for him I suppose, and all those long stays in hospital hold him back ever so much, and he will never get anywhere at that rate, but I don't think he really cares a lot now, and I can't say that I blame him a lot, because he has had a lot of hard luck, and those little setbacks make one feel that it doesn't matter what happens. Ah well, I don't suppose it will matter, and after the war is finished with we shall none of us care what we were like in the army so long as we behaved ourselves, the mere fact that I can be back with you is

enough to make me want the war over as soon as possible, even though it will stop me from getting any more stripes, [...]

I'm afraid that I have very little news for you today, none of the babies have been born yet, and even the puppies we expect seem to be very slow materialising, but all in good time, and I'll keep you posted of events all round. I must confess that I feel a little nervous about Wednesday but I guess I'll manage alright when the actual time comes along, I have a happy knack of getting away with things of this kind when they actually happen and not before, so I mustn't worry too much. I bet you think I'm awful, talking about myself all this time, but it is a bit on my mind, and you are the only person in the world who is the least little bit interested in my progress, so I'm sure you will forgive me this time if I seem to be giving you too much of it, please tell me when next you write. I'm in the middle of having my dinner now, and while I chew I'm doing this with one hand, it doesn't look any different to you but it is quite difficult really, and the one finger business is not all the easiest way to things, so I think I'll pack up till after dinner-----

Dinner over, and Sunday as usual there was no sweet, because we had Yorkshire pudding, and I must confess that this state of affairs does not appeal to me greatly because I do like my sweet, So I've had to buy a bit of chocolate to polish off with, and that's the way the money goes. Oh, I forgot to tell you that our gaiters of which I am so proud will no longer be white, but they have to be a dirty straw colour from now on, and as you may guess, that does not please me very much, I do like to have them looking clean, and I guess I shall not be so keen on wearing them now this has occurred, well, well, that's the army all over they cannot be content with anything for very long. It really is a lovely day, I find myself wishing every time I look out of the door, that I could be at home enjoying it with you, what a lot I owe old nasty, and if ever I get the chance I shall make the most of it too. I'm going down to the cookhouse soon in the hope of scrounging a cup of tea, they seem a little more friendly towards me now I am a L/ Bdr, they say that they cannot afford to fall out with us, so I guess I shall be able to get some in a minute, and that will just see me off nicely. They have a new arrangement here now, we have a break at ten thirty in the mornings and have cocoa and biscuits but the tragedy is that we now have no supper, and I don't know which is worse, all I know is that I get very hungry about eight o'clock in the evening and just as hungry in the morning, so it looks to me as if we ought to have both, especially as we are now cut down so with bread and meat, but I guess we shall survive all right.

Well [.....] I think I've told you all there is to tell you for today, but I shall be with you again tomorrow.[...] Goodbye [...]

*17 March 1941
Horsley Camp H.Q.
Typed letter*

My Darling,

I had a letter from you this morning as I expected, and I guess that it will be the last too, until I have told you my actual address from when I move off, unless of course there is still one you would have may have written on Sunday, I do hope there is, because your letters are my only link with you materially, and the days which by the way, are very few now, when I do not touch lucky enough to get one from you, make me feel very unhappy. Charlie has just got back from his 48, and he is as browned off as we all are when we first get back, but he had more luck than I did, and arrived here at four, and he didn't leave St. Albans until the same time as I did, so he had nothing to be really upset about, but I know how he must feel, he has three little daughter's to make his home seem even sweeter, and he says that he forgot there was war on while he was in his garden, it seems that he did exactly the same things that I did, and so I sympathize with him fully. I have got to get a bath tonight somehow, and I don't know where to get one from. I guess I shall have to have one on the instalment plan in a bowl of water on the floor, and that promises to be a cold job. But it's got to be done, I have to see the M.O., tomorrow, and I must be clean. I feel a little worried about the coming ordeal, but they all tell me that it is fine to have a course now and again, it breaks the monotony and we are supposed to be finished every evening at five, that seems too good to be true of course, but it is so, and I shall appreciate that very much I can tell you.

I should appreciate it very much if you could send me some fags as soon as you have my address, because they are more and more difficult to get (if we had the money) and as for getting sweets now, well you can guess what a job it is if we can't get all we ask for, they are certainly cutting us down, but there it is and there it will have to stay, if you have all the cigarettes down that way, we can't hope to have them up here, and so you will have to send them to me, even if I have to pay for them, and once I get settled down back here again, I should welcome a cake or two if it could be possibly wangled, I know you thought that I couldn't be bothered much with cakes,

but they are starving us almost now, and we have to buy all sorts of odds and ends to fill up with, so perhaps you will have mercy on us and send a little now and then. I do hope you won't think this as scrounging letter, I know it is, but I don't want you to think that I'm writing just for that reason, you know how I feel about writing to you, and whatever you think I shall still go on doing it [...] We had a couple of big shots here this afternoon, but it didn't worry us much, after having the G.O.C. here, nothing can bother us a lot more, and we are probably hardened to this sort of thing. The boys are very busy now digging the plots all over the camp ready for spring gardening, I wonder what sort of results we shall be able to show in the summer if we're here that long, but somehow I don't think we shall be, although there is no telling, and we might see the war out, if we are lucky anyway, they have made the place worth living in, and the new paths all covered in asphalt are a treat to walk on, and my office really is clean nearly all day now, and then we have the electric light, and the wireless to help the odd moments by, and lo and behold, what more could we wish for, except a nice cosy home and a loving wife to kiss, a lovely bed to go and sleep in, and a nice pair of warm slippers to put on, and a pleasant evening in the garden, and a nice fire to come in to, and a lovely supper of fritters or something tasty to look forward to, not much difference is there? and after remembering all that I feel as if I could run home to you right now, those things are just the things that go to make my home life complete, and I could ask for nothing more [...] To put in the Sergeant's words, that, my dear is lust, not love as love it is I have for you and to hold your hand is all I ask, and my supreme reward. He has just read the last lines I typed, and had to add his little bit for you, I think you will have to meet him one day, you will be quite impressed I might tell you, and the more you get to know him, the more you would like him. We have a fairly good time here in the office together, and I like it very much when we are working on a job together, we crack all sorts of jokes, and get many a laugh when we feel a bit down in the dumps, and so the war goes on. I find I have very little in the way of news today, but I guess you will be content with having a letter from me telling you how much I love you [.....] I'll be with you again tomorrow, [...] Goodbye,

*L/BDr Furlong
Lucknow Squad
Tactical Wing
2nd AA Div School
Ollerton Road
Tuxford, Notts
18 March 1941*

(About 40 miles North East of Horsley).

To my Darling,

Here I am again sweetheart, & one day earlier than I expected, I had to come here in the devil of a hurry because someone made a mistake in the date, but I'm here, & that's the end of it, & for three weeks my life is going to be one hell of a stir, everyone tells me that it's a terrific affair, & it certainly looks it too. We have been issued with full infantry kit, & it's a puzzle to know which piece goes on first, but I guess I'll get used to it as time goes on, but I fear I'm doomed to a hell of a time, it appears it's going to be all infantry work, & that means hours on the parade square, long route marches, tons of scrubbing & cleaning, & long cross country runs, so I'm certain to knock some of this fat off, but that part of it will be a good thing, but I don't relish the first three or four days, they're going to be hell for sure, & fancy getting up at six each morning, the very thought tires me.

Here is the other side, the camp is like Yaxley, lovely hot & cold showers, & baths, plenty of food, just as much as we can eat, & lovely airy rooms, it makes life much cleaner & sweeter, & I shall like it for that reason alone, & our instructor is only a youngster who looks as if he might be a decent sort, so I'm intending to show up as well as I really can. We have the old double tier bunks here, & I have been unlucky enough to get a top shelf again, but I am managing somehow, & in a lovely big room like this it isn't too bad to be on top, every bed has a window to itself & a large cupboard, so you can guess what a lovely place it is, & everywhere is central heated, so we ought to be healthy enough. I have twenty five others with me, & we're all one stripers, so we're all in the same boat, & I think I might find a friend amongst them here & there, but so long as I manage to jog along with them all, I shall be happy, & now you have my address you must write to me regularly, & I think after all the cleaning etc., I shall have plenty of time to write to you. We are being allowed this evening to settle ourselves down, & we're doing it pretty well I guess, but a rude awakening is before us, & at the moment I dread the morning, one look at the beautifully scrubbed equipment, the gleaming brass work, & shiny rifles, is enough to

make one gib, & I've got a feeling I shall be told to get a haircut tomorrow too, so once again it's goodbye hair I expect.

I think I'm going to have a bath tonight after all our preliminary cleaning is done, & then I'll get to bed ready for a grilling tomorrow, but you shall know more tomorrow night. There isn't much more to be said for today really, but I do so wish you could be with me, & then I'd feel a lot happier, [...] at least I am taking the first serious step up the ladder to make me worthy of you, so I feel a little happier about that, & I'm going to see what else I can make of it as soon as the opportunity occurs.

There's one thing I forgot to tell you, I remember writing to you yesterday telling you that our gaiters had got to be blanco'ed again, & I had already done mine, well here, they have to be scrubbed white, so I've had to get all the Blanco out of them again. Ah well, that's the army all over, & at least it keeps us out of mischief.

Well darling, my pen is about run out, & I have no ink here, so you'll have lots of letters in pencil soon, but I'll find enough to write---[...] Your Bill always.
(*Continues in Pencil*) Dearest love, the first day is just over, up at six, & finished at 7 at night, & now lots of cleaning & studying, don't be surprised if you only get one letter a week, because we only get Sundays off, all the rest of the time is drill drill drill, & I'm about bugged now, so please forgive me darling if my letters drop off for a spell, & don't send any parcels to this address, I should appreciate cash more. You will be pleased to know that I have hardly time to smoke now, but that all helps to depress me more, but I guess it'll make a man of me, & you'll notice the difference when you next see me.

By the way, the course finishes the day before I'm due to start my leave, I do hope I can pull it off alright, keep praying for my success darling, it all depends on you, & now I'll have to pack up & press my trousers, I was ticked off on parade for hair, & blouse had two hairs on it, so you can see what sort of place it is, just like prison, I used to moan about Yaxley days, but this is worse than that, so please have mercy on me if I'm too tired & busy to write regularly, but they won't break me, I'll survive somehow, Goodnight [...]

*Lucknow Squad,
Sunday (about 22nd)
Probably 23 March 1941
(12 page pencil note)*

My very own darling,

If you are feeling half as depressed as I am not receiving any letters for the past week, you must feel pretty blue, but today, being Sunday, we have the whole day off, and I'm going over all that has happened to me since I arrived here. First of all I must tell you once again that I shall have very little time for writing at all except Sundays, but if I can possibly do it, I shall squeeze one in during the week, & please pass on all news of me to Mum, because I'm afraid she isn't likely to hear anything until this period of imprisonment is over. [...] The thought of you [...] is really the means of survival in this terrible prison, as you will probably realise when I tell you all we have done in three days here, only the thought of you kept me from deserting after the first day, & I am certainly having to earn this stripe, but at least that is a comforting thought, which is more than the average one-striper can have, & if I apply the knowledge I have gained in the correct manner when I get back, I should make some rapid strides, [...]

And now, darling, a programme of events for each day I have been here. First of all, I was supposed to have arrived here on the Wednesday, but that was a mistake in the Battery office, & I was suddenly told on the Tuesday morning to pack all kit & get going; well I had a devil of a lot of formality to go through at B.H.Q., & after four hours of being interviewed & medically examined, I was conveyed by car to this place, which is about twenty miles north of Nottingham, & the furthest I have ever been from you, the nearest town is Retford which is nine miles away, & I feel absolutely cut off from everyone. When I arrived here I was conducted to this barrack room, which is really a wonderful place, but we're never in it unless to work, & sleep is unheard of, because what little time is allowed for that purpose is in my case wasted by worrying about what's to come, but at least I know that it is not going to be for ever, & every day is one day nearer. We have double bunks, & for mattresses we have paliasses thinly stuffed with straw, and after the old mattresses I have been used to, they are like iron, but anything to lie on is a wonderful thing here if we have the time to lie on it.

The first day was regarded as an easy one, Wednesday morning it started by calling us up at six (an ungodly hour) & they turn all the radiators off each night so

that its terribly cold in the mornings, then comes a mad rush for the ablutions, a quick shave, & a wash, & lots of brass to polish, our beds laid out with blankets folded absolutely dead?, they mustn't be an eighth of an inch out or we'll be for it, then dress & brush our clothes all over, & fit on all new webbing equipment, which consists of belt, bayonet, bullet pouches, water bottle & haversack, & the amount of brass on them is heart-breaking. All this has to be done by seven & the floor swept right through, & then we have to stand by our beds to be inspected, after which we parade for breakfast at seven, & which by the way has to be eaten & forgotten in half an hour because first parade is at quarter to eight, & this just gives us time to wash up, & pass the clothes brush over each other once more before we parade for inspection. We start the day at eight sharp by marching (190 of us, all one stripers) round the parade ground, & then on the order "form up" we double on to the square & form into our respective squads, & have a little stand at ease & attention to liven us up, then comes the inspection, & this is my biggest worry, every one is inspected by an officer, & he is most thorough, if you have as much as a hair on your clothes you're for it, & your name goes down in a book, fellows are told off terrifically for not having stripes sewn on perfectly, for not pulling in their tummies etc., but except for the first morning, I have escaped comment, but as they come to me each morning, my heart stands still & I dread it more & more each day, until I'm sure I shall have a heart attack one morning. Well, having got over that, we spend the morning at drill, & if you've ever tried standing to attention for ½ an hour or so, perhaps you'll realise how tired you can get, & then do a few times round the square at double time, you feel like nothing more than a good lie down, but instead we have P.T., an hour of it, & this usually followed by a lecture of some kind, & a break for ten minutes in which to snatch a cup of tea & a bun at the N.A.A.F.I. In the afternoon we have to do the commands & have turns at drilling the squad in what we were taught in the morning, & it's a nerve wracking business being out in the front demonstrating & drilling men who know as much about it as you do yourself, it would be much easier to drill

recruits because they wouldn't know if you made a mistake, but we manage pretty well all round, & end the days drill with an hours bayonet fighting & this is the most gruelling part of the day, we have to run right across the field a distance of about 2 or 3 hundred yards, & charge dummies, making various points, & after an hour of this on top of what I have already told you, you can guess what I feel like, & we have to utter the most bloodcurdling yells imaginable, the worse we sound, the more they think of us, & I have now lost my voice altogether, but that will come back again I'm sure. We then parade on the square, all with fixed bayonets, & are dismissed by the officer, & we have to run off the parade ground, & you never saw such an inspiring sight in your life, two hundred gleaming bayonets flashing in the sun, it's enough to scare any Nazi if only they could see us. We then have tea, & an hours revision of the days work, during which time we make notes & ask questions, & this brings us to 7 oclock, & then there are trousers to press, equipment to scrub, & a hundred & one other things to do, & by the time we have slipped over to the canteen for a supper, & I have a hot shower each night, it's time for bed, & lights out at ten thirty. On Friday we went for an eight mile route march with full kit, & it was gruelling to say the least of it, especially as we only had one ten minute break, & I was all in at the end of it, but that was in the morning, & we still had the usual drill period & bayonet fighting to do, & by bed time I thought I should die, but it's amazing what I can stand up to when I have to, as you'll realize when I tell you that already six men have been returned to their units as unfit for the course, & that always at least twenty report sick each morning in an effort to get out of something, but I have only been troubled with chronic acid, & I paid a visit to the hospital after hours, & got some opium tablets, & they seem to be just what I need, because I'm getting better every minute. Yesterday was Saturday, we had a colossal inspection in the morning & I felt I should die, but was passed over safely, & we went on with Marching etc., as usual, but in the afternoon, my goodness, it poured with rain, & we had to go for a five miles cross country race, I never thought I could do it, but I did, and what a course too, five plowed (sic) fields, they're terrible to run over, one brook to cross, we all fell in & got covered in mud & water, & I'm all scratches & bruises from dashing thro' hedges & barbed wire, & after the route march the day before too, I thought my number was up, but I made the course, although nearly last, (I think I was about 90th) but I felt satisfied to know that at least I didn't give up, & there were nearly two hundred of us, so I'm average at least, & we had hot showers to come back to, which made all the difference, but my legs, & back they still ache, that stone & a half will be off and a bit more besides when I'm finished here I know, but if I survive, I shall be fit, 100% A.1. you have to be, it's make or break, & they won't break me I do know, so I shall be able to call myself tough at the end of this lot, & you should notice a difference, a

drastic difference in my bearing & size when I next come to you, I do hope I can still manage to get my leave at the same time, I'm due for it the day after this course finishes, & I'm going to write to Charlie & ask him to put my name through at the right time, I shall be heartbroken if it doesn't materialise now, & I guess you will be too, so keep on praying [...] Today being Sunday, we were allowed to remain in bed till 6-30, just think of it, 6-30 on a Sunday morning, it's madness for me, & it was snowing too, but now at 10-30, the sun is shining and the world looks a bit more inviting. We have the whole day to ourselves, but lots of cleaning & clothes pressing to do, so when all writing is finished, there will be plenty to use up the rest of the day, but two things I do intend doing, one is a bath, & the other a good long rest, in readiness for tomorrow's work, I forgot to tell you that we double all the time between lessons, never march, it's just like an army prison, & they get more time to themselves than we do, but I'm not going to take it down now even if it is only for the duration of the course, on the contrary I hope to make a fairly good impression & get some rapid promotion, of one thing I'm certain, & that is that someone has got to pay for this, & that means that I'm going to be all they expect a N.C.O. to be, I'm tough, & I expect others to be the same, so I guess my popularity will be gone for good when I return, but they do say that if we can command respect it is as good as friendship, so they can look out for changes when I return.

I have just been looking at next week's programme, it's alarming, arms drill, I dread it, & advance bayonet fighting which means more & more running & shouting, but I guess I shall come through O.K. Our sergeant instructor is a decent sort, young, very tough, & healthy, but very hard & firm, & he won't give an inch if we are wrong, but at least he's fair & just, & that's all we can ask of him, & I hope I can make a sufficiently good impression on him so that he marks me leniently, but he never talks to us outside shop hours, & it's all work when he does, so he stands very little chance of feeling for our true characters, but still, we keep trying, that's all any of us can do.

There is, of course, a bright side to all this, we have a N.A.A.F.I., where we can spend our few leisure moments, & the joy of having a real bath or a shower every day is no little advantage, & then there is the food, we get three excellent meals a day, & it's clean & well cooked & tons of it, they certainly cater for our type of appetites, & every day there is meat for tea & always a sweet for dinner, so on that side of things we are happy enough, & the thought that however unpleasant this domestic change is, we are gaining benefit, is enough to console me. There is one thing that gets me though, for the last two days I have had to survive on five cigarettes, I don't want you

to send any here, they have to go through an office, & they might not come out, but we can't buy any, the canteen is run out, & haven't had any for three days, & we are becoming increasingly irritable for the want of a smoke in our spare moments, at this moment I could do with one very much, but having had none since yesterday I guess I can wait that little bit longer, but I don't know how long I shall last under these conditions, but it's all good training, & I find that I can do without when I have to, which is more than I expected, my fingers are becoming quite clear of stain now, & not half as bad as they were, so even that has it's (sic) advantages.

Well [...] I hope all this does not bore you if you've had the patience to read this far, [...] even if I can't write to you daily, go on writing to me now you have my address, a letter from you is the only bright spot out of the whole day, & I think I shall have to beg a few shillings of you if you haven't already posted some on, because a cup of tea & a cake each morning & supper at night have taken away lots of my cash, & I am left with two shillings, no cigarettes, & five days to go before any more cash is due, so you will appreciate my position won't you darling.

And now a word or two about the boys in this room, they are all L/Jacks, & mostly young ones, my bed mate is a decent fellow, but 32 years old, he doesn't look it, we get on very well together, & do lots for each other, it makes things a lot easier for all concerned if we help one another. There is one poor fellow here whom we all sympathise with, he is 37 & volunteered, has been in the army just five days before he came here, so you can see how hard it must be for him, he don't even know how to wear a battle suit yet, but everyone is very kind & decent to him, & he is sticking it out wonderfully well considering his age, he did the run yesterday & the route march, although he told me yesterday he was nearly crippled & I don't wonder at it. It seems that he gave up a turnover of £1000 per year (about £54,000 in 2022) in the catering business to take a commission as they were appealing for men with his experience, & they go & send him on a prison course to start with, it's a damn shame, but it shows what Britons are made of, & is the spirit which will win us through. So Bob's your Uncle.

Well my darling, I don't think there is much else to say at this time of writing, I seem to have covered the ground pretty well, I'm afraid I haven't made up for the letters you have missed, but at least I have done my best, & if I possibly can work in one during the week I shall do so, [...] I'm sure I'm not living while we're apart, it's merely an existence & a hateful one too, but I'm fighting for you, & if a Nazi gets near me while I have my bayonet fixed, he won't get away I'll tell you now, because

this life is making me hard as nails, I would gladly die for you darling, & die fighting too, we owe it to Hitler for all our misery of being parted, & one day the time of reckoning will come, & then he'd better look out.

And now [...] I must try to get a letter off to Charlie telling him all about things here, & impressing on him not to forget my leave, that is one thing I'm looking to more than anything, as the supreme reward for all this persecution by sergeants & officers, & I sincerely hope & pray that it will be highly successful, as I know I should crack up in the event of its being upset, so once again [...] I would ask you to keep your fingers crossed for me, & hope & pray for the best, progress in the army has to be paid for I know, but that price is too much even for a stripe, [...] I must say goodbye [...]

*Lucknow Squad
Tuesday (date unknown)
Possibly 25 March 1941
Pencil note*

Dearest Darling,

I'm in the middle of cleaning my equipment, it's eight o'clock, & as it is still wet, I am, instead of swotting up all I ought to, going to send you a line.

Thank you terrifically for the cigarettes, we have all been for a whole week without being able to get a fag, we were reduced to picking up ends, cadging off those who had been fortunate enough to get one, & all the time I was hoping, waiting, & praying that you would send me a smoke, I was very near the breaking point, and your parcel came after dinner today, I was surrounded by ten fag hungry soldiers & we nearly went crazy with excitement to find forty inside, I gave them all one each, & after the rigid training of the past week I still have 25 left, which will take me through the rest of the week, but please please send some more, as many as you can, as often as you can, you don't know how deliriously happy you made ten soldiers, & although there are one or two of them still without, I have had to harden my heart &

keep the rest, but if I were sure of a regular supply I could be a bit more easy toward them, so do your bit for the war darling, (soft soap) [...]

The NAAFI (soldiers comfort?) have had none for a week, & none are obtainable in the village, so now you know how desperate we have become. Enough of cigarettes, I'm glad you are as happy as I am over my stripe, I find I was chosen from the whole Battery, for the course & I'm being trained as an infantry instructor, so I shall go all out to make as good a job as I possibly can of it, & ? (Illegible) that I must get in some study, so forgive the shortness of this note. Our days are steadily getting more strenuous with increased drill, marching, bayonet fighting & unarmed combat, we are left with little time to think, but I still have your picture with me to look at each bedtime. I haven't been out since arrival here, & shan't do so. there is no time, so don't worry about wild oats while I'm here, & now I must wind up darling, sorry for briefness, but more on Sunday, & once again thankyou ever so ever so much for the parcel, please do it again, I'll be seeing you,

Lucknow Squad
Wednesday (date still unknown)
(Possibly 26th March 1941)
(Pencil note)

Dearest Sweetheart,

[...] in about 2 weeks now, I should be with you again, you don't know how much I am looking for that day, [...] I feel as if I have been away from you for months, this life completely wipes out all sense of time, I don't even know the date, & that's true, but I do know that only 12 more working days are left for this course, & although it's doing me good, I shall be glad to get away from here, but you must please pray for me to get some good marks, I do so want to hang on to this stripe, & get paid for it, & I'm still very quiet in spite of all the rough treatment I'm getting, this instructor told us all last night that we weren't soldiers, but gentlemen, & that, in the army is an insult, but there we shall have to alter or get a bad report, & that I don't want, so I guess I shall have to become a hooligan, but I'm going to find it hard I know.

And now I really must thank you so very very much for your registered letter which arrived here today, which was double quick time, & I had exactly five pence left, but this should now see me through the course quite safely, & if you can send me cigarettes at least once a week, I shall be eternally grateful to you for saving my life. In all my whole career, both civvy (sic) & army, I had never known such a miserable week, it was all due to no cigs & money, but now all is well, & I can adjust myself once more to these conditions & hope for the best.

This morning we had another long run in our shorts & vests, & my legs were like boards at the end of it, & then we had the usual period of bayonet fighting & then drill drill drill all the time until I felt like pegging out tonight, but I'm taking it easy for the rest of the time, & I'm going to relax with just a bit of swotting, but first I had to thank you for your typical knack of helping me out of a tight spots, & I love you for it [...] I'm going to wind up, please forgive the shortness of my mid-week letters, I'll make up for it at the weekends, so possibly until Sunday, & don't forget to tell Mum all news of me, I can't write to anyone else this week[...]

*Lucknow Squad
Saturday
Possibly 29 March 1941
(10 pages in pencil -some very faint)*

Dearest darling,

Thank you a lot for your daily letters, they are all I can find to enjoy out of the days happenings, & its so refreshing to have some news from home, even if you think little things like taking Penny for a walk in the Primrose Wood are uninteresting, I think its wonderful, so please keep up all your little happenings for me, & send some more cigarettes, I finished up the last lot 2 days ago now & we're jogging along on home made ones from my pipe tobacco, & they are rank too.

The weather has altered here today, we had been having real spring samples, but now it's snowing & bitterly cold, it was so cold that our officer dismissed us from Parade this morning & sent us all to our Barrack rooms, so now you can guess what it

is like, I don't think it has been so bad all through the winter, & the sooner it warms up the better I shall feel. In spite of all the coldness, we have just come in from another cross country run, they didn't let us out of that, but now we have had a good dinner & got into some warm clothes, I feel a bit better, but my legs are like boards, & I ache all over again, fortunately we have the afternoon to ourselves, & this gives me the time to do all I want to before the next week of toil commences. I have just hung out my pants & vests to dry, having given them a good wash, & I don't make a bad washerwoman either, they're drying up quite white for a change.

I have made one good pal here since arrival, that is my lower bed mate, he comes from Hampton Court, & hates the army as much as I do, we are both going for a walk this evening, to the village mainly to get a haircut, & have a break, I don't need a haircut according to all other army standards I've known, but according to this crowd I do, & so to the barbers I'll have to go, I think you'll be sad when you see how short my hair is but I should get court martialled if it was as long as when I first came here.

The day's work is gradually becoming more & more strenuous, we did two route marches last week, & each one gets longer & faster & yesterday I actually had blisters on my feet, I don't know how I got back in one piece, but I managed & a little bit of plaster after a good rinse? Has cured them sufficiently for me to keep going, but next week promises to be a beauty, we have two more marches, but taking all the morning, & lots & lots of parades & inspections, it's the inspections which worry me, I seem to be pretty lucky, but I nearly have a baby (*illegible*) imagine how petty it all is, I'm sure my hair will be white when I get out of this lot.

Just at the moment I would give a lot for a real smoke, it might ease my feelings a bit, but the chances are very remote, unless I can get some in the village when we go out, we shall have a good try anyway, & for sanity's sake I hope we succeed, that is all there is to live for while we serve our sentence. You want to know how this course will affect you & my stripe, well, so far as I know, if I pass this course, I shall be paid immediately for the stripe, & the way we are marked here is just by comment, such as good, very good, etc., so I think I shall be alright, anyway, I always keep hoping & trying, & there is still the worst half of it to go yet, & lots might happen in that time, so keep on hoping with me darling & we shall win. Our bayonet fighting has reached a pretty advanced stage now, & it is always timed for the end of the day, so that we are tired, their argument here being that if we can do it well then, we shall do it even better when we're fresh, very sound reasoning no

doubt, but none the less very tiring, & we all feel kind of browned off mentally physically, & morally when the period is over, but I still find the dismiss? each night an admirable sight, to see nearly two hundred bayonets flashing in the evening sun is something worth seeing & I bet any Jerry would sh..t himself if he could see us, it would put the wind up anyone.

Every moment of every day is used to it maximum here, even what little time we are off the Parade Ground is designed for us to spend in cleaning & scrubbing etc., & there is plenty of it too, although I find that continual familiarity is making us more efficient in cleaning & wearing of it, so its all to the good. My greatest moan is that we really aren't allowed sufficient time to digest our food, half an hour to parade, eat & clean up for another Parade is not enough whatever anyone says, & that makes me have wicked indigestion, but I'm used to the feel of acid in my stomach now. We worked it out the other day, & find that we have 16 hours activity every day & just 8 for sleep etc., so you see our days are long & full.

In spite of all my complaints, we do have little moments in which to relax though, for instance, the night before last, they had a cinema show in the N.A.A.F.I., a good old cowboy picture, it lasted altogether, with the other items, about 2 hours, & cheered us all up immensely, we await another such evening, but have so far heard no more of future shows, although we live in hope-----

It is now Sunday, a beautiful spring morning, but still very cold, last night we went out as I told you we should, & had a haircut at a lady hairdresser, she comes from London, was bombed out, & her husband who is 34 was called up, so she has settled down here, & has got together a nice little business of selling wool with hairdressing as a side line, & she certainly knows her stuff, she said that in London she ran a similar business & her husband also went to business, & they had an 11 roomed house & a nursemaid for their little girl, now she has managed to get this old fashioned cottage, & do it all up by herself, & start a little business going & I think it's a paying concern too. You can tell how old fashioned the cottage is, she has no water laid on and has to draw from a pump, but she had electricity laid on, & did all her own wiring up in the shop, & lo & behold, a nice little country shop . Her husband was home for a weekend leave, he's fed up, & was about as cheerful as we, so we all consoled one another. After this we intended to call at the Y.M.C.A., & have a good tea, but found they didn't open till 6, so we went for a terrific long walk, right out into the country to a darling little village, & it was so pretty, but made us very homesick, we saw daffodils just breaking into flowers, & little lambs skipping about,

'twas a wonderful scene, but nevertheless a little saddening, & I couldn't help thinking of home at this peaceful scene, so the walk didn't cheer us up at all, & we came back to the town or village of Tuxford in time to have a huge tea of buns & sandwiches at the Y.M. reading yesterdays newspaper while we ate, & after spending a restful hour there, we returned to camp & did a spot of cleaning up, & then across to the N.A.A.F.I. for a supper, & by the way, we were able to get twenty cigarettes each while we were out (they still haven't any at the N.A.A.F.I.) so that helped us feel a bit nicer about things. I went to bed very early, about 10, & was soon fast asleep, but sometime during the night was awakened by a lot of shouting, & saw the waste paper box ablaze in the hut, & if it hadn't been noticed, we should all be roasted by now, but fortunately we had someone in the room who was a light sleeper, & when I awoke they were already pouring water on it, but it all goes to show, & we think it was due to someone throwing a lighted cigarette end into the box, but we shall be extra careful in future you bet.

This morning, we have to go out, to Nottingham to view a display of guns or something, & in ten minutes we are to parade, so I'm going to leave this until I get back, & if it is at all interesting I'll let you know all about it so for now goodbye darling[...] I'll be back soon-----Well well, back already, it is now 3 oclock & we've had our dinner & scrubbed our equipment ready for tomorrow, & now I'm on my bed with a free afternoon & evening before me, so of course I can get on now with all I have to say. First of all I must tell you what we saw this morning, it was a display by the A.F.S., & very impressive too, it started off with a lecture, during which I actually held an incendiary bomb, & then we were taken out & a huge fire of oil was started, & had to be put out with stirrup pumps, & the efficiency of them surprised me, it only took five pumps to douse it, our boys did it, not the A.F.S, & then they lighted an incendiary bomb, but that was a failure because it was a home made one, & it just went off like a firework you know, & terrific flare, & then it fell over & shot to the rear like a rocket, scattering a score of men in its wake, & then just petered out, although it was intended to be very serious it provided a touch of humour to the proceedings & effectively wiped out that part of the show, this was followed by allowing some of us to feel what it's like holding a hose, & it's a fairly tough job, it's amazing how difficult they are to handle. By this time it was nearly 12 oclock & time to go back, so to our lorries we went, 8 of them, each with 20 men on board, we made quite a convoy, anyway it was most entertaining, although it would have been better had it not been on a Sunday, because that was taking part of our day.

Since continuing this letter I must confess I have been to sleep this afternoon, I slept very very soundly too for 2 hours, & was awaked in time for a very nice tea, although I could have done with a little more, but luckily I've still got some cash left, & I can get a good supper later on over at the N.A.A.F.I.

I have made a few enquiries about the pay for my stripe, & if I hold it, you will receive 1/- (5p) a day more, while I will get 3d so that will make up for what I'm saving each week, & you'll be 7/- (35p) a week better off, it's worth having I think. I hope you are looking after our manure heap at the bottom of the garden, don't forget to water it well & try to turn it over now and again, & then you will get a nice crop of spuds, & I wonder if your load of soot has arrived yet, if not I hope it will be there before I do come home again. I heard from my pal Charlie the other day, & he promises to put my name through for leave, & that I'm afraid is all I have to rely on, so unless something is done to the contrary in Battery, I should get away with it, I do hope so, if I thought it wasn't coming off, I should go potty, because I feel as though I have been away from you for years, I can't last out a lot longer than the rest of this sentence, so please include it in all your prayers darling, I need you so badly, & if you miss me half as much, we simply must be together soon, & please don't go to too many dances will you.

Next week (the last I hope) promises to be particularly tough, we have two route marches lasting all the morning, from 8 till 1, I wonder how my poor old feet & limbs are going to stand up to that, but I guess I can manage to get through, I always do, & nothing can keep me down. You wanted to know also, what will happen to me when I get back, well, I don't really know, if I go back to my own troop, they still have no-one in the office, & it looks as if all I shall get is a lot of extra work, although I should be used now for Infantry instruction, & if there are any more intakes coming to our Battery, I shall have the job of breaking them in, & I'll give it to them, someone has to suffer for all the knowledge I'm picking up, if that is the case, I shall be in Battery H.Q. as instructor, a truly flattering job, anyway we shall see in due course.

There are three or four boys here who live in London & are stationed up this way, & none of them ever go home on 48 hour leaves, they say they can't afford the train journey, & daren't tackle the hitch-hike, I told them how silly they were, & they are too, most of them are a bit more North than I am, but they have the advantage of being stationed on the Great North Road, which is a far better one for travelling on than the one I use, so I really can't understand them at all, & told them how silly they

were, but I couldn't shake them, & they're all married too, I really can't make them out.

You said you laughed at the picture of me sewing my stripes on, but so far, everyone has complimented me on the sewing & neatness of them, so I really believe it was worth the effort, & I forgot to tell you that every squad in this camp has an electric iron, & we all have to press our trousers several times a week, but they look pretty good, & altogether this course is having a real smartening effect, and everyone is looking red in the face with fresh air, even if there are shadows under our eyes from strain, but if you don't crack up on the course, I'm sure it makes you, so I guess I come under the heading of tough guy from now onwards, there is no limit to my physical endurance, it has been severely tried, & I came out O.K., in spite of the increasing sick parade every day, so I have a reason for thinking myself cock of the walk when I get back amongst the other weaklings, & I shall try to keep fit by going to bed as early as possible, & long walks or runs in future, & not too many cigarettes, although I guess the latter resolution will be a strain when I can get them as I want, I know I have been lots happier since last night because I have a few fags when I get the craving.

Looking down from my top shelf as I lay here writing, I see twenty men, all cleaning kit, or writing letters, & one man is using the iron, from 7 oclock onwards every day, there is a continuous stream of men pressing clothes, & today being Sunday has seen the iron busy all the afternoon, & likely to be for some time to come yet, & I have mine to see to as well, I wonder if you can imagine what its like. This is a huge camp, we occupy one wing of it, all one stripers, (190 of us) & then there is Battery H.Q. here with about another 100 or so men, so altogether there are nearly 300 soldiers here, a nice little haul for a Jerry air raid, but since I've been here, we haven't even heard one, they seem to be very peaceful here, I can hear you saying a good job too. The nearest town is Retford, you have no doubt heard of it, they have a cinema there, but I know I shan't visit it while I'm here, there isn't time, & I don't think I shall miss much, because the boys who have been there say it isn't really worth while, & anyway, tomorrow night there is to be a concert in the N.A.A.F.I. which means that cleaning will go by the board, for an evening's entertainment now & again makes a welcome break.

I hope to take a nice hot bath tonight, I have only missed about 3 nights since I've been here, but all the sweat I make seems to keep me pretty dirty & I find I need it, but it's so refreshing & I feel on top of the world after it, but I feel sure that all the

work is a terrific strain, proved by the fact that we sleep 7 or 8 hours every night, & Saturday & Sunday we do very little, & I slept as easily as anything this afternoon, I was tired too, & still am, I expect you to nurse me up when I get home, it is a lovely thought to know that soon I shall be able to stay in bed in the mornings with you [...] till 8 or 9 oclock for a whole week, what a change after 6 oclock each morning. Honestly, I feel like dying every time we are called, it is too early I'm sure of it, but there, its all part of the sentence & we have to take it.

I have worn through my shiny pair of boots since being here, that shows how much footwork we've had, & now I'm on my new ones, a very painful business as I've already told you, being now the possessor of one or two blisters, but I hope they are gone before the next march, I shall know it if they aren't.

Well, my darling [...] I have no more news for this letter.....Please forgive my lack of letters for the duration of this course, [...] I try to make my weekend ones as long as possible to make amends for the shortages, [...] I must get on with some trouser pressing, the iron will soon be free [...] goodnight, I have only 3 more waking hours left of this day, and they are all booked for cleaning & a supper & bath, [...]

Four Winds
Tuesday 1st April 1941

Darling Bill,

It is 4.45 and having worked hard all day I am taking a few minutes off to commence my letter to you. Do you notice the date? Now we are in April, it makes your leave seem really near, doesn't it? Actually you will be home on the 11th. So you see that leaves only ten days to go-eight by the time this letter reaches you.

I had your lovely long letter this morning, and, as usual, made myself late for work reading it. Even then I did not finish reading it till I got to work, it was so long and made up for not receiving many letters during the week, Still, I know that when your course is over and you have more spare time, you will write more frequently.

I am not going to attempt to answer your letter till this evening as I can't very well have it spread out before me on my work table. So I will try and think of some home news for now. Today has been horrible, -- raining all day, which is a nuisance because I had made up my mind to do some digging this evening. I want to get the shrubbery tidy by the time you come home. I am afraid there won't be many flowers out by Easter, except daffs. Some of the early aubrietia is out and one or two primroses and violets, and I think my prunus blierianna (*blireana*) will be in bloom in time (it's a pretty pinky red). I think it will be a lovely tree by the time it has grown to a decent size. I am still rather anxious about the weeping willow, I think some of the branches must be dead, although the trunk is alive. I do hope it grows all right.

Darling, Mr. Williams has just rung for me so for the moment. Au revoir.-----

Continues now written in ink

Hello, sweet, its now 9.45 and while up with Williams I took a favourable opportunity of asking for an additional two days holiday at Easter, as now I have six whole days off, and such a golden opportunity must not be lost, you simply must come home. Won't it be marvellous to have all that time together. I suppose you have no idea what time you will arrive or I would come & meet you. However if you cared to 'phone Mrs George when you reach St. Albans I would come as far as Hertford to meet you if its not possible to come further.

I'm sorry to hear about the blisters & hope you managed to cure them before any more route marching came along.

It is good news to hear that your stripe (if you keep it) will make such a difference in my allowances. It is certainly worth having. I shall have to spend part of it each week in a few cigarettes for you While you find it difficult to get them.

By the way, talking of money, I think the best idea is to give George & Edie cash I mentioned this to Edie & she seemed quite keen, so I am going to give them £3.00 from us both. ¹³I hope you consider this all right. If we leave it till after the war, we shall still have Barbara & Roy's present to buy & we don't want to have to buy too many at once, do we.

From all your accounts of camp life you certainly seem to be kept busy. No wonder you are so thoroughly tired out at the end of each day. Never mind darling, Think of what is coming----a most lovely soft bed to sink into a little fire to undress by, and a pretty soft candle light to see your love by—and when you are in bed-----
---!! So, darling look into the future (the now quite near future) and it will help you bear the present.

¹³ Worth almost £200 in 2023

Fancy you going for a long walk on Sunday I should have thought you had enough of walking, but I suppose it is nice to get away from the camp, and be able to think for yourselves.

By the way, Aunt Nell is going into hospital tomorrow (Wednesday) to have her knee manipulated, so by the time you get this letter she should be out again---I hope it is successful for her sake.

Darling I'm awfully bucked about my six days, aren't you. I am lucky! One thing, you must promise not to tire me out this time. It took me some time to get over your last 48 hours, and your last seven days. Well! I can remember I felt positively ill. I don't know how you managed to stand up to it. Its "Business" week this week, so Easter week will be holiday week. Goody! I say Bill.

Reverting to the practical—your soot has arrived but he hadn't got any "weathered" soot, so I don't think you will be able to use it yet. We have quite a bit here from last year, however, enough at any rate for the potatoes. The sweep stuck the new soot in the shed, and its such a large bag I can't shift it myself. He might know it won't "weather" in the shed. So, unless I can get some help, it may have to stay there till you come home.

Darling it 10.15 so please forgive if I finish off rather abruptly, as paper is short-----
Goodnight darling more tomorrow.....

*Lucknow Squad
SUNDAY*

*Possibly early April 1941
(10 pages in pencil -some very faint)*

Darling,

Only 3 more days of this course to go, & if anyone is sorry I should like to meet him. Everyone is in the highest of spirits, because we are nearing the end of our sentence, & after last week I can well understand it.

We had a new S.M. turn up last week, & he's everything they ever thought of saying about Sergeant Majors, talk about hawk eyed, he misses nothing, & says there should be no limit to our endurance, & what's more, he taxes our bodies to the full, but so far I have managed to survive, I really must be tougher than anyone suspected.

There is a Church Parade this morning, & we are just waiting for them to shout us on Parade. Everyone is spick & span, with belt & bayonet, polished boots & creases in our trousers like knife edges, I myself like this feeling of being all dressed up, & I wish you could see me, but unfortunately the belt & bayonet, which set off the uniform, are the property of this school, & when we leave, the equipment remains, but never mind, it will be a relief to shake the dust of this place from our heels.

This last week we have been rehearsing daily for the grand final parade on Wednesday, when the G.O.C. is coming to inspect us, this will make the second time I have seen him, you remember he spoke to me when he visited our Site, & if you have heard anything of rehearsals in the Army, you may be able to form some idea of what we have managed to survive, parades in the pouring rain, parades in icy cold winds, marching, marching, marching, up one side of the parade ground & down the other, through mud in the bayonet field & puddles, then back again for more marching & rifle drill. Terrifying inspections each morning, they make my heart stop beating every time I stand waiting, honestly if I could have known what this place was like before I came here, I should have been taken to hospital with high blood pressure, but fortunately I was innocent, & now it's nearly over, I feel that perhaps after all it has done me some good.

We have had 3 route marches this week, and apart from being very tired, I didn't do so badly, yesterday, Saturday, was very trying for all of us, I'll tell you about it. The day started as usual, out of bed at 6 then a mad rush to shave and wash and get everywhere clean, then of course the usual morning parade with its inspection, during which I got told off for having a speck of something on the back of my sleeve, but I didn't care a lot, having got a bit more used to this state of affairs by now. Then followed an hour and a half of concentrated hell under the S.M. with rifles, and if you know how heavy a rifle can get after holding on your shoulder for a little while you would sympathize with me. After this it poured with icy cold rain, and we were dismissed with instructions to get our groundsheets and tin hats on for a march, well, you can guess our feelings, and after a quarter of an hour marching we were soaked from the knees downwards with the water pouring off the capes onto our legs, and the rough wet cloth chafed my legs something awful. When an hour and a half had passed of this, we were laid off the main road and went across several fields and through a wood onto a high hill, where we were all issued with a map, and told to find out where we were, normally we should have enjoyed this, given fine whether one feels more in the mood for such things, but being wet through, cold and

miserable, we really didn't care where we were, and after sorting this muddle out to the satisfaction of our instructors, we were sorted out into groups, and told to get back to camp without using the roads, and if you know what Waterford Marsh is like in winter, and try to imagine 5 miles of this combined with ploughed fields, barbed wire and woods with steep banks, and pouring rain, you can see for yourself what kind of a mess we were in, and to crown all this, we all have to wear best clothes, and that was enough to break most hearts. Honestly, I'm not lying when I say that we really had mud up to our knees, we sank over our boot tops in it going across the ploughed fields they are hard to march over too, each foot weighs a ton. As we passed through the woods I still couldn't help noticing the beauty of the country around here, there were lovely beautiful mossy banks and dells, & the anemones & primroses we're out, being cruelly crushed by our heavy feet as we passed through, it seemed as if nature was mad, all the wonderful beauty marred by a cold wet day, and a couple of hundred soldiers being trained to kill, marching unheeded and unheeding through. For once, the camp, when we did get to it, was a welcome sight, and we were able to have a complete change of clothing and a warm shower, & although very tired we felt a bit more comfortable and the prospect of an afternoon off cheered us no end, but worse was in store, because after dinner, we were told there would be a cross-country run, as if we hadn't had enough mud, we said we wouldn't do it, & all went to bed, but they came and shouted at us, and out we had to go, and although only a very short run of 2 miles or so, it was just the final straw, and we were all too exhausted to even undress when we got back, I don't know where I found the strength to climb up to my top bunk, but I slept until awakened for tea, and I never felt so awful before, my whole body ached, I never knew there were so many muscles to ache. After tea I felt a bit better, and settled down to renovating my clothes, I had to scrape the mud off with a penknife first, and then brush vigorously with a very stiff brush for a long time before all traces were removed, then a long session with the electric iron made them look better if anything for their treatment, & after washing and drying my boots, and applying elbow grease for 2 hours, you'd never know what I'd been through. Unfortunately I cannot say that for all, there were one or two on the Church Parade, which, incidentally is all over now, who looked as if they could do with a little attention, however, that's not for me to worry about they'll find out all about it tomorrow morning.

Now for the Church Parade, it was held in the N.A.A.F.I., & who should be conducting it but our own Regiment's Padre, the one who used to take us at Yaxley, & being Palm Sunday we had the appropriate Service, he says that next week we must all try & get to Holy Communion wherever we are, so, my darling, we are going to

Communion next Sunday, & I think I shall enjoy it, he preached a very nice sermon, and my mind flew back to the rare days when you and I sat side by side in church at the Heath listening to the Rev. Brown; how far away that seems now, it's just like an almost forgotten dream, which comes back as vividly as ever as soon as a little incident stirs up memories, Oh I do feel so sad when these things happen, the primroses in the wood reminded me instantly of cycling trips to get roots for our rockery and many other such things, I do love you so darling, and being away, so very far away from you, makes me realise what wonderful things there are in life although we do not appreciate them as they happen. The service over, we assembled on the Parade Ground to be dismissed, & were told to clean windows before we could be allowed any freedom, a nasty bump back to earth, that's why I write it in this sequence, and it's typical of the army, lovely fleeting memories and then nasty jolts.

And now for the rest of the week's events as I remember them; on Monday we finished a very tiring day under the R.S.M. by the final session of bayonet fighting, I'll tell you about it. It is known as an assault course, & we start from behind cover, leap over a low wall, run 25 yds and stab a dummy, then on another 30 yds or so to stab another dummy, then a short run and we were confronted with a six foot ditch full of water, which we had to jump, and immediately the other side was a ground dummy waiting to die, then on again, a longer run around this time to another hanging dummy and a final run to the last Jerry, and all it was about 200 yards sprint with obstacles and broken by having Jerries to kill every now and again, it made me very much out of breath, and we had to run back then and do it all over again, I repeat, if I knew I could have stood it 3 weeks ago, I should have been the cockiest bloke in the Battery.

Tuesday was just a normal day with a 10-mile march thrown in for good measure, but they had a cinema show in evening and I saw Raffles, I had seen it before, but it made a nice break, the only thing once again was the nasty jolt of cleaning to do after reviving memories of the back row seats at the County ¹⁴ do you

¹⁴ Cinema in Hertford

recall them? There is to be another show on the last evening here with Will Fyffe, and this time there will be no cleaning to follow, a wonderful thought. Wednesday we had an interesting break in the day's work by our first lesson on Bomb throwing, we handled real live Grenades, & practiced with dummies, we have learned to take them to pieces and during the following session in the week, have had competitions with a 1/2d in the kitty to see who can throw nearest to the target, I managed to get in one Final but did not win in the end, but at least I am average. Thursday was a day of feverish activity a Lieutenant General was going to inspect us, and was not expected, so after an hour or two drill and a bomb throwing session, we had to clean the camp up, parties of men were detailed for different jobs, and I got into a window cleaning lot, we were given one window each, & everyone got a separate job, & believe it or not, with 200 men all busy at work, in exactly one hour, it looked as if a fairy had waved her wand over it all, it looked wonderful, there wasn't a speck of dust anywhere, the windows looked so clean you had to look again to make sure they were there, and doorknobs and keyholes and brasses everywhere shone out like miniature suns. We got thoroughly filthy doing all this, & then had ourselves to get clean, & this was not easy as they wouldn't let us use the ablutions because all the basins were so white, & we had to do the afternoons work with grubby hands & faces, but just before we dismissed for the day, the R.S.M. told us that the show was quite good, & to put it in our Sergeant's words, "it must have been bloody marvellous to get a report like that from him", so of course we all felt quite bucked about it, & felt that so long as praise comes where deserved, life is at least bearable.

Friday dawned & we had concentrated drill again, I wish you could fully appreciate what one hours drill with a rifle can be like, you would be sorry for anyone of us after whole day of it, and throw in a long march now and again to relieve the monotony, life is awful. This particular day we did a march, and on the return trip had to go for a mile with respirators on, this would have been O.K. for me if the ground was level, but there were one or two hills to get up, and if you can imagine what it's like to be out of breath with a gas mask on, you know how I felt, but I survived, I must have a good strong heart, that's all I can think of.

Well my angel, I have been very brief, and if only each individual day would go as quickly as I have recorded it, things would be much brighter for all of us, but they don't, and though some weeks seem to slip by quickly enough, the day in itself seems never ending, but now, all that remains of this period of prison is Monday(drill) Tuesday(drill) and Wednesday(Final Inspection) I have underlined that because it's such a lovely thought, to know that I have finished the course and

will be shaking the dust of Tuxford from my heels for ever,¹⁵ is something to be happy about. I think our reports have already been sent in, I tried to pump out some information, and know that at least I have a good one, so I'm not too worried, although I should like to know exactly, and I hope to find out when I get back to sleepy, dirty little S/L site at Golden Valley, where I'm going to be like a tornado.

I have written to Charlie again, & also to Sergeant Warden, appealing to them both not to forget my leave, but so far I know nothing about how I shall fare, all I know is that if it's left to Sergeant Warden we're O.K. but unfortunately we have Battery HQ to worry about, and so I continue to hang on an agony of suspense and anxiety. I think I should go frantic if it falls through, & seriously contemplate chucking the old stripe, & coming home anyway, but that is too black a picture to be gone into deeply, so I dwell lightly on it, and ask you to pray for me night and day and I'll do the same, then we'll not be disappointed. How I wish I could be absolutely sure, I could be the happiest man in the camp [...] it's seems much more than a month since I last saw you, I have completely lost all sense of civil life since being here. It seems as if we are cut off from the rest of the world, & the world we live in is bounded by barrack rooms & Square, beyond that I have no concrete evidence of another world ever existing, I look for my next meeting with you as a Christian looks forward to finding Heaven, it means just that to me, and I could never be happy until I'm there to stay----- I have just had a break for dinner, and they certainly excelled themselves today, I think it must have been to make up for our ill treatment this week, I'll tell you what we had. Roast Beef, Yorkshire Pud, Cauliflower, potatoes, (roast and boiled) and Gravy, this was followed by a lovely jam roll with lots of creamy custard, the biggest feast we've ever had in the army, everyone agreed on that, and then I slipped across to the canteen and had a coffee, and now I'm back on my top shelf, it won't be long before I'm going to have a much needed 40 winks, a thing we can only do once a week.

We got paid on Friday, (I'm telling you this so that you can see how money goes) and I received 8/6d, (42p)[about £23.00 in 2022], I went out in the evening for a haircut 4d, then managed to buy 20 cigarettes 1/ 6d., then called in at the YMCA for a cup of tea and 2 cakes 3d, & returned to camp with 6/5d., (32p) at supper time we felt very hungry, and went over to the N.A.A.F.I., I purchased 1 supper 6d., and two cups of tea and 2 cakes 4d., and went to bed with 5/7d., (27p) and that was only the same day as I was paid, Saturday I had to buy soap 3 ½ d.. & metal Polish 3d., & blacking 2 ½d , ..& a polishing duster 6d. & during the day had 3 cups of tea and 6

¹⁵ But of course he did go back again!

cakes 9d. & went to bed with 3/7d., (17p) & now having purchased a cup of coffee 1 ½ d., & a box of matches 1 ½ d., & another cup of tea during the morning 1d., I have 3/3d., (16p) left, and still there a 4 more days between me and the next pay day, so you can see why I am always hard up (I must hasten to add here that you mustn't try to send me any more money while I'm here because I shall probably be gone before it arrives) but I think by going very carefully, I can manage to wangle through somehow and that, I think is a pretty good account of how each copper goes in the course of a few days. I told you this darling, mainly because I hope it will interest you, please don't say it bored will you? I love to know all the minor details in your daily round, and I send mine on to you in the hope that you are the same.

I noted your remarks about dancing, and I'm happy to know that you have refused several invitations already, if you could get to know of one for Easter Saturday or the Monday night, we could have a lovely time together then, do you think there might be one? for once in my life I should love to take you to a dance for the sheer joy of dancing, I can imagine it now, holding you in my arms and waltzing round a brightly lit room in perfect freedom, please try to arrange a dance for us somewhere, I shall love it.

It was rather awkward of the sweep to leave the soot in the shed, but I guess we shall manage alright, so don't worry too much about that darling, I'll shift it when I come home, and I hope we get some nice weather so that I can get in some real hard work for you. Talking of weather, it's icy cold here, has been for days, with lots and lots of rain, and today it has snowed a bit, but luckily we have the day indoors, and very few have moved far from their bunks except for meals. I have a ton of brass to clean and boots to get shined, but they must wait until this evening, when most of the others do theirs, so you see, we are always busy.

I think you are a wonderful girl to understand why I can't write more than once a week, I try to make up for it at weekends, but I know it's far nicer to get it one every day, and I love you for keeping it up for me, it's lovely to be able to look for a daily letter, so many of the boys are miserable every day because the post does not contain a letter for them, I should hate to be left like that. I got your cigarettes yesterday morning, they were very welcome, as always, and what with repaying those I borrowed & making up for lost time, I fear I have only 20 left, but I know you'll understand darling, & I love you more and more each time I think of you and now.[...] I'm going to sleep for an hour to dream of you..... I did not dream, I didn't even sleep, we were rudely interrupted and made to help erect a stage in the N.A.A.F.I., for a band concert from which I have just returned, it was really good,

being a full Regimental Band of 32 players, they have come to stay and worry our lives out of for the rest of the course, having been chartered for the Grand Finale, it looks as if our lives are going to be misery for the last 3 days, thank goodness it's nearly over, but it was a good concert, they played army? others a selection from Mikado, which revived memories of a wonderful holiday at the Isle of Man, do you remember going to see that picture, I do, & tonight brought back vivid memories. Well, darling, it is now 10:30, soon now the lights will be out, & I must get some sleep in for tomorrow's penance, I hear we are going on another long march lasting the whole morning, Ah well, it's all new life time, and by the time you're reading this letter, it will be nearly all over [...] .. I'll say goodnight [...]

1617342 Bill
Usual Place
Nothing Happening
Fed Up

(~~Baka Horse~~)

Pencil letter

This letter is dated 3/4/41 but I think it is probably February or March as reference to leave on Wednesday 12 would not be in April 1941. Furthermore Bill refers to the future possibility of earning one stripe, whereas by 3rd April 1941 he already had it. He also mentions Charlie returning from a P.T. course which was in January 1941.

Dearest Love,

I guess you'll be surprised to see a letter written in pencil, but that's how I feel at the moment, I'm tired and browned off. It's a wonderful spring day, with the sun shining etc., but somehow I feel out of tune with it all, & I can only wish I was at home with you, perhaps it's because you aren't feeling too well this week, you remember you mentioned a visitor in your last letter, well at least that's better than having it when I happen to be on leave, because we should both be a bit bothered about it I expect [...]

Well my angel, things are unchanged since yesterday's letter, but today we have a concentration here, all the boys from other sites are here and various classes are

held in the different subjects, I intend to have a little go in 10 minutes time, I'm hoping to learn something about a lamp, you see, Charlie came back this morning, and he's all tough now after his P.T. course, so while he's here, I am taking advantage of it. They have started P.T. classes here already, hardly giving him time to settle in again before they were arranging to hold classes for ½ hour each day before dinner, but they all seemed to enjoy it, and I wished I could have gone out with them----- period of about 4 hours during which time I have learned all about the inside of a searchlight, and a little bit of drill, and later on tonight I shall be out again when it's dark practicing as a No. 13 whose duty it is to keep all the beams parallel and give orders if we're attacked by a machine gun, so I'm going all round in turn and take a go at everything.

We have had patent switches put on all doors in the camp now, so that when the doors are opened it puts out the light, and ours has gone wrong already and we have been mucking about with it, even the officer has had a go, but they're a damn nuisance, because every time the light goes out we have to stop writing, and the number of people who go in and out during the course of the evening leaves us with about 50% light out of the whole of it, but I expect it's a good idea really, and we shan't be showing lights all over the village any more. We had a change for tea today, jam and bread, instead of the usual old bread and jam, we were getting very fed up with it I can tell you, but now it's changed over we can start getting fed up all over again. Well, well, I guess I mustn't moan too much, after all we're lucky to get jam. I had a letter from Jack this morning, and he says he got well and truly drunk on his birthday celebrations, had to be taken home and put to bed, but don't tell Mum will you, he doesn't want her to know, but I guess he gets lonely at times and feels he must break out sometimes. I noted in your letter that you want to know when I'm coming home again, well, I'd love to tell you, but I'm still very superstitious, and after the last try I don't feel like doing it again, perhaps later on in the letter I will unbend and tell you, I'll see, because I love you so darling, I do want to tell you, as it would be nice for you to have something to look forward to, so I think I'll put it at the end of this letter. I bet you'll go straight to the end now to find out, please tell me in your next letter whether you did or not, I'd love to know. Our patent light switch is still giving a lot of trouble, the officer is getting really irritable about it, I think we shall have to put it out of action soon so that we have lights on all the time.-----

I'm sorry darling that I didn't finish this letter yesterday, but we had a hectic time, I see we were in the act of fixing the light yesterday, well, that's just what we did do,

and now the switch
 doesn't work any more,
 and the lights stay on all
 the time. It is of course
 Wednesday night now,
 and there is really very
 little to write about today,
 I have learned some more
 about a projector, (*a
 projector controller
 directs a searchlight
 beam into the night sky*)
 & did some special drill
 last night with the beam
 up, acting as a number 1
 or D.C., for a short time,

and again tonight, and I think that by the time the next exam comes off I should be word perfect in every possible subject, at least that's what I'm aiming at. I had your letter written from the Heath this morning, I hope your Mother is better now, she seems to be having a pretty rough time of it this winter, doesn't she, but perhaps the spell will be the last, I hope so for your dear sake. I'm ever so glad you got your rise, I expect you're pleased aren't you, or do you think you deserve it, because if you do think that, just think of me, I deserve one too, by the amount of work I have to wade through again now the officer has left, but can't get one just because I don't speak loudly enough! but wait till next time I'll show 'em. The officer is going to be away for a month, which means the sergeant and I are more or less in charge, and you'll be pleased to know that everything is under perfect control.

I am by means of a lot of wangling, managing to accumulate a little store of chocolate to bring home to you on the 12th, yes, that's the day, so watch out, and if you looked at the end of the letter you will have wondered why I didn't put it on weren't you, but I have been unable to get any more tea, so someone will have to be disappointed I'm afraid, we won't let that spoil a perfectly wonderful honeymoon [...], I'm looking forward to next Wednesday, and all I hope is that no courses or things like that will crop up to upset us this time, because it will be awful if that does happen after I have studiously avoided telling you up till now, but we'll hope for the

best now the die is cast. Oh!., to love those alluring seductive thighs which guard what means so much (quotation by my Sargent) tell me in your next letter whether you appreciate his efforts, [...] we're good staying in every night and writing whenever we can between work to our lovers [...] I could really write and write for ever, you might not believe it but I have just started again after three solid hours of typing, and it's now exactly 10 oclock or 22:00 hrs, & in an hour I shall be packing up and going to bed. Charlie is taking over night duty and we are in the act of brewing a cup of tea, for which I shall be truly grateful, when it arrives [...] Our poor old sergeant hasn't got to take any leave for over a month, & he's already been a week since his last, & missed one the time before that, so you can see a gunners position is really best so far as leave is concerned, would you like to make the sacrifice if I got to a good position? is it really worth it? I know it would be a bit of a wrench for me, but I guess we could manage, we should have to anyway, but perhaps the old war will be over before I get even one stripe, I don't know whether to hope it is or not, but leave it for you to decide, [...], I will end now by saying Goodnight my darling.... God Bless you sweetheart,

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
Wednesday
Possibly early April [before Easter]
Short pencil note.*

Darling,

[...] I hope that this time on Friday I shall be with you, but the purpose of this letter is to tell you not to look forward too much to seeing me over Easter, I am told that all leave in this Division is cancelled, & if, on returning to Battery tomorrow I find this is true, I must try to get leave on compassionate grounds, I sincerely hope this will not have to be, but please pray hard for me to come to you darling.

You can imagine my feelings, the course is over, & everything went down well & all are happy except me, all because I'm worried about the leave rumour, but whatever happens darling, I love you always, & the suspension will only be short, although Easter is what I really want, & I shall do my best to get it, Please pray

darling, I shall go mad if I don't see you soon, & if I can't wangle an Easter holiday with you, I'll let you have a telegram, but hope that won't be necessary.
Goodbye darling, {...]

*Horsley Camp
Wednesday morning 6-30
(Possibly 2nd April 1941)
Typed letter*

Hello Sweetheart,

I have just finished another spell of orderly N.C.O. and am I glad it is all over? this is the third time straight off I have had to do it, with 24-hours on and the same off, and though we have ample rest time, I am beginning to miss those night's sleep, because I cannot sleep in the day time, but soon I hope to see a few more N.C.O.,s back on the site, & we shall be alright again.

The reason I have not been able to write you a letter before this time is that I have been very busy designing window Bills for our next dance, which is being held the same day that I am due to return from leave. I can definitely state that I shall be home on Friday next unless something awful happens, but as I have already told you, I shall be a bit later than usual. By the way, I had to go in yesterday morning as a witness for a case of overstaying leave, and so I have gained a bit of experience for my own party, & I hear it is going to be a big affair, so I am in the limelight alright, The Major says he is going to back me to the hilt, although our officer does not approve entirely with all these charges, but he had nothing much to do with this lot, because sergeant Warden just took the matter in his own hands and now the fat is in the fire. Our officer labours under the delusion that a good talking to is all the men need, but they only laugh at him afterwards, and so I think we are doing the right thing to remedy matters

This morning I had two letters from you telling me all about your efforts to cut the lawn, and I tell you now not to worry about it, I shall try to deal with all those things when I get here, and I don't want my dearest wife all tired out when I get home, although I took especial notice of your remarks concerning spring, and that you needed me home [...]

I am glad that you are making such good progress with

your driving lessons, and perhaps you will be able to take me out in the car when next you go, I hope so, because I do get tired of always having to do the driving?

Soon it will be reveille for all, at six thirty I have to go round and awake the camp, I am very unpopular for this, but it's all in a day's work as a junior N.C.O., and so I have to grin & bear it. My officer told me last night that the pay for my stripe is being considered by regiment, and that means that the major has approved, and that soon now, perhaps by the end of this, week, I shall be a full blown lance bombardier.

It is a lovely morning, the sun is just coming out, and to see it over the hills is a wonderful sight, you could never believe there was a war on unless we knew as we do only too well, it is such a shame that such things as wars should ever come in to this far too short life of ours, and we have lost a year of it already, I hope we shall be able to make up for it afterwards, I know that I shall always love you, and more than that, I shall appreciate every little moment we do manage to get together from now on, [...] it does seem ages since I last saw you [...] I fear that this is all I have time for now, darling, but I promise to get you off to a good one later in the week, so please don't be too harsh on me, [...]

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
Monday
(Possibly early April-maybe 7th)*

Now I know what it feels like to be a real N.C.O., I am the most disliked person in the camp today, I put four men on charge, and Friday, the day I shall be home, I have to go first to Battery as witness, so I shan't get a very early start, & probably won't get home till round about fivish, so don't worry too much darling will you. It will be an experience for me, and now at last I am looked on in the way I should be, no longer a new one striper, but one that who has to be respected a bit, and everyone minds their P's and Q's with me now. I have Sgt. Warden's full backing, and he'll see me through I know, he is very pleased with me, and told me I am the first Junior N.C.O. who has dared to put anyone on charge here, and I have benefited greatly in the eyes of the powers that be, he says it will be an eye-opener for the Major on Friday, so I should soon be getting my stripe pay through. The price of

advancement is a big one, but for you darling I would do anything, and soon I hope to get another one up.

Now to more pleasant things, I have slept through most of the day and feel very fresh now, and though I did not receive a letter from you this morning, I am managing to keep fairly cheerful, & I look forward to getting at least one tomorrow morning, and by the state of my cigarette store, a parcel would be welcome.

The letter will only be very short I fear darling, but I did give you a good one last night, and can promise another when I am next orderly sergeant, and anyway, I hope to be able to tell you everything on Friday. Are you looking forward to it as much as I? This time it means such a lot to me, I have been buggered about with so much of late that it will be a welcome relief to forget everything for a whole week. I guess you'll be impressed by my lovely tan, I look real tough these days and feel it, and I have given my teeth a spring clean, so that I should look a little more like the Bill you first fell in love with one December evening, remember it? [...] And Friday darling, all our dreams come true then I must say adieu my love, [...]

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
10 oclock Thursday Morning
(Date unknown-possibly April 1941)
10 pages.*

Beloved

I am now halfway through a very worrying night, and I shall be extremely thankful when morning comes and I can get to bed, 24-hours straight off is a bit of a tough nut really, and by the time it is over I'm always glad to get to bed. Today has been a fairly easy one really, and yet quite enough for me to cope with. For a start I was left with only 12 men on the site to do all the maintenance, guards and digging, the remainder having been taken away to dig elsewhere, and I had a hell of a time chasing everyone round and jumping on them as soon as they had cleared up one job, I got quite unpopular by the time dinner was ready, but at least I got through O.K., and in the intervals between changing guards and chasing about in general, I drew a lovely plan of the site for a ground defence scheme, and pinned it up in the mess hut

for all to see, I am quite pleased with the finished article, and so is everyone else who matters, so at least some of my time has been profitably spent.

When the men came back from digging tonight my real work started, & I had to make the poor devils scrape floors white in their huts. It was a shame, after all day in the biting cold wind working like niggers, and Sergeant Warden knew I was for the men too, so he chased me up and I in turn had to drive the rest, but eventually all was cleared up, and I was able to relax a bit and compile my guard list for the next orderly sergeant. It is a tiring job all round, full of pitfalls and responsibility, but I managed alright, & now all I have to do all the night through, is to see the guards are properly relieved every hour and a half, and keep the fires well alight in the office and my hut. Gee it has turned cold up this way today, I wonder if you have the same changes that we get, it's really bitter and I couldn't get warm all day, but now, with a roaring fire right behind me, I wonder what it's like to feel cold.

I expect you would be very amused to see me now, my face is grubby and my hands are as black as a sweep's through handling coal, gone is my clean exterior, I parted with that as soon as it got dark, but at least I am comfortable, and that's everything. I feel very drowsy darling, it wouldn't take me long to go right off, but I mustn't do that even tho' the other orderly sergeants do, I am a firm believer in doing a job properly or not at all.

We three musketeers are going out again tomorrow night to the pictures again, but we shan't get as far as Derby this time, we are going to be content with Heanor, it costs too much when we go to Derby, I don't know what we shall see, and care even less, I do you know that we shall enjoy it however good, bad, or indifferent it is. I speak of this outing as being perfectly settled, but it really all depends on one thing:- P.A.Y. If we don't get our money in time we're sunk unless we can borrow from someone, & that's very unlikely, but as usual, we are all looking on the bright side, & I hope luck comes to our aid pretty soon. We received your darling little parcel this morning, and there was much rejoicing amongst us, but I fear that 40 cigs don't last long between 3 now, and we shall soon be in need of many more. Thank you also for the pot of paste, I haven't opened it yet, but I think it was come & go for all time tomorrow tea time, as I know we have to share it. My goodness I do feel tired, I shall have to go and wash my hands, and then the air will wake me up-----I went to sleep and awoke 1 1/2 later just in time to wake the next guard, & then had lots of other little things to do and followed this by good old wash and shave, and now I'm wide awake again, having had a walk all round the camp-----In just 5 minutes

time Reveille will be heralded by my voice, going round all huts waking the men individually, none of them ever want to get up, but that's the way of things, I know I'm the same when they waken me, then after I have taken breakfast parade, I can go straight to bed, & what a lovely thought that is too, although I don't feel very sleepy just at the moment, but I guess I shall get off soon enough.

When I awake, I have 3 buttons to sew on, & other little odds and ends of polishing etc., but I won't bore you with details of such things now----- . Would you believe it, 2 days have passed as indicated by those dots, and I fear you will have been that long without a letter, because it looks as if you won't get this till Monday, but I'll try to make it worth having now. My reason for not finishing the letter was because I fell asleep over it, and when I awoke it was too late to do any more as I had to wash, shave, polish the bayonet, and take breakfast parade, after which I was thankful to get to bed, and I fear I didn't wake up till tea time, which just allowed me time to get ready for pictures with Bob and Charlie, which I now proceed to tell you about. We started off well by just, and only just, catching the bus, I got there first and held it up for the others. We saw George Raft in Invisible Stripes, and it was all about Prison life and gangsters and shooting etc., and it was most thrilling too, I thoroughly

enjoyed it, we sat in the 8d,. seats, and quite good they were too. After we came out, and it was still light by the way, we went into a pub and had 2 pints each, one of which was bought for us by a civilian, and because I hadn't had any for such a long time, or because the beer was strong, we all three of us got very merry, and on coming out we had a 3 mile walk in front of us get back to camp, and talk about fun, remember that song from The Wizard of Oz, “ we're off to see the Wizard”, when they took a step backwards each time they started off up the Yellow Brick Road, well,

we linked arms and kept on singing that just like the picture, if you could have followed us home you enjoyed every minute of it. We sang all sorts of other songs in between of course, but 3 miles singing all the way takes a bit of whacking, & when I got home was I hungry, so we raided the cookhouse and managed to get bread and butter to which the addition of your little pot of paste made a tasty supper.

I awoke this morning with a sad stomach and a very thick head, but the biting cold wind and heavy work, combined with an aspirin took it away in about an hour, and after 3 hours digging and supervising in the construction of an emplacement for the Sound Locator, a task I seem to have clicked all on my own, we broke off for a bath parade and I went and had a wonderful soak, after which we

had dinner, eggs on chips with a lovely cup of tea and bread and butter, all for 8d., at the services canteen in in Derby. We followed this with a visit to Woolworths in quest of vanishing cream etc., & I also tried Boots, but none was even in sight, so it looks

as if it is as rare up here as anywhere, but it still won't stop me looking for it elsewhere, you know I'll try my best. Talking of rarities, you ought to have seen the cigarettes queues this afternoon, it's no lie to say we saw four queues outside different shops, and all because they had seen a fresh supply roll up, it is as bad as the meat queues outside shops.

In one instance we walked past a queue and five minutes later we passed by the same place, and they were all gone & a notice up in the shop NO TOBACCO or CIGARETTES and they were closed into the bargain, so that's how bad things were.

After the search for face cream I had a haircut and got my moustache trimmed again, that does please me ever so much, and I don't mind paying out for just that little touch. I fear he clipped it short, but it looks so very neat and tidy that I think I prefer it this way.

When we got back we had tea and got a 20 packet of fags from the Salvation Army Van which is our ration these days, and then, believe it or not, we had to work on my emplacement till 8 o'clock, and did those boys work although they swore about it. I seem to be trusted with far more things than any of the others 1 stripers I don't know why, but at least I am gaining experience and also a reputation for getting things done.

My boys are taking to me quite well now, I look after them pretty well, and tonight I scrounged them all some supper tonight as there was more issued and they like me for it, & then I joined in a game of pontoon for half an hour and lost 3d., but it all helps to keep them to me, because I know they moan a lot about me during the day, you see, I'm a bit of a driver, and while I'm working all the time myself they can't do much about it, so things are going pretty well towards winning the pay that goes with the stripe.

It is now 11 o'clock, all my boys are in bed, and I sit alone against my folded blankets with the wind cutting through the cracks in the hut, I have still got to make my bed when I finish writing to you, and I'm on the Rouser Team too as a Lewis gunner, in chief, but I don't care, I'm happy telling you all the things I have done, and all that you mean to me. I got your letter this morning ticking me off for being extravagant and spoilt, well, I know that's true, and I really will try to adopt your suggestion of allocating so much per day out to various things and sticking to it, the trouble is my wages won't cover my daily allotment but we'll see what sort of a job I

can make of it, and I'll report in due course, anyway I have a pound of tea to show for it, and I bought all the stamps since I came back, and besides writing to you, I have let Jack have a letter and one to Mum, so actually I could be lots worse & what's more I was asked today if I wanted any more tea, only unfortunately I hadn't the money, so the chance had to go till next time.

Enough of money worries [...], your letters seem to have lost that little something these last 2 or 3 days, I feel that Edna, although possibly a pleasant and welcome break for you, takes your mind off me a bit and my poor old letters suffer to the extent that you confine it mostly to news & no love, I like to read "I love you" several times, and the little romantic thoughts you have, and you often do write them darling, so of course when you cut them out I'm bound to miss them, so let's hope you will mend your ways, you see, I'm not alone with my faults

Well sweetheart, here we are having an argument on paper that will never do, you know how much you mean to me, & if ever I should lose you, I should die with grief, [...] nothing outside the camp interests me except my next leave, which so far is still O.K., [...]

I do hope you are able to read & decipher all this scrawl, my pen is running out again, & I'm scribbling away, but I think you will manage to untangle most of it, so I'll just keep on till my pen is dry, & then it will have to wait till tomorrow before I can finish off. You said you thought this pen was O.K., well it is to an extent but it will not hold much ink & I have to fill up two or three times every time I write you a letter & that isn't good enough, although things could be a lot worse I must agree. You can see by the ink that it's getting dry, & it won't be long before it peters out.

I wonder if you have patience enough with my writing to get as far as this, I do hope so, because I love to ramble on & on, I lose myself completely in a letter to you, & only when I am ending it do I realise that I haven't been talking with you. [...] Fortunately there is always work to take off my surplus energy, but even that only serves to make me ?? than ever for you when I do get home to you again. [.....] -----

You can see for yourself that the pen ran out darling & as it was long past bedtime, close on Midnight in fact, I dare not venture up to the office to get another refill, but now I have just finished a terrific days work on my emplacement, & though it looks perfectly wonderful, 13 hours solid digging & hard work is plenty for one

day's do, & I am glad to be able to relax once more & come to you with all my little troubles & bits of news.

Actually there is very little to add in the way of news but I will try to make amends for not writing for so long, but really darling, I think you will appreciate my position after reading my account of all there was to do.

I received your letter this morning containing 4 stamps, & I thank you very much, & I sincerely hope that by the time you get this letter your cold will be better, I know too well what they are like & I pity you, & my heart is with you all the time, I really should be at home with you, so that I could rub your chest at nights, & talking of that you could do the same for me, because healthy though I am, my cold which was so bad when I came home last, is even worse now, & I simply can't get rid of it, however, I am so used to it now that it doesn't seem to worry me a lot.

Today was a corned beef day, & my poor old stomach suffered terribly this afternoon, but I've managed to settle it now with some inferior powder I bought from the local village store, I hope it won't recur, because one dose of the powder drove me to the lats, twice, but at least it must have cleared the old beef out of me & I feel in the pink again. This is not the first time I have had trouble lately, I wonder what is going wrong, probably the unaccustomed exercise & fresh air, but I feel sure that the longer I stick it, the sooner I shall be healthy right through again. I was asked today if I would sooner be outside, & I heartily agreed that I would, it is so invigorating to have all the fresh air I need & good, hard work to keep my body fit, the only fly in this very beneficial ointment is the fact that there is a war on and I am so terribly cut off from you my darling. But lets hope & continue to pray that it will soon be all over, because like you, I long for the day to come when you will be able to devote all your time & attention to me & our home & garden. What a lovely day that will be, I can hardly bear to think that we may have a long time to wait for that wonderful day, & I do so hope & pray it will soon be all over [...] I think of you day & night[...] Goodnight darling, I'll write again tomorrow,

*Horsley Camp H.Q.,
Tuesday (Possibly April 1941)
Typed Letter*

Darling,

I have just finished a spell of night manning, and really it is my first experience of the real work at night, and I found it really interesting, but very very cold, it was snowing, and with full gas kit on you know, trousers cape etc.. I found it most uncomfortable, but managed to get on with it alright. It was the first time I had worn the full rigout, but having watched so many others put it on I had no difficulty in following their lead.

Tomorrow I am entered in the sports which are being held for the battery and I am entered in the mile race, and it seems that they fancy my chances, but I can't say that I do, however, we shall see. (*See next letter for results*). We have been polishing everything up ready for the great inspection, and it promises to be a real do, I shall let you know about it in due course. I am sorry that I have not been able to write as regularly as I have promised, but here is a brief resume of the days work we get all the time without exception, reveille six thirty, wash shave and clean-up, breakfast, and then the huts have to be scrubbed and made scrupulously clean. We are given till nine to do this, and then we have two hours maintenance, which consists of polishing brasses and a lot of dirty jobs. This is followed by digging on the emplacements till dinnertime, and more digging after dinner till five when we have tea. After tea, we have manning drill which is the same as night manning only we don't have a beam up. After this we have some more digging till eight, and then our time is our own, and you can guess what we feel like after all this, and we need a jolly good wash, to be followed by supper if we can scrounge it, and for days now I have been trying to make time to get you a really good letter out, but always there seems to be something or other that crops up to stop me, but I have managed to get into the office for a little while now, and though it is half past ten, I shall try to fill this paper up before I go to bed, and that won't be so very long, because although I love and adore you as I do, I really am tired, and bed will be a welcome thing for me tonight, especially as we have this sports day tomorrow. We had the Brigadier to visit us today, and he did give us a thorough inspection too, I felt that he must have wanted something to moan about because he picked bones out of our sound locator, a thing that should not have been as we always take the greatest pains over this job, but there it is, and we shall have a lot more little corners to clean into in the future. There are lots and lots of little things to tell you about if only I could find the time to write it all, but I fear that it

will have to wait until the opportunity comes in the shape of my next orderly sergeant day, when I shall have a night at my disposal again, you will remember that I had to paint all the time I was on nights last time, but I hope it will be different this next time.

I got your letter this morning telling me how you wanted me home on my 7-days, well, I might even be home a week earlier than I told you about, but I cannot be absolutely sure yet, and as for the next 48, here is another surprise for you, I think I shall be alright for one in June, as I did not receive ration money for the extra one I had at Easter, as so of course they did not have any official record of it at battery, and Charlie has put me down for the 16th of June, and we are both hoping for the best, and I think I stand a good chance of getting away with it too, so cheer up darling, it is better to be lucky than rich they say, and I feel like in this case it is true.

Blitz has made a wonderful recovery since we have been treating her for her eyes, and now she is nearly better again, but I fear that it will be a long time before the fur grows again all round, however, she will get over it I'm sure and that in this case is everything, because she does help to keep me in spiritual touch with home, to me she represents Penny with all her little ways and I like to treat her the same as I should our own little doggie

Well, well darling, it is now 11, I have been involved in an argument, and I fear that the poor letter has suffered, but I'm sure that you will understand and forgive me [.....] Your adoring husband,

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
Thursday (possibly April 1941)
One page only [rest missing] in green ink.*

PORTSAY

Darling,

In just another week (all being well), I should be looking forward to the morning, & I think it will hold good, isn't that lovely? to think I shall be getting home a week sooner than we expected. I bet you were pleasantly surprised when you read the glad news, and I knew it would make you happy, that's why I told you, but we

mustn't count on it too much until we are in each other's arms again. I'll let you know later on if I'm coming definitely by telegram, and in the meantime, you arrange provisionally with Ron, to spend a weekend with him and Len and Kitty, you can always let him know by phone at the last minute, but we won't dwell too much on that yet.

I went to the sports yesterday, and we had a grand day out, but I fear the mile race was too much for me, I fell out after two-and-a-half laps, I had a headache you see before I started, and I think a touch of bronchitis, so I didn't feel too good, and after I dropped out (the pace was too fast) my head was so bad I nearly blacked out, but after a little rest I was alright again, although everyone was more than a little disappointed in me, they didn't seem to realise that because I go running in the morning doesn't necessarily mean I am a fast runner, but there, we were up against professionals anyway.

Our troop won the competition for the best turnout i.e., smartness in dress etc., and we were second in the sports, so we did fairly well.

The last two nights I have been out on Rouser, at 2:30 on Tuesday night and 330 till dawn on Wednesday, and it was bitterly cold, I think that is why my cough will not go, it is really bad, and I think if I saw the M.O., I could have a week in dock, but I'm in the position now, where a thing like this would do me considerable harm so far as progress is concerned, & so I'm so I just get along. At least I look well, you just wait until I get home again, you'll see the difference and I bet you'll like it too, I'm sure my waistline has diminished, and my face seems to have got a bit more normal so I'm happy and that respect at least.

Thank you for the cigarettes, you really are an angel of mercy, things are painful in these parts now, and nowhere outside the S.A. Van are they obtainable, so I am extremely grateful for them, and they just averted a major disaster because the sports day made us miss the canteen yesterday, and we have to manage for an extra two days, I could easily make 40 last that time now, but there are all my boys to look after, they help me when I am hard up and so I do the same for them, & just at the moment we are all about.....

Second page subsequently found with burn mark & splodgy green ink

.....out again (myself mainly because I shared out) but the S.A. Van comes tomorrow, & I guess we shall just about get there. I know what you'll think when you read this bit of news, but as I said before if I was all by myself it would last easily, so please don't reproach me for being kind-hearted.

Bill (infront) by the Salvation Army

This letter can only be a short one again darling, they are all too short, but my time is so cut down these days, & it's all I can do to get you out a letter at all, so please be patient, & tomorrow I am orderly sergeant & that gives me a night to myself this time I hope so that I can give you a really decent note.

You will observe by the change of ink that I have just refilled my pen, & now you can see why I want my other one so badly, this pen is a real nuisance for letter writing, it doesn't hold a nib full, & I have to keep refilling with the above results, so try to get me a nib for my old one by next week & I'll collect it when I get home.

I observed from your last letter that you were keen on having me home for a week this time, it seems ages since I last saw you, that is because I love you so much, & I shall be as happy as you [...]
The burnt part is where I was trying to dry that nasty blot out by the fire, I can hear you laughing, but actually I was rather cross about it, & I hope you won't mind it being so.

Our little Blitz is getting better every day, the fur is beginning to grow around her eyes again now, & it won't be too long before she begins to look her old self again, so our labours have been well spent.

I shall have lots of little things to tell you about tomorrow night [...] it is now nearly bedtime & I feel pretty rough [...]

With regard to your suggestion of staying near me for a week, it will be wisest for you to hang on for a bit, because I think we might get a move in a month or two, & that's bound to hang up the leave, then I should be glad to have you near me, so we'll let that wait until we really need it, & now as the pen is needing another fill, I'd better say goodnight darling [..]

Bill Furlong aged 26 years on 14
 April 1941 in dress uniform his
 sister Edith was riding to George
 On 14 April 1941 was Easter
 Monday.

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
Monday night
I think this may be in March 1941*

Returned from Leave

My darling angel wife,

Here I am back safe and sound, but very gloomy, how I do miss you sweetheart, you've no idea what you mean to me now, I feel that I can't go on without you, yet knowing all the time that I've got to manage somehow until a month or so has passed. I just got my weekend in nicely, because as I came in today, I walked right into the office to find the sergeant altering it all again, it appears we are sending too many home at a time, and it has to be cut down drastically, and all those boys who were looking forward to the next one, now have to wait considerably longer, but I hope to be able to wangle mine again when the time comes, anyway I shall try my hardest, and I might tell you I narrowly missed having my 7-days altered, but I got back just in time to save it, I think it's alright now.

You must excuse the dirty paper just here, but I started this letter in the mess hut, and had to muck about with the oil lamp first, and then it went out, so in the end I am laying on my bed, in a very uncomfortable position writing away as if I'm going to bust. The reason I am not writing in the office is because its bung full of sergeants and officers, and so I've left Charlie to finish off his day, and I'm have to make amends tomorrow.

And now you want to know all about my journey back here, well,, I had marvellous luck, I stood for 10-minutes in St Albans trying to stop a car or a lorry, but nothing would pull up, and I was just beginning to be a little browned off when a lorry came along which I signalled, and he stopped for me, being a London driver, he asked me where I was going, and I said Derby or Nottingham, and he was going to Mansfield, that was right up my alley as he had to pass thro' Nottingham, so we agreed that I should go as far as that, but on the way, I found he was going to spend the night at Heanor which is about 4 or 5 miles from here, so I said I'd keep with him and I went to Mansfield first, and helped him take his load off, then came right to Heanor, & caught a bus to this place after walking about 2 miles. It was wonderful luck, from St. Albans to here pretty well in one lift, and I was back here at about 6:30, which was damn good going considering I had been to Mansfield and stopped there for nearly an hour to unload. The driver was a decent chap, looked like George

Formby but had a heart of gold. We stopped at dinner time and had a pretty good meal, and he wouldn't let me pay my end, and I found out that he hasn't been married as long as I have and he's 33 years old, he says he's very happy and wouldn't be single again, so we were kindred spirits. He lives at Wembley, and misses his wife when he has to sleep away from home, but says he makes up for it when he does get home. He is of course on War Work, and the stuff we unloaded at Mansfield was something to do with Aircraft, and I felt as I unloaded, that I was at last doing my bit, what do you think?

Hasn't it been a horrible day, rain all the time, but I didn't get a drop on me all the way because of my lift, but it's still raining now, and everywhere is puddles and pools of mud, so although my boots were as shiny when I arrived here as when I left you, they are now sadly in a need of more attention, but at the moment my chief concern is writing to you [...] I'm wondering if I shall sleep tonight, I know I'm going to miss you terribly, and the very thought of another night without you by my side worries me, and I dare not give myself up to it entirely or I should cry I know.

On the whole things have not altered a great deal over the weekend, but certain things are in the process of changing, the leave for instance, and Douglas or Duggie has got his commission, he leaves tomorrow, so it's goodbye to him. Also I hear a rumour that there is another promotion exam next week, I mean to be in on that, and then I'm going like hell for more. I intend to wheedle round the sergeant, and try to get all I can out of him, and I hope your piece of heather will keep all its powers and help me on, it gave me a good show today of what it can do, so I'm hoping it will hold good.

The officers dog is fast asleep on the next bed to me, she's not half as nice as Penny, but as I look at her I am reminded all the time about the wonder that I have just known [...] if I think of Penny I think of you, and my heart bleeds and calls out for you.[....]

The sergeant's dog by the way has been on heat, and he has managed to keep it tied up until this afternoon when it broke away, and it came back tonight, he's furious with her, and I'm afraid we're in for a litter of mixed mongrels in the near future, I'm wondering what they will be like, anyhow I'll let you know in due course.

I expect they wonder why I'm not in the office now, but tell the truth, I couldn't bear to be in there while I write to you, I had to be alone, where I can pour out my

heart, and tell you of the hold you have over me, and how great a part of my life you are [...] (*two pages of adoration follow*).

Three men are in bed, all fast asleep, and it's only about 9 o'clock, but the night is so terribly wet, that you can't really blame them, and I wondered that anyone has bothered to go out on a night like this, but the call of beer seems to be a strong one for some people. I can hear the rain coming in at the foot of my bed, there is a huge pool of water forming there, fortunately it is in the centre of hut, & no-one is affected, so that doesn't matter much. I forgot to tell you that George, the fellow I came home with, sent a telegram here today, asking for a leave extension on compassionate grounds, the telegram was handed in at Victoria docks, there was no address to reply to, & no reason for compassionate leave given, so of course he could not get a reply even if he was granted extra leave, but anyway he hasn't turned up, and the officer had decided that he only sent the wire to warn us that he would not be returning yet. I happen to know, although I kept it quiet, that George intended to stay longer somehow, he said he would find an excuse, and he's obviously found one, I expect I shall hear the full story when he does come back.

I do hope the photos come out nicely, I guess you'll be collecting them tomorrow, please send mine as quickly as possible so that I can have you with me all the time, because if I can see your darling smiling face, I can feel a little more like smiling myself [...] and now darling much as I want to go on writing and telling you [...] I must end on this page as the office calls, I have to see if I can get excused on grounds of tiredness & go to bed early, so goodnight darling....Your very own husband,

Four Winds
Wednesday 16/4/41



Dear Darling,

Well, at last the day is over, and I hope that long before now you are safely back at Horsley. I do hope you had good luck with your lifts, because it has been a warm day, and walking would not be too comfortable for you. I expect you are glad its over- anyway—the journey I mean, not the leave though even that means one leave nearer the end of the war doesn't it. I am glad I went to work today because its

kept me occupied and I hadn't time to feel sad and sorry for myself, though I must admit I don't feel too cheerful this evening.

I worked in the garden till 8 o'clock, digging.

I levelled the piece you almost finished yesterday and then dug it right down to the end, so now of course, there's only a small piece left to dig---thank goodness

When I got in I found the lights had fused so I spent half an hour trying to put them right, but though I mended two fuses, it didn't make things right, so I am writing to you by candle light.

I have phoned A.G. (Alan George) at the Northmet, (*local electricity board*) so perhaps he will call in on his way home. Unfortunately he is working till 10 pm. Still I don't mind & the others will have to put up with it.

The sirens have just gone, which is unusual so early, it's 9.30 and I think I shall go to bed, after I have cleared our bedroom up a little.

Darling. I know you'll miss me tonight, but I shall miss you too, specially as I shall be sleeping in the same bed as we both did last night, but I know we shall be together in thought and spirit, and so it will be till your next leave. Work hard & study hard, sweetheart & the time will soon go, and you know that I love you---so very much..

Horsley Camp H.Q.
17TH THURSDAY (Probably April 1941)

MY DARLING,

Back again at the old place, but what a contrast, now I have some interest here, there are so many things to learn, & I have been at it all the time. Yesterday, I had lots of luck getting back here, & arrived in Derby at 4.40 just in time for the bus, & in half an hour I was back here just right for tea, & I needed it. My first lift took me as far as Northampton, & you'll agree that it was a good one,, then I got as far as Leicester with a Home Guard liaison officer & his wife, & they stopped at a pub & made me drink several beers with them, after which I cared not whether (sic) I got back or not, but my luck held, & I carried on to Loughboro', & from there I walked for the first time for about 2 miles & was picked up by an army convoy & taken right in to Derby bus station, I got straight off of the lorry & walked in to the bus, & I only had 2 minutes to wait.

As soon as I got back, I was collared, & did an hours manning drill, & from then till bedtime I was busy swatting up all sorts of things, & it was quite late when I did get to bed & needless to say I could not sleep, I missed you so terribly. Already I feel as if we have been apart for weeks, and today, I have been out on site, & although very interesting, I found the time dragged on a lot. I had my first sample of maintenance today, they put me on the S/Locator, & I had brasses to clean & all sorts of stuff to do, but at least I am learning a hell of a lot, & tonight I have been at it again, it looks as if I have bitten off plenty, but I am definitely not going back to the office this time, I steer right clear of it.

My officer tells me he saw the Major about my stripe today, & they're not taking it away from me, they are going to put me on probation for a period, & if I work out all right I shall be paid for it, but it looks as if I shall have to go several weeks yet before I get any money, I sure do have trouble getting things don't I?

Charlie has been sorting out the leave today, & my provisional date for 7 days is 16th May, but it may be altered, anyway I shall try to keep it there if I can, you'll like that won't you? Cigarettes are scare up here, we can't even get any from Battery now, so when my supply is gone I hope to get a few from you.

Well darling [...] I know you'll think this is a very short letter, & it is, but I have my flashes of the old witch to sew on tonight, the witches are very disappointing, they are just a figure in red on a buff square of cloth, & they look rotten, but we have to wear them, & so I've got to apply myself tonight & see what sort of a job I can make of it.

Now darling [...] I must end this briefest of notes with a promise of something more lengthy tomorrow. I forgot to tell you that

I've had famous headache today,

I had to see the M.O., & get some tablets, & then lie down for a few hours this afternoon, I did feel awful, but it's cleared off now, & I have been able to carry on with

my work. I think it was caused by loss of sleep last night, but I took my run this morning just the same, & it was later on that this headache crept up on me. However, it is all over now & I am fairly well again, ➔ I'm on the Rouser team tonight anyway, so I hope we get a quiet night, I'd hate to be dragged out of bed, but I bet I do, they've had it every night here for weeks, & talking of action I heard on the wireless today that you had it pretty bad your way, I do pray that you are safe, I should go mad if anything ever happened to you darling. And now I really must say goodnight darling, [...] God Bless You, more tomorrow,

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
Friday 18th (April 1941)
Typed letter*

Beloved,

I guess you will wonder why I'm using the old machine again, well, it's because I'm acting as Orderly Sergeant for the day and have to do 24-hours straight off, which means of course that I'm going right through the night. My duty is to see that all the guards do their duty properly, and are relieved at the correct time, and during the day it has been very hectic for me, considering the fact that it was my first day at it, I have made a pretty good job of it, I look forward to the next time with keen anticipation, it gives me a chance to make myself known, and that is precisely what is needed in my case, as I find I'm still a bit timid.

Tomorrow I shall have all the day off, and in the evening I am going to Derby with Charlie and Bob to see Deanna Durbin's latest picture, I forget the title just for the moment, but will let you have full details next time I write, I expect it will take a little of my reserve cash, but on the other hand I have managed to acquire a pound of tea which cost me 2 /4 d and I hope you will let me have the cash for it in due course, needless to say, I shall have a good look round for you tomorrow in Derby for face cream etc., and in return for anything I find, I expect cigarettes, please don't think I'm being mercenary, but we are almost frantic up here now for cigarettes, we sent the D.R., out for a radius of 30 miles today, and he returned empty-handed, so you can tell how acute the shortage is up this end of the world, and when the Y.M.C.A. van came round they were almost overwhelmed, and I had none after all, so we had to

wait for the Salvation Army van, and luckily he did have some on, but they were strictly rationed out and we have just about enough to last us for another day, so I don't know what we shall do after that as the van doesn't call any more till Monday, perhaps you can appreciate my point, and on the other hand I guess you might say that is it is a good job that we can't get so many, but if only you knew what torture it is to be able to get a whiff now and again, well, you would not be so hard hearted, not that I really think you are so hard, but you know what I mean.

I did not finish putting on my witches last night as I anticipated, we were called out on Rouser, and I had it on crooked anyway so it had to come off again, & now I am without once more, & I do you not relish the task of starting again as it means that I shall have to shift my stripes to make it all come central, however, it will have to be done, and I might venture on it tonight if I feel like it later on, I'll tell you tomorrow how I fared.

It's funny, but I felt that I have never left the office now that I am here once more with all with all the old things at my fingertips, but I really believe that I have finished for good now except for those occasions when I am "Duty Dog" and that is quite a treat when the day is over and all the worry done with, and now the only thing left to bother me is the guards and the possibility of Rouser which is very unlikely tonight as the clouds are so low, so I feel free for a change. It is a wonderful treat to be able to work and not have to think all the time. And I like it, and what's more the air is doing me the world of good, everyone is telling me how well I look and I really do too, I suppose I shall be very brown or red when I get home again, and that will be when I told you so far as I have been able to gather, so look for that day won't you? and I'll try not to disappoint you. You have no idea how much that date is going to mean to me, & I hope it will be the same for you [...] There is really very little in the way of news for you my angel, but I try to make up as I go along so please forgive me if I seem to make the letter a bit disjointed, because that is the only way I have to make it interesting. I put in quite a bit of time this evening on the bayonet and belt which we have to wear on duty days, and I have had the attention of all and sundry to give me good advice etc., and now I've given it up for the night, but at least it looks a bit better than it did when I took over. My object is of course to make it look as nice as the ones we had at Tuxford, but that is hoping for rather a lot in one go, however, I hope with a bit of cooperation from the other N.C.O. 's that I shall achieve what I am striving for, and then we shall be able to really swank. I expect this is all very uninteresting to you, but it makes news, and there is just the chance that you will like

to know all about it although why you should I really don't know, please tell me in your reply whether you do like to know all about these little things.

Molly the dog, is now about a fortnight away from her puppies, we are all making quite a fuss of her and it will be very interesting to see what sort of babies she will get, our Officer has bought her some special biscuits all to herself, and she gets more attention than any dog would in a private house, but I don't envy her very much in her first confinement, but we're all very competent midwives, so she need have no fears about childbirth.

Are our potatoes through yet? I expect to be able to eat some of them for my next meal at home, says me, so you had better keep an eye on them and see that they have all the attention they need to make them grow quickly, and by the way, don't go over working your darling self in the garden will you? I don't want an overworked angel when I get home, you have got to be fit to have all the love I'm saving up for you again, and I can tell you that you will have to be fit too. Please forgive all the mistakes in this typing, but I've been out of touch with all this sort of thing for over a month and it seems as if I have to learn all over again on this poor old machine , although actually I'm not doing so badly am I? I notice that no- one has bothered to clean it since I left and the works are suffering in consequence, but it does work and that is all I need to be able to tell you that I love you [...]

By the way darling I forgot to tell you that my stripe is pretty safe, I asked the sergeant today how he thought the report will affect me, you said I should keep it, and be paid for it soon, so it's only a matter of waiting now, I think I told you yesterday what the officer said about the Major's comments, and it looks as if I'm under close observation, so here's hoping for the best.

And now darling heart I must close, I will be with you again as soon as I'm awake tomorrow, and although there will be no news, I know that if you feel the same as I do [....] Goodnight angel, God Bless You, Your loving, adoring husband,

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
19 April 1941
Typed note*

Darling,

[...] I am just off to the pictures with Charles and Bob, so there is not time to stop and think of any news for today, and anyway I have been asleep for most of it, so there would be very little to tell, [...] tomorrow I will tell you all about it, so please forgive the shortness of this note and I will make up for it later, [...] Goodnight & God bless you [...] Your faithful, adoring husband,

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
Sunday 20th Time 12.00
(Probably April 1941)
✈*

My Darling,

I'm sitting on the step of our hut in glorious sunshine, and the only thing wrong with life is that you are not here to share it with me.

We have just returned from a Bath Parade at Derby, and I've had a lovely swim, & apart from my cold which is still with me, I feel as fit as a fiddle. How I miss you though darling, the wireless is playing lovely music, I wonder if you are listening too? sitting here with eyes closed for a moment, I can imagine I'm on our own step outside the French windows listening to our wireless, it's so lovely, and wonderful, yet so very sad, we are miles and miles apart, most likely having the same beautiful thoughts and we can neither see nor hear each other, how I do wish this horrible war would end and leave us to our own lives as we want.

Enough of sadness, I must tell you about a little trip to the pictures yesterday. We had to stand in a huge queue for nearly an hour, but eventually got in, and it was worth it. You know, it is the first time I have seen Deanna Durbin in a film, and this one was called Spring Parade, it has some beautiful music in it, being a period picture all about Vienna, and all the lovely waltzes we both appreciate come into the story. It was very romantic, and as usual, I always put us in the leading actors places, and I was thoroughly lost in it all the time, & the other picture was good too, so we had our money's worth.

We had a bit of a job to get back as a last bus left at 9, but by going to various places we were able to get within a mile of the camp and landed back here in pouring rain at 11:30, but very cheerful. We

raided Bob's canteen for beer, & opened a tin of Bully Beef from the store and had a beano, and so to bed, having thoroughly enjoyed our evening out. It is the first time we three have ever been able to get out together, because with Charlie in the office with me it meant that we could never both be out at the same time, but now I'm out of it all, we can arrange our time off to coincide & we shall have a good time now.

I am moving from this hut today, & AM taking over control of a detachment of 12 men, I shall be responsible for lots of things now, but at least it will give me experience in handling men, which is just what I need, so I'm rather looking forward to it, although I guess I shall stop plenty of trouble to start with, but I'm tough and can take it.

Today being Sunday we have the whole day off, and probably this afternoon I shall take a walk with Bob, but we shall see, I might have a sleep instead, it's a really wonderful thing to be able to have time off, a thing I never knew while in the office, but let's hope those days are far behind. Did I tell you that Charlie is going on the same course as mine in a month's time, he too will get a stripe, and that's how N.C.O.'s are made, believe it or not, but out of 86 men, our officer can find no-one else worth sending but those who were in the office, so it's good groundwork we get at least. I read my report the other day, this is what it said:-

"Knowledge on entering school- fair, made good progress, especially in Weapon Training, Arms Drill weak, with practice should make good Instructor. Turn out-good". I asked Sergeant Warden what he thought of it and he said it meant that I shall keep my stripe and get paid for it, so of course I'm very bucked, and nothing is going to be too much for me from now on, although I expect I shall still have browned off periods.

Well darling, I intended this letter to be a long one, but actually there is nothing much to write about, here, there are no parades, route marches with their accompanying troubles to tell of, and we never have an air raid, although I wouldn't be surprised if Derby isn't next on the slate for a doing in the near future, but up to now we have been extremely lucky. I got my parcel with pants inside yesterday, and was very glad of them, it's a funny thing, but I only missed them the day before when I wanted a change, and I thought I might have to ask you to send them, but I forgot for the moment what a lovely thoughtful angel you are, and I needn't have worried.

Everyone has gone out for drinks this morning to celebrate the success of our Troop, we had a test yesterday, and came out top of the Battery and nearly Regiment, we are showered with congratulations and have a tough job in front of us now to keep up to standard, but we'll do it somehow. Next week, I'm told, is to be another Infantry week, which means that I shall be in the limelight a bit, and also that leave is likely to be held up a bit, I hope this latter part is not true, but fear that it may make me a week later getting home, but we shall see about that later, you can take it from me that I shall do my best and keep it where it is if possible.



It's time already with this one letter & I don't like it, but please fill this darling, I miss it so. I hear the news saying that London had another nasty night last night, I do hope & pray that you escape any trouble in our little home, but remember this darling, if ever you want me in a hurry, go to the police, it avoids all hold ups while they enquire this end, & if police send direct to us, we get away without any delay,

but that is a very unpleasant subject, so we'll avoid further detail. Our officer is off on another course tomorrow, & we look likely to be able to have an easy time for a while, because with Sergeant Warden in charge, although we have to work hard, we get lots of time off, & we all love that. I forgot to tell you I am on the Rouser team for tonight again as No. 13. My job as this number is to keep the beams parallel, & although it sounds easy, it very rarely is, but I'm learning all round actually, & before long, I hope to go on a classification examination & come out top, & if I do, well, it might mean another stripe up, I shall strive for it I can assure you, but there is much to learn, so my head is likely to be much taxed in the near future.

Just going off for dinner now darling, will let you know about it afterwards-----
----- not too bad, roast beef, potatoes & greens, with jam tart, I could have eaten a lot more, but I guess its good for me, & I bet I wangle a good tea, I do get so hungry these days, it's the fresh air I guess, I know I look better because everyone tells me so.

Looking across from here, I can see a valley, similar to our own view, but not many houses, there are two ploughed fields, & a wood in the distance, the scenery which is perfectly marvellous, is spoiled by the foreground which is all new emplacements, & they certainly do scar the landscape, but would prove invaluable against blast when we do start getting fun.

And now angel [...] only being with you can bring me to that happy state of mind we know so well before the war. Ah! To have those wonderful times over again, how little we appreciated it then, & how much we would value them now, can you recall evenings on the marsh,¹⁶ evenings in the garden, watching the progress of our flowers, occasional Sundays out on our cycles & the silly little things about which we used to quarrel & not one of which I can remember now, what loveliness we had & how little it meant to us then. I dare not recall all the other wonder we have known together, it makes me so sad & lonely, here in this village with families & loving couples around just as in our own town, & yet cut off from the world, I do manage to feel so very lonely at times, I think it is a good thing that very soon I shall have lots of work to occupy my thoughts, although even that can never keep you from always being uppermost, you are my whole life, & I am yours completely. [...]

¹⁶ Waterford Marshes

And now [...] I must bring this note to a close [...] Goodbye darling, it hurts me to write goodbye, but tomorrow I shall make time to write again [...] Your Bill always & for all time.

Horsley Camp H.Q.
21 April 1941
Typed letter
 ✈

Dearest Love,

Monday with all its accompanying troubles at last has been and gone, and now I have the evening to myself but I fear that it has been done in really because we have been digging till eight, and now, after waiting for this old machine, it is nine, but still, if there is no rouser, I should find time to get your letter in before turning in.

Today has been a funny one for me, I worked on the Sound Locator till 10:30, and then had to go into the office for the rest of the day to prepare training programmes for the rest of the month and the next one as well. I really don't know why I was made to do this job, because usually this one of the officers, or sergeant's pets, but I was able from past experience of typing them out, to make a really good job of them, and I'm very proud of my efforts, to think that all the training the men do for the next month will have been arranged for them by me, it's a nice thought isn't it, and it gives me pleasure to know that I was asked to do it, I'm the first Lance Bombardier ever to be allowed that responsibility, and I appreciate it very much.

Well, I have given you enough of that for the time I think, and now to tell you of the manning drill tonight, I took a number sixes job for the first time, and though I knew very little about it I succeeded in making a pretty good job of it, and I should have some more tomorrow if I can wangle it.

I started the day well, too, having had an opportunity to tick off several fellows for not folding their blankets up properly, they said that it was the first time they had ever been checked for it, and they were really upset about it all, but I told them that if their other lance jack had been careless with them, I wasn't going to be, but I think they are beginning to respect me already, & I am getting on pretty well in the new surroundings, they are a decent lot of boys, and I like being with them.

It has been a wonderful day again today, the sun was shining brightly at 6, and I went for my usual run by myself, Charlie had a bad knee through playing football yesterday, but I hope it will soon be better, because we are real pals now, and would do anything for each other. I'm afraid that we are both broke again though, I spent 3/- on tea, I think I shall send it on to you and Mum by post when I can afford it, and then I have stood Charles a few drinks at the local pub, and given him fags when I have had them, we share our good fortune with each other, I suppose you will reproach me for this, but I think I'm doing good with it if I share it all round like that even though I do have to beg borrow or steal for the rest of the week, but I look forward to a little parcel with some fags in it before the week is over.

I think I was very optimistic when I took out two sheets of paper to type this note on, because there is really very little news when I write daily, but I know that you look for one each day, and so, if you continue to send me a few stamps, things which have also cost me money since I came back, I shall keep on sending to you, but I know that you will because although I'm becoming an awful scrounger, you still love me don't you darling [...] so I shall be able to sleep and dream of you as usual tonight unless we are rudely disturbed by the boche. Talking of boche I heard that you had it pretty rough there the other night, I do hope and pray the raids had missed you and the others I love so much at home, tell me all about it when you answer this note. I had your letter this morning and I now have the time to read them when I get them so I know just what you put in them these days, and I felt very sad when I read that you were tired and miserable too, and I know how you feel when you say that it seems so sad to have to write what you have to say instead of saying it to mein bed, but never mind angel, the war won't last for ever, and we shall have to make up for all we have missed in these years out of our lives. At least we are learning what it is to be without each other, & I feel sure that it will be lasting lesson to both of us, and all the love and beauty we find together in the future so far away it seems, we shall appreciate.

Our officer has gone away on another course, and I thought that Sergeant Warden would be in charge, but that is not so, we have another young officer come here to look after us, and he is really nice, I like him very much, and he seems to have taken a liking to me too, he is very young, not so old as I am by a long way, and he is also very chatty without losing any respect, he's very popular already with everyone, and I think he is going to be the boss of the other site afterwards.

Reverting to the subject of cigarettes, I wish that you could have seen our efforts the other day, we have long since acquired the habit of saving all our fag ends, and we pulled them to bits, and rooled (sic) them in papers, and by this means managed to avert a major disaster, until the Salvation Army van came round again, they are the only people who ever have any round this way now, and even they are strictly rationed, to twenty per man. And as they only call three times a week, you can see for yourself how sadly we are cut down, but we're not dying yet, and it will take a little more than that to shake us.[...]

I hope to be able to get a letter off on time again tomorrow, and I sincerely hope that we shall not have anything too bad to tell of [...]. don't worry too much about affairs abroad, the object of all this campaign of Hitler's is to draw troops from this country, and we should fare the same as we did at Dunkirk, but fortunately, we cannot be caught twice the same way, and believe me, if things were conducted in this war as they were in the last, that is, without fear of fifth columnists etc., we should have been out there before this and well on the way to winning, but in this modern and very terrible warfare, we have to be very wary, and therefore, things seem to be a lot worse than they really are, because we are simply not to be caught, so take heart my love, England has to be taken before this war is lost, & that can never be, and you in the bottom of your heart know this too. Goodnight my darling [...] I hope I shall be with you again, so cheer up sweetheart, Your husband who lives for you alone,

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
22 April (probably 1941)
[Partially typed letter]*

Beloved,

Another day has passed, and I still live to tell the tale, truly, this war is a long one, and each day as it passes seems to have been a lifetime. Today has been just the same as every other day, consisting of maintenance in the morning, to be followed by work on the site afterwards, broken only by meal times, the time I am learning things that are very beneficial to me, and my self-confidence is increasing all the time. In the work periods I always seem to get the largest number of men to deal with, and they seem to work extremely well for me all the same, I wonder

if it is because I work with them, I expect so, as this always seems to work out extremely well. The reason for this sudden change to writing is because I was in the office typing, when quite suddenly the major appeared, & I just did a bunk, having no further business in there now, and as he is still there, I am continuing in pen until he clears off. I don't really know why he came out here tonight, all I know is that he's a blooming nuisance, and I hope he soon hops it.

Today, I had my first really good dinner here since I came back from leave, and for once I was full up afterwards, I must confess I thoroughly enjoyed it, and now although I have a bit of a headache, I feel just ready for anything. It is my night off tonight, but I am not going out, mainly because I have no cash also I have no cash to spare, and partly due to the fact that having spent all day in the fresh air, I feel a little tired, so when I have finished this letter it should be almost supper time, & after that I shall just make my bed and relax.

Our boys are playing a football match tonight against a Battery Team, and everyone who isn't playing has been allowed out to watch, I could have gone, but a letter to you is more important to my mind, and so I sit alone in this hut enjoying perfect quietness for the first time today.

Tomorrow I am orderly Sergeant again, which means 24-hours straight off with lots of worries, but I finish duty at 07 30 Thursday morning, & have no more worries till Friday, I like sleeping in the daytime once a week, it makes nearly 2 days go so much quicker. I have to wear a belt and bayonet, it does look so smart, I feel quite the soldier when I get into my best clothes and swagger about the camp shouting orders and supervising things all day long, I often wonder what sort of impression I am making, I do hope it is a good one, although I'm still quiet compared to the others, but at least all the work allotted to me is done quickly and efficiently, so I hope they take that into consideration when weighing me up.

The major has just left, I don't know whether he has gone to see the football match or not, but I think that now I have gone so far with this written in ink, I shall finish off this way. I don't know if I have told you or not, but I'm getting quite good at Aircraft recognition these days, and I can tell nearly all our own types now, we always pick up work when a target comes over, and have a discussion on the outstanding features of it, and that's how we learnt all about them.

I received your letter this morning which was written on Sunday, in it you report on your visit to Mildred, I'm so glad Penny is such a success, and I wish so very much that I could have been there with you. I must convey my congratulations to Len and Kitty, and also I expect I should let Ron have a line or two, but I have lost his address, perhaps you could oblige when replying to this note. I think really, that this Edna of whom you often write, has a bit of a nerve to just come crashing into our home whenever she feels like it, but I fear we can no longer call it our home, and therefore have to take it all as it comes, perhaps one of these times I shall have the pleasure of meeting her, I certainly hear plenty about her if that is all. Perhaps you could send a cutting of the wedding report from the Mercury,¹⁷ I should love to see my full title in print, it looks very important even tho' it does only denote one stripe, do you feel proud of me?

I've just been informed that we are to be on night manning tonight, that means that all the Rouser team have to go out for an hours practice in the dark, and although I'm not really affected I think I shall have a go at No. 6 's job just for the feel of things, I should love to control that beam for a little while, No. 6 is the complete master of the situation when in action, and you know how nice it is to control things. It has been a lovely afternoon here, we got so hot at path making that we had to take off our coats, but the day actually didn't start off very nicely, it was foggy and cold, and my fingers were frozen on maintenance this morning, I was glad when the sun came out. The countryside is beginning to look pretty now too, it looks best of all at 6 in the morning, and at sunset, there are some absolutely spectacular views around this way, and to one who appreciates the beauty of nature, this acts as a stimulant, & indeed I think that everyone in the camp feels the effects of spring, we are all very vigorous and full of energy, to such an extent that we are top of the Battery in everything, and very very much in the limelight, I'm wondering how long it will be before we fade into oblivion again, although I feel sure that while we keep our present officer we should always retain a high standard, the men are so happy, and one rarely hears a genuine moan, we all grumble about trivial things of course, but on the whole things are running very smoothly.

You said in your Sunday's letter that you hoped to get one from me for Monday morning, I sincerely hope you did, because although I didn't write on Friday, I made up for it on Saturday, and you should have got one for Monday at the latest, I think I have written four since I got back, one every day, and if they were delayed at all, you should be having a regular shower of fan mail now. Although there is much more work

¹⁷ Local Newspaper-Hertfordshire Mercury

done on this, the operational side of things, I seem to get much more time to read your letters, and write to you, I often go over yours now as much as 3 times in a morning, whereas before, in the office, I often had to wait till dinner time before I dared open one, I expect it's because we have definite times to stick to out here, and though the hours are long, they are not so bad as in the office, something for which I am truly thankful, and I still manage to get evenings off once or twice a week, so on the whole I fancy I'm doing alright, and with the summer coming on too, I should be right in the pink of health.

Out of all these things, one fact emerges with a bang every time, we are not together [...] & I miss you most of all when day is done [...]

The evening is growing cold now, with promise of a sharp drop in temperature, we ought to be just packing up in the garden and wondering what to have for supper now, and as I go back to those not so very distant times, I feel as if I could cry, we are losing so much of our too short lives, life is so unreasonable.

Bob is going home on leave on Friday, he has asked me if he can borrow our photograph to take home to show his people, I shall let him have it, he seems to think such a lot of me, and with Charlie, we make a very happy trio when we can get out together, you see, we all have the same sort of tastes, we like walking, we love music, Charlie writes lyrics and I can write music and Bob arranges and plays, things are evenly shared between us, and we call ourselves the three musketeers, and try to keep as happy as we can under rotten circumstances. I have just taken a bar of chocolate from Bob's canteen and had it put on the slate, it looks as if my wages are going to be mortgaged before next payday. It's funny, but I always seem to introduce money matters into my letters to you, I do hope you don't get fed up with hearing about my little worries, but I'm sure you don't.[...]

I have tried to make this letter a little longer than usual, & I leave it to you to say if I have succeeded or not, all I know is that I have had to fill my pen up 3 times again, but perhaps my other one will soon be back with me again, I do hope so, and now I must end for today as it is nearly time to start the manning drill [...]

*Horsley Camp H.Q.
4-5TH May (1941)
(Typed flimsy letter)*



My Darling,

Here I am again at last, I expect you thought that you had lost me, but really I have been very very busy all the time and I've not had the chance to get even a line in, I was orderly Sergeant on Friday, and now I am at it again for Sunday, and am halfway through the night and this is the first time I've been able to get in touch with you. We have been on rouser for the last 3 nights for 5 hours each night. And after that, with the day work as well, I've not felt like doing anything but sleep, so please forgive me darling if I have seemed to neglect you, I tried to dream of you as much as I could instead. I have been very busy tonight on training Programmes for the officer, it saves him time and worry, and I seem to click all sorts of jobs to do during a night that none of the others ever do, but at least I have been told today that my stripe will stick, can I still get paid for it very soon now, the only unfortunate part of it is that another fellow from the other site is being stripped to keep me on, he is inefficient, and so has to pay the price, I do hope I never come to that.

I have had a hectic night, and tomorrow, I show my first real authority, I have had trouble with drunken men, and two away from their posts when they should have been on sentry, so I'm putting 4 on charge, this will show them that I mean what I say, and at the same time prove my worth. It has been a disgusting show, and I feel very upset and cross about it still, so if I can nurse my rage for a few days I shall make quite a good case against them, and all this I have to pay for the honour of holding a stripe. Never mind darling, I shall be all the better respected for it I'm sure, and so I don't worry about it very much.

Well, having got that off my chest, I will try to recount the days for you as best as I can remember them, although for the most part I have been sleeping through most of the day, and working at night. I am a hardened member of the rouser team now, and can take my place with the best of them, although I do feel the cold when we are out

here. It's alright for the first 2 hours, but after that it begins to become a bit tiring, and if you are not very careful, it is not long before you are asleep, I must confess that the first night we were out for a 5 hour stretch, I fell asleep during a quiet period for about half an hour in the projector pit, and I found out afterwards that the number one did the same thing in the sound locator pit, so at least we all felt the same. It is a very exciting game, we have managed to get two targets in the beams and have been congratulated, and I love sitting in my chair in the centre of the three lights and directing them, it is most entertaining, and I hold the honoured position of being second in command, and apart from this I learn a lot all round during the day, so on the whole I am getting along fine, and soon hope to have that second stripe up, although if I do get it, I fear that it will mean another course for me in searchlight work, I heard the officer discussing me with major Wotton this morning over the phone, and he said that I was good, and someone was not so good, I guess that was the other fellow who is losing his stripe on my account, I also read between the lines a bit and saw that probably another course is being sorted out for, all I hope is that it doesn't come this week because all being well, I shall be coming home to you on Friday of this week, a week earlier than you expect me, does that please you? it makes me feel so happy to know that soon, very soon, I shall be holding you in my arms again [...]

We have had some wonderful weather here for the last 2 or 3 days, I'm getting very brown in the face, and very fit in the body, but all this night work doesn't do me a lot of good, and I shall be glad when we get a few of our N.C.O.'s back from leave, courses etc., it makes it all so hard for those of us that remain, but still, it can't be helped, and we have to make the best of it

I find that it gets very cold at nights though, I expect it is because of the alteration of the clocks, after all, we are getting up 2 hours earlier than we used to, and perhaps that makes some kind of difference, I know that I am always very glad to creep into my bed in the mornings, but how very much nicer it will be next week, to be able to sink down in a lovely soft bed, and to have you there cuddled up beside me, what a wonderful thought that is [...] ¹⁸

Thank you so much for the hankies you sent on to me last week, I needed them badly, but thank goodness my cold is rapidly disappearing now, and I shan't need quite as many. My nose bled yesterday, and that is a sign that I am recovering, so I just let it bleed until it stopped of its own free will, and felt no worse off for it.....

¹⁸ During the Second World War, in 1941 Britain adopted British Double Summer Time, which saw clocks being put forward two hours ahead of GMT. The clocks were turned back to GMT at the end of summer 1945.

5-minute break while I make toast, and now I'm eating same in-between writing to you, I do hope you will excuse this rather rude behaviour, but being an N.C.O. makes one a bit rougher than one normally, honestly darling, I'm becoming so used to ordering people about now, that I know I shall be ordering the Aunts about when I get home again, and I fear like I'm becoming hard hearted too, so watch out for changes, because even though my love has not changed unless to grow stronger, my technique may have altered [...]

Congratulations on your first driving lessons, you done pretty well for a start, seems to me that all we want now is the car, we shall have to look into the matter later. You tell me that Penny's eye is getting better, well, that's a good thing, I hope she has not lost any of her good looks for when I get home. Our little Blitz is also improving, her distemper has left her almost, but eyes will take a long while to get normal again, however I'm almost sure that she will get over it safely. She sits beside the fire now, I have to keep moving her away when she gets too near for fear that she should catch a chill, but I think she's too hardy for that. Molly had her confinement last week under one of the huts, she refuses a lovely bed that Sergeant Warden made for her in his hut, and now she is the mother of the two lovely little puppies that show promise of being very good lookers. We are keeping both of them, and so far the sergeant has not decided quite what to do with them, I expect they will be kept at the camp, though several people outside the camp have asked for one, I will let you know what does happen in the end.

The night telephonist is fast asleep beside the fire, he annoys me, because he will always sit on top of it, and he knows full well what happens when that occurs, however, it is no real concern of mine, and he wakes if the phone bell rings, so he does his duty and I'll not reproach him too much. Talking of reproaches, I have just had occasion to tick another fellow off for being away from his post, it seems to me that things have been far too easy for them of late it's about time someone took the reins for a little while to show them that sentry duty in wartime is a serious thing, but time will tell, and in the meantime I shall have to try and pull things straight.

How do you get on with the Aunts these days? do you still feel a little annoyed with them at times, and do you still crave for me to be with you for a whole week as you did last week, or has the driving lesson and various other things taken your mind off them for a bit, I should like to know. You asked me about this Bob of which I talk of quite a lot, well, I thought I had told you all about him, and in case I haven't he is a

boy who were sent out to us from Battery to act as storeman, and being called up with me, we knew each other from the Yaxley days, his home is at Peterborough, and he was a cinema manager in civvie street, he loves all the music that I love, and we often sit together in his store when we are off duty, listening to the speaker extension we have fixed up in in there playing lovely melodies. We have only one thing not in common, and that is he's crazy on dancing, he is a wonderful dancer, I have seen him at one or two, and there is no doubt about it he knows his stuff, and can be a proper jitterbug if he likes, but he's damn good company, and with Charlie, who by the way is on leave this week, we make a good trio, and these last two or three days we have been made into a quartet by the addition of another Charlie, the one who lent me ten bob (50p) once and then went to hospital, and once, only once, we all managed to get out together, and go to the pictures, we always enjoy our pictures, it makes such a welcome break from the dull routine, although I must say has been far from dull just lately. Now you know all about Bob, I'll fill in the gaps when I come home, although I'm sure that I talked about him a lot when I last was with you.

This poor old tripewiper is about finished now I fear, do you notice how the letters need a really good clean out, it has not been cleaned since I left the office, and do you also notice that we still have it in spite of all the threats we have had that it would be taken away. I expect one day the real owner will take it into his head that he wants it back, and will really make the effort to get it, I know I should never have let it out of my sight.

We are still paying the penalty of greatness here, there is at the moment a big blitz on equipment, and the boys had to forgo their Sunday afternoon off today, and had to spend it scraping old paint off projectors etc., in preparation for repainting, and the others we kept busy on camouflage nets, you have probably seen them, and I'm afraid that they were rather annoyed about it all too, so annoyed in fact, that they lost the football match that was played in the evening against Battery, and after beating them twice before by 8 goals to none. Ah well, it's all in a lifetime, so who cares?

I hope you have been able to fix up with the gang for the weekend at Ron's, I can state that I shall be home unless another course pops up between now and Friday, please pray hard at it won't.

The sirens are just sounding the all clear, ending the first nights rest we have known for over a week, and if it hadn't been for the low clouds we should have been out tonight for certain. They get some good warnings this way now, four a five hours

at a time, and the locals are really scared too. A land mine was dropped near our other site the other day, and it scared people for miles around, the first day I have ever had, I told him it would do them good to go and live where you do, and then they would have something to really worry about, but if Jerry keeps up to form, they will get used to it in time.

Tomorrow I take over another hut of men, the fellow who was away while I took over has now returned, and I have been shifted further down the line. The boys have grown to like me so much that they volunteered to get up a petition for me so that they could keep me, but of course things like that just can't be in the army, so, tomorrow I move again, and the new crowd is mostly old timers, so it's going to be tough going, but I guess I shall win, that stripe on my arm makes all the difference in the world, both to my authority, and also to my confidence, so I think I can manage it alright, and you shall have a full report in due course.

And now my darling
[.....] I think you have had
about all I can give in the way
of news, I find out I have been
typing for about 2-hours,
broken by changing guards and
making toast, so it's about time
I ended, I do hope this letter,
short though it still is, will make
amends for the big gap in your
mail, please try to understand
my position, and you must
know that I write always as
soon as the chance comes
[.....] Your loving [...] husband,

P.S. I love you. Cupid came from Edie's Wedding.

CHAPTER THREE

Searchlight Camp, SHOTTLE
Nr. Belper, Derbyshire
SATURDAY 7TH (Probably MAY-1941)

MY DARLING,

When we said good bye on Friday, we little dreamed of the changes in store for me when I got back here, for as you will observe from my address, I am now living at our exile site and liking it. The reason I am here is because of the serious shortage of N.C.O.'s here, there are even now only four of us & no officer, so we are considered to have our hands full, although actually the spirit among the men here is so fine that N.C.O.'s are not needed in their first capacity as disciplinarians and life here is just like one big family.

There is one thing terrible that has happened during my absence though, 15 men have been taken from each site and our leave is interfered with so drastically that I cannot hope to be home for at least two months, we are only sending one man a week on seven days, & one for each 48 hour period, so the only hope of a future meeting very soon will be for you to come here to me, but details will have to be entered into at a later date, I know I can never wait as long as two months before seeing you again, and it may even be longer than that, so we shall have to do something about it. Having delivered that rather awful news, I will proceed to unfold the story of my life since we said goodbye on a day that already seems so very far away [...] all I can hope and pray for now is the speedy end to the war.

Now for my journey back to Derby, it was really very uneventful although extremely tedious. I arrived at St. Albans at 11.15, and five minutes later met another fellow on the road who was also heading for Derby, so we got together and managed the first lorry as far as Dunstable. From this point, after a considerable number of vehicles had passed us by, we eventually stopped a lorry which was going right into Derby, I suspect you must have been praying very hard for me my angel, [...] We stopped once on the road just outside Northampton to stretch cramped legs and lie on the grass beside the road, it was a glorious day, and the scene was only to be described as perfect, the whole of Nature was in perfect harmony and yet, something

was lacking that spoiled the whole thing, you know what that was, YOU!!! [...] We arrived in Derby at six, and were we filthy, the old lorry was covered in black greasy dust, and the seat of my trousers together with the elbows of my blouse were sadly in need of a good brush up which I secured immediately on entering the town, after which I went to the forces canteen and after a considerable wait secured egg and chips. I caught the 7.30 bus from Derby and arrived at the old Golden Valley? At about 8.30 having walked leisurely from the bus stop, and what a depressing scene met my eyes, half the men gone, one dilapidated and care-worn looking sentry & a deserted site, it was like a place of the dead, and I felt I wanted to scream, for after such words as I had tasted in your company it was like being tortured with hot irons, and I was even more depressed when the officer told me I should be going to Shottle in the morning, for me this was the final straw, and I had to go out and have some beer, but even beer could not ease the ache and I spent a restless night trying to overcome the dreadful news about the leave, and this morning awoke with a most awful headache, due no doubt to both beer and the sleepless night, and now, I am at Shottle, the most wonderful spot on God's earth, near to the sun, we stand on the highest point in the district, from which on a clear day the coast can be seen, the Mersea I am told, is easily visible in the distance, and as soon as I have a free evening I am off exploring. The site is situated about five miles north of Belper, and that is the nearest habitation. For between us and that town there are about two lonely farmhouses dotted miles apart, we shall never see a civilian if we stayed here for ever, although it is a real beauty spot, and if I can secure accommodation for you in the nearest of the farmhouses, you will simply adore being here, and I for one prefer this place to the other, the only uncertain thing being that I may not be allowed to stay, and to think I used to dread ever being sent out here, I do so hope you will be able to share this bit of heaven with me before we leave.

This is a regular outpost, the postman being the only person to give our letters to, and as for cigarettes, well, our only hope here is the S.A. van, so please let me have both stamps and fags as often as you like while I remain here, and life won't be too bad. There is an atmosphere here that is exceedingly difficult to describe, it is peaceful and serene, set up here, away from all mankind, one forgets there is a war, and even the lights & machine guns have taken on the form of some kind of sport in which we may indulge, it is serenely peaceful, restful and wonderful, and all I need to make me divinely happy is you, but what chance have I of perfecting such a dream, I may as well wish for the moon, & tonight even that will be so much nearer but still so very faraway, I could liken the situation to my feelings for you, for here, amongst this perfect scene, my heart can be so very much nearer to you, and yet you are as far

away as ever, it makes me sadly wistful, and this strange contentment I have found is disturbed no little by the memories of such beauty as you alone can provide. [...] could we forget, the walk to Tewin, the dear little inn where our often talked of tea for two materialized, the day at Enfield, our evening cycle rides to your home & mine, and most of all [...]

I made a dreadful discovery when I washed at Derby, but I'm hoping it isn't so bad as it seems, I have lost my identity bracelet, and I cannot for the life of me remember when I last felt it, I do hope I lost it in bed at home, or somewhere where you will find it, I hate to resign myself to the thought that it is lost, so please tell me have found it again. I know this will be as annoying to you as it is to me, and I simply had to tell you about it, please forgive me for carelessness, although I feel the new links must have been entirely to blame.

Having got that unpleasant news off my chest, I will proceed with my letter. I have just heard that there is a cottage down the road a bit, in fact several cottages and a school, this being I presume the actual village of Shottle, and the cottage I mentioned is to let, four rooms with electricity & water laid on, yet miles from anywhere, and only 4/- (20p) per week rent, I guess it's a proper labourer's cottage, but at least it looks nice & clean & in very good repair, so it's worth 4/-. I couldn't help thinking how lovely it would be if you could live there providing I was going to stay here, because here, where no officer lives, and few seldom tread, it would matter very little whether I was on duty or not in the evenings, we could often meet unobtrusively and love to our hearts content unobserved by any, in fact, with the summer coming, we could be true children of nature, have you any ideas on the subject darling?

The sergeant is out shooting rabbits, this is, I know, a sudden change from the sublime to the practical, but I shall be off romancing again in a minute, so bear with me, such is the spell of this place that romance and beauty weaves itself into any description, and I was ever prone to such things. Reverting to the subject of rabbits, they shot two yesterday, and I hear they often have a rabbit pie to supplement the already wonderful food allowance. I hear we may also have eggs with our breakfast if we pay for them, they being obtained from the nearby farm. While we are on the subject of food, I must say here, that though I have had just two meals here, what a wonderful difference there is, plenty of it, and two really first class cooks who know how to keep things clean and nice, and I know my appetite is going to get bigger as I stay here, so that angle of things is safe.

I am just informed that at 11 oclock (2300 hrs) we are to turn out for night manning for one hour, & that means we shall not be in bed till midnight, but fortunately tomorrow is Sunday and we shall not have Reveille until 7 and I am told that 7 oclock here means 8, so maybe things aren't so bad. Well [...] I am going to get ready for action, and then bed, I am still very tired, and need a nights real sleep, I do hope we escape a "Rouser", for this means loss of much needed rest, so for tonight [...] goodnight [...] Goodnight Angel, God Bless You, More tomorrow,

*No address but Shottle mentioned
SUNDAY (possibly 18th MAY 1941)*

A glorious late spring day, with a cloudless blue sky & all the world around us at peace with life. We have just finished dinner, and the food is as beautifully cooked and plentiful as it ever was at Tuxford. This afternoon should be a free one, and I am at this very moment lying on the grass to write to you. We did some gardening this morning, but the soil here is very rocky underneath, and we had to have as many as four men at one time to get out some of the boulders, I couldn't help thinking how well they would look in our rockery, but that was just an idle dream which could never be realised, but while on the subject of gardens I am enclosing some Marrow seeds which I had given to me, and you might like to plant them, but if you do, remember they need gallons of water.

What a wonderful spot this is, I never knew such peace and utter contentment could be found in the army, but here, away from traffic and even civilization, where men are men, and one never sees anything but khaki clad humans, life is so very different, after just one whole twenty four hours here, I never want to go anywhere else unless I can come back to you, and that you must know will always be my eternal wish, but while we cannot be together, I shall be contented as I could ever be under army conditions, although you need never have any fear of my settling down to army life. The N.C.O.'s here don't have any maintenance to worry about, all they do is to supervise things in general, and any work we do in the way of gardenings or emplacements, is purely voluntary, and I really feel that we work harder that way.

As I lie here, I can feel the sun scorching on my back, it's a wonderful warmth, and a really refreshing feeling, I sure don't feel like any kind of work, so I hope we are

left alone for the rest of the day as promised. There is a slight breeze blowing now, ruffling the blades of grass and corn, & stirring the distant tree tops, nature is very much alive it seems, how awful that we should be at war when such beauty is here to be shared by all the world if they did but appreciate such things, but alas, too many of us see these things without noticing, and the wonder of it all is lost on us. I am in tune with life, living amongst such scenery, and having the most wonderful woman in the world for a wife and things that few men may possess together (*half page of adoration & praise*).

I have been to sleep darling, the sun was so warm, and the atmosphere so soothing that I just rested my head for a minute, and I'm afraid I didn't wake until teatime, and I must confess I was just in the mood for tea too, it's surprising how my appetite has grown, I have changed from a small eater to quite a normal one now, I think it must be the clean air, and good cooking, I guess I shan't lose much weight while I am here.

It has been a sleepy sort of afternoon, with nothing to do, and no-one to bother us, it has been very nice, & could be compared to a holiday camp without the sea. Talking of holiday camps, this is an ideal spot for such a place, and some of the boys are suggesting they buy it after the war and run it as one, and I feel certain that as soon as ever it got known, it would have to be a success, if we are to spend the summer here, as I hope we might, I shall be brown all over, because there is no-one to see us if we work in the nude, but I fear the impending move is not so very far away, and that spells the end of peaceful days at Shottle, however, I will not contemplate that too seriously because if we are to be here any length of time I want to have you up here with me for at least a week in June, I could wangle quite a bit of time with you, especially as these light evenings allow us perfect freedom from 7 till 11 every night, so give that serious thought will you darling?

Well my sweet, there is little else I can add to this letter in the way of news [...]. There is just one more item I forgot to mention, you remember I often talked about Freddie Burgess, well, he was moved to another section the same day I came out here, which means that he won't be seeing his sweetheart very often now, I felt very sorry for him and he hated going, although he got another stripe which makes him a lance sergeant now, however, he says that does not compensate for the loss of all his friends and girl too. He has, like me, been with this section ever since he joined the army, and now he's had to move, I expect he does feel a bit sorry for himself, especially as he will be about twenty miles away from his girl now, and by the way, I am about ten

miles from her now, which means that I'm not likely to get the rest of my free underclothes.

Well sweetheart it's a funny note to end on, but there is absolutely nothing else to write about now, I have run myself quite dry [...] but darling please send me some stamps as soon as you reply to this [...] I will just keep smiling as best I can, I will write again tomorrow, so until then, God Bless You, [...] Your Bill. P.S. The stripe is now converted, and my promotion has appeared on orders, which means that in 21 days from last Friday we start getting our rise, please pray for further successes, [...]

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
MONDAY 19TH (Probably May 1941)*

MY DARLING,

I got your first letter this morning, it was brought up to me by the officer from Golden Valley, and I felt very sad and wistful to read of your tears shed on my unworthy behalf, I don't know why you should cry over me, I'm not worth it, and if you didn't love me as you do I know you would heartily agree with me, but I'm so glad to be able to say and know that you do love me, and all I can do is to try and prove myself worthy of such lasting, heavenly sweetness which has been my good fortune since we first met.

And now to news:- last night I went out with the sergeant rabbiting (one or two T's?) and we had the most marvellous time over simply glorious country, the farmer allows him to go shooting just when he likes, and though after waiting under cover for one solid hour, we only got one, I really enjoyed myself, and intend to go again soon. We were accompanied by the orderly sergeant for the day, it's very annoying to think of an orderly sergeant out rabbiting, so vastly different from the other place, it is that very freedom which makes everyone so very happy here. We rambled over several fields, and then gazed down into a steep hollow whose steep slopes were studded with gorse, and at the foot of which winds the dearest little mountain stream you ever saw, purely natural waterfalls, are formed by huge rocks, and we all expressed the desire to have a stream just like that flowing at the bottom of our

gardens, it is simply delightful. In this hollow, secluded, & sheltered from the road, the rabbits come out to play, & we lay half way down one slope waiting for them to get near enough to shoot, it was very exciting, because each time we even moved a hand sent them scurrying away, but eventually three of them formed a group and came sufficiently close enough to let fly at, and the sergeant, who by the way has his own gun here, let them have both barrels, we killed one, and know for sure we wounded the other two, but unfortunately for both them & us, they got to their burrows before we did, and we lost forty cigarettes, you see, we sell them to the Y.M.C.A., girl for cigs, and share them out equally amongst the boys, it's a good idea don't you think?, we get 20 per rabbit.

I fear that I have another vice now:- eggs for breakfast each morning, for 2 ½d daily, we buy new laid ones from the nearby farm, and our cook does them for our breakfast, yesterday it was with bacon, today with liver, and tomorrow it will be with sausages, we have such marvellous grub here that one really wonders what does happen to it elsewhere, today for instance, we had a rice pudding that knocked any of Aunties into a cocked hat, we had as much as we could safely hold, and never in my life have I tasted such a creamy, delicious pudding as that was, if this keeps up I shall be adding weight instead of reducing as I had hoped. We had sausages and mash for supper, the sausage we now get are tinned and partially cooked without skins, and when the cook has finished with them they rival Hugman's ¹⁹ at his best, but enough of this rhapsodising on food, it is moments like these that make me realise how badly off you are in civvie street, but whilst on the subject I think it's beastly mean of the Aunts to refuse to have anything to do with our party, and though I hate to say it, you were a little (darling adorable) fool to pay them full money when it hardly cost them a thing to keep us that week, can it be you are losing your nerve, anyhow, please keep me informed of things as they happen, and I'll help all I can from this distance, I do hope tho' that life can and will be a bit happier for you with them, you are the typical little "brick" you always have been for putting up with so much for other's benefit, but in this instance I feel it is wasted, and therefore high time to put your foot down, we'll see how things go.

To resort to more pleasant things, after we shot our rabbit, we followed the banks of the stream to where it went under the road, and what a glorious evening it was, the sun was setting behind the distant hills, and as we leaned over the fence of a field full of cows gently grazing, one could not help feeling the voice of spring, but you were not there to share my happiness, and therefore it could never have been

¹⁹ Local Hertford butchers

truly complete, but forgive me for saying it darling, the sheer loneliness among all this beauty makes me happier than I ever have been before. I wanted to tell you that in the field of cows was a bull, who was doing his best to woo his chosen one for the night, we made three interested onlookers, and across the other side of the field we observed three more of our boys perched on the fence enjoying the show, but his lady would not yield, and he eventually gave up the chase while we were there and carried on eating his supper. There is a duckpond too by the hedge, and as we stood there observing nature in the raw, we saw the drake deal with two of his harem very quickly and efficiently, he left them flapping their wings and trying to smooth down ruffled feathers, but obviously very satisfied with life, all this happened in about a quarter of an hour, but how it made my heart ache underneath its appreciation of life as it should be, I could cry sometimes in spite of such beauty I can now have to the full [...] & you are not here to share, you simply must try to get out here next month if we're still here, I have already begun a campaign towards asking the farmer about accommodation, and I know that though we could only share the evenings mostly, you could, amidst such lovely beauty, enjoy yourself to the full, and I do hope & pray for you to come up here soon, you would never regret it even if I weren't here, it is the ideal country holiday spot, and even if the weather was as it has been today, raining all the time, it cannot dampen your spirit, and there is always a certain kind of wild beauty about the place which simply cannot be lightly overlooked.

I am orderly sergeant now, it is 11 at night, and having done my day's running about, I have nothing to do but write, and change guards, there is a flat iron here however, and I intend to press my trousers soon, so that will help to while away the time, and by the time you are reading the letter I posted yesterday (Sunday)., I think I should be fast asleep, and here, one can sleep undisturbed all day, because the boys are extremely quiet as compared to the other crowd, it seems that the whole place casts a spell over everyone who gets near the place, and it brings out the finest qualities in all of us, it is an indefinable something that I shall always feel, and will ever be trying to tell you about, the men are so different, we are happy, and always laughing with each other, more like carefree schoolboys than soldiers, the N.C.O.s are respected, and we do not have to use authority for anything at all, "Ask & it shall be done" seems to be the motto here, an order is an unheard of thing, and while perhaps it might tend to make one forget how to be stern, I somehow don't think it would, because no other set of lads could compare very favourably with ours, and therefore one would automatically revert to severity again.

I have only written one letter about Shottle so far, this is my second, please tell if you like it or not, but I feel you will find it interesting from this view point, when it was first considered as a site it was in the depth of winter, and a more dreary and desolate spot could never be found in the whole world, the huts leaked, and doors hung on one hinge so that the men could never be really comfortable, and instead of neat asphalted paths there were just ordinary muddy grass ones, water had to be used sparingly because of being fetched from the farm, and then, all the bad characters of the troop were selected to live here, it became famous amongst the whole of the Battery as the “Jankers” site, meaning prison camp, and threats of being sent to Shottle subdued the most hardened sinner, and out of all this hardship our “bad” boys went through, something was born that will always remain while this place exists, a spirit of comradeship, and fair play, the “bad” boys still have their off days, but only when away from the place, actually they are the first set of men I have yet mixed with in the army, and a real education to me, it is now a byword of the Major’s to quote the “Spirit of Shottle”, I often wondered what he meant, now I wonder no longer, if every soldier in the British Army felt the same keen sense of duty and comradeship as we do here, the war would even now be history, our men need no driving, no drilling, and I know they would fight to the last if ever it became necessary, I am proud to be one of them whatever outsiders think of the “Jankers” site boys, but then one has to live to be able to form opinions that really count.

I have just been out to call my next guards, it is a wild night, the wind howls like anything here, and there are dark clouds scurrying across the sky, but there is a strange lightness that is nowhere else I’m sure, and one can still see further than it would be possible to from any other point, it is nearly midnight, and honestly, I can still make out the horizon or skyline, I’m sure it’s because we’re near to heaven that such grand things happen to us, you really must come to share it with me soon, I do hope we stay here.

Yesterday, being Sunday, there were lots of cars out this way, we saw as many as two on the road together, and that is indeed a record according to reports on past Sundays, but today, being just an ordinary weekday, nothing but the ration lorry and our officers car has been by us, perhaps you will now realise how isolated we are. I don’t know if you remember me telling you that one of our places were “snowed up” in the winter, well, this was it, and when I told you lightly about that, I little dreamed I should be writing from here in a few months myself, and after my one visit here in the winter when I had my first (and last) driving lesson, I never dreamed I should be loving it so, and dreading a move, what really funny things life does to us doesn’t it. One thing

I can't help saying though, I expect you will feel more than a little wistful to know there is so much for me to experience here, but please don't become jealous of my sweetheart Shottle, you know you will ever occupy first place in my heart, [...]

We're just going to have coffee and toast, I'm not really hungry having eaten well and truly at each mealtime, but I shall just have one slice to help me along, & by the way, our cook here is more careful with his night supplies, we only get exactly half as much as we used to, so I'll have to find other means if any, of procuring scraps for the hungry nest. The coffee by the way is real ground coffee which we have made in a bucket, and is provided by Joe, my schoolteacher friend of whom you may remember me talking in my office days, he came from here to Golden Valley, where I found him good company, and then was sent back here where he is in his natural element, and we have become fast friends, he it is, who will secure accommodation at the Farm for you if possible, because he is very friendly with them, and often goes there for an evening, and always calls in for morning coffee, I expect to be initiated into the circle soon, and I believe the farmer is most entertaining, but of course I shall give you a detailed description of that when it happens. My pen has been behaving perfectly up to this point, but you'll see for yourself what sort of a mood it is in at the moment, I think it's a sign of emptiness I had better refill and see what happens-----no better? well, perhaps it will adjust itself as I go along, although I do wish my other one would hurry up and come.

We have an interesting job to keep us awake for the rest of the night:- cutting out aircraft silhouettes from printed paper, the idea is that we are going to stick them all over the ceiling of the training hut, they are surprisingly hard to recognise when parted from their surrounding technical descriptions, but serve to stimulate interest to such extent that we shall all get stiff necks by continual looking up, but really its very interesting and I enjoy cutting them out, I have added a Messerschmitt 109 and a Junkers 87 Dive Bomber to my memory box now, and with a careful bit of study will soon have a good few more of the main types off pat. A thing that surprised me when I first got here is the amazing interest everyone shows in training, always at mealtimes one is hearing heated technical discussions and I must confess I warmed to it straight away, I could never understand why the people from the other end were so detached from their work, in fact to put it briefly, Shottle and its inhabitants and myself are as one, they embody all my ideals of army life in a S/L UNIT, and I like it because it's so refreshing, my goodness, how stale I must have been getting down there, I dread to think I might have to go back, I know if I do I shall be very bad tempered, and someone will have to look out.

12.45, time is flying tonight, I can sit here and write and write, every word comes so easily and without any effort at all I could go on and on about you and Shottle my two sweethearts, but there is a guard list and Rouser team to make out yet, and literally hundreds of aeroplanes to be carved out, so I shall soon have to end my love letter, but I do hope it will help you to be a bit happier by knowing I am too, and do please give it your earnest consideration about spending a week or so here, you'll never regret it, in fact if I could get a real job here after the war, sufficient to run a car, I would build a home here, and I know that is just what you will want to do. Joe has just returned from the farm, fancy, he must be well in with them to stay as late as this, but he's a 100% Christian, so I know he has been behaving himself, and he has brought tomorrow morning's eggs in with him, so I shall have to forgive him this time, anyway he gets paid for his stripe and I don't yet.

There is a thing I must mention before I close, I'm sorry you had to put in the rest of the potatoes, I can make no excuse for my laziness other than I really was tired most of the time, and I ask you to forgive me for leaving you with some of the work to do.

If the sun shines tomorrow, I shall get up during the afternoon & take a stroll out to the point from where the Mersea & Liverpool can be seen, and then have a sun bath, but being in S/L's one doesn't really have to worry about sunshine, all we have to do is stand in the beam, and it has more effect than all the sun we could ever get, we did it tonight, and I basked for nearly five minutes in pure ultra violet, all the S.L.O.'s are very tanned, mainly through sunning themselves in their own beams, and very nice too to have our own sun treatment on the spot.

Well [...] I am coming to the end of my tether, I can feel my eyelids getting very heavy, and that means another walk out in the fresh air, but I have the guards to change in another five minutes which should give me quite a walk round, and I can come back fresh to my other duties which have been shelved while I write to my darling, you see, everything has to stop for you because I really do love you so, [...] Goodnight, God Bless You,

Within the period from 7 September 1940 until 16 May 1941 there were eight night attacks on Liverpool and Birmingham, during which nearly two thousand tons of bombs were dropped on these cities. Hull and Manchester suffered three major raids in the period with Coventry being the victim of two very destructive air attacks. Sheffield, Nottingham, and Newcastle had one attack each in this period.

*Searchlight Camp, Shottles
22 May (1941)*

My Darling,

Once again I am O.S. which you should know by now means that I can find time to write to you, my beloved, and this time, I am starting at least, in the daytime, the main reason being that all the boys with the exception of 10 have gone to Golden Valley for the day, and I am left as the only N.C.O. in charge of the camp. The day is not exactly a bright one so far as weather is concerned, but here it seems, no matter what the condition, one may always feel reasonably happy, it is so quiet & peaceful after the life I had led till now, before, I was always being chased around by some officer or sergeant, but now, although our officer returned last night, we are not so near to the home of the worry bugs, and are therefore very seldom visited, and the fact, strange as it may appear on the surface, is conducive to better and more conscientious workmanship than continually driving, for a good example one has only to look out of this office window, and though there is no-one to watch then, there are four men digging as though their lives depended on it, a quality in these men here I shall always admire.

The night before last, we went rabbiting again, once more roaming the banks of the dear little mountain stream, but though we wasted four shots, we did no more damage than to shoot several clods of earth, which in the half light only looked like rabbits, this mistake however, was not mine, but the sergeant's, who after all, merely takes me along for company, but the walks we have are most enjoyable, and I saw something I have never seen before in one field we walked through, and that was bluebells, all growing in the fields, I thought they always confined their existence to woods & glades, but here, it seems everything is different, and one has only to stray a few score steps to discover something new. I find that they also grow in profusion on the banks of the roads, a very pretty sight, although they have very short stalks which is, I suppose quite natural. Violets & cowslips are among the other gems, and the roadsides & hills are plentifully cushioned with brilliant yellow gorse, in fact when

the sun shines it is a typical paradise, one I shall be content to remain in to the end of the war, and shall be very loth to leave before that time comes, when I hope to be going to live in an even sweeter one, made so beautiful by the presence of you [...]. In spite of my contentment amidst all this beautiful land, I still yearn for the day to come when I shall be free to hold you in my arms wherever we are, for as long as I want, [.....]

I'm sorry I didn't write yesterday, but I was kept pretty busy all day, and later in the evening I ventured abroad for the first time into Belper for a drink. It was pouring with rain, and only because I felt like a walk did I go out, and after having done it once, I feel sure I'm not likely to go there very often, it took me an hour each way, I never dreamed it was quite so far, and by the time I had had my drink and returned here, I was well & truly wet, but it was an enjoyable walk in spite of everything, and in fine weather very beautiful. The road winds and twists about unreasonably, doubling back on itself to skirt fields and hills, and as one rounds each bend, so a different view present itself to be admired, hills & vales, with stately fir trees gracing the slopes and crests, interspersed with the ever refreshing yellow glory of gorse in bloom, and despite my discomfort with wet, harsh cloth clinging to my legs, I was able to admire, and be suitably cheered by such scenes. When I arrived back suitably cheered I had a nice supper of 1 pork pie & 2 steaming mugs of cocoa, & in every hut there were cheerful fires burning, so I was able to dry out everything that was wet, and luckily there was no Rouser and I was able to get a full night's rest in, but even that didn't prevent me from awakening with a terrific headache, (the third in a week) and a nasty sore throat, however, the headache is gone, and my throat is not so bad as it seemed first off, so I guess I'm not going to die yet. And now I have about 12 more hours, perhaps 14 or 15 of duty before me, I intend to write to Mum, and Jack, & perhaps even Ron, so don't mind if I have to use the stamps you so thoughtfully sent, because I think I told you they are extremely difficult to get up here. By the way, you asked me how I got on with the men who were on charge, well, the one who should have gone on leave was remanded, and moved temporarily, so that I didn't see him at all, & the other got 7 days C.B. which is about the lightest punishment he could have, & I talked it over with him & apparently he thinks no worse of me for it, the other two, who were both old boys, I ignored anyway, because no amount of punishment could ever correct them, and then I had this move, which just about saved me any further possibilities of embarrassment, so one way and another I have managed to get out lightly I suppose. I had a chance to distinguish myself still more on this direction the other morning, when I found that one man had stayed out all night and didn't return till 7, but he only got married a fortnight ago, &

his wife is living within five miles of the camp, & I know if I had the chance I should do the same thing, so I closed my eyes & forgot it, because if he loves his wife as I love mine, he deserves all he can get in the way of happiness while he can take it.

I looked for a letter this morning in vain, I thought perhaps I should receive the first posted directly here, but something must have miscarried, and I now have to await the postman tomorrow morning, who does not come till 9.30, so I shall have to keep awake somehow till then, but it would be worth it even if I had to remain awake all day, [...] what lovely words we spoke to each other on our wedding day, and how much they meant to me (*nearly a whole page of adoration*)

Four o'clock, soon be tea time now, I wonder if we shall really get tea today, so often now we have to drink cocoa, or coffee instead, either for breakfast or tea, and I really believe that is partly the cause of all my headaches, you see, we don't get anywhere near the issue of tea we need to, and often cocoa is sent out as a substitute, and we just have to make do, but as for other food, well, I shall never finish singing the praises of our cooks, and the fact that we can usually have all we want is sufficient to make me a cook fan for all time.

Well my darling, this letter is not going to such a long one as the other two were, [...] I must curtail it slightly to enable the men on evening pass to post it for me, [...] I could go on & on writing..... about Shottle ..but tea is nearly ready....I have to allow 10 hungry men waiting for tea [...] once more I say Goodnight, God Bless You....

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
Saturday (Probably 24th May 1941)*

Dearest Love,

No letter from you again today, which reminds me, I received a letter from you yesterday containing cigarettes in which you stated that you had waited five days for a letter well, let me inform you darling that this is the fifth letter I have written since last Friday, so if you haven't had them, please let me know, and though you sent my cigarettes direct to this new address, you made no comment of having got my letter

eventually, and you must have had them or how would you know my new address, also I should like to know what you thought of my description of the place & the life here, there are so many things I wanted to know about your reactions, and you seem to have ignored my lovely long letters which take me hours to write now I can't get at a typewriter.

Enough of moaning, I don't mean any harm, you must know that by now, [...] I have become so used to your little remarks and criticism about various things, that I miss them acutely when you cut them out, so please write all the things I love to read when you reply to this.

I am settling down to the most interesting life I've so far had in the army, I am now an expert at Morse, and this afternoon took a class for two hours, & taught them all the alphabet enough for them to be able to tell me any letter I asked them, and a few are now able to take down messages:- .. -.. --- -.. --- ..- (I LOVE YOU in Morse). I expect you know what that means, I love you it's as easy as pie if you really want to learn, and once you have the alphabet fixed, all that is needed is practice, & teaching others you will agree is the finest practice one could have. I have much more interesting stuff before me though. I had an aircraft lecture today, and the things I still have to learn amaze me, but I feel sure that with a little time to myself, I might be abler to become at least average, anyhow I'm going all out, and I'll let you know the result. Each day now we have a set period for lessons, and I do quite a lot in the way of instruction, (all from the book) and I get away with things quite well considering, so I hope to continue until I'm an instructor on V.I.E. etc. that is my goal & I'm sticking to it.

Although I love it up here, I can't help thinking of the long wait we have before us unless you come here in June, do try darling, I must have you before my next leave somehow, life is hard enough without having to endure more than we must, and you need a holiday to keep you sane & healthy (how are the aunts?), you didn't mention them last time you wrote, can it be they don't worry you so much, I have to know. My maintenance this morning consisted of cleaning one Lewis Gun, a most interesting job, especially as I had about 2 ½ hours in which to complete the job, so you can guess how easy life is up here.

It's been raining again, in fact is still, that makes three days straight off, do you get the same down our way, I know that in spite of rain everything is still beautiful &

wonderful here, & when the sun does shine, the contrast is so lovely that one is filled with the joy of living.

You did ask me how my free writing pads were received at the office, well, as soon as I knew they were going to send me up here, I decided that this would be the place to benefit, & they are most appreciated here because we only get leftovers as a rule, & it's quite a change for them to get something first-hand, the officer said good old Austin's last night when he needed some paper, so ²⁰Austin's are getting some advertisement in, & they come in pretty handy for my classes too.

Yesterday was my rest day, after 24 hours awake I needed it, but I got up at dinner time & had a shave etc., took a bike ride to Belper, dumped it at a pub, & bussed into Derby where I bathed & had a haircut, & a good feed of egg & chips, & then went to the pictures all by myself, I must confess I didn't feel too happy then, but I was in need of some form of relaxation, although as I walked through the town of Derby, seeing happy couples coming & going to pictures, & sitting in the pictures amidst such couples, I missed you terribly, & succeeded in making myself downright miserable, I was glad to get back & even on the bus I was surrounded by young & medium(?) pairs out for the evening, just returning from a show or something, all preoccupied with their love affairs to notice my loneliness & envy, until I decided I wouldn't go out alone any more to towns, it was, by the way, my first real glimpse of civilization since leaving Hertford, and things go on just the same as ever I find, so they won't miss me if I don't visit them much & I'm not likely to wither, no-one cares for soldiers these days even if they are as lonely as ever, I have decided to become a recluse, & in future my evenings shall be spent (a) study (b) shooting rabbits (c) sleeping, and of course I have always got the thing I invariably turn to in moments of loneliness, you, for to be able to sit down & write out all my feelings is a pleasure I cannot equal while we are apart. I still feel close to you as I write, I do hope you read every word, & feel the same as I did when I put them on paper, but I feel sure you must do, surely a year apart has drawn us closer together instead of making us become indifferent to each other. [...]

And now sweetheart, two questions, how is my mouth organ? & how is my pen, I know that both these items mean money to you, but really darling, now I'm isolated they mean so much more to me, & I feel as if I have lost two of my best friends with only a vague hope of ever getting them back, what do you think?, can you picture me here, in a small hut, just a bit bigger than our shed, with two trestle

²⁰ *Stephen Austin, printers of Hertfordis where Bill did his 7 year apprenticeship.*

tables & a fire, papers stuck all over the walls & a phone which however I tried, could never be connected to speak to you, & all I have for company is a second rate pen which for some unknown reason seems to have had a good mood on since being here, but which still doesn't equal my old one, and a bottle of beer at my elbow, there, apart from the telephonist, we are all the company I can salvage from the wreckage of life, pity me therefore, & send the old mouth organ along, I feel sure the boys would love to hear it sometimes, as if only for their dear sakes, please have a go at getting it for me darling.

I had my identity disc returned O.K., apparently it was dropped in Hertford & the police found it & returned it to my darling wife, what a good job you were known to them, because there is absolutely no means of returning it to any set address is there? Did you notice if the links were broken again, I know the catch is foolproof, so it couldn't have been that which caused the trouble, and I must confess I was extremely concerned when I found it was gone, I tried to think how & where I had lost it, and all to no avail, but my vaguest hope that it was lost in Hertford came true & now I am wearing it again, this time securely fastened & all links tightened as much as I safely dare, so if I should lose it again, you won't reproach me too severely will you darling because it won't be my fault, but I shall take jolly good care of it don't you worry, it is one of my dearest treasures.

It's left off raining now, & all is bright and fresh & green and a treat to behold, but unfortunately I can't take a stroll out tonight because I have taken over orderly N.C.O.'s job while the real one has gone out for a drink or two, but in any case I should have stopped in to write to you [...] (*almost a page of adoration*) ---
Goodnight [..]

Sunday. This letter seems to follow on from the previous one so could be 25th May.

Here I am again darling, and it's pouring with rain again, quite April weather we seem to get these days, and the showers are extremely heavy when they do come too, but as always, it mars not the beauty of the place, and as I sit here I can look out through the office window, across beautiful green hills, and fields cut up with the stone walls we saw so much of on the Isle of Man, remember? It is a pretty scene, one I shall always be able to picture, and if I had a camera, I bet the snap I could take would hold you spellbound, Shottle country is indeed beautiful and worthy of a little publicity, I composed a poem last night about the camp, and will forward a copy to

you just as soon as I get some typed out, and if I stay here long, I shall write one all about the beauty around us, all I want is the right sort of day, and mood, and I can turn out a masterpiece.

Well darling, I haven't much in the way of news since yesterday, we had an N.C.O.'s conference today in which a number of points cropped up for attention, it seems that our very worthy officer thinks we are slacking off a bit, so we have to pull our socks up about this way, but actually there is no real need for it, and I don't think anyone will be greatly worried by it. My schoolteacher friend and myself spent an interesting morning on camouflage nets, they are terrific things, and we hang them up on framework & work the materials in and out of the holes, the finished article has quite a pleasing effect, and one feels a certain amount of satisfaction with the time spent on it all. They are now draped around the gun pit, and I should imagine it would be difficult to detect from the air, another feather in our cap I suppose.

Sunday up here is very amusing to me, two or three of the younger lads have girls from either Belper or Wirksworth, and on Sundays these young ladies walk out to see their lovers, a distance of about five miles each way from either town, and when they get here, they just swap a few words over the wall and they're off again, and if anyone strange should stray out here, however old or plain she may be, the whole camp turns out to meet her, it tickles me to death, they must feel the loneliness very acutely to react in this way, although as you may have already gathered, I love it, and really want nothing else.

The air sentry stands on the gun pit edge, binoculars up, scanning the approach roads for as far as a mile, and should anyone be coming this way, we know all about it, our men are good at descriptions of various cars, men & women, and as I said, we miss very few details, mainly, I suppose, because they are so few and far between we cannot possibly miss much. This life, this lovely lonely life, if only you could share it with me, that's all I ever ask, & then my happiness could indeed be complete, I could ask for nothing more, because I feel positive you would react to this life in the same way that I do. I know it's doing me an immense amount of good, and I try with every opportunity that occurs, to rub it into the powers that be, that I'd hate to ever have to leave the place, and I really believe I shall stay now, I do hope so.

A little while ago I went out in the sergeant's car down to one of our spotting chairs, they are situated a good 300 yds from the site, and by virtue of the twists in the road, the distance one has to cover to get at them makes it about twice as far.

Anyhow, we knew that cattle were doing considerable damage to them, and so we intended bringing this particular one in for the night, and when we got there, it was tipped over & broken, the telephone was ripped off its wires & knocked to bits, and the chairs are a real job of work you know, on pivots and worth a considerable amount of cash, so I guess there'll be hell to pay for someone as soon as it goes in for repair. We have since found out that the old bull of whom I told you in an earlier letter, is now loose in the field, and so he is the one to whom the damage is attributed anyway, whatever did it, did it thoroughly, and it will be a job to put right. That is the only exciting thing that has happened today, and we weren't there to see that, so I guess you'll say we have a dull time here, although it's really very stimulating, and as you have probably heard enough times already, I don't want to leave here while the war is on.

I think I told you that my stripe should soon be paid up now, well it is about due next Friday all being well, and I must say that extra 1/9 a week will be very welcome, I do get most awfully hard up even out here in the wilds, because we get regular visits from both Y.M. and S. A. vans who sell us our fill of cakes & tea & of course the inevitable cigarettes, although Sunday is a bad day in the camp, no-one has any spare, and those unfortunate enough to be without have to beg borrow or steal, but never buy, from some more fortunate. I have five left from the twenty you sent this week, & I've simply got to make those last until tomorrow evening somehow, until the S.A. van appears again, and my already depleted purse will suffer the final blow.

I have just remembered that I forgot to tell you about Lionel the cat, she has two lovely little kittens, one is just like your Pixie & promises to be a real pet, they are going to keep them both, to live a righteous & sober Shottle life. I mentioned Lionel because on looking out of the window again, I can see our sentry sitting on a ladder down to the gun pit, eating his tea, and Lionel beside him, a very unwarlike scene you will agree, they make a pretty picture indeed, & fit in perfectly with this existence.

I think, my darling, that I have written all there is for the last two days, and all that remains to say, [...] I'm orderly sergeant for tomorrow, so until tomorrow my dearest [...] Goodnight [...]

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
28 May (1941)*

Dear Wife,

Forgive the coldness & formality of this opening, but after receiving two letters from you this morning, both severely ticking me off for not writing, I feel justified in getting a little tough. First of all, I have been here at my new address for 12 days, during which time I have written eight letters to you, all extremely long ones, this being the ninth and it works out to more than every other day, which you MUST agree, considering their length, is damn good. In my last letter to you, written on Monday night & posted Tuesday morning, I tried to explain that though I have it much easier now, my time is filled right up, this letter is being started in the dinner hour, because till eight at least tonight I shall be very busy with training & also after that I have to learn myself. If you don't mind me saying so, I think you are very unreasonable, and in spite of all the love you profess, I am beginning to wonder a little, do you love me as much as you say? I can understand your annoyance at not receiving quite so many letters from me, & I can see I shall have to shorten them & try to get in one per day, but I'm sure you won't find them half as interesting. Now for your end of the mail business, firstly let me tell you that every letter so far from you has been postmarked at Hertford 4 days before I get it, todays having been posted on the 24th May, and till this morning, I too, had gone without for two or three days, but I can't remember sending you a rip snorting letter about it, although I will if that's how you prefer things, don't forget that two can play at a game, and I am trying my hardest. Stripes take time, & another thing you don't seem to grasp is that I don't work in the office now, I can't grab odd moments in which to write, but have to give up dinner times or wait till the day is done, but it seems to me that no amount of explaining will make you see sense, as I shan't bother any more. I think the whole trouble is that you are getting browned off, & you had better take your summer holiday early in June, & spend a week or so at Shottle, I must see you soon somehow, & that will be the only way. I might be able to wangle one or two nights for sleeping out, but not all of them, & I shall be able to see you most evenings, that being a certainty, so perhaps you will give me some definite date to look forward to, & in the meantime I shall be looking for digs for you, there is very little more to say now, but I'll try to write again tonight, but since you complain so bitterly, I shall try to get this posted by the afternoon, just to let you know how I feel about it all. And remember, I

love you even though you don't reciprocate it, or do you? please let me know for sure, & cheer up, because I really do love & adore you,

Searchlight Camp, Shottle
29th May (1941)

Dearest Love,

This is my tenth letter from Shottle, try to check up will you, it seems to me that you are not getting them all, although I do hope that by the time this one arrives you will have been able to account for them all, as I have just read your ticking off letter again, and I don't like it a bit, it appears to me that the post is definitely at fault, and I suggest you vent your next spell of annoyance on the Postmaster general.

Well darling, I guess you should be fuming over my letter I sent off dinnertime, I was lucky enough to catch someone going out for the afternoon to post it for me, and you should have it by now. There is another difficulty I have to contend with, our only posting system is to rely on giving them to someone else, we can rarely post our own, & if the person concerned forgets, well, they're late getting to you that's all, and you really cannot blame me.

Enough of this moaning spell, but you will realize now that I am extremely indignant about your attitude because it was unjustified, & I hope you have got all your back numbers now & realised you must have been hasty. Firstly, How are you? And is Penny alright. I am pleased to read that she is still improving in her intelligence, and I could just imagine her strutting round with her blanket the other bedtime after finding it for herself, I hope she continues to improve. How do you get on with the aunts now? You haven't said much about them lately, and I do feel you might be bravely sticking it out, when a word from me might put it all right for you.

We have had a busy day today, it is now 9 oclock, and we have only really just finished the day. This morning as usual was maintenance, cleaning Lewis guns for me, and this was followed by the usual two hours training for the men, of which I am one of the leading lights as an instructor. After dinner the weather became definitely hot, and this was rather bad, as there was some real work to do in the way of making paths etc., but I managed to keep perspiration down to the minimum and was glad when tea came up, we had fried fish. After tea I took another session of rifle drill, and though I am becoming proficient as an instructor, I still have my awkward moments, and there are times when I manage to get a bit tied up, and I felt very embarrassed

when one of those I am trying to teach has to tell me how to do it, but on the whole I am improving though I say it myself, and with a few more weeks experience I should manage to be pretty good. After this we all had an hour manning drill, and finished off at 8.30 with some more path making, this happens daily now, and work is going on apace, the site is definitely more attractive than G.V. and you should see our canteen now, it's a really fine job of work, and a wireless too. It is distempered pale green & cream, & looks lovely. All the woodwork is painted green to match, and there is a counter at one end which consists of an old dresser, but it has been repainted to match the door there & looks absolutely marvellous. It is also used as a mess hut and for recreation we have a table tennis set at one end, but unfortunately we have very little time in which to use it, however, the effect on the whole is very nice, and should you decide to come & stay with me, I hope you shall see it one evening. Talking of staying here, the farmhouse is definitely out, they have no room, & even the skivvy lives out, so I shall have to make enquiries further afield but I feel sure I can find accommodation somewhere for you nearby, will let you know any further results. You asked me if my new sweetheart had lost her interest for me, on the contrary, she gets more and more beautiful each day just as you do. Her freshness & beauty impress one more as one drinks in the various scenes. Last night I took a walk by myself towards Belper way, but as soon as I got to the outskirts of the town, I turned back, although I really enjoyed the evening. At each bend of the road a different sight unfolds to dazzle one with its beauty, and one scene I remember vividly. Huge sweeping valleys, backed by hills almost high enough to be called mountains, and gorse everywhere, with a lovely forest of firs, you know what beautiful shades of green there are in fir trees, they add a beauty to this particular view that is breath-taking.

The foreground is broken by several stately oaks, and in the evening sunshine they were so beautiful as to appear almost unreal, they really are indescribable. We had a real storm a little later, I wasn't home by this time, and on the crest of one hill I watched it overtake me, every little detail in the surrounding country is silhouetted clearly against the hillsides, they look as if cut out of card, but when the storm came up, the lightning was vivid, & the clouds very angry, while the thunder reverberated through the hills and vales like the crack of doom, I got pretty wet, but couldn't help standing every now & then to admire it all. I was in bed at 10, having nothing more to keep me out & being pretty tired, for you will remember I was O.S. the day before, so I was in need of some rest. Joe has just come in from the farm, & he says his friends will make enquiries, he is very thick with the farm people & goes over there every day, so we ought to have something pretty definite soon for you, & when I want you

to get here just as soon as you like before I go & get moved again, so please pray for us to be reunited, & also put in a little bit about a sleeping out pass for me on my off duty nights.

Well darling, I haven't a lot to add to this for today, except that I have just been corrected with my address, don't put Near Belper any more, just write BELPER in capital letters, it seems that might be the cause from this end for the mail being delayed, and I always try to address mine clearly, so the post office should have no excuse after this.

Now sweetheart, I must ask you to forgive me for complaining so bitterly, please try to understand how I feel, and also be a little tolerant with me for the shortage of letters if you fail to get one every day. I don't write every day for the simple reason that I can't [...]. We mustn't quarrel in letters must we, it's bad enough to be parted [...] I shall not be able to get home for some time yet (at least Another six weeks) and you will agree that is a terrible while to wait. [...]

It is 11 oclock now, and I ought to be in bed, because in all probability I shall be on Rouser tonight, and therefore should get a bit of sleep in [...] you could bring that lovely dress with & if you arrive on a Friday, I understand there is a dance in Belper every Saturday evening, & I might be able to wangle something for us, so if you think it's worth the chancing, you might bring it. ""goodnight my sweet....

Searchlight Camp, Shottle.

29th May (1941)

10 Pages-half in ink and half in pencil

I W E C O M E S A F U L Y Q A I I F E D R I V E R

My very own darling,

[....] {*Whole page of adoration*}

I received your little parcel today in which were 40 cigarettes and the loveliest, longest letter I ever had from you, though I found it a little depressing, for when you feel sad, so do I, but darling, I sympathise with you , and I understand fully how you

must have felt when you wrote that letter. Perhaps it would be a good thing if the aunts were to clear out & leave you to go your own way, though I know you'd never be happy living with your mother for long, and she too would soon get on your nerves, so consider wisely and long before coming to any drastic decision.

I'm sorry the garden worries you as much as it seems to, but don't let it worry you too much, if you can't manage it, well let it go, we'll soon pull it straight when I get back again, and from various rumours it seems to me that the war will soon be over, because America won't be long before they're in now, and you did want something like that to cheer you didn't you darling? I too shall be very glad, I'm heartily sick of army life and routine, my only bright moments are those I get to myself to appreciate my memories of you together with the surrounding scenes, and believe me those moments become fewer and fewer, I guess they'll be even less soon, because there is to be a real Blitz on training, which means very little time to ourselves, so make the most of all these long letters, they may drop of again soon, and it won't be my fault.

I'm glad you've got a few of those I have already sent, I was beginning to get worried about them, I don't know yet whether to blame the person I asked to post them, or the post itself, I know it's a busy system...[...].
 Lines denote one hour, during which time I have been paid by my old officer, he says I am getting as sunburnt as hell up here, so of course I enthused about the place & put in all the spokes I could to prevent myself being moved away, but he seems quite content to leave me here for the time being, for which I am truly thankful.

By the way, Joe has arranged with his farmer friends to make enquiries about some digs for you [...] the question of a date arose, I'm sorry Marjorie's wedding would have to be postponed, but surely you wouldn't let that interfere with a week's heaven, or would you? After all, it's June that counts, I shall not see you all that month and it will be about ³/₄ through July before I get a 48, so please excuse yourself to Marjorie & come in June, & remember, we were married in June, the 25th, perhaps we could have a special evening somewhere to celebrate this our wedding anniversary, even though it may be a few days late, so please do consider it seriously.

This afternoon we had a bit of a test, a captain came out to try us, and I managed alright (one word) until the Vital duty was brought out, and my poor old sergeant came a cropper for not teaching me, I could have taken the blame, but for the fact that he didn't even know how to teach me, so he got all the hot water & I merely

got sympathy and ½ marks for trying, better luck next time, & it's done a really good thing in bringing out the fact that being an N.C.O., makes us miss bits of training because we always have to be training others, so I shall be having a busy time soon, I can see myself night after night, hour after hour, on the S/locator learning how to select a correct leading point (don't worry about technical terms, I'll explain one day if you're interested). This is the most vital part of my duties as a No. 6, and I simply have got to learn but never have the time. We had a few tests on rifle sighting & fire orders at which I shone, having all the Tuxford memories fresh in mind, in fact, as I've so often said, if I were in infantry I could easily be full sergeant now with my knowledge, but unfortunately one doesn't need infantry knowledge very much, and the biggest problem of all is the fact that however well one has learned a thing, if the occasion doesn't arise now & then to make you think, it is soon forgotten, but up here we do get a bit of basic training occasionally, and that just about keeps me alert, although I agree with Joe that army life tends to make one mentally lazy, a really bad habit I mustn't get into, being in debt is bad enough. Yes [...] I have to admit owing five bob to the canteen account, & I don't quite see how to meet it yet, but you did tell me to let you know, & it's not too bad a debt, perhaps you might solve it for me, I pass over the subject lightly [...].

I cleaned Lewis Guns again this morning, I'm getting expert at stripping those now, and this was followed as usual by the training period during which I should be learning & instead I have to be teaching someone else, honestly I have learnt more off the gunners than they have from me on the quiet, but they think I know all about it, & that's the secret of success in the army, bluff, so I'm not worried about that. The afternoon was split up by work for the first part, during which we shifted a huge heap of pine poles, I immediately thought of our little spinney & the??? last summer, and

each one I moved, I kissed you [...] so it became a pleasant task, to be followed by the mild examination which was stopped by torrential rain, and which still continues, we've had nothing but rain here for the last week, is it the same at your end of the world? [...] Shottle remains beautiful if somewhat damp [...] Tomorrow is Friday, this letter will go to post in the morning [...]

Break for supper, the canteen is full of boys, some playing table tennis, some reading, some trying to write, but there is so much noise there with the wireless & chatting that it's useless trying to do anything, but eat, so I paid my bill, bought 2 Mars & a box of matches, and here I am with 1/- (5p) to get through the week as, it will serve me right I expect if I have to manage somehow, and I could if I had to, but believe me, it's rotten being hard up in the army.

It is still pouring with rain & looks as if it will continue all night, I hope it does, we shan't get a rouser then, & we shall have another full night's sleep, making a week of unbroken nights. I haven't been out rabbiting lately, but the sergeant still goes each time we have a fine evening, but then if he has any writing to do he can manage it during the day while we are all busy at work, so I give up my little pleasure of rabbit stalking to write to you [...] sooner or later I shall have to take an evening out, and then there will be no letter, [...] They shot a baby one last night, about as big as a kitten, it seemed such a shame, especially as they would need about ten of that size to make a good meal, however, if it's put with another one or two we shall manage a few more cigarettes I guess, although the other day we had a big one to get rid of, and the Y.M. had no cigs so they gave us a pound & a quarter of tea for it, a really good bargain don't you think? Especially as we often have to drink cocoa for teatime owing to the meagre issue of tea in the army these days.

I'm glad you liked the little brooch I sent, I got it from one of the boys, and paid him for it tonight, was it in good condition when you received it? I'm afraid it's not gold, and therefore not very valuable, but perhaps you can keep it shiny enough to wear now & again in memory of me [...]

I have been pretty lucky with this letter, hardly any interruptions and a whole evening to myself, all the others have been working, I don't know how I got missed but I have made the most of it to such an extent that as you can see, my pen has run completely dry, so you'll have to excuse me continuing in pencil.

Tomorrow is my orderly sergeant day again, which means that during the night I can write you another long letter, but after tomorrow, I wonder what I shall use for stamps, I have used all those you sent me, & really can't afford any more, so what with one thing and another you'll think my love is an expensive thing, but if you feel I'm a little spoilt do as you wish with me, [...]

I was very sorry to hear of poor old uncle Ted's ²¹ illness, I do so hope he may pull through, but his very age is against him, and I think he will have to be very tough to get away with it now, I hope you'll continue to let me know his progress. ²² It is indeed nice to know you are now a fully qualified car driver, though I must confess I learned of this latest success of yours with a pang of regret, silly I know, but you used to be so dependent on me, & the old war has seemed to make me more dependent on you now, for happiness as much as ever, for finance, and after for advice on little things, so perhaps you will be able to understand how I feel. You did mention while I was at home, about driving a Y.M.C.A. van about in your spare time, why not go ahead? It will keep you occupied, and I think you should always be able to get plenty of tea then, it must be pretty plentiful or else how did our girls get enough to swap for a rabbit?.....let me know if you decide to do this.....

Even my pencil is wearing down now, & soon I shall have to be putting a new point on it-----here it is, I should have refilled my pen, but it meant going to the office, & if I got in there, the officers are still about, & I might click for a long technical discussion, for instance last night the letter I wrote to you was interrupted quite a lot one way and another, I had to stop and make some paste for the officer, who was busy making some covers for special papers, then later he wanted some help, and I ended up by doing the job for him, all of which took away valuable time, and I ended the letter at midnight, and I was very thankful for the quiet night we fortunately had.

I do hope you are able to understand all that I write, I know I scribble at times.....In your letter of today, I noted with a pang of regret that you were able to see Ted ²³, I nearly cried with the saddest memories of all the past days we have had together, & I should have so loved to be with you when you met. The mere mention of Ted's name couples itself with our romance, violent quarrels on Friday nights, hectic parties, local concerts, dances, & most of all, lovely stolen nights of love in the

²¹ Dale

²² Ted Dale actually died in December 1941-he was about 81 years old and had started work aged 10 years as an agricultural labourer picking stones

²³ Ladds

little lodge we both know so well, does that bring back memories to you too? Can you remember dark foggy nights, or rainy stormy ones, when instead of taking you home we went to the lodge, & fumbled for the key under the stone & having found it, unlocked the door to happiness & a night of wonderful bliss and love. How guilty we felt in the morning, but what a prize we had, beautiful stolen memories which no-one could ever take from us, and I at least am richer for them. There are many more such thoughts flashed through my mind as soon as I read Ted's name, there is no doubt at all, that he was my very best friend, I never felt quite the same about any one else, no, not even dear old Len, & goodness knows I miss him enough. Never again shall we know such times, they are gone forever, & if we should all manage to survive, and meet again, it will be just a fleeting glimpse of what used to be, and will only serve to make us hungry for what we can never know again.

Enough of sadness, I really must end now darling,I have been writing now for three & a half hours,, & while there is some daylight left I want to study just a bit,if you see Mum in the meantime, tell her I shall be writing to her too, by the way she should have got my letter by now, but I haven't heard from her at all since I got back, please find out if she did hear from me, & if she's sore, try to point out tactfully that I have more than I can comfortably manage with study, work & you now, and add to that one evening's rabbiting a week, I'm sunk completely, so perhaps she will stop behaving silly & let me have a line....I seem to be writing more than I get back, I hope this state of affairs will not continue, you have home, friends of one kind or another, garden, car driving, dances, stray soldiers (don't take offence) & a thousand and one other diversions, whilst I have but one:- Shottle & perhaps one evenings rabbiting.....I know you are all having a hard time, but at least you have soft beds, & a brick wall all round, my hut leaks, & the draught between the cracks in the wall has given me a sore throat ever since I got here.....[...].

Searchlight Camp, Shottle
30th May (1941)

Darling,

The first words with my new pen, thank you so very very much for sending it at last, now, my luck will change, and from now onwards everything will go smoothly and well, already the charm has started working in that my stripe pay is through, it appeared on orders tonight, & I get back pay for three weeks, and from what I am told, I draw the full amount increase for 91 days before it starts to be split up for you to share, and after today's experiences, you will agree I shall need a little

extra cash for a while, here is what happened. As you already know, I was supposed to be orderly dog today, well I was, but at dinner time I had to pack up & get ready to go to a demonstration at another Battery, it was all very interesting, but mostly eyewash as all the officers agreed. It was a demonstration designed to create efficiency amongst other Batteries in the training, & by the time the afternoon was finished, so was I, my poor old head is bursting asunder again, but worse was to befall, I forgot to mention that I went in company with 2 officers 3 sergeants & 1 lance sergeant, I being the only one striper, & I had to go where they went, do what they did, & drink when & what they drank, so one way and another I got well and truly broke & in debt again, so I shall be glad of it, but I shall send you ten bob (50p) a fortnight all the time I Am getting it all, & then when 91 days are up, you will get the 7/- (35p). I can hear you saying what a hope you have of ever getting 5/- a week from me, but seriously I mean it, & you just wait & see if I do. Another cheering thought today was, when I had my drinks with the officers, they drank to my second stripe, so things are looking up, & my conscientiousness & hard study will eventually be rewarded (I hope) by a further stripe.

Some rather less pleasant news follows, with all this new operational stuff afoot which makes us so many men short, leave will soon be suspended indefinitely, so you really must try to come on the date you mentioned, by which time I shall have fixed up digs for you, let's see, it was July 6th or 7th wasn't it? Well, I shall expect you this extravagance or not, so don't let me down darling will you.

-----line denotes all night, feeling so very ill as I did, I have been guilty of sleeping on duty, I just laid down for an hour to rest my head, and went to sleep, and the telephonist said he couldn't wake me, I don't think he tried very hard, but all the same, I have been asleep, & I feel very upset about it even though I know it won't really matter, it's wrong in principle, and I simply am a stickler for correctness of behaviour, so I have gone down in my own estimation. It is now five o'clock in the morning which means I have been sleeping for 2 ½ hours, it will take me some time to sufficiently recover my prestige to forget that.

I fear that this letter will have to be a short one now, but so long as you get it on Monday. Just to cheer you up, it will have done what I wanted it to, and by Tuesday you should receive my official recording of the weekend.....put it down mainly to high Blood Pressure, my biggest bogey in this army life, because if I always could feel fit, I know I should cut a better figure, but you don't feel much like

shouting & rushing about when your head is bursting, so have a little mercy when judging me.....

Thank you for the account of Ted's ²⁴ visit to Hertford, but there's not much chance of getting home to see him I fear, so you may safely assume that I can't meet him till the war is over, & I sincerely hope that won't be long. Talking of letters I must dash off one to Mum, I promised you I'd write tonight & I simply must, and as for Ted, I owe him one letter having answered his first one, & if he didn't get it, we can only blame the post again,in the meantime give him my ever living regards, tell him he is still my best pal, & one day we'll reunite. And now.....I really must say goodbye till Sunday [...] Goodbye Darling.....

P.S. Letter enclosed for Mum.

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle,
(Possibly 1st June 1941)*

Darling,

Whit Sunday, I wonder what you're doing at this moment [...] The weather is marvellous, the grass is beautifully green, & all the birds are happy. I am laying outside on my groundsheet to write to you, and a more idyllic existence cannot be imagined, if only you were here to share it [...]

Once again I must thank you for the lovely gift of my repaired pen, you've no idea how nice it is to be able to write easily & without fear of blots or running out of ink, [...] We have just finished dinner, most of the boys have rolled their beds down for a nap which will last until tea, but I prefer to be out with all this wonderful sunshine we're having. I must tell you about our food now, we are under a brand new scheme:- everything we are eating now is tinned, and I mean everything. It is going to be tried out for six weeks, and based on the amounts we are getting to start with, we shall all be too well fed to fight. It started yesterday dinner time, I'll tell you what we had to start with. Steak & Kidney pudding, I was amazed that the pastry could be tinned, but it was and lovely too, this was helped out with diced carrots, potatoes & peas, for pudding we had tinned plums, and excellent meal you'll agree, & beautifully cooked, clean & hygienic. Tea was just ordinary bread again with cake,

²⁴ Ladds

but for supper we had tinned carrot soup, & beans on toast, it was too much for me, I couldn't eat it all. Breakfast this morning was corn flakes & milk followed by hot tinned fish cakes, lovely they were, & dinner was braised beef, with diced vegetables again, followed by tinned treacle pudding, absolutely marvellous. I don't know what's on the menu for supper tonight, but it's all typed out & hanging in the cookhouse if we do want to find out, anyway everyone thinks it a grand success, we have never been so well & cleanly fed before.

Yesterday (Saturday) was my day off, I was up by dinnertime, & washed & shaved & went for a long walk, I talked for nearly an hour with a farmer some distance from here, he had two evacuees with him from Southend, they were bonny lads too, he said they were like skeletons when they came to him, & I believe him too, because there are a number of kiddies up here from Southend, & they all look as if they came from slum areas, but the open life of this district will make them fit, & will do them good which will last them the rest of their lives. What a long talk does to one, the farmer was a friendly bloke, told me he has a son getting married that afternoon so he had to use his evacuees to help him in the field. I told him your history & that I was married, he seemed quite surprised, & I tapped him about accommodation, but like all the other sources I have so far tried, I have negative results.

I am going out to Another place tonight, an inn, some distance from here, but strongly recommended by Joe's friends, and if it's not too far away, I shall fix up something for you. The question of accommodation in these parts is a serious one, they are all farmers, & each one is bung full of people from Southend, & each place we think of is full up, but even if it meant you staying in Belper I feel sure it would be worth it, though that would be a matter for you to decide, for as you have rightly guessed, there is no bus service out to these parts, & you would be nearly an hours walk from me, so if I can't find anywhere nearby, you must make the final decision.

In the evening I returned for tea, and after having tea, I was at a loss for something to do so as there is an urgent need for gardening, I did some of the camp's vegetable patch for the pleasure of it. I dug & planted 6 rows each of carrots & onions, & by the time I was finished, it was supper time. After supper I still felt energetic, so I've claimed a piece of ground in the front, which I dug over, & I'm going to make it into a flower garden. All along the front edge I shall sow Californian Poppies, & behind them shall be a scattering of Night Scented Stocks, and at the very back I shall scatter seeds of mixed Clarkia, it will make a lovely combination of

colour & scent, & will, I think look nice, & make an imposing entrance to our camp, as it is by the side of the Parade Ground. By the time I had finished all this, I was beginning to feel a bit tired, but after that huge supper I needed a bit of exercise & I felt no worse for it this morning. We made a marrow heap this morning, the farmer gave us a cartload of manure, I wished it was for our garden, but no such luck, & we have planted 24 seeds, which if they all grow, should give us all the marrows we're likely to need. The remainder of the manure is going for the use of a tomato bed, we shall be able to get some plants & this time I hope to be able to nurse them right up to fruiting, tho' I guess it's asking a lot to hope to see them through the season, however, I shall take the utmost pains with them, & hope to reap the fruits therefrom.

Tomorrow, I think I am going to the seaside, to a place called Saltfleet, we are going to do a bit of Lewis gunning, firing at a moving target, & Charlie went last time, he says they had a good time, especially as that is the home of my officer; his people keep a big hotel there, & he took the whole crowd of 53 there, where they all had a pint each on the house, & free packets of biscuits, quite a big hole in his weeks pocket money I should think, but they're very well off so I don't suppose he missed it. I shall let you know all about it of course if I do go.

You mentioned in your last letter that the Aunts had at last decided to look for a home in Watford, well, if they want to go, they're welcome, but if it means goodbye home, I shall feel very very sad, because Four Winds is half our married life, you are the other half, & without my wife there, & the knowledge of my home in someone else's hands would indeed make me miserable, I do hope you won't regret it, though I feel sure you'll tire of living with your Mother if you have to stay there long, but that is a gloomy subject & one will not dwell on too long.

Lionel the cat is making a fuss of me this afternoon, I think the weather must be affecting her, she has two of the loveliest little kittens, one like herself, & a black one. She is very much like your Pixie, & reminds me of home. I saw Mollie's puppies the other day too, they are proper little beauties, real bouncing babies, & good lookers considering their parentage, I quite took a fancy to them.

I am, as I said, going out tonight with some of Joe's friends, I have been asleep I'm afraid, for two hours, my poor old nose is a bit red now, the sun has some real heat in it these days, but by the time I'm due to come & see you again, I shall be a real seasoned looking veteran.

Monday Morning (Possibly 2nd 1941)

I went out as arranged last night, we explored new country, being in search of trout, having been told we could do some trout tickling, but though we thoroughly searched two streams, we found no trace of any life at all. The scenery through which the streams have their beds, is marvellous, they are pure delight, passing through sweet smelling fields & tiny wooded clumps, the banks are profusely flowered with garlic, a lovely white flower, but the smell belies their looks. There were also bluebells, which in their natural surroundings looked beautiful, & ragged robins helped to increase the beauty of the scene. The stream which we followed the furthest winds, as do all such of their kind, & with the tiny natural waterfalls, the rippling provided a musical accompaniment to the birds in their songs, truly a delightful ramble. After this we gave up looking for fish & returned to the car, & went to the Railway Inn, where we hoped to find a place for you to stay, it is situated 2 miles from here, & in a lovely spot, we spent 2 hours in there in company with 2 farmer friends who simply wouldn't allow us to buy any drinks & it must have been a fairly expensive evening for them, as we were on whiskey most of the time. I thoroughly enjoyed sitting there studying faces. Of which there was a variety, the pub has a terrific turnover being situate on the main road, & I must say they get plenty of stray callers at the weekend. At turning out time our sergeant in whose car we were riding, felt decidedly reckless for we returned to camp in record time, he never took his foot off the accelerator from start to finish, & if you could see the twisted roads, you might marvel at my being here to record these events, however, we got back safely & so to bed, I shall give you a more detailed account in tonight's letter, I am orderly sergeant today, & just rushing this off to catch the post man this morning, so until tonight my love, I'll say goodbye [...]

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
Monday June 2nd (1941)*

My Darling,

[...] just fancy, Whit Monday, and what a contrast from yesterday in the weather too, yesterday it was absolutely too hot to bear and we all worked either stripped to the waist, or at least in shirtsleeves, whilst today, the winds are doing their best to tear the huts down, and so awfully cold, I have done nothing but shiver all day, and this is the first time I have been really warm since I got up this morning. I am sitting in the office, once again in sole charge of the camp and what few men

there are left, the majority having gone for a Bath Parade, and it always seems to fall to my lot these days to act as orderly sergeant on these occasions, but it at least affords me a little peace and quiet while they're away, and I have time to write to you. Our officer has gone out for the day, on that Lewis Gun trip I mentioned, and no-one else from this Section goes until Wednesday, when I expect I shall go, so that should give me something to write about.

I received your acknowledgment of my ticking off letter this morning, I hope I didn't upset you too much, although I still think you deserved it, but, as you suggested, I really did regret sending it afterwards, though at least you will realise now how busy I am at times [....]

The place I visited last night would be an ideal one for you to stay at if you didn't mind the distance from me, it's a lot nearer than Belper, while at the same time there is a fair bus service which stops outside the place from Belper, so perhaps it is one of the best places to be, but I would not definitely decide yet, as it will be at least a month before you come this way, and according to the farmer friend, we may even yet find somewhere a bit nearer, of one thing I am perfectly sure, I'm determined that you must come here providing I'm still here when you are free, July is such a long way off [....]

I didn't have time to tell you all about last night, because I was in a hurry to catch the post this morning, but we had some real fun when we got back to camp, more than half the fellows had been out on the binge that night, and we made a merry crowd, there was much shouting and back slapping, N.C.O.'s were as mere Gunners, and I must say, I felt exceedingly merry, & the beauty of it was that it didn't cost us a penny. Later in the night, one of the guards, who had previously been out, was prowling on his beat, and he had to climb through the wire fence, over which hung the fire buckets to reach the path, as he was decidedly tight, and it was very dark, I fear he was none too careful, and his rifle, which was slung on his back, caught the bottom of the fire pail and tipped it so that at least half the contents spilled down his neck, he came in later to dry himself, and the air was blue with profanity, though we are still laughing about it. The boys are a witty crowd, and at bedtime, one rarely gets to sleep before 1 o'clock, we lay and joke nearly all night, last night for instance, one of them has a peculiar kind of rash cropped out on his hands, for which he is under the M.O., and he lay in bed, wondering what really was the matter with him, quite suddenly he said, do you know, I can feel the pain from my vaccination tonight, so his immediate neighbour chipped in and said, perhaps it's a year ago today since it

was done, & the germs are celebrating their anniversary. This remark made me laugh so heartily I felt I must pass it on, do tell me what you think of it-----

Interruption of one hour due to unexpected visit of Lt. Gen. Grove-White, 2nd A.A. Corps. Commander, & A.D.C. My goodness, what a do, but he was a decent old top, and didn't seem to be looking for trouble, and went away pretty pleased with everything in general. Not even the big noises at Battery knew of his visit, and the Major was in a flat spin for the rest of the afternoon, but he's only small fry now. I made him sign our visitor's book, and with this very pen, so it has started a distinguished career.-----Long break, just after the Lt. gen. had left, all the bath parade boys returned, they went right to Derby & found the baths closed, and now they're all back I shan't get much writing done.

It is now 11.30 pm. I am soon going off duty, they are taking me off because I have to go out all day tomorrow on a day course, thank heavens it's no longer this time. I've got to learn plotting, as if I didn't know enough about it already, but I guess it must be something new, and I'm always ready to learn, so tomorrow I go to B.H.Q., and probably the day after, so don't be surprised if the mail drops off a bit for a day or two, though I'll try and find time at the end of the day if I possibly can---the evening has dragged by, we had a pleasant supper, tinned bubble & squeak, & cheese, isn't it amazing what they do manage to get into tins these days, for dinner we had Irish stew, & fresh mashed potatoes, followed by real Xmas pudding, one fellow found a "tanner"²⁵ in his portion, so of course we all demolished ours in search of treasure, but with no further success. All these things came out of tins, and I am given to understand that on the results of this experiment depends the feeding of the whole nation, so we're taking the place of Guinea pigs, but a very pleasant occupation it seems to be, so we won't complain.

I have pressed my trousers & blouse, & cleaned my boots ready for tomorrow and now, after a really hectic day, I'm ready for bed, I hate to end this letter so soon, ...it's now midnight, and I've got to get up at six in the morning, [...]
Goodnight my love, [...]

²⁵ A sixpenny piece

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
Wednesday (Probably June 4th 1941)*

My Darling,

Sorry I didn't write yesterday, but I believe I warned you that I should most probably be unable to, I have just completed my second & last day of the course, & am now back at good old Shottle, having travelled here from G.V. in the S.A. Van as I didn't want to wait for our own car which was out. Phew, that was a course, talk about brain fag, I have a head full of phonetics, geometry, and triangles, but the system, which will decide the fate of S/Lights, and by that I mean will decide whether we are to be kept as such, or disbanded to other more useful units, I repeat, the system when put into operation, will be very successful, providing everyone is keen & efficient, that's why we've been specially selected for the job, & why we've had such a doing. Naturally I mustn't go into any further details here, because to reveal our system would be running the risk of leakage, and bang would go our best chance yet of beating night raids,-----enough said, you will probably be able to judge best by results when we start.

Last night I got back about 9, & had to spend an hour explaining the system to our sergeant, & by the time I was all cleaned up ready for today, I didn't have time to write, & now tonight, I have just a little longer in which to let you know how I've been getting on. First of all, since I can't talk about my course much, I have very little news for you, but I must say that B.H.Q., still gives me the jitters in spite of the fact that I get in more often. The gardens are very beautiful now, with Rhododendrons everywhere in bloom, but this simply wonderful garden is disfigured by corrugated iron huts, & rough paths all over the place. It is very much like Lea Hoe, you can perhaps imagine just another beautiful building requisitioned by government & allowed to go to ruin, but at least they keep the garden in good order, although in spite of all this beauty, I still cannot reconcile myself to being there, & I was as always, glad to get away.

We had no tea, & on arrival here, found that it had all been eaten at this end, & so we had to wait for supper, & I was glad to get something inside me, because being without cash I was unable to buy anything, but thank goodness tomorrow is payday, when I should get enough to cover my canteen account, which has by this time reached alarming proportions, but never worry, I shall get through alright (one word). I had not forgotten Len's wedding, & intend to send a telegram from somewhere, on

Friday, I hope it arrives in time, you can let me know afterwards. It has been a lovely day, the weather is absolutely a scorcher, & being in those tin huts all day had given me a headache, they do hold the heat so, but that's all over for a while anyway, & I shall endeavour to forget it for now, though the very stuff we have been learning all day is enough to make a headache on its own.

On Friday there is to be what is known as a field check, which means we are all going to be tested in our various jobs, & I don't feel any too sure of mine, a number 6 has a lot to remember, & more than that, there is a lot to learn when I started from scratch, but I guess I'll get through O.K. I do hope so anyway, & I'll tell you in due course how I did get on.

I have started another page darling because I hate to send you short letters, but I fear I have nothing to really fill it with so far as news is concerned, & my time is again growing short [...] I forgot to tell you that by going on this mysterious course today, I missed my chance of a trip to the seaside, they have just got back, but I guess the stunt I've been on is more important. -----interruption of 15 minutes while I have to clean the blooming Lewis Gun after someone else has fired it, you will observe the dirty marks, they're gunpowder & oil, & I'm most annoyed about it all, however, I guess I shall get over it, there is still a lot more to do to it yet, I guess I'll have to do it, it seems that I can't find time to fill in a decent letter to you anyhow, [...] I do so want to be with you again, but I must wait till July 5th, as that is obviously the most suitable date for us all [...] by the way I still haven't fixed digs for you, but I will find somewhere, never worry. [...] if Len & Kitty are half as happy as we are they'll be lucky [...] I am yours always & for ever,

Searchlight Camp, Shottle.

Night of 6th-7th (Probably June 1941)

My Darling,

[...] here it is nearly two oclock in the morning, and I have only just been able to settle down to write to you.

These last two days have been hectic ones for me, & now I'm feeling very very depressed, you'll see why as things are recorded. First of all there was the plotting

course of which you already know as much as you should, then today I was orderly sergeant & in addition we had the field check, or an easier description would be to say an examination in action to define whether we are fit or not, & this brought in it's train 2 majors, 3 1 pipers, a couple of sergeant instructors and a whole crowd of 2 strippers, who proceeded to split us into groups & thoroughly cross examine us. I had a hell of a time, having to classify as a No. 6, I failed to come up to standard, but was passed as being fit for the job. It was a nerve wracking business, & I was glad when it was all over, but felt very downhearted when I learned of my failure, I wanted to be a top notcher, but because of sheer lack of experience I didn't qualify. They fix a high standard you see, 100% in all things, and then a lower one to classify as any particular number, well, I failed to pass the standard, but classified O.K., so I hope you'll forgive me, & I promise to do better next time. I had a very awkward moment in manning drill, when asked to report, I stuttered, the first time ever, but what a let down, everyone noticed it, & I can't live it down, but perhaps in a day or two the memory will have died and I shall get over it. I get all worked up and worried, and the consequence was obvious, although it can't be helped & that's that.

Of one thing I am certain, I thought I had enough worries as a gunner in the office, but one stripe is worse, & I am always haunted with the fear of losing it, & that would be fatal, because if they ever do take it away I shall go right off the rails & become a hardened sinner, & I don't think anyone could blame me either.

Enough of gloomy reverie, [...] I got some money this week for my stripe, & was able to clear all accounts, & start level again, & tomorrow night I'm going out on the beer, I must drown all my sorrows for a while & get well & truly merry, I shall take for a companion my fellow worker here, the telephonist, he is good company, & a fellow after my own heart, we are going to the pictures first, & a few drinks later on, so we can't tell what time we're likely to get back, & what's more, don't care. Tonight, to dispel the depression a bit, I did lots more gardening, & now have 4 rows of peas to my credit, & thousands of runner beans, I have planted those all along the walls, & if they'll climb the stone O.K. I shall be rewarded with a fine show, but you should see the amount of seed they've bought, it's really heart-breaking, 12 ozs cabbage seed, 6ozs parsnip, 12 ozs cauliflower, & all the rest is about 500 times as much as we are ever likely to want, so I don't know quite what will be done about it, all I know is that we've got to plant & plant until it's all gone somewhere. I don't know if I mentioned it, but I'm starting a little flower garden & so far have been unable to get the seeds, would you get me some Escholtzias, Clarkia & night scented stock, I do so want to make the place something like home, however distant the

comparison might be, & they were some of our favourites weren't they? I felt tired now, all the digging & planting had done that & I should be in bed now sleeping it off & instead here I am doing my best to keep my eyes open. It really is peculiar the way tiredness overtakes one at 2.30 onwards, I could sleep & sleep, it would be no effort at all, & yet in the morning when I should normally be ready for it, I have a job to keep my eyes shut.

Our tinned foods are still going strong, but they aren't so nourishing as fresh stuff, & you mention the absence of these things, well, we still have fresh meat days twice a week, & this means fresh vegetables, so on the whole our diet is fairly well balanced, but you can bet your darling life, that we shouldn't be on tinned stuff if it would keep much longer, that, I think, is why we're having it, is expired the time limit, & they've got to use it, I bet anything you like to name that is the reason-----
----- I got so sleepy then I had to go out for a walk to wake myself up, I caught the generator guard in the cookhouse & he should have been down the road, but I just scolded him, & off he went, the other guard, on the gate is going home for 48 hours tomorrow, so he's too excited to sleep, & I don't have to worry about him, it will be 4 o'clock when he finishes, & he's going off almost straight away, how I wish it were me, I do miss you so terribly, & all the time I do my gardening I think of you & home, & the sadder I get, [...] here the question of accommodation occurs again, one of my boys has his wife living nearby, 1 ½ miles, she can find something I think, if not at her own place, at someone else's in the village, & if we can't get anything better you simply must take it, I've got to have you soon or I'll go off the deep end [...] Rest assured that when you come (July 5th is the date) you must bring Penny, & I mentioned her to all the places I have tried. You said there should be a vicar here, well, I don't know of one, you see, the church is chapel really, & there is very little else in the immediate vicinity of the camp, but I think this latest channel of enquiries will bring results, & you will have ample time to explore the surroundings for yourself, & I know you'll find it delightful, it's so wonderfully beautiful, & peacefully soothing, when all the world is full of trouble & sorrows, it's nice to know that at least one place is still unaffected by it, & you must share this beauty with me for a brief hour at least.

Regarding time off:- I shall arrange to be Orderly S. twice that week, which will give me two clear days & nights off, & though I should sleep on the site, I shall sleep with you, & the other days, well, if I can't always get out to you, you can come to me, & we'll find a quiet spot not far away from the camp, & yet within easy reach

if duty calls [...] Penny will simply adore the open fields & woods & the little mountain stream, so do come darling even if you do have to stay 1 ½ miles away. You asked me about the garlic, it is of course wild, but whether edible or not I couldn't say, I shall have to ask Joe, & if the report is favourable I'll get you some, though I doubt if the tubas would be much good at this time of the year [...] I have an awful catastrophe to report, I've got a very dud tooth, it seems to have come suddenly so I guess Mr. Hudson (*family dentist in Ware Road*) wasn't very thorough with his last examination, anyway it's crying out for attention, & this time I guess I'll just have to go to the army dentist, & I hear they don't put very good fillings in, two or three of the boys have had theirs done, & within a week, the fillings are out, but I shall have to leave all that to chance, & get there as soon as I possibly can, I'll let you know how soon, & all about it when it's all over.

Just before I started this letter I had a sewing session, I've put on 5 buttons, having been held together for the past week with a safety pin, I have also darned? one pair of black socks with light grey wool, & very nice they look too, & whilst on the subject of socks, will you please see what I have left there, I believe there are one or two pairs? navy blue, woollen ones, and if you find any I should love you to send them on to me somehow, I am reduced to 3 pairs, & the only place I can think as to where they'd be, is at home where I remember putting them to be washed when I was last home.

I got a letter from Mum today, she certainly does seem to have her hands full, says Mr ²⁶is at home too, so I guess she wouldn't be able to sit & write just when & where she likes, actually I think George had a bit of a nerve to shove a kid onto her like that, it's hardly fair, I notice he didn't do it to his own mother, but that's a characteristic of the O'nyons, selfishness to extremes, so we can't complain too much, they just can't help it, Anyway, I shan't expect too many letters from her now that I know how she'd fixed, poor old dear, she doesn't have much of a life does she.

There is one thing I missed acutely this week, & that was your gift of cigarettes, what stopped them, are you feeling a pinch down that way, or is some other soldier getting them? I do hope nothing like that has happened, because despite all the big shots statements, they are becoming more & more difficult to obtain up here, & I have come to rely on your weekly 40 to see me through, so if it's a case of

²⁶ Probably George Onyon

cash now darling, let me know, & I'll see if I can rake up enough to pay for the next consignment.

I sent a telegram off today for Len & Kitty, I do hope they like it, cost me 2/-, & I couldn't get out, so I had to get the sergeant to do it for me, but at least I know it has been sent, now all that remains is to know if they liked it or not. By the time you are reading this they will be well & truly spliced, & if they are half as happy as we are, they'll be lucky indeed, I do wish them every success, you must tell me all about it when you next write.²⁷ [...] *{half page of adoration}*

I am very sleepy now darling, I think it must be the gardening I have been doing, but at least it helps me to be quiet inside, & peace is a salve to broken hearts, for that is what is happening to mine [...]

I forgot to tell you that I have asked to be sent on a P.T., course, I want to get fit again, & also acquire the coveted cross swords, my officer has promised me the first chance that comes along, & I do so hope it comes off, then I could forget S/Lights & be an instructor, but I guess my failure in the classification will bring me a few courses now, they realise I need experience, & I do, I know I could do better if I was taught from scratch, but so long as I can be here for July 5th, all will be well, & they can do as they wish, I'll learn if they give me the opportunities others have had. And now [...] I can scarcely keep awake, I have never know such tiredness as this, ...I hope you can read all I've recorded, & I'll write a long letter on Sunday if we are allowed time off, so until then darling [...]

²⁷ Leonard W. Wagstaff married Kate E. Howlett, 7th June 1941

CHAPTER FOUR

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
Sunday 8th June (& Monday 9th 1941)*

BILL FAILS HIS EXAMS-BUT TEACHES HIMSELF TRIGONOMETRY

Darling Ivy,

How I wish you could be here beside me as I lie here writing, [...] The weather is wonderful again, hot sunshine, birds, a pleasant breeze, & all is peacefully serene, oblivious to wars, the countryside revels in sunshine & flowers. Truly a place for dreams [...] for here amongst the bluebells & daisies one could be alone for ever [...] Two of our boys have their wives here today, I envy them with their passing happiness [...] the perfect answer to my troubled mind is that you & Shottle should be together...I cannot hold out any longer than absolutely necessary, I shall be breaking bounds & giving up my stripe, & it would be worth it really, though I know you would not approve, & therefore I have to remain imprisoned [...] What a ghastly devilish thing this war is, tearing lovers apart, killing families, civilization is being stripped from mankind more each day, and there is very little else in the world but seeking after blood & pleasure, I cannot help feeling disgusted with humanity as I think on it. In this chapter of my life, more beauty is seen in a neatly folded blanket than in a rose, & it all seems like a ghastly dream [...] truly this war is trying us to the limit [...] we shall perhaps be richer for it when all is past.

As I lie here on my groundsheet, I am surrounded by buttercups, & the grass is getting long now, I see it waving in the evening breeze, I am reminded of evenings in the fields with my sweetheart [...] I have never known such awful torture as I often suffer vainly longing for you to be near me again. -----

Now to news, I fear that I abandoned this letter here, to answer an urgent call from the sergeant to go out with him in his car, we visited the local beauty spot, about a ¼ mile from here, & from which on a clear day one can see into Lincolnshire, the view is perfect, no words of mine can fully describe its beauty, perhaps you can imagine better if I say it beats the top of Snae Fell (sic) on the Isle of Man, it is about 1500 feet up and near the summit stands a huge rock, which is known locally as old Port Stone, & it is rather a wonderful landmark in that it seems so precariously balanced

& yet has stood for years, & it's a huge affair too,I was so pleased with the country around there that I shall spend all future Sunday afternoons up there weather permitting, one can be so alone amidst absolutely unspoiled wonder, a very rare thing these days, & I never knew before how beautiful this England was. From this point we toured winding country roads to Wirksworth of which you have doubtless heard, it is only a small town, & stands in a very deep hollow, all approaches to it lead down steep hills, & one can stand at the top of any of them & see all the town, we did, we thought it unnecessary to go right in, & so just admired it from the top, you will love it all when you get here, because I shall try and persuade sergeant to take us out one evening. We ended our tour by calling at the Inn we visited last week, where we met the farmer friends again, & imbibed far more beer than we should have done at their expense, but it made me feel happy, especially as I was still very depressed about the classification, but after a final binge I feel much better today (Monday) you see, I have had a whole weekend to drown my sorrows, they were many, you don't know how miserable I felt than about my failure, & so on Saturday night I went bingeing with the boys, & we painted Belper RED. I still don't know why we aren't in prison, and I've never laughed so much before, we had a grand time & I felt happy temporarily, all ended up at a dance, but spent the 1 ½ hours left till midnight at the bar there taking whiskies & all kinds of free drinks from generous & kind feeling "civvies". I was sober enough to notice though, that none of the girls wore long dresses, I believe you wished to know that, so it won't be much use if you do bring your dress, & it seems to me that I am destined to just know about that Red dress, & never hold you in it [...]

We got back here at 1.30, it took us all that time to sort ourselves out after the dance & bring back the cycles which took us down there, we walked most of the way, & what bit we did ride we took the most alarming risks, tearing down hills, swerving across the roads & acting the fool, & by the way, not one of us had a light, but we didn't encounter any cops on the way back, but we had one or two brushes with them in Belper, although they were lenient & allowed us to get away with a bit of cheek, anyway we didn't care. You will observe from the brief but comprehensive account that I had a good time.....too much work & study, made me stale, & I failed in the examination, (my underline), so I decided to play a bit, with the result that I felt even more depressed on Sunday, so I went out at dinner time & had 2 quick pints, & then again in the evening & now having learned that no-one else passed either, (my underline) I feel much better about it all, add to that the fact that you sent me 40 kisses in the shape of cigarettes, a thing I was really in need of, & thank you very very much.

I'm glad to know that Len's wedding went off O.K., though it seems to have been marked by the accident, how fortunate that no-one was really seriously hurt, though what did happen was bad enough, I do hope that Len & Kitty & Ron & Freda will have a happy week, [...]

Did I tell you? Charlie has now got a stripe, I expect he'll soon be going on the same course as I had, I think he's a bit more competent than I, he's had a secondary education, but I too have a hobby now, one that will bring me up to secondary standard, we have found a book of elementary Trigonometry, & ever since it's discovery have been engrossed in learning all about it, we are all, by all I mean the boys of my hut & the sergeant, we all are getting good, & my mind is definitely more alive than it ever was before, & this afternoon I have been with the officer learning all the things I need to know to cure my weaknesses for the next classification, it really is most interesting,-----just finished five quick games of table tennis, it's now 10 o'clock in the evening, I was called away first of all, to help with some training apparatus, then we took the wireless to pieces, it has conked out, but to no avail, after this I was drawn into this table tennis match & there I've been ever since, I'm hot & sticky, it's a warmer game than ordinary tennis & much faster, I'm getting on with it pretty well too. Our officer has suggested we run a concert in the near future, & I want you to send my mouth organ on to me just as soon as you can now, please try to get it for me, I must rehearse, & I have already promised to give some solos. Jock, our Scotch lad, has his mandolin, & he's really hot stuff, & we have a pianist, also there are some excellent singers amongst us (excluding me of course) & we should be able to manage quite a good show, & the officer has asked me to write a short play, which I think I could manage pretty well & I'll let you have the script if I ever do write it. By the way, will you chase Mum up & see if she has found my music, if that could be found we could put that on as well, so do your best darling, it would be most useful. I do hope you can read & understand all this I'm writing, I know it's awful scribble, but I must get it finished tonight. I have made you wait a long time by not finishing it yesterday, & so I am trying to make up for lost time, [...] I promise to make it up to you when you come to Shottle, the village by the way, which you will probably stay at is called Idridgehay, pronounced I-dra-Jay, it's a lovely little place & I know you'll simply love it [...]

I'm glad to know you are keeping some of the garden down, it's so nice to feel that despite your threats to sell or let the house, you are still interested in it, & I am

pleased to note that the aunts have also taken an interest in things, how do you react to that? anyway it's nice to know they're still alive at least.

Well darling there are lots of little details I could fit in about one thing and another [...] there really isn't time, but I'm orderly sergeant tomorrow, so I really do promise a long one for you then, [...] I'm usually so sleepy at nights I cannot properly think [...] Until then,

*Searchlight Camp, SHOTTLE.
TUESDAY (Possibly 10th June 1941)*

My darling,

Once again I am going to attempt a decent letter to you, and this time, except for changing guards, I really hope to be successful, though there's tons of work for me to do in the form of composing a tune to fit my poem, a play, & some funny words to fit the tune D'ye Ken John Peel, so that they apply to various personalities here, so you see, there is quite a bit in that respect, and of course I really must answer a letter from Mum, & I owe one to Ron, but none of these things will prevent me from giving you the letter I promised, and I really will try to make it worth reading.

Today has been pretty full for me, I always seem to get a lot of excitement & worries when I'm O.S., though why I really don't know, anyway I have quite a few things to report. First off, there was the usual mornings work, but this was made a bit of a bother because we expected some more big shots around, though they didn't turn up after all, for which I am truly thankful, but it keeps us all on pins, & we all breathe huge, deep sighs of relief when the coast is clear; we followed up work with some very concentrated training in which I took part, and I am improving rapidly in that I can beat the other No. 6's in all class practices, the things to which all importance is attached, & if I go on as I am doing, I shall soon be that 100% which is required of us all, anyhow I shall keep on trying & straining till I achieve it, but I'm becoming a bundle of nerves, my poor old body is ageing fast, you should worry about yourself, I feel forty, & nearly look it at times, in fact I am seriously contemplating the removal of my moustache in an endeavour to look a bit more youthful, I sometimes wonder if these stripes are worth all the worry they carry. To resume, the day wore on pretty smoothly, organising digging parties, yes, there is always digging to do, we never finish, & I have supervised the planting of more peas etc. Then there is the worry of arranging the guard list so that it doesn't interfere with work, & also evening leave,

you'd be surprised how difficult it can be some days, though on the whole things have gone pretty well in that direction today. I have also been kept pretty busy with this impending concert, we have borrowed curtains from the local women's institute, & I had the job of arranging the stage & fixing the curtains, our officer is tickled to death with the prospect of putting on a show for ourselves, & if all goes as we plan it, things should be a roaring success, I do hope you can get my mouth organ to me in time for it, because we want to hold it pretty soon, so see what you can do darling.

This evening I did lots of digging, & set some flower seeds in my little corner of the garden, but I need lots more night scented stocks, could you send me some please, I should treat them as a love token in every sense of the word, & they would be a living memory of you when they come out to spread their scent on the evening air. I have a piece of ground roughly crescent shaped, & in the front I put a few Californian Poppies, & behind this a very thin film of night scented stocks, & to the rear of these just a 2d packet of Clarkia, those were all I could obtain after a wide search, & then I sowed some French Marigolds at the back of this, & behind these are a mixture of Shirley & Iceland Poppies, & over the wall a mixture of Nasturtiums & Convolvulus, I do hope they all grow, it should look lovely, but I want to sprinkle in more night scented Stocks to fill up & make it smell lovely in the summer evenings, please help me to bring a corner of home to this lonely place. After I had finished sowing these lovely flowers, I continued digging & planted potatoes, I know they're very late, but we had to get them in, & better in the ground than rotting in sacks, so I shoved 'em in as I dug, & they're only about 9 ins from each other & the rows a foot apart, the officer said chuck 'em in anyhow, & I did, they should come up like a forest when they do break through, but things are so very slow germinating up here, I get ever so impatient waiting for them to show up, but they will come in time I'm sure.

Our poor old wireless has conked out, I don't know what's wrong with it, but we have been without news & music for several days now, & I do miss the music so, I love to be able to hear it as I work, it makes things so much easier, so I hope it gets mended by some expert in the near future. I have not pursued my search in Trigonometry today, it has been a bit difficult to grasp, in fact without the usual ground work I doubt if I shall ever grasp it properly, I'll try again tomorrow anyway.

Is it only 3 weeks since I saw you? it seems an eternity I don't know how I can survive another 3 weeks, but I shall have to somehow, & when you do come up here to stay I'll try to make up for it, I think with a bit of judicious wangling. I can manage

at least two whole nights with you. & how delicious that will be for me you can never imagine, & I shall have most evenings off I think because I spend all of them in the camp now in the garden so when I do want to get out I think the officer will allow me to do so, especially after he has met you, I intend you meet him & all the rest of the gang, so bring your gladrags to show off with, won't you sweet.

I had a letter from you today in which you say you went to an A.R.P. dance & had a happy time, well, I had a happy time on the beer, so we're quits, but I feel a pang of jealousy when you talk of R.A.F Officers etc., because from previous experiences I know how men come after you, and when I'm not there to make them shy off, I tremble to think you might meet someone just sufficiently nicer than I to lead you astray, I couldn't bear to think of any other man even kissing you, don't ever let that happen will you? I love you so completely [...]

It seems to me that the Aunts are definitely going to make a move at last, well, I hope they make a "go" of it, & if they do move, I can't help worrying about our home, the home we made together, how much it means to us, & what a terrible wrench it will be to lose, I know I shall never feel quite the same again, to know that you aren't there is enough to make me feel sad, but the thought of other people doing as they like in it, & my garden, well, it don't bear thinking about, please consider really seriously before you take the final plunge, I find myself hoping the Aunts won't move, though I know 'tis unpleasant for you at times, but at least they provide some sort of anchorage for us, without which we shall drift who knows where.

I wonder where Ron & Freda & Len & Kitty are tonight? they are luckier than we, but I bet they don't appreciate to the full all the happiness they have, one has to love such things before they can be fully valued, & I know only too well what that means, I'm afraid I have become dreadfully melancholy, but I can't help it really, I'm thinking of you, [...]

Darling, I must not continue in such a strain, so will you forgive me if I end soon, I can think of nothing to tell you except how sad I feel, & I don't want you to share my sorrows too deeply so I shall have to wind up in the hope that tomorrow will be a brighter day & bring brighter thoughts, so goodnight my love [...]

Searchlight Camp, Shottle
11th June. Wednesday-Thursday (1941)

My darling,

I have just come down from the beauty spot, I went up there to be alone & to write my one act play, & I have succeeded admirably in that everyone thinks it's good, I shall let you have the script in the near future so that you may judge for yourself, it's the usual type of thing, based on I want to be an actor them. There's a little Nell, & hero etc., and it's all about a parachutist and the Home Guard. You'll like it, though I wish you could be here to see it played, because Little Nell is the biggest fellow in the camp, & the hero the smallest & it should be fun. [...] It has been a perfect day, though I spent most of it sleeping, but this evening I washed & shaved, and then went up into the mountain, and there the most glorious of all scenes was mine to behold alone, the sun was a huge red ball in the sky, & little fleecy clouds were silhouetted with the sunshine behind them, and the hills and vales were plainly to be seen this evening, a very rare sight, because they are usually shrouded in mist, but tonight, perched up amongst the clouds, looking over the loveliest, most peaceful scene in the whole world, I felt alive, and yet not of this life, up there one seems to be able to become detached from the world, and view it as it's creator must have seen it when it first was made, it really is good to look at, in this remote corner of England, one can find a peace of mind and body which is always being sought and rarely found. I came back about nine, and felt good, & refreshed, I'm happy now [...]

Well darling I have no news for you [...] now my sweet I'm going to bed, it's eleven o'clock [...] Goodnight Darling, Your Bill.
 Thursday morning 9oclock

Goodmorning Darling,

'Tis a glorious day again, and as all the boys were in action last night and are not yet up, I find I have quarter of an hour to spare before general reveille, I hope the postman doesn't come just yet, because I should like to add just one more page to my very short note of yesterday.

➔ The lads were good last night, they illuminated a target for a whole minute, but as usual, nothing was done about it, so it was a case of labour lost again, although according to all accounts they disconcerted the Jerry considerably, he was twisting & turning all the time to get away, I hope we blinded him, they dropped a few bombs not far from here, but so far no-one has been able to tell exactly where, they shook our huts I know that because it woke me up, but no damage has so far been reported. You will gather that I was not in action last night, that's because I was Orderly Serg. the day before, so you see, I do get a night off now & again.

Joe has gone on 7 days leave this morning, he sends his love to you, but I guess he'll take most of it home to his wife, they are travelling up to Wales, for the benefit of one of his little kiddies, who suffers from ill health, so I hope it does her good. I envy him with his holiday, but mustn't be greedy [...] The telephonists here send their love to you, they always pull my leg as I write, so perhaps you will send them a saucy remark when next you write.

Well darling, it's nearly time to wake the rest of the camp, I've had my breakfast, tinned fish cakes, very tasty, but I fear we are feeling the effects in our tummies now, it stands? to sense that unaccustomed stomachs must have time to reconcile themselves to changes of diet, but I'm hoping we shall soon recover, it's nothing serious really, [...] I shall miss the post [...] Goodbye [...]

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle
Friday 13th (June 1941)
(10 pages of tiny writing)*

My darling,

Two days now since I heard from you, what's wrong, you know how much your letters mean to me, but I guess by the time you are reading my complaint, I shall have received at least one from you [...] I really do miss them. You will do doubt have noticed the ring around the date, you know my dread of such days, but up till now I have been fairly lucky, though I mustn't be complacent about it, because there are still about eighteen hours to get through, and all sorts of things can happen in that time, [...] We are threatened with a visit from the Colonel today, so far he has failed

to put in an appearance. I hope he keeps away, but actually the very fact that he might come has caused enough of a stir, and I have been busy up till now chasing everyone about & trying to get the place squared up. It always seems to be my misfortune to be the orderly sergeant on days when someone important is coming [...] We have packed all the fellows off on a bath parade now, so that if we are honoured with a visit from the powers that be, there will be less chance of anyone letting us down, they often do, you know.

It is a glorious day again, and that makes the third successive summer's day, the countryside is absolutely wonderful, and revels in the glory of the sunshine, this is made more refreshing by a strong breeze which is the natural birthright of the district [...] There is a Guest House where you will probably stay when you come here, and if I can get nothing nearer, you will be able to get a bus there direct from Derby, I find it's about two miles from this Camp, though really it's not near enough [...] I think you should manage [...] This is of course only provisional, I...have another possibility to explore on Sunday night in a Farmer who has so far escaped our net, he is a damn fine fellow, & always pays for our beer, and it was suggested to me that he might be able to accommodate you, [...] I do hope I'm lucky, because he only lives a little way away, I can see his farm from the office window [...] I am determined...that you shall come here to see me if you have to bring the tent [...]

I showed my officer your picture last night, he said " Good God, is that really your wife", she's stunning, and when I told him I should probably have you here next month, he said that I had better keep you well away from the camp. I told him you like a bit of fun, so perhaps we may all have an evening out together, that would be nice, but you must promise to behave yourself, because he is very susceptible to pretty faces, but I know you'll like him he is a decent sort.-----

Afternoon has merged into night, it is 11.30 and almost dark, the sunset was glorious golden, clouds, fine & delicate tinted with the most rare silver linings, and a peace such as one only dreams of [...] I am reminded of the sad & wistful song " When day is done", how that song applies itself to my very sad state of mind. [...]

It is night now, we two should be locked in each others arms asleep [...] I pray I shall receive a letter from you tomorrow [...]

Now to a little bit more news;- all the boys have been out on the beer tonight, they behave themselves extremely well considering the amount they imbibe, but they

are all very merry, and even my telephonist companion is in an inebriated state, but they're all dam good company, & I wouldn't swap any of them for ten of the Golden Valley lads, these men have spirit, a thing which is unheard of at G.V. and to be one of them is an achievement of which I am very proud, I never want to go anywhere else. I think it must be the beauty of Shottle & the peaceful loneliness [...] has had an influence on even the worst of them, because originally they were all chosen for this site as "bad" men & therefore to be separated from the rest, perhaps its just as well, these are men, the others are spoilt kids.

We expect a Rouser tonight, if it come off I am No. 6, I wonder if they'll let me do the job, I have never had that privilege yet, but my training is showing improvement all the time, & in due course I'll be as good as the rest of them, & this is an actual fact, the boys here look forward to a Rouser, an absolutely unheard of thing, in any sphere of the army, the enthusiasm here is incomparable.

Plans are progressing steadily towards the concert we are giving, the date is fixed for Monday night, I have written a short play, someone else has composed a dialogue, & with mandolin solos & various other items concocted by me, we should have lots of fun, everyone is looking forward to it with great relish, & tomorrow we are going to fetch the Women's Institute Piano, & fifty chairs for the great occasion, all the boys are being allowed to bring friends, & we should manage quite a crowd, I do hope it's a success. I am becoming quite an expert table tennis player these days, I often have a game after dinner just to get practice, & though I seldom win for the simple reason that I always choose superior partners, I feel I could hold my own with an average player now. It's surprising what a strenuous game it can be, after the best of three I am quite glad to sit down & have a blow, it makes me very warm. Last night we had some firing practice, I was assistant instructor, & we are holding a competition with a prize of five bob (25p) for the best shot, I've had five practice rounds in which I only scored 16 out of 20, but as the last 3 shots were bulls, I consider I have got my aim pretty well, and the next five shots I have will all be bulls (I hope), anyway it was good fun, & lying out there in the long grass, firing at a scarcely visible target is real sport, and if that was the most awful thing in war, what a blessing it would be. The garden is coming on pretty well, but things are so very slow up here, I do notice the difference after having had experience down South, but at least they are growing, & I guess that's something to be thankful for.

My companion is just making some cocoa, we don't get tea these days, I find it very nice, but I suppose its fattening, & I notice it has the effect of making me very sleepy, but at least its something, which is decidedly better than none at all.

I have the officer's case book in front of me, it is a kind of diary, I read it every day, though of course he doesn't know, & I find some very interesting things recorded therein, My name is mentioned several times as first of all being ignorant of the theory of the ringsight, then I find I am improving, & gradually it seems I shall become proficient until I become the star of the detachment, at least it is encouraging to note his observations on my progress, I find It extremely interesting.

I had quite an interesting afternoon with the officer today, we were alone in the office the whole time, & he tested me out in my knowledge of operational duties, in which I seemed to be pretty well up, & then we discussed life, & private affairs, his people keep a very prosperous pub at Louth, he said his father was retired, & they bought genuine antiques & made an old world pub out of a one-time dead loss, & last year they made £1000 profit, (~~about~~ £54000 in 2022) that was the first year, so it must be a really good concern, we discussed various other means of making money, but could not hit on the right one, I gathered from his conversation that his people are pretty well off.

Our sergeant too, comes from the aristocracy, he is widely travelled, has really posh connections, & in the running for a commission, the exact reverse of Sgt. Warden, they are both damn good company & definitely more my type than the average N.C.O. of Golden Valley, and they seem to like me, and this afternoon Mr. Lill, that's the officer's name, promised me that he wouldn't let them take me away now if he could possibly help it, so I think I shall be here to stay, and this is something for which I am extremely grateful.

You may remember that I told you of army plans to let W.A.T.S.'s take over S/L's, well, they have taken over one of the most advanced sites in our battery, I don't quite know what sort of a job they are making of it, but I understand they are quite a tough crowd, so perhaps they will soon be in complete possession of this trade, in which event we shall be getting pushed into something a little more active, I don't know that I shan't be glad of this, but on the other hand can never see them taking over such an isolated spot as this one, it might be alright (one word) in real hardships here last year, & I can't imagine A.T.S.'s with the usual "visitors" sticking out 6 or 7 hour rousers through anything like that, what do you think?

Time flies when I write to you, it is already 1.30, & I have to go & change the guards-----it's done, & now I can have another undisturbed? 1 ½ hours. I put the query because we may get Rouser any minute now, but I'm hoping it will keep well away tonight, the boys work hard most days, & it seems a shame to get them out at nights, I shall be glad when our new scheme comes off, the one I went on a course for, then we might do some damage, & that will be nice, for to be instrumental in bringing one of those infernal peace spoilers down, has become my one ambition [...]

The sergeant got a nice rabbit last night, I don't know what he did with it, I "gutted" it for him, I'm getting quite expert at this business now, it's still a bit distasteful of course, but familiarity breeds contempt, and while he keeps shooting them, well, I'll keep gutting them. I think he sent the last one home, I expect they would be very much appreciated in civvie street, & yet they are still looked upon as pests, and if we don't shoot them the farmer threatens to gas them all, what a wicked waste of meat.

Everyone is getting heartily sick of canned grub now, including yours truly, it seems to get more distasteful each day, I don't know what there is about it, but after a week of practically nothing but, the very sight of yet another canned meal makes me feel slightly sick, & the swill tub gets most of it. I noticed on the tins that they are all

tinned by well known makers, we get Heinz, Cross & Blackwell, Chivers, & several more I can't recall, but at least it gives us some confidence in what we're eating & I don't get any thinner as each day goes by. Today we had Veal & white sauce, fresh spuds & greens, followed by marmalade pudding, the puddings are very nice, but always seem to have a peculiar oily taste to them, one is inclined to overlook this for the first day or two, but as they keep coming up day after day, it becomes more & more noticeable, until I really believe there will come a time when we shall be refusing it. I can hear you saying you would like the chance of one of these meals, yes darling, it would do you good to have one now & again, but I shouldn't like to think of you eating all canned food as we have to, because I'm sure it's no good to us. My poor old guts has been nothing but a trouble to me these last few days, as have all the other boys, & we all swear it's the tinned food, so if I suddenly cease to write you'll know I've had one canned meal too many.

I had a good bath this evening, in the ablutions shed, I had to do it in easy stages, but at least I feel a lot cleaner & fresher than I did, it's very awkward when one is orderly sergeant on a bath parade day, because it means we can't go, but I always manage one of some kind & average one a week, so at least I manage to keep fairly clean-----

✈ There's a plane going over----any minute now, sounds like a Hun, I wonder if we shall get an undisturbed night, I do hope so, [...] here we are, you asleep alone, & I a hundred miles away, awake, with naught but memories to haunt me, & all I can do is write of things I think & things I dream of doing [...] Darling, I expect you will think I'm an awful cry baby when you have read as far as this, [...] because I have not heard from you lately, I have missed you more, do try to write daily, I look forward so very much to your letters [...]

Time has flown, it's now 4 o'clock, I have changed the guards again, they awaken very unwillingly, it is a shame to wake them at all, but duty has to be done, and we have had a quiet night after all, there have been bombs & guns going off in the distance all the time, but we were left alone, I hear the morning breeze getting up, it's tearing through the camp, trying to get at me, howling & raging, but whatever happens, they can't take the precious memory of you from my heart [...]

Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
16th June (1941)



My very own darling,

Here it is nearly 3 days since I wrote to you last, but honestly sweetheart, I really have had my hands very full, what with the play and various other items to be composed, and add to that the full responsibility of the concert (yes, I was the producer) and still working & training full time, I've been nearly dead. Now, it's all over, a roaring success from start to finish, & I am enclosing the original script of the play, please forgive all the dirt on it, but if you can imagine little Nell as a fellow 6 feet tall, & weighing 10 stones, & a hero our titch 4 feet 11 inches weighing about 7 stones you will appreciate how well it must have gone. We started off by mimicking Monday Night at 8 (*Monday Night at Eight was a weekly BBC radio magazine programme on the Home Service, broadcast live*), we had our 3 glamour girls (all boys) & I composed introductory verses for each item, although towards the end we had to put in a few impromptus which went down very well, anyway, we made the concert last 3 hours including ½ hour interval. The Y.M.C.A. lent us all their cups, & a tea urn, & we bought tons of cakes & biscuits & numerous other things which were all free for all, & altogether things went with a swing, I did wish you could have been there, because all the lads were allowed to bring friends, & I think I was about the only one without any guests, but I had my hands full anyway so didn't bother a lot, because if I can't have you, I want no-one.

Now let me thank you [...] for sending on the Mouth Organ, I gave a turn & Played your favourites, Vienna city of my dreams, Indian Love Call, Merry Widow and Polished off with "Over the Hill" & it rang out beautifully in our mess hut, better than if we had a mike, so you will take the credit for my success [...] thank you for the flower seeds, I have sown them with my others, & when they grow, they will be yours too, I shall be able to look at them & think of you, & home, when our garden was gay with Clarkia & sweet with night stocks. Clarkia for your beauty & charm, night stock for your sweetness [...] My officer is very keen to meet you, he keeps asking when you will be here, & so you must come, I think we shall be able to wangle him pretty well once you meet

him, bring all your smartest clothes, & stun him with your beauty, I shall be so proud of you [...]. Talking of wangling, I don't quite know if I have done a foolish thing or not, but one of my friends, who is also a jolly good lad, is the boy who has his wife at "Shangrilar", & he took a big part in the concert tonight as pianist so that he couldn't get with his wife at all, he then asked me if he could stay out all night, & so I've wangled his guard as the very last one on the morning which starts at 5.30, I hope he's back about that time, or I'm going to get a bit unstuck, but somehow I don't think he'll let me down, and after all, I'm going to do the same thing when you come here. His wife is inquiring tonight at the Guest House for you, my last straw with the farmer was a blank, they have absolutely no room here for visitors, all full up with evacuees, but I do hope the Guest House come up to scratch, it's a fair way off, but near enough, for us to get at each other & that's everything. [...]-----rude interruption here by a "Rouser", & now an hour or more is past, but though we manned our guns & were all ready to fight, nothing happened & here I am back again.

Now to news;- Last night I had a hectic time, I went out as is my Sunday habit, with the sergeant & his car, but this time the officer came, & we had a lovely tour round the neighbouring villages, & saw some perfectly marvellous views, in fact the more we see of it, the less describable it becomes, but the officer suggested a pub crawl, & so we explored as we went along, until we found a nice looking pub, then in we went to have a pint, ***!!! We had several pints in this manner, & found a lovely lot of really nice little places, & as we progressed, so did the sergeant's driving, & we ended up at the usual Sunday night stop, & we had just ordered our first drinks when who should walk in but Mr. Douglas, my other officer, he had a lady with him, looked like a bit of Golden Valley stuff, this called for celebrations according to Mr. Douglas, & the blighter introduced me to his very special drink which is called Happy Days, it consists of strong ale mixed with mild, & is more deadly than the good old Colne Spring, I drank two whole pints of the stuff before I realised how deadly it was, but managed to get home without disgracing myself, but I shall always remember the affair by these things, firstly standing at the bar with the sergeant, & two officers, with utter disregard to rank, we were nudging each other & calling by Christian names, it was priceless, but they were drinking heavily & didn't notice, & I'd had enough anyway not to give a damn, it's a lovely feeling, & we had a wild ride home; second & worst remembrance was the aftermath, I spent two hours at the Lav, being sick etc., & then I fell asleep there, utterly disgraceful I know, & I should be ashamed to tell you, but we're always frank with each other, it pays,-----This morning I had a terrific hangover, & only the excitement of the concert took it away,

but I'm on the water wagon from now on, I couldn't touch the free beer we had tonight, so it looks as if I've done the same thing for beer as I did with wine & cocktails, a good job too, I agree with you, yes I do, if I ever drink a glass of beer again it will be like I do when I have a port, just for company to celebrate a special occasion, so don't worry any more [...]

You impress upon me in your harmonica letter that I should be proud of the responsibility I now have, well, I am, [...] I'm all out for more stripes, that's why I go out with the officers occasionally, but it still remains very true, that 1 stripe carries all [...] about the exam over which I was so disappointed, we still came second out of the whole Battery, beating G.V. and my name appeared on orders beside that of Mr. Sill?, & I found I only failed on minor things which will be easily remedied, & so it remains in the army as it did in civvie street, things always look worse than they really are, & after a while they become insignificant, so I don't worry about that any more.

We are, despite many complaints, still on tinned food, for breakfast tomorrow though we have my favourite dish, fresh fried bacon, & tinned kidneys, they really are the goods, and
extremely tasty, but on
the whole, one gets
very fed up with tinned
everything, the
vegetables aren't half
as nice as fresh ones
even though they're
clean & dainty looking,
but I fear we'll have to
endure it for some time
yet, as there are enough
supplies in our stores to
last a whole month.
A meal now & then out of tins is very nice, but too much of a good thing you know
etc. etc.

This is my orderly sergeant day again today, I get a lot of them don't I? but that will be a big advantage when you come to me, because I have the following day & night free from duty, & that enables me to do as I please, so I'll plan a day out for you

on one of those great occasions, & take you up to Alport Stone, that, I find, is the correct name for my beauty spot, it is the highest point in the Pennine chain 1034 feet above sea level, wonderful absolutely, & I know you'll love it so much you won't want to leave, especially if it's lovely weather, so come prepared to enjoy yourself [...] I suppose there will be times when we shall be separated for the day, & on those occasions you will no doubt find plenty to do, with Penny for company there are lots of nice rambles, & there is always the evening together, I'm free after 8 each night till dark, & hope to get out earlier than that for your week, & the studying can afford to wait a bit, [...] I would do almost anything to get with you all the time, I mustn't take too many risks, you said you'd be disappointed in me if I lost my stripe, so caution with our love will be the keynote of a successful honeymoon. By the way, don't forget the Ethel's & Randall's, we might need them [...] (*there follows nearly 1 ½ pages of adoration*). And now darling I must end, the dawn is breaking and it's four o'clock, the morning breeze has been howling for an hour, & the sun will soon be peeping over the hill, chasing the moon high into the sky [...]
I pray for you, & the speedy end of this war [...]. Yours always,

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
19th June (1941)*

Darling

[....] Really this coming stay of yours is becoming a serious affair with me, & I am devoting quite a bit of time to serious propaganda in the right quarters, so that I may have as much time off as I possibly can when you actually come, with regard to your accommodation, I have had an Inn suggested to me as possibility, & that would be considerably nearer than the Guest House, so tomorrow I sally forth once more with the stern intention of further enquiries, I'm having a hell of a time but I'll find somewhere for you somehow, [....]

Now to news;- tonight, I went over to the farm for the first time to partake of coffee at the N.C.O.'s mess, they call it that because we are always welcome there, and each night Joe goes over with the sergeant & officer, & tonight I was invited to go with them, an invitation I was glad to accept. Dorothy, the farmer's daughter who incidentally has made all local inquiries for your digs, is a very fat & jolly girl, single, but makes excellent coffee, she seems to take her role as chief coffee maker for granted, & we all had two cups each, made with brand new milk straight from the cow, it was delicious, & here I might mention that she & Joe seem to get on very well

together, though she knows he's married with 2 children. He returned today from 7 days leave, so naturally was in need of comfort, but he has brought his wife & family as near as Loughborough now, so that each time he has a free day, he can go to see them, it's only about 15 miles from here, quite handy in fact, I wish you were as near, I'd be there on a night pass I bet. [...]

We have just finished a spell of night manning, that is, we had just finished when I started this letter but it's now 1.30, & we finished at 12.15, it's an hour & a quarter ago. This was my maiden voyage with a beam, & I did pretty well, I hope to be able to have a real do one night when we get a rouser, & it would be wonderful if I got an illumination, so I keep hoping against hope that the luck will be mine one of these nights. It's a lovely feeling to be master of the situation & to know that the success of the engagement depends entirely on me, I love a little bit of power as you know, & this suits me down to the ground. All the things combine to make me at least able to keep sane, & add to this the pleasure of seeing my flower seeds germinating, my peas & marrows growing like wildfire, I manage fairly well, but every time I think of you [...] I get a terrible feeling of frustration, & find that I can't endure it much longer [...]

We reaped a rich harvest from our concert, the Y.M.C.A., ladies were so pleased with us that the next day when they arrived, we all received a free tea & 2 cakes, they were delighted with us & we with them for their kindness. And some very posh people who were there, the Lady Bountiful of the district, have hired a concert party to entertain us next Tuesday, should be pretty good I imagine, anyway I'll let you know.....

I seem to have acquired quite a bit of local fame in the district as a concert promoter, so of course, I'm awfully bucked about it all, especially as I was congratulated personally for my Shottle poem, which by the way you never told me if you liked or otherwise, I have intended ticking you off before about that, & kept forgetting it, now, what have you got you say for yourself, you know you are my best & most generous critic, so please let's have an opinion.....don't forget to tell me what you thought of the play too, it's only a very short one, but with laughs it lasted 20 minutes, surprising isn't it?

We have been extremely busy all day today, the morning was maintenance & training as usual, but all afternoon & evening we were working on our third projector emplacement, & very nearly finished it in one afternoon starting almost from scratch,

we all work with our shirts off these days, the officer just wears his gym shorts, so I can see the need for Cooltan (*a popular sun cream of the day*) soon, needless to say, I, once burned twice shy, took off my shirt for the first time today, & then only for a little while, I value my skin too much to risk losing it again. All the boys work & slave like niggers here, the sweat runs in rivers all over the site, & we have had to install an irrigation system to dispose of it all, but it waters the garden, & grows some fine radishes, so that the sweat from their brow is not wasted; but really, they do all work very hard, and deserve a lot more consideration than they get, I am hoping one day to see them better off, their spirit is wonderful.

Albert, the telephonist, had got the two kittens here, he's like a brand new mother with them, they're both in his lap, wide awake & full of play at this hour of the night, now 2.30, but they are such lovely little things that I can understand how he feels, needless to say, everyone in the camp loves them, & at one time or another I guess each man has had them in his arms to make a fuss off (sic), including myself. I have been playing with them with a piece of string, they're delightful little dears, one is jet black, & the other is the image of your Pixie, I think you would like to take it home with you if you could see it. They've gone to sleep now, Albert looks so peaceful there, he's been out on a binge & has fallen asleep himself, he usually does manage to get an hour in during the night, & I let him, after all, he has very little to do, & the phone would wake him if he was wanted, so I just leave him to do as he pleases. Little Pixie is quite happy, she's perched on his knee with her paws, so tiny, just underneath her nose, & her head resting across his hand, she looks a picture, I wish I could get a snap of them as they are now; Pets make such a vast difference to us in this rather barren existence, it's all so empty really, there is very little of the real friendship & warmth we have all known, so that when a little bit of innocence & warmth in the form of 2 kittens, or a cat or dog comes into our life, the reaction is inevitable.

We have cured the question of sleep for our night workers now, starts as from tomorrow, we shall have a hut all to ourselves, because the spotters now are some distance from the site, they have had special little huts provided for them, & since we don't get all the peace we should like, we have commandeered one of these spotter huts for use in the daytime. The one we shall use stands on a hill just immediately opposite from the entrance to the camp, & commands a beautiful view, it stands in a field waist high with grass & buttercups & daisies, just ideal for summer sleeping out, so I think we shall like the new digs for night workers.

Tomorrow is bath day, so it looks as if I shall have very little sleep really, because it means getting up at dinner time to get ready for a dip, but I had a wash down today in readiness for something better in the way of a real bath tomorrow, so I expect I shall go.

In your letter I received today you say the Aunts have gone to Watford, you didn't say if they were going to look for a house, I'm wondering if they will, & by the way you haven't said much about them at all lately, how are things going in this direction? I was glad to hear of our lupins looking so nice, how I wish I could be there to share them with you, it seems such a long time since I last saw my garden, & will be some time before I see it again I fear, & all the nicest of my favourites will be over [.....] You remember in a recent letter you told me not to worry as you had not yet found a man who is a patch on me? Well, I hope that doesn't mean then you're looking for one, please tell me it is so. I hate to mention it here, but your letters just lately are not what they used to be, why? You never tell me your true feelings, there is no more confiding [...] you seem to have become so terribly matter of fact [...] can it be that you are getting used to being without me, I hoped that would never be [...] such is my love for you that the least suspicion that you are wavering would send me into a frenzy of fear that I might lose you, [...] do set my fears at rest when you answer this letter [...]

I didn't tell you all about the dental Parade yesterday did I? We went to a Dental centre at Derby, where there are about 8 dentists in action, we were shown into a waiting room where there were about 50 men, all waiting in various stages of nervousness for their names to be called out, & when this happens, an orderly leads you to your selected "butcher". I seem to have been very lucky because my bloke was a good one, who took a fair amount of interest in his work, though I still think he could have taken a little more time over the job & made something lasting from it, but so far it has stood for a day, which at least means that it might last longer. I have very little faith in Army dentists for the reason that quite a lot of our boys have had proper metal fillings which came out after a couple of days, I hope that won't happen to mine, but somehow I don't think it will, I bet you think I'm always on the dark side though I'm not really.

I'm beginning to get drowsy, darling, so you'll have to excuse my scrawl if it gets too bad, it seems that every morning between 3 & 4, one can't help getting tired, but really it's not funny, because that is when we are drawing near to the end of our 24 straight off. It's a hell of a job, chasing here, there & all over the place, looking for

the one or two dodgers one always gets in every walk of life, but it's a wearing business, especially when one gets it about every 3 days, though I shall be glad of these periods while you are here, it enables me to take a bit of time off in the day when I wish it.

Our officer will be going on leave very soon I think, so we might get it a bit easier while he's away, I like to think so anyway, he is a proper slave driver to the men, & they call him all sorts of names, though I find him one of the best, the whole trouble is that the fellows will not appreciate him as they should----- Just caught a guard away from his post!!! the third in just over a week, so I've given everyone a warning that if I have any more of it there will be some more "pegging", I hate to do it to these boys, but I will have this war run right while I'm in charge, so don't be surprised if I'm in another spot of trouble soon, because if I know these lads they'll still take chances.

We had fresh meat for dinner yesterday, & what a wonderful change it was too, everyone enjoyed it, & ate every little piece of it, we are all heartily sick of tins tins tins, just fancy tinned rice pudding, yes, it is absurd, we can get fresh milk from the farm & a handful of rice & turn out something far superior to that we get from tins. Tinned steak & kidney pudding, we had some yesterday which we couldn't eat, it was rotten, & so we complained, & the ration officer came out & took back a sample with him, though according to a meeting held last week, at which was one representative from each site, it seems that Shottle are the only crowd with whom it don't agree, though we've heard enough moans about it indirectly, I expect it really is that we've got the guts to stick to our guns & the others wait to see which way the wind blows, but we shall have to endure it for some time yet I'm afraid, as the store is packed with tins of carrots, tins of peas, tins of braised veal, tins of plums, (these aren't so bad) , tins of rice pudding, tins of steak & kidney pudding, various tins of sweet puddings such as marmalade, jam & fruit, all very tasty but nevertheless nauseating after a fortnight of nothing but, in fact out of the whole selection, the only things that are in favour are "sauté kidneys" (which we have with bacon once a week) Plums, & the Soups, everything else they can dump so far as we're concerned, believe it or not, we even have tinned Bubble & Squeak for supper once a week, I ate some last Thursday, & didn't have a settled stomach till Sunday, & even then it wasn't too good, Oh! & I forgot, tinned sausages for breakfast now & again, & tinned sausages in rice & tomato sauce for supper, this latter item being extremely tasty but nevertheless equally drastic to the gastronomic organs, but I guess we ought not to complain too bitterly, after all, we're very lucky to be able to have such a variety, though we'd

gladly sacrifice this for something fresh, & which we know is fresh, but I guess we'll survive, so who cares? the King don't I bet.
And now [...] I must end this note, God Bless You,

Searchlight Camp, Shottle
21st June (to 23rd 1941)
[11 page letter]

Beloved Sweetheart,

[...] I have just got back to camp after being out all day with the officer on another plotting do, & we shall soon be going into action in co-operation with the R.A.F., and radiolocation. There, I've said more than I should have already, so I leave you to guess the importance and secrecy of it all, & trust you to keep it to yourself. It has been a perfectly sweltering day, & they would have to choose a day like this to have to go to Battery, but I'm back now, & very cool for a change wearing my trunks only, & having had a perfectly lovely shower, by simply fixing up a stirrup pump to the ceiling of the ablution shed & turning it on to fine spray, it was lovely & very refreshing after a terribly hot day out, & it wouldn't have been so bad perhaps if we could have been dressed as we usually do these days, but to have a full uniform on took a bit of enduring I can tell you, but anyway I didn't have my shirt on underneath, I was just naked.

So much for today, actually all that has happened worth comment is what I have already told you, we enjoyed the ride of course, that was the best part of the whole day, & I was sorry when we reached our destination. Yesterday was not much more interesting, except that I had the pleasure of instructing a squad of men in various things I have only just learned myself, & in the evening I went out as I told you to find accommodation for you if possible at an Inn, & to get a haircut. The people at the Inn however are moving out next Tuesday, but they were almost certain the new tenants would be able to fix you up, so that looks a bit more hopeful, being not more than 1 ½ miles away from me, & very convenient really.

I received your telegram about your willingness to camp, but don't want you to come to that if we can possibly avoid it, because food is one of the main difficulties, but if the worst comes I guess I shall be able to fix something, anyway, you just keep right on with your plans for your holiday, & I'll do the rest, & by the way, My officer will be away at Golden Valley for that week from the 7th, while Mr. Douglas is on leave, so providing I don't get any courses to upset things, there is no limit to

possibilities, because though he & I are jolly good friends, he is painfully conscientious, & would make a bit of bother probably if I expected too much of him, whereas Sgt. Warden or my own Sgt., here will be very lenient I'm positive, so please pray for all these lovely things to turn out in our favour & all will be well.

To continue yesterday's news;- I proceeded into Belper after the heartening discovery that I might find your digs, & had a haircut, & boy, what a cut, it's a proper summer one, but nevertheless a good one, though I had to wait an 1 ½ hours for it, & by that time it was too late to go to the Pictures as I had intended, so I started to walk home, but before I'd got very far along the road, who should turn up by a good turn of chance but my sergeant, who stopped & offered me a lift, which I gladly accepted because I was perspiring terribly, he had two more of our boys on board, & one of them very kindly slammed the car door across my knuckles, bruising & removing the skin of two, they're sore now & I'm lucky my fingers were not broken, but I forgave him when they stopped smarting & all I'm waiting for now is for them to heal.

We are all becoming very very brown out here, you would think we'd been abroad, but it's a grand life if only I didn't have to be separated from my lovely wife [...]

Sunday 22nd

A terrifically scorching day again, but we don't mind today because it means a half day & we have been alternatively sun bathing & shower bathing all afternoon, you ought to see the wonderful shower we've fixed up in the ablutions out of one simple little stirrup pump, all you have to do is fill a bowl with water & then stand underneath & pump, it's lovely, but later on this afternoon the boys got fed up with these arrangements & so we took the necessary equipment on to the parade ground & one pumped while three of us at once stood in the spray, & this suited us down to the ground, we were like little kids, but it kept us cool & I've had three already. Joe has just asked me to go out with him to the usual Sunday night pub, & though it was my intention to stay tonight owing to the fact that the sergeant is on leave & we have no car, his friends have their car & we should travel in that so I have accepted his invitation which means I shall not finish this precious letter to you today, please forgive me darling, but I really don't get out a lot, so I feel sure you'll understand when this letter arrives.----- A lovely evening, & free beer too, we ended up at the farm & had a final drink & a chat with a wander round the garden, it was very very nice & I'm glad I went out, though sorry I haven't finished this letter, because I know what they mean to you, but I can't consider sending you just four pages for a Sunday's letter so I propose to wait till tomorrow when I shall be Orderly

Sergeant, & try to make it the longest ever in an attempt to make amends for your long wait.

Monday (23rd June)

Dear Darling,

A whole day gone, a day full of activity & rushing about for me, but it's all over now, & I'm sitting in the office ready for the night's excitement if any, we have just been called out for something or other, but when they found out that we were out in the open on the phone, they said we could pack up, I think it was for some more plotting exercises, we've been off & on all day, absolutely on pins all the time, but actually things weren't too good as a result of the first tryout, let's hope they get sorted out a bit better in the near future. I have also done lots of digging today between times & this evening I watered my beans, peas, & especially cared for our flowers, I also planted out some very tiny lettuces, things are so very much further behind up here than they are down our way, but at least this latest heat wave has speeded things up fairly well for us just lately, & we've managed to catch up a bit. You remember I told you about Freddie Burgess being sent away to another section the same time that I came here, well, the A.T.S., have now completely taken over his last site, lock stock & barrel, thus releasing about 30 men, & he has been sent up here, arrived tonight, & we're going to do all we can to make him love Shottle as much as we do. He's a bit sorry he didn't go to G.V. because that's where his girl is, but while he's been away, someone else stepped in, & I think he has lost her, so of course he's a bit downhearted, but I'm convinced that Shottle will heal all his woes.

Our officer goes on leave tomorrow morning, he is as happy as he could be tonight, & was in a very genial mood, I hope he manages to get an undisturbed 7 days, and that he is not recalled from it, he deserves it, I know you'll like him when you meet him as I intend you shall. We had a heart to heart talk tonight, in which my ambitions & possibilities as a sergeant were deeply discussed, & this is what I learnt, I have to develop a bullying attitude on parade, & a better word of command, he says he can't see me as a sergeant as I am now. My second stripe seems to be an accepted fact in the near future, how near I know not, but he seemed confident that I shall have another soon, & I told him I'm going to have the third too, & that if I'm to shout & rave, then well, I'll rave, but I must have 3 stripes, so he promised me a good talk on the subject when he gets back. We also discussed the question of commissions again, & he assures me that financial position is quite O.K. so long as I manage to get a Regt., such as this one, but if I was unfortunate enough to be stationed at B.H.Q., I

should find the going pretty tough, he admitted that he had no means of his own, but that if he ever needed help he could always get it, & I told him I had more or less abandoned the idea on these grounds, he sympathised & we left the subject there, of course I don't know what he thinks of me as a possible officer, but when he gets all confidential I can glean lots of things to my advantage, & I really believe that if I can satisfy him so far as improving my word of command & knowledge of other things he will push me on to my goal, anyhow I know he's my friend & that's a lot. I seem to have had a day today for heart to heart talks, because just before this I had a ½ hour conversation with the S.A. man ²⁸ about Christianity & friends & life in general, I found out that he comes from Jersey really, that's his real home, & he just lives in Derby. He has a long day, starts out at 7 every morning, & never finishes before 11 or 12 at night, & he's a really good sort, he had no tea today because the milk was sour, but I needed one so badly I said I'd drink it without milk, so he made me a full pot of tea (4 cups) & gave me the lot for 1d, he refused to be paid any more, & I enjoyed that tea just as much as if it had milk in, we parted good friends as I find he has much the same opinions on life as I have.

I got your two letters in one envelope this morning, you certainly are keen about the camping idea, but I have already sounded out about meals for you, & the suggestion, simple though it is, doesn't seem to appeal very much to the three farms I have tried, I am on perfectly wonderful terms with all of them, but as soon as your accommodation is mentioned it seems to meet with coldness, I really cannot explain this, but don't worry darling, because by the time you get this I hope to have fixed up some real digs for you at the Inn, & if I am successful I shall wire you to ease your mind so look for a wire on Thursday or Friday & failing this, I'll make a last bid for meals at the remaining two farms, although personally I should prefer you to stay at the Inn, so cheer up my love, things are not so black, the whole trouble is that I took it too much for granted that I should be able to fix you up & told you too soon, but 2 other of our boys are having the same trouble, so I'm not alone. I find the reason for shortage of accommodation is mainly due to the fact that all the farms now have land girls to fix up, & these always live at the farm as a member of the family, & they all have evacuees too, while the one or two cottages are full of farm workers with big families, & the cottage I told you of in an earlier letter is now taken from the books by a farm labourer & wife with four kids, which completely fills that up as you may guess, it's only four rooms, as indeed most of the places are round here, but there you see some of the reasons for my difficulties. [...] I'm not discouraged [...] I feel it would be worth it [...] to pay the Guest House fees, don't you? Remember the cost of

²⁸ Salvation Army

living nowadays, & the fact that accommodation is scarce, you can't really blame the people for shoving a bit on, & as for the question of tips, well I don't think you ought to worry about them, they should be nonexistent? in wartime, but I don't think we'll bother our heads about this until it becomes a last resort, so just keep your pecker up till I fix you up at the Bulls Head, you'll love it there, just 1 ½ miles away from me, with 2 certain nights together, & every evening, & the Sunday afternoon you have, & I'm sure you'll find plenty to do during the daytime while I'm not with you [...] remember, in your own words, I want to show you off, & I assure you that you'll have no need to stick your nose in the air to give a County impression, you carry that naturally, & all you have to do when in any company I take you with is to be your lovely gay & natural self when you're on holiday, you know what I mean [...] it will be just like courting once more, snatching all we can out of life [...] when I do get a 48 again [...]

Talking of 48 hours leave, we are not allowed any time extra for travelling, but have to stick to times shown on the pass, namely 2 o'clock till 2 o'clock, but while this is very annoying, I shall still have the joy of 2 nights with you, & Mr. Lill says he won't be too hot on the return times, I couldn't make it anyway, & he gave today's men their passes two hours earlier, so one way & another I shall not do so badly, but being an hours walk from the nearest bus is a bit of a devil, & I think we should be allowed a little extra time. I hear the A.T.S girls have taken over a wonderful site, the men who used to man it have been slogged almost to death, digging & building, painting polishing & scrubbing, but I hear the finished effort is splendid, the poor fellows though have been sleeping out in the open for the last week because the huts have had to be kept so perfect, what we men have to do for these "equal" women in the forces, I hope they never decide to put A.T.S. at Shottle, though I wouldn't be surprised at anything now, Britain will soon be in dire need of all her man power, & I expect we shall be amongst the armies of occupation, at least so they say, I can't say I relish the idea & it's best left undiscussed.

I don't quite know what to make of the latest Russian German do, but I agree with Churchill that anyone who fights a Jerry is a friend of ours, so here's to the downfall of 'ITLER & may the best man win out of Stalin & Churchill when we've cleaned off the other menace, anyhow things look decidedly better for us by the way of a change, because old whiskers has got his hands full at last, I can see you looking so happy now we have a valuable aid in our favour, knowing so well how you react to war news, & all I hope is that the end will come sooner than I expect, because with all these new factors I fail to see how it can end sooner than the last war, but perhaps

I'm unduly pessimistic, [...] Without you life is Hell [...] it's true that when I am merry I forget my worries, but how long does it last? Even in the semi-contentment I find in raising plants I find ample time to dream of you [...] Goodnight my love,

*Searchlight Camp, Belper.
Flimsy Dated Wednesday
(Probably 25th June 1941)*

Darling,

I received your letter this morning telling me that you would be arriving on Sat. I shall be there to meet you, so you needn't worry about finding your way, but please tell me which train to meet, although I shall be there in plenty of time so it won't really matter, all I want is to see you, & then I can be really happy at last. [...] I can hardly wait [...] I have only two more left to wait now, & I hope they go quickly.

Last night I went & helped with the haymaking, & I shall do some more tonight, so I hope you'll excuse me cutting this note a bit short, and anyway I shall be able to talk to you soon & let you know all the little things I haven't written about-----

Been haymaking, & air co-operation afterwards, it is now 12.30, so darling this will have to be a very short note, but I'll see you on Saturday [...] Goodnight darling,

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
24 June (1941)*

Angel Venus,

I am writing to you from the top of the world, here above all common life I can find peace and the solitude I often craved for in the early days of my army career. Here I can lie & dream of you, [...]

It is a perfectly glorious midsummer's evening, the sun is scorching and yet there is a cool breeze blowing to make amends for such intense heat, and all is still and quiet, such beauty and peace are surely found together, and I, now I have found them will be loth to go & leave them should we ever be moved. It really is a lovely place, the perfect setting for lovers & yet so rarely visited, a place where we shall

spend a lot of time when you come here to stay I'm sure. Even the trees are happy here, you can see they are, standing erect and stately, with their branches stretched out to cast a friendly shadow for the cattle sheltering beneath, here life is real, every single thing that lives and breathes revels in the joy of living, and no thought of wars or bloodshed could ever detract from the beauty of it all. And yet, I am not happy, true I have found peace, but with peace always comes dreams of you to haunt me & fill me with yearning [*there follows nearly two pages of adoration*].

The sun is in the West now, with not more than another hour to shine, a Wellington bomber is just passing over it, casting the first crude shadow of man's clumsy work over the countryside since I came here-----It is gone now, leaving behind the horrible realisation that we are at war, what mad ness is this, that man, with such a lovely world to live in & share with fellow men, should suddenly take leave of all the common rules of humanity, & start to rob & kill. Dreadful thought, thank goodness God does not see fit for all the beauty to be destroyed, or if one would gladly give up living.

Midsummers Day, I am filled with sad thoughts as I see the fading rays of sunshine shedding its peculiarly revealing light over everything, the hills in the immediate foreground are sharply outlined now, and the trees, green with an almost uncanny beauty, cast shadows down the slopes, heralding the approaching night, away in the distance a cuckoo sings its mournful monotonous song, and the gorse bushes around me have closed their flowers ready for sleep, all is peace, a sad peace, as realisation is born of all the suffering in the world, please God end this nightmare soon, that the beauty of midsummer night may once again bring nothing but joyful thoughts of the future [...]

Goodnight Darling [...]

Telegram sent by Bill on 25th June 1941. Note it has been stamped “WATFORD” so the question is, was it delivered on the right day? Note: Cowers Lane is a small settlement near to Shottle.

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle
Flimsy dated Friday
(Probably 27th June 1941)*

My Darling,

Just a quick line to let you know latest developments, my success at the inn is still in doubt, therefore I have decided to beg the farmer to accommodate you for meals, & by the time you get this I shall have either given it up as a bad job, or wired you anyway, but here is the farm's full address

Mr. Fletcher,
Dannah Farm,²⁹
Shottle. ETC.

Send your equipment there, send it by passenger or it will never get there. Book a return ticket to Derby L.M.S., & in the event of my not being at the station, enquire for the Bus station, & take a ride to Belper, go as far as the Bus does, and alight at what is known as the triangle, and from there you'll have a terrific walk in front of you, & you'll have to inquire your way, but I'm pretty confident that I shall be with you as from Derby station, so don't worry, I'm just giving you safety directions. I'm ever so sorry you had to wait till the last minute for details, but honestly darling, if you know the job I'm having, you wouldn't reproach me, I have done my best, & still you'll have to camp unless you hear different, but in any case it will be as well to send on your kit as soon as you receive this note even if we eventually don't need it, so go ahead darling because the meal business will be O.K. I'm sure, & you can bring Penny, so start preparing for love. The groundsheets I can supply, & your toilet can probably be carried out at the farm, so whatever happens you will be O.K. Don't bother about the Primus, & don't pack more kit than you need other than clothes of course. I'll write more later,

²⁹ Now a 5 star Country Hotel

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle,
Sunday 29 June (1941)*

Darling,

I guess you'll be wondering by now, what sort of weather you're likely to get during your stay here & I sincerely hope it's as lovely as it is now, the sun is positively scorching, tempered only by a slight breeze, but it's really wonderful, & if we are lucky enough to have this weather continued for a fortnight or so, I'm sure you won't want to go home any more.

I am writing from my usual perch on top of the world, only this afternoon I am not alone, I have introduced Freddie Burgess to the spot, and here we are side by side, writing letters home, I expect the sergeant will come & fetch us about teatime in his car, so you can see what a time we're having, the only trouble is, that this freedom & luxury only happens on Sunday afternoons, though perhaps we should cease to appreciate it if we had it always. I expect you'll want to know all about your holiday now, [..]. First of all I had a terrific job to persuade Dorothy the farmer's daughter to fix you with a daily meal, you see they are so busy now with the harvest, but she was quite agreeable to you camping in any of their fields, but when I told her I had given up hope of finding anywhere for you, & that probably you'd only want a mid-day meal, she unbent & said she see what she could do, which was the same as saying yes, because these Derbyshire people never commit themselves. You will be about 50 yds or perhaps a little more, from the camp, & what with seeing me in the evenings, & helping Dorothy with anything you like so long as you don't get in the way during the day, I think you're going to love being a married land girl for a week. You must like Dorothy, she's the kindest hearted girl I've met (except you) fat & jolly, hard to offend, & I think you will enjoy her company. She smokes, & we repay her for lovely creamy coffee each night, by sharing our cigarettes with her, I asked her what her

favourite brand was & she said she can't get them up this way, so you can partly pay your rent by obtaining through your Dad or elsewhere, as many Senior Service or Greys as you can, she will love you for that, so do your best. I think it will be wise for you to obtain all your rations too, so that you can turn those over when you arrive, it will help her quite a lot, I do so hope you get on well together, because I had such a job to persuade her to have you at all, & really if it weren't for Joe, who is so well in with them as to be almost one of the family, I'm afraid we should have had no success at all, so you must thank Joe as much as anyone for your being able to stay so near. Now for the question of tents, I believe they have to be camouflaged nowadays, so will you acquire permission from the owner of your borrowed one, so that should we want to camouflage it, I need to have no fear of trouble afterwards.

Everyone is cutting hay this week, so we are not very far behind up here after all, & I have been learning all sorts of things about farming recently, it is a proper gamble, & it's really amazing the amounts of money they deal in, no wonder they get worried at times. I, together with Freddie Burgess, have now become part of two families here, we have two farm houses where we are free to visit as we pleas, and one is Dorothy's home, and as you know, all the N.C.O.'s go across each night for coffee, we call it the N.C.O.'s mess, & Dorothy the president, it's funny really, because milk & sugar are so scarce where you are, & yet five of us can have two cups of the most delicious coffee every night we're here, it almost seems as if there is no rationing here, I can understand the plentifulness of the milk, but not the sugar, & we never dream of repaying it, so it remains one of the mysteries of Shottle.

Darling, are you looking forward as much as I am to this coming honeymoon [...]

Thank you for the cigarettes, & also all your letters last week, & fortunately I received the one you wrote me to counteract your ticking off, because I got the actual ticking off, so it didn't matter, though I'm sorry you have so little faith in me, I thought you loved me[...]

Now darling, about your travel, I did send some instructions [...] when you get to Dannah Farm, tell Miss Dorothy Fletcher that you are my wife, & you will be welcomed straight away, but I know I shall be here to meet you [...] now I must end my letter for today [...] I'm O.S., again [...] Goodnight [...]

Searchlight Camp, Shottle
30 June 1941
(10 page flimsy)

Dearest Love,

Monday has passed, it is now five minutes past midnight, and we are just settling down for the night of guard changing. We have been out on air co-operation tonight, a defiant was going to fly over & we were having a try to illuminate same, but he failed to put in an appearance, so of course we had a fruitless wait, but that's all over now, & we've retired rather disappointed. I've had a pretty quiet day really, the usual maintenance & training in the morning, followed by an afternoon & evenings damn hard work, we're on emplacements still, & this ground up here is full of rock, you go down one foot, & strike solid rock floor, the boulders we're turning out would make excellent tombstones, they're that big, & all this is being done in the heat of the afternoon, it's very wearing & I'm losing weight fast now, I weighed on Friday on Bath Parade & I go 12 stones now, that means pretty well a stone knocked off, that's hard work, less food, & more worry, & the summer time. You may be surprised when I say less food, but this rotten tinned stuff is upsetting everyone now, we only get fresh food twice a week, & each dinner that's dished up makes me heave, so much so that for the last three days I have eaten no dinner, but bought biscuits instead, & made do till teatime, although by then I find I don't need it & just have a couple of slices of bread & jam. Funny, we never get tired of bread & jam, & yet we get it daily, although Sunday did give us a change in that we had lettuce & radishes from our own garden, & things are beginning to move now to such an extent that we

shall very soon be able to add new potatoes & peas to the menu, & then thank goodness I shall at least be able to be a vegetarian, because even that is barred to me as all our veg's come out of tins, I really can't understand why all this stuff couldn't have been saved till there was a shortage, anyway it's upsetting us all, & I'm thoroughly browned off with it, I'm hunger striking now, I don't know where I'd be if it wasn't for the canteen & S.A. van, I'm afraid I spend all my money on grub these days, but so do most others, in fact, the only things that derive any real benefit from the tinned grub are the pigs who get our swill.

Enough of moans, I spent an interesting evening planting out some more lettuces and Brussel sprouts, my garden begins to look quite healthy after all this sun, the peas are in bloom and only 9 ins tall, although they should have grown to 2 ½ feet according to the packet, however we shall get something off them, so I'm not grumbling about it. My flowers too, are beginning to show their true characters now, I can tell by the shapes of the tiny leaves exactly which is which, & I watered them thoroughly tonight in an endeavour to hurry them up a bit, my one fear is that I shall not stay here to see them bloom, & that would indeed be awful, but I guess the A.T.S. would appreciate them anyway, so they wouldn't be lost.

All the boys went haymaking tonight, they've pretty well cleared the field where I intend your tent to be, & if they stack it there, I shall pitch your camp beside the haystack, & then you'll be right outside the gate of the camp, & yet concealed from view, I'm getting awfully excited about it all now it's so near, I do hope it means as much to you. I received a letter from you today written before you had any news from me, & you certainly seemed upset about it [...] I couldn't let you know any sooner for the simple reason that I had nowhere to put you [...] you will understand that I shall only have limited time with you [...] I shall of course steal four nights with you, the other two I shall be O.S. & that means that I shall be free for two whole days, & we must plan something very good [...] I wish it could be more, but I guess you'll find Dorothy will be able to find you a little job or two if you really wanted something to take up your time. Now as for instructions, I have already given them to you twice, but I'll repeat.....all you have worry about is your own blankets & sheets perhaps & a pillow case which can be filled with hay.....one thing I should appreciate, could you select my dark grey flannels, newest blue striped shirt with a suitable tie, & green sports jacket, & send them by post..... I expect you'll think I've got pretty brown during my absence, & I should have been more so if I could get "Cooltan", but I couldn't find any in Derby, so if you are able to procure it down that way, you might get an extra tube for a lovely soldier who is

always afraid of losing his skin. My nose has behaved wonderfully during these hot days, it got a bit red at times, & now and again gives a scurfy impression in places, but I've managed to keep the biggest percentage of it in one piece this summer, & very proud of it too, but I would feel a lot easier with "Cooltan" to protect it completely, so do your best darling.

.....will you give me a definite train to wait for (I've forgotten the one you mentioned before)I'll be waiting there for you & Penny & your suitcase, which I hope will not be too heavy, although I have found a way to the camp by bus from Derby which cuts a mile off the walking part [...] I expect Dorothy will find something for you when you arrive, I'll talk nicely to her tomorrow, she seems quite ready to have you now she has committed herself, & I really do believe when she meets you, you'll be friends, & probably she'll want as much time with you as I shall.

One very important thing still keeps tickling my memory, the Ethels & Rendells, don't forget those will you sweet, the time for babies will be at the end of the war, not before, although I agree it is getting late [...] ³⁰

Our officer is due back from leave tomorrow, I hope you'll be able to meet him, but he's due for a course at some uncertain future date, & may be gone when you arrive, I do hope he won't tho', because I'd love you to meet him, & he really does want to see you. Sergeant Robbs also is keen to see you, he has had several long looks at your picture, & he playfully suggests sending me to Golden Valley for the week while he looks after you, but I know he doesn't mean that because we are close friends & he's one of the best, & certainly the best sergeant I've had. He will be taking a commission soon I think, that is why Freddie Burgess is with us, against that time, we shall be sorry to lose him, but he wants a commission, although he emphatically states that he doesn't wish to leave Shottle now, so it's going to be a wrench for him when he does go.-----I've got to slip out to waken two fresh guards now darling, excuse me for a quarter of an hour, I'll come straight back-----Back again, they hated it, I get many a black look & curses when I do this job, but it has to be done, tho' it's hard with a handful of men, they never get more than four hours unbroken sleep, & we slog all day too, something ought to be done about it in the form of extra men, but they seem to be very rare these days, so we just have to grin & bear it.

³⁰ Ivy did, in fact camp at Dannah Farm as we learn from subsequent letters

My back has just started to itch, I scratched it, & lo & behold, my skin is peeling, [...] I kidded myself it would stay on [...] no-one bothers in the army whether one has patchy skin or not, [...]
 How I long for Saturday to come [...] I have I think arranged my next O.S. day to fall on the Friday, so that I shall be free Saturday until Sunday morning, then I shall work in the morning & have all the afternoons & evenings out with you, so we'll start off in a grand style if all goes as well as I hope & pray it will.

I forgot to tell you that I went on Bath Parade last Friday, & with Joe visited Derby Cathedral, where we both knelt & prayed for a few minutes, I prayed for the end of the war to hurry up, & for Dorothy to fix you up next week, so you see, prayers are answered, & now we must both thank God for our happiness, & pray for fine weather & that I shall not be moved during that week. [...] And now dearest love, I must end this note to you, & I'll write again on Wednesday [...] Goodnight, God Bless You,

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle
 Friday 18th July (1941)*

My Goddess, [...]

...now that I am
 back at Camp, how I
 miss you, all I have now
 are lovely memories of a
 wonderful & all too
 brief visit to heaven [...]
 I travelled back safely,
 but the journey has
 made me very tired; the
 fare from London to
 Derby was 9/11d, so the
 ten bob was just right, and I really appreciated the comfort of travelling without worry & miles of walking. Peter Robbs was on the same train from Bedford to Derby, & we didn't meet until we got out, & of course we stuck together from there to Shottle. He has left his car in Belper for repairs, & we called for it to find it wasn't ready, so we had to walk all the way, & that's just about finished me, you remember the big hill out of Belper, that's the straw which broke our backs, & we both realised how very much out of condition we were. We arrived in Camp about 4 o'clock, &

after a general sort out it was teatime, & I had two mugs full of lovely tea, in fact army tea has never tasted so nice before. After tea I felt pretty bad, with a headache & so terribly tired, so I made my bed & had two hours rest, I couldn't sleep, I wonder if I will tonight? somehow I'm afraid it won't be much, because I shall be missing you, & thinking of last night [...] I thank heaven I have you to help me keep my sanity & sense of proportion, & to soothe me when I feel like giving up [...]

And now my sweetheart, although it's a very short note, I really haven't any more to tell you [...] Oh! I forgot, George Platt is back, & so are all the other men who went away, but poor old Joe is still on his course, so I guess that leaves George in full possession of Dorothy, I may go over later on for coffee, & if I do, perhaps I can find out how the land lies, I'll let you know in tomorrow's letter, & until then [...] please pray for the speedy end of this terrible war,

Searchlight Camp, Shottle
20th July (1941)

Angel mine,

Sunday again, and as I am O.S., yesterday I have only just got up and it's now well into the afternoon. I have slept well, & feel refreshed, which is a good thing because I felt pretty tired this morning, and I still have a nights rest to come, so I should be O.K. by tomorrow. I told you all the boys were back, well, for the next two or three days we shall have about forty men here, & are they making the most of it too. They all went out last night, I was left on the site with two guards and Peter Robbs which meant that about 35 went out, and they all got drunk too, & rolled in at all hours from 1 o'clock onwards, the last arriving at 4.30 this morning still drunk, I believe they had a really grand time, but I'm glad I wasn't with them all the same. They are all busy polishing and getting ready for another binge tonight, but I'm not even going down to the Railway Inn for my usual drink tonight, instead, I shall write & write & then go to bed, so darling, you see I am keeping my promise to leave the beer alone, & I don't find it very difficult.

I have just been informed that I am the fortunate and favoured number 6 who is to remain here throughout this experiment, isn't that lovely, I expect I shall drop in for a lot of work, but it will be worth it to avoid the continual worry of daily moving from place to place.

Sgt. Robbs and myself went over to the farm last night, and Dorothy was ever so pleased to see us, and also to get a letter from you. She read out the passages concerning Peter Robbs & Joe, & Pete still says he's sorry he didn't see you off, but hopes to meet you again some day. We expect Joe back about Tuesday, and I guess we shall still be able to have our evening gatherings, only they will have to be a bit earlier. By the way, an opportunity has occurred where you can show your gratitude to Dorothy, they cannot buy tomatoes at any price up here, would you care to buy a few pounds & pack them carefully to send by post to her? She would really appreciate the gesture I know, because she misses them so, I told her you might be able to get her some, so perhaps you'll see what can be done about it.

Two of our night scented stocks came into bloom yesterday, there aren't enough to make that delicious scent discernible from a distance, but they are brave little heralds of things to come, & I picked a spray & took it to Dorothy, she loved the perfume, and appreciated the gesture, & I hope soon to have some Clarkia to give her. [...] I would give anything to be able to return to our old existence when you were mine to have & to hold each day and night [...]

The site is now deserted except for guards, and I feel very lonely and sad, I do miss you, & am reminded of your week here, when all I had to do after the day was done was to run across to the orchard, & there you were [...] That sweet corner of the orchard will always remind me of another honeymoon [...]

I have no news [...] as soon as things start to happen again I guess there will be plenty to tell you, especially as you know exactly how everything looks here now, so I'll close now [...] It is only 8 o'clock, but I'm going to polish boots, mend my trousers which have split their seams, & then go to bed. [...] Goodnight Darling [...],

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle
Tuesday 22nd July (1941)*

My very own darling,

I received your parcel of notepaper & 2 letters this morning, I knew they would come, although I felt very sad yesterday when the postman didn't have anything for me, but today has made amends, and Marjorie's cake came too, so I had quite a fan mail to attend to.

Yesterday I was kept very busy doing various things, among which was a class of plotters I had to instruct, and what with preparing today's lessons in addition, I had my hands so full, I had no time to write you, [...] I am only squashing this note in between scores of other things happening around me today. I will give you details; - The morning was made exciting by an accident which happened to one of our listeners. He was fixing a loudspeaker on a pole, which we use for training, it makes a noise like an aeroplane, & the pole is 10 ft high with the speaker on top, well, he had just got it upright when it slipped down the length of the pole & dropped corner ways right on to his head, it made such a nasty gash that he had to go to hospital & have 6 stitches in it, you never saw such a mess, & he didn't go unconscious either, it was marvellous the way he stood up to it.

In the afternoon we all, that is, all N.C. O.'s had to go to G.V., to take our first lessons in tactical stuff for this new stunt, & we spent an interesting afternoon learning & arguing about various things, but it stretched into the evening as well, & we didn't get away till nearly eight, but whilst we were there, we learnt that Peter Robbs has been made a full sergeant, he is delighted of course, & we had to wet his promotion on the way home, 7 N.C.O.'s called at a pub in Belper, & used all their beer up at Peter's expense, & as the driver of the van partook also, we had a really hectic ride home, he tried all ways to wreck the car, but he didn't succeed, & all we got was a good laugh, though I dread to think what would have happened had any of the military authorities seen what capers we were cutting. Ah! Well, he's now a Sgt. in reality, & he deserves it, he knows his job, & that's more than I can say for other promotions this month, but maybe mine will soon come along, please pray for me darling.

I am writing now at 10 o'clock, we are waiting for 11.30 when we have exactly 2 ½ hours air co-operation to do, which means I shall not be in bed before 1, & I'm O.S. again tomorrow, no wonder I'm getting thin (I can hear you laughing) anyway, our experimental experiences are on with a vengeance now, though I do hope we shall be able to wangle some system of leave in before long. You asked me to tell you when my 7 days would come, that's impossible, & I fear I shan't know for some time yet, & even if I do get leave it may only be for 48, but even that will be welcome under the present circumstances because the prospect is very gloomy at present.

Well well, I guess we shall come out luckier than we expect, as we always seem to do, though like you, I do wish I knew the exact date of our next meeting [...]

You mentioned going to the dance on Sat. I hate to disappoint you, but I wish you hadn't gone, it was to have been our dance, & it wouldn't have hurt you to miss just one surely. Your suiters remarks about it being a pity I am so firm made me furious, & I'd smash every one of them if I ever meet them. Surely they can be content to dance with you, it's more than I can have each week, but it proves my point, that though you may go for joy of dancing, they are always after something more, I know men, you kid yourself, but I love & trust you, [...]

Now I must end sweetheart, please understand me [...],

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
24th July 1941*

To my darling,

As promised earlier today [..], I am now settling down to an evenings writing, and though I haven't the faintest idea what I shall write about owing to lack of real news, I guess I shall be able to remember little things of interest as I go along. [...]

Now to such news as I have;- I received a letter from you this morning which was written Tuesday, & I was very happy to get it too, because mail from you since I got back has been very erratic, and I do so look forward to letters from you, [...] I showed the parts concerning Peter Robbs & Freddie Burgess to each of them, & Peter heartily agreed that he too regretted not being able to receive those kisses personally, he regularly enquires after you, I think you must have won his heart.

My night stocks are all in bloom now, but they are so very few, I do wish there were more of them, my Escholtzias have begun to bloom too now, I glimpsed two yellow heads this evening, I do hope I shall turn out some nice colours, they will make that corner look quite pretty. All the runners are blooming, & we have had two dinners from the peas, so things are going quite favourable all round.

I am writing this as I lie outside in the field adjoining the Camp, I have my shirt off, and the sun is very hot again, it looks as if we're going to get some more nice weather now, I hope we do, because the corn is ripening beautifully, & its's just the sort of weather for harvesting.

I shall go over to Dorothy tonight, & thank you for promising to send tomatoes to her, I hope you'll take especial care to pack them properly, so that she gets them at their best, I know she'll just love you for that.

We have a dog now, one of the lads went out the other night, & the dog, a beautiful thoroughbred Labrador Black Retriever, followed him all the way from Matlock, a distance of about 8 miles, he's a wonderful animal, bigger than Fretful (?), but far more intelligent, loves being petted, & has a collar on with his owners name & address, although so far, everyone has become so fond of him we are loth to let him go, it almost amounts to stealing, but he can't have been very happy at home or he wouldn't have left. We have christened him "Nigger", though he answers just as well to my pet name for him Black Beauty, anyway, he's a lovely dog, & I don't like to think of losing him. He gets on well with the cats, & at this moment is lying beside me asleep in the sun. He has a massive head & chest, & his paws are as big round as your wrists, I should hate him to get cross with me, he could make a real mess of things.

I took a shower bath tonight, & feel much refreshed & cleaner for it now, it reminded me vividly of the week you were here, when I bathed each day before coming over to the orchard [...] each time I go to the farm I instinctively look across to your corner, & silently wish you were still there for me to go to whenever I could, I don't know when we shall met again I'm sure, but I do pray it will be soon. We're now undergoing intensive training in all branches of Gas, I mentioned to you this morning that we had a whole afternoon of it yesterday, well, we have lots more afternoons to look forward to yet it seems, & though it's all very interesting, I find it hard to keep awake at all these lectures we're getting. The other part of our training is interesting too, but here again, with the constant need for sleep, & the very little we do get, when we sit down to receive lectures & take notes we have to spend all our powers keeping our eyes open, however, I have learned lots of new things, all of which will be a terrific stride towards promotion soon I hope, anyway, compared to old systems, my knowledge now is equal to that of a full sergeant, & I'm still learning, so I ought to be lucky soon. I do so want to get another one up, I want you to be proud of me, & I'm still striving all I can to get it, so pray for me & I'll know I shall succeed.

We had to hand in one of our blankets today, which only leaves us with three, so I guess a few of us will be cold tonight, I know I'm going to miss mine, but there's always my greatcoat, so I suppose I'll have to use that.

Joe has just come across on his way to the Sound Locator, he says I'm to give you his love, so consider it sent, although he could never have as much as I, & you know what he is with women? Hope he doesn't see this bit.

...there is little more in the way of news, & it's getting a bit late too, the sun has gone down, & the breeze is chilly, so I must go & put my shirt on, & see Dorothy, & before that, I have the guard lists to make out as I'm in sole charge now, [...] God Bless You, Your Bill always.

LATE NEWS 23.00 hrs Just got back from Dorothy, she says she received 6 pounds of lovely tomatoes this morning, she really is delighted with them, she told me to enclose her heartfelt thanks, and says she really will write as soon as she can.

Young Peter's two Aunts are coming for the weekend as from tomorrow & I think she'll be pretty busy, so forgive her if you don't hear immediately. Peter now has a pony, he is very proud of himself & goes riding all over the place, just the sort of present for a lad of his age. He sends his love to Auntie Ivy & I add mine, so you are extremely wealthy, will write again tomorrow. Bill.

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
27th SUNDAY (Probably July 1941)*

CONCERT GIVEN BY THE HOME GUARD & FRIENDS

Dearest Love,

I expect you'll think I'm very wicked when I confess to sleeping all afternoon until teatime, & then I had a guard list to compile and it's now well after 7 in the evening, & we have a concert on this evening too, given by the Home Guard & friends, so my time has been rather curtailed I fear, but I have a half hour before it starts, and I'll continue when it has finished.

Now to what little news I have :- Last night's binge, never have I seen Beer flow so freely, but I only got dizzy, an achievement of which I am justly proud considering the company I was in, even old Joe got terribly drunk, & went to a dance

afterwards. Mr. Douglas & Pete Robbs & myself had exercised remarkable control, & were only just off-serious, & I was prevailed upon to go back to camp rather than go to the dance, so I missed quite a lot of the fun. All the N.C.O.'s from G.V. were there too, we numbered 12, & each round of drinks cost 9/-, (45p) obviously too dear for all of us, so we had a 5/- whip round, & I know someone made some profit, because we didn't drink all that beer, however, the antics of all concerned was well worth the money. When I got back, I played about a bit, & then fell into a game of Banker with 3 other lads, we played until I had broken them all, I won about 10/- (~~about~~ £2600 in 2022) but I was tender hearted & gave all but 2/6 back to them.. so that I went to bed with an easy conscience.

I awoke today with a good old hangover, but four aspirins & cup of tea soon had me on my feet, & the morning quickly went by, & as I felt so very tired, I took my bed out into the field & slept all afternoon, which brings me to the concert which no-one has bothered much about until today----- The show is over, quite a good one too, although the polish of the last one has rather spoiled us for future amateur attempts, and we are inclined to be rather too critical, but seriously, for amateurs it was very good. I'll tell you all about it, they opened with community singing led by a girl piano-accordionist, she was good, & got plenty of encores, because there's nothing we love better than a good old sing -song, this was followed by the two "Belper lovelies" in a tap dancing act, dressed in very scanty scanties & not bad looking, they went down very well with the boys & myself I must confess, it is refreshing to see a bit of leg occasionally. They gave us several dancing numbers, & really were the best turns too, they had a wonderful variety of frocks & costumes which lent a finish to their acts, & anyway they were showered with encores etc. The comedian was another doubtful one, but such was his manner that even Dorothy couldn't complain this time. He put over one rather good joke about Mr. Lill, who was there by the way, here it is:- he said he had some sad news to tell us, namely that Mr. Lill had been found drowned in his hut this morning having slipped through the mattress into the spring below, we all laughed very heartily over this, & then out came one about Peter Robbs, he said we should all be pleased to know that sergeant Robbs recent operation had been very successful, he had died this morning, this one although good, was lost on the audience who were still too busy laughing about Mr. Lill's joke, but he was good all round, & helped the show along tremendously. There was also a young lad with a ukulele who tried to emulate George Formby, but he was very nervous, & rather spoiled his act by his obvious timidity, but there is no more generous audience than soldiers, & we helped him out by lustily singing all his choruses. The show lasted about 2 hours, & we were all agreed that though not as

good as the last, it was still very acceptable, & I'm sure everyone had a good evening. Dorothy invited Joe & myself over for coffee afterwards, an occurrence which is entirely new, for it is our custom to leave her to herself on Sundays, but she has two Aunts of Peters staying there this weekend, & she had to go & see to them anyway, & this factor persuaded us to go with her for our usual delicious evening coffee. She has written to you, & I expect her letter will arrive with this, but she seems very moody this week, I think mainly because George Platt is back, & has altered in his general attitude towards her, he never goes to see her apparently, & I think she must be rather too fond of him. I tried my best to cheer her up, but she's a difficult girl to understand, & I fear we left her in much the same mood as we found her, but she does have fits I know, & she will be just the opposite tomorrow I bet. Joe confessed to me tonight that he trod on the Holy Ground this afternoon:- our corner in the orchard, I forgave him & said I didn't mind him being there because he treated it with due reverence. It has indeed become a sacred spot for me now, & always I glance across there expecting to see a tent with a golden angel flitting between the trees, & I feel very sad as I think of the lovely week we spent here together [...]

I am orderly sergeant again tomorrow, which means I may have some extra time in which to write, & I really must have a writing Blitz, I owe letters to Ron, Mum, my Brother & Ted, & I hope to be able to get at least Ron's & Mum's off tomorrow in addition to the most important of all, [...] Everyone on the Rouser Team is out now on air co-operation, & they are likely to stay there for hours yet, usually till about 2 in the morning, we get it every night now, & this is my first fairly free evening, I say fairly free because I'm still N.C.O in charge of the Lewis Guns, & in the event of a real Rouser I should be out with them looking for Jerries to shoot down, but up till now all is quiet & though it is now midnight, I hope they will let us alone.

More news for you:- as we are one of the sites on the edge of the Battery Area, they have decided that we shall not have to deploy, but remain as a 2 light cluster, & the remainder of the unused men are to form a relief team for other single units when they're on leave, & this is a hell of a job, I do so hope that I'm not one of the reliefs, because they're always last to get consideration, so please pray for us both to be soon reunited if only for a brief 7 days. Life is funny these days, there are crowds of men here, we operate only one light & work with 3 teams which means that they are only required 1 night in 3, & yet we N.C.O.'s have never had such a busy time before. I have been put in charge of all Guards, & having conducted it very successfully for 5 days, I now have an accumulation of lists which give me a headache each time I

make out a new one, it takes hours to do, but it's worth it to be able to say that I am the first man to compile a list that evokes no complaint, a feat of which I am justly proud.

My lettuces are doing well now, we had lots of rain yesterday & it did them good, also the runners are in full bloom now, they look very pretty against the wall, the marrows have assumed tremendous proportions now, they look like tropical plants, & still no sign of blooms, I bet we shall have some terrific marrows when they do come. I am impatiently awaiting flowers on the Clarkias, they should make a fine show when they do start anyway, but I still wish I had sown the whole corner with night stocks.

I am nearing the end of this letter now [...] I could go on writing & writing, but I have to be up early tomorrow, the piano has to go back to the school, & all sorts of things to be cleared up, & it's 1 o'clock too, so I guess I ought to go to bed really, [...] Goodnight Darling, I will hold you in dreams, God Bless you & keep you for me, I love you always,

CHAPTER FIVE

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
29th July (1941)*

My own darling,

A year ago to the date of this letter, I was taken away from you, I dare not think of all the joys & troubles we might have shared in that year, and as for the enduring of it, well, a week seems like a lifetime. [...] I can never be happy until I am by your side for good once more, that time cannot be too soon now, [...] I have learned a lasting lesson, namely, that life is too deliciously sweet & precious with you, to waste even a moment with the petty little trivialities I used to make, so, providing this war soon will end, perhaps we shall have something to thank it for, it has made us completely aware of our being as one, and all we can do now, is to pray most fervently that it will soon be all over. We have both endured, and achieved many things which we thought impossible [...] our love has been tried & tested well and long in the fires of war, and would not perish, so we will count our blessings and be thankful it is no worse, for as you have so often said, there could be many more awful conditions under which we should be fighting.

Now to lighter news;- I received your letter safely this morning which you wrote in your birthday suit, [...] . Congratulations on your electrical achievements, I do hope it is a real success, but then, you always were capable really, and I know it will be all-right.

I expect you are looking forward to your trip to Wembley to inspect the maidens ³¹, I know you will make a good impression, and expect the old girls will say you're far too good for me, as if I didn't know, anyway I hope it will pass off successfully for you darling. Thank you for the envelopes and economy labels, they will be extremely useful to me, because being an almost daily writer. I find that my slender store of envelopes very quickly dwindles, and I don't know where I should be without you.

I discovered that all my marrow plants had bloomed this morning, colossal blooms they were too, I had no idea they grew as large as that, I should think we

³¹ Bill's unmarried maiden aunts, Edith, Florence, Margaret & Charlotte Hooper

could get some good results from them now. We have had lots of rain here in the last two days, almost continuous, it's pouring outside now at 2.30 in the morning, but I don't worry much about such things while the weather is still mild. I noted your postscript about keeping off beer for love of you, of course I shall darling, I think Saturday last was excusable owing to Pete's gun?, but honestly that's the first and last I had touched since we visited the Plough together----- Just had to walk round the camp to wake myself up, it's an awful feeling when your eyelids simply will not keep open, I'm sure it's knocking years off my life, anyway having strolled around a bit, & chatted with the sentries, I feel a little better, so I hope to overcome this lethargy, which always steals over me between 2 & 4. I have made out the guard sheets, having spent nearly all day drawing up a perfectly wonderful chart it looks beautiful, & I should think anyone would give me another stripe for my patience alone, I think I'll pin it up in the canteen tomorrow.

I didn't get across to see Dorothy this evening, & I must confess I missed her coffee and company quite a bit, that evening break has made a lot of difference to my attitude towards army life, & makes it a little more bearable when I know there are still human beings in the world. Well well, I guess I'll get over it. You will be very pleased to know about my general appearance, namely;- that my hair is getting longer, also the moustache, & that if anything, I am more suntanned than ever, so when I do get home again, you may be justly proud of my appearance, and also relieved that the moustache will not prickle.

I'm glad you took my mild ticking off about the dance to heart, and I sincerely hope you did not go this week, I wish you could find more to occupy you at home, I'm sure that if I can be happy in my spare time at Shottle, you ought to be able to manage something even better in a home of your own, but there, I never could see your point of view about pleasure, though I hope you see mine, you know I'm jealous of anyone having the joy & privilege of making and seeing you happy, & try as I will, I simply cannot curb this little green god, so perhaps you could make it easier by not going out quite so much, I know poor old Barbara (Ivy's sister) don't get much life, & I'd hate you to be like she is, but surely if she's happy doing absolutely nothing exciting, you could manage to cut down your exploits a bit. Don't think me hard darling, you know I was always unreasonable, & if you disagree entirely with me, don't be afraid to say so, & whatever you do, never fail to tell me anything, because Joe found out that his wife went to a Dance the other day, & he hates dances, & as he received his information some days later & quite casually, he is most upset about it, I think if he could blame it on someone, he'd do a bit of murdering on the quiet, & so

would I if ever anyone tried to steal you, so just keep right on telling me everything, as I do you, because frankness is the key to successful married life, remember, I promised to avoid beer, but as soon as I touch it, I tell you, & here a thought occurs to me, perhaps one day we'll strike a bargain concerning beer & dances, you hate beer, & I dislike dances unless I am with you, & even then I dislike the usual army of sissies & jitter-bugs which surround us.

Forgive me [....] You very seldom mention the Aunts when giving me news of home, how do things go these days? do you manage fairly well? you might let me know about them, and if your little affairs with them worry you at all, don't be afraid of boring me, I love to hear everything, because now, even more than a year since, I need your letters & news of home, they are my path to happiness, I wait for the postman each morning, & I can always see which letter is mine, you are the only one who uses business envelopes, & I can easily tell whether I have one or not, [...] your news, however scant, gives me that breath of home which means so much[...]

We still have our black dog, strange as it seems, the owner has not bothered to raise a hue & cry for it, a thing which I should have thought quite a natural occurrence with such a beauty, but he seems to have settled down permanently to army life now, & likes it. He does guard with the Generator Guards, turns out for Rousers, attends all parades, & always stands with the N.C.O.'s in front of the parade, just as if he had been trained to it, and he has found two nice young lady friends in Fretful & Betsy who are both on heat, so what with one thing & another he is kept very busy, although Fretful has been kept in these last few days, rather too late though I fear, although only time will show, no wonder he is short winded, he has a grand life, tons of food, plenty of petting (both kinds) & the run of the camp, I am not really surprised he don't want to go back.

My indigestion has been troublesome just lately, and if I remember rightly, this is about the time of year for a bout, it has been painful repeatedly for weeks, & I miss my MacLean's tablets now, do you think you could get a small lot for me? preferably in a tin because of sending them by post, if you did this, I would gladly forgo the cigarettes for a week, as the stomach is rather an urgent business, I should hate to think of getting my ticket on the same conditions as Arthur however lovely it would be back home.

My telephonist companion is fast asleep, has been for the last 3 hours, I wish I had as little responsibility as they now have, all there is to worry about is the phone, & they know jolly well it will waken them should it ring, but I let them all sleep, I

feel much more private while writing to you if I can feel alone, so I guess it's a good job they do sleep sometimes.

We have worked very hard all day long on camouflage netting, & Freddie Burgess & myself have almost worn ourselves out with draping & pegging them around the projectors etc., but it will be all finished by tomorrow thank goodness, and that will be another step towards the A.T.S., occupation if ever it comes, I hope it don't.

Well angel, I think I have given you all the news for today's happenings & all I can do is promise you some more tomorrow, so until then sweetheart mine, [...]

God Bless You,

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
30th July (1941)*

My Darling Wife,

What a pleasure it is to be able to address you as such, I have just been looking at your picture, and the more I look, the more I am convinced of my amazing good fortune in having such a wonderful girl for a wife. [*a page of adoration follows*]. Now to news such as I have;- I received your letter this morning telling me of a visit to my Aunts, you didn't say what impressions were gained, or any of the little details I should have liked to have known, I do hope the letter you are sending to follow that will give me more details [...] if you can't write what I want to read, I know it Is

because you haven't the gift of expression that I seem to have, & that I can look for active interpretation when next we meet [...]
 Sergeant Peters? has gone to the pictures at Belper tonight, he asked me to go with him, but I went last night, all by myself, yes it's true, I refused all invitations to go out drinking, & walked into Belper just in time for the show;- it was Charlie Chan in the Mystery of the Waxworks Museum, & it really was a good picture, I enjoyed it immensely, but always when I go out I am surrounded by happy couples, & it invariably makes me unhappy, so by the time I got back to camp I felt about as cheerful as when I went out, can you wonder I have a drink here & there, although honestly darling, I have made a stern resolution to avoid all booze from now on, you threw down the challenge in a recent letter, just a P.S., I wonder if you recall it, in case you

don't here it is;-

P.S. keep off the beer, that is if you can for love of me.

Well I accept that challenge, and it all depends on me now, & I can prove it too, so just you wait for results, I know they'll be good----- The S.A. van has just arrived, and as we have all just been paid he is doing a roaring trade, the only drawback to payday on Wednesday however is that we are usually painfully broke by about Monday, although if I stopped drinking once a week I might be able to make ends meet again. Joe has just gone over to Dorothy to take his thrice weekly offering of crisps & cigarettes, he is O.S. today, and so will not be able to go over when we do, & I have taken over for now while he gets out. You will be pleased to know that I am famous in the camp for my perfect guard sheets, I have been conducting them successfully now for eight days with not one complaint, truly an achievement of which I am proud, unfortunately the powers that be do not realise or appreciate the thousands of little things we lance jacks do, or the trouble we take over each individual to make things easy for them, so it will not benefit me in any way, but at least I have the satisfaction of knowing that I am the first man to succeed or even tackle the job, so I guess that's a big thing.

Two of our men are going home on compassionate leave tomorrow, one whose wife has just given him a son, and the other, Tiny, for a less happy occurrence, his brother has been reported missing abroad, & he wants to go home to pacify his mother a bit, actually he is not sure whether he will get his leave or not, but I do hope he will, it's jolly hard luck to lose a Brother, & I hope he isn't killed.

I had a long letter from Ted ³² today, he has very little to say really, but I simply must answer tonight, I have neglected him [...] He mentions that he may be over again in the near future, ³³ & suggests possibilities of meeting me, if he only knew how remote they were he wouldn't even mention them, but perhaps if we both pray hard to one who always seems to realise our needs, we may be together sooner than we could normally expect, but if this invasion scare keeps up, I guess it spells goodbye to leave for a time.

Well darling, I hate to end on a gloomy note, [...] we are being rushed off our feet these days, & I find it harder & harder to get in my letters to you [...] Goodnight My Love, [...].

Searchlight Camp, Shottle
August 1st (1941)

My darling,

This is to be the shortest of notes, I am dashing it off whilst awaiting a map-reading period, & the only reason I'm writing at all at this time of day is because [...] at the same time to tick you off because I didn't get a letter again today, perhaps it is the postal service, I hope so, but I do miss your letters if I miss a day, & since coming back from leave I seem to be writing more to you than you are to me, & it can't be because I have more news than you, because so little happens these days [...]

The weather is lousy here, we have had pretty well rain every day since you left, I think you took the sunshine with you when you went away, & the place doesn't seem the same to me any more, [...] I don't know when I shall see you again, please pray it will be soon, I can't endure this for long.

³² Ladds

³³ From the Isle of Mn

Today is Bath Parade day, & as Joe feels much the same as I do, we have decided to stay in Derby for the evening & go to see "Kipps" at one of the cinemas, did you see it at Hertford? I seem to remember you wanted to anyway, I hope it has the desired effect of cheering us up for a while. Joe has joined me in my resolution to abandon Beer, & we have proclaimed our intention far & wide, so that we cannot withdraw without tremendous loss of prestige, I know I can do without it anyway, & I hope you'll withdraw your challenge & admit that you do realise how very much I adore you.

Our black dog is gone, his owner came to fetch it today, he said we could have kept it but for the fact that he had a crippled daughter who idolised it, & so we had to part with the old boy, we miss him too, but he's doing a better job of work where he is I guess.

Now sweet, until tomorrow, I must say Goodbye, please do write as often as you used & do pray for my 7 days to come soon, [...]

Your ever loving husband,

*Probably Searchlight Camp, Shottle
(Possibly Saturday 2 August 1941)*

***This is a scrap of part of a letter with a ticket attached dated 31 July 1941
The top of the page has been torn off and there is no first sheet.
As Ed mentions a date it is likely to be a Saturday.***

.....it's Saturday.....for a binge, I promise toand I shall only get merry, anyway it's Peter's party & I couldn't refuse, & so while I'm waiting for the rest of the party, I felt I must let you have a note for Monday telling you how very much I love you.

It has been pouring with rain all day, & we have spent most of it having gas lectures, there are many things, awful things, which I shall tell you tomorrow, and you must please, always carry your respirator from now on, everywhere, if you leave it on your bike it's not good enough, take it in with you, because you may have spray

at the same time as Phosgene, & if you had to break cover just to get a respirator, you would catch the spray, & apart from that, 10 seconds in Phosgene, is enough to kill you, so don't waste time, always please take it with you.

I guess you'll think these instructions very urgent, well, they are, Mr. Lill has just come back from 3 weeks of real practical experience, and he.....*{torn page}*....

Thank you darling for the cigarettes, they came this morning, just in time too, because I missed the S.A. yesterday owing to a late return from Bath Parade, we had to wait a long while at G. V. on the way back, so once again I realised how vital you are to my well being even in in such small matters as these.

I expect you will be dancing tonight, if only I could be holding you, instead of some other fellow, how happy I should be, I hope, that even though I'm a poor dancer, you too would welcome such a chance, I do pray the war will soon end so that we may return to the happiness we knew before.

Now I really must say Goodnight my sweet, I'll have tomorrow afternoon to write again, so until then [...] God Bless You,

Searchlight Camp, Shottle
3rd August (1941)



My own darling,

Another week gone, & still no news as to when I shall be home again, I tried to wheedle some information from Mr. Lill about leave yesterday, & he says that so far as he knows, leave is still continuing, but no-one seems to be going home, so it seems to me that everything is hay wire, I wish I knew how I stood.

I was O.S. yesterday, so of course I'm feeling pretty tired now, especially as we had a very hectic day, towards the middle of the afternoon a crowd of brass hats came

round & we had to turn out our ground defence scheme, it was an extremely hot job carrying Lewis Guns, Ammunition, Bombs, etc., & chasing all over the place, but we evidently pleased the powers that be because they congratulated our officer on our splendid show, & he was as pleased as a dog with two tails. I was having a heart to heart with him again last night, & it seems that he is extremely pleased with the progress I've made during his absence, he told me so, & if I remain consistent it won't be long before I am a two striper I hope. We were out on air co-operation again last night, but the only target we got over to have a go at was denied us because the Remote Control went wrong at the critical moment, so we had to abandon the big sound locator & go to the small one. The more I see of that Mark 1X, the less I like it, it drives me frantic, full of wires, complicated circuits & cog wheels, all of which are continually going wrong, I wish we had never had the blessed thing, & it isn't as if it we're any good, because they have been proved worthless time out of number. Joe & the sergeant went mushrooming last night, they got a few, but actually they wouldn't have made one man a good meal, so I don't think it was worth all the trouble they took. They had them for breakfast this morning, & what I saw of Joe's share, they weren't worth eating. I'm going over with him soon to see Dorothy, because although contrary to our usual custom of going here on Sundays, she now sleeps there gain, & so we have started paying Sunday visits, a thing I am indeed grateful for, because of all the evenings in the week, I hate Sunday most, I am assailed by too many memories of things we once knew, & they make me realise how very little chance I have of knowing them again for an indefinite period, and I am correspondingly depressed, therefore, when Joe asks me if I will go over for coffee, I jumped at the opportunity as an outlet for depression, although the farm has its place among wistful memories now I fear, but even so, 'tis better than being alone.

You will no doubt have received a letter by now with 3 autographs on the envelope, well, that was posted in derby on Fridays Bath Parade, and was written on a tin of sardines which Freddie Burgess had bought, hence his reference to the sardine tin. You should be able to decipher Hoe's signature, but I guess there will be one that will puzzle you, that of Eric Dunmore, who came back from scarecrow with George Platt, he says see you sometime, I hope you will meet the guy again too, because if I can't get any leave, you'll have to come here again, I wonder if you'd like that, especially if Dorothy would give us a bedroom. You say she's not much of a letter writer, well, actually I'm not very surprised, she's not much of a conversationalist to talk to, but so long as she has written to you it shows that at least she still thinks of you.

We went to see "Kipps", as I said we should, did you see it too? I thoroughly enjoyed it, though it was a typical Wells story with a typical ending, but we all felt refreshed by a good bit of acting & nice sit down in a good cinema, & arrived back to camp, after walking from Belper, about 11 o'clock, just in time for air-co-operation, which is now becoming a nightmare to us all, because we get it each night there is no rain, & it invariably means three to four hours out after midnight, although they have decided that we should have more sleep now, & allow us to have 7 hours unbroken slumber after it finishes, but even that is not the same as sleeping at night, we all feel washed out more each day.

Thank you so very much for the parcel of cigs, & the face flannel, & especially the McLeans. I am better already, & the cold I complained about in my last letter has practically left me, so I'm almost normal again now, [...]. I'm sorry you've fallen out over a pound of raspberries, but I side with you, the interfering old cat who is trying her best to make you unhappy will be hearing from me if she continues as she is, anyway, don't let them intimidate you darling, just stick to your guns as I have taught you, & you'll come out tops. I was very intrigued when I learned that you were writing the letter during jam making operations, & recalled the lovely happy times we had together, when I used to help you, I could easily picture you with your pretty apron, anxiously watching the jam to be sure it wasn't burning, & then testing it to see if it would set, [...].

I have written a long letter to Ted, & it ought to make up in some small measure for the length of time which has elapsed since I last wrote [...] Joe & George are just having a terrific argument outside the hut as to whether Joe should go out with the gang to the pub, but like myself, Joe has succeeded in refusing, & soon now

I hope we shall be going over to Dorothy, we shall both be much better off I know, although such is the nature of our friends here that they almost take offence at refusal, which makes it very difficult to refuse.

My night scented stocks have increased wonderfully, & last night they were just lovely, Mr. Lill picked some & took into his hut, the Escholtzias too are now blooming & make a pretty splash of colour in that corner, I discovered a white one yesterday, I had never seen one that colour before, but apparently they are quite common, so I haven't made a discovery after all. The Clarkia is full of buds, but seems to be very backward in blooming, it's probably because they're rather crowded, but when they do bloom we shall at least have plenty for cutting. By the way darling talking of flowers, I sent you a head off my first bloom, you didn't tell me if you received it, or make any comment whatsoever[...] I do hope you appreciated it-----

Time has flown, it is now 1 o'clock in the morning, & you will no doubt wonder why I am up so late, but the truth is that we stayed late at Dorothy's, she is not very well, thinks she has 'flu, & then Joe & I went & got a few mushrooms, & on arrival back to camp were inveigled into a discussion on all sorts of operational matters with Mr. Lill, the two sergeants, & one thing led to another & we still didn't get anywhere, & all the time I still had the guard list to make out, so I had to do that before continuing with this letter, & now I fear it will be cut short, because I must post it in the morning.

George Platt has had his wife & daughter here all day I find, & they decided to stay the night at the Gove's Farm, so of course George has wangled a sleeping out pass, his wife is a very pretty woman, & I envied them no end as we arranged to take over his duties for the night. How I wish you were still here [...].

There is very little to add to this letter [...] except to say that all sites except this one are deploying tomorrow, which probably means a rough time for us soon, I fear we shall all be separated before long, but we keep hoping for the best, & I know we shall win.

Now darling I really must go to bed, because if I don't it won't be worth going at all, & I have to be up by reveille in the morning [...] this seems a very short note for a weekend one, & I'll try to give you a longer one next time I'm orderly sergeant [...] I have more & more difficulty in keeping awake, that's why I seldom write at

nights now, I have to keep walking round the camp to keep awake, so I guess you'll understand. Goodnight Darling [...] Goodnight my love, [...]

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle
6th August (1941)*

Darling Angel,

Forgive me for not writing these last two days, I wanted to, and even started a letter, but owing to the absolutely terrific and unreasonable amount of work there is, I have had my work cut out to even keep pace with it let alone get on top sufficiently to spare time to write [...] the fact I can write to you helps me feel easier & I know you want to hear from me as often as you can.

Well darling, by means of working my guards & duty rotas out during the works time, I have continued to wangle a whole evening to myself, & I shall devote it all to writing this letter to you. Firstly I will make a few comments on your last letter, you asked me not to stop you dancing, O.K., don't, I will reserve my views in future [...] we shall never see eye to eye about this. I think it's high time the Aunts, especially Nell, learned to be human, I was distinctly annoyed, & still am, about her kicking up such a fuss about your pen & ink, heavens, do they lay awake to see what noises they can hear, & even if she doesn't sleep all night, they still get enough rest in the daytime to warrant their going without, if she comes too much of that sort of thing it's high time we lost them even if it means letting the house go too.

We have started a new arrangement of things now amongst the N.C.O.'s, instead of doing turns at orderly sergeant for 24 hours, we have a permanent day N.C.O. in the shape of Bdr. Bullimore who you have heard talk of, & we take over after 6 o'clock in the evening to continue throughout the night. Meanwhile, we have all been allocated certain tasks about the camp to attend to, & we do nothing but to supervise that particular type of work. Of course our normal duties continue, but instead of all being responsible for everything, it has now been split up & we each have our own little corner. Joe is in charge of the cleanliness of Latrines, Ablutions, Mess Hut & Cookhouse, it is now his responsibility if it is not clean, & he will be the one to catch it. George Platt is to see to the general site tidiness & all the living huts, Eric Dunmore who you don't know is in charge of the generators & tidiness down

that end. Bullimore is permanent day N.C.O. & will conduct all parades & other little odds & ends. My job I have doubts about, I think it's the worst of all, I'm in charge of all guards & the other administrative work attached to S/L's, & last night I spent 4 hours of my own time arranging things so that everyone in the camp got a fair deal, & after that lot I decided that in future the work would have to be done in the firm's time, it's too much to expect of even a common lance jack to give up all spare time to things of operational importance, & so today I took the bull by the horns and did it during the afternoon, with the result that I am now able to write as long as I like this evening, & I shall try to achieve this every day. Needless to say I am the duty N.C.O. for tonight, I took over at 6 o'clock with a splitting headache which may be due to the biting cold wind we have here at the moment, or on the other hand the old Sound Locator which has been a source of trouble ever since it came here, we have been worried out of our lives with the mechanists all day long trying to make it work properly, & now it has been condemned by Ordnance, although even that hasn't stopped our own mechanists putting it into action for tonight & I have just come back to this letter after having been dragged out to help, & even now it is not in correct co-ordination with the projector, & as Sgt. Robbs is not in I have given it up until he does return.

I guess you must find my account of the daily round of work pretty boring, but I'm hoping that you won't [...]

Joe has just gone out mushrooming with Dorothy, I hope they keep walking, I have me doubts about Dorothy at times, & I feel sure old Joe wouldn't need a lot of leading on with her because he is definitely very fond of her, but I guess I'm a suspicious old bird anyway. Peter has got his father staying with him this week, we met him last night, & I find he looks definitely middle aged, but a very pleasant gentleman for all that. He is in munitions work somewhere in England, & I think this must be his week's holiday, apparently he just turned up & Dorothy didn't even know he was coming, it appears his letter was delayed in some mysterious way. Mr. Lill is on 48 hours leave, it appears that leave has not stopped in any way, & so far as I can gather, a deep mystery surrounds everything, & no-one really does know what's happened, even Mr. Douglas can't tell us, so all I can do is to wait & hope, & I want to be included it in your prayers for me every night, I hope you still remember them [...] I do pray that this horrible war will end this year, & that no more of the sweetest & irretrievable years of our lives will be stolen from us. [...]

The S.A. canteen has just been, the man is amazing, he is away from home too, but always he has a smile & a few cigarettes at least, but even he has been drastically cut down, & doesn't supply us with enough to last until next time. This morning we were all out of stock, & I've struck a rough patch financially too, so this combined with the other difficulties I have mentioned helped to make us even more miserable, & you can guess what sort of a reception the S.A. man received, we are all waiting for him, & even though we had no money, we quickly got an advance from our own canteen fund, which will have to be repaid as soon as we draw our wages, & I am now blowing out smoke in the usual care free manner, never thinking for a moment of the times when there won't be any fags again.

I have been looking at our marrows, & we have two or three well formed now, I perceived one small cucumber struggling for existence too, but the poor old runners which I spent so much time tying up, have been literally torn off the walls in the high winds we have just got lately, they are all withering, & I fear that after having reared them, we shall lose them after all. My Clarkia & Poppies are full of buds, have been for days, but they won't open, it's the sudden cold & miserable weather we have had, & I begin to wonder if I shall see the blooms of these lovely flowers before we move. I mentioned a move because Sergeant Peter has just got back & he has attended a conference, & it seems that Clusters have been decided as a failure, & soon we shall be back to single detachments under canvas, & worse still, the Cluster Sites which we have now made so very lovely & comfortable, are not in the correct positions for single light layout, which means that they will probably have to be abandoned, I dread the impending move, & sincerely hope it holds off as long as possible.

We are having a film show at the camp on Friday afternoon, given by E.M.S.A., it's "Contraband" featuring "Conrad Veidt" I'm sure I've seen it, but just can't recall where & when & what it's about, perhaps you could tell me, because I've got a feeling we saw it together somewhere.

The spirit of the lads here is terrific, they get mucked about in all sorts of ways now, and at the very most can only get out about once a weeks under these new conditions, but in spite of this & also the terrible possibility of no leave, they can still laugh & joke about the conditions, & crack jokes behind? The N.C.O.'s backs about each individual's discrepancies, but actually we know all about it & laugh with them more often than not. I forgot to tell you a most important piece of news about my progress in this last week or so, I have suddenly come into my own as a possible leader of men, & I have been conducting classes each day on the L.M.G.,³⁴ a job I seem to manage pretty well, because all the time limits laid down for tests soon to come have already been complied with after only one period of each lesson, a definite feather in my cap, & what's more I have fostered enthusiasm & the fellows are definitely interested, so of course I'm awfully bucked, & if by some very remote chance we came out tops in the test which will be held on the day after my birthday, I should do well towards my second stripe. I had almost given up hope of getting it, but my hopes are often dashed to the ground, & then miraculously raised, & if Mr. Lill continues to be pleased with me as he says he is, I am on my way, please back me up darling, I still need you behind me even though I am in the army and a hundred miles away.

I do hope you are able to read this scrawl, my writing I fear has been very hurried, & the letter has not been without interruptions in spite of my very high hopes of getting a clear evening, I have been out 3 times to have a go at the infernal machine, a disadvantage I find which accompanies all No. 6's, then the S.A. van came, after which I had to go out & make a weather report, we are on an air co-operation every night now for hours, the other night we were out in torrential rain for 3 ½ hours, from 10.30 to 2 in the morning, but fortunately the powers that be have decided that we need more sleep, & so we are allowed 8 hours clear after finishing, but as I said before, it's not like the real thing, & we still feel washed out, though why I don't know, because all work is now suspended, an ominous sign, & we should be able to keep pretty fresh, but I, being of the worrying kind have found life full of worries just recently, & often when I should have been in bed hours before, I am sitting up whether on duty or off, toiling over a duty & guards sheet so as to cater for

³⁴ Lewis Machine Gun

all, you've no idea what a colossal task it can be if one takes the men's interests to heart, & I do. I expect we shall be out most of tonight, the weather report is a good one, strong W breeze, cloud 5,000 density 9/10 visibility moderate, (we never say good for obvious reasons) slight haze, that is the form of report I am expected to make at intervals of ½ hour, but they don't take much notice anyway, because we still get air co-operation however bad we manage to make it sound. You have no idea with what enthusiasm the words "air co-operation is cancelled" are received, & I too feel the same about it. We are heartily browned off with it all, Britain's forgotten Army, the man who coined that title was inspired, he's right, we're dumped into a remote corner of the country, left to die or make ourselves comfortable as the case may be, & there we stay, some people say we are a definite help, including fighter pilots, others say we have a snip & then we're left, forgotten, all the glory, if such a word could be rightly applied to the horror of war, goes to the men in the headlines, & so it goes on, who wonders we are browned off sometimes?

I am gratified to know that you do carry your gas mask now, please train yourself to carry it everywhere, even into your office, have it beside you, remember, 10 seconds in a good concentration of Phosgene & you're a goner, & I couldn't live if you happened to be caught unawares, so please darling do heed my advice. Another new thing has been amended too, don't prick possible blisters of Lewisite, you of course know that applies also to Mustard, the reason for this new amendment is because nine times out of ten, Sepsis develops & the patient dies just the same, whereas, if you can get to a decontamination or first aid centre quickly, you may be treated properly, it has been decided far safer to risk Arsenical poisoning from the Blister of Lewisite than to invite other complications, so Remember;- Don't prick a blister. And a final word which will relieve all your responsibilities if you will only heed me, whenever the sirens go, take cover, because any time now you are likely to be sprayed, & you yourself know that if you are under cover you are absolutely safe from spray, & the vapour which would arise has proved to be harmless, only bombs are likely to give off sufficient to do any damage, so please do as I ask, & always take cover immediately.

✈ -----we are now in Rouser, it is about 1.30, & the air co-operation has been and gone, we only had the target over once & we didn't illuminate it, Sgt. Peter seemed rather peeved about that, but I can't do wonders, after all, it was my first go at target with the old locator, so I feel I am justified if I don't score a success first time out, what do you think? We're now on a proper Rouser, enemy aircraft are over, and it's a lovely night for it too, the moon is bright, and earlier on we actually saw a plane

against the white clouds, so if we do get any jerries over we should see them quite well-----Sleeper, how disappointing after waiting out for 3 hours, we all had high hopes of shooting down at least one, all the gun team were out & waiting for a chance, & we all felt in very high spirits, but now, we've got Sleeper, & they've all gone to bed except me, & what's more it's raining a bit-----pause indicates a quarter of an hour spent on covering up all the equipment, although I think it will only be shower, however, that's my responsibility & I don't want to take any cans back. My telephonist companion is now in the act of making cocoa, so I guess there will be another pause soon while we drink it, although it looks as if there will be a bit of a wait for the water to boil as the fire wants "mending", do you remember how you laughed at this expression of Dorothy's & other Derbyshire terms such as "mashing" tea? I am reminded immediately of happy work days, knowing you were near, & still happier nights, & ripped tent one morning, & you darling, patiently sewing it again, these, a & many more things spring to my mind [...] An inquisitive calf licking my lady's foot on Alport Height on Sunday afternoon, lovely, sweet memories, and yet not, for I find that Shottle is not the same since you left [...] One thing I must tell you:- Freddie Burgess went to the conference with Pete, & he says that leave will shortly continue, apparently Major Wotton has some scheme on for letting detachments go home, I do hope we're first, but I guess it will have to be left to your prayers which I know will be answered. Cocoa is served, smells good, & looks good, but I expect it will make me sleepy, I feel that way now, so you can perhaps guess what I shall feel like in about an hours' time, honestly it's real fight to keep awake, I shall be glad when it's tomorrow & I can get to bed, can you imagine what a relief it is after wearing boots for 24 hours & being awake for the same time, to just throw off your boots & clothes, & stretch out in bed to sleep [...]

---I really must end my letter to you, I should love to keep writing, but I've run out of news, so until tomorrow [...] I will say Goodnight [...] Your Bill always, 7 o'clock. Bed time at last I'm so tired. I love you always, Bill.

There follows a page from a letter probably August 1941 from Shottle, the first page is missing.

....the music is being played of the song" some of these days you're going to feel so lonely" & the thought flashes into my mind of the times we sang this song to each other laughing, never dreaming of the truth behind the words; I feel like crying now, because it seems to bring it home very forcibly to me, but at least I can still find consolation in the thought that it is none of our doing, & that as soon as fortune favours us, we shall be able to laugh again & forget as much as possible this terrible

yearning for a love that is so distant. [...] I hope[.] that you will not think I am getting too downhearted [..] I have time to dream of what might be if it weren't for this wicked war [...] I shall end this letter here [..] because it's getting dark, & I want to get in bed [...] Goodnight my love, [..] Your worshipping husband-

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle
Aug 10th (1941)*

My own darling,

Here I am again at last, I can hear you saying about time too, well darling, I think by now you really understand how very erratic my duties are, and that I can never be quite sure of my letter writing periods [...]

Now to news:- commencing with the most recent happening, an awful blight has descended upon us in the shape of one detachment of ten men having to deploy. It takes with it Freddie Burgess, & George Platt. Poor old Joe & myself were in a blue funk all the time the team was being chosen, for fear of them taking us, but now we can breathe again for a little while at least, though how long we shall be left undisturbed we know not. We shall miss Freddie, but not so much George because since he came back, everyone has noticed a change in him and he hasn't seemed really happy here, even Mr. Lill was remarking on it tonight, which is probably the reason for his going, & to think that at one time he was the boss' favourite, but seriously, he has altered, & he rarely visits Dorothy now, an occurrence which caused her much concern at first because he was such a regular visitor, & last weekend when he had his wife here, he didn't even take her over to the farm, this hurt Dorothy very much, so that she has washed her hands of him, so perhaps it's just as well he is going.

It's a terrible night, I pity the poor devils who are already deployed. They are under canvas, & working 24 hours a day, I do hope we manage to avoid any of it, because what with that, & leave so uncertain, we should be heartily browned off in no time.

Joe & myself went over to the farm tonight, Dorothy was in a funny mood, but seemed to cheer up when I arrived, because she said I looked happy, I had been absorbed all evening in a book called "Rum Alley", all about Rum Running & Dope

smuggling in America, & the first book length story I've been able to concentrate on in six months or more, I finished it today, nearly 300 pages, starting dinner time & reading in every spare moment till now, it was a fine story, & not usually the type of literature to appeal to me, but I guess I must have needed something like that to wake me up, I was getting stagnant. The film show we had yesterday was marvellous, & we enjoyed 2 ½ hours solid cinema programme, & I cleared up my worry about having seen the picture before, I hadn't, & it was a damn good story. The van which came is a wonderful affair, they carry everything, films, projectors, sound reproducers, screen, & what do you think? a generator to supply "juice" if they give a show where there is no electricity, I think it's absolutely wonderful, & sincerely hope we get some more before long.

I had your parcel this morning thank you sweet, it was, as always, most welcome, & for the first time the contents were intact, absolutely unbent & undamaged, & your letter was most welcome too, & the warmth you revealed in it is what I want to read every time, this probably made me happier too, [...]
I'm sorry about the night scented stocks, it's strange that you didn't dream of me, but perhaps you'll dream tonight, who knows? It is now 5 o'clock in the morning, 6 really, but the clocks have altered, & I have lost that extra hours sleep, & worked one extra instead, a state of affairs which doesn't appeal to me.

*During the Second World War, on Sunday August 10th 1941 Britain adopted British
Double Summer Time, with sundials being put forward two hours ahead of
GMT. The clocks were turned back to GMT at the end of summer 1945.*

I have just finished a bit of professional burglary, the cooks refused to give me anything to eat, & as I had had nothing since teatime & was expected to go till breakfast, about 15 hours without food, I got a screwdriver & burgled the food store, I was successful in obtaining a piece of jam tart & some bread & butter which effectively kept the wolf from the door-----

---It is now Sunday evening, I fell asleep for the last hour of the very long night, & after breakfast went straight to bed, & it is now nearly six o'clock on a Sunday evening which is rather dull & looks more & more like rain every minute, believe it or not we have had nothing but dull weather since you left, you took all the sunshine with you, & since being here the place seems just like that to me. I have had my tea & a good shave & wash & changed into some clean clothes & am now sitting in our

canteen with the wireless on, the children's hour has just finished & here is the news etc. etc.

Since last night's sad news of 9 men moving today, things have altered, & the men are still here, the move having been postponed until Tuesday, I hope it gets postponed indefinitely, because we hate to be split up so, but I fear our days are numbered in this glorious spot, because we shall soon all be back to single sites I think, I guess we'll get over it, but actually we're all very tired of being shoved about so & with no definite news of leave, even 48 would be welcome now, but even that is in the very dim future, we live only from day to day, & are getting heartily browned off. [...]

Well darling, I know this letter is extremely short, I do hope you have been able to decipher it all, because the other sheet was written while I was half asleep, [...] I have to keep getting up & walking about[...] Joe sends his love, he's here reading one of Mat Gould's stories, & Eric Dunmore also sends his love, [...] I love you always,

Searchlight Camp, Shottle
11th August (1941)

To my Darling,

Monday, and a more miserable morning I have never known, everyone was genuinely unhappy, mainly due I think to the sure knowledge that Cluster days are numbered, and that we had to spend most of the morning helping to pack a lister, projector & S/Locator together with all the other odds & ends attached to a Searchlight Camp, ready for transport tomorrow. Last night too, a blight seemed to have descended on the camp, everyone was restless, it poured with rain, was the first dark evening & no-one went out, all we did was to roam about restlessly from place to place, & an overwhelming desire to do something really desperate possessed us all, , more than once I heard, & felt the same, threats to either run away or commit suicide, we just couldn't settle, & ended up by going to bed early & yet not to sleep, & this morning everyone was so dejected, even Sgt. Robbs, that he insisted on having a Bath Parade, which was duly arranged, & we spent 3 hours away from it all. Freddie Burgess, Joe & George, Eric Dunmore, & myself all went swimming, we were in and out for over an hour doing our best to drown each other, but it restored our spirits a bit, and we followed this by a visit to the W.V.S. canteen in full force,

seven of us in all, & we caused much consternation amongst the ladies by ordering 3 slices of toast each, 21 slices, & they'd only one gas cooker, & cups of tea for all, we had quite a bit of fun counting the slices as we had them, although we were consuming it as fast as they cooked, and really I don't think they know how they stood in the end. After this we paid the usual visit of inspection to that famous establishment of 6d articles, without buying anything of course, & then I got a quick haircut after which it was time to board the Lorry for home. We got back round about 6, & after tea, there was yet more work to be done, we had to wangle the Lister³⁵ up to the parade Ground ready for towing tomorrow, & the various other necessary tasks calculated to save time in the morning. Reveille for all tomorrow is at 3.30 a.m. just think of it, I bet we shall all be worn out by nightfall, and then on top of that I expect we shall be out all next night, it's really heart-breaking, truly a terrific price to pay for fame as the best regiment in England, that is, S/L Regt. of course, all work, no leave, & buggered about from pillar to post, all hopes of future gone completely, if only I knew exactly when I should get some leave, even if it mean waiting till Xmas it would be something to look for, & life would at least be worth living, but stuck away as we are here, with nothing but work, work & more work, & nothing more interesting than lousy searchlights all the time, life is just one weary round of trying to keep awake.

One bright spot, I saw Clarkia bloom his morning, & my night scented stocks are now at their best, they smell beautifully just outside the camp, & these are the only bright spots in my life at present. We went over to see Dorothy tonight, she's a bit upset about George going away, in spite of everything she's still got a soft spot for him, & I think she's sorry he's going.

I've just heard that two of our lads due to move off in the morning, have "hopped it", they live at Northampton, & I very much doubt if they'll be found in the morning, but I don't really blame them, although I daren't do it myself, I guess they'll be for it when they get back, but if by some strange chance they are back in time, all will be well for them, & they'll be better off for a few hours at home, Ah. Well, good luck to them, I hope I don't have to "peg" them.

I've just been outside for a moment, it's pitch dark, there's a strong wind blowing with promise of yet more rain, & you'd never believe how bitterly cold it turns at nights now, if it ever comes to your having to stay with me again you'll have to have a bedroom somewhere. [...] if this dreadful mood persists, my birthday {15th} will see me very drunk, because I intend to celebrate it in the only possible way

³⁵ Probably the Lister Generator (possibly the LP4) for the searchlight. It was as big a van and had its own trailer

while I'm away from home if I continue to be blue, so please cheer me up somehow when you write again.

I hope to get a letter from you in the morning, I didn't get one today [...] You'll be glad to know my old stomach is all right again now, and also that my cold has gone, & best of all perhaps, my hair is now normal & the old moustache quite long, so even in the blackest of all moods there are still bright spots, [...] I guess the mood will wear off soon. Goodnight [...] I adore you always,

Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
12th Aug (1941)
➔

Dearest Love,

Another day towards the end of the war, and won't I be glad, I'm so tired of all this aimless misery, my heart is crying out for you [...] I received two letters from you today, obviously yesterday's as well, & I note your sadness concerning family affairs within the walls of "Four Winds", I too echo that sadness, & something has to be done about it, I don't yet quite know what, but of this I'm certain, if the old ladies are making you miserable, both they, & the house must go, & quickly too, I simply will not tolerate any of their mischief making, but whatever you do darling, don't leave with them in possession, we must find a different way out somehow, & if you already have suggestions in mind, please put them forward for my perusal & approval.

Now to lighter news:- the snaps, although not of the best, certainly gave me something to think about, I liked the one of you & Penny & Fretful, and as you say, it's a pity I cut the top of your pretty head off when I took the picture, but I shall appreciate it terrifically if you will send me one of that, & also the other one with you, Ron, Freda & Kitty, I liked it very much, the others, in which Penny seems to figure largely, I think are a bit of a failure so far as pictures go, except perhaps the one of her on the garden wall, and I definitely don't like the one of you in a bathing costume, I could hardly believe it was you, & still have my doubts, so you needn't have that one re-printed [...]. I hope you won't mind my candidness [...] I took them over to show to Dorothy tonight, she looked at them, & yet did not show any great enthusiasm, the reason being that George is gone, young Peter told Joe & I today that she has been crying nearly all day because of him, she's such a silly,

because we find now that he has several women of doubtful character to his string, & even after saying goodbye to Dorothy last night he went straight to Belper & took another woman to the pictures, & yet he pitched such a wonderful yarn to our Dot that she really thinks he'd been hard done by, & is heart broken at leaving her, I really can't understand her at all, I did my best to cheer her up, but she wouldn't be cheered, & so I hope time will work the necessary cure ;- These married men!!! (not me).

Let me see, what else struck me about your letters, Oh! yes, in one you commence by saying you wish something very nice would happen such as me coming home unexpectedly, or someone presenting you with a dozen new dresses, and man like, I resent the comparison, but not bad temperedly darling, I happen to know what you really meant, but all the same, be careful not to compare our love with new dresses too frequently will you, or I shall begin to wonder just what you think of me. You added in a P.S. that lots of people tell you I'm a very lucky man, am I? they seem to be having all the pleasure of your company while I'm away, even though I do have all your real love, [...] you tell me they help you forget [...] I know I'm the luckiest man ever born really, but I do feel jealous of those people (all men I bet) who tell you how lucky I am, [...]

Your hints about baking on Saturday afternoon have set me to anticipation of a lovely birthday cake, & I think it will be most welcome too, we get a bit fed up with bread and jam every day, but I warn you now, Peter Robbs, Joe, & Eric Dunmore are very hungry people, & it will not last long I fear, but it won't mean as much to them as it does to me, so I won't miss a bit of it.

I had a letter from Mum today, who also mentions a parcel, it's all very mysterious, but I guess all these surprises are going to be very pleasant ones, if only I could give you as nice in return by coming home on that day, but it's impossible, the way things are now, we shan't be home for weeks, I really don't know what to do about it all, [...] I'm still in England, so you see, we could both be lot's worse off. I expect you should have received my little surprise parcel by now, [...] who knows, you might get another one when you least expect it [...]

I'm glad Eva got married after all, perhaps a little bit of forbidden fruit will sweeten her temper again, I wonder. My heart goes out to poor Eileen, & I sincerely hope that Sam will not go abroad after all, I hate to think of any of my army friends in such awful circumstances, it's bad enough being in the same country. When is Ron sending the load of books he promised? [...] By the way, ask Ron to forgive me for

not writing, [...] our lives are no longer our own [...] I'll drop him another line, assure him that my best friends are still the old ones, & I haven't yet met one to equal them. I duly noted your remarks about doing 24 hours duty straight off, & I see you misunderstood my explanation, we still do 24 hours straight off, only the daytime is carried out for us now in our usual occupations, whereas before, we were doomed to a day of running about [...] I still get tired, so I guess it's not much material benefit, I'm on now by the way, it's 3.30 in the morning, we have just finished a four hours Rouser, tons of targets over, but no luck, the listeners are hopeless on the Mark 1X, but the worst of it is that I, being in charge of them I get all the blame, [...] I think poor old Leicester has been catching it pretty hot judging by the display of flashes etc. I hope the damage was only slight.

You know, my writing is getting awfully scrawly, I do hope you can read it [...] I find my thoughts are racing ahead all the time, & my pen will not keep up with them, & so the writing suffers [...]

It's a simply awful night outside now, pouring with rain again, & very cold, the wet St. Swithin's day legend is certainly right for these parts, how is it down your way [...]-----no grub again tonight, I've just persuaded the telephonist to burgle the cookhouse this time, & we got a bit of bread & some margarine, with which we intend to make toast, it's becoming a real racket with us these days to do these awful things, but what can one do, hunger makes a man desperate.

We've had a fairly interesting day today, a new full sergeant has arrived for 3 days, to educate us on P.A.D.³⁶ & he started off by giving us some very useful information about fire fighting, & followed this by a First Aid lecture, during which period he would insist upon referring to an Abdom-on-ial wound, & saw-line solution for Saline. Mr. Lill & myself got a good laugh out of it on the Q.T. but apart from this, it was extremely interesting & very useful, & we might be glad of the knowledge soon. I guess we shall get plenty of gas tomorrow, I think I'll go to the Spotters hut on top of the hill for my sleep in the morning, it will be safer & quieter.

I forgot to tell you that Mr. Lill has introduced a new member to the detachment now, he brought back from his recent leave, a little black puppy named Joe, its Mother is a pure Scottie, but she got loose at the wrong time with the result that a litter of 7 puppies were born of unknown sire, the bitches, 5 in all, were drowned out of hand, & the two dogs were christened on the day England made their

³⁶ Passive Air Defence

pact with Russia, & so one was named Joe (Stalin) & the other Winston, we have Joe, & he's a friendly little beggar too, you ought to see him chase the cats, & only 7 weeks old, he's got a Scottie framework all right but he's smooth haired, & such a big head for his size, he's really comical to look at, but nevertheless a lovable little fellow, & has won a place in our hearts. I call him Paul Robeson, he does look like a little negro baby, but I bet it grows up to be very intelligent because it knows it's way about already, needless to say, he was on "Rouser" with us tonight as all our pets are, old Ginger, the lovely clean looking cat, spent all his time with us at the S/Locator, he finds my listeners make a comfortable bed when they are resting on the ground, & while all this is going on, the two kittens are frisking about in the cookhouse, supervising the making of cocoa without sugar which we drink to keep warm. Just been out to change the guards again, it really has turned out to be an awful night, I pity the lads under canvas, & in turn dread the time when we shall move, but I think it's inevitable in the near future, though we still hope to cling to the old site is humanly possible. Peter shot one rabbit tonight, I operated on it for him with my nail scissors, I'm becoming an expert at this now, although I still have qualms for fear of it's still being alive. Dorothy very kindly cooked mushrooms in milk for Joe & Eric who had been out earlier & collected them, she packed them off complete with a saucepan full of steaming mushrooms & we shared them out spread on slices of toast when we got back to camp, this is the first time I have tried them cooked in this way, & they are very tasty, very sweet. Talking of grub, Peter Robbs, is very fond of his tummy, & he had great difficulty in securing one tin of sardines in Derby yesterday, so if they are plentiful down home way, let me have some for him & I'll collect the money. [...] I must end now, my eyes are very tired, I can hardly keep them open, & if I write much longer I shall have no control of the pen, & you'll not read what I've written, so for today sweetheart, Goodnight, God bless you always,

P.S. ENVELOPES AND STAMPS PLEASE. I LOVE YOU. It's now my bedtime darling, I'm so glad, pouring with rain, Cooks haven't discovered burglary.

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle,
AUG 14th (1941)*



My own darling wife,

In less than six hours now I shall be 27, just think of it, I have just realised how quickly a lifetime slips by, it's awful to think that we have been robbed of at least one

year's happiness already, and no-one quite knows how old I shall be by the time it is all over, and I'm afraid that instead of being the happy affair a birthday would be, it is quite a melancholy do, just one more year less to live, and when I think of all there is to do, I begin to wonder if ever it will all be achieved.

Now to brighter things, connected to the birthday. I'm ever so pleased with the cake, I must confess that owing to the fact that I shall be sleeping all day tomorrow (yes, I'm O.S. again, other's only 3 of us left now) I took the liberty of opening the box today, and this evening I sampled the cake despite your loving label on the lid. It is marvellous, a real success, I wish you could try a piece with me, anyway, you're certainly a lovely little cook in addition to your other assets, and I'm going to enjoy every crumb I eat of it, and you weren't content to do this for me, you had to put 5/-³ in as well, it is lovely of you, I think I shall go to the pictures, and have a drink afterwards, that is if I feel like going out when tomorrow comes, for since abandoning beer, I have become a regular hermit, there's nothing to go out for.

On the same day your parcel arrived, I received one from Mum containing another cake, some tomatoes, biscuits & sweets, I fear the biscuits got a bit broken by the time it arrived, but the rest of the articles arrived in good condition, and I have with the aid of various hungry companions, finished her parcel off, & from tomorrow, I fear yours won't last long, although I won't give too much away I promise----- I started writing this letter at 6 o'clock, it is now 4 in the morning, we have been out since 9.30, that just shows you how much time we get to ourselves these days, & I must confess I feel less like letter writing than when I started, but I'll try to make it worth reading. We had air co-operation to start with, & then it turned to a real Rouser, but the only targets which came over, 4 in all, we were not allowed to expose on, so all those hours we put in were to no avail, it's enough to make one weep, I know I felt like giving up, it makes one wonder why we're in the war at all, I honestly feel ever so guilty about it all.

Joe took Dorothy to the pictures tonight, they went in Eric Dunmore's car, I think it should have cheered her up a bit, she's been very miserable since George went away as I have already told you, but I guess she'll get over it.

We have a new Colonel now, named Hogsflesh, pronounced Hors fleagh, however he gets that pronunciation I don't know, & as if that isn't bad enough, his

driver's name is Bacon, we call him "Cat's meat", he should have visited us today but failed to turn up, I think he's another spit & polish maniac.

You keep mentioning leave darling, so do I this end, but it's no good, but rest assured that as soon as I know something definite I shall pass it on to you. By the way, your money should increase by 7/- per week now, ³⁸has it? let me know because I want to be sure that my weekly deduction is going to the right place.

Well darling this is about the shortest ever I'm afraid, it's now breakfast time, & my birthday, I shall sleep all day, everyone wished me happy returns at midnight last night on the field, I'm ever so tired, got a headache, [...] your Bill.

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle,
15th AUG (1941)*

BIL'S BIRTHDAY

My own Darling,

There is very little to write about, as you know I have been in bed all day, but I also know how nice it is to receive a letter on Mondays, & so I'm going to do my best to make it worth reading. First of all, although it was my birthday, I didn't go out, I was so very tired, and although I only slept in fits & starts, I was too tired to get up & stir myself. I think I'll go through the day's happenings in sequence for you. As you know, we were out nearly all night on various calls, & I went to bed at 9 o'clock with all men sleeping. I got to sleep all right, but then reveille was at 11, & they made such a noise that I awoke & read my mail, there was your letter thank you sweet, & one from my Brother & his girl, & when I answered her last letter I invited them to consult me if they needed advice, well, they have, they want to know what I think about them getting married, it appears they have been looking for rooms for some time now, but as so many people have told them to wait, they still seem a bit uncertain as to what to do, I have to consider my reply very carefully now, but my original plan has worked, I have secured an opening from which to start, far better than just barging in with advice.

I'll forward her letter when I have replied to it. After pondering for a while I fell off to sleep again, to be later awakened by more noise by the boys getting ready for a Bath Parade, but I hadn't time to get ready myself, so I had another piece of your perfectly wonderful cake, ate it, & went to sleep again, & I didn't wake any more until teatime & the S.A. van was here, so out I got & did the usual shopping, then a wash & shave, and tea with more of your wonderful cake, & Joe & Peter had a piece too, they thought it marvellous, & said you must have been saving your currants for years, anyway they all agree that you're a marvel.

After tea I had a real birthday surprise, a cinema show at the camp again, & I didn't know a thing about it, whether this was intentional or not I have yet to find out, but a better show I have yet to see, it started with a Popeye cartoon, the first Popeye I have ever seen, & it was funny too, then a short Western film with lots of singing, followed by the main picture, the crazy gang, in "Alfs Button Afloat", an old picture I believe,

but I hadn't
seen it, & did I
laugh, it was
lovely, made
me feel ever so
happy, still do,
it makes such a
welcome
change.

The
programme
finished up
with a Will
Hay short, &
we had a few
more laughs,
& then it was all over, but the programme lasted for 2 ½ hours, & we all agreed it was
worth staying in for, & hope they come again.

Now to more serious news, it concerns poor Dorothy, last night, after she got back
from pictures with Joe & Eric, they had a family quarrel, the father is a bit of a devil
underneath as you will see, it appears he has an evil mind, & things have been
coming to a head for some time now, & Dorothy's trip out brought things to a head, I
don't know how it all started, but Dick & his Father nearly came to blows over it, &
both he & Dot are leaving home, she says she'll go into Munitions, but she'll never
stand it I feel sure, & what Dick will do I don't know, but they mean it, & it'll take a
lot of patching up on the old man's side to prevent them going. Poor little Peter was
awakened, & he's got to go back to his parents, the N.C.O.'s mess is finished,
although Mr. Lill & Peter Robbs don't know yet, & altogether I think poor Dot's had
a rough ride, I'll let you know more about it when further details come to light.

And now it's bedtime, pouring with rain again, so that we're not in action
tonight, I can't get to bed yet, there's a card school playing in the hut, & they're using
my bed to sit on, talking of cards, I played last night again, Solo, a nice friendly little
four of us with small stakes, just like old times, & Mr. Lill caught us, he frowned on
me, & asked if he could join in, so we changed the game to Pontoon, & we fleeced
him for about 5/- (25p) , so he packed up, the game was ended very abruptly by

Rouser, & I got out of it about 4/- (20p) better off, so it was not without profit. We all looked on Mr. Lill's entry into the game as something very spectacular, an unheard of affair, even N.C.O.'s are forbidden to play with the men so it just shows what a good sort he is.

Well, my very own [...] I'll go to bed & dream of you [...] Your own Bill always.

Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
AUG 18TH (1941)

My own darling,

I'm sorry I missed you yesterday, but we are having a concert next Sunday, and here have been plays, poems etc., to write, and even now, my sweet you'll have to excuse the brevity of this letter, I have just a quarter of an hour before I am due out for the rest of the night on air co-operation, we certainly get plenty of it now.

The latest concert promises to be a real success, we have a wonderful programme, and this time we have a microphone to add to our possibilities, we have organised various items to broadcast, including In Shottle Tonight, this was a real riot and should get plenty of laughs, I'll send all the spare scripts when we have finished and a full report of the whole affair, & in the meantime I hope you'll forgive me if this week your mail is a little erratic, I really don't have the time to sleep now, all last night I was O.S., and up till 1.30 we were outside, & then I had to spend the rest of the night writing my play, it isn't too bad tho' I says it as shouldn't, you'll see, but I don't think it as good as the last one.

I got a parcel from Ron today containing Woodbines, & also your usual forty, thank you darling, they are always welcome, & will you thank Ron for me, & explain that I'll write next week when I should have a bit of time to spare.

Dorothy is still at home, I don't know what she'll do, but she has obviously cooled down a bit, & I begin to wonder if she'll move after all.

Well darling, that is the shortest ever, I must go now, I guess I'll be tireder than ever when bed time comes, I'll watch over you tonight as I do on every other night [...]

Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
 20TH AUG (5 oclcock in the morning)
 (1941)

My darling angel,

We have just packed up air co-operation, & had breakfast, & now the camp will be dead till 12 oclock, when they start getting up for dinner, my bedtime is an hour & a half away yet, and I'm taking advantage of this to get off a very short note to you.

First, I have been very worried all day about your letter I got this morning, or rather yesterday morning, telling me of the latest developments, and after weighing pros & cons, here is what I

order you to do, if you don't I shall take the necessary steps myself. Get the Aunts re-billeted at once, this should be easy enough for you. The house must go, let it through Mr. Williams, furnished, taking only what you need, to your Mother's, & live with her for the duration, consult Mr. Williams before you draw up a lease, we don't want trouble when the war is over. I expect this to be done within a week of your receipt of this letter, excuse underlining, but I mean every word I say, I've enough worries this end, and I've had enough of the old girls' nonsense. Perhaps Mr Smith

would take the home from you, it's worth a try before you see Mr. Williams, but remember, a week is all you're allowed even if the house stays empty for a while. I will not tolerate you living alone, so don't even entertain the idea, it's for the best darling, & you'll be free of a great worry, & at least have something to keep you in at nights a bit, I shall have to put my foot down if you go out much more, so don't abuse the trust I put in you by overdoing it.

Now just a few lines to cheer you up & keep you going, In a month's time, or perhaps less, I shall be home again, I enquired again tonight, & Mr. Lill assures me that I shall be home within a month, no date, I can't tell exactly when yet, but rest assured I'll be with you as soon as ever this experimental period is over, & that will be in about a fortnight's time, I'll give you all the particulars as I get them, no surprises this time, you need the information more than I. now for tonight, I must say au revoir, my letters have to be short & scribbled I know, but I'll make up for them later, I'm chain smoking to keep awake, 40 a day, I know it's awful, but if you had to keep awake for 20 out of every 24 hours you'd need to do something like it, now goodnight darling, [...] I tried to get off to come home & straighten things out, but they wouldn't hear of it, not Mr Lill's fault of course, but I should have only done what I've already told you to do, wait a minute, I've just had an inspiration, that is if you approve, re-billet aunts, & my Mother has been longing for another house, she would make an excellent home keeper for you, perhaps you prefer that, if not, do as I have already ordered, it's all plain sailing, just make up your mind which, but remember, **the aunts must go at once**, I absolutely mean this, & if you don't want Mum living with you, then the house must go too, now, keep your chin up darling, I'll be with you within a month Your Bill.

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
21st AUG. (1941)*

My own darling,

I hope you'll have settled your problems by the time this letter gets to you, but one thing I must impress on you, when the Aunts go, you must not live alone, let the house, it's the only obvious solution, and probably you'll be a lot happier at your Mother's house, so long as I can have you to myself when I get home is all I ask.

Now I'll have to apologise for all the hurried and very scribbled notes you have been getting. The reasons you already know, but my efforts are being rewarded, the concert party is coming on splendidly, and when it is all over, Sunday next, I shall be free to write a bit more. Because what little spare time we have has been taken in rehearsals. We had a treat again this afternoon in the shape of another cinema show. We had Carey Grant, Kay Francis and Carole Lombard, in a film called "In Name Only", and it was a very serious picture in places, with lots of love scenes, I enjoyed it, but there no doubt about it, all those love films just bring back to me the sweetest memories I have, and I'm filled with sadness, the only cure for which is to be able to hold you in my arms again. I heard some more about leave today, here is the position; As soon as this infernal experiment is finished we shall get all the men back who were deployed, and everything will be just lovely, because 7 days will re-commence, and as I'm already overdue, I can promise to see you sometime in September, I hope the early part [...]

You'll be glad to know that Dorothy's troubles are over, the old boy apologised, but there I no longer a mess each night, although we may call on her occasionally, actually I haven't even seen her since the affair, but I'm tied in each night this week anyway, so I guess I shall go to see her again next week, when I am

liberated [...] please write to her again, she really does appreciate it, and send her my share of cigs with your letter to show her how grateful we were for hospitality shown, I know it will make a huge difference to her to have some friend outside her plain old humdrum farm life, what do you think? Joe still gets his suppers when he's orderly sergeant, so he's still in favour at least, although even he daren't go as often as he used.

We have devised a wonderful back cloth to the stage, my idea. I was working on it all this evening, here's what it's like, 3 black silky looking curtains, and two white American cloth beams, one at each bottom outside corner, meeting at the top of the curtains. In the beams we have put a black silhouette of one Jerry target, and on the Black Sky behind rides the witch on her broom, beneath a new moon, it's a perfect study in Black and White, I do so wish you were here now to see it, if only we had more money, you could even come up for the weekend especially. And go back Monday, wouldn't that be marvellous (wonderful dreams).

Now to earth, you enquired about money, you needn't worry, I'm still getting 14/-{70p} per week, having qualified for another 6d {2 ~~1~~ a day proficiency pay, & I'm glad you're getting more too, now you are definitely a lance jack's wife, all I hope is that I can hold my stripe, Joe tells me of a rumour that the new Colonel says we're over stablished with N.C.O.'s, and that some men will have to be reduced to the ranks, I do hope it doesn't happen to me, I don't know what I'd do [...] it doesn't look as if the second one will be coming along very quickly does it? but I'm still straining like hell.

[...] I fear this letter still won't reach the length I usually make [...] I guess it will be the last till Saturday now, [...] I wrote a long letter to Jack and Vera the other day, they wrote me for my birthday you know, and consulted me on the marriage problem, if you could have read the letter, which took a lot of valuable time to compose, you would have wondered why people get married at all, but I do hope it delays the proposed do for a little longer than they planned. I'll let you have further developments as they occur. You would have laughed though, I wrote this very intimate and fatherly letter, addressed to both, but I wanted to send it to Vera, I had her address, but couldn't think of her surname, so I had to address it to Jack & Vera at her address, I bet they'd chuckle over that.

Well, once again [...] it's midnight and I'm going to turn in for what I hope will be an undisturbed night, it's pouring with rain [...] Goodnight my love, I'll see you soon, tho' I expect not in our own home [...] Your Bill always.

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle
23rd TO 24th (August 1941)
O.S. DAY& NIGHT*

Dearest Love,

This is going to be just the briefest note, I have been on all night as you know, and it is now 6 o'clock in the morning, but until 3 we were out on ROUSER, since when I have been making Guard Lists & Duty Rotas, and only now do I find myself free. I was going to leave your letter till later today, but felt that I simply had to write you now [...] I shall write further this evening [...].

Today, or rather yesterday, we spent all the afternoon & evening at G.V. again learning & studying tactics, & also a very long lecture on Gas, fuller details of which will follow tonight. I haven't been to the Farm for 2 evenings simply because I haven't been able, we N.C.O.'s are the sufferers from the experiment & no mistake, but I have seen Dorothy, & she sends her love & intends to write you soon, if she has not already done so. Joe came back last night, & his love is included with this letter, we had a drink coming back last night, and he toasted to Mrs Bill & 6 N.C.O.'s drank to you darling. How I wish you were here to meet them all now that the wanderers have returned, you would thrill them I know, because they are all lovers of beauty [...]

Now I must kiss you Goodmorning & take breakfast parade, I'll be writing at some length later today, God Bless you [...]

24th.later in the day

My darling,

I have just had the most crushing news, the leave starts on Friday, but it's only 12 hour day pass. I have tried all sorts of suggestions for combining 2 or 3 together,

but they remain unmoved, & unless you can think up a damned good excuse for wanting me home, we shall have to wait indefinitely.

Please don't take it too hard my darling, I am heart broken already, & can't bear any more, I know how you will feel, & I am really desperate. I told two of the boys that when I get mine, I shall come home & overstay my leave, but they all said from experience, that it would be wisest to stick it out, & grin & bear it. [...]

I hate everything in this world except you [...] There is just one chance, you mentioned some time ago that Barbara was going to get married, if you could wangle me as best man, & give me a date, I might get compassionate leave for 48 hours, but failing this, we shall have to wait for 24 hr leaves to begin again [...] it was going to be so heavenly in a day or so [...] all our dreams are shattered [...] the disappointment is too great.

I have had three letters from you this morning, one for the 20th, 1 for 21st & 1 for 22nd and I received the £1 all right, I shall have to spend some of it on the special present I mentioned, and now I shall not be able to bring it to you as I had hoped [...]

I am sorry you only just missed my phone call, & it must seem even worse, because it was only by a few minutes, but you can ring me at the number you have on the telegram, and if you do, please ring after 8 in the evening, or even later, because there is less chance of anyone being there to worry us. Don't ring on Thursday or Sunday because I don't think I shall be there, but any other day you should be able to get me if you feel like doing it. I know it is expensive, but under the circumstances, it is more than worth it.

The envelopes you sent were most gratefully received, but they won't last long, & I want you to send some more straight away, so that I don't run out any more. [...] I don't know why I endure this mental torture as I do, when I could only just go out one day, & come home to you for two or even three days. It would only mean 7 days C.B. & a day or two of my money stopped, & this price is a mere pittance to pay for a sight of you, but I shall leave you to decide, you know that I look to you for guidance in all these matters of conscience [...]

I shall now end this very plaintive letter [...] I'll say Goodbye & God Bless You, Your worshipping husband,

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
Monday (25TH. AUG ? 1941)*

Darling,

At last I am comparatively free to write to you again, except of course for operational requirements, & so I'm commencing this letter after dinner in the hope of finishing it to give to the S.A. man to post tonight [...] as I am O.S. again tonight, I will concentrate on giving you a good long one, that is if we finish operations before 4 in the morning.

First in my mind in order of Importance comes you, I received your cigarettes this morning, & also typewritten letter concerning mainly your plans about the house, but I'm afraid I must still insist on letting it, I cannot think of your living there alone even if Barbara does get over to sleep with you occasionally, because I'm positive she would not come regularly. However, I see your point about having the home to yourself for a while, it certainly would be lovely to spend our next holiday in our own home, & it therefore becomes imperative for you to re-billet the ogres³⁹ at once, because I expect leave will re-commence in about a week's time, & I come in the second group, that will give you a rough idea of how much time you have, & in the meantime you could have Barbara over to share with you. I must warn you however, that at the latter end of my leave (if I get it) I shall be assisting you to move to your mother's, & also negotiating for a tenant for the house, so if you want to avoid losing valuable time, you had better get busy about a tenant yourself. Nothing you can say will alter my mind, I am fully determined to get you away & let the house go, & go it will whether you think otherwise or not, tho' I don't think our ideas are as conflicting as that.

Next comes the Concert, it was a wonderful success, the best ever, even better than the outside concert parties which have visited us, everyone worked splendidly, & though I was almost driven to distraction acting as call boy, compere & stage director all at once, I enjoyed it, & as also Major Wotton was there, & personally congratulated us afterwards, I at least feel that it was worth the effort it cost us, but I was so very tired after it all that I simply couldn't sleep, I have had lots of trouble with insomnia just lately, absolutely going to pieces, & grey too, for now my hair is longer, it shows more, but I'm proud of it anyway.

³⁹ The Aunts

[...] I had a letter from Jack's girl today telling me all about their plans, & saying how disappointed they were that I couldn't agree with them, I'm disappointed too, but helpless but I'll enclose her letter when I write tonight & you'll see for yourself.

Now I must close, but I promise another letter will follow this as soon as it can possibly get there, [...] Goodbye darling [....]

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle,
Monday (Maybe 1941)*

SHORT LETTER WRITTEN AFTER RETURNING FROM LEAVE

My darling,

Here I am back again, not so gloomy as I thought I should be, but nevertheless a little bit down in the mouth. I went & had a long chat with Sgt. Peter. & we swapped experiences about leave, & by the time we had finished, I felt quite at home again. The S.A. Van came soon after this & I was able to get a much needed cup of tea, especially as there was none to be had at the cookhouse, I had a nice long chat with the S.A. man, & he cheered me up too, because he sees life from my angle & yours too, & the result is that I'm fairly optimistic, though what for, I don't know, you see, we're awaiting a big re-shuffle, as usual, things have happened whilst I was away, & do you know, all the hard work that was put in on the new sites has all been cancelled, & the lads have had to replace all turves & cover up all traces of work, now we are not going to single sites after all, but 'tis rumoured we are to be posted to another Battery, stationed in & around Derby, our boys have been out today working on this new Battery, taking down huts etc., & altogether it looks as if a move is imminent, I'll let you know more when I find out myself.

Well, there is little news for tonight darling, but tomorrow will bring out items of interest & I shall be better able to collect my wits, at the moment too I keep getting disturbed by other boys fresh from leave, they will insist on relating their holiday experiences, & that's one thing I now have in common with them. I'm going to miss you tonight I know, but if I keep awake I shall think happily of the wonder of you, & the lovely times we spent together last week.

Now angel, I must close, I'm sorry for the shortness of this note, but there are too many disturbing factors around [...] if I sleep I shall dream of you, & if I don't sleep I shall still dream of you, & I guess you'll do the same [...] please God this war will soon be ended & we may be happy again.
Goodnight Ivy darling,

Searchlight Camp, Shottle
Undated letter, possibly August 1941

Darling Wife,

Just a few sweets for you while I could get them, & also while I have some money in my pocket. You know I love you, & this is just a very modest reminder.

I received your letter today which contained the picture of a dish of bread & cheese, it certainly was tempting, & don't you think the pattern on the tablecloth was nice too? I felt very hungry after looking at that for a little while, & it made me long more than ever for those happy days we knew before the war, when you gave me just whatever I fancied, I shall pin it above my bed in memory of those times.

Another letter came today, also containing a picture, it was from Jack's girl, & the picture from her was of the two of them, I'm enclosing the letter so that you may see for yourself.⁴⁰

There is nothing more to relate today darling because I gave you all the news last night, but tomorrow will bring new events, & I'll write again then. Please tell me all I love to hear daily, I love you always, Your adoring husband,

⁴⁰ See page 364

CHAPTER 3X

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
25TH. AUG (1941)*

My own darling,

Here I am again as promised, and actually I have only just posted the other letter, but thought I had better get started, because we are reduced in N.C.O.'s to 2 now, only Joe & I remain, and, we have decided to try and avoid doing with O.S. from now on because it would come a bit hard on us, and therefore I lose my usual chance of letter writing, although this is all speculation anyway, nothing has yet been decided.

[...] Since writing my last note, I have been up to Alport Height with Serjeant Peter (note spelling of Serjeant is altered now, J instead of G) and it was beautifully wild & windy, we spent a pleasant quarter of an hour strolling around, & also took several snaps, including one of myself minus hat & looking as scruffy as I possible could, I had the marvellous scenery as background, & a cornfield, it will be interesting to see what it does turn out like.

I promised you a full programme of the concert events didn't I, well here we are :- we opened with a Male Voice Choir singing Keep on Smiling, & continued with Jock singing Rose o' Tralee, & I belong to Glasgow, he has a really nice voice & when he tries it's a treat to listen to him. We then put on a Sketch all about an Army Court Martial, we got in some beautiful knocks about red tape etc. it was written by Alf Gates our lorry driver, & was a real masterpiece. The Major was tickled to death with it. After this we used the "mike" to broadcast Shottle Home & Forces news bulletin. This took a careful rise out of various visitors who enjoyed the joke as much as we did, & then we sprung a surprise on them with two Guest Artists, two pretty girls from the previous concert party, who gave us song & dance, they're really good too, & gave three turns in all, very successfully breaking the monotony of an all male cast. Following on with a boy who plays piano accordion we lightened our hearts with a good old sing song, & then gave our highlight of the evening, the Rhythm Sisters Act. (Tiny, Daniel & Taylor?) you only know Tiny, but they were nearly all the same size & dressed up in borrowed feminine clothes, made up horribly, singing a skit on Cockles & Mussels, but did they make people laugh, they were definitely a hit. Once more we went on to the Radio. Featuring in Shottle Tonight, we interviewed

various people, who talked nonsense specially prepared by me, it went over well & then we had an interval during which time all guests were provided with tea & biscuits. After the interval we had a sketch of mine, got plenty of laughs, all about a burglar who strayed into the bedroom of 2 old maids & they wouldn't let him go, the boys who acted in it made a real job & absolutely kept the house in tears. We followed up with an Awkward Squad, Bdr. Bullimore was a Sjt. Major & he had lots of "rookies" & their antics were very laughable, we finished off with more songs by Jock, & some community singing with the accordion, Major Worth gave a little speech & complimented us all on a splendid show, making special comment on the man who did all the writing, so I got my reward, for what it was worth-----

Long period elapsed, & many things have happened, lots of new rumours, & many alarming facts, rumours of moves with all kinds of speculation as to our destination, & also the disturbing fact that the present ops may continue for some time yet, & as we can't start leave again till it's all over you can guess what effect this has upon the men. I'm getting browned off good & proper, & since the latest bulletin became very depressed, you see, I have been very busy lately, & have not had much time to think about how long since I was last home [...]

I rarely go out & very seldom sleep these days [...] I do pray that you will rid yourself of the ogres at the earliest possible opportunity, I'm convinced that they are responsible for your far too frequent pleasure jaunts, & consequently I can spare them no sympathy. [...]

I'm about played out for news again, but I'm holding out hope of getting my leave when I expected it, please pray ever so hard for this to be, [...] I'll say Goodnight, it's late now, & I've still got to go all night, so please dream of me darling, I'm watching over you from afar. [...]

P.S. Mr Lill got back about 2 this morning & dispelled all worries concerning leave, I'm keeping my fingers crossed.

Bill finishes his letter thus:

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
Night of 26-27th (August 1941)*

Dearest Love,

Thanks you so very much for your lovely long letter received today, I think it is the longest I have ever had from you in one piece, and I loved every word of it, it made me feel so very near to you [...] You do want to know a lot of things [...] I will try to answer them all in strict priority. (1) Why are so many men taken from the camp? I mustn't tell you, it's very secret work, and could be extremely dangerous for them if you or anyone in civvie street knew. (2) How many men are with me? Another ticklish question, but I'll tell you, 24. (3) What sort of a camp is it? The same as before, except that our equipment is a bit old fashioned, and the huts are arranged in one long row all along the road, surrounded by a stone wall about 4' 6" high which runs parallel to the huts on one side bordering the road, leaving just room enough for a tarmac path between wall & huts, actually it is a better laid out site than G. V. (4) Is there electric light? Yes. (5) How do we cook? the same as at G.V. coal fires. (6) Who was responsible for transferring me to Shottle? Our officer Mr. Douglas, not because he wanted to get rid of me, because they had only two up here against 7 N.C.O.'s at

G.V. and so I had to come here, it was that or be sent to another section, & I should have hated that. (7) How near here is the church? about 440 yds down the road, & there is no pub within 2 miles of here, and even if there was, we still can't buy cigarettes from them, they all think we can get plenty, although we are still strictly rationed on the S.A van to 20 per visit, and contrary to your remark about the peaceful life curtailing my smoking so much, I still find enjoyment in cigarettes, & therefore need them just as much as ever, I had a very thin time over the weekend, no-one had any in the camp to spare, and we were all scrounging from every source, I had two or three home made ones, reminiscent of Tuxford, but even they were acceptable, so please keep up your good work I need them. (8) Did I get your 4 letters posted to the old address? Yes. (9) Do I still take my morning run? No, I find the hills out here sufficient to keep me in pretty good order, but I am seriously contemplating another spasm of running in the near future. I will let you know. (10) Are you my lucky star? Yes, you are the luckiest break I ever had in this life [...] (11) Does the move mean no more tea for you? Unless you send me the money for it, yes, because my finances are in a poor way, but if I really tried, I guess I could still manage a little now & then. (12) Have we got a wireless? yes, a gramophone, & a really good mandolinist, and a canteen where we can buy Maltesers, Mars, & Milky Ways, Beer (no cigarettes) & Smiths Crisps, hence the crippled finance. (13) Very unlucky 13 too, can I suggest anywhere for you to go camping? yes, hundreds of places, but I'd rather you didn't go, reasons being unnecessary.

That should clear up quite a bit for you all the way round, I have made it very brief [...] and now to the burning question, can you come to stay for a week, or even a fortnight? [...] my enquiries have so far been fruitless, I still have high hopes of procuring accommodation somewhere nearby for you. If the nearest place was the Village inn, quite a nice place really & a lovely walk up to the camp, could you be content to be about 2 miles from me? that of course would be a last resource [...] of course you must bring Penny [...]

I had a letter from Jack today, he starts off by saying that judging from the poetic description of my present surroundings, one would imagine I was in training for a Cooks tourist agency, but that he too, now he is in love, sees things in much the same light, mentioning that trees silhouetted against the pale evening sky, previously unnoticed, ere now pinnacles of beauty to him, can you imagine it? our Jack, woman hater, no friends, & queer views on life, becoming normal at last, it was a definite shock to me, but I nevertheless appreciated the change.

My poem about Shottle (copy enclosed) has already had much publicity, copies having been freely circulated around the officers' mess & one to the Major, our own officer, or I should say, my old officer, rather got upset about the raving section sergeant's verse, but nevertheless enjoyed it, & was responsible for the major's copy, so I don't really think anyone is properly upset about it.

Today has been rather a trying one for me, first of all, there was a bath parade, & I being orderly dog, could not go, then in the morning there was a big inspection of maintenance, & we were visited by numerous big shots, who after thoroughly examining everything, finally decided we were pretty good, & gave full marks. Then this afternoon, the officer (our officer,:- Mr. Lill) we call him Shanghai Lill, chased the few men I had left for guards, all afternoon, including yours truly, until we had "Blitzed" the site from stem to stern, & what a time we had, tidying up store huts, collecting bits of paper, rags etc. from odd corners, he fairly tired me out, but I got my own back tonight, for when all training & work was finished at 8, I waited until he had finished his supper, then went & asked him to give me some training & tho' he liked doing it, I took all his evening up until 10.30, so he got some slave driving back at him after all, but I have learned lots, went all through the theory of sound again (quote Amazing Stories again) & various other theories all equally interesting to me, & by the time we had finished, I had learned tons & he was tired out, so all's well that ends well, & I am definitely the one who gained.

This orderly sergeant job is all very well, but I feel very tired about this time each night, it is 2 in the morning, one is at ones lowest so they say, & I can well believe it, I always welcome the dawn, it spells bed for me, & I can wake up & make a leisurely toilet, have a good tea & then sit back to enjoy life how I please, tomorrow if fine, I shall stroll out for the evening up to the highest point, with a pair of binoculars, & survey the scenery from a different angle, but if wet, as it has been for the last week, I shall just stay in bed & study, or write to you again, [...] as for Mum's disgruntledness, I have been back about 10 days & written one letter to her, probably shall write again tonight, or at the worst two nights hence, she still manages one per week, I really don't know why she grumbles so, but I'll try to work one or two extra in to cheer her up. The trouble with you women is.....There's a war on you know, & I've got to give some of my time up to it, so try to understand just a little [...] just think, Reveille 6.30, wash shave breakfast by 7.30 lay kit out, sweep huts scrub floor for inspection by 8.30 followed immediately by first parade, supervise maintenance till 10.30, train men in all practices & drills till 1 o'clock dinner, 2 o'clock parade again. More training of men, concentrating on backward

members, guess what they're like, 4 oclock, work on site as detailed, usually digging & generally supervising, 5 oclock Tea, 6 oclock more drill& training which goes on till 8. THEN we are free, except of course for the usual tete a tete among N.C.O.'s & officer about the day's work, & on top of all that, I've got to learn tons of stuff about my job as No. 6, which is all to be learnt in my spare time if any, small wonder I am very hazy about my real job to the distress of my officer, he thought I knew all there was to know. And then I get a moan about letters, my goodness, even infantry soldiers, who get more spare time than any other kind of soldier, don't write as often as I do, [...] do you realise that the bulk of your letters nowadays are written at night, or on our free Sunday afternoons, when I should be either out for a bit of pleasure, or sleeping. My average sleep these days works out to five in twenty four, sometimes even less [...] please be tolerant, S/L work is definitely the toughest kind of army work there is & this is not an exaggeration.

Tell this to Mum if you think fit [...] I expect you to pass on all news to Mum, [...] And as for you [...] little minx, you just wait till you get to Shottle, I'll show you who's boss.

Returning to cold facts;- it's a terrible night, we had a real thunderstorm this evening about teatime, & it's been raining ever since, now it is coming down as hard as I have ever heard it, & I find the same strange feeling we always felt when we lay in bed listening to it on the bedroom window, but you are not here [...] You really do love me don't you darling? I don't know quite what might happen to me if you didn't, I guess I'd go potty, so keep up the good work or have a potty husband [...] I have lots to do even as late as this (3 oclock) & I have study too, although what chance I shall have I do not yet know, so until tomorrow [...].

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
27TH AUGUST (1941)*

Dearest Love,

I'm browned off completely, today has been awful from start to finish, I woke up with a headache, & then I received no letter from you, a tragedy in itself, & then worst of all, Mr. Lill has been taken away from us for good, we are all heartbroken, & don't even care what happens now, & as if that was not enough we hear that the present ops may last for another fortnight yet, & leave won't start till that's all over, life is so very uncertain nowadays, & I am dying for you, my head still aches & I feel

very rebellious-----It is now Thursday morning, I couldn't write last night, I felt too bad, so I went to bed, & slept the best ever, & now I feel much refreshed. I'm writing this in the firm's time, so it won't be a very long one, but tonight I guess there will be more time to spare, [...]

We were all a bit gloomy this morning without Mr. Lill, but agreed that we must keep up the spirit of Shottle, because without it this place would be worse than a prison, so we are doing our best to be cheerful in spite of all such drawbacks. The worst thing to matter is that feeling of being kept away from you [...] one day we're told that leave will start this weekend, & next we hear we shall have to wait for about a fortnight, so you see what we're up against [...]

The song you wish to know about has never been heard in this district, no-one, not even the best of our dance fans has heard of it [...]

We are going to present Mr. Lill with an inscribed tankard [...] he also wants me to send him a complete copy of the Spirit of Shottle, so I shall want you to type me a few copies soon if you will darling, I'll let you have the words as soon as I can find them.

And now I must close, Sgt. Peter has just been after me, & looked very disapprovingly at me, so until tonight, Goodbye my love [...].

Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
28TH AUGUST (1941)

My own darling,

I received your letter this morning of Monday's date, and it made me very unhappy, but I know you didn't mean it, and when I get home you'll be surprised how easily forgotten are these awful weeks apart [...] I cannot give you any exact date for my next leave [...] please try to realise when a soldier has given up all he has of value in life, and is billeted miles from anywhere, and never goes out, how lonely he really is, I feel like that as soon as I dare try to think a bit, and as each day goes by without you, this feeling gets worse, so think before you write next time [...] I need reassurance all the time [...] . Your Bill always

Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
29TH AUG (1941)

Darling Ivy,

Just a line as I lie in bed, it's pouring with rain, and has been a miserable day, I still feel depressed, I expect because I need your company so much, how I wish we could have the lovely news that leave would re-commence, because once it does start I have only to wait a fortnight for mine [...] it wouldn't be so bad if we were in action, we shouldn't notice the passing of time so much, but our work is essentially boring, and to all outwards appearances useless, can you wonder at our reactions when faced with a doubtful future. Gone too is the prospect of promotion, apparently we have too many N.C.O.'s already, and some have to be taken down, awful thought, I hope I'm not one of the. Tomorrow we have a field check, I have to go, and I must say I'm not looking forward to it, we have to go about 15 miles to another site, and there are always too many officers anyway, they make me feel uncomfortable, I'll let you know how I get on.

Glad to know you are having a happier time at home with Nell out of the way, but you still have to get rid of them, & don't forget, they are not in a position to pick & choose, & don't let them browbeat you into anything you don't want to do, I'm convinced now that they are entirely responsible for your far too frequent trips to dances etc., and your change of feeling towards me, so for their sakes alone, they had better not be there when I do get home, they're not going to ruin our future chance for happiness. I'm glad you read Shakespeare, it's good for you, and should help you to find more in life than dancing all the time [...]-----

It's now Saturday morning, my pen ran out of ink & I hadn't any more handy, so I had to postpone the finish till now, we are all togged up for the field check, just waiting to be picked up by lorry, [...] Goodbye Darling [...].

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
31st AUG (1941)*

My own Darling,

Sunday, the day I hate most of all, nothing to do, nowhere to go, I have been playing cards all afternoon in company with the rest of the lads, there are only a few left now, we are all heartily sick of life, and welcome any diversion, I won ½ d after keeping my mind occupied for nearly 4 hours, but at least it all takes our minds away from the thing which is our biggest worry, no need to mention it again. Yesterday's field check went off O.K., we were, as usual, kept hanging about for hours before it actually started, and had to last from breakfast to teatime without food, so you can guess how pleased we were with the powers that be, and the stuff I was put through as a No. 6 was childish, I think I got full marks, the examiners seemed very pleased with me. I met Charlie Jenkins there, he's a one striper now you know, & like myself & Joseph, is pining for home & his wife, we are all suffering from deep depression, and Charlie has contemplated more seriously than I, the possibility of "doing a bunk", & said any time I feel like it, just to give him a ring & we'll go together, well, you can guess from this just how we feel, I honestly don't know why we stay, we all agree that stripes are not worth the trouble they bring, because we've all found out that one of these things on our sleeves lets us in for all kinds of dirty work, & apart from that we are expected to give up all our privileges & leave is supposed only to be of a secondary nature to us, well, well, when this experiment is all over & done with, at least we have the promise of 7 days, & shall we need it. Charlie suggests that we continue to visit each other's homes this time, we are going the same week, & will travel together, he comes from Welwyn you know, what do you think of the idea? if we can manage it I think it would be a good idea, but you'll see in due course no doubt. As soon as I can give you exact dates, please arrange for a weekend at Ron's with Len & Kitty & Bob & his wife, it certainly would be really grand to be all together again, just like old times except of course for Ted. By the way, he is over here till Sept 8th, he sent me a card telling me that if I was likely to be home to let him know, but I have already written & told him it's not much of a hope. He's staying at Cambridge of course, & I expect you'll be seeing something of him before he goes back. Do you see much of the rest of the gang these days? I should like to know if ever you run up against Len & Kitty, you never seem to mention them these days, & how is Penny, she too seems to have faded from the front line, I like to know all these little things, they are so vital to me. Ron has never sent me those promised books, I have given up hope of seeing them now, I

guess perhaps because I haven't had much chance to thank him for cigarettes sent, but I'll try to give him a line soon, & as for thanking Mum for the cake, I feel a bit guilty about that, so will try to get her a letter off when I've finished this one, but unfortunately we shall be night manning at 9 o'clock, & as it's now 7.30, I shan't have a lot of time spare, if any.

Eric Dunmore has gone home for the day to Northampton, & Joe has gone with him for the sake of something to do, so that I am left on the camp with Sgt. Peter, & am the only other N.C.O. I couldn't sleep last night, we had a wonderful chance of a whole night's sleep, but I just couldn't use it, & after laying in bed for over two hours vainly endeavouring to drop off, I got up & relieved a guard for an hour, the first I have done since joining, & I consider myself very fortunate, because after that hour I had had enough, it's very eerie standing alone at the gate, & very surprising how easily the imagination magnifies the slightest sound, but I had my bayonet, & this gave me a little more confidence. The fellow I had to wake for next guard was too drunk to do it, having been drowning his sorrows, & so one of the cooks had a spell, in fact, the camp was very capably looked after for the middle watch altogether.

The day has been the loveliest since you were here, hot sunshine all day, & ever so mild, I guess you must have had it even warmer down South, how did you spend it? [...] I got up at 7.30 having slept for the last four hours of the night, & we had breakfast, not much really, a rasher of bacon & some very greasy fried bread which I had to leave because my stomach wouldn't take it, & then we went on to the maintenance, which is always a source of boredom to me, I don't like it, & on Sundays it lasts for an extra hour, so of course I was "extra browned off" at the end of it, but fortunately Sunday gives us a free afternoon, & though I hadn't anything to do to occupy me, I couldn't settle to writing, I was glad in a way & spent the afternoon as previously detailed, we played outside the cookhouse minus shirts. We've had quite a few visitors out this way today, the sun having brought them out, & most of them have come to get blackberries, there's tons of them beside the road all the way to Alport & beyond, have you gathered any yet?

I had to go to Dorothy this morning to collect the monthly money for our pigswill, & I stayed talking to her for over an hour, all about life, her past, & I learned several interesting things, & she tried to console me because I'm miserable, & I must admit I felt happier when I left her, she & the (Eaves? Caves?) went picnicking this afternoon, I hope they enjoyed it.

All the pets at the camp are progressing favourably, little Joe the dog of course has gone with Mr. Lill, & we certainly miss him. The kittens are growing, & the little one like Pixie gets prettier every day. The lads have a new pet now, here is how they got it, one of the cooks was out for a walk, & he found a tiny chick which had strayed & was on the side of the road with a damaged leg, so he just grabbed it & brought it to the camp, & although it developed an attack of the gapes, it recovered, & still lives, & is surprisingly tame, it responds to the names of "Hoppy" owing to its damaged leg, & it allows itself to be stroked, I was amazed to see such a tiny little bedraggled bit of life, respond to the call of its owner just as any of the other pets would. Ginger still comes regularly out on all duty with me, & generally arranges himself on the neatest looking kit layout for the whole day. Fretful, you will be glad to know still keeps fit, but I fear has become a bigger thief than ever, I understand she has had more than one dinner from our cookhouse, & has had to be chased for it. The trees in the sacred orchard have yielded some very tasty apples, Dorothy sends some over to Joe now & again, & we invariably share the spoils, they are certainly nice, & young Pete always seems to be devouring them.

By the way, although Dorothy still remains at the farm, she is still not on particularly good terms with the old man, it seems that he has apologised merely because he realised how inconvenient it would be for him without her, & even now, relations are very strained. Joe goes over daily still, he's not afraid of the old boy, & he has actually taken her to the pictures since the affair, but Sgt Peter never goes now, & I visit about twice a week, when we're sure the old boy is out, Dorothy is still the same towards us, she thinks we have done a lot to help her forget some of her past, yes, she has a past, nearly got married at 20 she tells me, & then some other love affair upset her so much that she had a nervous breakdown, I expect she mentioned it while you were there, & she says she don't know what to do when we go. She suggested today that if leave doesn't come off soon, that perhaps you would like to spend a weekend there, & I want you to do this if things remain as unsettled in another week. You could get a cheap ticket you know, & I'm prepared to pay half for you if fiancé worries you at all, so please consider it if I don't send you the glad tidings in a week's time.

Now to more serious things, I'm still insistent that the old girls must be re-billeted whether they will come to your terms or not, makes no difference to me, the house must go for the duration, & you may only hang on to it until I get home, & the latter end of my leave as I said before, will be spent in winding up affairs. I know for

a certainty that if your evacuees are still there when I get home, there will be unpleasantness, I'm very sore with them.

How I wish I could be with you now, "When day is done & shadows fall I think of you", how true that is [...] we used to walk hand in hand down the garden to see how everything was growing, it is heart-breaking to think that this war is likely to continue for years yet, we can never make amends for the big slice out of our life, all we can hope is that it will never happen again [...]

I had a letter from Jack's girl. I think I told you, they have put the banns up, & nothing we can say or do will stop them says Vera, they have gone farther than we think, & just what she means by this I don't know, but I hope they're not making a bloomer.

I've just had a run down the path to the lats, & the scent from my night stocks has reached as far as that, it's perfectly lovely, but oh! so full of painful memories [...] never give me cause to think you have met someone better or I shall go mad, and now, as it nears time for night manning, I must close hurriedly, & I do hope I sleep tonight & dream of you [..]

Goodnight darling, [...].

Searchlight Camp, Shottle
1st SEPT (1941)

My very own,

Here I am again, still writing my love, what a glorious day it will be when I can tell it to you again [...] By the way, I had no word from you today, & after I took such special care to get one to you for Monday too, I was very sad when all the postman handed me was a letter from Jack's girl (*Vera*). She's in hospital, awaiting an operation, so it seems that if we can't delay the wedding at least fate can still step in, & though I wish them every happiness, I do hope it does postpone the happy event, I have just finished my reply to her, apparently she likes my letters, and as she isn't too bad at writing herself, we correspond about once a week, also, Jack never writes now, so she makes up for the deficiency.

We had a our bath parade today, spent the whole afternoon in Derby, & were able to go to the Pictures & see George Formby, his picture wasn't too bad, but I'm not over fond of him at any time, so naturally enjoyed the supporting picture more which featured Bob Crosby in "Let's make Music". Well, Derby is still the same, & as usual, it took a big town like that to make me feel really lonely, when I see happy couples, soldiers obviously on leave with sweethearts & wives, & love is everywhere for all to see, I'm filled with envy & a colossal sadness & yearning for you [...] We heard rumours about a new call up of women, if what I hear is true, you might be affected, in which case you have the choice of two things only, A.T.S., or munitions, & if you do have to face this, please choose munitions as the lesser of two evils, I know only too well what sort of a life A.T.S girls lead & I should hate to think of you having anything to do with them, so please

darling be guided by me, & you will still be able to stay at home & wait for me, even if you are living with your own people. On the other hand, I cherish the secret hope that your job will save you from such a choice, & should all this fail, the only obvious way out is babies, what do you think of the idea if we're forced? I'd like to know. Enough of unpleasantness, I like to think of you always as I know you best [.....] *{a whole paragraph of adoration}*

Leave is the next obvious thing to write about, I heard today that it's likely to start at almost any time, but as I tell you almost daily now, I can give you about a fortnight's notice before it happens, & mentioning that has reminded me yet again about your letter, I'm still anxious & not a little worried about it, I shall die if you ever cease to care for me, I do hope I get a letter tomorrow expelling it all.

It's now 9 o'clock evening, the news is on, full of the usual propaganda & hot air, I sometimes wonder why we don't fight instead of talking so much, I am almost convinced that the government want the war to last, & I would never be surprised to learn that the war is eventually ended by vigorous protests from the public when they get browned of with it. I wonder if you are listening? I am picturing very vividly, our own happy lounge & the wireless in the corner with you listening, perhaps knitting, or don't you do much there days owing to wool shortage, [...] you love me as much as you always did, you must, or else all my ideals are gone, I have nothing to fight for, nothing to make survival worth while [...]

Now darling I must end, the time has flown, I have written to Mum & Jack's girl, & it's time for work, yes, the usual old stuff, do you wonder our spirit sometimes wavers? Talking of spirit, I enclose the Spirit of Shottle, please type several copies for Mr. Lill & let me have them as soon as possible. He is very miserable where he is, & I believe he would sacrifice his commission if he could be sure to finish the war at Shottle, but he can't, & so he continues to pine for us, so please give him a bit of pleasure by typing my poem for him. By the way it's now famous throughout the Regiment, too bad it's anonymous. Now I really must close darling,

Searchlight Camp, Shottle
SEPT 2ND (1941)

Goodmorning Darling,

Another day gone, and one nearer to seeing you once more [...] you ask me to go out more, but I usually do get out at least once a week, & after it's all over I feel just as blue [...] In your letter written over Friday & Saturday, you suggest getting out with Joe & Peter, but you don't seem to realise that as there are only 3 of us & 2 always have to be in, how impossible your suggestion is, but I do the best I can to cheer myself up in my own way, without much success I'm afraid [...]

I note your solution to the domestic problem, & though not in favour, I stand down if you are likely to be happy under the new conditions, but I fear my relations with the aunts will never be very warm again, so it's just as well that we shan't see much of them, but I bet you what you like, they complain if you have the wireless on late at nights, & they'll find a hundred new things to worry you with, & one final word, don't you dare buy anything to furnish their room with, if they want anything they must buy it themselves, & I should still keep an eye open for other billets if I were you, I'm afraid I can't be as tender hearted as I used to be, they made you unhappy & I can't forgive them yet.

Well, enough of that, I see you still go to dances, but you omit the things I like to know most, with whom you went, where you slept, & how you get home, surely you didn't cycle all that way, & please tell me that you still don't dance the last waltze (*sic*), & that you still go home alone, because I still like to believe that you think of me when the dance is over [...]

....this is only to be a short letterwe are on Rouser, & have just had a stand easy, but expect another call out at any time, so I must get what sleep I can, although it's very rare with me these days, I lay awake till nearly 3 every night because I can't stop thinking of you, [...] in the meantime you can only lighten my depression by writing letters like you used to when I first left you [...] Goodnight darling, I adore you,

Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
 3RD. SEPT. (1941)

My Darling Wife,

This is destined to be another very short letter, & I fear contain disturbing news, I'm going on a course on Sunday to Newark, it will last 10 days, so for at least 14 days I shall get no leave, [...] I'm so desperate now, that I shall see our B.S.M. when the course is finished & see what he can do for me, please, please pray hard for me to be home soon. Actually, leave is not yet started, & I had to wait a fortnight after it stated, so perhaps the course, which should be an interesting one, will help to while away the time quickly, and who knows, during my time away, perhaps leave will get going, & I shall be nearly due when I get back. It's a No. 6's course on MK.1X, & I hope to be able to shine, & anyway I needed it, so should do well at it, I shall try anyway. Mr. Douglas told me tonight that 2 L/B's at G.V. have been reduced to Gunners today, & that only men who went on the course I did, have retained their stripes, so I'm very lucky to have missed it, though I still hope to gain another soon, hope is all that keeps us going these days, & fortunately dies hard.

We have started P.T. each morning here now, went for a run this morning about 3 miles, & we also have a deck quoit court on the parade ground from today, we have had a most strenuous day, & for once I think I shall sleep tonight.

I saw Dorothy tonight, & phoned you at Mr. George's number, but after waiting an hour for the call to go through, they could get no reply, & I had to come away disappointed, hence the letter, I should have loved to hear your voice again, so if you get this before Sunday, perhaps you'll have a try from your end, Cowers Lane 2.43. I can easily be fetched any time of day or evening, & shall be in every night till Sunday at least, so perhaps you'll give me a treat will you? Dorothy wishes me to send her love to you, & says I spoil you, do I? [...]

Now I must wind up my love, don't write here any more, I expect my new address which I don't yet know will start with Regt. School, & end with Newark, But I'll let you know as soon as I find out, so until then I guess I'll have to give up expecting letters from you from Friday onwards.
 Goodnight Darling, I don't know how I survive, hope it will soon be over, [...].

Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
5TH SEPT. (1941)

My Darling Wife,

By the time this letter is in your lovable hands, I shall be at my new abode, & I hope, for the sake of my sanity that it is vastly different from this life I'm leading at present, because we, both Joe & myself are in the depths of despair & misery. I am embittered, men are men no longer, each day now I am confronted by glaring examples of how they behave under rotten circumstances, & I should hate to be in a hot spot with them if they were likely to behave as they are now. I mention this because I have done my last good turn tonight, I allowed one fellow to stay out to see his wife & the usual thing happened, after begging on bended knees & almost kissing my hands he obtained my permission & was of course late back, & when I asked one of his pals to do guard till he got back I got slanged right & left, told I had no business to let him go out, & he wasd if he'd do it, so to settle all this I did the guard myself, but I'm finished with all the soft stuff, the people I help are the first to turn against me, & so from now on all men under me are just ignorant ungrateful beasts who have no right to the title of men, & therefore do not deserve to be treated as such. Friends are impossible in this life, Joe is about the only one who remains unchanged, even Freddie Burgess who is gone from here now, turned all nasty to Joe & myself today, & on returning from bath Parade we had to return the stage we had borrowed for the concert, & he refused to let the lorry wait while Joe & myself with 2 others erected it, & we had to walk all the way back, further than the Railway Inn, & you know how far that is, so you can imagine our feelings.

Well, enough moans, I hope the next letter I write will be more cheerful, because I shall be leading a different life, but more disturbing news has come to my ears tonight. 3 more lance jacks have come down to the ranks, so I think I've had a lucky break & will be able to retain mine, I do hope so, & perhaps I may even be made a P.C. under the new single det. Scheme, & there is also the very remote possibility of being kept at Regtl. School as an assistant instructor, a thing I am going all out for when I get there.

Now to the nicest of all, although I don't know how, & am not likely to know until the very day, I think I might click for my leave when the course is over, I'm pulling for it so keep your fingers crossed, perhaps you could come to some arrangement whereby you can get your holiday at short notice, [...] please don't have your holiday alone before I get there.

Joe & myself went to Derby for a bath today, to rid ourselves of some of the aches we have accumulated from our very athletic last few days, what with P.T. each morning & deck quoits every night we have made ourselves worn out, & yet I still can't sleep. After Bathing, we went into Derby Cathedral & prayed together, no need to tell you what our prayers were, & then we didn't know what to do with ourselves for the next 1 ½ hours, not enough time to go to the pictures & no money to spend, so we went to the library & read for an hour, then took a stroll around the museum, I read a very exciting story by Rafael Sabatini all about an old fashioned war & love affairs etc. but I came back to earth with a bump when the very rude library bloke came bustling round me collecting up all the magazines & even asked me to shift so that he could get at some more of his precious magazines, as if he was afraid I should pinch them, so I slammed my book shut & slung it across the table & made him fetch it, & it wasn't closing time either, it's funny, but if one wears a khaki suit & goes somewhere other than in pubs & cinemas, people look at you with suspicion, do you wonder I hate life as it now presents itself, I have lots more to back up my opinions which I'll tell you as a story when I get home, but in the meantime I'm glad you still remain unchanged [...] I don't know how I keep as patient as I do, it must be Shottle, because all other sites are more browned off than this.

Thank you for the letter received this morning, they cheer me up no end & I love you for it, & by the way you mentioned cash the other day, well, you know how much I needed it on my last course, I should appreciate a shilling or two as soon as you get my new address which I still don't know. One big thing about the course is that I shall not go without friends, Eric Dunmore & Bill Wilkinson are going, & several Sergeants who I know quite well, I'm the only one striper amongst them, so here's hoping.

Well Darling, I've scribbled like blazes, because I was on guard when I intended writing, but I expect you've got used to deciphering my scrawl by now [...]

*Militia Camp,
Hawton Road,
Newark-on-Trent, Notts
10TH SEP (1941)*

Darling Ivy,

Three days gone already, and it hardly seems as if I've got here yet, so if the rest goes as quickly it will soon be all over, and honestly, if it weren't for leave being so urgent, I should love to stay here. This life suits me, plenty of exercise & drill, it's building me up again, I wish I could lose a little weight though, it worries me a little to think that despite all this sweating I'm still as tubby as ever, but I can assure you I'm no fatter than when you last saw me, so I hope you'll still love me we do meet again. I haven't heard from you yet, & you've no idea what difficulties I've been in financially, so I do hope your letters will start arriving from tomorrow, for apart from needing cash, I begin to pine for news of home and you, do you still love me as I do you [...] what have you been doing these last few days. All these little questions I want to know about, they mean so much to me.

I had a chat with the B.S.M. here today, he used to be my sergeant at Farnah Green & remembers me well, he asked me how I was getting on these days, & if I liked it here, so I gave him a full account of all that had happened since he left me to come here, & he seemed quite happy to be able to chat for a while, & add to this the fact that I seem to have found favour with most of the instructors because I've shown more intelligence than the rest of the class, I think I should get a good report, I do hope so, because I want to make an impression on our own officers so that they notice me, although I believe that has happened in a minor way already, because although it may be self consciousness, I feel I have been watched particularly for several periods since being here by the adjutant, and the school commandant, and, though, I always tremble when he looks my way, the R.S.M. he's a devil for wrongdoers, and I'm always worried to think I'm doing something wrong.

There is a N.A.A.F.I. here, as at all such camps, but we can't buy anything other than tea & buns, even the cigarettes are not as plentiful as outside, & now we can get no chocolate, so what they're for I don't know, I've just been over & spent my borrowed 3^d on a coffee & bun, costing 2 ½^d and the army never sees anything back in the way of profits.

I don't like the A.T.S. being here, everything we do there are women watching us, taking the rise at us on the parade ground, an unheard of thing, & it's very bad for discipline too, & I don't think A.T.S. and men mix too well, so if they want to be in the army they should be kept on their own, they can't cook any better than our own cooks at Shottle, & they have every possible modern method to help them too, so I fail to see what use they are, & apart from all that, it takes about 20 of them to do what 5 men could do much better, & they're all common type girls, the sort who swear & joke with the roughs of the army, they drink beer, smoke & swear, & I don't like it, I am so glad you aren't likely to be mixed up with them ever.

I've just found out that we are to work all day Sunday, everyone is indignant, but it won't make any difference, we shall still have to work, although we shouldn't have much to do anyway, & would probably get browned off with inactivity. Eric Dunmore says if we get off Saturday afternoon, which is likely, he is going home to Northampton, & if I cared to go with him I can, so perhaps to make a change I'll go, though if I do, I shall be thinking all the time how much nearer I am to you and yet still not able to see you. Ah! To be with you again, my wildest dreams realised [...], to miss a day with my mail get's me very depressed, and I feel as if my life has had the bottom knocked out. [...]

Now my angel, I must end, I fear it still is difficult to write a really lengthy letter on this course, there is so much to study up so that I may become word perfect, we are to have a written exam at the end of it all, & I simply have to be top, so please forgive me if

I end here
won't you
darling, to go
on to this:-

I've got to
learn this
darling,
Goodnight,
God Bless
you

*Militia Camp,
11th Sept. (1941)*

Dearest Love,

I adore you, the thought of you thrills me
And dreams of your beauty fill my head
Without you I'd be much better dead,
So please say each time you write,
How much I must mean to you,
You love me, please say that you do.

I had you parcel today
With smokes & cash as well
There is little more to say
Except that I think you're swell.
You see my sweet little wife
You are dearer to me than life
And only when you're very near
Can I ever be happy dear.

Thank you for lecture received
I really have never believed
Life is as black as it seems
Because I live chiefly in dreams
Tho' 'praps I was getting depressed
Surely getting it off my chest
Is the best thing I could do
And who could I tell but you.

Forgive me darling of mine
If discontented I seem
But your beautiful eyes that shine
Are nothing but a dream
And till I once again
Can feel you in my arms

Obsessions in my brain
Craving all your charms.

Another day is here
And I hope the time is near
When I shall see your face
And once again will grace
Our home with tobacco smoke
And 'praps we'll share a joke
As we sit in our very own room.

Your description of the home
Is exciting to extremes alone
And I know when we're together
It will fill my wildest dreams,
For to be alone with you
And no-one else around
Is just a heav'n for two
Nothing nicer could be found.
You sent another letter
Which I received to-day
In which you thought you'd better
Find a word to say
To Joe my friend you know,
And probably by now
He's had it & I hope
Feeling a bit more cheerful
And not inclined to mope.

You mention stripes again I see
A tender subject now
But if opinion's left to me
I think I've shown them how
A good N.C.O. should be,
For daily I'm progressing
Through this blooming school
Thankful for possessing
Common sense's golden rule,

And up till now I'm top
 Of all the other 6's
 I mean to stay there also
 Though strips aren't held for "sissies"

I guess you'll think I'm mad
 Wasting all my pad
 Writing to you in rhyme
 Instead of cutting time
 Saving paper too,
 But then dear, I love you
 I also know my sweet
 Although we cannot meet
 At least you used to like
 My poems in days before the war.

A parcel came from Ron
 Containing books & things
 But all that was left was books#
 For at packing he's a dud
 And the cakes were merely crumbs
 Giving me heartfelt pain
 For over & over again
 My parcels are shaken about
 And the contents within have been spoilt
 For lack of sufficient care
 It really is a shame.
 But the books he sent I loved,
 So did all the rest
 And they crowded round my bed
 To scan for ladies undressed,
 So I've started a library scheme
 Whereby they all can look
 At each & every book
 Without confusion & loss
 And naturally I'm the boss.

---“---

Just got back from a S/L site
 Where they haven't installed electric light
 'Twas dreary & dull & hard to see
 I hope such a site will not be for me.
 We went there by lorry to practice at night
 Well over fifty, & gosh what a plight
 We all had to pack in this van like sardines
 A good job we soldiers are more like machines
 And after we'd spent 2 hours or more
 Back we packed in score after score
 And returned to the camp all hungry & wet
 Only to find that the NAAFI was shut
 So Ronald's crushed parcel was raided for crumbs
 Shared by my pals we all ? our "turns"
 And now it is bedtime. Another day gone,
 Tomorrow we start on the last half of course
 And though I feel happy in this sort of life
 I terribly want to hold my dear wife.



The sirens have gone & I guess we'll get bombs
 We're near to an airdrome & you know what comes
 A terrible rumble has sounded quite close
 I guess that was Jerry who gave us a dose
 And now darling angel I really must sleep
 My angels watch over you & vigilance keep
 And bombs can fall round us as fast as they like
 While they are here, they're far, far from you
 And sleep tho' I may not, comfort is here
 You love me darling & want me to be near
 So God Bless you sweetheart, you know how I feel
 Always at your pedestal I want to kneel
 I love you angel you know that is true
 Please always remind me that you love me too.
 Your Bill

Probably Searchlight Camp, Shottle
14th Sept (1941)

My darling,

We're moving, it's now 9 oclock in the morning, we've been up since five, & will soon be away, everything is upside down, & everyone is chasing everyone else, but I have done all there is to do at the moment, & I'm taking advantage of the lull, to write a brief note.

In the first place, we are not going where we thought we should be, our destination is now 8 miles north of Derby, but I don't think it's much worse than before, & I still think it's possible to get home fairly easily, so don't worry too much darling will you.

I will let you have our new address just as soon as I can, & I shall expect some very long letters from you [...]. I expect someone will be chasing me out soon, I don't see myself sitting here unmolested for long, but at least I feel I've sneaked a little time with you, as this may be the only chance I shall have today.

The weather looks pretty stormy, I hope it don't rain too much, because moving is bad enough without having to get wet thro' at the same time, but I guess we'll all get over it.

I think my darling I had better end this very brief note now, [...], Your adoring husband,

Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
18TH SEPT. (1941)

Darling Wife,

Back again, and how nice too, though unfortunately it's not likely to last, because once I get used to the same old routine I know my enthusiasm won't last. I stayed at G.V. last night especially to see about my leave, & I had a bitter disappointment in that I should normally have been home by now, but Joe is going on a 3 weeks course on the 30th and so he has to have his leave first, & he goes tomorrow morning, & I have to wait until Monday week, a thing I wouldn't normally mind, but I'm still not sure of it, old Douglas wouldn't give me anything definite, he

was horrid about it last night, & we had a row, because as soon as I mentioned leave he flew at me, said if he had his way there would be no leave, so I politely reminded him that he's not married, to which he replied that made no difference, but what's the use of arguing? I should get the worst of it anyway, so all we can do is keep hoping, hoping & praying, are you praying darling? I do hope so, I have such faith in your prayers. One good thing at least, Duggie goes on a 10 day course on Sunday, so at least he won't be pestering us for that length of time, & for which we are truly thankful, honestly, if you knew how hateful he is now, you'd never believe a man could be so despicable. In his temper he made all sorts of veiled threats about going abroad & not getting any leave at all, & I wouldn't put him above any of them either, he's cheap, & I despise him utterly.

Now to more pleasant news, Shottle greeted me with a pretty display of flowers & music this morning, it was such a contrast to the gloomy, browned off aspect of G.V. and I welcomed it, because it seemed as if my sweetheart had missed me & had planned a welcome, so, as we backed into the camp I saw on the corner, my pretty little flower garden, which is at last flourishing, & heard the sweet strains of "One Fine Day he'll come" on the wireless, & saw the smiling faces of the boys fresh back from leave, with no apparent cares or worries in the world, & though I am already settled down to Shottle routine again, I offered up thanks for such a place to live, though I doubt if I shall stay here long, I think that when we deploy, I shall be a D.C., and that, I hope will pave the way to some stripes, I shall be disappointed if it doesn't. I have not, of course, heard the result of my course yet, but I think, & certainly hope, that I am near if not, the top, & I passed the Corps Standard on the field check we had about a fortnight ago, a very high honour, & that's why I shall probably be a D.C., then I certainly shall have my hands full.

I read your letter to Joe, he received it the same day as he got one from me, & he says he will reply to it while he is on leave, I wonder, anyhow he was very pleased to know how you felt for him & probably amused at your "Joe Darling" tone; but I felt you were a little devil to suggest that my company was more depressing than uplifting, & I couldn't help thinking this afternoon as I planted cabbages, about your reference to the fact that I will not adopt the O' well I'm here etc., attitude, how little, if anything, you know of our feelings. Of course you can be like that, you have everything except me, & therefore plenty to make the best of, what have we. You tell me will you?

I'm glad you liked my news poem, & strange as it may seem, I wrote that just as quickly as I'm writing now, with only an occasional pause for rhyme, so you must not judge my spare time by poetry received, perhaps I'll give you another one soon.

Before I close, a word in your darling ear;- [...] Oh! I forgot, I'm suffering from 'Flu! Yes, it's true, the strenuous course made me sweat at times, & I caught a chill, I think I mentioned a cough in an earlier letter, well, on the last day of the course I awoke early & could hardly move, my head was bunged up, & my chest was tight, but I had to get up because of the exams, & so out I went, but I couldn't survive the P.T. we do exercises with huge pieces of timber, & on that last morning yesterday, I couldn't lift my end, got moaned at by instructor, told him I wasn't well, & he said the proper thing to do was to report sick, & sent me off to put my clothes on. Anyhow, I got through the day somehow, & apart from that incident all went fairly well, & today I don't ache so much, & what with one thing & another, moving etc., I almost forgot I had a cold, except that I have to keep sniffing & coughing, & get frequent attacks of hot & cold shivers, anyhow I think it's wearing off, & I can't go sick because Douglas would think I was spiting him, & I wouldn't let him think that for anything, & in a way I suppose it's a good thing I'm not home today, because in a weeks' time I shall be O.K. [...] I should hate to leave you with a cold, though it often happens.

Well now darling, I really do think I have given all news now, I haven't yet visited Dorothy, so I cannot tell you how she is, but I guess all is well or Joe would have told me, so until tomorrow we'll assume she is O.K.. [...] Goodnight darling, I love you always, Your Bill.

Postscript:

THERE WAS A LITTLE BLONDE
WHO WAS VERY VERY FOND
OF LIFE AND THE JOY IT COULD BRING
BUT THE HUSBAND SHE HAD
WAS A SERIOUS LAD
THO' HE LOVED HER LIKE ANYTHING
AND ONE DAY HE WILL FIND
THAT MORE PEACE OF MIND

IS TO BE FOUND IN ADOPTING HER STYLE
 AND THO' TWAS WELL MEANT
 HIS LIFE HAS BEEN SPENT
 IN DENYING HIMSELF OF A SMILE.

Do you think that's true? it took me 15 mins. Bill

*Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
 SEPT. 19TH (1941)*

Little Girl

Winter is on us, we're all in bed
 And it's only just gone eight o'clock
 Ten men have we now
 That's all there are left
 Doesn't that give you a shock

The evenings are dark
 We're not allowed out,
 So what is there left we can do
 But roll down our beds
 And puzzle our heads
 For amusement with just one or two

Joe left us this morning
 To go on his leave
 I wished & wished it were me
 For I've fears for the worst
 By not going first
 And wonder if ever 'twill be.

But at least he was happy
 That's all that we asked
 So p'raps something good has been done
 And who knows but what
 That sooner than thought
 We shall have joy by the ton

This rhyme is erratic
 But then so am I
 Tho' I still hope twill help to amuse
 My darling sweet wife
 Whose love is my life
 And for whom I haven't no news

Last night with old Joe
 To the farm we did go
 To visit a lady you know
 She's well you'll be glad
 And the trouble she's had
 Is over & forgotten also

She's awfully pleased
 That the harvest is in
 Assisted each day by our boys
 She gave Joe two eggs
 One of which he gave me
 That's one of friendships joys.

Tiny's in love
 You'll be surprised to learn
 A girl from the village below
 He acts like a kid
 But 'tis refreshing also
 And the best thing he ever did

That's all of my news
 And I have no fresh views
 Of life and the way it is lived
 So just one more verse
 Devoted to you
 And then I shall close for tonight.

Goodnight then my angel
 I love you my sweet

I'm yearning to have you right near
 And will never be happy until I'm with you
 And then I'll have nothing to fear.

Your own Bill CHEZVOUS AMOUR

Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
 21ST SEP. 1941

Dear Beloved,

Writing from the camp
 of ghosts, where only echos
 (sic) & falling leaves remain.

To tell the story of the life
 and beauty we knew a few
 short weeks ago. All day I
 have been restless. Not
 caring if I live or die, can't
 settle down, pacing up and
 down the camp, unable to get
 out even if I wanted to, &
 now at bedtime I shall not
 sleep, so I am compelling
 myself to write to you in the
 hope that telling you all

about it will help me. You've no idea what a place this is now, lonely, desolate,
 haunted by echos in empty living huts, with the ever present doom of being suddenly
 ordered to pack up kit and go out to some undeveloped site. To make matters worse I
 heard today that I shall still have to wait for a week after Joe gets back before I can
 come home to the peace of your loving arms, a veritable haven of rest for which I am
 continually longing, but at least I have a date now to look forward to, Oct. 4th. and
 that is a help, though how I'm to survive a fortnight of such a life as this I know not.

Yesterday I was told that I am to be a D.C., an honour indeed, and my 9 men are already picked for me, and on the whole they're a pretty decent crowd, my new home will probably be Shangriler, the place you couldn't say, & that's only a few miles from here which won't be too bad, and I shall still be able to visit Dorothy now and again when I can stroll out on a Sunday. The novelty appeals to me, but I do not relish a return to hurricane lamps, & cooking outside, having to fetch water, & a thousand and one other disadvantages, however, the change will do me good, and I should have plenty of responsibility to keep me occupied.

Two new things have come about in our uniform which I had hoped to surprise you with, but I keep getting my leave postponed, so I'll tell you, & ask your opinion when you have seen them. First, we now have leather anklets, they are certainly more practical, but owing to the fact that the H.G.⁴¹ also have them, we are not particularly keen on them, especially as we are not allowed to colour them in any way, but merely treat them with saddle soap. Actually they look very smart, and as a good many other units now wear them, I guess we shall soon become accustomed to seeing them. Next, we have been issued with new witches, they really are smashing, embroidered in bright scarlet silk cotton, is the old girl on a background of navy blue felt, I have sewn mine on, & they're very striking, there's no doubt these little fancy bits certainly do brighten up the uniform. There now you have my secrets, there is one more very big one I'm saving especially till I get home, I do intend to keep it, I also know you'll love it when I tell you, but that's got to keep.

I'm afraid you are rather neglecting me for stamps just lately darling, I have just got 3d left, & I fear that when I've posted this I shall just have to wait for payday, unless you do happen to send some in tomorrow's letter, the money still seems to disappear, although this week I had to buy toothpaste, shaving cream & soap, all at once, which you will readily appreciate made a hole in my allowance.

I haven't yet heard the result of my course, & I really appreciate your remarks about being in the first three, I think I ought to be, but then you don't know the natures of men under army circumstances, I'll explain in detail when I get home, but all the same I'm sweating on a good result, & will be extremely disappointed if it's not so. There is to be another field check on Saturday, this time on MK. 1X, I wonder if I shall do as well on that as at the last, I do hope so, I love being efficient, & recognised as such, but if they don't soon give me leave I shall cease to be interested. I noted your comments about Eric's going abroad, you seemed pretty matter of fact

⁴¹ Home Guard

about it, is that because you thought I am unaffected, I hope so, it worried me to think you have ever reconciled yourself to that possibility, & it's a big one too, I think I shall die. Sergeant Peter is waiting for interview for his commission, I guess we'll be losing him soon, Ah well, this can't last for ever, and in a 100 years who will care what mental torture mankind suffered through the maddest war of all. That, to my mind is the most awful thing in war, life is cheap, property was made to come down sooner or later, but nothing is so painful & lasting as injury to spirit, & we, the workers, are the ones to pay, before, during, & after, unsung, unhonoured, mothers, wives, & sisters, and husbands, never will the scars of memory be completely eradicated, & the only consolation we can find in all of this is the possibility of knowing the world might be a better place, though evolution has shown that each succeeding generation will not take the lessons of its precedents to heart, & must needs find out by the same bitter mistakes for itself.

I am in need of comfort, mental comfort, how easily I have slid back to melancholia, but can you wonder at it, to be continually thrust down the leave roster by the office boy who is nothing but a muddler, & by various other unforeseen circumstances, I am heartily sick of it all, & often regret giving up my power in the office, though I feel one must make sacrifices if one wishes to progress, well I've made plenty, & there are more to come it seems. Forgotten Army, how true, I wonder who thought of such a title, he must have been in similar mood, daily we are told by various outside people what a cushy job we have, I wonder, well, I know, for what better proof than experience.

Darling, I thought about taking up Pelmanism, for this winter, do you think 'twould be worth the speculation, I see they're advertising half price for Forces, I shouldn't do it if you don't approve, because I've got to draw out some cash if I take it up, but somehow I feel you'll agree that it's a good idea, please think it over & let me know your decision in due course. How is everyone at home, hope they're all well, give them my love, tell them that one Fine Day he'll come. What a lovely tune that is, do you know the words, they're lovely, I'll try to get them for you, it fits our present circumstances perfectly. Tomorrow is Monday, just one more day of monotony, dull dreary maintenance, followed by dull & very dreary training, followed by dull dreary dinner followed by dull dreary training followed by dull dreary work, usually of a dull dreary nature, followed by a nice cup of tea & so to bed, the tea is the only thing that isn't dull, and if it were not for a certain bright red painted van with GR, on it, calling here each morning with news of you, I should

certainly finish off this business of madness. I'm on the borderline, the more I write now the dafter I get, I think I'd better make my bed, perhaps tomorrow. [...]

Searchlight Camp, Shottle.

24TH. SEP. 1941

Typed flimsy letter

Beloved,

I bet this will be a surprise to you to see once again the old familiar typed letter, here is the reason for it:- I'm going out for the day to a swimming gala at Nottingham and I'm waiting at G.V. for transport. It promises to be pretty good and I hope to make an enjoyable break.

Leave is the all important subject now, and as I am right on the spot, I have made special inquiries and am at last able to definitely state that I shall be home on Oct. 4th. which will fall on a Saturday, and as I received your letter today stating that you had provisionally fixed your holiday for the week preceding that I'm afraid that you will have to alter it by that much, I do hope that will be alright, and that Wheeler will not put any obstacles in the way, we have waited so very long for this to be, and I should feel very much like pushing his face in if he upsets it now, so please you do your very best to get it when we want it, because I am unable to do anything about it.

Sergeant Peter goes for his interview on Friday to see if he will get his commission, I guess it will be come off alright, we can expect to lose him soon, but anyway we are all going to be split up soon, so I don't suppose it will matter that much. A whole batch of fellows went off this morning for their wonderful week of freedom, and I felt very envious and sad that I could not be with them, but at least we still have ours to look forward to, and they will have had theirs when I am just off, so there are advantages to being last after all, I do hope that we shall get reasonable weather.

Thank you for the cigarettes you sent, I got them this morning, but why have you reduced the supply these last two or three times, are they becoming difficult to obtain now, I do hope not because I have come to the point now when I include them in my weekly allowance of smokes, and that other 20 makes all the difference, but thank you all the same and it's nice to know that you still realise that life is no better for us now than it was at the beginning of our army careers. I mentioned that because I find that all fellows say that they used to get a regular supply of mail when they were first called up, as I did, and then after a few short months is all drops off, and only the few who are dear to us continue to write, that is as it should be.

Well, darling, it does seem strange to be using tripewiper again, but I seem to have got into the swing now, it's a different machine from the one we used to have here, and (sic) Underwood now, and the back spacer is on the opposite side, a thing I have not yet got used to, and I find my speed has decreased considerably too, but it has given me something to pass the time away on, and I have gained the opportunity of writing you a letter in the firm's time, which you will agree is very unusual these days, but I'm quite used to writing in my own time, and it still gives the pleasure it used to, I still fell (sic) after writing to you that I have just finished talking to you [.....] all I can do now is write until I can once again hold you in my arms [.....]

Now.[.....] I have to get off the machine, the telephonist wants to do some typing and I mustn't stop him, so until tonight, when I shall be telling you all about the gala goodbye my love, [...]

Searchlight Camp, Shottle
 25TH.Sept (1941)

Darling wife,

Only 8 more days to endure, & then you'll be in my arms again, what a heaven that will be for me, & I expect for you too, for if your heart aches for love as much as does mine, then you too are in dire need. [...]

Thank you or the extra cigarettes which I received today, they were a welcome surprise, & I'm sorry I mentioned the shortage in yesterday's letter, please darling forgive me, I am still too thoughtless to be worthy of your love, [...] Judging by your letter of yesterday, you seem to be needing me all right [...] I am simply dying to see the new arrangement at home, & I long to be alone with just you for company in our own little flat, would you do me a very great favour, & buy the record Room 504 for us to play each evening before we go to bed, I love that tune, & the words seem to be composed for us alone, don't you agree? I promise not to say anything about the garden darling, & perhaps I will be able to squeeze a couple of days on tidying up for you before I return, what do you think? Will you arrange to spend the weekend at Ron's? with Bob & Len & Kitty, I should be home at teatime at the very latest on Sat. Oct. 4th, & we could travel there in the evening, do you agree to this? There are so many exciting things to do, I can scarcely contain myself with the joy & anticipation of it all, it promises to be such a wonderful leave, the loveliest of all, we have waited so long, nothing will be able to make us unhappy, & perhaps you might even arrange a dance evening, & wear that heavenly red frock I have never seen you in, could you? I'd be sublimely happy if you would, please try, for me. [...] I wish I could be starting off to you in the morning, I'm sure the train journey will seem hours long, & I still don't know how I will survive it, & though I still have more than a week to wait, I feel as excited as any schoolboy on his first holiday, & all because of you [...]

Now I promised to tell you about the swimming Gala, it was wonderful, I was in charge of the party, & took 20 men in a lorry to Nottingham Baths, There were some wonderfully exciting races, & the one legged diver we used to see at the Isle of Wight, gave us a performance, & the show was ended by a Polo match, in which were eight international swimmers, including a famous person named TEMME, who swam the Channel both ways, never in our lives should we have seen such wonderful swimming had it been civvie street, & I loved every moment of it. There were several well known performers who have taken part in Olympic Games, honestly darling, I was thrilled to bits to be able to see such a performance, & I got a stand

right on the front rail of the gallery, it would have cost a fortune to see such a show in ordinary times, & to have such a view. The show lasted for 4 hours, & I enjoyed every second, & was genuinely sorry at the end of it. We got back to Shottle at 7.30, & I went happily to bed.

Today has been interesting too, I have adopted the valuable policy of burying myself in work, & now I am to become a D.C. (which does mean detachment commander) I have lots to learn, so Sgt. Peter has filled my brain with Ohms, Volts, & Amps, today, if only I could remember them all first time, I do need Pelmanism. (*Pelmanism was a system of brain training which was popular in the United Kingdom during the first half of the twentieth century*) Tomorrow is the day Pete has his interview, & I am to be in charge of the site, it will be an interesting beginning to my future career, & should give me valuable experience.

I went to see Dorothy tonight, poor girl she misses Joe, & was ever so glad to see me, you see, she had another bust up on Sunday, & felt pretty miserable, she says she hopes to be called up soon, & will be glad to go. She was ever so happy to see me, & I'm to go over again on Saturday, so at least I do some good, & she certainly bucks me up. She sends her love to you, & says if ever she's down our way when she's in the W.A.A.F. she will be glad of our hospitality.

Well, I was going to write such a lot tonight, but in my extraordinary high spirits I have condensed all my news into a comparatively short letter, & I've scribbled too, I do hope you'll understand it all, but p'raps you guess how I must feel, have you ever been terribly depressed, & then found life isn't too bad after all, my moods are all too frequent, & the times I feel like this all too rare, so it's only natural to absolutely gush with high spirits when they do assail me. Now I must end, I am very tired, been playing Badminton & deck quoits in the early evening, & I sweated some of my cold out I hope [...] please excuse me if I end now, I'll soon be with you [...] Goodnight darling,

Searchlight Camp, Shottle
28TH.SEPT (1941)

My Darling,

Sunday once more. And what a lovely thought it is to know that next week at this time we shall be together, it seems such a terribly long way off though, and my patience will be sorely tried by the end of the week. However the time will come, and we must make it the happiest leave of all.

I received your rather long letter of Wednesday's date in which you commented on mine of equal length, and I enjoyed reading it immediately, with but one exception, and that was your description of going to the dance. I have reconciled myself to your mania for rhythm by now, but you mentioned Jack (your partner) And that's where the unpleasantness must come, I distinctly remember a terrific argument with you on my last leave regarding my refusal to allow you to go with a definite partner, & I forbade you to do so, "now you've gone and done it", well, I need hardly say what my opinion is, but if it happens again we shall fall out in real earnest, & I shall find you out if you continue in this manner & omit to tell me, I refuse to share my wife with anyone, & I don't mean maybe.

Well, that's off my chest, its' been bothering me quite a bit, & after all, I don't put many restrictions on you, so I feel you ought to respect what few requests I do insist upon, now you must be a good girl & I'll show you what a model husband is like in reality when next Saturday comes along (by the way I haven't mistaken the date, it is Oct. 4th & is on Saturday, so expect me some time after lunch, I think I shall telegram you from a station somewhere, to let you know how near I am, or what trains I'm travelling by, & perhaps you'll be able to meet me.

I'm glad my surprise mystifies you, but it's not another stripe I fear, promotion is at standstill in this Regiment, we still have too many N.C.O.'s & the time is a fair way off before I can get another, although this hasn't prevented me from working like anything for it, we had another field check yesterday on MK. 1X Sound Loc. Very much more advanced, & I simply flew away with it, so at least I'm acquiring a reputation for efficiency in the Battery itself, which is an important step in the right direction, so that when opportunity does come, I shall be all ready for it, this promotion business in searchlights is a really hard job, you see, we have to acquire

such a vast technical knowledge in addition to being soldiers, but at least our honours are won & not wangled, & a stripe with S/L 's is a sign of intelligence, so please continue to be proud of your lance jack lover.

Your tomatoes arrived in perfect condition, with only two split, & they had ripened beautifully too, so we, that is, the survivors of Shottle outpost, had them for tea, with cheese, & lettuce from the garden, & all agreed you must have what it takes, to be able to grow such things all by yourself, most of the lads were very impressed when I told them you had grown them, & Sgt. Peter sends his heartfelt thanks for his share, he's passionately fond of tomatoes, & so enjoyed them immensely, he's gone on leave now, went yesterday, after a successful interview about his commission, he now has to wait four or five months before he's taken, so he's getting his leave in while he can. Joe is due back today, I guess he'll be pretty miserable, but perhaps I can cheer him up, & anyway, p'raps he won't need it, after all, he will have had a week at home & is going on a course on Tuesday, so life should be pretty bright enough even for him now, I'll let you know how he is as soon as he gets back. I went to see Dorothy again last night, & she get ever so talkative with Joe away, I think she's fonder of him than she'd like it known, she's knitting him a pullover, & various other articles, & has given up 16 of her precious coupons for wool just for him, so he ought to be very grateful to her, but I don't think he realises the magnitude of such sacrifice, & takes it all for granted.

I've just finished having a bath in the ablutions shed, & feel much better for it, though it was bit draughty, & I had to have it in the instalment plan. I haven't been able to go to a bath parade since I got back from my course, & after being able to bathe every day, you may imagine what a contrast it now is for me, but as usual, I'm becoming accustomed to conditions again, & soon the luxury of a bath will be but a pleasant memory.

I am in the office this afternoon, all the boys are asleep, and so I crept out & came here, we have taken the wireless from the canteen, & installed it here, & there's a little fire too, so it's nice & cosy, & I'm writing under as ideal conditions as it's possible to get at a searchlight camp.

I never have any news about Aunts now, how is the new scheme progressing? I hope alright, do you see much of them these days? I fear they'll never be the same for me again, & my greeting will lack its usual warmth when I meet them again, my

goodness, what a lot of unhappiness they caused you , & anxiety for me, can you wonder at my affection for them fading out.

You didn't tell me what you thought of my idea of taking up Pelmanism, I can't do anything decisive outside of army life without your approval, I still value your judgement on such matters, & so it still awaits your approval. Have you bought "Room 504"? I do so want to be able to lie on the sofa beside the fire without the lights, & have it played to me while I hold you & kiss you [...]
My news is scant, and I have I fear, reached the end of my letter for today, [...] I must say adieu, [...].

Searchlight Camp, Shottle.
30TH. SEP. (1941)

Darling Wife,

Only 3 more working days, and then----- well, is there any need to say how happy I shall be.

I have been out all day with a detachment of men preparing our new site at Idridgehay, (*a village a few miles from Shottle*) and honestly, I'm worn out, never have I worked so hard before. It's a virgin field, so you can guess from what you've seen of Shottle, how much work there is to be done, and today has been the first day. From what I have been able to see of our immediate surroundings the place is little less lonely than we are now, & there is a hill at least a mile long to climb before we get there. The view is much nicer than this one, it gives the impression of greater height, and we can still see good old Shottle from there, so it won't be too lonely. The village has a few more houses than we have here, & we're nearer to it, with the local pub at the bottom of the hill, also a church, and there is a fair bus service to Derby within easy reach, but enough of description, it amounts to careless talk, & I mustn't be a victim.

The winter is almost here, it's icy cold today, & in spite of hard work, we've had a job to keep warm, and when I read your letter of Sunday's date, it made me long to be home again, for if you can sleep with windows wide open it really must be warm. I heard the result of my course today, I was easily top with 96%, it is said of me that I was the best N.C.O., at the school, so I've got something to keep up haven't I, but with winter coming on, & I hope lots of spare time I shall have ample

opportunity for study, & I hope I shall be able to make the very necessary forward strides.

Joe left early this morning for his P.T. course, we were all up at 6. tons of work to do, he didn't want to go, 3 weeks is a long time for such a strenuous course, but he'll soon be back, & happier for a change I hope. He enjoyed his leave, & was decidedly happier than I'd seen him for a long time, but he says the time goes all too soon, don't we already know that. We went over to Dorothy last night, she has nearly finished Joe's pullover, & it's a smasher, but he seemed to take it for granted, although I guess he realises the good fortune of having such a friend. I shall continue to visit her, & even when I move I shall endeavour to get up here on Sunday afternoons. Don't forget my extra surprise will you, I mean to keep it & tease you a bit, but I know when I spring it you will be delighted, so keep on guessing. You tell me I must visit Mum as soon as I get home, very well, I will, but if you feel like meeting me, I shall still telephone or wire you to let you know my time of arrival. I enjoyed your Sunday lunch, you must see that we have it again during the week, you know how I love such unconventional dinners. Today as I was out all day, I had bread & jam, & a half of bitter at the local, & by the time I got back here I was too far gone to eat anything else, so you'll have a small eater to contend with.

Well darling, I think that's about all for today, Please tell me what you thought of my poem, especially yours, I hope you liked it. Goodnight sweetheart, I adore you,

Searchlight Camp, Shottle
2ND. OCT. (1941)

Darling,

Just fancy, by the time you have started to read this I hope to be on my way home. Home, you've no ideas what sheer joy that word conveys when I know I shall soon be there with you once more. I amuse myself by wondering what I shall be doing this time next Saturday, about now, 7 o'clock, I surmised that we could now be (a) sitting by a cosy fire chatting, (b) at the cinema, (c) at a dance, (d) in bed

will you please choose from one of the alternatives so that we may do exactly as you wish for our first evening. [...]

Now to what little news I have. You know I told you I had been slaving hard on my site to be, well, we had cut out & levelled a car park, & finished a long path to the projector, when up came Major Wotton, and said he was very sorry, but we should have to put it all back, it appeared that our present section Sgt., a muddler, had put us in the wrong field, in fact, in the wrong village, so all our terrific work was for nothing, & yesterday we spent all day relaying turves which had hardly dried out after removal, and now it appears that we are to go to a little village near Wirksworth, with a name I can't even spell, it's pronounced Kirk-ii-ton, (~~K~~*k Ireton*) and do you remember the little village nestling in the valley which we could only see when the sun shone, well, that's the place, I have mentioned it before when describing the view from here, so it's at least a lovely little spot, & just as easily accessible to bus routes, I do hope they don't change minds & decide I must go elsewhere.

[...] For the last three days I have been bothered with a pain in my leg, which seems to go inside the bone from ankle to spine, & I have tonight traced the source of pain to a joint beside the kneecap which links up these places, & it sends a paralysing pain all over aforementioned parts, so as I have received no knocks or bruise, I immediately decided it's rheumatism, & I don't like it, it's painful, so you'll have to patch me up a bit before I come back here, or else it looks as if I'm in for a very painful winter. I don't sleep well either, so all round it will be a health cure for me when I do come to you, I shall be cured mentally, spiritually & physically, and it's you who will be responsible.

Now darling, although I have started another page, I fear my stock is exhausted, and so until I see you now my angel, I shall say cheerio, & roll on Saturday teatime, I'm sure the journey will seem longer than usual and I don't know how I shall be able to restrain myself as far as Hertford, but I do hope it will come quickly. [...] don't forget you may be proud of me now, a D.C., who passed out top of the course with a D against my name, & a remark that I was the best N.C.O. on the course & I shall make a good D.C., that's the full report. By the way, D means distinction, Goodnight darling, & God Bless You,

Searchlight Camp, Shottle
Tuesday (Possibly 14th October 1941)

Dear Darling,

I've been sitting here on my bed for the last hour, trying to think of enough news to make a letter of, perhaps you have experienced the feeling that sometimes assails me, when I feel as if I simply can't write, or don't you get as restless as that. Anyhow, here I am, and as you'll see, I've decided to write across the sheet instead of down it.

Today as my first day back has not been too bad, and I feel strangely content, which causes me some puzzlement, because I expected to be so very miserable, but it's nice not to be so depressed, and I hope it lasts. It has been pouring with rain here all day, and here is a brief programme of events as they have happened:--

8. Breakfast

9. Inspection by Sgt. Robbs, and then into the training hut, and I took an hours instruction on Morse. This was followed by other instruction on aircraft and general things, and we ended the morning with maintenance, tho' I wasn't detailed for anything, so I sat in the cookhouse drinking tea & chatting to the Roman Catholic Padre.

1. Dinner, (nothing like the last nine days food) and I ate very little.

1.30. Y.M.C.A., van came, & we had more tea & the usual display of wit around the canteen.

2.0. Rifle drill under Bdr. Jones until it rained so hard we had to pack up. We then went into the training hut again, & had some plotting exercises until Mr. Douglas arrived on a visit, & he took the rest of the afternoon up telling us all about the new moves, it seems pretty certain now that we shall move on Sunday, & shall take over Tuxford area, & if that comes off we shall be near to Lincoln & Grantham, which means that we'll be near the Gt, North Road, which in turn means getting home quicker when I do get leave. This impending move means that leave will be mucked about a bit, but I'm hoping we shan't suffer too much, I'll let you know all developments. I don't think it will be wise for you to send any letters to this address after receiving this one, because if the rumours I have told you are true, we shan't be here after Sunday.

I understand that this site will be closed too, poor Dorothy will be lonely, I haven't seen her since I go back, but must go over tomorrow.

I forget to tell you in yesterdays letter how I travelled. The journey went fairly quickly, I ate your dainty little sandwiches & tomatoes at 2 oclock on the train, & then went to sleep, & I didn't wake till we were nearly at Nottingham, which took away all the lonely thoughts which would have assailed me en-route. I got to Belper by 6 oclock, & walked up the terrific hill, you know it now, but when I got to the top, a pony & trap passed me & stopped, the owner offered me a lift, well, I thought, at least it's better than walking, so up I got, & found he was a sweep, so I travelled in style, in a sweeps pony & trap as far as the milk churns where our ways parted, do you remember where I mean? I had to walk the rest of the way, but he saved my legs a good bit & I was grateful, several of the lads saw me riding in state, & I got my leg pulled this morning, however I didn't mind.

Well, there is nothing else I have to say now darling, except perhaps the loneliness of this place has impressed itself very deeply on me since coming back, I miss the trees, & the place seems very bleak now, I'm glad we're moving, & I hope it's near a big town. [...] I fear my letters will be short, but I'll soon get over this restless period, & then you can have the usual length of news. Goodnight Angel, don't forget your promises, & 9 days of heaven, see you in 6 weeks (I hope).

*10568642 Pte. L. Wagstaff
No. 1 Squad "E2 Coy
5th Batt'n R.A.O.C.
Racecourse Camp
Chepstow
Mon.*

Undated Letter (Probably October 1941)

Dear Bill,

I was very pleased to hear from you, but not to hear that you had been stuck right out in the wilds. I thought I was bad enough off here, but after the description of the dump you're at I find that I should be very thankful, we have only a mile to walk to get to some semblance of civilization (such as it is). As to your query about the scenery its quite lovely, but after a couple of hours exposure to the winds that come down from the hills, you decide that the Welsh can have it, at least they can at this time of year.

The first three days I was here I was under canvas but now I'm faring better for I've been put in a hut with nine other fellows, quite a decent lot of fellows too, all welders. In fact our entire intake of 120 consisted of welders. We are really fortunate here as we have two N.A.A.F.I.'s and one Y.M.C.A., at the camp, but we hardly appreciate it as we are all missing "civvy street".

We have had a fortnight on the square up to the present and according to the infantry sergeants in charge of us they are trying to cram 6 months training into the space of 5 weeks. ~~Apparently the majority of the R.A.O.C., in France were not at~~
~~Drinking to the fact that they had had experience with all arms~~ (my
bold M.F.)

I am receiving instruction on the Bren. During the last ten days we have had two inoculations, one T.T. and one T.A.B. the latter are just dandy aren't they, beside which I have had two trips to the dentist, and am due for another next week.

Thanks pal for writing to Kitty she told me your letter cheered her up no end.

I'm glad I managed to persuade Kitty to visit Ivy and I hope she will continue to do so. She wrote to me about it and she said she could understand Ivy wanting to go out for a little fun now and again for the whole time she was there not a sound could be heard from the aunts. And Bill don't get jealous too easily over Ivy, I can remember once when at Rons for the week-end we were sitting down having a chat, when suddenly she sprang up and said "Oh I've forgotten to write Bill his letter for today" and if you could have seen her face as she was writing that letter you wouldn't be jealous or doubt her love at all. Forgive me for writing to you about things that shouldn't concern me, but I'd hate to see you and Ivy unhappy. I think too much of you both, although Ivy sometimes thinks I'm a bit of brute I know, for nine times out of ten when I see her I chaff her and poke fun at her, really I value her friendship almost as much as I do yours and I couldn't bear it to see you broken up, not that I worry about that for a minute for I know down in my heart that you two are made for one another, and I know that after you sit down for a minute Bill, you realize that you have nothing to worry about, for even I know that Ivy loves you.

Well Bill I'm afraid that I've written rather a lot about things that shouldn't concern me, and if I've delved too deeply I'm sorry, but being a "nosey parker" and a little blunt I simply had to tell you. If I have offended you please write and choke me off, but remember in my clumsy way of going about things I really mean well. With that apology I'll end, hoping to hear from you again soon. Yours as Ever, Len
PS. Excuse spelling and make a list of those words spelt wrongly and send them in your next letter.

SEARCHLIGHT CAMP, SHOTTLE.
16TH.OCT. (1941)

My own darling wife,

Another day gone towards the end of all this torment, and once again it has been very uneventful, but first I must apologise for not writing yesterday, although when I tell you I went out last night you will understand.

Now to events, yesterday all the lads were sent out to work for another Battery, leaving only four of us on the site, and it was a wet, miserable day, so in the morning we did what maintenance we could, I scrubbed the canteen floor, & generally tidied up, & made this last till lunch time. After lunch there was nothing to do, the shortage

of men made training impossible, so guess what, I got a book of Annie. S. Swan's, one of the old fashioned novels, and I sat in the cookhouse all afternoon with Sgt. Robbs, Bdr. Jones, & the cook, and we all just read, and at 3.30 we had a break for a cup of tea, weren't we lazy? But it's been like that ever since I got back, the impending move has upset all routine, & we just do what is necessary, & nothing else. Everyone seems very unsettled, & the people we have made friends with here are genuinely upset at losing us, they're almost heartbroken, though for my part I don't mind leaving Shottle, it's just my outside acquaintances which might give me a bit of a pull, tho' I'm sure I'd soon get over that, after all, there are only Dorothy, the Y.M.C.A., girl, who we lose when we move, another Farmer who is Home Guard Officer here, & old Joe Rose, who I see very little of, but the other lads have made a real army of friends in Belper, & I believe there are many broken hearts locally over our lads, everyone tells us how different we are from the usual soldiers, & that's why they love us, don't ask me how we're different, I don't know, Last night, as I said, I went out, in company with the cook & another, the H.G., officer called for us in his car, & conveyed us to a village some 8 miles away where a dance was being held, and though we left the camp at 8, we didn't get to the actual dance till 10.30, by which time we were decidedly merry, I had whiskey, not too many, just made me very talkative, & put a sparkle in my eyes, we had a grand time in the pub playing skittles, & stayed till kicking out time, then on to the grand dance, it was a typical village do, the hall was as small as our canteen, & there were mostly mothers & young children dancing, we met Stephanie & Beryl, our guest artists at the last concert, they gave a cabaret show at the dance, but it was wasted, the people wouldn't keep quiet, & kept on laughing, I wonder they didn't walk off, it was a shame, but it just shows what the average mentality in the midlands is like. We had a few dances, though they don't deserve the name, you know how well I dance, add to that a tiny crowded hall with others doing likewise, & you have a good idea of what it was like. The doorkeeper was hopelessly drunk, we just walked in & didn't pay, & best of all, we helped him clear up his beer, of which he had a bottle. We were brought home at 12.30 by another kind friend with a car, who has recently taken a house near Alport Stone, & so we were picked up from the doorstep, & dropped back onto it, & though from a dancer's view it was a washout, from a stick at homes view it was a jolly evening. I think they got most laughs out of me, because you know how I behave when my tongue's loosened, & I talked & talked, & they all loved it. On Saturday, we are all going down to the Bull for a farewell binge, so I guess a few of us will get hangovers for the move on Sunday (if it comes off).

Today, more men went out, & though I have been mucking about all the time with equipment, the actual amount of work covered is pretty small, except perhaps I have the consolation of knowing that the sound locator works perfectly now. Just before tea, Sgt. Peter came after me, & put me through the gas chamber, 3 of us, who had missed it time & time again, & at last we have been tracked down & caught. It was only C.A.P., & we all sat over it with respirators on first, for 5 minutes or so, then took them off, & my goodness, did my eyes & nose smart, I was glad to get out, but at least I have the assurance that my respirator works properly. Talking of respirators, I found your little oil silk cap in there today, & though tempted to keep it as a souvenir & memento of your lovely golden head, I will try to enclose it with this letter, because you'll need it pretty regularly if our weather is anything like we're getting up here, do you know, it's been raining almost continuously since I got back, one could almost sense the change of atmosphere creeping up as we travelled north on Monday, & when I awoke at Nottingham, it was so dull & dreary, that I thought for one terrible moment I had slept thro' & missed my station. It was such a contrast after leaving London in sunshine, & I feel it very much, please tell me what sort of climate you are having, it will be interesting to know if this kind of weather is peculiar to this district. I rather fancy it must be, for since you left here after five glorious weeks of sunshine, it has done nothing but rain, & we have had few spells of sunshine.

I received your first letter this morning, thank you darling for loving me so [...] It's funny about you not watching me out of sight, I know it's unlucky, & I guessed you did it because of that, strange isn't it, we, who scoffed at superstition to such an extent as to have opals, yet we have become afraid to take chances, because although there is probably nothing in it, we can't afford to take risks, [...] I could appreciate your feelings about paths & lawn, & all other traces of my recent occupation, but I note you wisely put them out of your head & got stuck into work. I hope you slept well, I didn't, I missed you, [...]

Your remarks concerning Wheeler have moved me very deeply, but I'll not dwell on the subject, he is the meanest kind of worm, & is beneath my contempt, you would do as well to adopt this view, it will help you to control your feelings when he's about, just ignore him whenever possible, I'm sure you'll be much happier. By the way, when you go to Mum's again, in case I don't write for a while, please tell her that my address is uncertain after Sunday, & that as soon as we are settled down I'll write, give my love to her, & Edie, who shouldn't really need it because George will soon be home again I suppose..

Please forgive me for worrying darling, but do tell me as soon as possible whether my lack of control on a certain morning last week has cleared itself up., I'm terribly upset when I think of the awful consequences, & you must tell me as soon as it's all right, I can't bear to think it will be otherwise.

I shall shortly be going over to Dorothy, this will be the first visit since my return, though she sent her regards by Peter& I gather from him that she's all O.K. We had a letter from Joe this week, he tells us that he has a black eye from B...? (*boxing* ?), & is thoroughly miserable & fed up with the course, he will be glad to get back I think, though if we move on Sunday, I wonder whether we shall ever see him again, I don't want that to happen.

I'm still receiving congratulations for my course result, & Mr Douglas beamed all over when he saw me, apparently the people who were left in charge while he was away were afraid I should get a swelled head, because they didn't tell me all the truth, unless it was jealousy, but anyhow, he told me that I was the best junior D.C., ever to go to Regimental School, & that it said this on the report, which is indeed an honour & quite different from what I was told by his underlings, now I wonder who's lying, I'd love to see the report for myself. Anyway. I don't seem to have gained much from it other than the reputation for being a wizard with a MK. 111 S/Locator, perhaps it will provide a basis for future successes, I'm hoping so anyway.

Now angel I must close, I hope you have been able to read this far, I'm afraid I scribble rather [...] I do so adore you [...] God Bless You,

SEARCHLIGHT CAMP, SHOTTLE
17TH OCT. (1941)

Darling Ivy,

What a terrible day it has been, I wonder if your weather was the same, it's been teeming down all day, & the wind has made it worse too, blowing at almost gale force it drives the rain everywhere, the huts are leaking, & we've all had to shift our beds so as to avoid the drips, you would laugh perhaps to see inside the hut tonight, we're all piled up on top of one another in the centre of the hut where it's dry, but it's a damn shame they can't have the roofs mended, if it were down at G.V. they'd have it seen to straight away, poor old Shottle, still neglected.

Well the impending move seems as if it will come off, events today have pointed towards it, & I'll be surprised if we're here on Monday, but I'll keep you well informed, as much as I dare. Some of us will be going on scarecrow duty too, & that means hardship and with the winter coming on too, I hope I'm not chosen, though wouldn't be a bit surprised.

The lads were out digging all day again, & once more I have guarded the cookhouse fire all day, honestly, from what I have done here since I got back, I might just as well have had another 7 days, it seems rotten when I think of it that way, & I don't wonder the war drags out, time & money wasted every day, it's awful.

This morning, after maintenance, Bdr. Jones, Sgt. Peter & myself went to see the cook to tell him we were hungry, that was 11 o'clock, and we kept teasing him about his meanness until eventually he took out of the oven, a huge jam roll he was baking, & cut it up hot, we ate the lot between five of us, & still tucked away a good old dinner. We stayed the rest of the morning pestering the cook, helped him make some syrupy kind of sauce to pour over baked apples, & talked & talked, I've had more tea since coming back than ever before, morning early, breakfast, at 9.30 when the postman comes, at 11, after dinner again at 3.30, & then tea time, & always two cups when the Y.M., or S.A., vans call, then on top of this I have seen Dorothy last night and tonight, & had 2 cups of coffee, & on getting back to camp gone to bed with a mug of hot soup, I should get pretty fat if this goes on, but I don't think it will last for much longer, because if we move, conditions will not be quite the same.

Dorothy is quite well, & has finished Joe's pullover & tonight was on the last finger of a pair of gloves; he is due back either tomorrow or Sunday & she hopes to be able to give them to him personally, I hope she can, but somehow doubt it. By the way, he has written a lot to her, & from what I can gather, he's had a hell of a time, he says he looks like a skeleton, & has a split eyebrow & black eye, in fact I think he's ready to die, & will be very glad to come back (if ever) to Shottle. I think his appetite for P.T. is gone for good, as would mine if I was subjected to such rough handling. I hope they never send me on such a course, I'm sure I should die, because if Joe feels so bad when he's 100% fit, I would be sure to feel worse.

Thank you again for the short but lovely letter today, they are like you used to write when I first left you [...] never before have I noticed the sheer loneliness of this place so much, we are literally cut off, & I don't know how I've survived so much of

it, but having 9 days of sheer delight with you restored me to sanity, & now your delightful letters to keep me there, & the impending move, have all combined to keep me true to my resolve, & when we do move, I'll try to stick to it.

I noted that you are already counting days to our next meeting, I too long for that to be, & already feel as if weeks have gone since I saw you last, & the worst of it is. That I'm never really sure just when I shall get off again [...]

Well angel, it's still pouring with rain, but I must try to sleep, we have to be up early in the mornings in spite of the shortage of work. I do hope you manage to read all my scrawl, I'm writing as I sit in bed you see, & you know how difficult it becomes after a while with the pad on your knees, & always when I write to you, the words simply tumble from my mind, & the consequence is this indecipherable scrawl, tho' I continue to do it in the hope that you can after all, find out what I have written. [...]

Now darling I really must end, tho' I could go on for ever telling you of my love & emotions, it's now past 11 at night, and most of the lads are asleep, so I must slip down between my itchy blankets on my very hard bed, amidst the most dreary surroundings, & dream of [...] you. Goodnight Ivy darling [...]

Four Winds
Saturday 18 October 1941

My own darling Bill

Thank you very much for the long letter received this morning It is amazing how you manage to find enough news to fill six closely written pages. Of course I shall not be able to send this letter off to you until I get your new address but I thought I would write daily just the same so that you get a very long one to make up for the lack of letters for the next few days. If the Shottle Site (*a village in Derbyshire*) is really being closed down I am afraid Dorothy is going to feel very lonely indeed, & I dare say that when you have all gone she will volunteer for the ATS or the WAAFS at once & I certainly shall not blame her. It is too lonely a life for a young girl to lead. She is missing all the fun & young companionship that is her right

Will you—if you do see her again---give her my regards & wish her the best of luck from me, if she does join up.

I was glad to hear that you went out the other evening to a village dance, though it certainly sounded a rather boosey (sic) affair to me. Still, it makes an evenings break for you—so long as you don't revert to beer again darling.

O, by the way, about your “indiscretion” last week—you needn't worry any longer—it is all right—only don't take that as permission to repeat the performance will you? It is nice to hear that you did even better than you thought on your course. Perhaps it will make even old Douglas look on you with a more favourable eye in future

This afternoon I have been busy digging up the carrots (sic) They will quickly dry because there is a terrific wind blowing In fact it is a gale—you can hardly stand up in it---& you can guess what it is like trying to cycle. However it is not cold & we have had a lovely sunny week since you left—better than the one we had previously—yet you say you have had cold & rain. Isn't it amazing how different the weather can be—even 120 miles away? Having stayed in all the week, I am going to a dance to the band of the Northamptonshire regiment—your regiment. It is a great pity that it could not have been the previous week. Not that I shall be able to wear my red dress anyway. I shall have to lose a few more pounds before I can do so. Well darling, I'll write more tomorrow, so till then my love—au revoir.....

Sunday evening 9.30 pm

Hello Sweetheart, here I am again to write to you again.

It has been a very quiet Sunday for me. I didnt get up till 11 oclock & then I spent an hour in the garden topping my carrots & storing them in the sand. During the process I got stung by a wasp or a bee. My finger still tingles.

In the afternoon Penny & I walked into Hertford with my bike which we dumped in Dicky Hall's back yard for a new tyre tomorrow

Then we came back by bus so I don't think we were out for more than an hour. I have been busy Since then I have been busy knitting my gloves. One, started yesterday is almost finished (two fingers & a thumb wanted) so you can tell I have kept at it. I have also spent an hour on my coat but the poor old thing has so many bad places, that I shall have to tackle it again another evening. I really think, darling, that you should have bought me that mink we were looking at in Oxford Street last week.

I went to the Shire Hall last night & had a happy evening Dorree & Freda were there. Joan from the office & young Peter & lots of other friends I know. They have a

auction of various things for the comforts for the troops fund. I got 3 lbs of onions, but I am afraid I forgot to bring them home with me.

Joan was lucky enough to win a pair of stockings in the draw.

(For your peace of mind I would mention that I refused most firmly to dance the last waltz & came home alone.)

And now, darling, I must finish for tonight & go & have my bath So, my sweet, for a few hours Au revoir.....

Friday

My own darling husband,

I have just received your first letter from the new address. It is 8.30 in the morning, & I want to send off this letter before I get to work in the hope that you will receive it tomorrow morning. To do this will mean that I shall not have time to enclose the cigarettes I have bought for you, as they are at work, so, darling they will have to wait till tomorrow so please darling, don't think I am neglecting your welfare only I am sure you would like this letter as soon as possible.

Kitty spent the evening with me yesterday So that is why I did not write any more---

However, I hope to send a long letter to reach you on Monday---

Your new camp sounds terrible—but I must read your letter again later when I am writing to you this evening & in the meantime, darling, keep smiling.

All my love from your own Ivy.

Four Winds

Tuesday 21 October 1941

Thank you, darling, for your letter of Friday's date (the last received) though. I was sorry to hear that it was such a wet rough day. We are having lovely sunny autumn days here and each day I wish that I could go out walking in the country instead of having to go to a stuffy office to work I hope your weather has improved again now, especially if you're a moving to a new site. As I did not hear from you this morning I presume that you did move after all during the weekend. I hope you find yourself in more congenial surroundings now. If you are to notice the bleakness & loneliness of Shottle, it is certainly time you moved, or you would find a winter there very dreadful

to bear. Anyway, I shall be very interested to hear all the details of the new place as soon as you have time to write to me

I am hoping to be able to meet Kitty (Wagstaff) from work this evening. I thought she might like to come over one evening this week, as I expect she will feel a bit lost without Len. Still she has an advantage over me in that she lives with other girls of her own age so I expect she'll manage to get along all right.

Well darling, I'm afraid I've no news for you, so for the moment I'll say au revoir

Perhaps tomorrow morning Ill get a letter from you with your new address: I hope so anyway.///

Keep smiling---.....

CHAPTER SEVEN

*The Camp, Thorpe-Le-Fallows,
Sturton by Stow, Lincs.
21st. OCT (1941)*

My darling,

At last we have arrived at the new abode and you'd weep for me if you could see it, honestly, you know how many houses there were at Shottle, well that was thickly populated in comparison, here is the new layout. A village two miles away, from where we have to fetch water, there are a few houses there I think, & a pub, & apart from that, nothing except a farm nearby. We are 10 miles north of Lincoln, and from the village a bus runs to that town twice a day,- in the morning at 8.15, bus back from the town leaves at 5, and there is so little traffic, that we can never go out to Lincoln for an evening unless we're prepared to walk the 10 miles home, in other words, we're sunk, but I'm hoping that when wise start life on the single sites, we shall find that some of them are nearer a town. We have no electricity, that's a big blow, but I have been lucky so far in getting a bed in the hut which boasts of a paraffin pressure lamp, & the light's not too bad.

Enough of moans about the camp, I'll tell you more later, here's a brief account of the journey. We left dear old Shottle, which now seems like a metropolis, at 10 o'clock, and came straight here, a journey of 60 miles or so, & we had most of our kit on board, so that we had to be packed in like sardines all the way, & standing too, it was so bad that once we got in, we couldn't change position, & when they stopped for a leg stretch, & let the tail board down, we all fell out, you'd never believe how badly we're treated, & all that time we had no food, we arrived here about 3 or 3.30, & immediately had to take over, & test equipment etc., so that when we did get our meal, we enjoyed it. We brought all the cats, & poor old Ginger, you remember him, was car sick 3 times on the way down, he's got a proper headache now, I felt very sorry for him, although the two kittens behaved perfectly & acted as though they were quite used to moving. The chicken gave us no bother either, we captured it, & tied its legs, shoved it in a box & dumped it somewhere underneath all the luggage, & when we got here, it was more perky than ever before, & who knows?, perhaps the ride may have shaken a few eggs loose, & perhaps she'll start laying tomorrow.

Now to our last night, The new Battery took over at 3 o'clock, & we were given the rest of the day off, so after a good clean up, I went over to Dorothy, & then on to Belper in company with one other Gunner who is a decent fellow. We were in the town very early, so had a walk round & did a bit of window gazing, then called at the forces canteen for a cup of tea. Now come the piece you will be sure to laugh at, we had a date with Stephanie & Beryl & 2 more girls, one of whom runs a hairdressers shop, & the other is her sister, Stephanie works for her, whilst Beryl is also a hairdresser at Derby. The whole camp promised to call at the shop to say goodbye to them, but the bulk of the lads got lodged in pubs, & didn't budge, with the result that my pal & myself were the only two to keep the appointment so we had four girls between the two of us. We were very inquisitive of course, & had the Eugene perming machine demonstrated to us, from the squaring off of the head to the steaming, & 'twas very very intriguing to me at least, what you women do for beauty. We then saw & experienced a demonstration of vibro massage, & had some beauty treatment. Believe it or not, we agreed to let the girls shampoo & set our hairs, & went through the whole process, I had mine reconditioned with some special Eugen stuff, & we went under the driers too complete with hairnet on the cotton wool pads over our ears, it was so funny, & the girls killed themselves at sight of our very red & beautiful faces under those weird machines, but afterwards, well, my hair did look marvellous, I wish you could have seen it it was a picture, & they all agreed that it was a masterpiece, though I fear it was not so neat this morning. We had some tea & cakes & nice long chat, & then the sirens busted the party up, & as it was too late to have a drink, we walked home quite sober. It's strange, we've known those four girls ever since the first concert they gave us, & only this last week have we been friendly enough to spend an evening, I can't help thinking now how much fun we've missed, & just as I started taking your advice & going out more often, we have to leave it all, & the lads who were here say that the people around this way are pretty rotten & most unsociable, so it looks as if things won't be so good. On Saturday, still following your advice, we took Sgt. Peter out with us for a farewell binge, & this was strictly a stag party. We drank lots of Whiskey, mostly at other people's expense, & got decidedly merry, one member of the party, who by the way has now gone on scarecrow, took on the job of selling arrowroot biscuits & crisps, he sold both tins right out, & bought a round of drinks with the money he took, & not even the landlord did anything about it, but when he took down a lovely vase of roses & tried to sell them at 2/6 each, we thought it was about time we were going, so out we went & called in at the usual Saturday night dance, but as soon as we got there, the salesman passed right out with drink, & we put him down on air raid shelter to cool off. Sgt. Peter became sick, & spent the two hours we were there in the W.C.

steadfastly refusing to leave it, & I fear all I did was talk, & wander about, trying my hardest to control the dizziness in my head. The other boys enjoyed themselves, & several people talked to me, though I'm sure they knew I'd had too much, because I couldn't answer sensibly. Eventually the dance ended, & we collected mainly by force, Sgt. Peter, & our other friend who steadfast fully accused us of leaving him down "that cold hole" to die, chartered a taxi between the 7 of us, & rode home to Shottle in grand style. I went straight to bed & woke in the morning wonderfully fit & well, not so Sgt. Peter, he was sick all day, couldn't even keep water down, & spent the whole day in bed, but fortunately he had made a good recovery by Monday, though he carefully avoided coming out with us on the last night. You see my angel, I took your advice seriously, & stepped out a bit, I also forgot my troubles & felt happier on those few outings, but now, what a contrast, not even a place to get to even when we get evenings off, tho' I still hoe it won't be as bad as we think.

I had a letter from Edith on Friday last, she tells me that Mum has already sent on my socks, well I do hope she registered them, otherwise I shall never get them, the fellows who took over Shottle are not the type to re-address a parcel, they might send on our letters, but I know a parcel will never leave their hands, & if it does, well, I'm a poor judge of character, they have been specially selected for Shottle, all Jankers men, who did a lot of "bunking" out, well now they've got a long walk when they do break camp, & they've been sent there for that purpose.

We have taken over this area because we're best, being in the "Killer" Zone, I hope we prove very effective, but bombs dropped so close last night that there nearly wasn't a site to come to, lots of 'dromes nearby, including a decoy in the next field, carless talk, etc., so enough of vital things, but I do hope I get some leave soon, I know 'tis not very long ago since I saw you, bit because I have not heard from you since I told you to stop, I feel very lonely & it seems ages since I saw you or heard from you. [...]

It's very cold here, colder than at Shottle, & I didn't think that could be possible, but here, there is no shelter at all, absolutely flat & monotonous, no hills to break the wind & we're fairly near the coast too, so I suppose it's not surprising really. The water is going to be a problem, it's thick with lime, being drawn by pump, & when it's biked, the lime is so bad that it forms a sort of black scum on the surface, I can foresee some illness from it after the clear spring alter we have been used to. I guess there'll be tons of things to tell you about as I get settled in, but for the time

being it's wise that you don't know too much at one go, so I'll continue on general lines.

Dorothy is heartbroken, she has become far too fond of Joe, & this morning when we said goodbye, she cried, & I could see she had been crying most of the night, it was obvious that she hadn't slept very much, I do wish she hadn't thought quite so much of us, but there you are, love is like that, after causing pain when it should be so beautiful. I shall write to her as soon as I have finished writing to you, in an endeavour to cheer her up a bit, I told her she was not losing us completely, & promised never to let her be forgotten, tho' I'm sure that after the war you will love to call on her during a summer holiday won't you?

Well angel mine, there are all sorts of things to attend to, including Dorothy's letter, so please forgive me if this one seems short after my rather lengthy silence, but we shall be on Rouser soon, & I fear I'll not finish all I want to, so I had better end here, but I promise darling, I'll write tomorrow to let you know my further observations, & will continue my usual regular correspondence. Goodnight my angel wife, I do so love you,

Four Winds
Wednesday 22 October 1941

Hello darling,

Here I am once more, adding another page to my letter. As I still haven't heard from you (as I expected to this morning) you should have a lovely lot to read when I do send it off. I presume of course, that you must have moved, or I should certainly have heard from you by now.

Well, I didn't get along to see Kitty last night, as I was working 'till seven o'clock, so I thought I would see her this evening. However, it wasn't necessary, as she rang me today to ask me for your new address. I said, I did not know it myself yet, but she agreed to come to tea tomorrow with me & stay the night & perhaps I shall have heard from you by then

I went round to see your mother. She has knitted a pair of socks for you & is very anxious to start another pair, but will not do so until she hears from you that the first pair are the right size

So, sweetheart, when you do receive them, will you please let her know immediately how they fit I have nearly finished my pair of gloves. The weather is colder & & really begin to need them. Then I shall start on yours because I expect you too, will soon begin to find them necessary.

It is 11 oclock & & the "all clear" has just gone. As a matter of fact, I didn't know there was an alert on. I expect the wireless drowned the warning.

Is Joe back from his course yet, & how is he? Has he remained at Shottle or has he been transferred with you?

I do feel sorry for poor Dorothy if everyone has gone from Shottle. She will be dreadfully lonely, much more so than ever before the camp was borne, because she has now become accustomed to the company. I should hate to live in such an out-of-the-way place- for even this house seems a lonely place to come home to in the evenings—mainly, I think, because one comes home to an empty house.

Well, darling, I am sorry. But really I have no news for you, so, once again, I will say goodnight & God bless you---All my love, sweetheart & keep smiling!!

PTO when you will find Len's address

10568642 Pte. L. Wagstaff

No. 1 Squad "E" Coy

5th Battn R.A.O.C

Racecourse Camp

Chepstow

Mon

*The Camp, Thorpe-Le-Fallows,
Sturton by Stow, Lincs.
22nd .OCT (1941)*

Darling wife,

This letter will only be a short one I'm afraid, we're on Rouser again, that's the second night, & we shall get it very night too, I'm afraid it's going to wear me down before long, it's bitterly cold, Shottle was hot in comparison, I never knew it could be so cold, & dread the winter here. Two or three of the lads gout our last night to the village, & they say it's absolutely dead, & there is nothing to go out for, & even the

beer, according to the connoisseurs, is rotten, so can you wonder at their long faces which are lengthening still more as we look around us. You can tell how large the village is by the population, 42 in all, and Lincoln so far away too, yet it doesn't seem that far in the daytime, the country is monotonously flat, & we can see quite plainly the towers of Lincoln Cathedral, it's just that so many detours have to be made because of the dykes in these parts. The reason I'm able to write while we're on Rouser is because we have a quiet spell, & are allowed to remain in the huts fully dressed, & so long as we can get out in 30 seconds, we are O.K., there is a lot of activity over Sheffield way tonight, & it looks as if they're going through it, I hope we get a few strays this way, I'd love to see how our gun works.

All day long we've been engaged in a spring clean, the S/Locator MK1X needed a lot of attention, it had been neglected, & we found lots of faults with it, & the floors of the huts have had to be scrubbed, although they don't look any cleaner, honestly, if you could see the dingy places they are, painted dark green half way up, & then a dirty yellow for the rest, including the ceiling, you'd appreciate why we miss dear old Derbyshire with its clean air & water, & lovely clean huts, & yet the fellows we took over from say they've been in worse places, though they seem to me to be a scruffy lot, who wouldn't try to make life any cleaner or easier if it were possible. One bright spot remains, two boys are going for 48 hours in the morning, they are the pioneers who will sort out the way home for the rest of us, & it also proves that at least for the moment, leave still continues, & I long for my turn to come round, though I expect hers' still a month to wait, I do wish I could have a date to look forward to.

Nothing much else remains to tell you, except perhaps you'd like to know we still get a few cigarettes, from a N.A.A.F.I. van which calls daily, their tea is horrible, & you'll guess it must be awful if I say that, but at least we may still smoke. I'm afraid the old pipe still takes getting used to, & although I don't smoke half as many cigarettes, I'm still not a confirmed pipe smoker, but I am trying. I understand that we

shall get a Y.M.C.A van 3 times a week too, & they usually have nice tea, so that is a consolation.

Now I must end darling, I'm not yet as depressed as I was, although why I don't know, but if this place turns out like it looks, I shall die of loneliness, please keep me alive with lots of letters & love, & I'll move all I can to get my 48 at the right time. Goodnight darling sweet wife, I do so rely on you,

*The Camp, Thorpe-Le-Fallows,
23rd .OCT (1941)*

Darling,

Another dreary day has passed, and I fear that the atmosphere of the place is unchanged, it's beginning to get me, & however hard I try I'm afraid it's depressing me gradually, I do hope something happens soon, I feel I shall scream, & only two days here, I suppose it's the change of scenery as much as anything, it's so monotonous, and absolute contrast to Shottle, and then there's the terrible cold, this morning for instance, we were working on the MKIX, & our hands were frozen stiff, that's no exaggeration, they really were stiff with the cold, I absolutely dread the winter with its biting east winds, we shall get them straight off the coast all the time, & I thought I could take it.

That's' my moan for today over, I hope you don't mind sharing my little complaints, but honestly darling, there awful sites make me resentful sometimes as I think of cosy fireplaces & comfortable settees etc., & worst of all, here are people still enjoying these who ought to be in the army, I suppose I'm getting old & crotchety, but I still don't like it, I'm sure it's only the poor old army who are treated this way, & if we could live as well as the Brylcream Boys (R.A.F.) we should have no complaint, they're spoilt.

This morning I helped to fetch water from the village, we piled on about 30 cans onto the wagon, and had a ride to the red Lion Hotel, where we draw all the water from a pump, it was a long job, & then we had a drink, they had no whiskey, so I took a glass of port, & though it wasn't particularly good, I welcomed it as a break,

& then we did a bit of shopping, procuring a pound of biscuits, without any trouble, soap, & various other odds & ends from the village G.P.O. which is also a very comprehensive general stores, where one may buy such things as Mcleans (genuine?) stomach powder, down to Ostermilk for babies. George Platt, who is now with us, was able, without any difficulty to buy an Airgraph Form, he has a brother in Palestine, & sits beside me now writing to him. We came back with a lorry full of splashing cans of water, & it was like being at sea, with water everywhere, it got at the soap which we had stood on the floor, and as fast as we recued it, the lorry bumped, and flowed the water to the other side & wetted it all again, I can assure you it was joy ride.

The Y.M.C.A. called today, & their stock was poor in comparison with our old service, the van was not kept so clean, & the two ladies very very snobbish, & to make matters worse they insisted on us bringing our own mugs if we needed tea, because they didn't trust us with theirs, & only two cakes each, charging 1 ½ d for them instead of the usual penny, but we were allowed 10 cigarettes, & their tea was worth drinking, which is more than I can say for the N.A.A.F.I. It appears that they take alternate days to call here, & really there is very little to choose between them for service, they're not a patch on the good old S.A. man & his wares. Talking of him, I heard today that he has gone abroad, I don't know where to, but he's on the same sort of work, he said he would go as soon as he had a chance, I wish him luck.

Can you picture a Nissen hut? you know, the kind of semi circular corrugated iron structure that stands in front of the County Hospital, well, we have one for the canteen here, flag stones for the floor (cold to the feet) & they're coloured with red ochre of all things. Two very dilapidated old armchairs, & a settee provide the only break, there is a poor attempt at an old fashioned fireplace, made by the previous occupants, it's a colossal structure, & sticks halfway out into the room, but it don't work, they've made the chimney too small, & it doesn't carry the smoke away properly, so of course until the fire burns up, we are in a bit of a fog, & when it has burned up, here's only room for two to sit in front of it. The other furniture consists of a piano which sadly needs tuning, & four tables with forms for meals, this is all. Now, have you got the picture clearly? its night time, the fire is out, someone who can't play is one fingering "Did your mother come from Ireland", there is but one light, fortunately overhead, at the table on which I write, & by it's inadequate & fluttering light, three of us are furiously writing, that is a special view of our canteen & restroom for the winter nights, outside it's bitterly cold, inside now it's nearly as

bad, could you wonder if I did go mad? but I promise I won't darling, love for you, & love from you will keep me sane.

Joe has just entered with the disturbing news that he is to go to Newark tomorrow on another P.Y., course, he's upset, but frankly, apart from leaving his friends, I think he's pretty lucky, because his muscles are still hard from his last course, & anywhere, whatever the life, is better than this hell hole, though I shall be awfully sorry to see him go, but I think it will only be a short spell, & I hope he'll come back to us.

Joe, George Platt & myself, took a stroll tonight just before it got dark, & we went in the opposite direction from the village. We walked two miles down a perfectly straight road, & all we saw ere two farm houses, & miles & miles of flat ploughed fields, awful, so we decided that nothing of interest lies in that direction, & walked back to the camp.

Now darling I fear my store of news is out, so I will gracefully retire to bed, it's early, but bed is the only place we have for comfort, & 2 nights out of 3 we are disturbed for homing beacons, marker beams, Rousers etc., so I must make the most of it tonight, as it's my night out, & nowhere to go.
Goodnight darling, Pray for another leave soon [.....]

*The Camp, Thorpe-Le-Fallows,
24th. OCT (1941)*

Darling Ivy,

Just another short letter to tell you about today's experiences for what they're worth. Nothing has happened really, & yet I simply must write, it is all I have to cling to, because if I tell you all my little thoughts & fears & worries, you can comfort me, & only you can do this.

I spent the morning overhauling the MK1X, it appears that the people we took over from are very slack, & they really have allowed their equipment to get in a terrible mess, now we, as usual, have the job to get it straight, although we nearly have succeeded now, & anyway it had made something interesting for the first few days here. After lunch I had a read for half an hour, nothing interesting, just a book I

found & started to read, & now I haven't the heart to stop, so I put in a ½ hour each day at this time. When we started work again, I helped in the store for a while, then scrounged around the cookhouse & succeeded in getting some coffee, after which, we had a go at the canteen fireplace chimney, which as I have already described, is inadequate, but after making a bigger one out of corrugate iron, & fixing it in position with clay, we were in a worse mess if anything, & everyone was covered in soot, because someone had lighted the fire before we commenced operations. However, when the fire burned up a bit, there was naturally not so much smoke, & it turned out all right, so we kept it going with coke after that, & by this evening, we had a huge furnace of coke which was built halfway up the chimney, it took 8 buckets of coke, plentifully helped out with choice nobs of coal, on top of the already existing fire, & after a few minutes in front of it, we were glad to move. We played cards, & I lost 5/- too bad, but what else is there to do? & then the brightest bit of the day, a second hand battery set arrived, purchased out of Troop Funds, so we rigged that up & had a bit of real music for a change. Slowly the fellows filtered out, & took the light with them, leaving the wireless, the fire, & me, & it was just ten o'clock, the programme was announced as the B.B.C. Theatre orchestra playing Eric Coates & Valteafels? selections, so there I sat, on a terribly dilapidated but nevertheless fairly comfortable chair, in the dark in front of the dying embers, listening to the most glorious music, & I'm afraid it got the better of me, because I had tears streaming down my cheeks, it's fatal if I'm alone when lovely music plays, memories are too vivid & they hurt, so after the music was finished I came in here to write to you. Now it's 11 o'clock, I'm the only one awake, two of the strange fellows who are still with us, have come in drunk, one lies opposite me, he has dozed off with a lighted cigarette, & it's nearly on his fingers. I expect he'll wake up in a hurry soon, no, he's just dropped it, & that's about time for me to sleep, so goodnight pretty angel wife, [...]

Four Winds,
Saturday 25 October 1941

My own darling Bill,

I was awfully disappointed to learn that, after all, you have not been moved to a more civilized place than Shottle—but in fact to somewhere even more desolate. I know you must, all of you, have felt very depressed & disappointed When you saw your new home & as if that isn't bad enough, you have to go even further away from

Hertford, so that even Len in Wales has no further to travel when he gets his leave Of course Lincoln is very flat, being so near to the fens & you will notice it more particularly after Derbyshire.

Being near to the coast (and to Hull) you are sure to get a good bit of activity now & you are right in the front line defenders of Britton (sic) (if that is any consolation to you) I can only pray, my darling, that you are kept safe now that you are in a more vulnerable area.

Do you think you may eventually be supplied with electricity and have the water laid on?

These to (sic) things are really essential if you are to have any degree of comfort during the winter.

I'm glad you managed to transfer your pets to the new site—you'll have something to remind you of Shottle. What of the army bikes? Were you allowed to take them as well?

I must say that I was most amused at the pictures of you under a hair dryer. I'm sure you looked very charming.

It was nice to know you had a jolly "last evening" in Belper. As you say "don't know what you've missed" by not going out occasionally as a mixed party- stag parties are of course, very good fun, but, if you asked me, they usually seem to end up in a good old boose, which dosent happen if some ladies are present.

But, as you say, just as you are taking my advice & getting out a bit, you have to move & now you will have to wait till you meet some more nice people

Perhaps if you get onto single sites nearer to towns, you will be lucky. Ten miles is a terribly long way, I know, & you have plenty to moan about. I realize that, darling & I fully sympathise, only I would like to point out that things would be a hundred time worse if you were fighting on the Russian front, so my dear there is still lots & lots to be thankful for—so please keep smiling won't you.

I sent off your cigarettes this morning, not waiting for this letter, so as to make sure you received them on Monday, but as I shall post this tonight, you should receive it as soon as the cigs. Your mother also posted off your socks today. Don't forget to let her know as soon as possible if they fit as she is anxious to start another pair. (I am, of course paying her for the wool)

You can look forward to a parcel during the week as she is going to make you a cake. The only stipulation she makes is that you send her tin back afterwards-(I think the cake is worth that little trouble. I was going to make you one as well this week, but I won't make it just yet you won't want two in one week will you?

The weather today has turned wet and cold. So I am afraid I shall not do anything in the garden. However, Hart? tells me he will come along tomorrow morning and so I told him to dig the vegetable garden- it must be done for the winter. This evening I am going to the Tudor cafe with Dorothy. It is a special invitation dance and we were only able to get tickets because Jack Piggott was kind enough to get them for us, though he is not going himself.

Tomorrow I'm going up to Waltham X with mother see the Dales, ⁴²who are not too grand. However, I hope to be up early enough to write to you beforehand though I don't suppose there will be much to say after this long letter. I bought the wool for your gloves today, so I will Knit them as quickly as I can, because I know you will need them where you are- there being no hills between you and the sea, so you are sure to get the cold sea breezes.

Kitty came over to see me Thursday evening, & stayed the night. She was awfully pleased to receive your letter, (which I read) I also read the 2 letters she had

⁴² See Page 188

received from Len. He has a lot to learn about the ancient art of writing love letters so your easily flowing sentences seemed particularly attractive to her. She couldn't understand how I could live alone and still remain cheerful- she seemed to think it a miracle. I don't know whether her company is good or bad for me as she might make me come to pity myself and that would be a very bad thing indeed. Anyway she met me at 1 p.m. today and we went to the Colour Studios & I bought her an oak bread board and knife to match & a cheese board and knife to match. They are very nice and I would have liked to have kept them myself. So now we have made Len & Kitty a wedding present and as you know, we have bought Barbara's as well- so I am glad to have those off my mind, though I am liable to be hard up for a month in consequence.

It is nice to know that you are getting a NAAFI & YMCA van calling regularly, because that is some small comfort to be able to get tea & cigarettes daily & I'm glad too that your leave has not been suspended because of your move. You have been back nearly a fortnight now & so perhaps in another month you will be home again,--though it is a great pity that you will have even further to travel. Well sweetheart, this is quite a long letter for me, isn't it & as I have no more news for today I will finish by saying I still love you very much indeed & though I am not very good at putting my tenderer thoughts onto paper they are still born? when I think of you darling, but as you know, I have learnt to be lonely and cheerful as well so long as you are well & safe I can wait fairly patiently till the time when you we shall be together again--.....

THORPE-LE-FALLOWS.
27TH (This letter could be October 1941)

Darling wife,

From the wilds of Lincolnshire, where civilians are rarely seen, there stands a lonely outpost of still more lonely men, they are assembled in their canteen, someone is at the piano who can play, & all the lovely old ballads are being played, accompanied by the heartiest singing from the men; "You are my heart's delight" has just been requested, & is now being played, the lovely strains of this wonderful melody bring civilization to us, with heavenly memories of times which were once to be had for the wish. It is futile now to wish, and all we can do is to take refuge in such memories as we now have.

Today we have had many more men sent to us, they have come to do all the work, there are R.E.'s, Pioneers, & R.A.S.C., about 20 extra men, they are crowded into the dining hut & training huts, sleeping on floors, tables, anything, and we are thoroughly crowded out. Everything is upside down, leaves are suspended again, & everyone is in an uproar. I am shortly going on a course, a MK IX., D.C.'s, I don't know for how long, or when, but it will be soon, and will be a big stride in my climb upwards, I've got to go all out for the top, although I'm terribly shaky on MK IX., & if I do have as much success as on the last course, it will indeed be worthy of praise.

The socks arrived quite safely today, & relieved me of considerable anxiety, tell Mother the feet are perfect, & she can go ahead with the next pair, I wrote her a day or two ago, & will do so again soon. I think she will be wise to postpone the cake until we are settled down, that is unless it's too late & she had already made it. We are so very uncertain, I know I shan't stay here, or at least I hope not, & so it would be as well to save up all the little things she wants to send until I'm fairly sure of where I'm to stay.

George Platt has been showing me how to do a couple of conjuring tricks, & I can now make a penny disappear in the air & then reappear, & have mastered a very intriguing trick with 2 hats & a piece of paper, I'll save them up for you when I next get home. Joe got back from Newark tonight, he didn't do a thing, having hurt his back whilst at Oakham, but we shan't have him for long now I fear, because of his Education transfer. It appears that he has to go on a 12 day course on the 7th & if he passes, his transfer will automatically go forward, & we shall see him no more. I'm glad for him, but sorry for myself, I shall have difficulty in finding another such friend.

My mail this morning was bumper one, I had your parcel of cigs, Mum's parcel of socks & humbugs, a letter from you, & a letter from the Y.M.C.A. girl who was very friendly with me at Shottle, she has a fiancée who is a Flight Lieut., and hasn't seen him for a year, so we aren't too badly off are we. She wrote from Blackpool, where she is spending a holiday of gaiety to try & cheer herself up a bit, & I promised to write her occasionally which I am doing, & it's certainly nice to get lots of letters, it makes me forget my loneliness because I know I have friends outside. I wrote to Len⁴³ yesterday, I hope he soon answers, I want to know how the poor old boy is faring. I was sorry to hear that Kitty takes his absence so badly, but rather than let her company pull you down, you must build her up to your standard, for as you say, you

⁴³ Wagstaff

have learned to be happy in spite of loneliness, & you will have to teach her how, don't forget I'm still learning, and therefore your letters are still very essential to me, & also their contents, so just keep on telling me about your tender thoughts [...] I'll get home quicker on the Gt. North Road, than I used to on the Watling Street, you just wait & see, Lincoln, Grantham, Peterboro', & right down to Hatfield, you study the map, it's a straight road, & much easier, because there's more traffic, the only difficulty will be getting to Lincoln, & where there's a will there's a way, the added distance does not discourage me at all, so why should it you.

Time draws near for bed, & before I go, I want to listen to the wireless at 10.30, a programme of Ivor Novello's songs from his famous plays, I wonder if you'll be listening, I shall picture you do so anyway, so with this picture in mind, I now settle down in the armchair before dying embers of an open fire, to listen to delightful music. Love, Life, & you are one.....

Note: the pic of postage was supposed to be a picture which is approximately 1p today. There was only one post and most letters were delivered the following day usually before 7am.

Enfield
2.11.41

Letter from Ron Dempster (after his marriage)

Dear Bill,

I got your new address from Ivy last week, so I thought it time I dropped you a line or two.

It must be three weeks since you went back but to me it seems like only last Sunday---it probably seems more like months to you though. Anyway, it was darn good to see you again you old Sinner, & I was damn glad to hear from Len, when he popped over to Waterford to say Cheerio to you, you & Ivy seemed very happy together. Incidentally, talking of Len, I must say it came as rather a surprise to me after such a long lapse. I'm left on my Jack-Jones now, & I must admit that I didn't like it a little bit.

Wasn't it a stoke of luck that we should all be together the last week-end before Len was called up. Had we have known that he was going then, I think there's little doubt but what we would have got well and truly oiled! Before, when you got leave, it was possible for us all to get together for a weekend, but it will be almost a miracle if both you & Len get leave together. I wish it were possible for us to spend Xmas together.

What is your new abode like? it sounds like another one pub hole! Have you got Len's address-I'll put it at the bottom in case you haven't. Its a hell of a bloody long one!!

Ivy asked me if I could get some Brylcream⁴⁴, but I am afraid I have been unsuccessful so far, but I'll keep trying.

Cheerio Bill Old Boy, & keep your pecker up. Ever your Old Pal, Ron---Freda sends her love.

(Len Wagstaff's address entered at the bottom but see previous letter from L.W. in early October- M.F.)

⁴⁴ Brylcreem is a British brand of hair styling products for men.

*Four Winds,
3 November 1941*

My own darling husband,

I wonder if you are lucky enough to be doing the same as I am this evening--- sitting by a nice warm fire.

It is a lovely moonlight night but very cold, so one does not appreciate the beautiful night quite so much as usual.

Actually half my evening was wasted as Mrs Matthews called just after I got in at 6.30 (she brought my WVS badge & its very nice) ⁴⁵ & you know what she is when she starts talking. I did not get rid of her till eight oclock & by that time I was quite ready for my tea I can tell you I had hope to put in a couple of hours on your gloves but after all it was not possible. I want to finish them as quickly as possible but I am rather busy at work just now, or otherwise I can generally find a few five minutes each day when I can squeeze in a little knitting.

I have just had some nice milk coffee. I am drinking quite a lot of milk lately – a pint a day. Soon we are being cut down again in domestic supplies so we do not refuse any the milkman can let us have at present. Its probably good for my chilblains but bad for my figure. I am still doing my exercises each day, but I hav'nt (sic) noticed my waistline melting away yet. Penny thinks I am having a fine game when she sees me touching my toes & will jump up at me & try and bite my nose till I have to swear at her & make her go into her basket.

⁴⁵ The Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) began in June 1938 to prepare women for civil defence work-The WVS is still in existence today and is known as the Women's Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS)

O, darling I know what I particularly wanted to ask you. When you next go into Nottingham, if you have another chance before the course is over, will you see if you can get me any more Hiltone I hav'nt used all the other up, of course, but I don't want to be stranded when it is gone. If Nottingham does not present any opportunities, perhaps you would be kind enough to try at any big town in which you find yourself.

I will, of course send you the money immediately you let me know you have got some more. I know it is of no use to send in beforehand as you would only spent it & not have it for the purpose for which it was intended—am I not right? I have been very conscientious today & paid off some bills with the house mortgage, water rates & North met bill I have got rid of some eight pounds today—my, how the money does go—but I guess that is a fact you have already found out for yourself.

What do you think of Jack ⁴⁶ getting married on Sunday week? (I presume you have received your mother's letter telling you of this). She, your mother, is a little upset I think over it, though she cannot complain that it came as a surprise to her & they are evidently quite set on going through with it, so there is nothing more to be said. Anyway, there is no reason why they should not be very happy together. Edie & your mother will be going to the wedding & George too— as he will be able to get leave. I told Edie that you would not be able to get off. Even if you could, I know you wouldn't want to give up your next 48 to spend it at Worcester would you. (Needless to say I did not tell her that).

The little nail brush I am enclosing was the only one I could find with reasonable hard bristles Its only a baby one, but will it carry you on till I can get another?

Well, sweetheart I see that it is already past eleven oclock & it takes me quite half an hour to get ready for bed, so,I had better say goodnight.

⁴⁶ Bill's brother

Work hard on your course & don't forget to go on loving me as you always have done & I'll do the same----'Bye my love, Be good (or fairly good) & Keep smiling.
I am always your own—

*Four Winds,
Wednesday 5 November 1941*

My darling,

I wonder if this letter will reach you in time if I send it to Sherwood Lodge. I am hoping to receive a letter from you in the morning, letting me know when you will be leaving there. I havnt (sic) had a letter there last two mornings so it looks as if you have been kept pretty busy, though I hope you have managed to get out on one or two evenings. I sent you 20 Players off this morning. Did they arrive O.K? I saw your mother this evening & she says she hopes the cake was forwarded on to you all right. Was it nice? With it was a letter telling you that Jack was being married on Sunday week (16/11/41) —though I don't think it will make much difference to you will it? You wont be able to get off to go to Worcester. You might, however remember to send a greetings telegram on the Saturday to them. I know they will appreciate that.

It is very cold again today. When I got in this evening I nearly went straight to bed as I had to get in my coals & wood & set about lighting the fire & it really seemed too much trouble. However I eventually, did light it & when I have bn finished my letter to you I think I shall have a nice hot bath. The wireless has cheered me up & made me feel less lonely. It is when all is quiet that I notice being alone most, so I generally have the wireless on as much as possible in the evenings. Well darling, there does not seem to be any news so once more I will say goodnight. I suppose you havnt any idea when your next leave will be have you? It would be nice to have a date to look forward to. Lots of love sweetheart.

*THE CAMP,
THORPE- LE- FALLOWS
NOV 11TH (1941)*

Darling Wife,

Tuesday evening, the course is ended, & tomorrow we return to our old exile. I don't know what will be my future when we get back, but I rather fancy it will be a transfer to a single site, I hope somewhere nearer to Lincoln. I shall travel in style & comfort again, because Eric will be with me, & we shall use his car, which you'll agree is much better than on the back of a lorry.

Today has been rather hectic one, for me at least,:- all exams, & though I've done pretty well, the full sergeants were favoured, & so far as I am able to gather, they have been awarded better marks than we underlings, & there lies the big disadvantage of not competing with equal ranks. However, I have the satisfaction of knowing I have learned a considerable amount to my advantage, & in spite of opposition, I'm as good as the rest, & in due course will be able to state my exact position on the lists.

I guess you'll wonder why I could drop off writing so suddenly, well, I've excused myself several times, but once again I hope you are able to appreciate the fact that to derive any amount of benefit from this course necessitated a considerable amount of study, & reaction from this damped my ardour for writing, & I went out instead, knowing full well that soon I'd be back in the wilds & unable to go out again, so I hope you'll forgive me darling.

On Sunday we
went to Belper
again, & I met the
girls, hairdressers
all, & proceeded to
Derby, where we
went to the
pictures, having tea
afterwards at the
cinema café We
went to the
Gaumont to see
“Tin Pan Alley”, &
the film broke
down about ten
times, I couldn’t
help recalling most
vividly our visit
there together
darling, you
remember? During
the thunderstorm,
& the picture broke
down, so we went
to the café for coffee & sandwiches. I felt a bit conspicuous with four young ladies,
but on the whole enjoyed myself. We finished up again at Belper, & concluded a very
pleasant evening at the girl’s house who owns the business, & they played all my
favourite tunes on the piano whilst I sat in the most comfortable chair & enjoyed the
fire. Altogether it was a jolly nice treat for me, & well worth going out for, I hope you
won’t mind sweetheart.

Yesterday, (Monday) after 2 hours “swotting” in the evening, we had a film show here, & saw my favourite, Ronald Colman in a heart stirring picture “Under two Flags”, & though ‘twas an old picture, I hadn’t seen it, & it was a truly wonderful show, all about the foreign legion, & there were some lovely love scenes in it which made me very homesick. I do hope I can get home for the weekend, & I also hope I shouldn’t be expected to go to the wedding under any circumstance, so if you see Mum you might try to explain that to her for me will you sweetheart? & failing that I hope to be home during the following week, please pray hard my sweet, you know how much I want to be with you again.

Well my angel, I have packing to do now, & soon I hope to be with you, so until I get back to Thorpe in the Wilds, I’ll say Goodnight my

love, I always adore you,

*THE CAMP,
THORPE-LE-FELOWS
12TH NOV. (1941)*

Dearest Love,

I’m back at the old “dump”, & truly it seems worse than ever before, because after the whirl of life & work this last fortnight, the contrast is appalling, & I am near to suicide. I left Sherwood this morning at eight, & with Eric travelled to Tuxford, where we had to wait an hour, from there we travelled on to Troop H.Q., a worse place ever than this, & that’s where poor Eric has got to stay, I had to wait there all day for transport to this place, I nearly went mad, & was thankful when we started off on the last stage of the journey, the only snag being that on the way we had to call at the new single sites to pick up working parties & their kit, so that we arrived here just

as it got dark, then I had the bother of sorting out blankets etc., & finding a bed, no blooming lights only hurricanes, all but one of the pressure lamps have gone out of action, & that's in the office which is where I am now. There is a lovely fire in our fireplace, but that's over in the canteen, & if we want to write letters we must also have a decent light, so all the fire is any good for is to sit & dream over, & worst of all, our wireless has been broken during my absence. The leave is all to hell, owing to shortage of men & excess work, so I guess I've got my work cut out now to wangle a 48, though I'm still trying my damdest, please, please darling do pray ever so hard for me, because if I don't soon see you I know I'll apply for a transfer into something decent & manly, & where we're treated as such, here we're less than the dust. Already in this district there are floods, & that's only after one or two night's steady rain, so heaven help us in the winter. At the other site, there is over 2 feet of water around the emplacements in the trenches they got the earth from. I have a truly painful chest cold, it's made my headache, & is my course reward, the result of perspiring on the march, & then having to strip for P.T., & going out into freezing winds, Ah! well, it had to come, I always get a cold in winter, & if it gets worse I really will go sick this time & try to get a rest. I have today received my winter issue of clothes, leather jerkin, & woollen underclothes, he vests area little lighter in weight this time & I shall probably wear them, but of course I shall not use the long pants, they are for old men. I also had a pair of gloves (army issue), which are most welcome, & I hope yours will soon come along too.

I received two letters from you when I got back here, the cigarettes saved my life, for after a very expensive course, I was both broke & out of smokes & had been scrounging for two days, being in debt as well, so you may guess how welcome they were. I must confess I rather scowled to myself about Ron trying to wangle the evening with you, & I'm very glad you didn't encourage him in any way, he must not have another such opportunity if you can avoid it. I pass over Fred Harvey's dancing classes, because you should recall how madly jealous you used to make me there. It certainly was a shame you could not get to Nottingham over the weekend, but there it is, & it's no use crying over spilt milk. You ask for Eric's petrol secret, which is rather more than I care to talk about, but since you mentioned for the time that this Jack has a car, & has used all his petrol, I am right in assuming that he must do a lot of running about in it locally, I sincerely hope you don't go out with him to dances in this way.

Mr. Douglas will be up here soon, & I have to broach to subject of leave when he does come, I hope you'll sympathise with me, knowing as you do how awkward he is on the subject, so I hope I get results, & favourable ones too. I do so want to be

the first to hold you in your new black frock, will you do me a very special favour, & reserve that privilege for me, it won't be long for you to wait, & I should so appreciate it darling, so please try your best for me alone. Remember the red dress? I don't want that to happen again, because although you seem to think your clothes bore me, I really am extremely intrigued by them, so give a poor forgotten soldier a break will you.

Well, my sweet, I have to write to poor Dorothy tonight, she also had written whilst I was away, so you'll forgive me if I cut this letter short for tonight, & I promise to write a longer one tomorrow, there's bound to be lots to talk about, so until then my dearest, goodnight, & God Bless You, you know how I worship you,

Four Winds
Wednesday 19 November 1941

My darling Bill,

Good evening sweetheart. How are you I wonder. Are you doing the same as I? Writing & listening to Sandy playing "Black Eyes". It is 10.30 & from 9.30 to 10.30 there has been a marvellous programme on the Home Service--- a symphony orchestra, who came to the mike at a moment's notice because it was not possible to broadcast the advertised opera. Having had no time to practice they played all well known airs from famous operas & the result was just lovely. They ended with the Dance of the hours--& you know how the violins are given full play in that piece & with such a large orchestra, it couldn't have been played better. I hope you were listening but I expect you had "Calamity Club" on instead.

John Arthur Furlong & Vera May De

Well darling I have been to see your mother & taken her some eggs & potatoes & she says the wedding went off all right. The bride wore white & had two bridesmaids & they had a wedding cake, so it seems that they tried to make it as nice as possible. As I believe you know, they have taken a furnished house but have got quite a few of their own things in it now your mother was a bit upset to think Jack was actually married now & that she had no-one left to call her own. However, it was inevitable wasn't it? And the girl is quiet & I should think, will make a good placid wife for him—not a bit like your own gay irresponsible spouse is she? Still I guess she doesn't love Jack as much as your "butterfly" loves you. How could she? Their love hasn't had time to take root as ours has Ten years is a good time to

grow deep roots isn't it, & I know that it would have to be a pretty bad storm that could do any lasting damage to our love The most important years of our lives have grown too deeply & intricately together for us ever to be able to live independently again.

I do hope darling, that when (if ever) you are assailed with doubts about my love for you, & the fact they (sic) I enjoy the company of other men, you console yourself with the thought that, whatever happens, we are too much a part of each other ever to be really parted. For my part, I could never be completely happy away from you, even if I believed I had ceased to love you & loved someone else- you are Bill & Bill to me, means sooner with whom I shall forever be closely tied to, not simply because of my marriage vows but because he is so much a part of my life, that life just couldn't be complete without him.

Well, darling, when I started writing I didn't intend to start phylosiphysing (?spelling) but I hope you don't mind.

Still I mustn't write for much longer as I see it is already eleven oclock. Penny has been up with Mr. Smith all the evening & it looks as if she is going to stay the night

with him. I think he likes her company. He seems to encourage her anyway. I returned his book today which George has so kindly mended. He was very thrilled with the neat finish & wanted to pay for it. I wouldn't let him of course, because he is such a good lodger & I am glad to do him a favour when I can.

Well darling, I suppose I must say goodnight (John MacCormack [*Irish tenor*] is singing "Smiling thro" at this moment), are you listening I wonder.

God bless you darling.

P.S. Did you get the cigs I posted today?

Four Winds
Undated-Monday evening 10 pm

Good evening, darling,

I am still here- though I think you must have forgotten the fact, for I have only had one letter from you in eight days--& I felt sure I should hear from you this morning,--But perhaps I ought not to grumble, for I know you have very little time on courses to write even to me.

I do hope my dear that you have plenty of coal now, for if your weather is as bitter as ours is, you will need it. It is really terrible tonight. Snowing hard, & driven by a cold north-east wind which has chapped my hands & lips. It's a good thing I am not asked to live under your conditions. I think I should just curl up and die—"roughing it" & Ivy don't go very well together & I think that goes for Penny too. How she loves the fire! She woke Barbara up four times last night trying to get into bed with us. I'm such a sound sleeper that she often succeeds without waking me-but it can't be helped. It is too cold for her to sleep in the kitchen these days.

Did you, after all, darling, get the old armchair & flat iron promised you? Well, sweet, I have started a second page,--being an optimist—but I really don't know what else to talk to you about—not having heard from you just lately.

O, the boy in the Surveyors office (Ron Cain, aged 18) has confessed to Mr. Waine that he wants to marry young Joan & is saving up for it. He makes it pretty obvious that he is in love with her—but we are rather tickled that he thinks so seriously of it—if he only knew—he doesn't stand a dogs chance. Still he might be like you & wear her down to saying yes, mightn't he?

I have had a pain under my right shoulder blade for three weeks. I thought I had been sitting in a draught at first, but it cannot be that. What do you think it is? Here are the missing words to the last song I sent you. “ I had to go, the time was so short We both had so much to say My kit bag to be packed, the train to be caught etc.

There now you have the whole words of the chorus. Do you know the tune—perhaps you’ll here (sic) it on the Reifles? Radio.

Well. Sweetheart, it’s getting on for 11.p.m, so I think I must get ready for bed.

Goodnight [...]

Four Winds

Undated January letter -Tuesday

Darling Bill,

I wish you could be with me this evening, for it is exceedingly cold outside, but inside I have a nice large cheerful fire and am comfortably settles on the settee with cushions & a H.W.B. Does it make you envious? It would be nicer still if you were here as well. As you are not, Penny shares the settee with me instead, but she is fast asleep (taking her comfort for granted) & she is making funny noises as she sometimes does in her sleep, so she really isn’t much company just at present.

I did not hear from you this morning but I expect I shall tomorrow with the news that you are now a full blown Bombardier!!

I sent off your other two vests today. Trust they arrive safely.---

By the way, darling, what date now do you expect to be home? Is it the first week in February? The time will quickly go you know—only another three weeks! And one thing—we do appreciate being together when it does happen. Any further news of overseas service? I always pray that you won’t have to go--& until you do go, I shall keep hoping that my prayer will be answered

Well [...] goodnight.

Four Winds
Undated letter -Wednesday

Another day gone by darling & what a day!! It is bitterly cold with an east wind gale blowing. It has even been snowing. The wind has chapped my lips & hands, so you can tell the kind it is. I am afraid that you might be getting it too, & if you are you will be feeling it more than I am for at least I don't have to work out in it. I do hope you don't get called out while this weather is here. It would be dreadful to have to do night work in it.

I received a letter from you this morning written on Sunday. I'm glad to know that Joe? Has at least got what he wants in the way of work. Tell him I send him my kind regards & very best wishes & two big kisses to start him off in his new work. I am afraid you will miss him a lot at first, though that is the way of the war—you make good friends & then lose them. Glad to know you have managed to improve your canteen fire place between you. A good fire is very essential for your comfort in these days & helps to make up for lack of outside interest when you have a free evening.

It's nice to know that you have the offer of using your neighbour's billiard room (with supper thrown in). I do hope that you won't be too long in taking advantage of it.

It is a very good thing to get out for a little while, even if you don't get far away. I am afraid there is little news for you again today unless I happen to go out in the evening, I do nothing but spend the day at the office & the evenings at home doing odd jobs & generally tidying up—both myself & the house—Tonight I have been jam making, washing, darning, and sweeping are interesting things, so do you wonder that when I come to sit down & write to you, I cannot find a lot to talk about.

I did see Madge the other day & she asked me to tell you that she & Reg were being married on the 29th November. I expect you will be writing to him soon in answer to his letter (which I enclose for you).

You tell me to ask you some questions, so that you can write a longer letter. Let me see what can I ask you-----there must be lots of things I want to ask you-----

- 1) Are you still under the care of Douglas, or is it a different officer now.
- 2) Did you receive the 20 players I sent yesterday, also your mother's socks
- 3) How many men are on your site
- 4) Is S.Peter still with you or have you an officer with you

- 5) Have you heard any more about your second stripe
- 6) Did you make any enquiries about the additional pay which you think you should receive or had you forgotten all about this.

Well, darling that's enough to go on with today. I'll ask some more tomorrow & now as its past eleven o'clock I'll send you all my love & say goodnight & God bless you. I am, as always Your own

*Four Winds,
22 November 1941*

My dearest Bill,

Thank you for writing to me so promptly. I did not expect a letter from you quite so soon.

I am just amazed to hear that you are moving again. Don't you ever stay in one place for more than a week?

Now darling about this visit of mine. This evening I had made up my mind to come to see you if you could get digs for me, but your letter, seems to squash this idea. Then Mr. Smith came in. He has been to see his mother in Shropshire & has had the most awful experiences in travelling. He was hung up for two nights & there was nowhere to sleep, no rooms available anywhere. It seems that the Christmas travel rush has begun—even a week before Christmas. He says that you just can't get on the trains-- & preference is of course given to the troops, & those passengers who can't get on the trains are just left—there are no extra trains.

Well, darling if its like this now, what will it be like during the actual holiday. Anyway, it has frightened me off travel so my dear, even if I get a telegram from you I shall not come-I really darn't .

I wouldn't mind a bit if I could be travelling with you-but alone!! Well, I don't know what I would do if I got held up & couldn't get home. So if you do send me a telegram (though it looks as if you won't) I shall send one back to say I am not coming & this letter will explain why. I hope you'll understand.

I am very glad that you had good fortune in getting back. I thought a lot about you & was afraid you would find your case very heavy by the time you got back to camp, but as things were, I don't suppose you noticed it.

I'm glad the 7/- arrived all right. You should be receiving some more from the village fund, so look out for it. Also your Union has sent some money to the address where you were, last Christmas. If you can remember where that was (golden valley I think) perhaps you could make some enquiries there for it.

Well darling, I'll say goodnight now as there seems to be no more news.

Au revoir till tomorrow [...]

*THE CAMP,
THORPE-LE-FALLOWS.
23RD NOV. (1941)*

Dear Love,

Sunday and no day off, we've been out digging all day, & I can assure you I'm heartily sick of it, we don't deserve to win whilst the powers that be insist on our working on trivial tasks, on what should be a day of rest (whilst we may).

Now you want to know what has been happening these last few days, well, precisely nothing really. On Friday I received the cigarettes which were of course very welcome, but I put your letter in my pocket intending to read & enjoy it when we got out to the scene of our work, & then it was only the shortest of notes, I was disappointed I can tell you, but you made up for that on Saturday when your next one arrived, so lovely to read your innermost thoughts & know you mean them my little "butterfly". Of course I knew you loved me my sweet, & you shouldn't even suggest I have any doubts ever, [...] I am indeed very very fortunate to have you for a wife, [...] all I can say during this awful period we live through, is thank God for deep roots, [...]

Now to a little news, Joe is now officially accepted by the A.E.C, & is sergeant for the Derby area, which means that he can visit Dorothy pretty frequently, & I guess he does. Charlie Jenkins met him in Derby last week, & he says he is completely happy, so I guess that's everything, though I miss him a lot. He hasn't written me yet, though I'm still hoping he will soon, & I can't write to him first because I don't know how to get in touch with him.

I expect you've read the papers & seen that I shan't be home for Xmas, too bad isn't it, I did have hopes of wangling a few days this year, & after all, why should we be forbidden to travel, why not civvies? however, I guess we'll get used to the idea, & will have to celebrate our Xmas either before, or just after the holiday.

Did you know? I'm going on another course on or about December the 8th. Radio location this time, & as a D.C. too, so I'm climbing up, & this one I really do want, son in spite of the fact that it will be at Tuxford, & there will be more than the usual quota of "square bashing" etc., I shall enjoy it. (I often wonder if you understand all I write, it's awful isn't it? please tell me if you ever have any difficulty & I'll try to improve). Did you like my poetry? I'm sending the words of "One Fine Day" this time, do tell me what you think of them darling, because it really does mean so much to me.

Yesterday (Saturday) was the promotion Exam, & up till now, I don't know how I fared, so keep your fingers crossed for a day or two my love, & so far as I can tell you, I know I passed the exam with flying colours, but it's a "wangle" as I've already told you, & there may be some others more favoured than I, & again, it depends on how many vacancies there were, so you'll see how necessary it is for your fingers to stay put until we know the worst. I made a terrific impression on the second in command Capt. Brown, with my bayonet fighting, he gave me a big lift with a very good report, it so impressed him that he related it all at the officer's mess, because Duggie told me so, & I got by old Wotton fairly well too, not a bit like the last interview, we had quite a chat this time, he began by telling me I did well on my last course, & I modestly? replied I was top of the Battery, to which he replied I was not only top of the Battery, but top of Regiment, so I said that I was still not satisfied with the result, because I knew I was better than two or three of the sergeants, & that they marked according to stripes a lot, this made him laugh, & he inferred that I had it in a nutshell. I think I'll get by, but at this stage I daren't be too confident, especially as Sgt. Warden who is now back, told me two days before the exam that I needn't be discouraged if I went under this time as there was plenty of opportunity opening up soon, in the field of Radio, you see, we're all beginners now, & no one person knows any more than another yet, so it depends a lot on my capabilities now in learning quickly, who knows? I may yet be an instructor at Regtl. School. What a dream, but it may come true.

I tried to buy another vest woollen yesterday, but they wouldn't let me have one, so after a bit of casting around, I eventually found someone who doesn't wear

them, & have exchanged a shirt for one extra vest, & I guess that as soon as I find some brown paper, I'll be sending a dirty one home for washing, hope you won't mind.

Now my love, although I've missed several day's letters, I really have exhausted my store of news, so little happens outside ordinary drudging routine that I marvel at the lengthy letters I am still able to write, so please forgive me if letters these days are not as long as they used to be, [...] I feel very guilty when I can find nothing of interest to relate. Just a minute, a little incident occurred today which will interest you:- It was during our lunch hour out at Saxilby, a miserable little village six miles from here, & as it was a Sunday, we didn't feel like doing a lot of work, so we took a walk into the village, to have a few drinks, & we found a friend, the landlady of the pub, a good, honest, kind-hearted Yorkshirewoman, who doesn't like Lincolnshire any more than we, but she's married a Lincoln man. Well, we had a round, & she asked us if we'd had dinner, to which we replied we had, & told her just as a matter of interest what we'd had, two slices of bread with meat paste, & she then disappeared for about five minutes, reappearing with three dinners of Yorkshire Pudding, potatoes & onion sauce (no meat of course) & she said "here you are lads, get these down you", now wasn't that sweet of her? & what a real treat to taste "civvie" grub again, I think we got our money's worth don't you? & if I'm ever sent there as D.C. I know where to find a friend if I'm lonely.

Now that really is all darling, I'll write again tomorrow night, & remember, I must have all of you, & your love, because my love amounts to worship, Goodnight Darling, God Bless You,

Thanks a lot for tobacco X.I Love you

*THE CAMP,
THORPE-LE-FALLOWS.
24TH NOV. (1941)*

Darling Wife,

This note will, I fear, be a very short one, you see, I have found an ideal partner with whom to compare songs, & very soon now, I shall be sending at least two for you to work on, but I fear that I shall only send melodies & words, the

accompaniment is too big a task, though that should be sufficient if you can assure me of a sympathetic hearing, my stumbling block now is lack of M.S.S. paper, I have not been able to get to a town & buy any you see.

This is how it happened, I went over to the canteen, & found one of the fellows I “pegged” you remember? he was playing the piano all alone, so I asked him to play some waltzes for me, & then spent two hours teaching him Chopin’s Nocturne, & Waltze in D flat, & found him an apt pupil, then quite suddenly he played a march, a really catchy tune, I asked him where he got it from, & he said he made it up, so of course I opened up, & we improved on it, eventually fixing what I consider to be a beauty, all I hope is that he hasn’t heard it somewhere before, but it’s certainly a new one on me. I then taught him one of my old waltzes, & with his uncanny knack of extemporisation we have made a really pretty little tune of it, & that’s why I have to end this letter early, because I simply can’t resist having a go at some words for it.

I might add that my new colleague is a born musician, but has never been tutored, a great pity because he plays beautifully, anyhow, if we’re careful & can get to a piano together, I’m sure I can do something for us, please pray for me sweetheart, I do so want to do something special for your sake. Now I must try to settle down to serious work, tho’ the atmosphere is not very conducive I fear, but I’ll try, Goodnight Darling, I love you,

*THE CAMP,
THORPE-LE-FALLOWS.
25TH NOV. (1941)*

My Darling Butterfly,

[Here we are again, and this time, although I have no news, I hope to make my letter a little more interesting. I did a bit of my own song last night, & managed to get a few words on to paper, but after humming it all day long, I find there are plenty of adjustments to be made before it can be ready for anyone to hear.

I’m still going out each day in charge of a working party, & we’re certainly making headway since I took over, I’ve been complimented once or twice on the advancement. Duggie came round today, & I asked him about my other stripe, but he says nothing had been heard yet, though he hopes the results will soon be known.

I feel very tired now, after a day's hard work in the fresh air, I'm always glad to get home & have a rest, though I have such lots of letters to write that I really cannot afford to be completely lazy & neglect everything. Tonight when we got back, the fires were out and there was no paraffin for the lamps, & you may be able to imagine how awful the prospect is without these two essentials, but I scrounged around and lighted a fire, which is now roaring away and giving out a nice heat, & I found a lamp which was not quite empty, thus providing sufficient light to see what we're doing. I had a lovely wash, which freshened me up considerably, though I've still got a good old backache, which nothing but bed will cure.

Too bad about poor old Uncle Ted, it seems as if he's about finished, though it's hard to reconcile oneself to the thought, I suppose his wife won't go for long without him, they're a grand couple, and I'm rather surprised that you think expense prevented him from going to hospital, I know they were tight, but surely not so tight as that, however, I guess you have good reason for your suspicions or you wouldn't mention them.

I'm sorry you find the Two Brewers atmosphere uncondusive to loving letters, because I like them all to be 100% full of it, & if they are spoiled in any way by such conditions I feel as if I've been cheated of something very precious, my life here is so very lonely, that every word of love you write helps to lift me to heights unknown, and I look forward so much to your letters for this reason-----Break here while I had supper consisting of two pieces of toast made from a couple of slices of bread & butter left from tea, & a mug of cold tea warmed up on the fire, can you wonder I never complain or want anything special when I get home. And that, I think is about the lot of news for today, very little of importance ever comes my way, though I love to write daily, because I feel closer to you as I write. [...] heaven knows how I would live without you now, life would indeed be barren if I could not have the love of my Venus to inspire me. Goodnight Darling, I adore & worship you,

*THE CAMP,
THORPE-LE-FALLOWS.
27TH NOV. (1941)*

Darling,

Nearly A fortnight has elapsed since you were last in my arms, & it seems like a lifetime, how time does drag when I cannot be with you, fortunately I've had tons of work in which to bury myself, though not particularly interesting I fear until today which has been different, we erected a hut, & I was intrigued from start to finish, it kept 3 of us busy all day until five oclock tonight, & we just got it finished & were surveying our handiwork as the lorry came to collect us.

You would probably be very amused to see us each morning as we set out to work in our lorry, looking exactly like prisoners of war, dressed in denim overalls, gum boots, & leather jerkins, loading onto the wagon all kinds of kit, rations, tools, & building materials, then punctually at 8.30 off we go for a windy ride to our village, always stopping on the way to invade this place for cigarettes & matches, & seldom meeting with any success. The site on which we're working is nearing completion now, & only needs electricity & water, which are going to be laid on in due course, & when the sun shines, it's not a bad little place after all, I guess it would be nice in the summer, but we shan't be there I fear. The churchyard adjoins the field in which we are building, & the school is also nearby, so that all day long we hear the laughing. Joyous shouts as they romp in their playground, & at lunch time they come over in their hundreds to play football in the adjoining field, & our boys play with them, & yesterday the vicar brought over some apples for us, so it looks as if the people who eventually got to live there will be well looked after. On Sunday morning too while we were there, the local Home Guard officer, a captain, came with four of his men to have a look at us, & we had quite a cosy little chat, during which I gleaned lots of information both about his armament & local affairs, they ought to be more careful. Last night, Duggie came up here & paid us. Afterwards "nabbing" the N.C.O.'s for a talk on the new tactics we are to adopt, they will be complicated, & as D.C.'s we shall have a pretty sticky & responsible job when the fun starts again, but I thrive on responsibility, & look forward to a chance to prove my worth. After the official business was discussed he remained until eleven thirty laughing with us over amusing anecdotes on this war during the blitz last year, though I had none to relate, I thoroughly enjoyed hearing others, & was kept in fits of laughter for a good hour, &

despite my tiredness, felt better for a good old laugh again. The night before, I paid my first social call in company with George Platt who often goes, to Mrs Warner next door, it was indeed a very pleasant evening, & her two children are the brainiest kids, perfect examples of how I want mine to be, there's Mary, aged sixteen, local A.R.P warden, no work, looking about twelve, & Michael aged fifteen, a bright, brainy lad & a real little man, they make a very happy trio, & their mother has managed to remain very young & alert, & is more like her children for liveliness. We played "Housey Housey", I lost a shilling, but enjoyed the diversion, & then had supper of baked potatoes in jackets stuffed with cheese, home made bread, & ryvita, & coffee, a truly lovely touch to perfect hospitality. They said they rarely see father, who as you know is a dentist in the army d somewhere down Surry way, & they've got used to being without him, he only gets home about twice a year, I should like to know what he does with his 48 hours because even officers get a few, but naturally I refrained from comment. George has gone there again tonight, in fact he goes every night, he thinks Mrs Warner a charming woman, she is, but he'd better be careful, I remember still a Miss Dorothy Fletcher, & I know he's a devil with women of all ages, & he's the ugliest blighter too. Enough of that for today, though I guess you'll be glad to hear these things, because you'll see I'm coming to life again even in these dreariest of surroundings., I'll tell you more as it happens.

Time flies, already one of our boys is in bed asleep, another one is vainly trying to make his bed on a top bunk, you would laugh to see his antics, the bed is rocking like a cradle, & he is standing on a heap of blankets he wants to spread out, & every time he goes to throw one over the bed, his head hits the ceiling, it really is amusing, though very annoying if one happens to be in a like predicament. You'll be sorry to hear that poor old Ginger the cat is not in the best of health, he has hurt his back left leg somehow, & it's all swollen & causing him great pain, he hasn't eaten for two days, so we took him in tonight, & gave him some milk which promptly upset his stomach, but he managed to keep it down & is now asleep under George's bed, we don't know what to do about his leg, though I thinks it's broken & has begun to set wrongly, I'm sure I wish I could do something about it, but we've done all we can, & that's to make him comfortable. Sgt. Robbs little dog "Pluto" grows well, & is the wickedest little puppy, always into mischief, & typically inquisitive, yesterday it fell into the water around one of the emplacements, & had to be rescued because the banks were too steep for it to climb, & an hour later it had fallen into some more water in a ditch which runs through the field, so it had two good swims yesterday, & Sgt. Robbs was as pleased as punch because it had been swimming. It's an amusing little thing, looking more like a dachshund with a Scottie's head than anything, but it

holds itself well, & is full of spirit, he allows the boys to pick him up by his tail, & he doesn't murmur, only comes back for more. The chicken should soon start to lay now, it's a fine specimen, & is the pride of the man who reared it, the most amazing thing is how all these dogs, cats & chicken live together & never fall out, they are all perfect friends, though the cats have found some rivals & lovers locally, because we often hear them "scrapping" at nights, the cook threw a boot at them the other night, & I have a strong suspicion that that's how poor Ginger's leg was hurt, though of course that's only my opinion.

Just finished putting up a "Homing Beacon" for a lost aeroplane, it's cold outside with a howling, piercing wind, I bet the pilot was glad to see our old beam showing him the way home, the air force would have lost literally hundreds of planes during the war if it weren't for us, they're a real boon to airmen, but we never get a thank you, just a moan if we show them to an aerodrome which isn't their own even though they have landed safely, but we only obey our orders, so I don't know why they moan at us, they're lucky to live. It's only quite recently I learned that it's a risky business to fly at night, & that as pilot takes his life in his hands each time he goes up in the dark, & learning this fact, I realise more now, how much use we are to the country in various little ways, & am suitably reconciled. You haven't yet told me how you liked the words of Madame Butterfly, though I know you will love them, & agree with me that perhaps some of it could have been written for us, I love to hear your opinions on such things, it makes me so much the happier.

And now my angel, I must close, I have two pairs of socks to wash, & you know how important they are, by the way, what about my gloves? they were nearly finished when I last saw you, surely you're not neglecting me for more air force blue? & whilst on the subject of comforts, will you please send some more McCleans, my tummy is all haywire these days. On Saturday I intend to go to Lincoln again, & I will have another try for some Hiltone, though I cannot promise anything definite of course, but honestly, I'll do my very best darling, though why I should help you to be beautiful for other men's pleasure is beyond me, but I know it's because I love you, even though you have paid for it. No offense sweetheart, you know me by now, & now I really must close, remember the army is the backbone of Britain, & I'm a bit, so keep loving me as I do you.

*THE CAMP,
THORPE-LE-FALLOWS.
28TH NOV. (1941)*

Darling Butterfly,

Some strange inexplicable feeling is upon me, I am horribly depressed, and previous to starting this letter I have been lying down feeling utterly “done”, & I didn’t care if I died, I do hope that nothing is wrong at home, because it feels just like premonition.

Enough of gloom, I know you don’t want to hear about my troubles, although somehow I always feel I have to tell you. I had a bit of an accident tonight, old George was chasing me across the yard, & I had a plate of dinner in my hand, I slipped & miraculously kept the plate from spilling, but hurt my knee badly, & grazed my knuckles, of course we had a good laugh, but at the moment I cannot bend the knee, & it hurts like hell—I, hope it’s nothing serious.

Such news as I have concerns only the weather, which has been awful all day, raining off & on all the time, and my work which still goes on day by day. We have had a lot of attention paid to us today, having been visited by the C.O. & the O.C. Battery, also another Captain & Duggie, all at different times, but they were all pleased with the general appearance, for which I am responsible, & I’m quite happy about that. Tomorrow, thank goodness, is a half day, we have it on Saturday now, & work all day Sunday, & I intend to go to lousy Lincoln & visit the pictures & do some shopping, accompanied by George.

Thank you so much for the cigarettes, they were in the nick of time, because we have had no N.A.A.F.I. for several days, and were unable to get any in the village, so the sight of your darling handwriting, & the size of the envelope, was a doubly welcome sight. I was also lucky in receiving a parcel from Mum, which had in it a pair of socks, for which I was truly thankful, & 10 cigs, I wrote her yesterday, so will you thank her for the parcel until I write again.

That, my precious is all the news, but the way I feel tonight, I simply must tell you that I adore you, & implore you to always keep your love for me, [...] you are not at Thorpe in the Shadows, & your life is still fairly normal. & you must come below the surface to rescue me, surely you’re not blind to the fact that such a life as this will

inevitably change me if we're not careful, & it rests with your letters almost entirely to keep me from bitter & hard thoughts.

Forgive me darling for this outburst, but if I were in your arms tonight I'd cry, I know I would, [...] Goodnight my angel, I do so need you,

*THE CAMP,
THORPE-LE-FALLOWS.
30TH NOV. (1941)*

Darling Angel Wife,

It's very late, and I will excuse myself on the grounds that I have been out working all day, came back tired, & after a clean up, was persuaded by George to go round to Mr. Warner's, which I did rather against my plans, because I had intended to write to you early, & then get straight to bed, whereas now, it's midnight, & I've only just started to write, my bed is still un-made, but I couldn't rest easily knowing what I had so many things to tell you. Most important of all I suppose, is my hasty P.S. on the outside of my last letter, you see, I had sealed it before I learned the glad tidings that not only was I passed, but top of the promotion exam, now all I am waiting for is for the promotion to appear officially on orders, I can't adopt the rank of Bdr. until that happens, although yesterday I went to Lincoln, & amongst all my shopping I bought new sets of stripes costing 4/6d, so I hope I don't have to wait too long now. Everybody seems very pleased with me, & I have been congratulated all round, & last night officially christened the new stripe, a very expensive affair.

Now, I went shopping yesterday as I have already stated, & first on my list was Hiltone, I went to Boots again, no results, they sent me to a big ladies hairdressing place, no luck, they sent me to a large store which had a beauty department, no luck, they sent me to another smaller hairdresser with the same story, but they went one better by saying I shouldn't get it, & I've come to the conclusion that Lincoln is a Hiltoneless town; I don't know where to try now. I guess you would have enjoyed the spectacle of me, with a retinue of four devoted gunners, going into all the beauty parlours, feeling awful fools amongst a lot of women, & getting nowhere, but I was honestly disappointed about it, & am still trying to think how else to procure some.

The rest of the afternoon was spent buying Xmas cards & presents, tea, & we ended up at the pictures, which although very old fashioned was thoroughly enjoyable, an Edgar Wallace thriller called "The Terror" after which we caught a bus home, & had a few drinks in the village.

Today I had a new works party, & a new place to go to, it's all very well being in charge of work, but I seem to have no fixed abode these days, & now to crown all this moving about, tomorrow I have to pack up & move to Troop H.Q., a worse place than this, & the fellows aren't very nice, they're all Golden Valley crowd, I hope I don't stay there long, it's only supposed to be a temporary move, & for once, I don't want to settle-----there.

Forgive me for my last letter, I really was terribly depressed, but I shouldn't pour out my troubles as easily as that, & I was sorry the next day [...]. You anxiously enquire about Dec. 18th. Well darling, you cannot be looking forward to that day any more than I, & couldn't possibly be wishing any harder than I for a reunion, I shall try like hell to get off, but things don't look too good at present, & I daren't even suggest the possibility yet. You ask about the course which commences on the 8th, well so far as I know it is only for a week, I hope it's no longer, or it will destroy all possible hope of the 18th, which is an absolute obsession with me, how about you?

Thank you darling for the M.S.S. paper, I hope they have a piano at Doddington, the new home, & I shall use it, never fear, & the brown paper too, was an inspiration, I shall be sending home two vests for you to deal with just as soon as I find the time to pack them, probably tomorrow evening.

Duggie goes on a weeks course in the morning & we have a new officer taking over, a captain, so not only will I have a new home, but also a new officer, & I shall be

living at the same place with him, things are all ? our just lately aren't they, but I guess it keeps my mind occupied a bit, & at least I'm fairly sure of another stripe now, never fear, I'll let you know just as soon as it arrives.

Remember what I promised to try for, to give you as a Xmas gift? well, O got it yesterday, now's your chance to test your memory, & if you guess rightly, (only one guess mind) I will send it to you for Xmas, & if you don't guess, well, I shall still send it. I suppose you'll laugh at my hinting, just like me isn't it, never could keep a surprise, I've got something, & I must get it out, but that only proves that the army cannot alter me, [...] I could never be without you for ever, it would kill me I know, so please pray hard for me to be home on the 18th. & I'll get here. Now [...] I really must close, forgive the writing, it's ever so late, & I shall have hardly got into bed before it will be time to get out again, [...] Your for ever,

*THE CAMP,
THORPE-LE-FALLOWS.
1ST DEC. (1941)*

Darling Angel,

Here I am still at the old place, I didn't have to move after all, I had all my kit packed up, & then a message came over to say I needn't go, & was I glad, & better still, I didn't have to go out to work today either, the reason being that we had a bath parade & by the time that was over, it wasn't worth going out. We don't go into Lincoln for baths though, worse luck, we have to go to one of the other sites where they have three showers, a very cold and only half efficient way of bathing. It was a cold day, bitterly so, & the lorry has only half a cover on it, which means that we get most of the wind, & having been thoroughly frozen with a ten miles ride, we disrobed & had a shower, not too bad you know, but the place isn't heated, & the floor concrete, which is like stepping on to ice, but after getting accustomed to it, we weren't too badly off, but all that is undone on the journey back. Because after having nicely warmed up, there's ten miles or so to journey back, & perhaps you'll imagine what drastic effects may be produced by a hot bath followed by a freezing wind for

half an hour, we all had colds to begin with, but had to get clean, & I'm sure these conditions will not improve our health, however, we survive, & that's everything I guess.

Tomorrow I go out to my new abode, or should I say, my new working place, a neat little village 3 miles from Lincoln, & near the main road, the villagers are good to the lads, & I wouldn't mind living there, although it's all mud. We are getting pretty poor food now, our two cooks having thrown the job in, too much work they said, so of course we have to endure the amateur efforts of two well meaning. But untrained Gunners, but I don't eat much nowadays, so I don't suffer as much as the others. Thank you my sweet for the cigs. Do you know, I almost sense when they will come, it's always when I have none, & no means of getting any, they saved three of us this morning, I do so want you to know how really grateful we are, & the boys all remarked on the way your cigarettes always turn up at the right time, you see darling, the NAAFI has been neglecting us for over a week now, & we only get the Y.M. about twice a week, so unless we are able to procure some outside, which is not very often, we're sunk completely, & I think I'll be sunk anyway this week, because I spent out pretty well on Saturday with various things I bought, so perhaps you'll help me in time for my course which will commence on Monday next, because I'm afraid I've got to borrow to see the week through. You may like to arrange your letters to find me straight away when I move to Tuxford for the week, here's the address,

401 Bty,
Militia Camp,
Ollerton Road
Tuxford,
Newark, Notts.

Don't forget, that's after Monday next, so perhaps I'll have one waiting for me when I get there, although I shouldn't send it to arrive on Monday morning, because I shall not leave here until about 11.0, & I shall see the postman before we go. I have just about enough cash to send on my vests which will accompany this letter, & by the way darling, I have to complain in fact it really isn't a complaint, but a favour, will you please try to send a few stamps, I write to lots of people, & it keeps me poor, & you used to keep me well supplied at one time, please don't be annoyed will you? I love you so, & yet these little things I have to ask of you occasionally, or I'd never make ends meet.

I wrote to Jack last week, & not only dropped a hint, but asked him point blank to continue helping Mum, & if he couldn't, he must let me know, but I still have had no reply, so I guess he's thinking up some kind of an answer. Now [...] I must close, don't forget your prayers every night, I need them as much as I need your love.

Four Winds
Wednesday 3 December 1941

My darling sweetheart,

It was nice to receive your long letter written on Sunday-though you should not have stayed up late to write it.

Well, my dear, I guess you are walking about with a very Swollen head just at present having pulled off the hat trick once more & managed to be top of your exam. Did you really do better than the sergeants taking part?

If so, even Major Wotton? Must have changed his mind about you not being cut out to be an N.C.O.

Have you got those stripes sewn on yet? Don't forget I'm buying them for you with the Hiltone money. If you can get your 3rd stripe by the end of March (most unlikely so I think I'm safe) I will pay for them too.

The Hiltone I managed to get from a stall in the open market—genuine stuff too—wasn't I lucky? Thank you darling for doing your best for me in Lincoln. It looks as if it will soon be quite unobtainable so, if you are in Derby at any time don't pass up an opportunity to get some from Boots if you can. Whatever did your pals say when you trailed them round the beauty shops in Lincoln?

O, and about that present you have bought me. My guess is—gipsy earrings or a dress clip. Am I right? If it is earrings [...] could you let me know otherwise if I can get any in Hertford I shall probably treat myself.

Now [...] about the 18th, of course it will be simply grand if you can manage to get home & I shan't give up hoping till 7pm on that day. If however, it is impossible—don't worry yourself over it too much. In these extraordinary days we have to forego many customs & celebrations that we would not dream of missing if

things were normal. So don't get yourself in any one's bad books by pressing the point too much if things are against you. We can always celebrate when you get your next seven days—better late than never!

As I told you in my note this morning, poor old Uncle Ted had died.⁴⁷ The funeral is on Friday afternoon, after which Auntie will make her home at the T.B (*Two Brewers*). She will have the sitting room.

Mum & Dad are busy packing up her things to be brought to the Heath. Son & I (he comes home on Saturday) may go up on Sunday to finish the odds & ends if necessary.

I asked Dad to bring the garden tools (including a barrow) to the Heath as I said we could do with most of them. Needless to say Uncle's death curtails my dancing activities for a bit—something that I am sure will please you.

Pressure at work is very heavy & everyone is talking about being called up. We shall probably lose Joan & young Ron (the surveyor's clerk) & this morning [cheers]} came a letter from the Ministry of labour & National Service to say that E?V Wheeler could not be regarded as being reserved

That shook him! I wish you could have seen him. He went straight along to Williams to ask him to see about deferment (sic) . Later on in the day I told him (in front of the Kids) that Mr Waine our Surveyor, who is 39, says he does not wish the Council to try and get his calling up deferred, and unless he is very thick skinned my dig must have struck home

As things stand at present, I & young Roy, my office boy are the only two people at present reserved, & goodness knows how long my reservation will last. Even if it does, the work & responsibility falling on me is going to be hellish---I only hope I get paid accordingly.

Well [...] I would have sent you cigarettes again today, but not knowing your address, it may be risky—they may not get forwarded to you. So I think I shall wait till I can send them direct to you.

And now having exhausted my news, though its only 9 pm., I had better stop writing, just adding that [.....]

⁴⁷ See page 188

*THE CAMP,
THORPE-LE-FALLOWS.
3RD DEC. (1941)*

My Darling,

No letter from you today, I expect that's a kind of punishment to me for not writing you yesterday, but I was ever so disappointed, & I do hope I get one tomorrow. I am D.C. now, here at Thorpe, & will remain in sole command until I go on my course, it's a bit of a worry on a big place like this, but I've managed the first day safely, & if tomorrow goes as well I shan't worry. Speaking to Sgt. Warden today about my promotion, I find that the War Office have to sanction the rank before I sew on my extra stripes, I do hope I wasn't too optimistic when I spent 4/6 on them, but anyway, I guess I shall use them one day.

Last night, George & myself went round to Mrs. Warner's for a break, & as usual spent a jolly evening, though they're miles above our social status, they go hunting, & that to me is sufficient proof of superiority, though nicer people one could never meet, we usually play Newmarket all evening, remember when we used to enjoy our card evenings?

Our weather has been pretty awful here, fog, for two whole days, & it's still here. Yesterday, on our way out to work, we were prevented from getting to our destination by an accident which was blocking the road, it had just happened, a bus, collided with a lorry full of tarmac. All the passengers of the bus were on the side of the road & every one injured with cuts & blood everywhere, & the lorry, well, if you could have seen it, the front was just squashed flat, & that's not exaggerated, & the poor driver was amongst it somewhere, dead as a doornail, & absolute mincemeat, we had to walk the rest of the way to our work, & three hours later, when our lorry brought a load of ashes for our roadmaking, he told us that he had just towed the wreckage apart, & as they parted, so the remains of the corpse came into view, it put our driver off his dinner, & he absolutely crawled along for the rest of the day, & really, anyone who escaped accidents yesterday was very lucky, because honestly, visibility was not more than five yards, & even now it's cleared a bit, once can only see for about fifteen or perhaps twenty yards, so if this is a sample of good old Lincolnshire weather, give me Hertfordshire every time.

Now you want to know the reason for me becoming D.C. here, well, today some of the new places were taken over, leaving Sgt. Robbs, George Platt & myself in charge, then Sgt. Robbs was told he had to go to Oxford for a few days with regard to his commission, which left just George & myself, & as I am on the two stripe list, I become No. 1, & George my No. 6, & if we're left alone we shall manage very well. Of course I shall relinquish this post on Sunday, because on the next day I shall be off to Tuxford, & from what I see of things now, the prospect of leave before Xmas don't exist, though I still hold out vague hopes for the 18th don't despair darling, just keep saying your prayers, & if you need me badly, I'll be there. About this call up for women, will you please allay my fears as much as you can, does it affect you, & if so, how, & since you will not go into munitions should you be entangled?, surely you'd be better off as an expectant mother & living at home, it would also ease the worry of waiting until too late perhaps, & in either case you would give up the house. This way you would help the country, & also me, or do you prefer your Butterfly existence to go on till perhaps the war is over & we're too old to have the children we planned. Think it over, go beneath the surface a bit this time & think of the future from more than one angle. Don't think I'm selfish, or silly, I'm serious, & most of all, it's your decision, but after all, we are married, & have had more freedom than we planned, why not talk it over with your Mum, & of course, if you can continue as you are, & do not have to go,, well, just forget my suggestions. Cross? please don't be, you say you could always understand me, I do hope you will this time too.

Now, I heard from Ted today, he's been in the Army for three weeks he says, & doesn't like it, though he admits it might be worse, I shall drop him a line tonight, to help him on his way a bit. Joe also wrote today, he is happy, & will soon be moved to his Home County, isn't he lucky? He is at present near Derby & has visited Dorothy, who also wrote today, they all send their very best love to you, & wish us the best that life can bring.

I shall enclose my song, it's only the melody, & I rearranged & rewrote the words & music myself in the end, because my colleague is gone, the army can't leave pals alone can they.

Will you please explain that I don't understand music sufficiently to be able to write the accompaniment, but if it's good that won't matter, Anyway, please see that it does get that sympathetic hearing you promised, I should be on top of the world if it could be as good as I think it is. Needless to say, my inspiration was my lovely wife, & the incentive was the spur this utter loneliness gives.

Now darling, my supper of toast is ready, & the cocoa is getting cool, enough to drink, and as I have really exhausted my supply of news, & will say Goodnight & God Bless You, [...] . XXX P.S. Look after my music. XXXX

*THE CAMP,
THORPE-LE-FALLOWS.
5th DEC. (1941)*

Darling Wife,

Thank you so very very much for the parcel, & you needn't have worried about the gloves being too big, they're not, & aren't they lovely, I shall be with you each time I wear them now.

The tobacco too, was welcome, though I fear I still prefer cigarettes mostly, it seems to me that I shall never become a real pipe smoker, however I still continue & hope.

I didn't write yesterday because I was too busy, & I had a spot of bother last night with an R.A.S.C. lorry driver, which ended up with a court case this morning, & after getting up early & ready for it, a telephone call came, & our officer wanted to know the details, so O talked him out of the charge, & that worry was over. Next worry came today, they sent five really tough nuts from Battery to me, all Janker boys, one of whom has been in the glasshouse, & before they had even settled in I'd had a row with this one, & told him where he stood, he has now cooled off a bit, so it looks as if I've discovered the right treatment for him. They were all very huffy, & I let them alone till after dinner. Worse still was to come, Major Wotton came round, & he just walked all over the camp, looking every where, then after half an hour gave me the biggest dressing down of my career, said the place was filthy, & wouldn't listen to me explaining that I had only four men to do all the work, he left a very harsh criticism on paper for me in the office, & honestly, the site looked no different than it does any other day, & all the usual cleaning jobs were done, however, he was obviously intending to pick holes, & so I caught all that should have been taken by Sgt. Robbs, & yet he always gets away with his inspections. I will admit I feel very crestfallen, because I've had it all shoved on me so suddenly, it's not like being a D.C. on a single site, or even with all my own men, instead, I have 5 pioneers who live with us, & come under my rule, 1 RASC driver & lorry, 2 new fellows yesterday, & now these other five, & out of all those, I know about 6 men, who are the remnant of good old Shottle days. They've taken all our good men, & sent some buggers, forgive me darling, I guess I'd feel a lot better if I had my stripe confirmed, they're

sure making me wait, I do so hope this apparent failure to please the powers that be, will not interfere in any way, but I do my very best, & that's all I can do.

Now to more pleasant things, your present, yes, Gypsy earrings, just the sort I know you'll love, & I'm proud of them, they were the only pair in Lincoln. I'm glad you got your Hiltone, & I'll consider my effort last week worth while, because you have it anyhow. Course starts Monday, that'll be as you read this letter, & I won't be sorry to have a break, because unlike Sgt. Robbs, I have to be available 24 hours a day. Shall try to go to Lincoln tomorrow just for the afternoon, nothing much can be done in about 2 hours, very little money, but George will be there, & I guess we'll find a bit of fun together somewhere. I wish something could be arranged hereby you could come to me over Xmas, but it's pretty hopeless as things are, & I guess we'll have to spend it apart again, but, like you, I won't give up hope for the 18th. until the actual day is here.

Remember Tiny Adams? he tried his hand at cooking today, we haven't a real cook now, & they tried to make a rabbit pie, it was a scream, I watched them, he had an assistant who knew no more than he did, & they did the stewing of the rabbit OK, then tipped it into a big meat dish about 2 feet long, 1 foot across, & five inches deep, Tiny had already made the pastry, using a full bottle of sauce as a rolling pin, then came the difficult task of putting the pastry over the tin, so the two of them seized an end each, having remembered to place a large china mug in the centre first to keep it up, & after a little flutter, they got it covered, then came the trimming, & I told Tiny to cut all round the edge of the tin, which he did, but as soon as the overlap dropped off, the pastry started slipping into the meat, & as fast as he rescued one end, the other end slipped, they ended by Tiny holding it in position with both hands, whilst his assistant cut little bits of dough in strips, & fixed them lengthways over the top, so that it looked for all the world like hinges all over the top, but it did the trick, & into the oven it went, I didn't eat any, but it was a success, everyone who hadn't seen it made, enjoyed it, but neither myself, Tiny, or his assistant had any, we had seen it mucked about too much. I know I laughed & laughed, it was such a relief after Wotton's visit.

Just a note to say how very sorry I am about poor Uncle Ted, because though unexpected things are always happening, I was accordingly prepared, it still seems to hit me, he was such a healthy old lad, I can hardly believe it could happen so soon, I guess his poor wife won't last long now, I shall be surprised if she gets over it. Please

convey my deepest sympathy & help her through in every way you can, Best of luck kid.

Goodnight darling, it's late I've had a rotten day, but telling you all about it helps me a lot, & your letters now are wonderful, I look forward more than ever to them, they help such a lot, please keep loving me & telling me, I need it more than ever now, & the worst of it is I daren't take a night out because I'm always wanted, roll on the end of the war.

I love you & adore you always, Bill. P.S. Just heard that Wotton was drunk last night, guess I stopped his hangover. Love Bill. XXX

Four Winds
Friday 5 December 1941

My darling Bill

For two days now I haven't heard from you &, of course, I do not know at all where you are. I presume your move has prevented you finding time to write to me, but I shall be glad when I receive your new address, but if I don't hear from you tomorrow I shall send this letter to Thorpe, and I hope the other letters addressed there have reached you too.

Well, I have nothing particularly exciting to relate. Today, of course I have been to Uncle's funeral Auntie, I must say, bore up very well & afterwards seemed quite willing to discuss the moving of what belongings she required to the Heath, though it must be very hard to have to pull up roots of forty years standing in one house & make a fresh start at her age I only hope things work out all right & she fits in & is fairly happy at the Heath.

Now, here I am, home again. A bit fed up & depressed—mostly because there is nothing nice to look forward to at the weekend-& one's own company can be rather boring at times. However, I am going to have my hair permed tomorrow afternoon so that will help the time along a little

Well [...] Short as this letter is, it seems that I having nothing more to add. The mood is not on me for writing tonight. If however, I hear from you in the morning, I may be able to add some more lines--- & now Goodnight [.....] Always ...

Saturday 8.30 pm

Well darling, I am afraid I did not send off this letter today after all. It really did not seem worth it—There was absolutely nothing in it. Anyway this morning I received a letter from you & this evening your vests with another letter, so now perhaps I can find some more to write about

About your vests, my dear, I see that the letter you wrote with them was (sic) written on the 1st—yet I do not receive the parcel till the evening of the 6th. I hope you won't be held up too much for clean underclothes because of this. I will send them off to you the first thing on Monday morning— you should get them on Tuesday or Wednesday.

This afternoon I had my hair permed & then went to tea at your mothers. George is home for seven days & one of his pals is here too, for 48 hours. He is Scotch & cannot get home for short leaves. They are going dancing this evening with George's best man & his wife. They would have liked me to make up the round number but I don't want to go this week because of Uncle's death—I don't think it looks very nice, so here I am sitting at home by a dismal fire that will not burn up. There is a terrible wind tonight & raining too. I feel sorry for anyone out in this weather tonight & they are many round Hertford, as there are huge manoeuvres on which include the Army, Home Guard, ARP & Fire guards—they are lasting over the week end so there will be lots of empty beds tonight.

Now about your song. I do not think anyone will accept it without an accompaniment so Joan from the office has taken it home to add one. You didn't put any key—did you know however, Joan will add anything that is necessary. Then I will see if I can get it a hearing.

I am sorry I havnt sent any cigs lately but I thought you had gone away. I will, however, send some with your vests (which should arrive the same day, or the day after this letter)

I'm sorry to hear you can't wear your other stripe yet. As I have told people here that you have got your second now, I hope it will be finally approved before you come on leave.

I doesn't look as if you will be home for the 18th, does it but until that day, I shall keep hoping

I hope you managed your DC job all right. I hope too that you will do well on the Tuxford course. After your recent successes I know you won't fail badly, anyway. Well, my dear, I really think that I have exhausted all my news—so I will say

Goodnight God bless you & send you my love—as always—

THERE FOLLOW SEVERAL LETTERS PROBABLY FROM THORPE -LE-FALLOWS CAMP WHICH HAVE NO DATES.

Monday

Dear Darling,

I know you will be glad to know that although I didn't leave Hatfield until 11.30 this morning, I was actually in Lincoln at 4.45, amazing luck wasn't it, & that means I only took 4 ³/₄ hours to do all those miles, there's no doubt about it that the North Road is best for travel.

Now to tell you about my journey. Firstly when I got on the bus at Hertford, who should I see but the air force fellow who brought me home on Saturday, so of course we had a good old chin wag, & the journey to de Havillands went very quickly, we wished each other luck, & I walked towards Welwyn, signalling cars until one stopped, a huge Wolesley, with a real "gent" driving, he was off to Cambridge, & took me as far as Baldock, he said my luck was out, because usually on Mondays he travelled to Newark, & I agreed with him, but after a little walk through Baldock I managed to stop a lorry which was going to Northampton, & I went as far as Bedford with him, & the next lift was another fast car going to the East Coast, but he wasn't going my way, & I got out at St. Neots, where I had to walk about 2 miles because there seemed to be a space in the traffic, but eventually, a little khaki car came along, & I had ago at it, & it turned out to be a NAAFI car, the man was some kind of manager, & was going to York, so of course I went as far as Newark with him, a distance of c some 80 or 90 miles, we travelled at 50 all the time, & he really was a delightful personality, he'd a son in the army, stationed out Cairo way somewhere, who is also in A.A., he said it was a crime that motorists should pass us by because it didn't cost them anything, & altogether we got on very well, he's seen a lot of England, told me all about Scotland, Ireland & Wales, & the Shetlands & Orkneys, in fact it was a real education to converse with him. Well, he didn't know the way, & I wasn't very sore, but I kept directing him, & we landed without mishap at Newark at 3 o'clock to the minute, where I said goodbye to him, & he went to get some lunch. I was sorry to leave him, but had to be on my way, though now I had only another 26 miles to cover, so I found the Lincoln Road, & in 2 lifts, both fast army cars, I arrived in Lincoln at the time already stated, and this my first time in Lincoln, here is

my description, the lousiest, sleepest, moth eaten, miserable, one eyed town (or city) in England, it's really horrible, all canals, & wharves, railway crossings over the main street, & no cigarettes & no Hiltone, I tried all the appropriate shops in the main street with negative results in both cases, needless to say, I was disgusted, & even more so when I wanted to find the place where the bus started from, it took a quarter of an hour, & I was only just in time, after following side streets & coming out beside a canal, I found the bus stop was over the other side of a sort of harbour, full of barges, it was like a sea port, & a desolate scene. I think a more appropriate description would be to liken it to a London dock, I hate it, & won't often go there unless to the picture. That's the last straw, Lincolnshire, & Lincoln itself is the most unbeautiful place in the world. Anyhow, I got my bus, & that was the chief thing, & believe it or not, although it had been pouring with rain all the time I was travelling, I didn't get a spot on me until I reached this lousy little village, from where I had two miles to walk, and it poured, so I had to get the old groundsheet out at last, and it was just twilight as I walked into the back of beyond. Duggie had just left, & it seems he has been kicking up a fuss, because we don't get back in time, & in future, somehow, we've got to be back by two, but I'd love to find out about travelling time, perhaps you could get some information, because if we really are entitled to not, I shall assert myself, & even if we aren't. I still won't get back any earlier.

Hertford seems to be a long way off now, here in the wilds, alone & dreary, I have only the loveliest memories as proof of its existence, & I shall know no peace of mind until I'm there again, once more to hold you in my arms, [...]

And now my sweet, I have eaten & found a cup of tea, my head is clear, though I have an ache in my heart, [...] Soon I shall be off to bed, I think I'm tired enough to sleep, I hope so, because otherwise it will be torture, I do hope you too will sleep, & perchance we shall meet in dreams. Goodnight

WEDNESDAY

Sweetheart Mine,

Forgive me for not writing yesterday, I was sent out in charge of a working party all day, & became very tired, so that when we got in at night, I had eaten a hot meal, & had a wash, I went early to bed, and tho' I know I ought to write, I was just

too utterly tired & browned off to do so. All day long we were working in mud & water on one of the new sites, and awful place, I hope I don't have to go there, it's as bad as this, Our food for the day consisted of bread again, good isn't it/ How they expect us to work our best on that all day I have yet to learn, but we do get a dinner at night, though for the most part, I never feel like it after having to wait such a long time. Today I had to go again, & it's rained all day long here, you simply cannot visualise the awful mess that place is in, but just think of the marsh⁴⁸ in the depth of winter, magnify the mud & water, & you'll have a good idea of what it's like, and that sums up the whole district, it's all the same.

I got back here tonight, and found I was free for a change, but nowhere to go, so since making my bed, I pulled a novel out of the coal bin, read it, & put it back from whence it came, it was a powerful love story, all about a girl who went wrong, & then met the ideal lover, but it all came out right, & so I didn't mind, but whenever I read about lovers, & love scenes, I am filled with a longing for you [...]

I fear this work party business each day is spoiling my chances for study, but I still feel pretty confident & will have a good old brush up the day before the "do". You will be delighted to know that I was 6th on the course, & the best of this Battery, Eric was 7th so I still hold sway as top dog, I didn't get a D., against my name though, only a Q.1., but that's next, & pretty good for a novice, & though not entirely satisfied, it will carry me on for a bit, please pray for me all day Saturday darling, I know your thoughts make a vast difference to my life, for instance you thought of me all the way back here on Monday, & my luck held all the time, so please prove this fact by doing likewise on Saturday next. Talking of lifts, one fellow here arrived at the camp gate by a small van, which had brought him all the way from Wood Green in London in one long hop, he was going to Gainsborough which is near here, so if that aint luck, I don't know what is, & it only goes to prove that mine's still no more than average, though I cannot complain, we are still luckier than lots of other people.

Tomorrow I guess I shall be out again, though we don't leave until 9 which allows us to meet the postman first, the only thing which matters in this desolate place, I often wonder if I'll ever get out to do any shopping for you, though I'll not give up hope yet. If ever you do come this way to visit me darling, you'll see that rather than exaggerating, I have not done the loneliest of the place justice. You found Shottle lonely, well, wait till you see this, all I hope is that we'll move before long, or I'm sure we'll all go "bats". Sgt. Warden is supposed to be coming back today, I hope

⁴⁸ Waterford Marsh

so, he looks after our leave better than anyone else I know, & tho' whilst he was actually here before, the fellows would have cheerfully shot him, they know now they are worse off without him, & will welcome him back.

Oh! I forgot, we have two new members to the menagerie, first, a little kitten strayed in yesterday & registered as a canteen wallah by bagging the chair in front of the fire, & today Sgt. Robbs brought back from leave a dear little puppie (sic) which is a first cross between a Cairn & a Scottie, we've christened him Plato, which is Sgt. Robbs nickname if he did but know it. The chicken flourishes, & should soon start to produce an egg each day, it has grown into a healthy clean limbed leghorn pullet, & is a real credit to those who have reared it, I hope it lays, because Ted Smith the cook threatens to cook it for Xmas if it doesn't come up to expectations by then.

I had a letter from Dorothy Fletcher this morning, she hadn't much to say, except thank me for 'phoning her, she tells me Joe is enjoying himself at last, & is a sergeant for the duration of the course at least, & if he passes muster will retain the stripes, I wish him all the luck in the world, & hope soon he will write me so that I can get into touch with him again.

Thank you darling for the envelopes, they are just in time, you will see I had one left by your letter I wrote Monday night, I found that after rummaging about in my case, but now of course I have a lovely supply, & needn't worry for a week or so. I'm ever so glad you went early to bed the day I left, & I hope you slept, it was the best thing you could do, & I know you didn't wish any harder than I for the comfort we found in each other's arms at bed time, I know I will never fail to appreciate it again when all this terrible trouble is over, [...]

Soon I shall be in bed again, a lonely, hard bed, grubby blankets instead of clean airy sheets, & no-one beside me[...] *(there follows a short poem)*

Wednesday (Sorry Thursday)

Dear Darling,

I missed the usual letter this morning, & spent a lonely day, they have come to mean so much to me now, I simply can't afford to lose even one, I wonder if I shall get two tomorrow, I hope so.

I've been digging again all day, & am now thoroughly worn out, my cold has got on top of me, & if it weren't for the exams on Saturday I'm blessed if I wouldn't go sick, as it is I'm in bed by nine, & writing as I lie here. I have been sitting in front of the Canteen fire, too tired to work & get out of my overalls, just flopped off the lorry, got my dinner & then fell into a chair & slept for an hour, & since awakening listened to the wireless for a while. After this, I came over here, had a bit of a wash, then rinsed my feet, & socks, & here I am, no news, nothing at all to write about, except that I hope next time Jerry drops bombs he'll try to wipe out Lincolnshire, because the more I see of it, the more I believe in evolution, & this bit forgot to evolve. Rain, cold winds, & mud, miles of perfectly straight roads as flat as a billiard table, can you wonder if I should suddenly go mad, & we have to go out digging of all things, it's terrible, & I'm covered with sweat which turns cold, & mud which goes hard, it makes me wish a thousand times I wasn't in the army, but had been more fortunate & got into the Navy, where we could be thoroughly wet, & still keep clean. Ah! Well, I guess we shall win, but it won't be by what we're doing I'm sure.

Fortunately, I still have a lovely wife, she is my guiding star, without her I might as well be swallowed up by the very mud I'm digging [...] I can go to sleep & perhaps awaken in the morning feeling fresher & happier, especially as I'm sure there'll be a letter. Goodnight Angel,

SUNDAY

My Darling,

Thank you for your lovely long letter, it was such a relief to hear from you again, and to know that you still think of me, for having lived nearly a week without news, is like being forgotten, and I don't like it a bit.

Now, I didn't write yesterday because I know I should have more time today, so I'll try to recount all that has happened since my last letter. You will be interested to know that Joe has been successful with his educational transfer, and he leaves us on the 7th November. I'm glad he has been successful, but how I shall miss his quiet & yet reassuring company, you will never quite realise, but at least he will have what he wanted, and that's really all that matters.

Yesterday was much the same as every day, except that after maintenance I wangled permission to work on the faulty chimney to the canteen fire, we carved a

huge hole in the roof, and continued the brick work right through, it looks really professional, but that's because there was a bricklayer on the job, I only helped, but you ought to see the fire now, it works, no more smoke & fumes, we have a huge open fire to sit round, it takes over a half hundredweight of coal & coke, & is just like a malting fire, but it's lovely to see a fire, & now we have something to spend our winter evenings on instead of going to bed early, it stays alight all night, & is still there for breakfast. Last night all those on duty gathered round & we spent a fairly pleasant evening just toasting our toes & listening to the wireless. Did you listen in? I expect you were dancing, but because we had a fire, & a radio I couldn't help thinking of you, & hoping you were just doing the same. There was a good feature on all about boots, it was St. Crispin's day, the patron saint of boots, & his storey was intriguing, & the programme a wonderful medley of snatches of music old & new, & delightful stories, and it was nearly 11 o'clock before we stirred ourselves sufficiently to go to bed. During the building of the chimney, we had to borrow a ladder & a trowel, so we ventured to the only home nearby, a big one, & asked for those things which we got, & also made the acquaintance of the owner, a woman of 40 with 2 children, a daughter of 15 & son of 16, her husband is a Lieut. Dentist and they have taken over this huge home for the duration, and it has 7 bedrooms, 3 or 4 reception, & all sorts of other odd little places, in fact a typical country mansion, & do you know what the rent is? 12/6, amazing isn't it, no rates either, but then it's nuchal terribly long way from anywhere that I expect the owner couldn't get a tenant at its real value. She extended an invitation to any of us who cared to go there in the evenings, they have billiards & darts, & all kinds of things, & she says we can have supper too, so I guess sooner or later some of us will be taking full advantage of her hospitality. We are all assembled now in the friendly glow of the fire, Lois Levy⁴⁹ is on, I expect you are listening tonight at any rate, he has played a selection from Bitter Sweet to end with, & the wonderful strains of "I'll see you again", it brings back such vivid memories of 9 days heaven, & my heart is with you this moment as never before, their love in that picture was great, but mine is even greater, I'm sure of that. Now he has ended, & there is nothing else of interest on for a while, & so we have switched off, leaving a silence broken only by sighs, & the scratching of pen nibs upon paper, as we convey our thoughts to those we love.

I'm afraid that you'll find my letters these days er very disjointed, but I just write & write, and anyway, I expect you are glad to have them, in whatever form I write. I'm also developing the habit of scribbling too aren't I? That's because when I start writing with my magic pen, my thoughts run faster than I can write, with the

⁴⁹ Louis Lewy was an English film music director and conductor

consequence that you have to decipher my scrawl, but still darling, I do give you plenty of practice don't I? I expect you can read it as well as I can-----

Break here for supper, a dixie of soup has arrived, & stands in front of the fire, we have all dipped in with mugs & plates, & enjoyed some really fine rabbit soup, you see we have had rabbit pie for dinner today, & this is the remains, but you know how very acceptable a bowl of soup can be this weather, & so do the cooks, I can assure you it was very nice. That's one good thing about our Battery anyway, we really do get good food, our rationing scheme is very generous, & now we are settled here, is running full swing again, & as our appetites have increased with change of air, we are eating all we get, I bet I'll become fat again before I come home, I expect you'll go thin if you are still continuing your exercises.

We do so miss our electric light, these old lamps are so very miserable, & the light is dreary.

I forgot to tell you that when we were coming down here on our lorry, we passed about fifty Italian prisoners working in the fields, we shouted them, and every man jack gave us the victory sign, so it certainly looked as if they were happy in England. But there, apart from being in a strange land, they get a better deal than we do, they at least start & finish work at the right time, & have proper leisure hours, & you may depend they get good meals. All the same, I'd rather be English & put up with a few inconveniences until we win, then perhaps we'll get a square deal, because we're not getting one at the moment.

When your letter arrived on Saturday. It was accompanied by one from Dorothy, she sends her love & good wishes to you, & asked me to pass them on when next I wrote, the resay of her letter is very sad, she keeps looking at the camp, & thinking of us, & I know too well the agony which memories can bring, & I pity her. She has sent a parcel to Joe, in which she says she has enclosed cigarettes for me, & she also said I was to tell her of any little thing I wanted, so it looks as if she'd spoil me too if she had the chance, She says she's very fond of us, I don't doubt it, but she really shouldn't have allowed it to go so far, I only hope that our continued absence will help her to forget how much we meant to her. I don't think she will do as you suggested, join the forces, she has settled down at home until Dick gets married, & I wouldn't mind betting that now we're gone she will have no more trouble with her father, I hope not anyhow, because we shan't be there to comfort her. The lads are

going to have the wireless on again soon, “Happydrome”⁵⁰ is due at eight, I hate it, that fool Enoch’s horrible voice bursting through everything is a real nuisance, but they’ll enjoy them selves, & that’s what a canteen is for, so I am training to concentrate amidst all sorts of diversions, it’s a hell of a job to begin with, but I know I shall win, & so I continue.

Actually there is no more news, I wish you’d ask me a few questions now and then, I could have something to fall back on then, & I’m sure my descriptions of all things I tell you of cannot be completely satisfying. I see you had Kitty with you, I’m glad although as you say, she probably won’t be quite as lonely as you, nevertheless I like to think of you getting together occasionally, & I know Len will. Thank you for his address, I shall pass on a letter to him tonight, it’s early, & I guess he’ll be glad to hear from as many people as will write to him. You mention my socks from Mother again, I fear I shall never see them, our D.R. has already been to Shottle to collect any mail which may have been delivered after we left, but he returned empty handed, & I’m not the only one who was anticipating things, several others know that there should be letters there for them, I know I hadn’t read those characters wrongly, & it looks as if I have lost a pair of good socks, & Mum will not know how the feet fitted after all, *cest la guerre*. Didn’t know I could speak French did you? Here’s some more, *chez vous amour*, I know German too, *Ich habe dich so liebe*, quite a linguist aren’t I? & in English too I can say it, I love you. [...]

We have just been called out by the sentry to have a look at the decoy light in the next field, it seems like a young searchlight, & should let us in for a bit of fun. The Happydrome is on now, & it takes such a lot of my attention from letter writing, I’m glad I’ve nearly finished, because I like to be quiet if possible when I write to you, it brings us so near to each other, don’t you feel that, it’s so easy for me to picture you at home, & I can almost imagine I’m there with you, I wish I were, but in spite of the paper’s headlines about leave for soldiers & square deals etc., we are still treated anyhow, but I’m sure the War Office don’t know about us, we are separate from the army, we’re 401 Battery, the “stooges”.

Well sweetheart, it seems as if I have about used up all my material, so I’ll close down for tonight, but always bear this in mind, Night & Day you are the one [...] I will, be glad when the time comes to die for you. Goodnight my dearest

⁵⁰ The Happidrome was a BBC radio comedy programme produced in Britain between 1941 and 1947.

P.S. We've found out that the decoy light is only about 200 yards away. The boys have told me to add this postscript to say it might be the last letter you'll get for a long while, but we're only ragging. Bill & the boys.

CHAPTER EIGHT

*DIV. SCHOOL, (S/L WING)
MILTIA CAMP
OLLERTON ROAD
TUXFORD
NEWARKNOTTS.
TUESDAY 19TH (DECEMBER 1941)*

Dearest,

Forgive me for neglecting you so these last few days, but you must know by now, that I have my hands full.

I will commence to recount my experiences as from Saturday. First of all I was called out to investigate a mysterious parachute which had landed a mile away, & it certainly did look sinister when I got there, but I was foolishly brave perhaps, & went straight to it, & I found attached to it a white box with wire coming from it, well, it could have been a booby trap, but I turned it over & found a label telling me that it belonged to the air ministry, & that I was to report time, date, etc., to an address in London, & in the meantime I was to keep the instrument in a dry place until further instructions, so, still rather worried that it could be a Jerry trick, I detached the box, & carried it a mile back to the camp, half expecting I might blow up any minute, & when I informed Battery, it did cause a stir, I left it to them, but the box is still at Thorpe, or was, when I left.

That was an exciting start for the day, then I got on with my cleaning "Blitz" that Major Wotton had started, & he came up again, & found as many more faults, & this time I had Sgt. Warden with me, so I stood up to him, so much so, that he's got a new opinion of me now, & not altogether favourable I bet, but he expects miracles, & I only had four men, though he wouldn't accept that as an excuse, despite the fact that Sgt. Warden told him he could find more faults on his own site, anyway, heaven knows what will happen now, I left on Monday Morning, & was very very glad to do so, I wish I could stay here, it's lovely to have a bath every night, & electricity, central heating etc., such a welcome change.

On Sunday, we had a compulsory cross country race, in which 56 of us ran, it was a five miles course, & a gruelling one too, but I managed to come 18th. which I think

was good, but now, I'm stiff all over, ache in every joint, got a cold, & am covered all over with scratches, so you can guess what I think of cross country races.

Now for this course, as I told you, it's a Radiolocation course, & definitely the finest one I've had, no red tape, no parades, no P.T., no footdrill, it's all lectures & practical periods, & I'm thrilled to bits if still a little mystified, but I think I'll be wiser by the end of the course. We have to do long hours, having reveille at 6.15, & first & only parade at ten past eight, & no time is wasted between periods either, & this goes on till 5.15. when we have tea, & after that a "prep" period of one hour, so we finish then, at 7. It's terribly complicated, but also very very fascinating & certainly effective, poor old Jerry won't have a chance if he dares to try raiding any more.

Well sweetheart, I know I haven't written lately, but I seem to have condensed my news very thoroughly, so now to general comments. First, I do need cash, please help, secondly still waiting for a second stripe to appear on orders, hope it's soon. Next, thank your little friend for helping to write my song, you didn't say what you thought about it, & you certainly weren't over enthusiastic, so it seems that it "aint much good, anyway, please give it a chance. Glad to hear Auntie Nell took her blow calmly, & with you, I hope she will manage to live happily as possible at the Heath. Also, I'm glad you have abandoned dancing for a while, & I think a week is too short a period if you really do want to show a little respect, try a fortnight, there must be other things to do, for instance, I need a scarf, a nice easy job for you, what about it? you seem to be swinging all your knitting on to Mum, whereas you should get pleasure out of doing it for me. I mustn't grumble at you though, you're awfully good to me, so I love you for it, please keep it up, I need it while I keep upsetting old Wotton, but perhaps I've done myself a good turn, who knows? anyway, he knows I've got guts now.

Well sweet, I've got buttons to clean & boots to polish, so will you please forgive me if this note seems short, I have so little time to myself this week, that I just have time for supper & a bath, & it's almost time for bed, & I'm awfully tired too, so goodnight darling until tomorrow, I'll write again if I can. [...] XXX

*Militia Camp,
Wednesday 10th Dec (1941)*

Dear Darling,

Your parcel arrived here safely this morning, & I must say I'm glad to get it, both for the cigarettes and the clean washing, but oh that letter, one good page of ticking off, I guess I deserved it, but I can't for the life of me recall having made any reference recently to the subject under discussion, at least, not so strong as I have been. Ah! well, such is life, and so for not making me miserable, I guess you shouldn't have sent it if you had any suspicions at all that it might, I leave it to you now if you can remember what you wrote.

Enough of petty things, though at the moment there are few other subjects of importance to discuss, however, I'll try to collect what news of interest I have, & we'll see if it makes a respectable letter. I think I told you I had another cold, I feel pretty rotten, & my head aches all the time, my lips too are getting awfully sore & dry, I think it must be due to the cold winds, though knowing this doesn't help matters much. Today on the course has just been another mad whirl of circuits & diagrams, my head is full of them, & not one is as it should be, I do hope it becomes more orderly towards the end of the week, or I shall fail miserably. We won't talk about that. The food here is good & clean?, but not nearly enough, all of us have to buy suppers at nights, it's fortunate that we have a N.A.A.F.I. & in truth we have no time to get any further afield, because the evening is gone by the time we've finished the day's work, I'm writing now in the period between tea & "prep", so you can see, if it were not interesting, we should be heartily browned off by now.

Things look pretty black for the 18th, we have to find men to man two more sites, & that means a lot where leave is concerned, so you'll have to hope harder if you really want me home for that date, needless to say I shall explore every possibility as soon as I get back. I shall have another bath tonight, I'm taking fullest advantage of the wonderful facilities provided here, because all too soon we shall be back at that awful hell hole Thorpe, honestly, after only two days of this life, I positively dread it, do you know, until I came here, I hadn't seen my face in a mirror for weeks, there are none on the site, & we all shave & wash from memory, & right up till now, I haven't heard a wireless since I last saw you. Ours is broken down, & it would be wonderful to hear some music once again, I guess I'll have to wait until I do get home once more -----

Break here for 3 hours, 2 of which have been spent drawing diagrams, it was so very fascinating that we gladly stayed an hour overtime on our “prep” period, and this was followed by a nice supper at the N.A.A.F.I., in a pleasant little room set aside for Bombardiers, & of course a chat & a smoke with numerous friends and acquaintances. Now it is nine oclock, & raining again, so I guess we’ll get a wet night.

Well angel, [...] by now you should have received other letters of mine telling you of my urgent need for comfort which only you can give, [...] Goodnight Sweetheart,

Four Winds
Tuesday 16 December 1941

Dearest Bill

You know you are a naughty boy----- Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday—four days without a letter from you. Wouldn’t you be cross if I did the same!

I suppose you have finished your course now & are back at Thorpe. I hope all the figures & problems sorted themselves out before the end of your course & you were able to make as much sense of them as the rest of the class.

You will be pleased to know that this evening I have started on your scarf. I do hope it will not take as long as the gloves, but, being straightforward, & so followed? Without a pattern book, I don’t think it will. It has turned colder down here, so I expect you have a drop in temperature too, & will want your scarf as soon as possible.

I saw my friend Jack I the town today & was moaning about having 4 ½ days holiday & nothing nice to do and he suggested that I come up to see you. I said that I did not think I would find anywhere to sleep and he replied “Well you can at least write & ask Bill to have a look round. If he is keen in you coming he is sure to do his best to find somewhere”

Well, I couldn’t help remembering the trouble you had at Shottle, but it started an idea in my head & I wondered if it would be possible to come & see you on Friday (Boxing Day) & return home on Sunday. Do you think it would be possible (provided I do not see you on the 18th) Is there any hope of a bed (or a settee) at the village pub or, anywhere else near, just for two nights? What do you think? If you decide that I

could come, you could send me a telegram, not later than Tuesday & I would catch the earliest possible train on Boxing morning so as to arrive in daylight. You wouldn't have to come & meet me. I would find my own way If you do send a telegram, please address it to 20 Castle St (or simply Hertford 3007) as it reaches me quicker & the Aunts don't get the chance of opening it.

Well darling this is just a sudden idea, which Jack has egged me on to suggesting, so if it is not possible, never mind—I leave it to you to decide as to whether it is practical or not. Its too late to start another page tonight so---night, pleasant dreams [...]

*The Camp,
South Carlton
Dec 19th (1941)*

My Wonderful one,

Fortune favoured me today, I travelled from De Havillands to Newark in one car, & it only took 3 hours, why couldn't I have been as lucky coming home? Anyway, I was so very grateful for such a lucky break, and when I got to Newark I took a bus to Lincoln (16 miles) & it only cost 1/3, I arrived there at 4 p.m., & only had to wait a quarter of an hour for the bus to this camp, & I was back here before dark, so it seems as if the white heather did work after all.

When I got here I found that poor old Fred Burgess was in hospital, he has lost two fingers at least, had an accident with the generator, & it literally tore his hand to pieces, that happened yesterday, & has rather unnerved everybody for Xmas. I found George in charge when I got here, & tomorrow he goes back to Thorpe, which leaves me a D.C. once more, hope it works out better this time.

I got two letters, yours for the 18th, & the 7/- (35p) one, I'm still waiting for Mum's parcel. I'm very tired, & I hope You'll excuse the shortness of this note, because I really must get to bed, but tomorrow there will be more to relate I guess, so until then remember, the most wonderful 18th, and the fact that I positively adore you.

Saturday is here, & I'm moving again, it looks as if our Xmas is off, I'm going as D.C. to Saxilby, maybe for the weekend, & maybe for longer, so at the moment, I don't even know where I shall be for Xmas, naturally I'm annoyed & upset but I shall have to make the best of it. Now in about 1 hour, I shall be gone from here, but if you have sent my present, the boys here will see that I get it. I'll write at length tonight if I'm allowed any time when I've taken over, so until then sweetheart, cheer up, & happy Xmas, & if I do come back here on Monday, I've started accommodation enquiries which if successful, I'll telegram you, so I'll keep hoping. XXXXXXXX

Four Winds
Friday 19 December 1941

Dear darling,

Just a short note to you, since seeing you off this morning.

First of all, I do hope you had an easy journey back. I shall be waiting to hear about that. It is now 9. Pm. Up till now I have been busy straightening the house, & now I have a nice fire & hope to get to bed fairly early after a bath. I'm tired so I know you must be.

Wheeler has been as sweet as sugar to me all day, so whatever he thought about my late arrival, he kept it to himself.

Mary told me this morning that she thinks you are a very nice boy (as if I didn't know) and that I am lucky to have you for a husband. What do you think??

Cyril Halt? Called this evening and asked for your address, so I expect you will be hearing from him very shortly. I hope all my letters addressed to Thorpe have reached you safely by now. You must have had quite a read.

Well darling I think that's all for now, for I do feel so tired, & that make me realize how my poor husband must feel.

Goodnight my love, your own ..

P.S wasn't it a lovely 48?

*The Camp,
South Carlton
20 Dec 1941*

My wonderful one,

Although I use the above address, I still am at my new abode, hoping all the time that the move will be but a temporary one, & that by the time you are reading this I shall be back in my little village of South Carlton. 'Tis a grand feeling to be a real D.C., I have a little hut all on my own, with a good lamp, & a nice fire, so you see, the job has its advantages, though I've been pretty busy since taking over, being occupied with sorting various things out which were left in an awful mess. The whole afternoon I spent in making plans of the site, & the thing that made me swear was the fact that I had already made a lot for the other camp, & if this D.C. had done his job properly, they should have been completed for this site. However, the job's done now, & I have the satisfaction of knowing I have done two men's work.

Now I guess you'd like to know more about poor old Freddie Burgess. It appears that he was down at the generator with our No. 9 & they were going to adjust the fan belt, & this being done, the No. 9 started the engine, & after a moment or two heard a cry from Freddie, who had been poking about inside, whereupon the other boy dashed round to see what had happened, & found Freddie about to faint, his hand being about half torn off, & the fan belt broken. From what I can make of it, Freddie was doing what his better sense should have warned him to leave alone, although as usual at accidents of this kind, no-one knows exactly how it happened. He lost pints of blood before they got him to hospital, & has had transfusions, & the last report says his condition is critical, I expect it's the shock. It is reckoned to be a certainty that he will lose two fingers at least, though if it's as bad as descriptions make it, he will lose his hand. One thing is certain, he will lose a stripe, & perhaps all of them, because if sick for more than 3 weeks, the Army automatically remove one stripe, & of course there will be a big court of inquiry, & if as I think, he is proved to have been doing what he should have left alone, well, goodbye 3 stripes. It's all a rotten business, I feel very sorry for him, because he must be in terrible pain.

George Platt is now back at Thorpe for the Xmas holiday, so he will be able to share his Xmas with Mrs Warner, we never seem to stay together very long, all I hope, is that I get back to S. Carlton on Monday when another D.C. gets back from leave, I do hope I can stay there, because even on Monday it will not be too late to let

you know about accommodation, & if I'm lucky, I'd love you to accept the chance, though I agree its asking a lot of you.

I heard a rumour today, that I came third on the last course, I hope it's right, that'll show 'em, I'll confirm this as soon as I know for sure, and anyway, everyone I speak to seems to think I'll get that other stripe after all, I still hold out hope because none of the others are through either.

Sitting here, on my bed, by the light of an oil lamp, I find it hard to realise that only 48 hours ago at this time I was holding you in my arms, what a wonderful time that was [...].

I hope you have received my Xmas card, the words in the verse were not all I could wish for, but it had a red rose, and you know how I love to send red roses to you, they mean so much [...]

And now my dearest one, I must end this note, for try as I will, I can think of no more news, so until tomorrow then darling, I must say Au revoir....

Four Winds
Sunday 21 December 1941

Darling Bill

Sunday once more—I wonder how you are spending it? Mine has been a lazy one. I did not get up till one oclock, & after doing some housework, I spent the afternoon from 2.30 to 5 listening to Handel's Messiah and working on your scarf Yesterday I went to Ware to a dance. Jack & most of his friends were there—11 of them in all. They made a special effort to get together as their officer has received a letter telling him to be prepared to lose all his present wireless operators by January 15th for overseas service-so , although it was a jolly evening, I think most of them felt a bit sad really. For none of them want to go but with the fighting all out in the East, it looks as if you will all be going, doesn't it? Its something I don't want to think about before it comes.

I went up to Enfield yesterday afternoon to have my new costume fitted—It was very foggy. It has been inclined to be foggy ever since you left on Friday, so, my dear, if you do find me digs, I shall not be able to come if the fog does not go. You know what trains are like in fog. I havnt enquired about the times of trains yet. I am waiting to see if I get a telegram from you. I expect you will have some difficulty in finding somewhere for me to stay. Anyway I have bought a new hat (which I hope Mum & Dad will pay for as a Christmas present) in case I do come to see you.

Tomorrow evening, I don't think I shall write to you a I am going to the cinema with Kitty. I have received several Christmas cards & feel very guilty because I havn't sent any this year. I suppose I shall have to get a few & do some last minute posting.

Well darling I am now going to finish my letter to you & write one to Jack & Vera to ask them what they would like for a wedding present from us. I have put it off till I can do so no longer.

So, darling, au revoir for the present-----[...]....

*THE CAMP,
SOUTH CARLTON
21-12-41*

Darling,

I'm back again, & after only one day away from this place, & this is how it happened. I commenced the usual daily routine at the new place, & about halfway through the morning out came my old pal Wotton, & wanted to know why I was there, he was in a really good mood, & apart from a few complaints I got a good report. Then he said, you've been shoved about a lot lately, I must see about getting you settled down, & now here I am, still D.C. but at my own little site, & the boys were glad to have me back too, I have been waited on hand & foot since my re-arrival here, & though there is a lot of work to be completed by Wednesday, I know they will all do their very best to help me out. Poor old Duggie got all the rockets on visit because he didn't know what was happening anywhere, & had shifted his men about such a lot. He came out tonight to detail my work, & confided in me quite a lot, we are pretty good friends now, & I think he has altered a bit for the better, probably because he's had a few tickings off just lately, so if he will play, we too will do our bit.

Tomorrow I shall collect my reports from the village about your accommodation, & I do so hope they will be favourable, because I want you so much to see my surroundings, which aren't too bad now, & my boys, who are really a damn good crowd, but most of all, I want to see you [...]

Now darling, I must close, I do hope these letters will reach you before Christmas, because they are my complete history since I left you on Friday.
Goodnight angel,

P.S. Just heard the distressing news that poor old Freddie is having Morphia, hope it's not as bad as it seems.

Four Winds
23 December 1941

My own Darling,

Thank you so very much for the Red Rose Christmas card. It was sweet of you to send it to me—but how I wish we could have been spending Christmas together. We won't be the only ones parted, I know, but it won't stop us from feeling pretty lonely, I'm afraid I have received eleven cards so far, so I am having to buy cards at the last minute to return the compliment

I hope the Army provide you with a good Christmas dinner. We are very lucky at the T.B. Dad managed to buy two chickens & yesterday he won another in a Christmas draw. Then with the help of your ration card, which you sent me, I was able to get double rations & so bought a nice piece of pork to help out the chickens. Most other people are not so lucky—poultry being practically unobtainable & so they will have to do with their weekly 1/2d of meat (including your mother)
Still, I guess we are lucky to have enough to eat.

Auntie Nellie ⁵¹ gave me something very nice today---her best tea service---a twelve cup service, which was a wedding present to her fifty three years ago---nothing is missing but one cup, which she broke.

I told her I would try & keep it another 53 years. I shall have to bring it home a bit at a time—for I should hate to break any of it.

Poor old lady. ⁵² It can't be very nice for her to break up her home in this fashion. How she really feels I don't know for she is outwardly cheerful---helps Mum & does most of the cooking—so perhaps her new found tasks keep her happy. She is also doing Mum's mending-& has done some for me too.

Well darling I did not receive a telegram from you today, & I am glad , for, as I said yesterday, I have decided it would be too risky to come—even more so, as you seem to be moving almost daily.

Its disappointing not to be able to see you (& taste my cake) and I am certainly not looking forward to this lonely Christmas. However, I am hoping I shall have you for seven whole days in January!!

Well my dearest one—it is 10.30 & my bath calls, so, for today, au revoir
I send you all my love & am always your Ivy

Four Winds
Christmas Eve 1941

My darling Bill,

Christmas Eve—but I can't say it has been a very happy one. This morning about 12 oclock I received your telegram to say that you had booked accommodation for me. Well—I really didn't know what to do. Unfortunately the wire arrived too late for me to ask Williams if I could possibly have Monday off (if I didn't get back on Sunday) as he had already gone off to Devon by that time

Had he been in the office I should certainly have asked him & probably risked the travelling. I asked several people what they thought travelling would be like & they all said “pretty terrible—and you are asked not to travel” So I eventually, with a lot of heartburn & misgiving, sent off the telegram which you will have received by now. I am afraid you were very disappointed, but I do hope you don't feel I have let you down.

⁵¹ Ellen Dale nee Webb

⁵² Aged 88 in 1941

Please don't think I don't want to come, or that there are attractions at this end because that's not true.

Anyway, darling I'll try & make it up to you by paying you a visit in the near future one weekend. Would you like that?

Having finished work at 1 pm today I was at a loose end. I had lunch at the Heath & spent most of the afternoon wandering round the shops, then I went to the pictures & spent the remainder of the evening at your mother's. Jack, & Vera are home At 9.30 I heard Jack whisper to Vera and ask her if she was ready for bed (evidently the novelty hasn't worn off yet) so I took the hint & came home

Well, darling in half an hour it will be Christmas day & the thought doesn't thrill me a bit for you can't make whoopee when you're sitting alone by the fire can you? However, I'm not really grumbling---I have a nice Christmas dinner to look forward to, & although I'm not with my husband, he is at least in England & that is almost all one could wish for these days.

I suppose I ought to think about getting to bed now. I can't "lay in" in the morning as I am going to morning service with Auntie Nellie. I hope you don't get too drunk over the holiday.

By the way, I am sorry to hear about Freddie's accident---thank goodness, however, it wasn't you!! I do hope you are able to tell me in your next letter that he is improving & trust that he will not lose his hand.

I shall be glad to have news of your stripe when you get it (as I am sure you will) & like being a "D.C." If you like South Carlton, lets hope you stay there (till you move to London!!!)

Well, my sweet, I really must say Goodnight now.

God bless!

Please write & tell me that its all right about me not coming up to Lincoln & put my mind at rest.

Always your own

Four Winds
Christmas Day 1941

This letter ~~was obviously written beforehand~~ marked to be opened on Christmas Day as the photo ~~on~~ Boxing Day was ~~announced~~ by the telegram mentioned on Christmas Eve.

Good morning [...] Merry Christmas!

Now I wonder if you were a good boy & did not open this letter till Christmas Day? You opened it beforehand, because you couldn't wait? Well then you're very naughty!!

However I hope you like the enclosure. You can't exactly call it a Christmas present but how difficult it is to think of something you would really like.

Anyway, I'm very pleased with my Christmas present from you. Thank you again darling very much.

At the time of writing this letter, I do not, of course, yet know whether I shall see you on Boxing Day or not, but if it is not possible perhaps the photo will help in some measure to make up to you for not seeing me. Don't eat too much on Christmas Day (or drink too much) If I do see you the next day, I should hate to find you confined to bed with a severe hangover.#

Well, have a good time sweetheart—I'll be thinking of you—always your own .

Four Winds
Boxing Day 1941

My darling Bill

11.30 Boxing Day morning—but no “morning after the night before” this year. I wonder if you had a nice Christmas day—mine was, of course, very quiet. I went to morning service with Auntie & then was busy cooking the dinner, making mince pies, etc. During that time I had the only three drinks of the day, so a rather mussy head, made the cooking rather more difficult than it would have been. The remainder of the day was spent finishing your scarf, so that you should have it as a new year present. Not exactly a hilarious way of spending the holiday was it. Barbara was lucky for Roy came home in time for dinner & went again early this morning.

He has managed to get home each Christmas of the war, but I bet he won't be home for the next one.

Auntie played us a few carols on her organ in the evening, so we did have a little singing.

I hope to have a full account of what your Christmas festivities were. I am sure they were more exciting than mine. I hope too that Freddie Burgess is getting better.

Well, darling this seems to be about all I have to say. I have been sitting looking at this blot for the last half hour but it gives me no inspiration. So, for today, I will say "Adios" My love to you and the boys

*THE CAMP
SOUTH CARLTON
27TH Dec (1941)*

My wonderful one,

I need hardly tell you how bitterly disappointed I was over your decision on the holiday, though from what you have told me about travelling facilities, I could not possibly have expected you to take such chances, & so of course, darling I forgive you, & I really do understand why you couldn't come, & now the holiday is over for us, I fear it will not be much good if you do come here for a weekend, because I shall have no free time, so it looks as if we shall just have to survive till the end of January, & the only consolation I find there is the knowledge that our meeting will be infinitely sweeter by waiting for it.

Now about Xmas, one word sums it up, & I needn't even say the word. Never in all our lives have any of us been so utterly miserable & lonely, no beer to help us forget, no cigarettes, & even now, we are still scrounging everywhere for a smoke. We haven't seen the Y.M. van for a whole week, & the one place in the village from where we usually buy cigarettes were out of stock all the time. The one bright spot on the programme was our Xmas dinner, they did us well, roast goose, pork, brussels sprouts, baked potatoes, & a big pudding, which supplemented by my Mother's, gave us something to think about, & after dinner, we were all so full up that we went straight to our beds to sleep it off. We had several informal visitors, the Colonel came & personally wished us all the usual things, then came Duggie & his understudy, a Mr. Bunce, who will shortly take over, & lastly, & most unexpected because we

thought he was on leave, came the Major, he caught me asleep, but he was in a wonderful mood, so we didn't have to worry about him. The evening was spent as all our others are, card playing & bed. Yesterday, (Boxing Day) we had to work all the time, but I packed them all up at four & chanced the consequences, & Duggie came round & caught us all having an early tea, however, I talked him round, & we continue in our good works.

I'm sorry I haven't written much, I haven't had the time, we have been working like hell itself to get finished all that was detailed before the holiday, but my labours were rewarded, because on Xmas Eve, the old major came out to us, & was he pleased?, so pleased in fact that when he left, he told Duggie to tell me, that there was a wonderful improvement which, coming from him is praise indeed, so for me, I relaxed for an hour, & let the boys have it easy. I felt pretty bucked about this you know, because I've only been hereabout four days, though we really have put in some hard work, but I intend to keep on until he does realise I'm worth noticing.

You'll be glad to know that Freddie Burgess will not lose either hand or fingers, he was lucky in that when he got to hospital, there was a brand new M.O., straight from Harley Street, who was specialist in the setting of bones & the sewing of tendons, & after two solid hours work, during which time Freddie had a shot or two of Morphia, he had patched up the hand & pronounced that although a very long job for healing, he would eventually be able to use it again.

The amount of damage to his one hand was colossal, he broke the bones in all his fingers, & severed the tendons of the two centre ones, so I think he's damned lucky to still have all his hand left, & I'm sure that had any other old sweat of an M.O. been there, they would just have amputated two or three fingers without bothering to see if it could be patched up.

Oh! I forgot, we were out on air co-operation on Xmas Eve for two hours, and again on Xmas night, did we swear?, & don't it make one's blood boil to think that even at such a time as Xmas, they can bother to play at searchlights, I was honestly disgusted with such a government.

Thank you darling for the simply marvellous picture you sent, of course I opened it before the day, I couldn't wait, but you needn't scold me any more, you already did that in the accompanying letter. Where did you get it taken? London I'll

bet, & you said you hadn't been to London since we went, I'm sure it couldn't be any local photographer, so what have you to say for yourself young lady? You will have guessed no doubt, that I would frame it in some way, & so, by the simple use of a piece of white board from the back of my writing pad, & some plaster from the first aid, box, I have given in a mounting which would have cost 2/6 extra at the shop. It is inset into the board, & I fixed a little strut at the back which allows it to stand on my table, & I have arranged it in such a way that every time I open the door to my hut, there you are looking at me. I love it, & even now I steal glances as I write, & knowing as I do, that I cannot have you, it is the nearest thing I know----- since commencing this letter I have been involved with a mechanist's visit of inspection, & inventories of all kinds of things, & worst of all, one hours air co-operation again, it's freezing like anything, & the glass of the lamp was thick with it, we have to thaw that off before we dare strike arc?, or it would crack the glass, then I should be in trouble, a thing I want to avoid now if I possibly can.

As for news of my stripe, well it's as far away as ever it was, the only consolation is, so are everyone else's, I do wish it would hurry up though, I'm just itching to sew them on. Now it's nine o'clock, it has been a pretty hectic day, but I'm through with it at last (I hope), & very soon now I'll be in bed. I have to get up at 5 each morning these days, you've no idea what that's like have you? You see, I do guards to help the boys out, so that they have only one & half hours out of their sleep, & they really do appreciate it & work for me like anything. I shared all my Xmas stuff with them, & in truth I'm one of them, & I find that this way of dealing with things help me get along a lot better, & I kid myself that my boys would be sorry to lose me.

Well dearest one, there you have all the news, it's scanty I know, but true, & all I can see for the future is my 7 days, you can't imagine how I long for that. I'll write again tomorrow if I can find the time darling, but being D.C. keeps me pretty well occupied, so you'll forgive me I know if my letters become a bit irregular, though I shall try to avoid this. Goodnight Angel.....

Sunday

Darling,

As promised here I am again, though I fear yesterday's letter will accompany this, because no-one went into Lincoln today, however, I shall have them both expressed, & you should receive them early.

Today has been very uneventful, no visits, just ordinary routine work, but I heard some shattering news tonight, all leave is put paid to for a week, on account of Xmas, which means that I shall not be home for the 29th., but the day after. I guess this will disappoint you as much as it did me, but there's nothing to be done about it I'm afraid.

You'll see I am out of ink, & this pencil isn't much good either, so you'll have to forgive me if I end here, but I promise more news tomorrow if there is any.

Your picture, perfect in every detail, gently smiles at me, & will do as you hope, help me till we meet again....

Four Winds
Sunday 28 December 1941

My darling Bill

Have you recovered from the holiday festivities by now? I expect so. I did not write to you yesterday, thought I did not do anything very much. I am still at the Heath & last night I went to the cinema with Barbara & Dorothy.

Boxing night I called for Edie as we had arranged to go to the Shire Hall to a dance. However when we got there we found there wasn't one. Well, having got all dressed up you can guess that we were disappointed, so we decided to go to Ware drill hall instead & I'm glad we did for most of the boys from Hunsdon were there, having a "farewell" meeting as two of the boys—Joe & Vic—had that day been given four days embarkation leave. They are going abroad on Tuesday or Wednesday. We had a jolly evening. Though underneath you could see how depressed the boys were. They are all good pals & hate being split up. Bert & Jack (who are at present on leave) are expecting to go in a fortnight's time. I feel as if I am losing very old friends instead of people I have only known a few months.

Roy & Leslie have gone too, as you know. Now I am wondering how soon I shall lose my own husband. It really is a dreadful feeling.

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-.....

Darling here is a break of an hour while I had my dinner (another very nice chicken) now it is 3pm & I am going back to Waterford. I hope after being away for four days,

that I shall find a post waiting for me & a letter from you among it. Then I shall be able to write again to you this evening but I would like to post this letter to you in Hertford this afternoon so that you get it on Tuesday, so till this evening, darling au revoir your Ivy

~~Secret letter~~
~~dated~~ 28
~~December~~ 1941

Four Winds
Sunday 28 December 1941

Good Evening my Darling,

This is the second time I have written to you. The first letter was written at the Heath. Then I came home—lit a fire & proceeded to thaw myself out. Since then I have washed my hair & done an hour's darning. I was disappointed when I got home to find no post waiting for me after four days, so I won't have a lot to talk about tonight after all.

I have been trying to teach Penny a new trick this evening but she gets so excited that she gets all mixed up & she ended up by jumping up at me & scratching my face

I called to see Jack & Vera before they returned to Worcester today. They want (want?) a work basket form us which they have seen in a shop in Hertford for 30/- so I expect I had better get it this week before it is sold. They seem perfectly happy together but every bit as "spoony" as they were before.

Well darling I'm sorry that this will be another short letter but perhaps I shall hear from you in the morning & then you will get another longer letter tomorrow.

Love & my fondest wishes for a happier new year to you and all the boys your Ivy.

P.S Trust scarf arrived safely

*THE CAMP
SOUTH CARLTON
29th DEC (1941)*

Dear Darling,

Once more I have managed to find time to write, but already it is past nine 'o clock, so if I find enough news to make this letter a long one, I shall be late to bed, & then, at five tomorrow morning, I shall be wishing I had gone earlier, though really darling, it gets a bit monotonous going to bed at 9.30 each night, & I guess a change will do me good.

I have been busy messing about with the lamps, they are a nuisance, & now after about 2 hours dirty oily work, I still haven't achieved much, for my lamp is spitting & flickering all the time, you can imagine how disconcerting this is when one wants a light to write by.

We've had some pretty severe frosts up this way, but I guess they're pretty general, although tonight the thaw seems to have set in, & I wouldn't be a bit surprised to see a fall of snow soon, & that wouldn't bother us, but for the fact that we have run short of coal, & have just enough to last for about two days, & we aren't allowed any more until the 5th January, so it looks as if someone's fence has got to suffer between now & then if we are to survive.

Thank you so very much for the scarf, it arrived this morning, and at the right time too, just when the weather is coldest. The cigarettes were more than doubly welcome, for even now, the Y.M. hasn't called on us, I do think they're a rotten lot,

because they spoiled our Xmas. I am now very well off for gloves, Dorothy the hairdresser from Belper sent me a pair for the holiday, & Dorothy Fletcher sent me some khaki socks, & now you send a scarf, I should keep warm enough.

I sent half of my boys to Lincoln today, to get a bath, & do all the other little things they want, & tomorrow I shall allow the others to go, & will perhaps go myself if I dare, though I see no reason why not, after all, I've got to get a haircut, & I have got to get clean, although I manage a bath on the so far up & then so far down system in the privacy of my little hut now & again.

A postal order for 16/- came this morning, a very acceptable gift from the village Whist Drive, & I am going to write a letter of thanks right away. Strangely enough, everyone I ever knew sent me a present this year except Austin's, they're rotten crowd aren't they, I shall make a point of visiting Mr. Mansfield when next I'm home just to tell him what I think of his organisation.

Brrrr! It is cold in here, I've allowed my fire to go almost out to save fuel, & now the atmosphere is decidedly cool, so I guess I'll soon have to get into bed to warm up a bit.

I made the acquaintance of a few farmers this afternoon, whilst finding out about A.R.P. etc., & do you know, they have no fire Brigade here, & very little organisation of any kind, & it's a big village too. I found out why there is no pub, & no shops here, apparently the gent who owns ll this estate laid down the rules that no such places were to be built when the village was made, & this applies to two or three other villages nearby, so that all the inhabitants have to go to Lincoln for everything, & from what I can make of it, most of them had a dry Christmas as we ourselves did, but what a poor show eh!, he's a proper old killjoy isn't he, though I understand that he's passed away recently, & his son now holds the reins, so of course all the locals are hoping he may alter things a bit.

I've just had a look at your picture, it's wonderful, yes, it really is, [...] I shall have to wait & wait until at long last January the 30th comes along, & then I shall be yours for a week [...] when this horrible, awful war is over, I shall be able to prove to you what a lasting lesson this parting has taught me, & the longer we're apart, the deeper becomes my love, [...]

Now I really must say goodnight

Four Winds
Monday 29 December 1941

My own darling,

What a dreadfully cold day it has been --- I do hope you havn't found it so as well

Everyone here has been complaining about the sudden change & this evening I have been hugging the fire (which took me nearly an hour to light) in a vain endeavour to keep warm. It is the sort of evening when one needs a lover to cuddle close to ---- you see, I can still remember what we used to do--- though those days are so far off that I can't believe they even really happened.

I was glad to get back to work this morning after the holiday & so, believe it or not, were Barbara & Dorothy. It is the very first time any of us have actually welcomed a Monday morning.

I felt sure that Monday would also bring me a letter from you but I was disappointed--no doubt, however you have written but the post is still a bit delayed. I am sure to hear tomorrow, as I haven't had a letter since Christmas Eve.

Did I tell you that Auntie Nellie keeps giving me odds & ends from her possessions--- I believe I have mentioned a cupboard for the kitchen & her tea service---- this has now been augmented by two decanters, a silver butter knife—two jugs & two nice strips of Rose-coloured carpet which will fit nicely into our bedroom colour scheme.

She also told me I could have any ties of Uncles which I thought you would like, so I chose a brand new grey one, which will go very nicely with your black suit. She herself seems in very good health & I do pray she will keep so, for mother more than has her hands full already. Mr Smith's mother is not too well & he seems (*damaged*) worried about it—He wants to move her up this way but cannot seem to find anyone suitable who will take her.

This evening I did a job I hate doing—that was to get up into the loft & fix up the bowl fire. I hope it prevents any freeze up, for I don't think I can get up there again for the steps broke just as I reached the floor. However, if the fire is left switched on each night, perhaps we shall avoid any crisis.

Well my sweet, it is 10.15. Everyone else in the house, including Penny, has retired to bed, so perhaps I had better follow suit. By the time this letter reaches you it

will be a brand new year. Will you make two resolutions---? (*damaged*) always on the bright side of things & (2) to say your prayers daily.

No. 2 will help to to (sic) keep No 1 you know. These are the two I intend to make--& I hope to keep them.

Goodnight now [...] God bless Always your Ivy.

THE CAMP
SOUTH CARLTON
30TH Dec (1941)

Dear Darling,

Another day nearer to the 30th, how I wish it were just one day away, it does seem such a long time to have to wait, I really don't know how I shall survive that long, but I guess it will come eventually, & all too soon will be gone.

Today has been just a little bit different in that the Major called on us, he seemed quite satisfied with things in general, & for once was in a good humour, & as soon as he'd gone, I slid off to Lincoln for the afternoon to get a bath, & I needed it you bet. This is the first time I have visited the Lincoln Public Baths, & you never saw such a one eyed little place in all your life, I really cannot understand why they have such an utterly inadequate place. There are about 24 baths for men, & the same for ladies, & because I was late I had to go up the ladies place where I found quite a lot more soldiers doing the same thing, but I can't say this state of affairs is to be desired, though beggars can't be choosers, & I really did enjoy being wet all over at once again. I had a good soak, & then on coming out, called at the S.A., canteen & found three more of our lads, who waited while I had a cup of tea, & then we went forth on a shopping tour during which I bought blanco, ink, soap & toothpaste, posted five letters which I wrote last night & bought a dozen stamps. All this made a big hole in that postal order, but I guess it has served a very useful purpose, so I can't complain. You may be interested to know who the five letters went to, well, one to you, one to the people in Waterford who sent me the 16/- & one to those who sent 7/-, one to my union people who sent 5/- & one to Stephanie & Beryl & Co., I was up until midnight last night writing, but at least it's done with for a bit, & anyway it was worth it to know that so many people thought about me. I think I shall write to Mum

when I have finished this, & then if I have time, I will give Kitty⁵³ a line, she sent me a card at Xmas.

Our long drought of no callers was broken with a vengeance today when the Y.M. van called for the first time in a fortnight, then half an hour after they had gone, another one came, & directly after dinner, just as I was ready to go out, lo & behold came the N.A.A.F.I. van, so we are going to be well cared for at last. I went into Lincoln with the N.A.A.F.I. girl, & we chatted a bit about Lincolnshire & homes, & she tells me that her birthplace was Wales. But she married an Air Force officer & they settled down at Chiswick, London. I told her where I live, & she knows the place quite well, & would you believe it, her husband went to Haileybury College, she says she was there with him three weeks ago, & he showed her over the place. They are very very lucky, her husband is stationed here, & has a living out pass, & he finishes every night at five, while she finishes at four thirty, they live in perfect happiness under almost normal conditions, & she tells me they have been here for a year, aren't they a lucky couple, if only the army allowed such privileges, some people get all the luck.

All our coal is gone, & we have no paraffin, which means if some don't arrive tomorrow we're sunk for light & heat, I do think they're mean because with such weather as we're now having it is essential that we have some means of keeping warm, but there you are, Britain's forgotten army can take it, & they have to. At the moment, we're burning the wood from an old fence which was at the front of this place, I don't know how we'll go on when that's gone I'm sure.

By the way, will you please send me a pad when replying to this letter, I have only about 20 sheets of paper left, & I would also very much appreciate a few more envelopes too, because I can't last out much longer as I am.

I'm sending with this, all my vests, I hope you'll not think them dirty, but you needn't worry much, because I still have the woollen singlets with which I'm managing until you are able to return them.

And now my sweet [...] I must continue to catch up with my correspondence. Oh I forgot, & I'm sorry too, your cake was a winner, I still have some left after letting everyone take it, & I shall make it last just as long as my tummy will let me, thank you darling. Goodnight & God Bless You,

⁵³ Wagstaff

*THE CAMP
SOUTH CARLTON
31st DEC (1941)*

My wonderful one,

The last day of the old year, and what a miserable one too, all day long we have been surrounded by a heavy mist, & the frost has only partly thawed, so that there is that incessant drip, drip everywhere, & all the time the bitter cold & miserable fog made work outside a cold, muddy business, & now it's freezing again.

We've had a pretty quiet day, and at the beginning the outlook was indeed an unpleasant one, for we were faced with the prospect of another week without any coal, but I ordered the boys to find wood, & then detailed two to chop it, & then scouted the village to find out when their coal-man called, making it well known that we had none, & at last I met with unqualified success, for the people who were willing to accommodate you, came to my rescue. The man is a gardener at a huge mansion, in which R.A.F. pilots are billeted, he said he didn't see why they should have plenty of coal & we had none, & I was to send a wheelbarrow up & he would fix it. Well, he did, he gave us five loads of lovely small, clean coal, the prettiest sight you ever saw, & just as we were putting the last load into the bunker, Mr. Bunce arrived & asked what it was all about, so we told him we had bought it cheaply from a man in the village, he was properly upset because we had had to do this, & said it was shameful, & he would see what he could do about it, but I said he needn't bother, so long as we were allowed to burn it when & where we liked, this remark being made because Wotton yesterday issued an order that fires would not be allowed in living huts during the day. So now, we shall have roaring fires in the day just to shame them, & if we have any complaints, we are going to say we're burning our own fuel.

So you went to a dance Boxing Night, & enjoyed yourself, I hope you didn't drink much, & please for heaven's sake stop worrying about Jack going abroad, & start worrying about me a bit more, you know I crave all your love & attention, he has a wife to do his worrying as you should for me, so just be content with one husband young lady, or I shall begin asking questions. Now don't get cross, it's not meant that way, remember I've seen and approved of Jack as a friend, & probably would miss him as much as you do if I saw enough of him, so just give over will you, because I heard today that one of our Batteries are on embarkation leave, which,

if true, means that we shan't be long, & in the precious little time we may have together in this pleasant land, parted though we are, I want your undivided attention.

Now to lighter things, I hear there is another and more technical course bowling along, to do with radio, I hope I click, the knowledge is well worth having, & I should very much appreciate it, though I hope it won't come at the time I expect to be on leave.

Yesterday I wrote to Mum, & Kitty as I said I would, & even then I was in bed soon after nine, there's nothing to keep us up after that, & anyway we had no fires to speak of, so it was warmest in bed, but how terribly cold this morning, honestly it's awful at five, & pitch black, I hate it, though until we get more men I shall continue to do it.

I'm going across to the men's hut in a moment to get a haircut by our amateur barber, he doesn't do too badly, & will not interfere with my top hair which I want to grow long, so he shall have a try at mine.

Well darling, that seems to be about all for this time, but I'll promise another letter in the morning, & in the meantime keep your chin up, remember you're the wife of a soldier even though he is in the searchlights, [...] XXXXXXXXX



