

BILL & IVY FURLONG'S WAR TIME LETTERS

Michael Furlong

BOOK ONE-JULY TO DECEMBER
1940

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.

Huge thanks also to my eldest son Jamie for his input, ploughing through my first version, looking at the technical side for errors & omissions as well as drafting the introduction & re-structuring the layout. Additionally, he insisted upon the graphic showing the location of Waterford marshes as well as the "Family Tree" with cast of characters. As I sought to reduce the amount of work by cutting out large chunks from the letters in my first draft, his views on the flow & content were very valuable & without them the manuscript would have been a much lighter and far less meaningful document.

Michael Furlong

March 2023



WAR TIME



LETTERS BOOK ONE. JULY TO DECEMBER 1940

A TRANSCRIPT OF CORRESPONDENCE
BY MICHAEL FURLONG.

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INTRODUCTION

At the dawn 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, 20 Castle Street, Hertford. In fact in the 1939 Register she is listed as a National Registration Office Clerk. 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.

On the day Britain declared war on Germany, 3 September 1939, Parliament immediately passed a more wide-reaching measure than the Military Training Act passed in May 1939. 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.

The communication between Bill and Ivy is a fascinating 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 village gossip about the vicar's stolen plums to the envy of the new recruits' gas masks, the juxtaposition of humour and hardship is stark. 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. These early letters of correspondence 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. I realised early on 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. I have also deliberately left out words of endearment where they are obviously superfluous and add nothing to the story. This often includes beginnings & endings as well as the lavish use of such words throughout.



WELCOME TO HIS MAJESTY'S ARMY



This first batch of correspondence comprises of approximately 94 letters from Ivy to Bill, from 31 July 1940 to December 1940.

Each letter varies from 1 to 5-6 pages, often written on both sides. In December 1940 Ivy numbered the pages of one letter and they totalled 25. Most spelling errors have been transcribed as written. Additionally she would often commence a new sentence on a new line without an indent, I have tried to reproduce these exactly as she wrote them as well as replicating the regular apostrophe omissions.

Bill's letters number some 110 from July to December 1940. He often wrote twice or even three times per day as he frequently worked night duty rosters. This confused some of his date keeping but the letters have been transcribed in chronological order to the best of my abilities.

YOU ARE ABOUT TO BECOME A SOLDIER. This will mean a big change in your life. You will find yourself performing unfamiliar duties in a new atmosphere.

At first, naturally, you will feel rather strange to your surroundings: you will miss your home and friends. But you will soon realise that your comrades are in the same position, and that you are all starting from the same mark.

Later, when you have grown more familiar with your duties, and the reasons at the back of these duties, you will realise something else—namely, the greatness of the service which you are to-day rendering to your country; a service which that country will always gratefully remember.

Here are three words of advice :—

- (1) Learn to obey all orders smartly and without question. This is not a mere matter of outward show: very often the lives of an entire body of men may depend upon the prompt action of a single individual. The more thoroughly you acquire that habit the safer you and those who serve with you will be, and the sooner we shall achieve final victory and peace.
- (2) Acquaint yourself with the traditions of your particular corps or unit, and live up to them. This will lead you to take a pride in its history, and will foster in you the team-spirit, commonly known as *esprit de corps* which is the life-blood of the soldier.
- (3) The British Army draws peculiar strength from the close relations which have always existed between officers and men. The officer's first duty is to his men: he not only leads them into action, but he is responsible for their welfare and comfort at other times. He joins in their games, he listens to their troubles. Therefore, whenever you stand in need of aid or advice, do not hesitate to approach him (through your serjeant or other non-commissioned officer) and tell him the whole story.

Once more I welcome you to the Army. Fear
God, Honour the King, and May Victory
Soon Crown Our Arms!

Anthony Eden

THE WAR OFFICE

Secretary of State for War

**NOTICE TO MEN ORDERED TO REPORT
FOR SERVICE UNDER THE NATIONAL
SERVICE (ARMED FORCES) ACT, 1939.**

1. The enclosed Enlistment Notice shows the unit to which you must report and the date and time at which you must join.

2. If you are sick and unable to travel, you must obtain a certificate from your Doctor and send it by post to the Officer Commanding the unit which you have been ordered to join, at the address given on your Enlistment Notice. The Officer Commanding may grant you sick leave, so that you can join as soon as you are fit to do so.

3. If circumstances suddenly arise, such as the illness of your wife or a relative, which make you wish to apply for leave to delay joining for a few days you must write to the Officer Commanding the unit which you have been ordered to join, giving a full explanation of the circumstances which have arisen and which make it necessary for you to apply to delay your joining. The Officer Commanding may, if he thinks fit, grant you leave of absence for a reasonable period so that you can settle your private affairs.

4. If you are granted sick leave or leave of absence by the Officer Commanding, any travelling warrant enclosed with your Enlistment Notice

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should be returned to the Divisional Office of the Ministry of Labour and National Service with a suitable explanation. You should retain the postal order for four shillings, however. A fresh travelling warrant, for use when the period of sick leave or leave of absence expires, will be issued by the Officer Commanding your unit.

5. You must understand that you will be deemed to have been enlisted from the date shown on your Enlistment Notice, and that unless you have obtained sick leave or leave of absence as explained above, failure to join your unit on the appointed date will make you an absentee and you will then be liable to be arrested and brought before a Court of Summary Jurisdiction.

N.S. 138.

(23651) Wt. 53212—5105 100000 4/40 P. St. G. 344

NOTICE.

1. When you join your Unit you should take with you:—

YOUR RAZOR

Your Gas Mask.

Your National Registration Identity Card.

Your Ration Book.

The enclosed envelope N.S. 124 completed in accordance with the directions at the top.

2. Before you leave to join your Unit you should take or send (or ask your employer to send) your Unemployment Book (including Exempt Persons Book) to the nearest Local Office of the Ministry of Labour and National Service. The Local Office should be informed why the book is being surrendered. You should keep a note of the number on the book.

N.S. 34.

(5574) Wt. 9001—4098 500,000 4/40 T.S. 677

The letters are a mix of typed and hand-written, both in pen and pencil, depending upon what was to hand at the time. Writing from the bomb-shelter adjacent to her home, or the cellars of her employer, Ivy could sometimes only write in pencil. Other times Bill had spent his meagre allowance on chocolate and couldn't afford ink for his pen. I have included scans of the original letters as appropriate throughout.

Air-raids feature all through the correspondence with some descriptive accounts of bombings, dog-fights, tracer fire and flames. I have therefore used this symbol ✈ to denote mention of air-raid warning, bombing or aerial combat.

The letters begin shortly after Bill leaves for army training.

21/10/40

1617342 GNR. FURLONG.
4 SECTION H. Q.
FARNHAM GREEN
DERBYSHIRE.

To the inspiration of all beautiful thoughts,

Sweetheart darling of my heart, I love you, the very thought of you is a treasure beyond price, to be with you, my one desire.

My adoration of you can never be adequately expressed in words, because the wonder and beauty of you have taken me beyond the realms of human joy to something more beautiful than I could ever say.

A vision, radiant with love and life, pure and sweet as the nectar in the loveliest lily, loving all, kind and gentle of nature, and yet the child of passion. My dreams of such joy and ecstasy as you alone can give, take my breath away, indeed to dream of you at all is a thing I can never forget, and to be with you, transports me to the highest realms of bliss and joy, unknown to any others than ourselves.

How useless are these words, when my very soul cries out for you, and yet, they are all I have to tell you of my deep and fathomless adoration and love for you. It seems that I can never reach the end of love, and love is never complete, there is always more, and still more beneath.

A picture of blue summer skies is before me, radiant with happiness, ripe, golden corn, waving in the summer breeze, and poppies smiling all the time, inviting me to spend a while in the wonder of their kiss.

Modelled on Venus by a sculptor who had naught but beauty in his mind, you are the child of love, a woman, and yet something more, an angel perhaps, and yet still a woman, for who but a woman could know the wondrous art of love as you have shown you do, and yet no ordinary woman could be the same, thus the only answer to this sweetest of all puzzles is, that you are someone sent from heaven to help me see the beauty in this life, and beautiful it is. With you, the plainest thing on earth is tempted to reveal the beauty underneath.

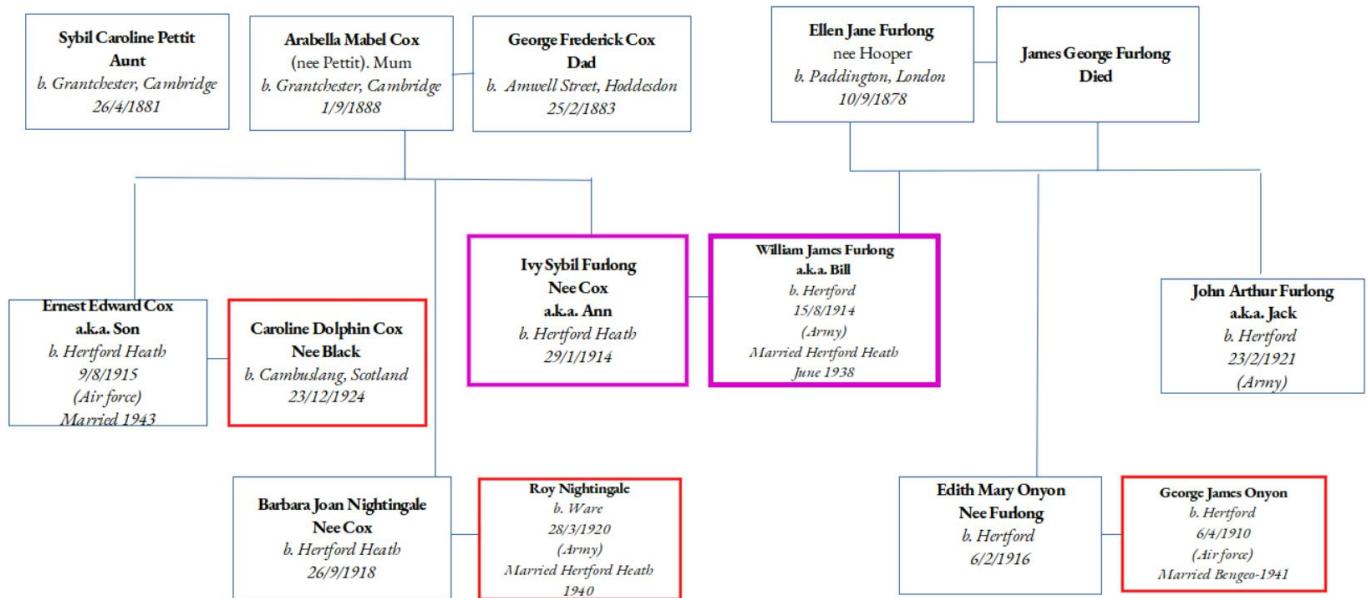
And here my note must end, for such a wondrous girl as you inspires me to write and write for ever, and I know that whatever I try to say, true love will have it's sway, and simplest of them all, yet more revealing is the same old and ever new, beloved I love you.

Your adoring husband,

I LOVE YOU

Bill.
XXXXXX
XXXXXX

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)

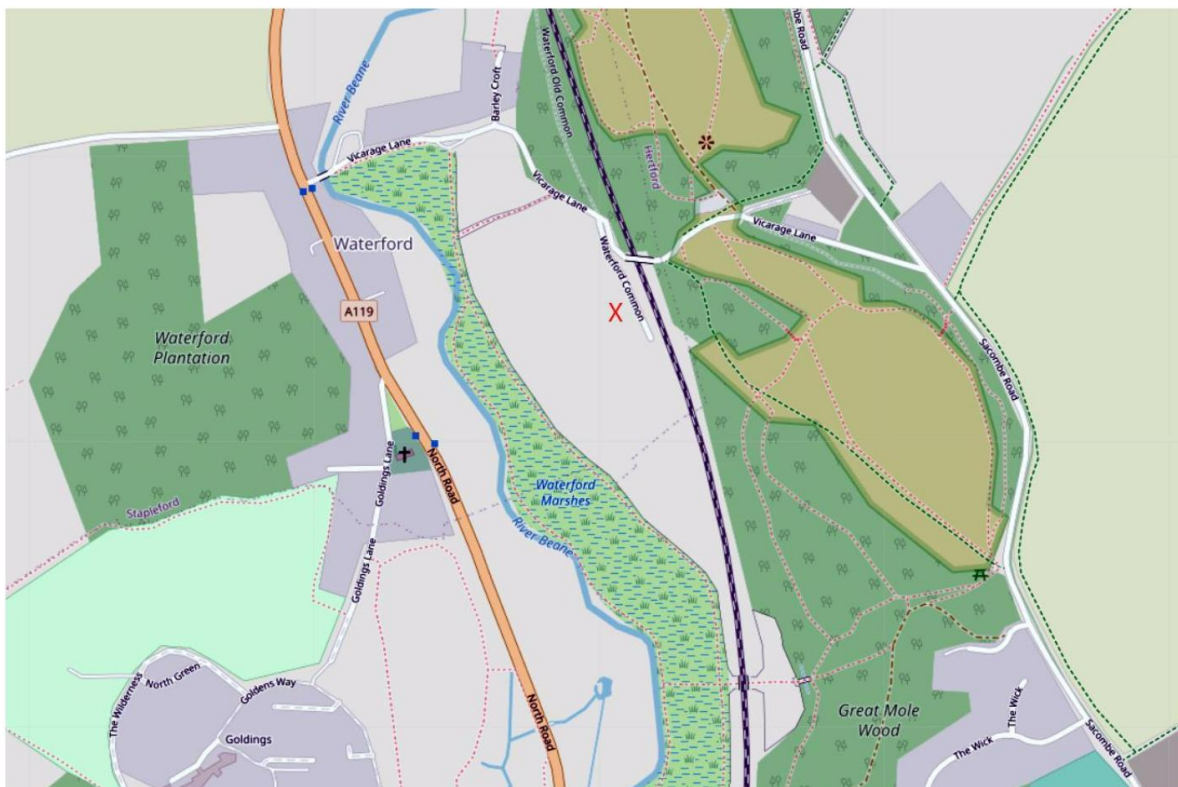
George James Onyon (married Edith in 1941) b. probably Hertford-6/4/1910 (Airforce)

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.

The Hertford North Station is a mere 1.7 miles by road from “Four Winds”, Waterford for train services to London, Kings Cross Station.



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



Looking east across the marshes, circa 1946

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

In July 1940 Bill left the comforts of Waterford to begin army training in Yaxley, near Peterborough, Cambridgeshire. The registration of all men in each age group in turn began on 21st October 1939 for those aged 20 to 23. The following May, registration had extended only as far as those aged twenty-seven so this would have included Bill, but by the end of 1940 more than 2 m men had been enlisted.

Ivy remained in Waterford and continued her job as secretary at local solicitors Longmores. The two maiden aunts, Sybil Pettit & companion Nell Barker, are living at Four Winds as “refugees” having fled from Margate, a town which witnessed much action during the 1940 Dunkirk evacuations and, following the fall of France, efforts being made to remove the vulnerable from coastal towns in southern and eastern England facing German-controlled areas. Some towns in Kent and East Anglia evacuated over 40% of the population.

Additionally, it is quite likely that the story about Ivy not wanting to accept compulsory billeting of civil servants or the housing of evacuees from London has some truth in it, with her spare room occupied by someone she knew, she could, quite legitimately refuse to take anyone else. There are several references to her neighbours, the Smiths being full with impermanent occupants at this time.

This social adjustment was felt by everyone across the country. For Ivy at least she had the comfort of home life, as well as the regularity of her job, but for Bill the shock to the system is well documented throughout his early correspondence.

He also found it difficult to adjust to the fact that getting home, even just for a few hours was almost impossible and some of his escapades, especially when “thumbing” lifts make entertaining reading.

1

FOUR WINDS
WATERFORD
HERTFORD
HEREWednesday evening
31. 7. 40.

My darling Bill,

I hope you got my letter of this morning. I wrote it under rather trying conditions as I had a lot of work to do and was there for rather a long time. Wheeler might come in and see me, so you probably thought it read rather scappily, being started and left a number of times before it was finally finished.

Well darling how did today go? It's been so hot. I have cut half the big lawn this evening, but had to give up because my hands are sore.

First page of a five page letter written by Ivy shortly after Bill leaves for army training

Wednesday evening

31 July 1940

Four Winds,

Waterford,

Hertford, Herts

My darling Bill,

I hope you got my letter of this morning. I wrote it under rather trying conditions as I had a lot of work to do and was there fore rather afraid Wheeler might come in and see me so you probably thought it read rather scrappily, being started and left a number of times before it was finally finished.

Well darling, how did today go? It's been so hot. I have cut half the big lawn this evening but have had to give up because my hands are sore and because I wanted to write to you again, even if I haven't much to say. I know you won't get a lot of time to write to me for a little while but when you do you must tell me what the place is like, how far are you from the village etc.

I saw Molly England tonight. She has had one scribbled letter from Cliff, asking for his marriage cert' and grade card. I was able to say that I had had three letters. She said she couldn't sleep at night. I must be callous to sleep so well!

Friday is Joan Trapp's 21st. She is inviting some eight or nine girls to tea at the Regal², and then on to the cinema. She says I can stay with her if I don't want to come home alone, but I told her I shall just have to get used to that and the sooner I start the better.

Mum came into the office this afternoon. She doesn't think much of Auntie Gertie³ now, and says it will be a long time before she asks her here again. Uncle had given her (Auntie) £5 on Monday evening, and, of

² Possibly the Regal Café in Old Cross, Hertford

³ Arabella's sister Charlotte Gertrude Doe, nee Pettit, from Margate

course she cleared off with that.

It's getting dusk now darling and it looks so lovely and peaceful in the garden and over the village – there's a lovely sunset.

Fifteen minutes interval

Mrs Collins and Francis Paterson have been trying to bring me into the truth for the last fifteen minutes so now the lovely sunset has gone and I have had to put on the lights. It's nearly ten o'clock darling so I must say goodbye again. When will you get any leave dear, or when can I come and see you. Yesterday was the first day in nearly four years that we haven't been together - Isn't it awful? I do hope I can see you soon. I would come one weekend if you thought you would be fairly free. I love you darling and you must imagine that I am kissing you now goodnight – turn over and go to sleep. Good night darling. I love you.

Yours Ivy

P.S. Auntie says I am to say we have got the garage lamp fixed up and that she is still a grumpy looking old B.

*July 1940
1617342 Gnr. Furlong,
401 Coy.R.E. No.6 Squad,
The Camp,
Yaxley, Nr. Pettrboro'.*

Possibly Bill's first letter home from training camp, undated

I hardly know how to start, so much has happened already. I'm in khaki now, and the camp we're at seems to be a training depot. There are 24 of us, all new hands, in one big hut, and its more like a holiday camp than a military one.

We have camp beds, hot & cold water, a bath room & shower baths; we all had to strip out & wash under a shower as soon as we got here. Dinner was roast beef, peas & potatoes & tart afterwards. You will please excuse the writing as I'm doing it on my knee. I understand that inoculation is compulsory but I must go now darling
will write properly later, Love forever Bill

July, 1940

Second undated letter from Bill

Once again I will try and write a proper letter to you, the sergeant made us finish our others in rather a hurry, hence the abrupt ending.

Since that time we have all been inoculated twice, once for Tetanus & once for Typhoid, we are to have the same again in a few week's time. In the meantime we are granted 48 hrs leave, but confined to barracks. I have found a pal I think, he is a dental mechanic, married with one little daughter, and he's invited me to his home when we get just a few hours leave.

We are not going to be allowed out of barracks for at least a week, and have been told that our first 3 weeks here will be all infantry training, so we've got plenty to look forward to.

The fellows in my hut are a decent lot, mostly clerks etc., with the exception of one whose name is Pennie, he is pretty well daft, and should never have been passed for army, he can neither read nor write, and all today he has been the only one in step, I think the sergeant has got his hands full. Most of the boys here are married, and we all agree that we are going to be lost without our wives, but the sergeant tells us we shall soon get over that.

Well darling I don't think there is much more to tell today, I'm feeling tired and my arm aches a bit [...] the further I am away the more I'm going to miss you [...] Goodbye darling for now, and as soon as I get another chance, I'll write again. Give my love to the Aunties & Pennie, and everyone else,

July, 1940

Third undated letter from Bill

I'm still alive, but only just, we all had a terrible night, and feel worse than ever today, just like the Flu it is, and we have to get up for meals, and to tidy up the room, clean buttons etc.

We are being taken for a march this afternoon to see a searchlight, some way down the road, it should be interesting, but none of us felt much like marching I can tell you.

I missed you terribly last night and as it goes on, it'll get worse I'm afraid, [...] and if I could get hold of old Hitler, I'd inoculate him in both Balls, nothing could be worse. Never mind we shall soon get it over, and I'll be in your arms again, that's what I want more than ever.

By the way, we all had to have another hair cut yesterday, and we are a bald looking lot now, & these silly caps feel as if they're falling off all the time, but I shall knuckle under I expect

Well sweetheart, I think that is all for the time, I shall write again as soon as the chance comes because I love you so, Goodbye precious,

July 1940

(401 Coy R.E.)

Camp

Fourth undated letter from Bill

You will notice that there is another line in the address I've put it in brackets, so don't miss it out when you write.

Well darling, we are still supposed to be on sick leave, but they've been getting some good work in on us. Yesterday we went for a 2 mile route march, and this morning we had to clear the camp of all rubbish and

take it to the dump. We have also been busy cleaning windows, door knobs etc., as they expect everything spick and span. I expect we shall be taken for another march this afternoon, and then tomorrow morning we are supposed to be fit, and we start our real training, and from what I can see of it, we are in for a good old time.

Our first post arrived this morning, and there was only one letter for our hut, and that wasn't mine, I'm hoping to get a steady flow of letters from tomorrow onwards tho' because I do so want to hear from you about your darling self, and Pennie, and the Aunts, and the Garden. By the way I hope you won't overdo yourself in the garden. My goodness, I do miss you, every minute I think what I would give to look at your dear face, if it was only a glimpse I could be happy [...]

Since my arrival here, I have naturally found out more about the fellows, and I don't think I've ever met a nicer crowd. Four of us used to work in print, and several are railway clerks, and yesterday we had a very deep discussion on Christianity, and I find that they are all chaps of my own social standard and I think we shall get on well together. By the way we are all Grade 2, although after our medical we are classed as B.I.

I understand that when we are finished here, we are to be sent on to another camp, 20 miles further away from home, where we shall see our first searchlight, and receive our training in this branch of the army. I'm hoping we shall have a chance to get on there, because there isn't a great deal of opportunity here.

The cigarettes I brought away with me are still lasting you will be glad to know, and after tomorrow I think there will be still less chance to smoke, so you see I'm not doing badly.

Well my precious, I think I've told you all for today, but please write as often as you can, because so much depends on it. [...] Goodbye my sweet,

Wednesday

31st July 1940.

*"Four Winds" Waterford,
Hertford Herts.*



Your three letters arrived this morning so I don't know if it is the Yaxley P.O. or the Hertford P.O. who is lax. I am sorry you had to be inoculated (sic), but perhaps when you get this you will be feeling better by the time this letter arrives.

On Monday evening Penny & Auntie came mushrooming and Tuesday I spent sticking the peas [...] I am sorry you are only at a training camp [...] You may go a long way away [...]



Ivy with puppy Penny at Four Winds

Did you have a raid on Monday night. They were supposed to be over

East Anglia, are you in East Anglia? I didn't know Cliff England was married to Molly. Of course I know her well as she works in Coop drapery. I asked her how she was going to work with a baby and she said she hadn't got one. Who told you???? I expect you look like a convict now with another hair cut. It was bad enough with the first one.

Auntie Nells sister in law and her daughter Dorothy who is 20 odd may come down at the weekend, so perhaps I shan't feel too lost in my spare time.

When I went to the Heath ⁴yesterday Auntie Gertie wasn't there. She had cleared off that morning at breakfast time without saying Goodbye to mum & Dad or Even Uncle She just walked out of the door with her suit case in her hand and said "Im off home". Uncle ran after her to carry her bag and she snatched it away from him. When he asked her if she was going away without saying Goodbye to him she wouldn't answer him [...] It makes me wonder if she is going funny. [...] While I remember, please date your letters so that I know when they are written. Also have you got the marriage certificate, as I want it for changing my National Health Card [...]

Thursday
1st August, 1940
Camp
✈

I was absolutely overjoyed to get your letter this morning, because I'm getting really downhearted now, that is, when I have time to think.

Well, my precious, today has been our first real day's work, and we got up at 5.30 to shave & polish, P.T. at 6.30 till breakfast at 7.30. It's now 9.0 pm and we've only just really finished, and am I tired. We practised all the blasted morning standing to attention and at ease, till our legs would hardly hold us. Then we had $\frac{3}{4}$ hour for dinner. After dinner 1 hrs lecture on Colonels, Captains etc. and who to salute. Then back on parade ground

⁴ *Hertford Heath*

to more at ease & attention, to be followed by learning to salute, and the way our sergeant wants it done doesn't allow muscles to relax for an instant, so you can guess how we feel. When we finished this, we were taken for a 50 minute route march, which just got us back for tea ½ hour, and then we all had to wash our feet, and complain of blisters, soreness etc., when the officer inspected them. After this, we should really be finished our days work, but our old sergeant is a real bugger for discipline, and we were all called out again for fatigue, digging air raid shelters in the hard clay, and all day, from 9 onwards, the sun is blistering hot. Well, we finished fatigue about 7.30 & I had a hot shower bath and was just getting ready for a nice cup of coffee at the N.A.A.F.I. when the bloody air raid warning went, and out we had to go, complete with gas masks, tin hats etc., and after assembling, we were dismissed again, as it turned out to be just a single parachutist landed. It seems that they have had a hell of a lot of excitement down this way lately, so you can guess we're all wondering what will happen tonight, anyhow I'll let you know.

I understand that we might get 24 hrs leave in about 3 weeks, and I can hitch hike home in perhaps 3 hrs but will have to train back, but I'll let you know as soon as I can.

How I long for that day to come, but my goodness, what we've got to go thro' to get it I'm sure I'll make the most of it, and I'm counting the days to then.

I think your Auntie Gert was a bit of a rotter, going off like she did, but I wouldn't be surprised if her spine trouble isn't affecting her brain, so we mustn't judge her too harshly.

Well precious [...] when the war's over I'll never let you out of my arms again, except when I go to work.

When you next write please tell me you miss me a bit, I'm not afraid to let you know how I feel, and I certainly thought you were a little callous, although I know it wasn't meant that way. [...] please help me to feel I'm taking all this for something more than the old king & country [...] there's one consolation darling, I think that all this drill business won't help my

⁵B.P. much, and from what I have seen of things it might stand me in good stead later on.

Well precious, I'll say goodnight now, it's ten o'clock, with lights out at 10.45, and I have to undress & tidy up a bit, ready for 5.30 reveille tomorrow [...] P.S. The marriage Cert is in the cash box or Env.

Thursday evening

1 August 1940

Waterford

Are you feeling hot and tired in this weather? I have cut a little more of the lawn this evening and been to see your Mother. Jack will be at home this weekend [...] so of course your mother is happy. Edith hasn't heard from the Bus Company yet [...] coming home up the lane my chain broke, so I shall have to go to work in the morning on your bike & push mine. I shall leave yours in the back room of the office [...] if you come home, you will be able to get to Waterford easily, ...if I am not at the office, Mrs Smotherley has a key to let you in [...]

Aunt Nells niece is coming for the weekend. We are probably going to Tewin Water on Sunday as the gardens will be open [...]

I suppose "GNR" stands for Gunner, and yet you are in the Royal Engineers...? [...] When you are qualified will you get any extra pay? [...]

The enclosed cigarettes are in case you are still not allowed to leave camp and I wouldn't want you to be without a cigarette [...]

⁵ Blood Pressure

Friday morning

I managed to get to work all right with your bike but it was a struggle, and I was 15 minutes late but I am jolly glad now that my chain did break, because it made me come to work the main road way,⁶ and just past the Hospital I found a 10/- note Isn't that marvellous? So now I have got my fare to Yaxley and will come as soon as you are free.

Auntie N this morning received the notification that she is granted an extra pension of 6/6 a week⁷ -so of course she is on top of the world. Now we are free to try for the billeting allowance."

- 1) *In June 1940 the Old Age & Widow's Pensions Act became law. It reduced the qualifying age for women to receive a state pension to 60 years. (At one point during governmental debate unmarried women were referred to as widows). Also part two of the Act provided a need-based supplementary pension which was intended to prevent recipients from having to seek poor relief.*
- 2) *The Billeting Allowance was set at £1.1s (one guinea) for Bed, Breakfast and Evening Meal and was originally intended to cover the provision of support for those families who were compelled to take in "civil Servants etc" during 1940.*

⁶ Now the A119

⁷ Her 62nd birthday was at the end of June



Sybil Caroline Pettit (b. 1881, Grantchester, Cambridge)

Friday
2nd August, 1940
Camp

It is a real pleasure to write to you after a hard days work. I thought some of my gardening was pretty strenuous, but compared to this, it's child's play. We are receiving 16 weeks intensive infantry training all squashed into 3 weeks, and this consists of arms drill, marching, bomb throwing, bayonet fighting, and everything a soldier must know.

Today has been far more strenuous than yesterday, but I don't think I'm quite so tired, so it's making us fit physically anyway, but then we need to be, because our lieutenant says we are in the first line of defence here, and if there is an invasion, it will come on the west coast, and some of our detachments are only a few miles from there, and when we are finished here, we shall be drafted to one of those detachments. We went to see one this afternoon, and there is one nice big hut for living in, and another one for meals.

There are ten men to a detachment, who only come back to this camp, which is the headquarters, once a week, to have a bath and a little drill to keep them in shape, and from what everyone says, and that includes our lieutenant, and instructors, the life on searchlights is the most strenuous there is, and that every day consists of 24 hrs duty. They say it is a forgotten army, and that everyone thinks of other armies, because our work can only be seen at night, but we are consoled with the thought that we are Britain's first line of defence, and I'm in it up to the neck, so it's shit or "bust".

Well precious, I won't weary you by telling you what we did today, because it was much the same as yesterday, but we've improved, and everyone in the officers line is very pleased with the progress we are making, because we've only had 2 days drill so far.

I promised to tell you what would happen last night, well, the air raid sirens went in Peterboro' 5 times, but I don't know if any bombs dropped or not, yet, I expect we shall hear in time.

We have been gleaning from the “old sweats” what is in store for us, that is how I can tell you so much of our future career, and I also learnt this afternoon that although we have been inoculated twice already, the effects of which have only just gone, we are to have two more, and also we must be vaccinated, not a very pleasant thing to look forward to, is it? but unfortunately it is compulsory now so I have to make the best of it, but the medical officer says we shall be immune from tetanus for life, and typhoid for at least ten years, so we must not worry too much.

I hope you manage to enjoy your pictures tonight darling, I’m thinking of you now, and I’d like nothing more in the world than to be with you at this moment, but I can only think I’m there, and that is poor consolation I’m afraid.

I think we might get out tomorrow afternoon for a few hours, and I shall go into Peterboro’ and get myself one of those coloured caps, our regiment is red & blue, so it ought to look quite smart for when I do get home.

You mention staying here for the weekend, but I’m afraid it wouldn’t be worth it just now, because we don’t get any weekend completely free and only a few hours now and then are allowed. I might find out more about this later. [...] this one week has seemed like a year to me, so I don’t know how long the war will seem I’m sure, but it’s a damned long one.

Give my love to the Aunties, and tell them that a soldier’s life is a hard one, but they needn’t worry while we’re here, because we couldn’t possibly run away from any invaders, we’re too tired. Please tell me something about Pennie in your next letter, I miss her a bit, because of the fellow we have here called Pennie, and every time I hear his name, I think of home (I’m afraid I’m sickening for a dreadful spell of homesickness).

Well precious, I must write a brief letter to Mother now [...]

Saturday
3 August, 1940
Waterford
✈

What appears as two letters maybe written at different times of the day

At last everyone has gone off to the Council meeting [...] I can start my letter [...]

Yesterday was Joan T's 21st and I went with several other grass widows to tea at the Regal where we had a cake with 21 candles. Afterwards to see Sonja Heni ⁸ at the County ⁹. There the mothers joined us as we went at 10.p.m. to the Plough ¹⁰ to have a Sherry. Joan's mother can knock it back she had six whisky's and didn't turn a hair. The girls were giggly after only one sherry. After that Peggy Battell (Mrs Rogers daughter) took us in her car to Joan's house for coffee, and at 11.30 she ran me home. [...]

At 12.30 I wasn't asleep and some planes came over. It was very cloudy but the place was alive with searchlights. Well I've laughed at many people when they have said they heard German machines but I shan't any more.

The noise was as different as chalk from Cheese to the English planes. I've never heard anything so peculiar or more ominous. They passed over and went in the direction of Hatfield-However I haven't heard of any raids. I hope you don't get too many [...] Do you think you will always have to be on duty for such long hours or is it during this preliminary training.

⁸ possibly Norwegian film star

⁹ cinema

¹⁰ pub adjacent to the cinema

Second letter (also Saturday)

I knew you would be about 100 miles away when you said you were going to Nottingham. 24 hours leave will be of no use to you there [...] I hope [...] that the rumour about twice weekly collection of letters is not true...It would be awful to have only two letters a week [...]

Owing to the London raids, Aunt Nell's niece telegraphed to say she would not be coming this week end We are awaiting a letter to hear what happened [...]

We have had no more warnings since Sunday, although Hatfield have one or two Bombs were dropped at Widford during the week, including delayed action bombs. One man fell in the crater and was killed. They have also been dropped on Edmonton cinema, and last night the other side of Ware.

I had a 1st Lt a 2nd Lt and a S. Major in this morning. They very much wanted my office for a military P.Office However I said "nothing doing I am already using it for Government work.

I am writing this at home now It is afternoon now and we have just had a warning. However we sat in the Hall and nothing happened. Barbara¹¹ arrived in the middle of it and Mum, who was in Hertford, had managed to get into a shelter, but many people could not. There was no room. The warning lasted about an hour [...] we picked 1 ½ lbs tomatoes yesterday from the garden. Note Miss Smith's¹² phone No is 3356 but the Georges¹³ will soon be on the phone.

¹¹ Ivy's sister

¹² South neighbour

¹³ North neighbour

3rd August 1940

No 6 Squad

The Camp

Yaxley

My Dear Wife,

This is the first Saturday in my life that I have had to work all day without being paid extra for it, but at least we have a clear evening. I thought we were going to get the afternoon out, but we were shot up the waistcoat, and had a hard afternoon's digging instead, but some of us are being allowed out tomorrow evening for 3 hrs. I doubt it will be worth going out for, but I expect we shall anyway. It has been very hot today, and my poor old "snitch" has caught the sun a treat, I bet it will peel, but there's no one here to worry, so why should I.

Well my Venus, I have up to the present only received 2 letters from you, and I think the postal delivery must be pretty lousy round this way because I expected to get at least one today. Never mind, I shall look very hard for one on Monday morning. There is a little cairn terrier in the officer's quarters, and it has three of the sweetest little puppies, I have just been playing with one, and I'm afraid I felt very homesick, because it reminded me so much of you & your Pennie. How I long for the day I shall see you close enough to touch again. Every night I look at your photograph & tell you how I love you, but I want you to hear it, and as soon as I can, I shall see that you do & in the meantime here is something to be going on with [...] Please write again soon darling & tell me all I want to know, I know you miss me [...]

There is one boy here, who is a real good mate, and he's only been married a fortnight, I think he feels very much the same as I do, altho' I've had more than he, I feel as if I have been robbed of my right; but we're all going to take it out of the Boche when we contact them.

Well precious, I don't like to end my letters too soon to you, but I have several others to get thro' yet, and so, my sweet, until tomorrow, goodnight.

Sunday
4 August 1940
Waterford

A hastily scribbled pencil note

I am hoping you are being allowed a little more leisure. Its so hot that it must be awful in your thick clothes. Son¹⁴ is home for seven days [...] This morning we went up to the Heath for a game of tennis, we missed the bus and had to walk all the way [...]

Sunday
4th August 1940
The Camp,


My very own,

For the first time this week, we are able to relax. The day has consisted of –rise at 7. Breakfast 7.30, Church Parade at 9-10 and the Padre is a really nice fellow, he preached a good sermon, and he's a man's man. After church we had ½ hours fatigue, and from then on we are finished, and am I glad, because I've got a splitting headache, and my arm has gone wrong again now, as a result of the inoculation, it is now more painful than it was, and if it's no better soon, I shall have to report sick. It's a good job it's my left arm, or else I shouldn't be able to write of my love for you, but you needn't worry, I shall get news to you whenever I can. I am going out tonight for 3 hours, with 2 of the best pals I've had, the one who has only been married a fortnight, and the railway clerk, who is only a youngster, and when you realise that this will be the first time we've seen anything but a barrack square & tarmac roads, you may guess what a

¹⁴ Son is the nickname for Ernest Cox, brother of Ivy and a navigator with the R.A.F.

relief it will be if only for a few hours.

We are trying to get to Peterboro', and have a look over the place, they tell me there is a very fine Cathedral there, and it should prove interesting. We shall, of course hitch hike into the town, as all the fellows here say it's not a bit difficult to get a lift to anywhere, anyhow we're going to try.

Everyone in the camp in the old soldier line and there are quite a few, say we are unlucky to start here first, because it will go hard with us when we're shifted to another place, they say we're too well treated, but if that is so, I dread to think what a rough place would be like, I only hope I shan't ever meet up with it.

This end of the world is all chimneys, I've never seen so many before, you know what McMullen's brick chimney is like, well they're taller than that, and last night while I was trench digging I counted no less than 50 or probably more, all dotted about the countryside, it looks like a real industrial town, no wonder we have air raids this way.

All the boys in the hut are laying on their beds now, one is cleaning boots, two more are pumping a football, ready to have a kick about, I must say they have more energy than I have. The general air about the camp is a Sunday one, and I've never felt so thankful for a respite. The boy next to me, who only lives in Peterboro', has been given the whole afternoon & evening off, because he don't live far away, he is the luckiest devil in the camp.

All day long there are aeroplanes overhead, and at night one is lulled to sleep by their drone. I must say I manage to sleep a bit better now than I did at first, but I could do with far more than I get.

The sun is absolutely blistering today, and I'm thankful we are not in it drilling & marching, or I think I should die.

Well my treasure, I must close now, but I love you just the same as I ever did, I'll always love you darling,

Monday

5th August 1940

Camp

To my sweet darling wife,

[...] I hope the day is not far away when we shall meet, if only for a few short hours.

Well darling, it's nine o'clock again, and we've been on the go since 6 this morning, & I can assure you that I'm completely buggered up, and only by writing this note to you, do I hope to lose myself in the land of dreams for a little while, it's the only time I'm happy.

Today has been an eventful one, we have clubbed together, and hired a wireless for 3/6d per week which works out at 3d per head roughly, and tonight was the first time any of us have heard the news since we came here. There is some nice soothing music on at the moment, and it's quite a treat to hear.

Every night the boys make me play "Goodnight my Love" after lights out and they all sing it & then go to sleep, we all think of the sweethearts & wives we long to have in our arms again.

We have been learning how to fire a Lewis machine gun today, and things are becoming quite interesting for short periods during the day. But the majority of it is still drilling & marching & trench digging, we look like convicts & work a bloody sight harder, please excuse my language, but that is precisely how I feel.

This morning we went for a route march, and an old lady came out & gave us a glassful of rhubarb wine each, and another came out with lemonade & cake, they were nice old dears, & we appreciate it, but I don't think the sergeant will stop us there any more. Because they say it is not wise to drink on the march.

Yesterday we went into Peterboro' & it's a perfectly lousy dump, Hertford is a thousand times better. The Cathedral is a beautiful place & provides about the only item of interest in the city. It is not a particularly

large town, about as big as ST. ALBANS I should say, although probably it is a little larger.

We got on a bus to come back, and there was a lady conductor on, and as her husband was a soldier, she did not take our fares, which was very nice of her I thought.

You ask why we are called gunners when we are R.E.'s, well here is the explanation. We have been officially changed from R.E.'s to Royal Artillery, hence the title Gunner, but as we have not been officially told about our address yet, we must continue to put 401 Coy. R.E. but it will soon be R.A I expect.

Our lectures here are proving very enlightening, & do much to prove what an important part we are playing in the home defence, and its by no means an easy or safe job, as our strenuous training proves, but I shall stick it, because I know now that I am playing an important part towards defending "Four Winds", in which lives the only person in the world who matters to me, and if it comes to fighting, I shall know how to, because we shall be taught bayonet work, it's a proper blood thirsty business, but I shall take delight in sticking any jerry who tries to get to Waterford.

You said you would like to come to Yaxley, but I really don't think it's feasible at the moment, because we never know when we shall be allowed out, and when we don't, we can see no one or nothing except huts and parade ground. So darling, until things sort themselves out a bit, you must rely on me to let you know when it will be possible, I should like nothing better in the whole world than to see your sweet face for a few hours, and I'm terribly homesick.

You were certainly lucky to find ten bob, and I'm very grateful for the cigarettes you sent, I like to think that is my share of the proceeds. As a matter of fact I did not receive them until today (Monday) and all the weekend I sat without a letter to read, I do wish you could write more often, as letters are the only solace any of us find in this prison, you should see the boys crowd round when the letters come & the envious looks for the lucky ones, so please try to make me a lucky one, up to now you & Mum are the only ones who have written now, & I think I've got a lousy set of pals who won't write when I need letters most but perhaps things will settle

down soon, & I shall get a glimpse of the life from all the familiar angles.

Please don't worry too much about my moans but I am depressed tonight, and letters, as I said before, are the only bright spot in the days proceedings.

I think we have more injections in store for us this week, and my arm is still troubling me from the last lot, so I don't know how I shall be after this dose.

I have just been discussing the possibilities of you coming here, with my friend who lives in Peterboro', and we think I might wangle Sat afternoon from 2 till 9-30, & you could spend the night with his wife & come out to the Camp on Sun. afternoon & I could meet you at the gate & we could sit in the fields until you had to go, I think the possibilities are favourable if I can wangle Sat. afternoon, anyhow I shall do my darndest, and in the meantime perhaps you could look up a few trains for Sat. & return on Sun. I shall give you further details in time, as I find them out.

Well darling, on that cheerful note I shall end for today, and my only hope from now on will be to see you on Saturday.

Goodbye my darling until tomorrow [...]

Tuesday
6th August 1940
Camp

I have made a few tactful enquiries, & find that I am granted Sat. afternoon off, from 2.30 till 9.30 or 10, & the sergeant, who is a really fine chap off the parade ground, says nothing will be said if I can get someone to do my shift for Sunday afternoon, so that I may contrive to see you on both Sat & Sun afternoons. My friend from Peterboro' says you will be welcome to stay with his wife for the night. I want you to go to Peterboro' station, there are two there, and you will get off at the first one, from there it is only a short distance to the swimming pool & if you get there before I, or

vice versa, we will wait in the gardens in front of the pool. I expect you will need to get a little time off from work if we are to make the most of my freedom, & I expect you to tell me when you will arrive, & hope you will find out about return trains from Peterboro', because it is impossible for me to do so. The country is not exactly nice around this way, but I'm sure we can find somewhere quiet to put ourselves but anyway who cares so long as we are together again [...] although we have worked 14 hours again today I don't care in the least.

This afternoon we did a route march of 8 miles, & are my feet tired? & then to crown that, we all had to do an hours digging. Everyone in the camp must do an hours digging every day, on air raid shelters & trenches, it seems that something hot is expected shortly, & we are prepared for any emergency. But I do hope nothing is going to happen to stop us getting together this weekend, but if for any unknown reason my leave should be stopped after it was too late to let you know, you could wait for ½ hours or more & when I failed to turn up, you would have to catch the Werrington Bus & get off at "Fox Covert Road", No. 4 & the lady's name is Mrs Ruck, pronounced Rook. The place is just outside Peterboro' & is known as Glinton¹⁵, so if you remember Mrs. Ruck [...], that is where you'll spend the night, & I shall contrive to get a message thro' & an explanation as to why I can't come, but that is looking on the gloomy side of things & I shall continue to dream of the weekend. By the way bring the F.L.¹⁶ I left, in case it should be needed, you never know, & we can't take chances.

The conditions governing the camp are very lenient, for instance, one of my friends here, had his mother & father call here unexpectedly today, and although he did not see them when they called, he was allowed out for 5 hours this evening to be with them & I think that was jolly decent of the S.M. He is a fine chap, in fact everyone here are real gentlemen & are really most considerate when we try to do our best.

Please remember I shall not be off until 2.20 on Sat. & I may be a bit

¹⁵ Glinton/Werrington is at the extreme north of Peterborough whereas Yaxley is on the southernmost tip of the city

¹⁶ French Letter

late getting in, so don't give up hope too soon, will you darling.

We are told that next month we shall all be on searchlight training, & I think that it will be very interesting from then on, although we get plenty to think about now.

You will be pleased to know that I have undertaken the tremendous task of teaching "Pennie", our dimwit, to read & write a bit, he doesn't even know his alphabet & he's older than I am, so you can guess what a job I've got, I don't know if I shall ever do much good, but at least I can try. He seems eager enough to learn anyhow.

Well my precious sweetheart wife, I must close now, so goodbye my sweet & God bless you [...]

Wednesday

7 August 1940

Waterford

Typewritten letter

I was thankful to hear that you were allowed to have an easy day [...]

Lister (sic) darling, did you get my parcel sent you on Friday containing 44 Kensitas and toothpaste, also the parcel sent off yesterday containing 40 Players and two boxes of chocs? Son tells me that things are likely to be taken from parcels before they reach you [...]



In future I am going to put sealing wax on the string [...] I was going to write this letter...last night but Aunties asked me to go "chipping" so it was [...] late [...] I cut the front lawn, in between having to stop every two minutes because Mrs George would talk. I read in the paper today that an invasion is imminent (sic), which makes me want to see you more than ever, in case things happen and you don't ever get leave.

Is it any use if I come at the week end? [...]

Auntie Gertie wrote to Dad on Monday (not Mum¹⁷) and complained about the food she had had and the sleeping accommodation and said that it was obvious she wasn't wanted that the Charlie¹⁸ evidently preferred the company at the Two Brewers to her's (which is not surprising as Mum says she nagged him from the day she arrived). Of course they are all very upset over it as it will probably make a permanent break. As if there is enough enmity in the world without making more [...]

Wednesday

7 August 1940

Waterford

One day nearer to seeing you!!

Dad came over for teas & [...] looked over the garden. He says we are lucky to still have peas [...] but brussels sprouts were too closely set [...] I dug a root of your main crop potatoes this evening-There were 22!!.....Dad thinks the ground is looking much better than when he was here last [...]

I bought a half tea service from Woolworths yesterday 6/- the set. One of our cups...had a piece fall out [...] there were only two...we had to have some more [...] What are you doing with your civilian clothes? Will you bring them home [...]? I expect they will be too crumpled to wear [...]

Thursday

Continued in pencil

It's [...] marvellous that I shall be able to see you this weekend. ..

¹⁷ Gertie's sister

¹⁸ Her husband Charles

I made enquiries about trains [...] Depart Hertford 11.43 Arrive Peterboro' 2.48 if I miss this one [...] The next is Hertford 1.41 arr. Peterboro 4.59. [...] I must catch the 7.12 from Peterborough if I am to come home via Hertford North, but I shall enquire if there is a late train from Liverpool Street on Sundays [...] I do write every day [...] the letters seem to take such a long time to reach you [...]

8th August 1940

Yaxley Camp

I'm sorry you did not get a letter yesterday, but we had one of our hardest days on record, & I developed a terrific headache, and although we had an evening off, I was only fit to go to bed after the days work.

Well darling I did not receive any communication from you yesterday, or today, but I am expecting to hear from you tomorrow, and I am taking it for granted you will come down on Saturday, although we are only granted Sunday afternoon off, but you stick to the instructions I gave you in my last letter, and I think I shall wangle Saturday as well. I'm simply dying for Saturday to come and remember, the garden outside the swimming pool is our meeting place, I think there is some shelter there should it be raining, but I'm hoping it will be fine.

Today has been a fairly easy one for us, consisting of learning signals, & a little bit of drill in the morning & then a lecture. After this, some big bug came from headquarters to inspect us, and we were practising loading & unloading a Lewis machine gun, he said we looked an intelligent lot, and everyone seems to be pleased with us. This afternoon was not so good, we had another lecture by the M.O. telling us why we are inoculated, and after that we went for a 6 mile route march, and some of the way we had to wear our gas masks, can you imagine this? on a scorching hot afternoon, with your whole body sweating blood, it's not pleasant I can assure you. After tea, it was our fatigue night again, and out we had to go for an hours digging, and I'll admit I don't feel so tired as I did at first, but I still don't feel exactly fresh. There is a concert on at the NAAFI tonight, but I'm not going, I'd rather write this letter to you, there are two more boys doing the same

with me, and it's sure a treat to have some quiet. This is the best time of day for me, it's when I feel nearest to you. [...] you've no idea how long it seems since we parted, but I hope we shall arrange a break to that soon, I do hope I can pull it off for Saturday.

I believe we are due for another needle tomorrow, so I expect I shall be a little bit sore for the weekend, but I shan't think about it while I'm with you.

The fellows here say I'm getting greyer every day, I wonder if you'll notice any difference, I certainly feel older, but if it wasn't for B.P.¹⁹ I'm sure it's doing me good, but of course I must be doing exactly the opposite to what a doctor would prescribe, however, until I've finished this course, I shall say nothing, or I might get taken off, and I'd be shoved in the cookhouse, or something like that, and I'm sure that doesn't appeal to me.

How is Pennie? does she grow much? I hope she is learning to behave herself a little better now.

You might remember me to the Georges & Smiths & Matthews when next you speak to them, & tell them that I'm getting on alright, although it's not so easy a life as I've been used to.²⁰

The window in our hut by my bed faces West, and as I look, there is a beautiful sunset, I wonder if you are seeing it too at this moment, I can picture you in the garden, I hope you are not overdoing it tho'. [...]

The fellow in our hut who I was teaching to read & write has done well, he is being moved on Friday (tomorrow) to another place, because he is too daft to get on here, but I think he is playing for discharge, because when we asked him where he was going, & what he was going to do, he said, act daft again of course, so we've drawn the conclusion that he isn't so daft as he seems.

I think we are definitely going on to searchlight work next month, our sergeant told us that he was going to teach us, which will be very nice,

¹⁹ Blood pressure

²⁰ See picture on page 12

because he is a brick, & is really very patient with us all, but I think he will get his reward, because we are whipping into shape nicely now, and I think the lieutenant payed him a compliment today when we were on parade, so he is quite pleased with us.

Well my little tinkie, I think I have gone thro' all there is, and it only remains to be seen whether you get this letter on Sat. morning, I think the postal arrangements are very sluggish actually, but you should receive it, and you can read it on the train. I'm going to end now my precious, so until Saturday, I'll send all my love to help you on your way.

11th August 1940

The camp, Yaxley

Here I am back amongst the boys again, having my leg pulled, they all tell me I've got a sparkle in my eyes, & I've told them that I could win the war on my own now, or at least I feel like it. I felt very downcast when the train took you away from me, and made my way to the Bus stop, where I found I should have to wait an hour or more, so I started walking home, and the first car I waved to, stopped & picked me up, it was a posh one, & there was only a man & I presume his wife in it, she knows Hertford very well, as she used to work for Dr. Hyslop Thompson, the medical officer. She said she didn't think much of Hertford when I told her I didn't think much of Peterboro', & in the end we agreed that all towns are as bad when you're a stranger to them.

The boys here are now saying that we may not get our 24 hours next week, as half the camp is being sent out to detachments, but I believe there are over a hundred new men coming in next week, & if this is so, we should getaway [...] ..I shall be home on Saturday so we can cancel any arrangements you may have made.

I've just had another happy surprise, this seems to be my lucky day, the P.T. Corporal just came in & asked us if we would rather go for a swim instead of P.T. in the morning, we shall be taken to the pool by lorry at 10

to 7 in the morning, and will be admitted for 2d each, & as this is my first chance of a dip I am very pleased. He says we shall only be able to go about once a week tho', and if he can't get 30 men, we shan't be able to go at all, but I'm looking on the bright side, nothing can depress me tonight, I love you darling, & we've had a little bit of Heaven, that is something to carry us on to next time, & I hope it won't be long. I'm thinking of you now, its 9.30 and I picture you on your way to Hertford from Kings Cross, I think you are about Haringey now, I wonder if I'm far out? perhaps you can let me know.

I expect you are terribly tired my darling, you must be, what with all the travelling & excitement, but I'm hoping you think it was worth it, you've made me the happiest & luckiest soldier in the barracks [...]

Well my precious, I think I have told all there is for today, I expect we shall catch it hot tomorrow, but I'll tell you all, after we finish our fatigue, because I'm sure we shall get it, but I don't care, I've lived again, even if only for a few short hours, so until tomorrow darling I'll say goodnight and God bless you my sweetheart.

Monday
12 August 1940
Waterford

My darling Bill,

I wonder if you understand my shaky writing of my last letter to you. It isn't too easy writing in a train, with your Identity Card for a pad and rather misty eyes. I have a nice firm table today and can see very well again now thank you. You will be pleased to hear that I was in doors at Four Winds a minute or two before 10.30 yesterday and it was a lovely moonlight night. Did you look at the moon too. At least we can still do that together, and the sunsets too. I think that makes us feel closer to one another.

I think Aunt Nell will be in London next week end visiting her brother,

so if you can come we may be fairly private. We need you home to take some of the spare energy out of Penny. She tires me before I tire her. How was drill today, and is your arm alright?

I am told that ²¹Webby got his papers on Saturday for this Wednesday. One is in the Pioneer Corps (thats the roadmaking corps, isn't it?) and he has to go to Glasgow!!! Can you imagine him? Now be thankful for all your own luck!!!



Across the valley from Four Winds. From left: Len Wagstaff, Sybil Pettit, Kitty Wagstaff, Nell Barker, Ivy, Bill

Len²² came over on Saturday. He told the aunts that he will have to register again on Saturday with this new calling up of all engineers. (If you read or listened to the news lately, you will know that all classes of engineers are to register, and there is to be a severe combing out of reserves). He says he is fed up with hanging about and wont mind going. I wonder. Well darling, I expect you will think this a short letter, but I have to go to this Water Supply & Sewerage Committee meeting and would like to get this posted beforehand

²¹ Reginald Webb

²² Wagstaff

Till tomorrow darling, Au revoir. Your own Ivy

Monday

12th August 1940

The Camp, Yaxley

Dearest Treasure,

This week promises to be the unluckiest one in store for us, judging by today's performance. I'll try to outline the programme.

First of all we got our swim this morning, after breakfast we came to earth with a bump, (1) bayonet drill. 1 hour. (2) bomb throwing 1 hour (3) machine gun loading sighting etc., interval for dinner afterwards (4) 1 hrs foot drill. (5) lecture on map reading. (6) a 2 hour route march & back for tea. After tea (7) an examination Gen Knowledge & observance, I don't yet know the results. (8) 1 solid hours overtime marching across & back across & back the parade ground, until we were nearly on our knees (it is now 8 o'clock & we have actually finished, & the way everyone is swearing, it looks as if a meeting is in the wind, I hope nothing comes of it tho', because we shall all have to suffer.

We are losing one of our pals from the squad tomorrow, he is going away with other fellows from other squads to our main headquarters, I shan't say where, and everyone seems to think we shan't get our 24 hours this weekend, as things are being buggered about from all quarters.

Well darling, Sunday seems a long way off now, today's work has pushed it right in the background but as I write, my memory refreshes, and I glance at my overcoat & it all comes back to yesterday, they can't drive you away darling, however they try, & that is their object I'm sure, but please keep writing as often as you can, & they won't succeed.

By the way I had no mail this morning, & so I reported the fact that a parcel had been coming over a week, & the corporal in charge said that every letter & parcel was signed for as it is received into the camp, and the fault is not at this end, & if I don't get it tomorrow, you must make a

complaint at your end. I shall write tomorrow night, & if I make no mention of the parcel arriving, will you please proceed to make inquiries, because I think if pilfering goes on, it's time it was stopped.

I am just listening to the boys at the end of the hut, they're really sore about today's work, & if they're were overheard, they would all be put in the glasshouse for life. I'm wondering what the outcome of it will be. There are one or two of us chipping in now & again to try & calm them, but nothing can be done, they're cross, & they'll stay so, I think. But anyhow, if we get another day like this, it will bugger me up, & I shall have to go to the M.O.

Perhaps tomorrow will dawn better for us tho' I hope so because I don't think the future holds much promise for us, in fact it looks pretty bleak, but the sun shines for a moment, every time I think of yesterday, and it continues to shine as I think of the next time we meet [...] nothing will ever part us, we were meant for each other, and we remain together in spirit, even tho' we're apart.

Arthur & myself are sticking together like glue, & I hope if we're moved, we shall stay together, we're both in love with our sweethearts, and are the only two who write every day, we're both at it now, pouring out our hearts to the ones who mean so much to us, we don't care what happens once the day is over & we can get our pens out, because as I try to explain, every time I write, I feel nearer to you, it eases the pain of being parted, & while we can write, I can be reasonably happy.

Well my precious, I think I have passed on all the news for the moment, but I shall probably have plenty to write about tomorrow, & I just wondered what sort of birthday I shall get,²³ I bet it won't be much of a treat. By the way I haven't found out about an identity disc yet, & I think that after all, I had better have a new mouth organ instead, as mine is definitely going to the dogs, & the boys do appreciate it, especially on the march, so if you will forget the disc & get me an organ of the usual size 10/6 I think, I shall treasure it as much as anything else you could send. If you send the actual instrument please put tons of packing round it, as it's

²³ 15th August

sure to get damaged if you don't.

Please forgive all the instructions about a birthday present, but I thought it as well to tell you, in case you forgot.

I really think I have written all there is now my own precious, please take care of yourself, & remember me to the Aunties, & tell them I'm trying to keep my pecker up, so Goodnight my love, God bless you darling,

Tuesday
13 August 1940
Waterford

My dearest Bill,

Many many happy returns of today- the 15th and may the next one be spent at home in peace. I hope you like the words on your card. I nearly drove the girl in the shop crazy looking for one with words I wanted. I was very particular as I would not be able to to (sic) wish you a happy birthday myself.

Inside the card you will find a little bit of me I bought it for you when I came on Sunday, but in the excitement of seeing you I forgot to give it to you. I hope you will keep it for good luck.

I haven't bought your identity disc yet Please let me know just what you want on it. [...]

Webby sent me the snaps today What do you think of them I think they are good but I don't see the one of we two together. Have you got one of this? The Aunties would like one or two copies of the four of us together with the house in the background. When you write to Webby he may be able to get one or two done through his pal----- or, better still, ask for the negatives.



Back of Four Winds, August 1940. From left: Ivy, Nell, Bill, Sybil.

Don't forget darling if it is possible. I saw him today and thanked him for the snaps I feel sorry for him having to go so far away. I hope you will write to him. I have just seen Ron²⁴. He hopes to get married in September. I think he's rather fed up with living on his own. I don't blame him do you! I went up to the Heath for lunch as usual today. The Aunts were there as well with Penny. having brought their own lunch. I brought out a pot of mustard for them and of course G.G. Penny immediately knocked it over and licked of (sic) the mustard. We simply had to laugh. But do you know even this did not seem to deter her much, as she was soon around (sic) after any food that was going.

Len²⁵ is coming over on Saturday I think, so if you are home you will see him but I'm not banking too much on that or I shall only be so very disappointed if you don't come.

There is "business as usual" today, if you know what that means and

²⁴ Dempster

²⁵ Wagstaff

don't forget that if you do come home we have no "Ethels"²⁶ or this week end Ron's would be suitable. I leave it to you. I hope you don't get this till Thursday. I must post tonight or I may not be in time for your birthday now as its 6.30 and I am still at the office. I think I'll say "Goodbye darling" I send you all my love [...] as its your birthday.

13th August 1940
The Camp, Yaxley

My own darling,

I love you although I'm now in the last throes of death. My goodness, what a day, I shan't stick this for much longer I'm afraid. We drilled all morning, & this is no easy thing I can assure you, & after dinner, we went for an 8 mile route march & did an hours manoeuvres in a field, the only break we had in the whole afternoon was 10 mins. I just staggered home, I'm sure I didn't march, we had to wear tin hats all the while, & my head was so wet that it was just the same as if I'd been swimming, and ache, well it was one of the best. To crown all this we had to go digging after tea, & we could hardly carry the shovels, but we were put on the shelter where the officers were standing over us all the time, so we had to work, & was I glad when we packed up.

After this I got a haircut, & had a shower and here I am darling, tired but happy again. [...] By the way I only got your letter this morning, the one you wrote on the train, & the parcel has not arrived, so perhaps you will proceed with a complaint, I think we ought to do something, because it's not safe for anything to be sent, if one cannot be sure of it reaching it's destination. How did your work go without old Wheeler there to worry you I should imagine it keeps you busy this week, but as you say, while you have plenty to do, you can't worry too much, but keep writing darling [...]

Since your cake was split up on Saturday, we have had another from someone else's Mother, who lives in Wales, & another boy's wife from

²⁶ These would be French Letters or "FLs"

Watford has sent some sausage rolls, & small cakes, & they all shared, so that makes three successive nights we've had cake for supper.

Last night the sirens went in Peterboro', but I don't think anything happened, at least we've heard of nothing. Anyhow, it didn't keep us awake, I think nothing short of bombs will ever worry us while we work as we do.

You will be happy to know that I'm reclining on the folded overcoat, and it's bringing memories back again, as fresh as ever, how I enjoyed that Sunday, the memory will live for ever my darling, & soon we shall be together again I hope.

Well my precious, I am about at the end of my tether again for today, I shall go to bed early tonight to lie & dream of you [...] Goodnight my love, God bless you, & keep us for each other,

P.S please send more envelopes

14th August 1940

The Camp, Yaxley.



Today has been considerably easier for me, because I reported sick this morning. Yesterdays hard programme mucked me up, & I woke with a headache again, & on top of that, I can never get my breath properly from the time we start till the time we finish.

Well, as I say, I reported sick at the hospital, & the M.O. has gone away for 7 days leave, & the sergeant there did not know what to do for me, so in the end he excused me all duties until tomorrow, (my birthday) at 11 a.m. when I must report again, & there will be a locum to see me. I bet if he troubles to take my blood pressure, he'll have a nasty shock, because I'm sure it's worse now than it ever was. The others in my hut, haven't been hit too hard today, and they were let off at 4 today instead of 5. I don't know if we are being allowed an evening off or not, but it's about time we had one. The other men who were here before we came, have told us that

we're getting a rougher time than they had, & they had much more free time than we get. Never mind, I think we shall get the weekend off if we're lucky, at least, our sergeant seems to think we're pretty sure of it, so of course everyone's in high spirits now. I do hope we shan't be disappointed, but anything can happen to us now we're in the army, so we shouldn't be surprised.

It appears, according to what we've heard, that we were nearly bombed last night, at least, we nearly had the warning, & this afternoon, as I was laying on my bed, the sergeant major came in, & told me if I heard the siren go, I was to put on my tin hat, & get into a trench with my gas mask & cape, as quickly as I could, because we are likely to get some raids now. So you see, things are warming up, & there's a need for men like us in England after all.

I was sorry to hear poor old "Webby" is going to the Pioneer Corp, he thought he was for R.A.M.C., you know, and that will be a terrible come down for him, & apart from that, I think the work will be pretty hard; I wonder if he will get infantry training first, or whether he will just get a pick & shovel, anyhow he's got my sympathy. By the way, I haven't had those snaps from him yet, I wonder if we'll get them now.

Well my angel, I'm afraid I have very little to write about today [...] each day brings me nearer to you, soon we shall be in each other's arms again, building up more memories to treasure.

I don't know whether we shall be vaccinated this week or not, but I wouldn't be surprised if we don't have to wait until the M.O. comes back, but I shan't mind, because it will be a change to have a weekend without a sore arm.

All day long now we get hundreds of planes buzzing overhead, & they're all low, it's positively impossible to imagine this place really quiet, but we're quite used to it now.

Now my darling, I'll have to end for another day, & I'll be writing again tomorrow, so goodnight my love, God bless you Your very own loving husband

15 August 1940

Waterford

Bill's birthday

I received two letters from you this morning— one written on the 13th & one on the 14th. So you see sometimes they get here at the proper time.

That means that I shall not get one tomorrow morning now, which is a pity. I am sorry you have had to report sick. They must be taking it out of you and I'm sure it will only make your condition worse, all this violent exercise. Never mind, we are half way through the month. I am anxious to here (sic) what the M.O. said to you.

your birthday today! I wonder if you are having a nice easy time laying on your bed, or slogging away in the heat! By the time this letter reaches you, you will know if you are getting off this week end. I'm keeping my fingers crossed darling, but I am not thinking too much about it in case you don't come. But I know you'll do your best. Aunt Nell is in London So we shall be almost alone.

You will be pleased to hear that Penny is none the worse for her sting. Her face was quite its normal size by the evening.

I am going to try to get Mum & Auntie Sybil to the cinema tomorrow evening with me. (But we shan't sit in the back row & cuddle).

I seem to have a little cough. I wonder if I got it on Sunday? Anyway, if I did it was worth it, but even so darling. I think I would rather see you at home, somehow I think it is nicer don't you?

I have filled in a form for the missing parcel, claiming 4/2 But it will be some time, you know, before we get it, if we ever do. How are you off for cigarettes. I expect you have some money. If you want any I will send money as I don't want to risk cigarettes through the post again Don't ask for any this week though, will you, as after the week end I am rather short

By the way, you should have the snaps from Webby by now as he

posted them to you the same day that he posted mine but if you can get hold of the negatives, as I suggested in my previous letter, it would be useful.

If I am to send this off while I am in Hertford, I shan't be able to put in any of your envelopes, but perhaps I can get some from somewhere.

Now my darling, I must get on with my work, so goodbye my dearest love, and please when you come home, show me that you love me as much as you say you do in your letters. I think you are shy about saying much when we actually meet!!

I love you Bill and am just existing for the time when you are home again

15th August 1940

The Camp, Yaxley

Thank you for the lovely card you sent to me, it was the only card I had, and you couldn't have chosen a better one, I shall treasure it until I die, as a token of your love for me. I had another letter from you as well, so that I had two together, & there was also a parcel from Mum, containing a small cake & some sweets, also 5/- for a birthday present, so I didn't do badly, and all the boys in the hut greeted me this morning before I realized it was my birthday. We have an evening out tonight, & two or three of my friends are going to the local pub & I shall stand them a drink each. Although Arthur & myself only take cider.

Today I went to the M.O., you will remember I reported sick yesterday, well, he did not bother to test my blood pressure, & ended up by saying I was fit for duty, & gave me some tablets to take 3 times daily, I wonder if they'll do any good? Anyway I do feel better today, because I'd had a days rest, & all this morning I did nothing, but I had to come back to it this

afternoon, however, it wasn't too strenuous to start again.

Arthur has to go to the pay office tonight with two or three others, I do hope they're not going to take him away from me, I'd be lost without him now, & I like to think he'd miss me too, but I'm looking on the black side & it's probably nothing quite so bad.

Now darling, here is a surprise for you, I think I shall be home on Saturday about 3, if I'm lucky, & I shall have to be back here by 10 on Sunday, that is if our luck holds good, so you can kill the fatted calf & make ready for me. How I long for that day to come, & it's not far away, in fact by the time you get this letter, it will be very near, so please expect me now darling, but don't be too disappointed if I don't come, because anything can happen to us now, you know.

I shall have to end now my darling, but I shall write again tomorrow just the same, and tonight I'll pray that you'll soon be in my arms again, so Goodnight my Darling

Friday

16 August 1940

Waterford



My darling William,

Friday here and I am now anxiously awaiting a letter from you tomorrow, saying whether you are coming home or not. I hav'nt made any arrangements for the weekend but I think I shall call Molly England and provisionally arrange a ride on Sunday in case you cannot get away of course. I didn't get a letter from you this morning because I had it yesterday. Barbara is away with Roy in Sussex for a few days so I expect they are happy. I don't expect this will reach you till Monday, when we may have met, if it does get to you tomorrow don't forget to collect your bike from my office. And if it doesn't reach you till

Monday, and we haven't been able to meet, well darling never mind, we have still got it to look forward to.

It's such lovely weather. It would be so marvellous to be on holiday together, say at Jersey, wouldn't it. I wonder if those happy times will ever return!! At present there is no time for anything but the war and we are certainly kept busy 144 enemy planes down yesterday!! Thank goodness it is still quiet here and I pray that it may continue to be so. I dare say it's exciting to watch the fights but I think I prefer the peace & quiet.

Well darling [...] on paper is the only way at the moment of expressing our love for one another, we must put up with it.

P.T.O

Saturday morning (in red)

We have air raid warning 5. o'clock yesterday but too excited that you are coming home to write news now!! Will tell you when you come!!

All my love

18th August 1940

The Camp, Yaxley

Here I am, back amongst the same old surroundings, & how gloomy it all seems, it's been raining here, so you can guess what it's like.

Well, I met all the boys at Hitchin, & the train was absolutely packed, but because we were soldiers, we were allowed to sit in the mail van, amongst the letters & parcels. When we got to Peterboro' we visited the services canteen & got a cup of tea & a pork pie, & then hitch hiked very successfully back to camp, arriving here at 10 to 8, & nearly all of the boys are back to time, although Reg, the very tall boy, was coming back on a motor bike that his father has bought for him, & he hasn't shown up yet & it's a quarter to nine, I hope he hasn't had an accident or anything. Arthur travelled from Kings Cross, & his wife went with him, but he's very worried now, because as the train was about to leave, the sirens went, & he had to leave her in London with an air raid on, so of course he's on pins now until

we hear the 9 o'clock news to see what happened. I do hope nothing like that happened to you after I had gone.

Well, my angel, you seem very far away now, as your darling face got further away, my heart went further down, until it touched my boots, & it's very heavy now, how I wish you were here, or better still I were still with you, but all I have are beautiful memories on which to survive, I shall cherish the thought of every moment spent this weekend. I understand we will have to wait 3 weeks before I can come home again, & until that is nearer, we can't be certain, but I shall count every second to that day when I stand on the Gt. North Road waiting for a lorry to bring me home [...]

All the boys have brought something back with them, and I have done nothing but eat since I have been back, sandwiches, cakes, biscuits, & one fellow has brought some lovely Victoria plums, they're delicious. [...]

Well my treasure, I really have no more news for you until tomorrow is over, [...] Give my love to Aunties & tell them I think I shall survive to my next leave, and I'm counting the days.

Sunday
18 August 1940
Hertford

Written in pencil

Here I am back in Hertford. It is exactly 5.25 Not bad going is it? There was a bus in when I came from the station and it went off at once, so I thought I would just let you have a little note from the office, before cycling home, so that you may hear (sic) from me on Tuesday. I expect you will get this on Monday all right as I posted one on Saturday.

Well my darling the time has soon gone but I did not mind leaving you half so much as I did last week I felt as if we had had as perfect a weekend as was possible under the circumstances. and therefore that the train could

not entirely cheat me by taking you away.

Now I am going home for some tea my dearest. This isnt a letter, but just a note which I must post while I am in the town ²⁷ so that you will get it Tuesday- so don't mind if theres not much in it. There's no need to say more than to ask you to think of Saturday night. So goodbye my darling [...]

Monday

19 August 1940

Hertford



My dearest Bill,

I had just dropped your letter (which I wrote half an hour after leaving you) in the post box, when the syrens went so I went into the Castle Grounds for 35 minutes. By the time I got home it was 7.pm or thereabouts. There were no bombs dropped that I know of but I was anxious about you as you were probably in the train, or perhaps waiting at Hitchin.

I felt rather unsettled after seeing you so I did just nothing that evening and we went to bed early. I thought I should lay awake think (sic) of the night before and feeling lonely, but I quickly went to sleep. I hope you don't mind. I only feel sad if I stay awake and think. I was reading some famous love letters last night of Napoleon to his Empress, Browning to Elizabeth Barratt etc. They were certainly romantic in those days. It said that the art of love letter writing is lost, but I don't think that is strictly true because you write me very loving letters even if they are not quite so flowery as in the older days. But it also said that men write much better love letters than women I believe that is true because I feel I just cannot say what I want to on paper, its always so stiff and stilted, so darling if you think my letters are rather practical and cold, you must realize that it isnt how I feel but because I cannot express myself properly to you— although its just the same when you are with me— so you see, you think you know me— but

²⁷ Hertford

you don't really. It must be true that women are mysteries to men.

I am on the Surveyor's Office for half an hour to look after it. Thus the time to write to you and solilquise (sic). I have got the wireless on with some nice music—so its quite nice.

Its much cooler today, in fact I feel cold, so I think you will find it much better now on the Parade Ground. How were all the boys, all got twinkles in their eyes?

I have just been round to your mother's to lunch as the Aunts were coming to Hertford. Edith has heard this morning from George²⁸ She evidently wrote him a "snotty" letter last week because he wrote this morning saying that if she was going to be nasty, he was going to volunteer for foreign service. It really makes me wonder if they will ever be married even now.

Well darling I'm going to take Penny for a ride to Stapleford this evening to see about the Aunt's billeting allowances as until Rev. Bradney²⁹ issues these she can't get anything from the Labour Exchange I will let you know how I fare with the back payments so now will say Goodbye for today. I bet there weren't many boys got letters on Monday morning, but you were one of the lucky ones. Am I right?

Goodbye my darling [...] Your very true

P.S In pencil

Would you like your pipe sent? A pipe & a moustache look well together and would make you look more handsome. If work is very hard & trying this next fortnight, try your very best darling, and stick to it. Remember you are starting level and this is the test! I want you to get a stripe before George or Roy-so go to it!!

²⁸ Onyon

²⁹ Vicar at Stapleford Church & probably the billeting officer

I know you have far more grit than the two of them put together but you must be able to show it-so remember darling its up to you, and if its hard going, I shall be all the prouder when you do get on.

19th August 1940

The Camp, Yaxley



Here it is Monday evening, and we've had a fairly strenuous afternoon & evening. This morning wasn't too bad, because the old sergeants have gone away, & everyone was ever so happy, there seems to be a more cheerful atmosphere about the place, & we don't mind doing things so much. We had bayonet fighting this morning, stabbing sacks of straw, & even that is a very gruesome affair, as different parts of the sack have to represent parts of the body, such as throat, right & left breast, guts, groins etc., but we got over it pretty well. After this we had some machine gun practice & learnt to take one to pieces.

After dinner however, we got a little more complicated. We spent the whole afternoon on fighting patrols, which consisted of a cross country run in uniform complete with tin hat gas mask & rifle. We had to learn the art of camouflage by making string nets for our tin hats & sticking bits of grass & leaves in them, you would laugh to see us stalking the enemy, we look as if we have birds' nests on our heads, but it really is very successful, because we got to within a few yards of our objective before being discovered, I must admit however, that it tired me more than a route march would have done, & after tea we got an hours hard labour, making machine gun pits, we had to shift big concrete blocks, each weighing about 3 cwt., talk about building the pyramids, they had nothing on us.

I forgot to tell you we had a warning in the camp this afternoon, & spent a half hour in the trenches waiting for bombs, but nothing happened, & we found out afterwards that it was supposed to have been a gas practice, but they sounded the wrong signal, so of course all the big shots got flustered, & machine guns were set up, & every one was very serious,

all for nothing, but still, it was a bit nerve wracking with no roof over our heads, & I can tell you, we have no desire for the real thing.

We have two Coldstream Guards in our barracks now, they're under arrest, & everywhere they go, two of our big fellows go with armed rifles. They were caught in Peterboro' being absent without leave for four days.

They're nice looking boys, & very silly, because they knew they would be punished. I was talking to them at supper time, & they said if they miss one ~~parade~~, they get 7 days C.B.³⁰, so I don't know what they'll get for their offence but I understand they are certain of a spell in prison.

By the way, Reg, the boy with the motor bike I told you about yesterday, arrived here this morning, it appears that his old bike conked out when he was only 11 miles from his home, so he 'phoned the camp, & had to leave his iron in a barn, & spend his evening getting back to Luton, & then came on here this morning. He got chewed up a bit for being late, although it wasn't his fault, but it just shows how careful one has to be.

Arthur has brought his camera back with him, & has succeeded in obtaining permission to take photos of his pals, so I might perhaps in the near future, be sending you some pictures of us. He sends his love to you, & thanks you for the wonderful honeymoon you gave me this weekend, he told me he also had a marvellous time. We're both counting the days to the next one.

I received a letter from you this morning, I presume you sent it on Friday, but it was very welcome, because I did not expect anything until tomorrow. I also had a letter & a parcel of books from Ted³¹ he says he envies me on my first leave, I will enclose his letter for you to read. Little does he realise that I have already had that beautiful experience, & I'll bet even he cannot imagine just how wonderful it was.

We did a bit more probing today, as to our future, & it seems pretty certain that we shall get our searchlights eventually, so we feel reassured for a time at least, until we hear some more rumours.

The two corporals who are taking the place of the sergeants, are really

³⁰ Confined to Barracks

³¹ Ladds

fine fellows, & it's a treat to work for them, we shall be sorry when the others come back, because they seem to put everyone on their mettle, & the N.C.O.s are afraid of them & they have to take it out of us, but this week, well, we're all relaxed, & we'd do anything for anyone. [...]

I think I have run myself out of news again, but the memory of my weekend lives on to cheer me, I think it can live forever [...] Your loving husband

20 August 1940

Waterford



My darling sweetheart,

Thank you for your lovely letter this morning. I am glad to hear you were not late back to camp. It would never do for any of your leave to be stopped would it? Its little enough as it is.

We haven't had any warnings since Sunday, although I hear that the Heath had an extra one that we missed over the weekend. That made three for them in three days.

I am going up today to get some greengages for your mother Auntie S has already got a lot for us. There are so many that mum is selling them, so I am going to see that I get plenty to bottle and make jam with. I dug all the potatoes on the "shelter" side of the garden last night. I shall try to do the other side this week as the wire worms are getting busy. Talking of worms I think thats what I saw from Penny this morning. Anyway I have got some tablets for her, but it says "fast the dog for 12 hours first". That will be a penance for her won't it?

I am going to Rons tonight, although to be quite frank I would rather go home. There is so much to do in the garden.

I bought my winter shoes yesterday while I thought of it. I had hoped to buy a 15/- S.Certificate this week, but I can't have my cake and eat it can I? I am at the Surveyor's Office again and there is just 10 minutes left before I go in which to say how much I love you. [...] you already know that,

although I know you want me to write it in each letter and I know how much you think of me because there is generally half a page of each letter telling me so, but I hope you will try and prove it by doing your best to get on. [...] I must go [...] I will write again tomorrow,

20th August 1940.

The Camp, Yaxley.

I received your note this morning, and I was glad to know you didn't have to hang about in Hatfield after I left. [...]

Well darling, today has not been quite as tiring as yesterday was, but the effects of it combined with the after effects of yesterday, have made me feel about all in, and just lately my digestion has been playing me up, I'm grateful for Mcleans now.³² We have a free evening tonight, but of course we can't get out, so I'm going to spend it writing letters, & then I shall go to bed early. We've had some more sack stabbing today, & learnt a bit more about taking a machine gun to bits. An hours route march was all we had today, & that was quite enough for me, but really it's better than drills, so I shouldn't complain.

Cyril Ruck had to go to the M.O. again today, and he has been re graded to D. I think that is the lowest possible, so his heart must be bad. He mustn't even wear his gas mask unless he can sit quiet somewhere.

I'm afraid my Venus, that there is very little else to write for today, except that the two Grenadier Guards I told you of, are still here under guard, they don't seem to be in much of a hurry to collect them. Our corporal told us today that they are only 17 ½ years old, I'm very sorry for them even tho' they did know what they would get.

Nearly all the boys are writing tonight, so I shall not be alone in my

³² *Maclean Stomach Powder Tablets. Manufactured by Alex Parsons of Manchester).*

labours, I shall write to Mum, & if I have time I shall send one to one of my mates, either Ron or Len, or even George at work.

So my angel [...] I must say goodnight & God bless you, think of Saturday,

(2 hours later) [...] I have written to Mum & Ted that's all I shall do now, so goodnight [...]

Wednesday 21 August 1940.

Waterford

My darling husband,

Thank you ever so much for the lovely long letter received this morning. I think it is the longest yet. I have been busy at work this morning and as yet I havnt had time to read it through a second as I generally do. I am very glad to hear you are not being worked too hard this week, but still more pleased to hear that you stand a good chance of being put on a searchlight after your initial training.

(I am at the Surveyor's office. its nice to be able to write during the day time to you.). I went to see the Rev. Bradney about the billeting and got it all fixed up and have drawn the allowances So I am going to put £2. away in certificates (also buy £5 which is the cash box as I dont think I need it in the house, but the remainder of your £5 (£3) I shall leave, as you may need it at some time. Today, the Aunts have got the Billeting Form have been to the Labour Exchange to get Auntie Sybil P.A. allowance, but they have another form which is to be signed by the Rev. Bradney, so weren't able to get the money this morning, but I think they stand a good chance of getting an allowance made which will be very nice for Aunt S. Yesterday they made 21 lbs of jam from the fruit from the Heath.

Last night I went to Ron's ³³ with Kitty & Len. Len says that he is

³
³ Dempster in Ware Road

certain to be moved under the new registration of engineers, and that Kitty will go with him (married of course) and will get a job in the same town, and they will live in rooms for the duration of the war.

Ron has almost made up his mind to get married next month and Len is to be his best man Bob is supposed to be getting married at the end of this month, if he hasn't done so already, and Sid & Nancy are being married on Friday (not that the last mentioned worry me at all).

All this news last night made me feel very miserable. It seems as if all my friends are going away— fancy even Len & Kitty, so I didn't feel very happy, but we had a game of cards, although no one seemed to have a lot of heart for them.

Len said someone must see me home (in spite of my vigorous protests) and Ron offered. However I managed to get rid of him at Old Cross. We are meeting at Ware road again next Wednesday, although I hope I can persuade Len not to be silly and insist on bringing me home as I don't want it. I must get used to looking after myself, and anyway he paid me the very doubtful compliment of saying it was for your sake he was insisting on it as you had asked him to keep an eye on me or something. I don't know what is supposed to happen to me in the weeks we don't meet.

By the way 3 marriages mean 3 presents so we shall have to find out what they want.

I expect if Len does go away and takes Kitty, the chances are they will settle down wherever he is sent and not come back.

Ted's ³⁴ letter which you enclosed with yours, sounds a little wistful but I feel sure that his wish that we shall all meet again on the Island ³⁵ won't come true. I think we shall be scattered after the war and not likely to get holidays together any more (even if we can afford them which is very unlikely)

I was thinking I might make myself a dance dress this autumn, in case you take me to any ?? in a staff dance at the College ³⁶ etc Do you

³⁴ Ladds

³⁵ Isle of Man

³⁶ Haileybury College

approve? I don't want you to think I am preparing to be flighty. But as you know I have to borrow a dress if I do go out anywhere. So please let me have your decision my lord!!

Your humble servant must finish her letter now as she has to go to lunch, but she sends all her love and kisses to her most beloved Lord and master, and awaits with great eagerness his next lovely letter to cheer her lonely day. xxxxxx

21st August 1940.

The Camp, Yaxley



Here we are with another gone, & what a day. We had an air raid this morning while we were on parade, there was no warning, all we heard was a terrific boom, & looking up, we saw three spitfires chasing a Dornier, we all had to break & run for the trenches in case we were machine gunned, but it was soon over, & we found out later that the bombs were dropped about 5 miles away, & right next to our company headquarters, but so far as we know, no damage is reported.

This afternoon we went for another march, & our corporals are sports, they didn't want to march any more than we did, so we got out of sight of the camp, & then they let us break off, & get into hedges, & there we stayed for over an hour, until it was time to go back, I reckon that was decent of them. We finished at 4 this afternoon, but we don't know if we shall get out or not, as there is quite a lot of work to be done.

Now darling, here is my latest news- don't write anymore letters until you hear from me again, we are moving tomorrow or Friday. Isn't it lousy, we don't know where we're going exactly, but I understand that it will be near Nottingham, and we shall be under canvas, so the outlook is not what I should call cheerful. However, I shouldn't worry too much my sweet, because I have been told that it will be no further away from London that

we are now, & I don't think it should affect my next leave, & whatever the blasted War Office do, they cannot take away the beautiful memory of last weekend. [...]

I must end now, because I'm giving this letter to a fellow who is going into Peterboro' tonight, & I can then be sure of you getting it quickly. Please tell as many of the people who write to me as you can, because I shan't have a chance to send them all a line, but if you pass on the news to Mum & Ron & Len, that will save some letters going astray. [...]

I shall write as soon as I know my new address, but I suspect we've got a hell of a lot to go through before we settle again [...] God bless you

Undated letter Possibly August 1940

Hertford

Typed letter

My dearest Bill,

Thank you for your lovely letter received this morning. It scarcely reaches the ground after being pushed through the letter box before I am pouncing on it, although Penny reaches it before me in the morning. Then I run up stairs to read it, although I am nearly always late and can't really spare the time, and then I read it again as soon as I get to work.

I am sorry you have had such a hard day, perhaps today will be better. At least the weather isn't so hot, and you have the consolation of knowing that it won't be for long (you are not regular infantry) and that you will soon be on searchlight work.

I went to get you a mouth organ this dinner time. Teib's had only one, and he said that it had gone up from 10/6 to 17/6, so I wouldn't have it. I though (sic) it sounded a bit too much like war profiteering. I went to Elliott's ³⁷ and they seem to have a good selection there of Honer's ³⁸ but not exactly the same as you have had before. There is one that is

3

⁷ Elliott's shop was in Ware Road

³⁸ Hohner

supposed to have a true violin tone, But I didn't decide on any one as I though (sic) it may be the wrong one and I would much rather wait until you are home and we could go into together. If you arnt home this week end, you may be next,- what do you think about it? Of course if you see one in Peterborough that you like and buy it. I will send the money on to you.

Penny had the time of her life yesterday at the Heath. She got thoroughly black with coal and dirt and spent the whole after noon playing and romping all over the place with Paddy. They are excellent friends now. Of course Mum & Dad fed her too much and she came home looking just as if she was about to have six pups. Today I think she has been stung in the mouth by a wasp. and her poor little lips are very swollen (it makes her look so funny you can't help laughing at the poor little thing) However she seem's lively enough in herself, but its like a hippopotamus biting your fingers when she is playing with you. If she isnt any better in a day I think I shall take her to the vet's. That blooming woman next door³⁹ won't let her alone and Auntie S said she saw her feeding her this morning. If I catch her I shall tell her straight that she is not to be fed except at her proper times. I wish people would mind their own business. I shall not let her be taken over the fence if I can help it. There's a nice long paragraph about Penny for you. I expect you'll think she's grown when you come home.

Do let me know how you got on in the general knowledge test yesterday. Is Arthur the one who has been married 2 weeks? I can't remember.

Don't think this is done during work time. It isn't. It's now 6'clock and I am wanting my tea, but if I do this at home I cannot post it tonight for you (Don't you think I must love you a lot? I do darling!!) I am too busy to spend ant (sic) time during the day on letter writing as Wheeler is away. However, Williams complimented me on the report I made out on the Water Supply and Sewerage Committee Meeting on Monday. I have got to go to another one on Saturday morning for the relief of the homeless and destitute persons. Dry isn't it.

Well darling I really think I ought to go home now. I am rather anxious to see how Penny is, so I'll say goodbye till tomorrow when I shall write a

³⁹ presumably Mrs George

short letter before going to first aid but I don't know if you will receive it on the proper day as I may not be able to post it till the next morning, so if you have a day without a letter, the probability is that you will get two the next day.

Please let me know if you object to type written letters and if so I will pen them. Goodbye me darling, God bless you, I love you so much.

CHAPTER TWO

22nd August 1940.

No. 6 squad, Sherwood Lodge,

Arnold, Nr. Nottingham



I don't know when you will receive this letter, or even if you will get it, but we've just arrived at our new barracks, & it's an absolutely god forsaken hole. We're 7 miles the wrong side of Nottingham & 7 miles from Mansfield. The place is an old mansion, standing in perfectly wonderful surroundings, & for tonight we are billeted in a room in the house, but there are also tents, & I expect we shall be moved tomorrow. The people who were here before us must have been pigs, you ought to see the inside of the house, its thick with dirt & dust, & absolutely stinks, & to think we had to spend 2 hours cleaning our own hut out before we left it, & then we come to a beastly hole like this & have to clean up after some other lazy swine.

From what I can make of it, we are now about 100 miles apart darling, & I understand that we shall have difficulty in hitch hiking home, but I'm game for a try as soon as I get leave. [...] I have been up since 5 this morning, and travelling 5 hours in a coach, they absolutely crawled along, & now it's 6 o'clock & all we've had so far is 2 sandwiches, & nothing to drink, I'm dying for a cup of tea, but don't know if we'll get it.

I understand we are likely to get plenty of raids here, and I shan't wonder at it, because this place is lousy with aircraft, but I've reached such a state now that I don't think anything will wake me tonight, & I know we haven't finished yet, because there's bound to be tons of fatigues in a vile place like this. The lavatories are the good old open fronted earth type, & our wash places are tin bowls. We shall have to shave in cold water, & shan't be able to get a bath so far as I can find out, but tomorrow perhaps

there will be a different story, anyhow we shall see, but I can tell you we miss the old barracks.

Well darling I must end now because I want to see if I can get this of straight away, as I understand the post is only collected twice a week, but this may only be a rumour. So goodnight my love,

Friday 23 August 1940.

Waterford

My dearest Bill

I received two letters from you yesterday, one that was posted at 9pm the previous evening, so that was quickly delivered. However, I read it again this morning and pretended (sic) it had just come.

I am sorry to hear you are moving. If it is near Nottingham, you must be going further North. Perhaps it is only for a short term training period. , and anyway your next letter will probably give me some news of what you expect to happen. You know my friend Thelma Gegg? lives in Nottingham so if you were there for some time I might spend that long weekend with her that is due to me I hope you don't find it too bad under canvas but I expect you are sure to miss many of the amenities of the other camp. One thing, Nottingham should prove more interesting than Peterborough. There are supposed to be some very interesting buildings there.

Len came over on Wednesday and dug some potatoes from the side that was properly trenched. They are real beauties I know it would do your heart good to see the results of your labours. They are most beautifully clean. I expect the soot saw to that. There is about 1 cwt dug so far but there's lots more still to be dug.

The surveyor here has supplied me with a special nozzle for the hose which gives it a stirrup pump action so you will be pleased to learn that we

are as good as supplied with a stirrup pump which only cost 10 ½d ⁴⁰. I am going to try it out on Saturday.

You will also be pleased to hear that Auntie Sybil was granted 11/- weekly by the P.A. Evacuation Authorities. This makes their joint income 37/6 weekly ⁴¹ which is just splendid for it will pay for food, insurances etc. and for their share in fuel & lighting.

On the whole I think they have done very well, don't you?

I won't write any more today darling but will add some each day till I can send it to your new address.

Goodbye my sweetheart, I love you

23rd August 1940.

Camp

What a day we've had, scrub, scrub, scrub, all day long, but at least we've made the place look a bit cleaner, you simply can't imagine how much dirt there was, we've even had to scour the walls, Arthur & myself have clicked the job of cleaning up our room, & after a days really hard work, it looks a bit cleaner. We have to get our meals in a big marquee, & have to be fed in relays, because of the poor kitchen arrangements, it seems to amount to the survival of the fittest.

This place was certainly once a beautiful home, I don't yet know who lived here, but it's about twice as large as Leahoe ⁴², & there is even a chapel built onto the house. ⁴³. The grounds are marvellous, but of course the lawns & everything else has been ruined by soldiers, it seems such a pity that a wonderful house such as this must have been, should meet such a fate, but at least it's got some cleaner tenants that it used to house.

They were a Staffordshire Regiment, notorious for filthy habits, but I

⁴⁰ Less than £3 in 2022

⁴¹ About £121 in 2022

⁴² Hertford

⁴³ Sherwood Lodge, later owned by the coal Board, was demolished about 1973 as it was considered surplus to requirements

never believed anyone could be quite so unclean. There are two or three of them left here, and one of our boys went to the Lav. the other day & I met one there, he just got off the seat without using paper, & pulled his trousers up, so you can guess what a vile lot they were, I tremble to think of the fate in store for our beautifully clean camp at Yaxley.

But I think I have complained enough, there remains only one other, that is, no mail has yet been forwarded to us, we are all downhearted about that, but hoping to get it even yet. [...]

I'm even further away, but that only makes me realise even more how much you mean to me, [...] and providing I can get 48 hours leave now & again, I shall be able to get home alright because we've been looking very closely at a map today, & it seems that if we can get to Newark, we shall be on the Gt. North Road, & shall probably have no difficulty in getting to our loved ones. I shall travel with Arthur this time, even though we do live miles apart, we both come from the same County. I don't know exactly when I shall be lucky enough to get another leave, but you can safely bet on me coming home at the first opportunity. I have very little else to add now my precious angel, but I shall be writing as soon as I can tomorrow, and I will keep you informed of all the events in the next few days, I think we are in for a devil of a lot of work of all kinds in the near future, but until it comes, we shall rest as well as we may.

Well my darling wife, I must close now,

24th August 1940.

Camp

To the sweetest girl in the world,

[...] (a *paragraph of adoration*)

Well my treasure, things seems to have slackened off here for some unknown reason, & the whole of today, we have been unmolested, that is after we were turned out of the room we so carefully scrubbed, & sorted into our various squads, & then 16 of us were put into a big marquee, so we are really under canvas now, & getting tough. We have to shave &

wash in cold water. Apart from the moving, today has been exceptional, it's so quiet as to be ominous, I think there is something in store for Monday.

The food has gone wrong here now, you should have heard the moans today, this dinner time especially, the meat was underdone & not enough, & the sweet course was so small that the corporals reported to the officers, but all the satisfaction we got, was the reply that we must make it go round, we are all still hungry, & have had to send a man down to the village to buy chocolate.

There is no NAAFI here, & if we don't take our opportunity to buy cigarettes etc., when someone is allowed out, we have to go without. By the way, the person who gets the stuff, has to have a special pass to get by the guard, we're kept in here pretty tight, & tonight, only 22 are to be allowed out, although I'm not one of them, we hope to get tomorrow evening, but it won't be worth much because Sunday is a lousy day to get away. I think we shall have to go on guard tonight, not a very pleasing prospect if you could see the grounds, & as you may have gathered from the address, we're on the fringe of Sherwood Forest, our only arms are pick handles, although we shall be in pairs, so it won't be quite so lonely. I just left this letter for five minutes to have a haircut, the fellow is a marvel, it seems you're no sooner on the chair, than it's all over, so I really don't feel as if I've stopped writing, but I'm four pence poorer.

Arthur & Co have gone out into the fields somewhere, to have a game of football, & I'm left alone in the tent, so at least I can write to my darling in peace. Some of the fellows from our Squad shipped out last night & went to Nottingham, they all got drunk, but managed to get in without being seen, needless to say they got paid yesterday, but they're all broke, & one of them, a really decent little fellow from Bedford, is seriously trying to get an advance on next week's pay, I don't know if he'll succeed or not. Another one suggests pawning his "civvie" clothes, so you can see what a state they're in. Both Arthur & myself are wondering how we shall get thru' to next pay day without scrounging, because all we seem to spend our money on is cigs. & food, but I guess we'll manage somehow, if not, we'll have to send home for some.

I received a letter from you this morning, the one you wrote on Wednesday, & duly noted your remarks concerning Len telling you I detailed him to keep an eye on you, but the truth was, I said when I left him, take care of Ivy for me, & if I had been in his place I should have insisted on taking you home, so you needn't worry. I also note your comments on all our friends getting married & leaving home, it is indeed a gloomy outlook, & don't bear contemplation, but perhaps you are rather looking on the black side, at least I hope so. As to the problem of wedding present, I'm afraid I shall have to leave that to you my darling, although nothing would please me more to be with you worrying out something that was not too expensive. I hope you will choose something extra good for Len & Kitty should the occasion arise.

You ask me if you should make a dance dress, of course you may, if you derive pleasure from it, make as many as you like, so long as you are happy as you can be, so then will I be, although my one wish is that when you wear it, I shall be by your side.

I'm glad you have got Auntie's allowance thru', it will certainly be a big help, & if you can get P.A. for Auntie S ⁴⁴ she won't feel quite so dependent on us. Give my regards to the old dears, and tell them they mustn't worry about me, but I should like to be at home with you all, I don't like being shut up in the country, miles from anywhere, with nothing but dreams to live on. The house here is supposed to be haunted, but the 2 nights I spent there were quite uneventful, & the ghosts must have passed us by, I am told that the last thing it was used for, was an asylum, so you can see it has a history.

I hope you've noted the new address, this one that I have written today is as near correct as possible. I understand that the 401 Coy. R. E. must be left off, as it really is a secret as to the whereabouts of troops, so don't forget [...]

Just fancy, it's four o'clock, & we still are left alone, I really can't believe it, it's too good to be true.

⁴⁴ Sybil

Last night we encountered one of the fellows who used to be here before we took over, & did he go thro' the hoop, we told him what a filthy lot of beasts they were, & all the excuses he gave us that they had to work all day, & couldn't be bothered to clean up at night, well, you can guess what sort of officers they've got.

We have no W.A.T.s.,
⁴⁵ here, they weren't allowed to come because of the lack of facilities, but yesterday, they pinched a wagon from the camp, & came over to see the boys they were so friendly with at Yaxley, it appears that nearly all of them had boys amongst us & they shed many tears when we left. I was most surprised at this attitude because I had gained the impression that the fellows didn't think much of them, but it seems you never can tell, anyway, the girls don't think much of the other soldiers, & they have applied for a transfer, so that they can come here to cook for us. I hope they do, because the grub here is as I said, pretty lousy, & although the conditions for cooking are poor, they will make a better job of it than the men are.

Well, sweetheart, I'm afraid there is very little more to write this time, but I expect I shall have plenty more to say tomorrow, so darling until then I'll say goodbye, & God bless you,



⁴⁵ Probably the Women's Auxiliary Territorial Service

25th August 1940.

Arnold Camp

My darling wife,

Here it is, Sunday, & today we went to the church attached to the building, it's a wonderful little place, about as big as Waterford one. But much more beautiful inside, I really enjoyed it.

After this we had lunch, & then came a nasty blow, we had to be vaccinated, & now I have a nice little pad on my poor old left arm, which covers two little scratches, & I'm told that we shall feel it in about 5 days, I hope I'm not too bad this time.

We're going out tonight, & I don't yet know what we're going to do, but I suppose we shall visit either Nottingham or Mansfield, I shall tell you all about that tomorrow. I'm afraid there is really very little to tell you in this letter, but yesterday I sent letters to my brother, Ted, You & George Catlin, so you see I had a real writing day. We've taken some snaps today, & when they come out, I'll send them on to you, they should be alright, but we'll wait & see. We've just finished our tea, & wasps, you never saw so many, we have spent all our time swatting them, but wonder of wonders, no one has been stung.

I'm afraid my darling, I have nothing else of interest to tell you [...] I'll always think of the weekend I spent in Waterford, & I'm looking forward to the next time I'm coming home, so until tomorrow, Goodnight,

Monday 26 August 1940

Waterford



My dearest darling,

Thank you so much for your two letters of Friday & Saturday which I received this morning. I am very sorry that the food is not good and hope very much that it will soon improve. I am enclosing 2/6 to help you through this week. I expect you will be glad when you get the extra pay next month. Thank you darling for saying I may make a dance dress. Its awful extravagance but if the material is not very dear, I hope it won't cost me many shillings.

We have just had a warning this afternoon, but there was nothing doing near here as far as I know.

I went for a bike ride with Molly England on Sunday. We went to Benington Aston, Broadwater and home through Watton. It was quite a nice ride. We saw a searchlight battery on the way and both wished most fervently that our husbands were there. Molly came home to tea with me, and so ended an uneventful Sunday.

Have you heard any more whether you are going on search lights yet, or are you at an infantry training centre now? Please tell me how far you are from a village, and if any buses run to Nottingham etc. Not that I am thinking of coming, I can't afford to, but I like to know, as much as possible, what the place is like where you are living. Is your own sergeant back yet by the way?

When we had the warning this afternoon, those wonderfully conscientious people Wheeler & Rogers stayed on in the office. When I returned after the all clear they were hard at work.

They are not get this little baby on that stunt though, I sarcastically called them two brave little hero's and slammed the door after me. I don't think they liked it. Wheeler hasn't been in to see me since. That sort of thing gets me riled. If they were hurt by flying glass they would be the first

to complain. Well, now it's time for me to go home I'm going to be a good little wife and ??? as wash your flannells (sic) so my dearest I must say goodbye till tomorrow I missed you very much over the weekend, and think all soldiers should be allowed home each week end, then I could survive the days in between, thinking of you coming home in a few days, but as it is, I daren't think at all, not more than about two days ahead anyway. Please write all you can darling, but you mustn't stay in on an evening off to do it. Here is all my love, Your very own,

26th August 1940.

Arnold Camp



My own darling wife, [...]

Last night Arthur & myself went into Nottingham, & our impression after one visit, is that it is a town of prostitutes & police, & we don't think much of it. It is a terrific place, we only covered a little bit of it & we were walking for about two hours, until we were tired, then we went to a nice little café & had a coffee & 1 sandwich which cost us 6d each, scandalous I call it. We had to walk about 3 miles of the 7 miles home, because it was dark, & all the buses were full, & the cars we signalled would not pull up for us, but eventually we did get a lift & just got home in time to miss a terrific air raid over Nottingham & district, we saw dozens of searchlights & anti-aircraft shells bursting in the air & heard all the bombs explode, it was like hell let loose for a few minutes, but I don't know if any damage is reported or not, anyhow it was quite an experience, & was the only bright spot in the whole evening, because we were absolutely fed up to the point that in Nottingham, we nearly sat on the curb & cried, we felt so lonely in that big place, & no one seemed to worry about us, that we got thoroughly downhearted, but it's worn off a bit now, because today we got on to normal routine again, & we've had something to occupy our minds.

Life here isn't so bad as it seems, now we're a bit more used to the conditions. & while the old sergeant is away, everything is pretty free & easy. For instance, today we did a bit of bayonet work, & then went on to machine gun dismantling, & this afternoon we had a competition to see who could strip it down & put it together again in the shortest time. Needless to say, I was quickest, except for the instructor of course, so you see, I'm not doing so badly, when we are allowed to find out what we can do. We enjoyed this form of instruction so much, that the corporal allowed us to miss the next period which should have been rifle drill, & carry on with what we were doing, this of course would have been an unheard of thing had the sergeant been here, but he isn't & we're all the happier for it.

I received the first letter from you direct to this address today, the one containing several days events, & it was most welcome. I noted with approval your remarks concerning Thelma Gegg?, & I think you should write to her & suggest that you might spend a weekend there soon, because as you say, the 24 hours leave will be of no use to me for getting home, but if I can let you know in time, you could come to Nottingham & I could spend the night with you there, however, we shall see. I was ever so pleased to learn of the Auntie's good luck with their allowances, they won't feel dependent on us any more now will they, I expect they are pleased too.

Thank you for telling me about my "spuds", it cheered me up no end to learn my labours were not in vain, & that the soot kept away the wireworms, they were my only worry, anyhow you won't have to worry about the winter supplies now I hope.

We are told, I don't know how true this is, but as I said, we're told that our training in infantry is due to finish this weekend, & then we shall start searchlight work, & shall I be glad. I don't yet know which part of the business I shall be put to, but I expect that will come out in the training.

I had a bath this evening, you would have enjoyed helping me, I got a pail of hot water from the cookhouse, & a tin bowl from the wash house & in front of all the boys in the tent, I worked in front of them all in the nude in easy stages, but at least I feel cleaner now, you've no idea how quickly you can get dirty here. I'm afraid I splashed the floor pretty well, but I don't care, because it's such a relief to be clean. [...] it seems years since I saw

you, instead of only a week, [...] I have only just begun to feel really homesick, I expect it's because of the realisation that 24 hours would not secure me enough time with you now. I missed you terribly before, but it's even worse now, [...] once this terrible war is over, I shall make it my business never to let you go again [...]

You need not worry about the twice a week collection of post, there is a pillar box at the bottom of the drive & the guard lets us slip out to it to post letters whenever we are free, & all our mail is forwarded from Yaxley, each day, so you see there is nothing to worry about after all, it was only a rumour.

You seem to have had quite a lot of air raids just lately, I hope they never get any nearer, I always worry a bit when we hear of air raids in the district [...] How is Penny?, you haven't mentioned her lately, I expect she is still growing, and I wondered if she missed me this time or not, I should like to know.

The A.T.S., came here again today, it seems that they can't get on at all with the other fellows, & all they seem to want is to get back with our lot, but it don't matter much to me now if they don't, because the food has improved since yesterday, & we now get more than we need, & what's more it's properly cooked, they seem to have worked wonders with the poor cooking arrangements they have, & we realise now that all our grumbles were ill timed, but who cares anyway.

Well my precious [...] I'm afraid that I have run out of news now, except that it's just dark & aeroplanes are out patrolling already, which is an ominous sign, so I guess we'll have more excitement tonight, I hope they don't get too near

Goodnight my love, [...] please take care of yourself [...] I'll write some more tomorrow,

Tuesday 27 August 1940.

Waterford



My darling Bill

I hope you are still safe & well. We had a warning last night which lasted from 10.15 to about 3.45, but as you see I am still alive to tell the tale. It was the second that day for, if you remember, I told you in my letter of yesterday that we had one in the afternoon.

We were just getting ready for bed when the syrens went, and were having a look at the network of searchlights. We sat in the hall, but the Smiths went down to the shelter. At 1.0 o'clock I went to bed, the Aunts promising to wake me if there was any action. This is the fifth warning since you went away, but the Heath get more than we do.



Your brother and sister came over last night (Monday) Jack is on night work ⁴⁶ but was home from Friday and goes back this evening. He has had no warnings at all where he is George is now in Birmingham, and Edith is on holiday this week, preparatory to commencing her new job on Monday

You would have laughed at Penny yesterday morning. She used the doormat for the wrong purpose, and then came upstairs to me and made such a fuss of me, licking me and not attempting to bite that, of course, I suspected she had been up to something wrong. She is artful I expect she thought that if she came and made a fuss of me I shouldn't slap her. It didn't come off though! By the way Stuart Purkiss-Ginn died of a heart attack on Friday. He was buried during yesterday's air raid warning. Longmore, Ashley Webb, and Purkiss-Ginn. Three very well known Hertford men in about one month!!

Don't forget to let Mr. Mansfield ⁴⁷ (who by the way is now mayor)

⁴⁶ probably aircraft work at Hatfield

⁴⁷ Probably George Charles Mansfield

have your new address. You may get some free cigarettes one day!

Did I tell you I saw Lionel? Symonds on Saturday/ I don't think I did. I met him in Maidenhead Street. I never saw anyone so changed in all my life He's no longer a boy -but a full grown man. Tall, broad and muscular with the face of a man, in fact after I had started to talk to him, I began to ask myself if it really was he, or if I was speaking to a stranger. The army has certainly filled him out, you know how painfully thin he was. He took your address, so you may get a line from him.

I shall be very glad to have a snap of you, but regret more than ever now that we did not take the opportunity of getting a studio portrait done in Bond Street.

I was turning out your trouser pockets last night before mending them when I found a "pin" for the lawn mower, so now I shall be able to do some cutting when I feel like it.

I am sorry you had to be vaccinated but of course it was inevitable. Please be careful Bill not to get it knocked and then I expect it will heal up all right— but I expect you will let me know about that.

Now darling I'll say goodbye till tomorrow. Look after yourself if only for my sake, because I love you so much.

27th August 1940.

Sherwood Lodge Camp

My angel [...] Today has not been so good for me, because I've had one of my famous headaches, & although this morning was not so very hard, this afternoon we had a 2-hour route march & although I asked to be excused, they would not let me off, and I had to go through with it, although every time I put my feet to the ground, my head nearly fell off. I think the corporals thought I was trying to swing the leg, this is all very well, but I think they ought to show a little consideration.

There is very little to relate today, I think you had all the news yesterday, & until things move a bit there will not be a lot to say.

So far as I know, we didn't get any air raids last night, at least if we did, they didn't wake me. I hope nothing happened near you, to cause you worry, you must tell me if anything does go wrong of course.

I shall be glad if you will send some more paper as soon as you can, because I've nearly used it all up [...] & although I dislike doing it, I should be glad if you could spare me the price of a few cigarettes this week sometime, because all our money has disappeared very quickly this week, I think most of it went on chocolate at the beginning of our stay here when we were short of food. I do hope you won't mind me asking for money, but I wouldn't do it unless I had to, I don't want to borrow from anyone here, and Arthur is in the same boat, because we share everything, even to the last cigarette, so please help us if you can. I'm sorry this sort of thing has to happen, because I wanted to manage on my own, but perhaps you won't think too badly of me. [...]

There's a fellow opposite me started to wash some socks, and he's got a pail of water with the socks in, and he's stirring them with his fork, he looks very comical, but I expect it will come out alright.

I did not receive anything from you today, & I wondered if you had missed a day, or whether the letters had gone astray, anyhow Arthur had the same bad luck, so we both had to go without, but we're hoping to be luckier tomorrow.

Well [...] I shall have to say Goodnight now, but perhaps tomorrow there will be more to report, because I understand we've got a 4 ½ hours march tomorrow morning, so it should prove interesting [...]

Wednesday 28 August 1940

Waterford

My dearest Bill

I did not receive a letter this morning, but I hope to get one tomorrow, so I must just wait for news of you as patiently as I can. If only you were nearer I would try to cycle to see you at the weekend, but I am afraid that is impossible. I missed you very much yesterday and today, and am just

beginning to feel neglected and lonely. More than anything I miss have (sic) someone to kiss me and pay me some attention and I find it increasingly difficult to sit quietly at work all day on my own. and have nothing to look forward to in the evening, (although I am going to Ron's this evening).

Your sister says she feels the same and will be glad when she starts her new job and is working some evenings. I suppose I ought to look up some of the girls for tennis or a visit to the cinema. Having no young people to talk to, my feelings are continuously bottled up as, of course one can't talk to the aunts about that sort of thing and even if one could they wouldn't understand. I wonder if you can understand how I feel Perhaps not, Its too difficult to explain on paper.

Anyway darling, come home as soon as you can, and pay me lots of attention, because I do miss it so much and until now, I hadn't realized that it was part of my life.

Ive still got Penny, I know, but you can't cuddle her because she still bites so.

Well I havnt any news so Goodbye darling. I hope you won't think this is a queer letter, Your loving Ivy.

Thursday 29 August 1940

Waterford



My darling Bill,

From your lovely long letter you wrote on Monday it would seem that you are feeling about the same way as I am—pretty desperate and needing you very much. This feeling can't go on I'm sure and one must get quite used to being parted I think. As I told you in earlier letters I did not miss you too much, but now the feeling of being alone, and, somehow, cheated, grows stronger every day. I know I ought not to say it in a letter, but I have wanted you so much that I have had a pain in the pit of my tummy for two days. That's why I think we must get over this stage and

become resigned, since it is impossible to live keyed up the whole time.

We had a warning lasting for six hours yesterday-from 10 pm to 4 am. I was at Ron's ⁴⁸ when it started. He, as a Home Guard, had to go out, but Len Kitty & I finished our supper before leaving. The planes were right overhead when we got outside, so we took Kitty home, and then Len saw me home. It was fairly quiet along the road but there were more planes overhead when we reached home.

We stayed up till 1 pm during which time there was plenty of droning overhead but then it got quiet and the searchlights went out so we went to bed. (When the searchlights are up you can see your shadow as if it were bright moonlight). About 2pm the Aunts got up again as there were bombs dropping but I stayed in bed and went to sleep as there was work in the morning. Bombs were dropped at Lt. Berkhamsted, Essendon & Stanstead Abbots-no damage as far as I know, but there are some delayed action bombs. The night before they were dropped at Cuffley but we didn't get a warning that night.

I was very pleased indeed to hear that you were smartest at handling a machine gun, keep it up darling and you'll soon get on. You say you may be on S.Lights next week. That's very probable – after all, your sergeant is coming back at the end of the week fresh from his course and the obvious thing to do is for him to instruct the squad While everything is still fresh in his mind. I wonder if you will stay where you are for the course or be moved to a detachment?

I'm sorry you don't like Nottingham, but surely it is more interesting than Peterborough! There must be more doing at any rate. I'm glad you weren't there during the raid you spoke of. Nothing must happen to you!! Sorry I wasn't there to help you with the never never bath. If I had been I wonder who would have been the most embarrassed? The boys, you or me.

Now darling I must finish as I have to go to the Heath and then to the First Aid Class at 8 pm and it's already five to six [...] I wish you were nearer, Ever your Ivy

⁴⁸ Ware Road, Hertford

29th August 1940.
Sherwood Lodge Camp



Angel wife [...] I'm sorry to say that I did not write yesterday, so you can see how much it has increased. We had a chance to get out last night and we took it, because it made a break, & we went into Nottingham although we did nothing but buy some chips & fish and came home again. The car we stopped to take us there was the most exciting part of it, the man who was driving, wanted to catch a train, and we didn't drop below 60 all the way, even built-up areas didn't seem to worry him, and we made the 7 or 8 mile trip in 12 mins. I don't mind telling you my heart was in my mouth all the time. Coming back we had to board a bus, but they didn't take our fare, so we had cheap evenings travel, but were back too late to write letters I'm sad to say.

We had some terrific air activity just as we got home, and the gunfire and bombs were a real sight, I don't know just where they were exactly, but they were only a few miles away, and most of the night guns were thundering away, so that our sleep was very disturbed, it is a real experience I can tell you, & on more than one occasion the enemy has flown right over the camp, but I'm glad they don't know we're here, or it might not be very pleasant.

Your letter containing 2/6 arrived yesterday just in time to save us, and I can see there was no need to have asked you for any, our letters must have crossed. I also received a parcel from Mum with some sweets and cigarettes, for which I was grateful, and if you are going to see her, please tell her I got it safely and that it saves us from borrowing.

Our training finishes tomorrow definitely, so far as Infantry goes, and all day tomorrow we are going through the mill, because we've got to pass out as soldiers, in front of the C.O. After this we shall start learning a special branch (whichever we are suited to) of searchlights, and after

another fortnight we are to be sent on detachments. Last evening we had a test for Vision, I got 30 out of 30, and we then had an interview with our officer, he asked me if I knew anything about cars, and I said nothing at all, so he said alright, we'll find you a job on searchlights.

Afterwards we found out that he said the same thing to nearly all of us, although some were asked if they could cook, & were duly slated as cooks. We concluded in the end that our jobs are already taped out for us, so we must just wait and see. I hope I don't get a spotters job, because our corporal told us today that the chances of a stripe in this particular branch are very remote, so keep your fingers crossed for me darling.

You will be pleased to know that we have all got beds in our tent now, so we sleep on the floor no longer, you can start picturing me with a proper gas mask, because I understand that they will be issued to us soon, although I don't know just when.

We have had a very easy day today, in preparation for tomorrow's ordeal, but we shall soon be through now I hope, and we'll feel comparatively free again, but I think the old sergeant will be teaching us on Monday, and we shall still be kept in check a bit.

I learnt a rather distressing bit of news today concerning leave, it appears that when on detachments we are allowed 24-hours off in every 8 days, but I am so far away that 24-hours are not much use, & we are not allowed to forgo any of these and put them together later on so as to make it 48 or more, because we can't be spared, but I'm still hoping to get a decent detachment commander who will perhaps give me a few hours extra, so that I can at least attempt to get home. By the way, the other fellows I told you about, who thought they would get two or three days off when finished training, all had their leave cancelled, and they don't know when they'll get off now, so we shall have to be patient, and wait to see what is going to happen, but you can bet your darling self that if anything is going I shall take the chance while I can. [...] Now I'm looking forward to the day of seeing you again, you'll never know, I live on the hope that it will be soon.

I'm sorry Penny misbehaved herself, I hope doesn't do this frequently now, but I'm glad she is getting artful, because it's a sure sign of intelligence. You don't say if she missed me at all since I was last home, I

should like to know.

The fellow from Hoddesdon who is in our tent, would like to know if anything has happened to Hoddesdon, because he hasn't heard from his wife since we've been here, & several other boys from St. Albans and district are also vainly waiting for letters and they're all worried in case bombs have been dropped, but the excuse put forward for the small posts is that rail traffic has been disorganised which is very feasible. Anyhow, Arthur & myself seem to be the only two who have received regular mail since we arrived here, I think we are very very lucky, please keep up the good work, because I look every morning for a long buff envelope now, just the same as Arthur looks for his blue one, we can always recognise our sweetheart's letter now before they come to them.

My vaccination is just beginning to be troublesome now, it aches and itches and is a nuisance, I find it is just 5 days since Sunday, which is the prescribed time for it to start working, anyhow, I shall be damn glad when it's all over and done with, because I'm about fed up with having a sore left arm and feeling bad as well, I really can't see how it's winning a war.

You mentioned an air raid warning in today's letter & said that the Smiths had gone to the shelter, which Smiths did you mean, or did both families go down, I should like to know please. You also make mention of finding a pin for the lawnmower, but I'm afraid my darling that you'll find it either too large or too small, I forget which, but you'll find out. I'm glad Jack got home again, because it cheers Mum up so, I hope you call as often as you can because I'm sure she appreciates it, & while I remember would you please find me a nice card for her birthday so that I can send it to her, I seldom get a chance to go out before the shops close you know, and it's only about a fortnight to her birthday which is the 10th Sept, as you probably know.

How are the Auntie's faring? You don't say much about them so I presume they are alright. I should also welcome news of Matthews, Smiths, Georges, the Vicar & first aid, & any local news, it all helps me to think of home & picture the village in its various phases.

I am soon going into supper, to get a drink of cocoa, it's surprising how very few fellows go for this, yet it is usually quite a decent meal [...].

Friday 30 August 1940

Hertford

(First part in pencil)



My own darling Bill

It is 12.30 and beautiful sunlight but there is an air raid on so I am writing this in Longmore's cellar. It is full of old wills and testaments but there is electric light and I have a table and chair, so am fairly comfortable, but would have liked to get home as it is nearly lunch time. However I thought it was rather a long way to go in a daylight raid so I am waiting at least for a little while to see if there is anything doing.

The letter I received this morning was written on Tuesday but it is too late now for you to receive money this week if I send it, so I can only hope the 2/6 ⁴⁹ sent on Monday helped you a little. I am enclosing another to help you next week. I'm sorry I didn't get your letter earlier or I would have sent you some more this week, but I expect you are paid today, being Friday. Perhaps Arthur received some, so that you were able to manage.

You will be pleased to know that it is afternoon now and the warning only lasted 20 minutes. Over 100 bombs were dropped in the county on Wednesday evening, but amazingly there were no casualties. I saw Dorrie last night and she is thinking of giving up her job and going to stay near her husband, as, of course he can get a sleeping out pass. She says neither of them have saved any money, yet with her own salary & the army allowance she must get £4 to £5 a week. She says she doesn't know what she would do if she were me. Neither do I. Her husband was offered a commission a month ago, but he refused it as they decided they had no money to keep it up. He has 10 more years to complete his 21 years term and retires. When you come to think of it that's not very long and Dorrie says he hopes to take a commission a couple of years before he retires at the good old age of 38!!

⁴⁹ About £8 in 2022

You were asking if Penny missed you. I don't think she did this time, but you must remember she is only a puppy still, and quickly forgets, but I expect she'll make a fuss of you when you come home again. I am going up to Mildred's this evening, and as you won't get this letter till Monday I think, I will post it tomorrow. There may be some more news to add [...] I hope you pray each night for this old war to finish quickly.

Friday evening. Just a little note of today's news. We had another raid this afternoon at 4.30. I had just stepped out from work with Mum to buy her a new hat. She had just got the first one on when the sirens went. By the time we got out of the shop there were loud explosions and anti aircraft fire nearly overhead, to say nothing of a dog fight. However I can't say I saw much as I was to (sic) busy running with mum to the Bailey Hall shelter. It isn't far, but you would be surprised how far it seems when you are expecting a bomb to drop in the street any second. I don't think I was afraid, however, or if I was I didn't realize it because I was too busy looking after Mum. She felt rather shaky I think, but soon got over it. There were no bombs dropped in Hertford, and the all clear went about 5.40 so we got mother's new hat after that. I went up to Mildred's but came home at 8pm. There are three wounded German airmen in Hertford Hospital, and there were several planes brought down in the vicinity, I don't know exactly where yet. Miss Smith ⁵⁰ saw a German bale out in his parachute over Stony Hills way ⁵¹, where there is a delayed action bomb, so perhaps we shall here (sic) it go off tonight.

Dr. Wigfield? (who takes our first aid classes) has had to leave his house at Watton as D.A bombs have dropped in his garden and orchard— now darling we are soon going to bed so Goodnight my dearest I only wish we could be together in these awful times.

Saturday morning [31 August] 9. Am. We have just had another warning from 8.30 to 9. I heard some bombs drop in the distance But am just off to work now. I haven't had a letter from you this morning, darling. Perhaps you have been too busy to write. Goodbye now darling [...]

⁵⁰ Back in Waterford

⁵¹ Small hamlet near Chapmore End

30th August 1940.

Sherwood Lodge Camp

My darling wife,

[...] Today I received two letters from you one written on Wednesday & one on Thursday, & I know I just how much you must feel now you begin to miss me but please try to last as long as I'm away, because I know then that I shall have something very beautiful to look forward to when I do get home.

We have had a hell of a day today, the officer did not come today to pass us, (he's coming tomorrow) so we had to go for a route march all morning and we did 15 miles in tin hats. & I woke this morning with a headache & I've still got, so you can see what a state I'm in. This afternoon we were supposed to go on a gun drill, but the instructors got together and took us amongst the trees and let us go to sleep, but here is the funny part, the corporal posted a sentry to keep a look out for the Sergeant Major, and he went to sleep. He was awakened by the S.M. who tapped him on the shoulder and said "What are you doing here?" so the sentry said "I'm on guard sir, I'm watching for the S.M.". Of course the S.M. caught us all corporals as well, dozing in the wood when we were supposed to be drilling.

Fortunately the S.M. is a decent fellow, & all he said to the chief instructor was that he had better put someone on guard with some sense next time, & as there was an hour left of the afternoon we had to get back to work again.

And now Arthur and I have instructions to go on guard tonight, so what with aching left arm, and aching body thro' marching, & a headache that's splitting, I look like having a good night, I shall think of you all the time and perhaps I shall forget all my aches and pains.

And now for some lighter news, we've heard a rumour that in a fortnight's time we are moving again to Newark this time & as this is 20 miles nearer home on the Gt. North Rd., it looks as if 24-hours will get me home to you again, so please wait for me, [...] I can hardly wait to see if this will be true. It's hard to say when I shall get away again, but I shall be there at the earliest opportunity you can bet, and now my darling [...] I must

go to clean up for guard duty and nurse my headache a bit, so goodnight [...]

31st August 1940.

Sherwood Lodge, Camp



Here I am again safe and sound after a night out on guard, & what a night, it's the best one I've had in the army, I wouldn't have missed it for anything, although I hardly know how to keep awake. For a start we had more air raids than we've ever had before, and we narrowly missed being wiped out, the bombs dropped 2 miles away in a dead line with us. Derby is rumoured to be pretty well ruined, and as early as 10: o'clock we heard of a whole row of houses in flames, and talk about fireworks, it was a wonderful if dangerous display.

Then we had more excitement in the camp, we heard a clatter & on investigation found a fire starting behind the garage, we had to turn out the rest of the guard and beat it out, & our guard officer suspected that someone was round about in the woods, and it was a blood-curdling affair at 3 o'clock in the morning, patrolling a section of wood by myself, but I loaded my rifle, and would have shot anyone who didn't answer the challenge, we had five rounds each for emergencies. Anyhow we didn't find anyone about, & apart from 3 latecomers, who arrived at 10 to 3 in the morning instead of ¼ to 11 at night, they were of course reported. The guard officer was a nice fellow, he has come in from a detachment to teach us everything about the lights, and already we know the various engine sounds and heights, so we've got some good groundwork in.

This morning we passed out as soldiers, & Monday we commence the real

thing, by having a 3-hour lecture on Air Defence, & in a fortnight we shall be considered efficient enough to send to a detachment. I expect I shall find out on Monday what part I am to play in the crew, so I will let you know in due course.

The effects of the vaccination are making themselves felt in our tent now, several fellows being definitely ill now, but up to now, mine only aches all the way up & down and underneath & inside and everywhere, but we have a pass to go out this afternoon & evening & Arthur & myself will go to the pictures for a sleep, & try to get a picture of Nottingham Castle after tea, we shall come in early, because quite a few fellows had to walk the 7 miles home last night owing to air raids.

I also intend spoiling the look of my £1 note today, I'm going to buy a red topped hat and badges, I hope you'll like it when we next meet. Won't it be wonderful to be together again [...] I'll say goodbye & God bless you,

Sunday 1 September 1940.

Waterford



I am just sending a short little note to let you know we are still alive. Mum & Barbara are over to tea (it's Mum's birthday) so I want to post it when I go to the Bus with them.

We had three warnings yesterday 8.30-9. 1-2 and 6.7.15, but we had a quiet night, although the Heath had three during the night, in fact they had 9 warnings in the last 24 hours. We have only had one today so far. A bomb fell at the Heath last night, and properly shook up the occupants of Two Brewers⁵² I believe, although it is H. College way⁵³, and way Barbara said she was out of bed and down stairs before she realized it.

We are still waiting for the bombs to go off at Watton. The road is roped off and traffic is not allowed through.

⁵² The pub that her Mother runs

⁵³ Haileybury

I hope to hear from you tomorrow darling, and the last letter I had was Friday and that was written Tuesday and I am anxious to hear how you are.

Please forgive this hurried short note, but I want to catch the post and will write at greater length tomorrow, Your ever loving Ivy

1st September 1940.

Sherwood Lodge, Camp

My sweet darling [...] I am depressed by the thought of the many miles that keep us apart, & my heart is heavy wondering when I shall see you again. [...]

My rotten old vaccination is giving me hell today, I have a terrific lump in my armpit and another is coming at the base of my neck, I ache all over, even my skull bones, and I've got a temperature, in short I'm afraid I have the fever which goes with vaccination. Anyhow it's worse than any of the inoculations were, and I don't like it a bit, but the fact that I'm writing to you about all my troubles, make me feel a bit happier already, because I can be sure of your loving sympathy, to help me on.

We went to Nottingham yesterday, & found the castle, but we could neither go in the grounds, or take snaps of it, because it's full of soldiers, so we came away disappointed.

Also we looked in lots of streets for a place to buy a dress hat, but could find none, but there is one somewhere I know, & one day we'll find it. After we had some tea, we went to a cinema to try and get some sleep, but the picture was so boring it kept us awake. We came out at nine & had a look at the damage by bombs in Sherwood, we saw two or three houses with roofs missing, and walls blown down and windows, well I've never seen so many broken ones before, streets of houses were without them, it seems that more damage is done this way than in any other. There were no serious casualties, and no one was killed, so old Jerry wasted his stuff after all. I heard that incendiaries were also dropped, but they fell in the

open and they too were wasted, which is a good thing. We got home early because we were tired, having had only one hours sleep since 6 o'clock the previous morning, which made about 36 hours straight off. The bus conductor was decent again, & let us ride free of charge, for which we were duly grateful, & we were in bed by ten o'clock, & I think asleep five minutes later, but we had to get up at 7 this morning, just the same as any other Sunday, although there's nothing to do when we're up, but that's the way wars are won.

Our old sergeants are back, & they took the Church Parade this morning, I'm afraid a lot of the fellows were brought back to earth with a bump, because they seem to have come back more determined than ever to knock all our spirit down, but I don't think they'll succeed while we have such wonderful wives behind us. The padre gave a good sermon as usual, but he contradicts himself quite a bit, for instance he said that if we want to be happy we should keep the Ten Commandments, and immediately, the thoughts of thou shalt not kill, & remember to keep holy the Sabbath day flashed through my mind, & I find myself wondering how a soldier can be trained to kill and work every day, and still keep the Commandments, only a padre is able to do such things. But never mind, I shall still try to be a good soldier, because I love you so, & I know I'm learning to do something that will make you safer.

Nearly all the fellows have wangled another pass to get out again today & only Arthur & myself are left, we don't want to go out so we don't worry.

I sincerely hope you haven't had too many air raids lately but from what I have gathered from your letters you don't seem to worry too much about them now, & I'm glad because while we were out in the thick of it on Friday night, we found that the only thing that really worried us was how our sweethearts were faring.

We have two or three new fellows in our tent, they belong to another squad but they seem quite alright & we get on pretty well with them, & they've told us that they prefer our company to the previous mates they had.

While I think of it, & don't think I am impatient or difficult to please, but

I have decided to have an identity bracelet after all. It will be quite in order to have my number engraved, because it sticks to me thro' my army career. The usual engraving is name W.J. FURLONG, & the number on one side, & any loving inscription you care to have on the back, I shall leave that to you, & I shall treasure it.

In all your letters so far you've not told me how you got on with your claim at the post office for my lost parcel, or have you given it up, and have you taken my mouth organ in for repairs yet? I should like to know.

I have just had my tea, and the camp is lousy with old sweats now, it appears that they arrived today from various detachments, & their task is to teach us as much as they can in as short as time as possible, I think some of them will have a hopeless task, because there are quite a few duffers here who will never learn anything. I'm hoping I shall get a good job, because we've been told that only 3 jobs out of a crew of 10 offer any chance of promotion, so please pray with me for one of those jobs, because I do want to get on. I think Arthur will get a stripe soon because all the N.C.O.'s seem to like him, but he says if I don't get one as well he will refuse, in spite of all my protests he insists this is what he will do, so I hope we can get on together or else I shall be in an awful position, but we won't worry too much about that until it happens, & I hope to be able to tell you in a few days what my chances are.

I hope to be able to send you some photos in a day or so, Arthur and I took the negatives in yesterday, and all the people concerned wanted postcard enlargements of course, & we got a real shipping order of 42 postcards at 4d each for Boots, we ought to wangle ours for nothing, or at least Arthur's because it was his camera and film.

We are all looking forward to the morning, & everyone is in the best of spirits except of course for the people with vaccinations, but even this can't keep our anticipation down completely.

Last night sentries had more fun than we did, they had a parachutist alarm and all of them were turned out and given 20 rounds with instructions to shoot anyone who didn't answer the challenge. The flying squad was out, and everyone got very excited, but it turned out to be just a drifting barrage balloon, so there was no cause for any worry after all, but I

can guess how the fellows felt who were on guard, because it was their first night as well, & they said the same as we did, that they wouldn't have missed it for anything. You'll be surprised how brave a few rounds of ammunition make you feel, especially if you get orders to load, and you feel equal to pretty well anything that comes along.

I think I told you about our hairdresser here being a pretty good man at his job, well as you know, he charges 4d for a haircut, this however has put an idea into certain fellows heads who are always hard up, and one of them has some clippers and scissors, so they have set up a rival business, three of them go out & scout for customers, while the fourth does the deed, and you ought to see some of them, they're a real sight, and one of them even had to go to the other barber to get it put right, I don't know how long their business will last at that rate, but I shan't be one of their customers I'm sure. By the way the bait for this trap is a penny cheaper, but from what I've seen they ought to pay for the practice they get.

I hope the dance dress you're making will be a pretty one, I'm sure you will look beautiful in whatever it's like, and when I come home I shall want to see you in it if it is finished when I get leave again.

I had a letter from Jack the other day, the first I've ever had from him but there wasn't much of importance in it, however, it's nice to get letters from everyone now, because they make a link with old and best times. Talking of letters convey my apologies to good old Len for not writing very often to him, but tell him that as soon as I can really spare the time to settle down for a good long spell of letter writing, I shall send him all the news, although I hope you pass on anything that might interest him about my progress here. Give him my love, & tell him I wish I was in his shoes, & that if he can possibly keep out of the army, to do so or he will forever regret it. [...] (*over one page of adoration here*).

Thinking of you is all the consolation I can find in this dreary life [...] I hear a wireless in the [...] (*missing page*)

Monday 2 September 1940.

Hertford

(Pencil note)



Pencil once again indicates an air raid. It is 4.15 and provides a nice break from work to write to you. I am glad the 2/6 arrived safely and also to hear that you are now sleeping in beds (do you cuddle your pillow or haven't you got one). I expect by the time you get this you will be busy searchlight training.

I hope of course you are not given the job of "spotter" if it means no promotion but if you are there will be the consolation of knowing that you will be away from the actual searchlights and if it is attacked you would probably be safe. Anyway, we always seem to be pretty lucky people, so whatever happens is sure to be for the best.

Please let me know won't you, how you came out when the C.O inspected you and passed you out as soldiers.

As far as I know, there is nothing the matter with Hoddesdon as far as air raids are concerned (although they have numerous warnings) so I expect the boy's wife simply doesn't write. Probably she doesn't think as much of him as I do of you!!!

During daylight raids the Aunts go down to the shelter, (which I think is sensible of them). The Mac Smiths⁵⁴ came down once, but usually they don't bother. You want to hear village news? There's nothing exciting to report O! the vicar has a fine tree of Victoria plums outside his house. Last week he went to London to buy 20 bottling jars (you can't get them locally now). When he came back in the evening, every plum from the tree had gone! Someone had been busy. During last weeks first aid class we were learning about the functioning of the heart and bloodstream, and the vicar couldn't stand it (I think it made him feel sick) and he had to go out. Poor man, he evidently has his little troubles!

I dug a few spuds yesterday (Sunday) but it was so hot. There was a little robin with me, busy looking for grubs as I turned the earth over, and he

⁵⁴ Two doors away on the North side

actually came so close to me that he went under my skirts and for a minute I could not see him. I have never known such tameness before in all my life! You would have loved to see the little darling. You know the turnips you set, well we had some for dinner today, together with garden peas & carrots. We have picked so far about 5 lbs to (sic) tomatoes but there are plenty more ripening each day. We have also made 60 lbs of jam.

Your sister ⁵⁵ starts her new job today I wonder how she will fare. I am glad you will get regular time off on detachments Perhaps you will be put nearer home and then we might be able so (sic) see one another. Even if you didn't get home till late at night and started back in the morning, we would have a night together, which after all is the main thing and if you started away after breakfast, you would probably have time to hitch hike back, so that it would not be too expensive. But darling that is at present only dreamland we must wait patiently to see what happens by the end of the month.

Now as the "all clear" has gone and its nearly 5.30 I must say goodbye God bless you and keep you safe [...] till we meet again- A kiss from me and a big lick from Penny, (who is very fond of laying with her head on my pillow to keep me company)

9.15 same evening

In pencil

Well, sweetheart I am afraid there is really nothing more to add to what I wrote earlier today. I have been busy till now getting the upstairs ready. It is very quiet outside thank goodness.

I suppose we may Thank the bad weather for this, so if that's the case, I don't mind how bad it gets. I am glad however to know that you havn't got to be out in it all night. It is indeed a good thing that you got an indoor job. Penny is gradually getting better, but she likes to play up a bit, and be made a fuss of like her mistress isn't she?

Well since my pencil absolutely refuses to write any more (since my brain isn't thinking any more) I will say goodnight darling God bless you I love you your Blonde.

⁵⁵ Edith

2nd September 1940.
Sherwood Lodge Camp

I'm afraid this letter will only be a short one, because I feel so ill, I'm going to bed early. I went to see the M.O. this morning and the butcher just said oh that's nothing to worry about, and yet 3 of us in the same tent can hardly stand, but I hope I shall feel better tomorrow, I don't think I could be any worse.

Well, today was the great occasion, I've been chosen to be a spotter, & Arthur also, but as they have 2 spotters to each detachment we might get together. Today we have had to learn the points of the compass, & we've got to be efficient enough to jump at them without even thinking, & this afternoon we went into a huge field and practised shouting at someone 100 yards away so that they could understand what is said, I can tell you our throats are really sore. Every movement we do has to be done at the double, and they make a drill out of it all. Our instructor has taken a fancy to me tho' and he selected me as right marker for the parades which is quite an honour. He also says that if we are keen, we can get on, & that any rate we shall have to learn all other branches of the lights, but first we are spotters & that is our job. I shall have to learn all there is to know about aeroplanes now, but the instructor says I have nothing to worry about [...], as soon as I feel better I shall let you know all details of my progress, and until then [...] I say goodnight my love.

P.S. I got the writing pad this evening thank you.

3rd September 1940.

Sherwood Lodge.

Pencil letter

I think in a fortnight I shall be able to get home & see you, it's a long time to wait, and I'm not sure about it then, but we shall see, anyhow I'm building up my dreams.

You must please excuse the pencil this time (my underline), but Arthurs pen has gone out of action & he borrowed mine & he hasn't finished yet, so I'm making do. You will probably be happy to know that I feel a little better today, although I'm not by any means well but I didn't go sick because I have so much to learn.

The work we're on is extremely interesting & I think if one has a normal amount of intelligence, one can get on quite well. I'm a bit hazy on the cardinals and half cardinal points of the compass, but I'm going to practise when I've finished this letter, & I'll be as good as any of them.

By the way, thank you for the 2/6 you put in my pad, I didn't discover it until just now and it dropped out, I was pleasantly surprised because we were desperately in need of cash, Arthur is broke and I only had 1/- or so, but if we go carefully we shall get thro' all right now.

I understand that we shall finish our training in a fortnight, and we shall then be moved to Newark, from there we shall be sorted out and sent to various detachments, I'm keeping my fingers crossed for a shift a little nearer to home. Our corporal told us that we should get a short period of leave before we're shifted out, that's why I mentioned it at the beginning of this letter.

Our tent is a proper hospital it's really funny if you look at it from some angles. We have 4 of us who are half dead and if you could hear some of the remarks passed you would die laughing, but it's serious really, because the M.O., won't let any of them rest and he tells them all that it must be expected with vaccinations, he's a proper bloody butcher with a heart of stone, but so far I've avoided him & plugged along on my own.

I hope you don't think this letter is too rambling but I'm just writing as I think tonight, & anyhow I expect you'll be able to make some sense out of it.

I'm really stumped for news today, because today's work was the same as yesterday. We had a sight test and I got full marks and I passed in everything we were tested on, voice, points of the compass although I told you I was a bit slow but I passed anyhow. We have tons to learn, theory of sound, all aircraft we must know from all angles and a hundred & one other things, all in a fortnight and just when we're feeling worst, but we shall get it all in I'm sure, at least we shall I know because Arthur and I are favourites already, we shall of course endeavour to maintain this position. [...]

I shall try to get on for your sake because you mean so much to me, my whole life revolves around you, [...] I'll say Goodnight God bless you darling until tomorrow,

(4th August 1940).

Sherwood Lodge, Camp

(I think this should be September as Bill mentions the vicar's plums)

Once again I feel equal to anything, although of course my arm will be sore for weeks, but that don't worry me much, because our work proves so interesting that I forget all my pains, & as my fever has passed off, I'm in love with life again, but still not in tune because my darling wife is not here with me, but as I mentioned yesterday, I hope to get a brief leave in about a fortnight, so build up your dreams with me, for our second honeymoon.

I will try to outline the day's events as nearly as I can remember, (by the way, we have to start work at 8 now, instead of 9 so we have to get up an hour earlier, but we don't finish any sooner, so the day is an hour longer).

Rise at 5.30, breakfast at 7, parade 10 to 8. The first lesson was points of a compass, we have to stand in a circle of little cards on sticks, & the instructor gives us one of them as a point of the compass for instance he says "you are facing S.W. give me east", & each time he alters the point, so that we get quite dizzy with finding out where we are, and the part that gets us so confused is that we have to face the point asked for, in 3 secs, or we're no good, but up to now I've just scraped in, we get 2 lots of this every day for $\frac{3}{4}$ hour per lesson, so you see we must get good quickly.

The second lesson, we had a practice drill on directing the searchlight on the target (all planes are known as targets) & this too keeps us on the run, because everything must be done so quickly owing to the speeds of modern planes, but I enjoyed every minute of it.

After this we had a lecture on aircraft, & already after one lesson, I've got quite a few sketches & notes to digest & as you may guess, this could not be anything else but interesting.

The last lesson for the morning was in the fields, voice control, we have to stand 170 yards from one another & shout orders & make them act, the object being to make us shout clearly so that we can be understood, because you probably know there is a lot of shouting to be done on a crew, & we as spotters do most of it, but don't worry darling, I shan't shout at you when I come home, I shall be glad to rest my voice.

After dinner we learnt all the stoppages of a Lewis gun, which is still an important part of our equipment.

This was followed by another lecture on the theory of sound, I'm proud to say I shone at this, I was the only one who knew the speed of light & sound, & really the whole lecture was nothing new to me although it acted as a refresher, I find my general knowledge is extremely superior to any one else here although I say it myself, & most of it has been derived from science fiction, so please don't scoff at my taste in literature any more; we were asked how far the sun was from the earth & only I knew, we were also asked the distance from the moon & only I could answer, so you see the old mags do come in useful after all. I mustn't crow too much because I might come a cropper yet, so I'll pass to the next lesson which was supposed to have been more compass points, but our instructor thought

we were good enough, so he marched us well out into the fields under some trees, & we laid on the ground & had scientific discussions. When this was over, we were due for the last period, which was recreational training, we played football until teatime, & now we're finished, but you can tell from my report that our days are full of brainwork, & we have to be on the alert all the time, but in comparison with infantry training it's wonderful to be able to show your individuality, & not have your head snapped off every time you blink, & at least I am able in some small measure to reconcile myself to the life that is before me, but I can never be happy while we're away from each other, & I shall write every day [...] I'm hoping, wishing, praying day & night for the war to end, so that I can once again revel in your happiness, which is my only joy in life.

I received a letter from you today, & it seems that you are getting too many air raids near you, & I feel rather uneasy about this, & if they hurt you my precious, I don't know what I'll do, we are helpless really, & it doesn't bear thinking about.

And now to lighter things, I was pleased & amused at the report on the Vicar's plums, it will do him good to lose something other than respect, & if he has a few more set backs, perhaps he'll be a bit more human.

We've just finished our supper, we sat outside to eat it & it is really beautiful now, in the cool of the evening, there are beautiful trees here of all kinds & the sun's reflection in the sky provided a perfect background & just over the tree tops I saw a new moon, you can guess what I wished for. It is hard to think of war with such marvellous scenery as we have here, & on such times as these the only thing that brings it home is the knowledge that the ones we love most are not with us, it doesn't seem possible that such beauty should be marred by one man, nothing that could happen to him would be too much.

I must retire from letters now, because I have a lot of notes to write out, & excuse me putting this in here, but one of our boys have come in & told us we're going to move very soon, so if my mail stops you'll know why. And here is another bit of news I just heard. You remember I told you that the camp is lousy with fellows from detachments who I thought were going to teach us, well they're not here for that, it appears that we have a lot of fifth columnists amongst us, & they're in for observation, & the trusted ones

have to patrol the district & watch for suspicious lights etc., & this I think is why we shall be on the move again soon, but when I come home I can tell you much more than I dare write, so until then, you must wait for more details [...].

September 1940 ?

Hertford Heath



(loose pages) Do you realize how far you are away? George is in Birmingham and you are much further north than he is He came home on 48 hours leave last week. It took him 7 hours to get to Hertford, at least, it would have only taken 7 hours, only he got held up an extra 5 in London (a contingency that must always be managed to get back in 7 hours all right. But remember he is not so far away darling. So if you do come home you must have 48 hours. It is hopeless to try and do it on less. I know you'll think I'm a wet blanket but we must be sensible. Can't you soften your officer's heart and get 48 hours. You must see that even if you get through without any holdups (which is extremely unlikely) it is still too far to come for 48 hours.

Now I expect you feel cross with me, and miserable but please darling, don't be, I expect something will turn up and we shall be able to meet. We'll leave it open and see.

I am writing this at the Heath. I haven't been home to dinner, I called to see your Mum instead & then came over here and Barbara & I are actually going to the cinema to see Charley's Aunt ⁵⁶ (Arthur Askey)

You say you think of me in our bed. Well, my dearest one, I'm not always there as when the guns are very heavy and there are too many planes overhead to be comfortable I sleep downstairs on the floor as I think

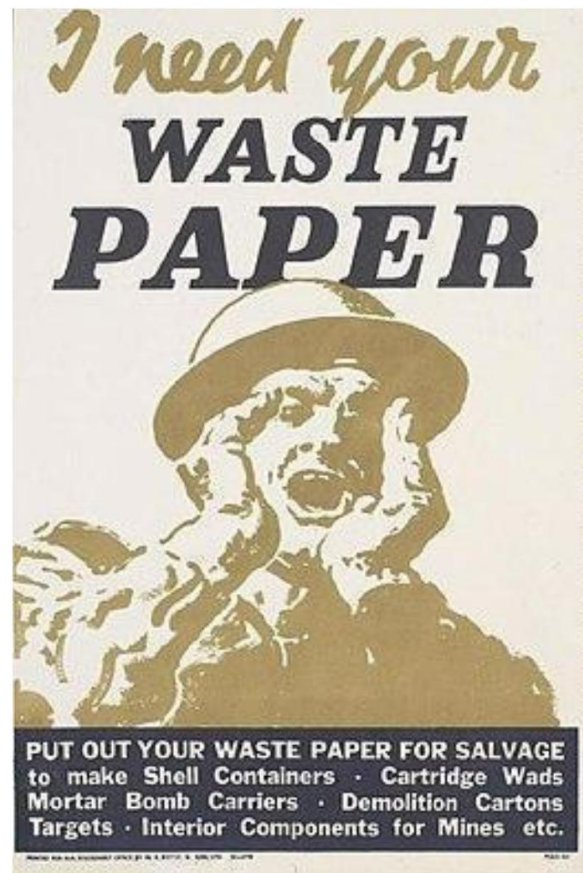
⁵
⁶ Arthur Askey film

that there is more protection from shrapnel splinters downstairs. I wouldn't mind being upstairs if you were there but the aunts sleep downstairs now, although I do go upstairs if its quiet when we want to retire.

September 1940 (*otherwise un-dated*) *Letter to the Rev. Davis, Vicar of Waterford Parish.*

"Dear Mr Davis, I am writing to ask you whether arrangements can be made to collect my waste paper. I turned out all my old magazines and newspapers in June when I understood a collection was to be made. The Clerk of the Parish Council told me that you had agreed to arrange a periodical collection in the village. As no such collection had been made by August, I again mentioned the matter and I presume that the authorities must have got into touch with you as shortly afterwards two small boys came on Saturday to collect paper. However, they were not able to take away more than a portion of my collection, but they promised to call weekly. Since then, two more Saturdays have gone by, but there have been no more small boys calling for wastepaper. Can't you possibly do something to buck them up? When one sees the results all the other Parishes in the Rural District are obtaining with salvage, it is very disheartening to see one's own village lagging so far behind, Yours truly
Ivy Furlong"

Note: Paper Salvage was a part of a programme launched by the British Government in 1939 at the outbreak of the Second World War to encourage the recycling of materials to aid the war effort, and which continued to be promoted until 1950. The compulsory recycling – or, as it was known, salvage – of paper in wartime and postwar Britain focused primarily on raising household collections. The scheme formed a key part of a wider National Salvage Campaign. As the war progressed controls were tightened salvage became compulsory in late 1940 (initially for local authorities with more than 10,000 inhabitants this was extended to smaller towns a year later covering an estimated 43 million people). According to government figures, less than 1,000 tons of scrap paper was salvaged each week in Britain before the war. By 1940 local authority collections had risen to 24,851 tons a year (308 per cent of total collections). This rose to a peak of 433,405 tons in 1942 (496 per cent of all collections); by which point 60 per cent of all newspaper derived from recycled sources.



Tuesday 3 September 1940

Hertford



Written in pencil.

It seems most of my letters to you are doomed to be started in air raids. It is 10.30 am in Longmores general room again ready to dive down

the cellar. I received your letter today written Saturday and I am so pleased to hear you have actually started searchlight training.

You are evidently getting some excitement as well as us but I hope that if you are in Nottingham, you will take cover as you are supposed to and not stand about in the street Remember you are very precious and valuable to me, and one always looks after valuable things as much as possible, specially as you can't be insured and replaced if you are damaged.

Edith ⁵⁷ tells me that after her 2 weeks training she will commence at a salary of £3.1.0d rising to £3.15.0 (~~£2.3in 22~~).⁵⁸ Getting good isn't it?

I am enclosing a modest card for your mother's birthday. There isn't much choice but I thought the verse was nice.

We have just come down the cellar as there are planes overhead, at least all the females are (eleven of us).

I finished getting up the last of the potatoes last night (helped by the little robin). Now there are only the very late ones which we put in, in odd places. Now darling, I think that's all for today. I'm afraid it's rather short but more tomorrow I hope. [...] —-----One more warning this afternoon for an hour. At this rate I am afraid work will suffer. Goodbye once again dearest one.

Wednesday 4 September 1940

Hertford



Written in pencil.

I did not receive a letter from you today which was a disappointment (although I ought not to be greedy) for I always tear to the door when the postman comes. However I expect there will be one tomorrow. We have

⁵

⁵ Bill's sister

⁸ The job is a bus conductress with London Country buses.

had a nice short warning --for 25 minutes, not long enough for me to settle down to a letter to you. Isn't it simply marvellous weather. I do wish we were on holiday together. I haven't mentioned having my odd days off yet, as I am still hoping that we may continue some time together this month. I expect it would be an expensive journey for me to Arnold ⁵⁹, but in case I do decide to spend a day or two there, is there any chance of you getting out in the evenings and is there any nice place where I could get a bed, and a café for food. I wouldn't want to stay in Nottingham, or do you think it far better to leave all talk of meeting till you are actually on detachment. You see I must have my odd days some time within about the next six weeks, then the week I can leave almost indefinitely.

I have just seen Joan T. She heard today that Howard has got his third stripe (the first he has actually had since war began as he was a corporal in peace time).

Last night Len & Co came over, and they helped to get one of the divans down into the dining room. We have put it where the sideboard stood, and that is against the opposite wall. Actually it fits in nicely and there is plenty of room, and with a cover on and several cushions on it, does not look unsightly. Now if we want to we can all find somewhere downstairs to sleep in the event of night raids. The Aunts made a nice trifle for supper but poor old Ron had one of those bilious attacks and could hardly even see anything, let alone eat. However he managed to get home all right I think

Auntie Sybil had a OHMS letter this morning to say that her allowance had been increased from 11/- to 13/6 which was very welcome news. Here is a piece of scandal. I heard yesterday that Freda B is to have another baby in four months. It is the boy Taylor's who has been taking her about some time. He owns a coal business on the Heath.

Freddie told me last Christmas that he was anxious to marry her. Now he will have nothing to do with her, saying she is only after his money. However perhaps he will change his mind and marry her soon.

Penny is still just as much of a rake? as ever. Yesterday morning I was just about to have my early cup of tea (unfortunately not in bed, having

⁵⁹ Notts

no loving husband to wait on me now) when she took a flying leap at me and knocked it all over, and the hot tea spilled all over her. Perhaps she won't do that again in a hurry.

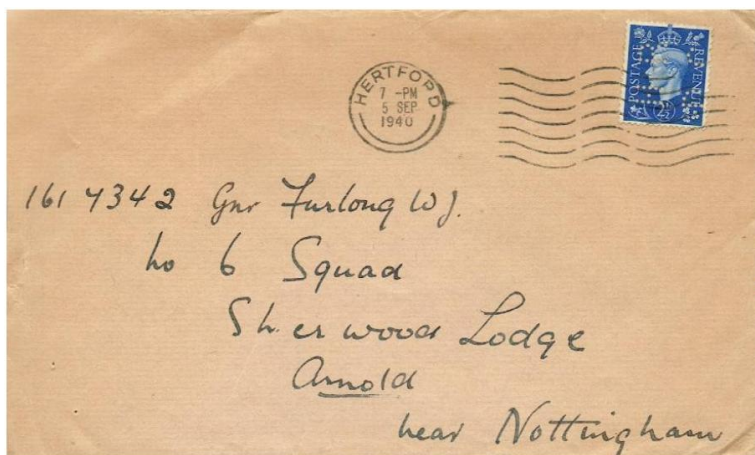
Well now darling I think that's all my news for today. Please send me all the little bits of news you can think of and in the meantime, here is all my love just for you Ever your own

Thursday 5 September 1940.

Hertford



Written in pencil.



I received two letters from you this morning, the Sunday one the longest I have ever received. It must have taken ages to write. I knew it took me a long while to read, Thank you ever so much darling. I was sorry you have a bad arm when you last wrote.

Perhaps you are feeling better now. I do hope so darling and I do wish I could be with you to look after you when you aren't feeling too good.

----- This wiggly line indicates a 5 minute break to drink a nice cup of tea (needless to say I am in Longmores during a warning). There was a battle last night about 10 which we watched from the garden. I saw a flare dropped and thousands of shells burst in the air. But the strange thing was, there was no sound so it must have been a long way off, although you could hear the bombs and guns from Hertford. I have come to the conclusion that we hear very little at Waterford, we are in a valley and sounds simply seem to pass straight over us. When you are in the shelter you cannot even hear planes right overhead.

The aunts of course don't come out and look at anything "we had so much of it in the last war, etc. etc." I'm getting rather fed up with "what we had to put up with in the last war" However I expect I shall be so glad when you are home again, and our house is our own, where we can do just what we like, and talk about what we like and get up just when we like on Sundays.

I am glad you have decided to have a identity bracelet, but I don't know whether you want a gold or silver one. Please let me know darling and in the meantime, I shall have another pay day. I went to see Mrs Webb this week and paid up your club to the end of the year. I had to take it out of your money left in the cash box (9/9) I hope you don't mind darling. The wireless licence is due too but I'm going to let it wait for a fortnight. I hope they won't summons me.

So you are going to be a spotter! Well I hope you are finding the learning interesting. At least I should think it is the safest job. By the way you tell Arthur from me that he is not to be so silly as to refuse a stripe, should he be offered one, just because you don't get one as well. Friends are supposed to help one another and not retard each other's progress, as that would be wrong. Anyway I shouldn't like to think you refused promotion for the same unsuccessful (but mistaken) reason. I am afraid I must confess having been very naughty and not yet taken your mouthorgan for repair. I brought it to work once or twice but each time there has been a warning and I haven't managed to get along to Elliotts. I am so sorry dearest. I will try to take it in tomorrow.

Now darling I think that is all my news. I am going to read your letter again when I have a moment, especially the loving part [...] I really cant tell you how I miss you, its all inside me [...] Goodbye till the next letter

5th September 1940.

Sherwood Lodge



Here I am again ready to report on news, although I'm afraid it will be scarce today because nothing much has happened, but first come the piece that I know only too well, & that is I've just been stung on the neck by a pretty little wasp, but already the sting has gone from it & I have pretty well forgotten it, but I thought you'd like to know.

I think we are going for gas masks tonight, at least there is a rumour about, and we're all looking forward to this bit of equipment because we are fed up with the old boxes, so I hope it's all right. Today has not been quite so interesting as yesterday because it has been mainly work we had yesterday but one period was new, we had to sit in a spotters chair which are on a swivel, & were blindfolded, a buzzer was then set in front of us & we were turned away from it, we then had to get back, by listening to see if the sound strikes both ears at the same time, and we then should be facing it again. This sounds very easy, but it's surprisingly difficult to concentrate on a little buzzing noise, when all around people are shouting, & aeroplanes overhead, but we're allowed 3 degrees margin of error each way, and considering I was dead on 2 out of 3 times I don't think I have much to worry about. We had some more points of the compass, only this time we had no cards around us to represent them and we sat in our chairs, and on being told the point we were supposed to face, we were swung round two or three times, & then had to shout out where we were facing. It was very confusing and I had a headache, but my speed is improving & I was right 3 out of 5 & each time was less than 3 seconds so I'm not worrying. I shone at Lewis Gun again, so a few more marks will go against my name I hope. We had no lectures today, but I was sorry about that because I like lectures, however, I guess we'll get some tomorrow. We finished up the day with an hour's PT which did not improve my head I'm afraid but it's all over now, & while I'm quiet it's alright. I couldn't sleep very well last night, I don't know why but I think my brain was overtired and that's why I got a headache I think, but I should be alright tonight.

We had a nasty load of bombs dropped in Nottingham at 4:30 this

morning, it woke everyone in the camp and positively shook our beds, I don't know what damage was done yet, but hope to get into town tomorrow night & will perhaps find out, but I do know they were the biggest I've ever heard.

Well darling, I think that's all there is to write today, but I'll be with you before you know where you are, so please don't go away will you [....].

Friday 6 September 1940.

Waterford



Dear sweetheart,

I received your letter dated 30 August, exactly eight days ago!!! I think it must have done some travelling before it reached me. Still it was nice to hear from you even if it was rather old news. It was the letter in which you wrote about the S.M. finding you all dosing (sic) in the woods and that you may be going to Newark in a fortnight. That would be simply fine! Just imagine 24 hours off every eight days and home each time! But I'm not going to look too much on that side of the picture yet. I may be disappointed Newark is Thelma's old home, and she may be back home with her people for the duration for all I know. It will be lovely if you can get there.

Isn't it marvellous weather? The poor garden is horribly dry, but I hope you are home before the rainy weather starts. The tomatoes are still ripening beautifully but its a good job you cant see the poor lawns.

We had one warning this morning as I got to work but the Heath had one for eight hours last night, and three again so far today, so I'm thankful I don't live there.

A man came in yesterday to ask how you were getting on I can't remember his name but he is the new man in the Bindery, who came from Simpson's, and lives up Ware St. You will know whom I mean.

The aunts are each knitting me a winter vest (during warnings) so I shall have something to keep me warm and free from colds, as there will be no-one to rub my chest with camphorated oil this winter, unless of course a miracle happens and the war is over, then I can swan? About in the house with out any clothes till I catch cold, just for the pleasure of being looked after and petted by you.

Do you remember the hard old mattress that came from your home with your bed? Well the aunts discovered it was stuffed full of feathers, so tight that it seemed like an old flock mattress. I have bought a 4 ft tick and made it into a beautiful feather mattress. Aunt N is going to send for another mattress from Norfolk Rd. ⁶⁰ for herself, so that I can have the feather bed to put on our bed in the winter Won't that be fine for us? We ought not too (sic) feel cold. I'm sure you'll love it when you come home in the winter nights sweetheart.

I took your mouth organ into Elliotts today, I will call in about ten days and see if there is anything doing. I received an acknowledging letter about the lost parcel, but as it wasn't registered I doubt whether they will replace it We shall just have to wait & see

Here is ~~Saturday~~ morning ⁶¹ & Council meeting Thus I can spend a little while writing to you. The weather is simply glorious I havnt? of plans for this week end, but shall probably take Penny out on the bike and sit in the fields. Last night I dreamt you came home unexpectedly for seven days leave, and we were trying to get hold of Wheeler or Williams to ask for 7 days holiday for me, However they were too busy to see us, and in the meantime we were bombed & machine gunned. I can remember in my dream saying as the planes came over "God Protect us, God protect us". What a nightmare. Thats the first time, I remember dreams of you and it was disappointing to wake up and find you were only a dream after all. This morning I received a letter (in pencil) written on Tuesday Isnt the post terribly slow. You say that you may get some leave at the end of your training. Won't it be marvellous!

Your mother says she hasn't heard from you for over a fortnight.

⁶⁰ This is the Boarding House that the aunts manage

⁶¹ 7th September

Surely you must have written darling and the letter gone astray. Anyway please write to her.

Your sister said she was on a bus at Colliers End yesterday, when she thought she saw you pass in an army lorry. As she exclaimed "there's my brother" the soldier in question turned to his pal and seemed to say there's my sister! Anyway they both waved simultaneously, but I told her, it couldn't possibly be you. When I was round at your mother's after work yesterday the sirens went, and the "all clear" sounded five minutes afterwards. The sirens went again and the all clear 20 minutes later. We had another at 10 pm for forty minutes but we heard the bombs drop before the sirens went. They rattled the door handle and Aunt N⁶² jumped up from the settee like a two year old (despite the knee!)

Your sister likes her job⁶³ and it's as well she isn't at Simpsons now because they and Addis, McMullen's & the laundries? have to work overtime without pay for the time during raids, and as there is time lost every day-almost without exception, they are doing overtime every night. Which must be frightfully annoying I don't know how Austins⁶⁴ fare, but perhaps you will have heard from someone there. I am still busy at odd times seeing to your old flannels (sic) There are six I have found, most of them had to be reinforced at the seat, and I am tacking down the creases before washing so that I can iron them properly afterwards. When are you sending your civvie clothes home by the way?

Did I tell you I saw a General stop on the Heath road the other day to give two privates a lift. I bet they felt a bit uncomfortable, if highly honoured.

I am going to ask for that rise in about a week. If by any chance I don't get it I shall apply at the County Hall, as after all, I must study myself as well as the work. But I think somehow that there won't be any trouble.

Have you had extra money this week I believe the 6d per day extra pay was to start at the beginning of September.

I have just been speaking to Barbara on the phone. She tells me the

⁶² Nell

⁶³ Clippie

⁶⁴ Stephen Austin, Printers

(sic) Michael (Marie's husband) is home on 48 hours leave, before sailing for Egypt. So of course Marie's feeling cheerful. I hope to goodness you don't ever have to go abroad We grumble about being parted but how much worse it would be if you were in a foreign land, at least we have the hope of seeing one another every month or two.

Now my sweetheart I am going to stop writing. The wireless next door is playing "alone" How sad songs can seem nowadays! But we'll keep smiling we are very lucky in so many ways and how sweet it will be when there's peace again and we can be always together, just you & I and Penny and perhaps a little Bruce? Although times are hard & difficult, we have lots to look forward to darling haven't we.

Well I meant to finish but I must tell you about Molly England I went into the shop last night to see how she got on last Sunday. When she went to Ramsey to see Cliff for the first time for five weeks. Well they said in the shop that she had left, so I guessed something was wrong, and went up to her house to see her. She said that she didn't get to Ramsey till Sunday afternoon, and had to hire a car for the last eight miles. Her train went at 6.30- and so, as it had cost her so much for such a little time, she decided to stay the night Well, of course she didn't go into work on Monday, which didn't please the manager and on Wednesday he told her she was a "damn nuisance" when he caught her talking to a soldier in the shop and that she could get out if she liked which she did straight away Now of course she's out of a job, but hopes to get to another branch. She says she darn't tell Cliff till she gets fresh work, as she's like me, she can't last long without one.

Now my dear I really must close with "lots of love & kisses" which I am carefully saving for you so mind you come home and see me before I overflow with them and start cuddling some other soldier by mistake-Your ever loving wife

On the 7th September, 1940 the German air force changed its strategy of attacking the British air force (Battle of Britain) and began to concentrate on bombing London. Nearly 2,000 people were killed or injured in London's first night of the Blitz.

7th August. (this is probably September-see address)

From No.6 Squad, Sherwood Lodge

Another inoculation this morning, & thank goodness this really is the last, it wouldn't be too bad if we had recovered from vaccination, but we haven't, however, it's in us now, & working well, my arm feels like a pudding.

This last was the second tetanus, & it really hurt this time when it went in, I felt quite bad.

We're going out on detachments next Wednesday, but I don't think my address will alter much, anyway, you continue to address them here & I'll correct it later. You see, when we're out on site, our letters are delivered by a dispatch rider, so they have to come here first. A half of the boys here got 36 hrs. this weekend, & yesterday we were told, all of us were to get it, so you can guess how disappointed we are, but they tell us that we shall get our 24 hrs pretty regularly when we're sent out, so I still hope to see you in a few days.

We got our respirators yesterday, the kind that resist ARTHUR gas, they are the latest type, & we're the envy of all the old sweats, they are quite sore about it really, they say that we should have had their old ones & they the new, but the fact remains we are in possession & we're sticking to them. So now my darling [...] you can draw a picture of me in your mind, complete with service respirator, & looking like a real old hand, we went into Nottingham last night, & looked down on all soldiers with boxes, they're rookies now to us.

We collected our photos, & I'm sending two home to you, the one of our own squad is not here yet, but I'll let you have it as soon as it's here. The group is squad 5, they were our hut mates at Yaxley, & you'll see they're a jolly looking crowd. The other one as you may guess, is one of Arthur & I, & I'm sending two so that you will pass one on to my Mother.

With Arthur at Arnold, Notts, Aug 1940



I hope you still call on Mum pretty regularly, I'm sure you do [...] it will make her happy. It's a good thing Auntie's allowance has been increased, I expect you were all pleased about that, But we did not get our rise yesterday I'm sorry to say, I don't know why, but anyhow it will have to be made up next pay day.

We found a shop to buy our hats last night, & when we got there they were closed, so we're still without our colours, but we have applied for another pass this afternoon, & we might be lucky enough to get out, & of course if we do, we shall find all the shops open.

Our lieutenant told our instructors that he's very pleased with us, & of course so is our instructor now, & he's says we've done very well indeed. Both Arthur & myself have top scores on all the sheets, & we hope to be recommended for stripes one day but I think we shall have to wait a considerable time for results, because our work on sites will have to be watched first, & so we're both hoping for a decent detachment somewhere, who will say the best of us when asked for a report. [...] I shall end my letter to you now, because I've just been told we have been lucky enough to get another pass, so until tomorrow, I'll say God bless you

Sunday 8 September 1940.

Waterford



My dear darling Husband

I am actually writing this letter at home. I have just got in after being out since yesterday afternoon. There was an all-night warning. 8-5 and I stayed at the Heath (and Penny) for the night. The Aunts are not in. I expect they have gone to church.

Barbara and Roy want to get married. They suggested special licence in a Registrar's Office But I told Barbara that she could get married just as quietly in a church, so I went to the vicars with her last evening to put up the banns, and as he kept us some little time, the syrens went while we were there so I came back instead of going on to Hertford. There had been a previous warning at teatime when I saw 30 bombers go over towards London and shortly afterwards we saw lots of shells bursting in the air. Later on as it got dark there was a brilliant red glow in the sky—obviously a very large fire somewhere after the raid. I heard this morning that it was a warehouse at Tower Bridge.

Since writing the two previous pages...the Aunts have returned from Church, we have had lunch and now it is about three and I am upstairs sitting on the bed writing to you. Did you hear the 1 o'clock news? 400 Londoners killed and about 1,400 injured, and severe damage. I am afraid the casualty figures will have mounted by the time we get the evening news. Isn't it awful. How glad I am we don't live in London, because although we get lots of enemy planes over this way, at least they don't bother to deliberately attack us. I do hope if any of your squad are Londoners none of their relatives are in the casualty list.

As transport services are somewhat disorganised, I am wondering how long it will take for this letter to reach you. Anyway as soon as I have finished it, I shall go into Hertford to post it in the hope that you will get it by Tuesday.

I called in to see your mother & sister ⁶⁵ on my way home from the Heath this morning. They were more or less popping in and out of bed all night because they could hear bombs dropping.

We went to bed at the Heath at 12 am (midnight) and I did not hear the "all clear" at 5 am.

When I got home I had to give Penny a bath. She was like a Sweep. I don't know how she managed to find so much dirt at the Heath. I also gave her some castor oil to make her clear inside as well and I noticed she ate damsons, greengages potato peelings, bacon rind, chicken bones, steak, cake & biscuits, to mention a few things when I had my eye on her, so I won't contemplate what she found when I wasn't looking.

By the way I told Barbara we shouldn't give her a present till after the war when she had settled down in a home after the war, and she agreed that would be the best idea. What do you think? She says that with the Army allowance & her own wages, she can save £2 a week, which is very nice in theory. I only hope it works out in practice. Things don't always, do they darling?

I was looking at Newark on a map last night, Bill, and if you do the same you will see that it is no nearer home than your present position, in fact it is due east of Arnold. You will merely be moving near the cost. However, if it is on the Gt North Road, as you say it is, then it should be an advantage for getting home.

Now I will go and post this letter to you There's so much I want to say to you Sweetheart, but I can't put my thoughts (or perhaps feelings) down on paper, but you know how I do love you darling and I'm always thinking of you [...] please pray each night & day [...] for the time when you will be home to stay and in the end He will answer ours (sic) prayers I know, as He always does. So now goodbye darling God bless you

⁶
⁵ Gashouse Lane, Hertford

8th August 1940 (this should be September-see address).

No. 6 Squad, Sherwood Lodge.

My own [...] (*a whole page of adoration here*)

And now my queen I will unfold to you, all the things that have happened to us since yesterday.

In the first instance, I ended my letter to you yesterday by telling you that I was going into Nottingham with Arthur, well, we went, & at last I was able to buy a dress hat, but even now I can't get the cap badge I want, however I shall probably be able to procure one of them from somewhere or someone in a day or two, so when I come to visit you now you will have reason to be proud of your slave who is fighting for you. I shan't tell you what colour the hat is, but we found out that we needn't wear a red topped one, because if we wished, we could have the regimental colours instead, & as this was far superior to having a glaring red one I chose another, so please wait until I come to you, & you will see how I look.

We had tea in the YMCA place, and got quite a good one for 6d each, egg on chips with bread & butter & a cup of tea, it's quite a treat to be able to get something without having to pay twice it's worth. When we finished our tea we jumped a bus & went to the new cinema at Sherwood, which is about 2 miles from Nottingham on our way home. We saw a Raffles & a picture called These Three, they were both very good pictures, but right in the middle of the second picture, the screen went blank and the manager came on and said there was an air raid, & those wishing to stay could do so, well, you should have seen the stampede, I wonder there wasn't someone hurt, but anyhow, in about 1-minute Arthur & I

were watching the rest of the programme alone, I don't know where all the people went to but they certainly did it well and quickly. When we came out all the buses were stopped and we had no means of getting home, so what do you think we did, well I asked a warden, who was conveniently nearby, to stop a car for us, he stopped five all in a line and we went along until we found one with some room, & off we went, so you see the army is never lost.

Today has been one of exceeding hard work, it seems that an invasion was expected immediately, & we, that is Arthur and myself, have made & finished a gun emplacement almost entirely on our own, it's five feet deep and six feet across, dug about 3 feet into the earth, and sandbagged all-round the top, it looks really fine, and we're proud of it, and now to complete the effect, there stands in the middle of it, a loaded Lewis gun, ready to blast the first Jerry that comes near enough. In addition to this, all the others have been busy with the trenches & emplacements on the rest of the camp, but ours is the only one that has been finished, so we have stuck another feather in her caps. I think the situation must have been pretty serious, because all men on leave were recalled immediately, even those poor person's who only went yesterday for 24 hours, they all had telegrams telling them to get back as soon as possible, and would you believe it, when they got back, they were informed that the order had been cancelled now, & they were free to go back & finish their leave. Of course those men who were on seven day leave returned, but the poor devil's who only had 24 hours, had wasted about 6 travelling, and having only about 5 hours left, they were lost, & they are spending the evening in Nottingham.

I might add that there was no tea for them when they got back, because the ration did not allow for them, so they've got to go hungry until tomorrow, or buy what they want.

I think I told you that we should be out on detachments by the end of this week, I believe that this is quite true, & now Arthur & I are wondering if this means we shall be parted, I hope not, but I'm afraid that's what it will mean. We shall of course do our utmost to stick together, and until the time comes, we've just got to hang on & wonder?

We are all excited about our move, & wondering where we shall go,

but I'm afraid it's not likely to be much nearer home, in fact it's more likely to be further away, but when leave is due, I understand we get a very generous 24-hours, so I shall be able to get to you somehow my darling [...]

I hear from conversations about the camp, that East London is pretty badly hit, I hope they haven't ventured too near to Waterford, & I'm rather worried because I have not had a letter from you since Thursday, but I'm hoping to get two or three tomorrow, because I'm sure you write every day as I do, I only hope that you get mine pretty regularly, and I think that the reason for the delay this end, must be that communications are disorganised somewhere & that all your letters will arrive safely. Please enclose all the little items you think will interest me, because I like to know what is happening behind the lines, it makes home so much nearer to me. How I long to see you all again, it will be a treat, to see old Auntie Sybil's grumpy old face, and Auntie Nell and all the faces I love and connect with home, it seems years since I saw you all, although it's really a very short time ago, but a day without you is like a year, so you can guess what a month has seemed like, it's becoming almost unbearable.

I went to Church this morning on Parade, & I think I have told you about what a delightful little church it is, and when I went in today, it seemed just like walking into Waterford Church, & I thought of you by my side and our house opposite, I nearly cried, it seemed so near & yet it's really such a long way off. I simply could not help thinking of the times when we go together on Sunday mornings, but you're so far away, my heart bleeds every time I think of it.

I expect we shall get some concentrated training on the first few days of this coming week, because we're still tenderfoots, & they want to rub as much into us as they can, in as short a time as possible, so I guess we're in for a cramming, but it's all interesting work, so it won't seem too bad. We've just had orders to alter the position of our cap badges now, which means that a hole will have to be made to acquire the position required, but there, why should we worry, the army is full of little whims like this, & we just have to fall in line.

I think I have about used up all the news now.... So goodnight my love....

Monday 9 September 1940.

Waterford



My dearest Bill.

Here is Monday once more---cold & cloudy this time---and although its nice to have the week-ends, they are not something to look forward to so much now as they used to be when we were together, and it meant a whole day in each other's company-----However, it has the consolation of not making the event of Mon day seem so black as it used to.

I received your Wednesday's letter this morning, and I think it is the cheeriest one you have written so far, because at last you have found a real interest in your work and I can't tell you how happy I am to hear that the Science Fiction books did some good to you after all. I expect by the time you get this letter you will be feeling quite proficient and be thinking of your next move to Newark. I hope, of course that you and Arthur are not parted, but it wouldn't surprise me is (sic) you get put on different detachments as you are both "spotters". By the way Cliff England is also a "spotter" but I think he's finished his S.L. training now. He started it before you.

I posted your letter yesterday and then called in at Waterford P.O. ⁶and got a Library book there for the first time. Then like a good little girl I went home and stayed in and read it, in fact I finished the whole book before I went to bed. There was a warning in Hertford from 8 pm Sunday till 6 the next morning, only the funny thing was that we didn't hear it , so of course we went to bed as usual. Of course we heard planes overhead, and bombs dropping somewhere but that often happens when we don't get the warning and one would stay up every night if one waited for absolute quiet.

You don't say if you get warnings in the Camp, or are you in too rural an area to hear them? I need not ask you need I darling, to let me know as soon as you possibly can when you know definitely that you will be home

⁶
⁶ On a Sunday!

for a day or so as holidays are not finished here yet, and I have very short notice I may clash with someone else's leave, as of course, its difficult for more than one to be away at a time with such a small staff.

I am over at the Surveyor's office writing this, as someone is on holiday, and so we have to take turns at looking after the office—it is the Rural District Report Post you see, and must be manned in case of damage being reported during a Raid.

Did I tell you that Sid & Nancy got married at Longmore's about a fortnight ago?

Sid actually had the cheek to call on Ron on the day of the wedding and ask him to go to the reception at his house, and Ron was fool enough to go. Anyway, he was the only guest as none of the others turned up, and of course, Nancy's people wer'nt (sic) there. I felt a bit sorry for them when Ron told us, but they don't really (sic) deserve much sympathy, They didn't ask any other of their old friends.

I will leave this letter now as its still morning, and there may be something to add by this evening, although life goes on very uneventfully here except for raids, so I wonder & find anything to write to you about. I often wonder, when reading my letters through (I do sometimes) whether you manage to read all I have written. Isnt it awful scrawl. I do hope you dont mind darling. I don't think I could write slowly & carefully.

5.30

There's no more news to add Sweetheart except "business as usual" this afternoon, so goodbye my love—God keep you, Your very loving Ivy

9 September 1940.

Sherwood Lodge, Camp



My own [...] each thought I am allowed to have to myself is devoted to you. I received a letter from you this morning, the first I've had since last Thurs. I am one with thousands now it seems, because everyone is complaining of not having received their mail, this one I got today was

posted on the 5th which means it took 4 days to reach me, I'm wondering now if you get mine promptly, you know I write every day so please check up and tell me when next you write. I observed your comment on my identity bracelet & wish to inform you that I should like a silver one, as dainty as possible in men's styles, I think I told you that all that I need go on it is my name and number, & I hope you will put something very loving on the back. I think it will be best if you keep it for me until I get home, otherwise we may lose it in the post.

Well my sweet today has been a fairly easy day for us, & not quite so interesting as usual, but we've learnt plenty more, so we can't complain, in fact the only complaint I have about today's proceedings is that we had to work for an hour this evening on trenches, but that's all over now and once again I have what is left of the day to devote to you, the one I live for & am fighting for.

On Wednesday we are told, we are to be examined by numerous big shots, officers all of them, of course, & on the results of their questionings, we shall be passed out or failed accordingly. I don't know what will happen to those who fail, but I hope I shan't, I feel pretty confident with what we have learnt but we shall see.

Also on Wednesday the officers of our company are entertaining us in the bar during the evening, they are paying for all the drinks and cigarettes, so I expect it will be a boozy turnout, but that won't worry us because we shall have grapefruit, but we'll take all the cigarettes we can get free. The object of this coming party, is a farewell one apparently to us before we go away, there are rumours now of us being put on the Lincolnshire coast, I don't know how true this is but I hope we don't go. But whatever happens to us we can't help & we shall have to knuckle under to whatever conditions prevail.

The sirens have just started up, they're screaming their guts out & it's very early tonight, I'm wondering if anything serious will come of it. It's exactly 8.45 which is indeed early, and when I've finished this letter I shall go out and see what we can see. If anything happens before we go to bed I shall report it at the end of this letter.

I noticed in your darling letter today, a tendency towards fed upness with the Aunties, & I can understand how you feel [...] but I must ask you to try & be your old sweet self, you must remember that the poor old dears are homeless at the moment & be as tolerant as you can, & when it's all over you will have the consolation of knowing that you did your bit. To cheer you up, remember that I'm nearly as bad off as you, because you still have your friends near if you care to seek them, & they can help you to forget a few of your worries, & I will try to dispel the rest with my letters by making them as long as I possibly can. You may always expect a long letter after the weekends because I have the time usually to stop & review the past events, but during the week when I write from day to day, I am naturally limited, but I will always make as much as I can for you.

We are all rather shaky about our shift during this week, because our first few days on detachments will be a bit nerve wracking, but I think we shall have some experienced men with us to start with, so we should get on alright, so please picture us on our first night, which should be towards the end of this week, & rest safely & surely, because at last I shall be proving some of my love for you, by watching over you during each night, & if I have anything to do with it, no Jerries will get by our light without being illuminated. [...] (*another paragraph of adoration here*).

PS The all clear is just sounding 9.22.

10th September 1940.

Sherwood Lodge

I have just received the longest letter I've ever had from you, 12 pages & written on the 6th. I shall read it again as I answer your queries etc., but first, although I dislike even mentioning it, I resent the remark on which you ended, you know what I mean, your reference to overflowing your kisses on some other soldier. I know you would never do such a thing, and it's not that I'm complaining about, but it spoilt the letter I think, & I would rather you leave other soldiers out of our love, [...] please keep on saving those kisses [...] until I get home to see you, which won't be many days away I'm thinking, that is if our luck holds.

Tomorrow (Wednesday) is to be a great day for us all, we are going to have a written exam, & will be interviewed & questioned by about 6 officers who will pass us out, we shall then be moved to sites & will start straight away on our new jobs. Our instructors have told us that we are better spotters than any at present on detachments & we should make a vast difference to the number of targets illuminated, as we're a really smart lot, & I can tell you from what I have experienced during these last days that I have no fears for the future at all, I am absolutely confident on everything I have learnt, & I'm not the least bit worried about tomorrow. I expect by the time you get this letter, I shall be in action, as it seems to me that our mail is a long time getting to it's (sic) destination, so I shall have plenty to write about soon.

You mention that Mum⁶⁷ has not heard from me for a fortnight, well that's all wrong you know, because I religiously write to her each week, & sometimes more, so we can blame the post again. As for hearing from anyone else, I'll be quite frank and say they're all a bloody rotten lot, they have my address at Austin's and I never even received an acknowledgement of change of address, I haven't heard from Ron, Len or Ted for weeks & I'm thoroughly disgusted with them all, surely I don't have to do all the writing, before I can get a reply, and in any case I always send more than I receive. My only wish is that I could swap places with them, they would then realise what a letter can mean. And here, where it's nearly all sleep & work, & I have to scramble to even write you a letter, & still have to find time for others, makes it very hard when I know that all those at home have more time & money to spare than I. If you get an opportunity, I wish you would convey my direst curses on all concerned.

I'm glad my mouth organ has gone to the doctor's, and I hope they will repair it successfully, I shall be very glad of that soon, & talking of repairs, will you get my other shoes done as soon as you possibly can, for the ones I have with me are about done for & I can't spare them until I have some more to fall back on.

⁶
⁷ Ellen Jane Furlong

You can tell my sister that she didn't see me at Colliers End the other day, because I have never been anywhere else but Nottingham, I must have a double.

I must say I appreciate your efforts with my old flannels, I hope they will justify the time you spent on them. I should think your new frock is under way now... I would like to know how it's going on because I'm very interested in how beautiful my darling wife can look.

I cannot see why Marie is pleased about Michael going to Egypt, I should think she ought to be very upset, if she could only realise what it means, she probably would be very worried. We keep hearing rumours about going to Egypt too, but our Corporal told us yesterday that a grade 2 man would never leave England, & also that there is no truth in the rumours, so I don't think we have any cause for worry.

I'm sorry Molly England has got the sack, I think her manager is most unreasonable, I hope he has a son in the army, he might be sorry before he's finished bullying. I think she did the right thing anyway, and I don't suppose she will have much trouble in finding a new job. It's really amazing what a rotten lot of buggers there still are in the world, & if I had my way they would all be shot out of hand, & the world might then be a happier place to live in, and while such people exist, I'm not surprised at countries being at war etc., but one day things will alter I expect.

I hope you won't think this letter is a disagreeable one, I really don't mean it that way, but I feel aggressive towards the people who owe me letters, & it's finding its way out in comments on other people, so please bear with me, & if I know your nature you'll probably agree with me.

You say we have much to look forward to, of course we have, we have life itself in front of us, & we will make all we can out of it, with you & I we can make our little world a wonderful place for two & perhaps three who knows, I can hardly wait to start it, but soon we shall have this terrible war over, & I shall be back with you, & start our life anew, so cheer up, it won't be long, & I'll always be able to write to you whatever happens.

And now I must close down until tomorrow, I daresay I shall have lots to write about from now on so until then Goodnight my love, so sleep tight my wife & God bless you

Wednesday 11 September 1940.

Waterford



I regret to say I did not write you a letter yesterday. The day was extremely busy, and in the evening the Gang were due to come over, only as a matter of fact only Ron turned up, and he came so early that it prevented me getting in a few lines to you before hand I had a letter from you yesterday written last Thursday (isnt the post slow) but I didn't have one this morning. However I presume you are busy studying as you said you may be in your last letter, so I am not worrying if I don't hear from you so frequently as before. I have no exciting news for you. As I said Ron came over, and we heard guns or bombs about 9.30. However there was no warning so after he had gone I had a bath. This morning I learnt that the warning went about 8. Pm and lasted till 5 in the morning. I expect the wind must have been in the wrong direction Anyway it was just as well we didn't hear it as I shouldnt have had my bath and we might have had a restless night. We are getting people in Hertford now from London, specially the East End. Liverpool Street is handy for them I suppose. And the train simply tips them out at Hertford. I don't suppose they have all had their homes bombed, but are moving away simply from fear. The bombing of London certainly is terrible isn't it? I wonder how long the population will be able to stand it. ***N.B. Two million houses (60 per cent of those in London) were destroyed in the Blitz.***

Now we are getting what the other continental countries have already had, and it remains to be seen whether Britons are made of sterner stuff. I pray God that we are

Penny has grown out of her harness now and she has a smart red collar on. She wore it for the first time yesterday, but she doesn't seem to appreciate it at all.

After finding that she could not rub it off she sat in her basket and sulked

and although she couldn't exactly cry, she managed to looked (sic) a thoroughly mastered? dog. By the time you get this I expect you will nearly have finished your two weekends training—and perhaps know when you will be moving. Every letter that I open now I half expect to find that you are coming home in a day or two and although it hasn't happened yet, I keep on hoping.

Have you got a wireless where you are or do you know if you get them on a detachment? If so, perhaps you could make use of Sandy's half hour ⁶⁸.

I sent your mother a P.C. ⁶⁹ for her birthday ⁷⁰ yesterday. Your card, however, had not arrived. I expect that it will come today though.

Barbara had her banns called for the first time last Sunday I wonder if you will be able to come to the wedding. She has no idea yet when it will be as Roy has to get right from Northumberland and so can't do it in exactly 24 hours. Of course she isn't having any reception. Just the two family's at the church but I expect they will go home after the ceremony just for a drink. I think she's sensible not to have any fuss. Then the money that dad would normally have spent on a reception, Barbara can use after the war when setting up home.

Well darling, that really does exhaust my news, but I still love you very much Sweetheart a whole shillings worth!! Like you I am living for the day when we shall meet again. God bless you sweetheart-

⁶⁸ a popular forces programme

⁶⁹ Postcard

⁷⁰ Ellen Jane Furlong born 10 September 1878

11 September 1940.

Arnold Camp



My very own,

This will be the last time I think, that I shall be writing from his address, because we are going out to detachment tomorrow. You may, of course continue to write to this address, because as I told you before, all mail comes here first, & is then distributed.

We had our test this afternoon, and I obtained full marks as I knew I should, & I think all this adds up for future reference, so I'm not worrying. We are all wondering now, where we are going to be sent, we know we shall be split up, & I'm very much afraid Arthur & I are doomed to separation very soon. With regard to the question of leave, you mention not being able to get your holiday at very short notice, well I can tell you nothing except that when I do get it, it won't be more than 24 hours, the only question being as to whether it will be during the week, or at a weekend. I'm hoping it will be very soon, but we're always in the dark, & I don't suppose we shall know until it is due. I shall let you know, you must do the same as I have to do, just wait as patiently as you can.

I am surprised at Barbara getting married so suddenly, but there, I don't suppose any harm will come of it, and as you say, it's all very nice in theory, but I hope it will be as nice in practice for her sake. I think you are quite right in leaving the present until they are settled down.

We've just heard that 79 incendiary bombs were dropped on Yaxley Camp, so it's a good job we weren't there, or we might have had more to think of. You asked in a letter received today, if we had any air raid warnings here, well we hear everything, see everything, but we're so used to it all that we take no notice. All enemy planes pass over this way, & Derby, Birmingham etc., are all the objectives, & sometimes we get stuff unpleasantly close, but as I said, we ignore such things now, & take them for granted.

I'm afraid that there is little more to report now, although I thought I should have a lot to write about today, and so I've written a little bed time story for you, I hope you'll like it, & read it tonight, in bed. Goodnight my darling, God Bless You.

Thursday 12 September 1940.

Hertford



I am just squeezing this letter in at your mother's house-I am going back to work this evening for a little while and so if cannot write this at work so W will immediately find me a job. There are literally hundreds of people leaving London, many of them almost destitute, and of course it makes a lot of work for us.

I received a letter from you today (of Saturday's date) saying you were going on detachments on Wednesday. So I guess you're already there now. Does this mean that you are not going to Newark darling.

I also received your snaps this morning and its very nice to see your smiling face each day instead of about once every goodness knows how long.

I shall be interested to see the snaps of your own squad when it comes.

We had the usual all night raid last night, at least it was the noisiest and we slept down stairs. At least we slept what little we could but the guns are nearer us now and so I expect we shall get disturbed nights in future.

We had a fright about 10 pm We we (sic) sitting in the hall, as there was rather a lot of activity, when we heard a bomb falling towards us from the village.

There was an awful whistling as it came through the air, and I can tell you that all the occupants at Four Winds held their breath for a few seconds However it passed over the house and I believe landed

somewhere in the gravel pits⁷¹. There was abang (sic) when it landed but not the explosion we had expected, so I thought it must be a delayed action or an incendiary. However when things were quieter I went out and asked the Georges what they thought, and they happened to be just making for the shelter and they said there was a strong smell of carbide, so that it must have exploded. I hope so anyway. I can't tell you anyway darling how much I wish you were with me during the nights Somehow I should feel so much safer. But I have to always appear calm because I know that if I get panicky, the Aunts will too. But I hope when you do get home we shall have a quiet night and be able to go to bed It would be awful to have to spend our precious night sitting up with others wouldn't it.

The enclosed letter explains itself. What do you think of it? I'm just about fed up with that man. We had a village collection for the spitfire fund—Four Winds managed to find 4/- but our beloved vicar boldly put his name down to 1/6

By the way the letter to him is only a copy. I am posting the original today—so will let you know what results it produces.

Now darling I must get back to work Did you listen to the Premier's speech last night? He thinks the next week will produce an invasion if it is coming at all.

Please come home as soon as you can sweetheart. I do so want to see you again [....]

Undated letter (weekday).

Hertford

Dearest Love

I received two letters from you this morning—both short ones, it is true, but it was nice to get them just the same. I was very proud to learn that you came top in your preliminary exam. I hope you do well in the final as well.

It would have been nice wouldn't it, if you could have got home last Sunday, but of course it would have been most foolish to have attempted it. It is too far to do in one day.

7

¹ Other side of the Railway line

I'm sure you will be annoyed when I tell you that only a few measly gallons of petrol stand between you and me spending this weekend together. My friend Jack is going home to Nottingham for his monthly 48 hours. Shortage of petrol however, forces him to hitchhike, & but for that he would have been very pleased to have dropped me on your doorstep for the weekend & picked me up again on Sunday afternoon. Your friend Eric, however, seems to get petrol all right. What is the magic word?

I saw Ron ⁷² this evening as I was coming home from work. He insisted on coming home with me (having bought some bones for Penny). Having come as far as the gate, I couldn't do less than ask him in for a cup of tea. He said Freda was out for the evening & he was feeling "brownd off".

I think he rather expected to stay the evening, but I simply couldn't have put up with that, so I told him I was going out again after tea, which wasn't true, but to make it look so, I let him escort me as far as Bengoe & then when he was out of sight I came back home.

The Aunts have been to Cousin Lizzie's funeral in London today. You may remember that she spent a fortnight here early in the year. Penny, of course had to be shut in the whole day, but she was very good & did not misbehave herself in any way.

I think I shall send this letter to your old address if I do not get instructions about this, as I should think you must be nearing the end of your course.

Well sweetheart, I havnt any more news for today so, for now
Goodnight my love God bless you I am always yours

⁷²
² Dempster

Friday 13th (Possibly September 1940)

No Address given (Camp).

My darling,

I have omitted the address from this letter, because we're moving again on Saturday (tomorrow). I am now on a detachment, Section H. Troop 2, radio telegraphist & typist, that's me. But Oh my darling, I'm so lonely, I've never never felt so terribly heartbroken as I do now. I've lost Arthur, and everyone here is a stranger to me. All I've done here this morning is get paid & answer telephones, & the rest of the time I have to stand about. I'm writing now, as I sit in H.Q. office, having nothing else to do, and during the day the place is full of officers, although at the moment all I've got with me is a very young sergeant, he's a decent fellow, but I don't know him very well yet, so I've got absolutely nothing to live for. And now, to cap all my misfortune, all leave is cancelled until the 30th of the month, & I don't know how long I'll have to wait after this before I can get my meagre 24 hrs. It seems as if everything is against us, although I hope that if I keep this job, I should be able to get away fairly easily when things are smoothed out a bit.

The site I'm at now is positively lousy, we're right in the wilds with the nearest village 2 miles away, the very appearance of the place is enough to break anyone's heart, but to have to stay here, and well I think I should go mad if I don't find something to occupy my mind. But fortunately we are moving tomorrow, as I told you, and it won't be far enough away to worry about, we shall be exactly five miles farther away from one another, but it won't make much difference to my getting home ~~when~~ I can break away.

Arthur has been kept behind, he tried to make them let him come with me, but it could not be done, & I persuaded him to let it rest there, because I think he will soon have a stripe on his sleeve, & I don't like to think he'd lose it on my account.

As for my chances now, I don't quite know how I stand, but perhaps later on I shall get to know more, & I can tell you all about it then. Anyhow, the fact remains that I've been chosen for a good job, but I understand that no one person is ever kept here long enough to learn the ropes, but we

shall see in due course, & everything will come out right I hope.

You hadn't better write any more until you get my new address, although I guess that by the time you get this letter, my next will be on it's way. I shall still continue to write you, because now, even more than ever, it is the only thing I have to keep me sane, & the only outlet to my emotions. I'm dying to see you again, and hold you in my arms once more, I feel like bursting into tears every moment I think of you, in fact the more I think of you, the more I feel like crying, because everything seems so terribly hard on us, we're so much in love, & so terribly far apart, & three weeks or more to wait before I see you, seems an eternity, I don't know how we shall survive, [...]

I'm sorry that this letter should seem so miserable to you, [...] And now, I'll say goodbye until tomorrow, when I hope to be able to get a chance to write again, and perhaps the outlook won't be quite so gloomy. Goodbye

13th September 1940.

No Address given (Camp).

Typed letter (in red).

You will no doubt be surprised to get a letter from me which has been typewritten, especially in red, but the ribbon on this old portable Imperial is about finished and the only thing to do was to change over to red because there are no more ribbons available, but as I expect to get plenty of this sort of thing as soon as we are settled in our new quarters. I bet you will laugh at me trying to type as expertly as you do in your office but I understand that when we go into action again I shall be kept very busy indeed so of course this will give me plenty of practice.

This office is the gloomiest place, you can't imagine. At this time it's dark outside and this effort is being made by the flickering light of a hurricane lamp, it's rather a strain really but you've no idea how it relieves the tension I'm enduring. I have to stay here in this office until the other fellow comes to relieve me, and as he has gone out on business of some

importance I don't know just when he will be back, but I'm here until he comes.

I have already written to you once today, telling you how terribly lonely I am, so I won't bother you with any more moans, and I'll be content with telling you how much I love you. I've just received a letter from you which was written on Wednesday and you mentioned Barbara's wedding, and wonder if I shall be able to get home for it, well, if you can give me a definite date, I might be able to wangle something later on so do your best. I am looking forward to seeing Penny in her new red collar I bet she looks a pretty little girl, but I'm not surprised at her not liking it very much.

The officers here are a decent lot, for instance, one of them came in this afternoon with some chocolate and he gave us a piece each, which very much surprised me, but I've come to the conclusion that army life is full of surprises. The only thing that is really alarming is the terrific speed at which the money goes, and I think it seems to go quicker when there is nothing to spend it on than if there was plenty to get rid of it on, but I shall have to ask you to help me out if I get in a tight spot, but I shall not do this until I have to [...]

I know that we are so far from each other, but I know that the day is not far distant when we can see each other again, so we'll just have to keep smiling until that wonderful day comes along.

Well my darling, I think that is about all I can think of at the moment, but if I get a chance to have a few minutes to myself tomorrow, I shall have another try to type to you, and you will be able to see how I improve. Goodbye, God bless you

Sunday 15 September 1940.

Waterford



I'm just going to write you a little letter although I am afraid there is nothing much to relate from today. Freda & Ron⁷³ have spent the day here and we have just messed about doing nothing in particular. This morning I dug up some ground & planted 2 score spring cabbage plants. (Mr Young asked after you & said he had missed you coming) In the middle of planting there was a warning. However I carried on until some planes sounded unpleasantly near (there was lots of cloud) I was just going down the shelter steps, when there was a rattle of machine guns, and this baby of yours practically fell into the shelter I can tell you. I think they were aiming at something or someone on the line⁷⁴. They sounded as if they fell on the line or the tin sheds beyond anyway. We had a good hard shower after dinner so I expect my plants will live all right

Ron & Freda-Wartime



The boys came round yesterday for waste paper, so I expect my letter to the vicar had some effect, although I havnt seen him since. I slept upstairs last night for the first time since last Tuesday and although the aunts said there was very heavy gunfire during the night, neither Freda nor I were awake to hear it. This afternoon I make (sic) some heavy curtains to go up in my bedroom, They go right over the whole window resting on a rod on the picture rail. I have taken the shade off the light, so I hope to get a decent light now, without worrying about the blackout.

I hope you don't mind me telling you all these silly little happenings, but nothing exciting has happened, and I wanted to send you some sort of

⁷³ Dempster

⁷⁴ railway

a letter so that you would not have to be disappointed one day when the post came.

I am wondering whether I shall get a letter from you tomorrow saying where you are. I hope you will let me know what are your new conditions, I mean the arrangements for food, sleep, etc. I do hope you manage to be fairly comfortable, although the bad weather is coming, and I am afraid you will have to rough it this winter.

Well darling this weekend is nearly over, and now I am going to look forward to the next one in the hope that you may be home (that is if we arnt invaded before then).

Ron is in the lounge putting on some of your records. There is one of Strauss's on now- and beautiful music always makes me feel sad but specially now, as I think the records are so closely bound up with you.

Now my dearest one your letter is written, so goodbye my sweet-God and my love keep you save (sic).

CHAPTER THREE

**15th September 1940. Section headquarters,
Searchlight Station,
Farnah Green ,
Nr. Belper, Derbyshire**
(Typed letter in red)

To the fairest in the world, I'm still trying to master the typewriter as you can no doubt see, what do you think of my efforts? I'm afraid that I'm terribly homesick still and all I can think of at the moment is how I can wangle some leave to see you. I heard this morning that leave will be resumed tomorrow week, so I shall go all out for the first chance. If this fails, you will have to come down here to see me because I cannot stand it much longer, I shall go mad, the only thing that keeps me from taking leave without permission is the knowledge that you would not approve, but I must see you soon somehow.

Yesterday I tried to get a trunk call through to you, and after waiting for 2-hours I asked the girl on the exchange how much longer I should have to wait, and she told me at least another 5 hours and I had to cancel the call. I tried again this morning, and was told that only priority calls to London are being accepted, you see how hard it is for me I can't even hear your voice although I am ready to pay any price for it. It seems as if all things are against me, but I expect we shall win through in the end although it's pretty hard at the moment.

I'm just having my dinner like you used to at the hospital, and I can't say that I exactly like it. Guess what I've got, potatoes, cauliflower (both without salt) and some cold meat roll. Not very exciting is it, and the worst of it is, there's no sweet to follow, so I've got to eat it or starve. The cook on this detachment is lousy, he mucks all the food up, and everyone grumbles about him, I hope they get someone else soon.

We had a devil of a game getting to this place yesterday, to start with

we had to get up at 6 and get ready which we did in record time and then we had to hang about all the rest of the day waiting for instructions as to where to proceed, we arrived here at eight o' clock in the evening, having travelled about 30 miles, and that's how the army moves, just imagine, a whole day to go 30 miles, do you wonder why I'm going off my head. The scenery around here is simply marvellous, but I cannot appreciate it in my present mood, it needs you to make it complete. We're on top of a very high hill and can see for miles, but unfortunately the winter is coming on and we are exposed to all the winds, so I expect we shall need all the woollen goods we can get.

You will be sorry to hear that I knocked the scab off my vaccination this morning, so I expect it will be a long while hanging about now, but it doesn't hurt any more so I'm not worrying about it much.

I don't know how long we shall be here, because I understand that this is only a temporary shift, so I suppose it means more moving later on, however, I'm getting quite used to it by now, the only thing is that every time we move we go further away so I hope we stick here for a while at any rate, because I'm far enough away now. I think that I have said all there is to say for the time, but I'll be with you as soon as I can, the reason I'm packing up now is that the sergeant major is in here with me and I don't quite know how he feels about me typing private letters in the army's time but he can't stop me from posting this to you anyhow so goodbye, I'll write again tomorrow [...]

16 September 1940. Typed letter from,
85, Ware Road, Hertford



"Ivy read me a short passage from one of your recent letters to her. Well it isn't necessary for me to make any excuses, but I do not wish you to think I have not troubled to write to you. I saw Ivy one day about 2 weeks ago, and she told me you were moving to another camp in a day or two, so I at once wrote to you at Yaxley and have since been waiting for a reply to get your new address. However, I have since got that from Ivy!

I have been terribly worried about Freda and Thelma in London, since these bloody murder raids have been on and they have had one or two narrow escapes.

On Friday, a Molotov Bread Basket of incendiaries fell on the building in which their flat is situated and it really was a miracle that their place escaped harm. I felt really queer all last week, and I think it was all due to worrying.

Ivy very kindly put Freda up for the week-end, and she went back to London this morning. I know the change of air and two nights good sleep in a bed did her the world of good. They have been sleeping in the Air Raid shelter for nearly two weeks now so you can guess how she appreciated it. I spent last week-end up there and got four hours sleep the whole time. It's a perfect bugger! *(In 1939 Horace & Thelma Sexstone lived at Ashdowne Road, Uxbridge, very close to RAF Northolt-Thelma was Ron's older sister).*

I haven't seen Len for a fortnight now, but he is still around and working as hard as ever. He and Kitty has (sic) their holiday next week. I haven't heard from Ted since you went away though. I expect Ivy told you Sid and Nancy were recently married. I was the only guest at the reception, and to be honest I wasn't at all keen on going but I didn't have the heart to refuse. *(Hand written-Had a good Feed anyway!)*

Well pal, I understand you have been going great guns and come out with a First Class in your tests-damn good mate- I can see you coming home a Lance Jack before long.

Things have been pretty quiet around here lately and no sudden deaths have occurred during the past week so the local news is sweet F.A. (*but see subsequent letter dated 24 September from Ivy*).

I am afraid this bloody Air Blitz has mucked our wedding arrangement up for a bit; we don't know what's going to happen from day to day now, and as we have got to rely on Horace & Thelma for the wedding arrangements---it's a bit awkward. (*Ron Dempster & Freda Castle were married in early 1941 in Hertford*). Still everything comes to those who wait, I suppose...

Ron Dempster."

16th September 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

My precious wife,

[...] (*a paragraph of adoration here*)

I'm much happier now, & I guess you will be glad to know it after reading my last two or three very gloomy letters, but honestly dear, I've never never felt so awful in my whole life, I nearly went mad, but yesterday I confided it in the S. Major, & asked him to give me something to do, & he very kindly understood how I felt, & set us on clearing up and general sorting out, & we were kept so busy that I felt considerably better in mind and body when we were finished. After tea we got permission to go out, & I went with a fellow from Welwyn, and another chap named Les, who possesses a really posh car, he's pretty well off I think, but he's a nice boy, we went to a pub & I had two half pints, I enjoyed the first, but the second was not so good, but it made me feel happier, & we came out and explored the town of Belper, which is quite a big town, & we're only a mile away so we shall see a little civilization for a change.

We had to get back early because Les and I have to stay up all night, last night was my first, & Les had to teach me my work. It's called plotting & it's very interesting, so interesting in fact that that is why I'm feeling so much better. I'll explain now what plotting consists of. In the first place we have an emplacement at the very tip top of the highest hill around here, and we have to keep watch all night for aircraft, flares or Verey lights, searchlight beams & suspicious lights, & every time we see or hear anything we have to take a bearing, & estimate the distance away, and if it's an aeroplane we estimate its height, we then ring up the battery H & report all the information we have gathered.

We then plot the position and course on a map specially marked & the time, & there you have it in a nutshell. Last night we only had one Jerry, and he came right overhead, and later on we got a friendly plane, but actually the night was very uneventful. We also have to give weather reports, and all together we're kept pretty busy one way and another, but the cold, I've never felt so cold before, I shall most certainly need a balaclava helmet, & some gloves & mittens, the gloves & mittens must be woollen, but I shall be home soon & we can talk it over then.

I have some more cheering news for you now, although I'm not banking too much on it yet, but here it is, I was told that leave is being resumed next week, so I touched our section sergeant, and he said it was so, and I said could I have mine amongst the first lot, and he said that if he had anything to do with it, I should certainly get it early, so be ready to hear anything from a week onwards.

I will now try to tell you something about the fellows here in our hut. They are a rough crowd generally, one was a professional heavyweight boxer, & the others are tough guys too, & when I first went in amongst them, I felt very out of it, & they were very rough & ready towards me, & gave me the impression that they resented my presence amongst them, but I've got to know them very well now, & they're really very kind hearted boys, well I should say men, they're all older than I, on HQ staff, & it's only their roughness outside that is anything to worry about. I forgot to mention that we came off duty this morning at 5.o'clock & went straight to bed, where we stayed until 12. I then got up and washed and shaved and had dinner, & now it's nearly 3 & I'm still allowed to remain on my bed, but I

expect I shall have to resume my duties about 5:30 this evening but it's quite a nice state of affairs & I hope it continues.

It's raining here now, has been since 5 this morning, & I am told by the locals that it rains here 9 days out of 10, that's because we're so high up, it's like the Isle of Man, you know how doubtful the weather was there, well it's the same here, but it's beautiful just the same, and I only wish we had the summer to look forward to instead of winter, but we'll make the best of it somehow, and if I can get home occasionally, I shall be quite happy, so long as we don't shift again soon.

The boxer has got his own wireless set, & it's a real pleasure to hear news again, while we were at Sherwood we heard nothing at all. This morning we had some very beautiful music to listen to, and dance bands play "I can't love you anymore" & other lovely tunes, they make me realise how far away you are, & yet it seems like a link with home & I wouldn't be without it really. The set is exactly like Mum's, you remember the one we bought for her, & it's directly opposite my bed, & every time I look up, I can see Mum's living room.

This hut we're in is very cosy, we've got a stove at each end, & we're not too crowded, I've got the corner farthest from the door, & it's a good position. My window, as always it seems, faces West, & commands a perfect view, I wish you were here to share it. The windows on the opposite side face onto the Road, & we see buses & cars & people going by, they can see right in our hut, & the kids from the village come each day to talk to us out of the windows, & run errands if we want anything, in short everything is perfect now I'm settled down, ~~except~~ the very great distance from home, I think it's about 150 miles now, but I shall still come home on the shortest leave, if it only means a night with you it will be wonderful, & I shall be extremely grateful to the powers that be, when I can get there, so keep praying darling as I am always doing, & I shall be with you again in no time. I heard the wireless a little while ago playing "night & day", & you can guess what that meant to me, [...] honestly darling I felt like crying, indeed I often should if it weren't for the fact that I'm always in somebody's company. But enough of my gloomy moments, you have heard enough about these last few days, & I mean to make the most of my opportunities & be as happy as I can in the prevailing circumstances. The work, now I've

captured? A job, is very interesting as I told you, & providing I don't get mucked about too much, I don't think it will be very hard to get to like it, so don't let me worry you any more, I'm sorry I told you about my past miseries, but I had to let someone know [...] so perhaps you will forgive me if I worried you too much.

Coal in these parts is amazingly cheap, our lorries went out today to get some for each detachment, & guess how much it was-30 cwt. For 5/-, don't you wish it was as cheap round your way, you see we're very close to the collieries, & providing we fetch it ourselves that is the price. ⁷⁵

I am enclosing a letter for Mum, because we can't get stamps just when we like, & I'm hard up, so I'll save the price of a stamp & trust you to deliver it safely.

I think you had better send me a pound from my money, I'm afraid I have only my weekly wage now, & I might want a little to get home with when the opportunity comes, so if you will see about it, I shall be much obliged, will you please send some envelopes too.

And now [...] I shall have to end this letter, I have been interrupted several times to do little jobs, but I've managed fairly well this time I think, so goodbye my sweet darling wife, I'm happier now I've told you everything, & I'll write again tomorrow, so God bless you, & keep you for me alone [...].

17th September 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp.

Dearest heart, Goodmorning (sic) I love you.

Here I am with another chapter of my army career, I've just got up & finished shaving & washing, & I'm feeling very fresh. It's twelve o'clock, and I went to bed at five, so I think I've just about had enough sleep.

⁷

⁵ One & a half imperial tons of coal for 25p

We had a very blustery night, there's a terrific gale raging up here now, we've lost the cookhouse door, & although the cook has been nearly three miles across country to look for it, it is not to be found, so you can guess what a breeze there is. The night was very uneventful, and apart from a few bomb flashes in the distance there was nothing to report, but then the weather was so rough that I wonder anything could stay in the air at all.

I started work yesterday after tea, I had my first dose of typing. I had to get 8 copies of Company orders typed out, & I used carbon paper, the first try, I got half way through & found that I had the carbon in the wrong way round, so I had to start again, but no one seemed to mind how long it took, so of course I didn't worry much, but I'm getting my speed up, & if I can keep the job, I should be quite good in time. I shall try to learn shorthand I think if the job holds out, but that's all in the distant future & I shall see how I get along. I think I shall have to start work earlier today, because the S.M. seems to think that we should be on the go as long as possible, but I don't really mind, because I like the work now, except for the telephone, I'm afraid that I'm not really over fond of that. The S.M. has just interrupted me to tell me there will be some typing to do this afternoon, so you see my premonition was right, & I shall be keeping you company.

I've just been talking to Les, & I find that he is a B.A. he has had five years at Cambridge, & he was going to be a schoolmaster when war broke out. I asked him why he didn't take a commission & he tells me that he probably will later on, so I expect I shall be losing him one day, & I shall miss him because we're getting pretty thick already.

The one o'clock news is now on & we've got the S.M sitting on our beds with us listening to it, he's a friendly man really & very young, I was told last night that he is younger than I am, but if he is he don't look it, I'll have to find out some time.

We've made ourselves quite a cosy little plotting shed on top of the hill now, we've commandeered a pill-box, & bunged up all the holes with sand bags, & put a bed in & oil stove, so that we take it in turns to sleep, but up till now, I've managed to keep awake all the time. The detachment boys are up there too, they're mostly militia lads, & a nice lot too, they've got dogs & 1 cat which go with them wherever they go, the cat is named

Lionel, I don't know why, because it's a she, & it's a dead image of your one time pixie, same colour markings & everything, & she's very affectionate, she spends all her nights rubbing around our legs & purring, It's nice to have something at least which shows affection, & if the truth were known, I bet that's why the boys keep their pets.

The food we're getting now, is improving slowly, & the reason is that my other friend from Welwyn is a confectioner, & he's been helping since we've been here, we even get a cup of tea after dinner occasionally here, & this was an unheard of thing in our training bases, but it's all to the good.

I have at last got interest in a book, it's called Golden Glory by Henry St. John Cooper, it's all about love on an island in the Pacific, something like Blue Lagoon [...] it is the best relief to my pent up love that I have found so far. [...] I'll be with you again tomorrow, so until then, Goodbye [...] I am yours alone [...].

18th September 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

I am still managing to get along without feeling too unhappy, but I'm very homesick, & I'm longing for a glimpse of you, it would make me so much happier, & I should feel like going on for a bit longer, but now, it seems that no one is sure when we shall get away again, but it can't be so very far away, because the moon is now on the wane, & when it's fading out, leave should recommence, so my angel wife, watch the moon for my homecoming. I stood at the top of the hill all last night, and watched the old moon, it brought back all the things we have done together in the moonlight, do you remember our swim at the Isle of Wight, and the walks we had, the swimming party at our new home, going home from dances, and all the other lovely things we have done by its light. All these things I think of at nights, & always your sweet dear face is there to help me on, I picture you asleep in our bed, & know that I am watching over you, it gives me some feeling of being able to prove my love for you. [...] it can't possibly be much longer before we are together again.

I have been here four days now, & I have not received a letter from you yet, I did expect to get one today, but I guess you'll have written, & it is the post that is to blame. I'm living in hope of getting several tomorrow, so please don't disappoint me will you. I typed a very long letter to Ted ⁷⁶ last night, & I think I shall type my next one to you, so that you can see how good I'm getting.

A long period is now elapsing-----it is now evening & I started this note this morning, & right in the middle of it the S.M. came after me to go with 4 other blokes on a lorry. We spent the whole afternoon going round the sites collecting odd things. I guess we must have had a 60 or 70 mile ride & the country is absolutely marvellous because of the hills, we're on the Pennine chain here, & the weather has been bright & all we do is struggle up hill & tear down again, but I wish you could see the view from the tops of the hills, we could enjoy it together, because even in my sorry state I appreciated it.

I'm going to have a night off from plotting tonight, because I only get 4 hours sleep in 24, & we have arranged it now I have learnt, to do it every other night, which won't be too bad.

As I got back tonight, the dispatch rider brought in the mail, & at last I have a letter from you, the one you wrote on Sunday, in which you tell me of the machine gun fire & I'm thankful that they did you no harm, I hope you will always be safe. You tell me of thick curtains in our bedroom & ask if I want to know of these silly little things, [...] they make you seem so much nearer. I'm glad your letter to the vicar stirred him up a bit, & I feel sure your cabbage plants will grow, because your fair hands have planted them, & as always, I'm sure they'll grow. I'm so glad you wrote that letter, it came in time to save me from getting downhearted again, [...]

⁷
⁶ Ladds

I'm glad Freda & Ron stayed with you for the weekend, I hope they relieved the monotony of having the Aunts with you alone, because I have gained the impression that they get on your nerves a bit occasionally, but never mind, I'll be with you soon providing nothing happens in this war to prevent leave being resumed.

I had a brief note from Arthur today, & it seems almost certain that he's in for a stripe, he's learning to deal with the new recruits that are now training. As for me, I don't know if I shall ever get very far now. I'm stuck here on H., because all they seem to want is work work work, & no one appreciates what is done in the end, but nevertheless I can't see into the future, & I told you that I might not be here for long, they have a habit of sending good men out on courses for different subjects, & I might be taken away yet, because I've got thousands of good marks on my training records, but I shan't be very concerned about that until a little later, at present I have all my work cut out to keep pace with the tasks I have each day.

I'm afraid that owing to the interruption I suffered this afternoon, this letter will not be posted today as it should be, so I'll save it until tomorrow & send tomorrow's letter with it. I try to write each day to the one I adore so much, & up till now I have been very successful, & I don't intend dropping the habit now, although sometimes I might be short of stamps & it might have to wait until I can procure some, but always I shall write the day's events to you, & tell you how much you mean to me.

There is a fellow in the bed opposite me, who is a well known rugby player in Northampton, & he says the war will be over in 4 months, because Turkey & Russia will soon be in the war, I do hope he's right, it would be wonderful indeed, I shall pray day & night for this to be so, & on this note, I'll end today's letter, so Goodnight this time my angel wife, I'll be with you again as soon as I can.

19th September 1940.

No Address

(Farnah Green, Camp)

Dearest heart, Another day nearer to seeing you & from what I've gleaned this morning, it won't be long now, as it is rumoured that 24 hour leave is due to start again on Sunday, I do hope & pray that this is true, it will be so wonderful to see you. I can hardly dare to hope too much, but all the same I am hoping, I can't help it, I shall keep on hoping until it happens.

Last night I had a little accident, nothing serious, but I think I've got two black eyes coming to me. It happened like this, I had fixed a shelf over my bed, and placed all my goods on it, & I was trying to hang my gas mask up underneath, the shelf tipped, & our heavy plates which we eat from are made of metal, well, mine fell off the shelf, & the edge of it caught me square between the eyes, it bled like anything, & this morning it's very sore because it's bruised badly, I shall be very surprised if it heals up without my eyes being beautifully shaded first, but I'll let you know of my progress, you needn't worry about it, because I'm not.

I've been in the office this morning for an hour or two drawing maps & I did a little bit of typing, but there are an officer, the S.M. & the sergeant there & I could find nothing else to do, so I just walked out & decided to write to you, I'm laying on my bed doing this, & it will soon be dinner time, so I shan't worry about work for some time yet, although one of us is supposed to listen for the phone. I am told that when the Radio Telephone is installed here in our new quarters, I shall be kept busy, so I guess I shan't have so much free time then but up to now, everything is very free & easy, & no one seems to mind whether we work or not. We get up when we like, that is if we sleep at night, & we can walk about all day in slippers & nobody cares, in short so long as the work is done, it's a proper rag time army. It all seems so strange after our training when discipline was so strict, & it takes quite a bit of getting used to. We don't bother to salute officers, & they talk to us as if we were one of them, our own officer often cadges a light for his cigarettes from me when I'm smoking, so you can guess what he's like.

I'm afraid that this is about all I have to mention in today's letter so I'll retire now, to the typewriter, where I hope to dash off a letter to Ron or Len, so until tomorrow , Goodbye & God keep you for me,

Friday 20th September 1940

Waterford

I had two letters from you this morning One of last Saturdays and one of Tuesdays, so now all the "back numbers" have arrived and the missing links in the story of your progress are complete and I know that you do office work during part of the day & "Plotting" during the night. And also know now who "Les" is, but I would still like to know where the rest of your squad are.

I am glad that leave is to be restarted in another week. I told you it would soon come along again, but I hope to goodness the powers that be are generous to you and give you 48 hours as its really not worth coming for 24 hours. In fact I am afraid you wouldnt be able to do it, and certainly not have a whole night to spend with me. However, I am sending you a £1 of your money as you ask with 2/6 as promised, for smokes But I hope you won't use the £1 till you really do come home, because you have only 30/- left now from your £5 So don't forget , you'r put on your honour to be careful. I wish I earned more darling then I would sent (sic) you some every week but I'm always broke half way through the week , so I can't.

I am glad to hear that you are happier now and I hope you will find your work very interesting, so that it keeps you too busy to be very homesick Of course I want you to miss me, but not to the extent of feeling utterly miserable.

My little watch hasn't turned up yet. I shall put an advertisement in the Mercury⁷⁷ next week with 10/- reward but I am afraid its gone for good. I miss it very much quite apart from the fact that I would never have parted

⁷⁷
⁷ Local newspaper

with it as you gave it to me. However its no use worrying over it. These things do happen sometimes.

Young Neilson (a solicitor at Longmore's) joined the Irish Guards today. He (and his wife) came to say goodbye. They are just our age and live up Queens Road.

I am afraid I felt envious as she was driving him to his reporting station in their nice big car, and I expect she will often be going up to see him, as I could come & see you if I had plenty of money.

However later on in the morning, a boy I know came in to ask if he could have a couple of evacuees. He had his leg of (sic) two years ago, a month after he got married, and now he can't even get any unemployment relief and has has (sic) to try to get P.A.

He thought two little evacuees might help to make his little bit of money go a bit farther. So after seeing him, I just couldn't feel envious of the Neilsons any longer. It made me realize how lucky I really am and if I don't get my rise I am going up to the County Hall because I want to save enough money to have our house decorated inside after the war and some new curtains & carpets and your greenhouse and O! such lots of other things, which I don't know if we'll ever get, but at least its something to look forward to.

You must forgive me if I don't write any more today but I want to go round to see your mother and deliver your letter to her so, Goodbye my darling
I will write some more tomorrow for you, With all my love.

20th September 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

First Letter. [...] I had my first W. Dream last night, needless to say, it was all about you, I did feel so happy in my dream, if only it could be true, it would be so wonderful. I was pumping our Section officer this morning, & he's told me that nothing definite is said about leave commencing on

Monday next, but that he has also heard the rumour, so of course we're all wondering & worrying as to whether it is right or not. If it does turn out to be so, I'm likely to come home any day, it probably won't be a weekend, and I shan't know until the last minute, so you must just wait & hope with me, & perhaps all our dreams will come true. [...] last night I went to Belper & felt so lonely, I do wish you could come here & enjoy the place with me, it would be so wonderful, but at the moment, my time is pretty well mucked about & I never know when I shall be free, so it hardly seems worth asking you to come here for a few days, & apart from that, I might be put somewhere else at almost any time, my life is not my own any more, & I can only give you my heart, that will always be yours.

I am rather worried about the fact that I have not received any letters to this new address yet, I got 2 yesterday which were written on Sun & Mon last and they went to Sherwood Lodge, well please send your next letter to the address on this letter, because the other one soon won't be, they're shifting soon, & our letters might get lost.

Well, I'm going to have a bath now I hope, we're being taken into Derby by lorry for a good old wash down & not before we need it, so I shall pack up here, in the hope I can post this to you in Derby, so Goodbye until tomorrow, & please send the pound on quickly, I need it for something special,

20th September 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Second Letter.

Hello my angel,

It's still today, & I'm just back from the baths. I blooming well had to stay behind to keep an eye on the lorry until someone else had finished, & so when I did get mine, I had to hurry it, but I got a bit cleaner, & I feel better for it.

I don't know if I told you that quite often things get pinched here, but I went to get my tea, & when I came back my fork & spoon had vanished, I followed an old sweat's advice & said nothing, but I think I know who stole it, & he will be short as soon as I get a chance.

I will let you know how I get on.

We three telephonists have this evening compiled a proper timetable to work to, & here is the beauty of it, we showed it to the section officer, & he signed it before the S.M. had seen it, so we should be able to stick to it. We have arranged it so that we each get a fortnights night duty & a week days, & the question of leave if any, will be settled by the others having to work a bit harder, but the way we've wangled it, those on nights should be left undisturbed all day, and the one on days will start at 9 in the morning till 7.30 at night, which won't be too bad if the S.M don't interfere at all, but he can't do much without consulting the officer, so we shouldn't worry much about it.

I am writing again because I get restless & can't settle down, I have borrowed a book from one of the mechanists, he is a real gentleman, he used to be a salesman in the leather trade, & I like him, but can't settle down to read, so I've chosen the only thing to make me reasonably happy, and that is writing to you, I'm sure that this is the only thing that I really enjoy doing, I only hope you are getting them all, it would be terrible if you didn't because I like to think I'm talking to you as I write, & you've no idea how I love doing it, you must have reams of paper from me now, the very act of writing to you is the thing that makes me happiest, and that is all I can do, until I get home to you, I don't know quite when that will be, but I hope it is soon, I guess you're as tired as I am of waiting for it to happen, but one fine day I'll be with you again, & it may be sooner than you expect. We've got to go out and fix up a tent soon, the old S.M. is a bit of a bugger sometimes, but we have to do it regardless of what we think.

I had a letter from Ron the other day, & he says you showed him my moaning letter, I'm glad you did because it was nice to hear from him again, he also sent me some money to get some cigarettes with, & I was grateful for his kind thought, I hope they will all write regularly now.

My nose is very sore now, where I knocked it, but I haven't got 2 black eyes as I expected, so I don't worry about it much, but it's very bruised, & sore when I wash. We have put the tent up now, it only took a few minutes, & it's done now [...]

I hope to be left alone now until it's time to go on to my plotting & radio

telephone, I'm looking forward to that so long as I am left alone during the day, it makes the time fly to the day when I shall be walking down the road to Derby to try and hitch home...it doesn't seem possible that it was summer when I last saw you, ...it feels like years, I don't know what state of mind I should be in if I were to go abroad, I'm sure I'd go out of my mind.

As I look out of my window facing west at the setting sun, I cannot help but think of our windows at home, how I regret the tiny little rows we sometimes had, when I spent whole evenings saying nothing & feeling cross, I wish I could have an evening with you now, I swear I'll never be cross with you again, being apart has shown me how essential you are to me [...] when this war is over, I'll never let anyone take you from me, I'll be with you always [...] until I die.

I will put in here that the boys in our hut are all gambling their wages away, & the S.M. is sitting watching them, he sometimes joins in himself, so you see he's got his good points, I think I told you he was young, well he's 24, & is applying, the same as Leslie my B.A. friend for a commission, & according to what I hear, he will soon be leaving.

I think you've found this letter is longer than you thought it would be, but that's because I didn't have a chance to post it in Derby, so you're about three pages of observations better off.

The news is now, it's quarter past six, & a man has just finished explaining the rudiments of plotting, I wonder if you were listening & thinking of me, I shall be on it for a fortnight now, watching over you as you sleep, and thinking of you all the time, so sleep on darling, Goodnight my love, God bless you & keep you,

Saturday 21 September 1940

Waterford

Thank you for your two letters (enclosed in the one envelope). I think you must have missed getting mine regularly, although I hope you will get one every day now that you are settled.

It is nice to hear that leave will soon be restarted (perhaps next week you say. That's just fine) But you mention that be 24 hours. Now listen my

dearest one. I know you are terribly anxious to see me, but not more so than I am anxious to see you, but even so we must be sensible
 Now my darling Bill Barbara wants to cart me off so Will you forgive me if I close now, As always I want to say how much you mean to me, but I can't find the words for it, so I must simply say [...] Your most loving "Baby Thrush"

21st September 1940, 12o'clock.

Farnah Green, Camp

I'm now terribly worried about you, as I have not received a letter from you this week since the one you wrote on Monday, is anything wrong?, or don't my letters reach you, if not I sincerely hope this one does.

I have just got up, having had only three hours sleep, & I don't know if I shall be allowed to rest this afternoon or not, but I sincerely hope so. I have just taken a walk to the top of the hill to see the detachment boys, & it's wonderful up there this morning, they were having their dinner outside, and it's beautifully mild, & the scene from there, it's positively breath taking, and I said to the boys wouldn't it be nice if our sweethearts were with us up here, and I was rewarded with a deep sigh from them all, I myself felt as if I was cut off from the rest of the world, & I couldn't help feeling sad, in fact as I write here to you, I could really cry, and I think when I do get home to you I shall cry with relief [...] please don't think me a baby, I do so need you, you've no idea how much, & now I hear on the wireless that Hertford towns (sic) have been bombed, & naturally as I have had no communication for a week, I'm nearly frantic, you must have written some letters to me, & surely I should get them on Monday, if I don't, I shall wire you, although you will get that before you do this most probably, so you'll know if I have received anything or not.

I got another fork & spoon, & I think I pinched it from the right place, so my conscience is still untroubled, & everything is plain sailing, I shall now engrave my initials on them, so that in future I shall know what to look for.

I really am in need of envelopes & money now, I asked you to send me a pound for a very special reason, & you shall see what that is when I come home I hope, but the fact remains I want it quickly, & also I must have some envelopes, I can't keep using O.H.M.S. ones, or I might get into trouble sooner or later, so please send quickly. By the way, when you reply to this letter please tell me how long it has taken to get to you, state the date of writing because I shan't remember which letter I asked you in.

We had a very uneventful night last night, with nothing to report except a few searchlights about twenty miles away, we could only see them through our binoculars, but we reported them even tho' they weren't in our area. Our lights do not expose now, for tactical reasons, but they have to stand-by just the same, awaiting for a possible order.

I shall read your Monday letter again soon, and this will be the fourth day I have done this, but the way you started it, still thrills me, & shows me what a place I must have in your heart, who knows that soon I shall be nestling in a place in your arms. How I want that wonderful day to come, I really don't know how I have survived so long, & even now, I often think of taking leave without permission, it would be well worth the consequence, but I know you would not approve, even on such a beautiful day as this & so I must just continue to yearn for you & all you mean to me, [...] All last night at different intervals, my friend and myself, were poring over maps, & working out the quickest routes home, I am now in possession of two routes, with the names of the principal towns I must pass thro', & I hope I shall soon be using them.

I'm sure you must be tired of me saying every time I write, that I shall be coming home soon, but each time I say it brings it nearer to coming true, so cheer up. I have just sent a telegram off to you, I couldn't wait any longer without having some news of you to get me over the weekend, & so I've broken down & wired you. (*see scanned telegram*).

I hope it doesn't frighten you, or raise false hopes, [...] but I had to do it & you'll understand why.

Charges to pay _____ s. _____ d.
 RECEIVED
 12.45
 _____ m
 From _____
 50
 450 1.35 BELPER DY 18
 No. _____
 OFFICE STAMP
 HERTFORD
 22 SEP 40
 Prefix. Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words. _____ m
 FURLONG FOURWINDS WATERFORD HERTFORD
 HAVE NOT HEARD FOR A WEEK IS EVERYTHING OK REPLY
 LOVE BILL BELPER 171 + + + 171 + +
 For free repetition of doubtful words telephone "TELEGRAMS ENQUIRY" or call, with this form at office of delivery. Other enquiries should be accompanied by this form and, if possible, the envelope. 8 or C

I'm in exile here & I must have some link with the girl I adore, [...] I am driven nearly to distraction by the thought of the many miles between us, I can never rest properly until I see you again, so until that wonderful day, I'll say Good bye, I shall be watching over you tonight.

21st September 1940.

Second letter typed at 20'clock A.M

Farnah Green, Camp.

My darling, You will see by the time I have put at the top, that I'm on duty once more, and as this is my period for the radio telephone I am taking the fullest advantage of this opportunity to show you how good I am getting, don't you think so? I've just finished a spell outside, and you'd be surprised how cold it gets on this night work, but I enjoy it just the same, and I do hope I can keep the job, I don't see why I shouldn't because I'm getting very proficient at all of the tasks I have to do and I'm easily the best typist here now, so you can guess what the others are like, although I must say I have had more practice than they have because I'm always typing letters to my friends now, for instance, yesterday I sent one to Ted, Len

and Mr. Gabriel, and today I sent one to Ron [...]

Up till now, there has been nothing to report except the radio telephone, which I shall in future refer to as the R.T. as that is what all the others call it, and this infernal machine has to be listened for all the time, as all our detachments have to report every hour, and as there are five of these, all reporting at different times, you can see for yourself what a job it is. Here is how we call---Hawthorn 4-1 calling 4-2 or 4-3 or 4-4 or 4-5 depending on which one we want to call, and so here is how the message goes, 41 calling 42, 41 calling 42, have you anything to report, have you anything to report, can you hear? over to you over, and then we switch over to receive and listen for a reply which after we have received, we have to repeat twice, in fact as you have seen, everything has to be said twice, and we only do one thing at a time, either receive or send, we have headphones on for receiving, and we talk into a microphone to send, so you see it's quite a complicated affair, but nevertheless very interesting.

My friend who is on with me tonight, is now outside listening for aircraft etc., but in reality, he is in the act of making a nice cup of tea in the cookhouse, and in a very short time we shall be drinking same and enjoying it to the utmost, that is one thing I like about this job, we can have unlimited tea, and usually there is something to eat as well, and this kind of thing makes the task more likeable.

I hope you don't mind me typing to you sometimes, but it's really only to show you that your tuition was not in vain, and seeking your approval of my efforts, I might add here that I am faster now than I was at home, I should think my speed is about fifty, and that isn't too bad is it for a novice. Please don't think I am getting conceited or anything like that, far from it I'm just naturally pleased with my progress, because I thought I should be awful, so you can guess why I want you to say the same.

And now, just a few more words of love to you alone [...] (*a paragraph of adoration follows*) I wish the English vocabulary allowed for lovers but it does not, and so with my meagre store of words I have to tell you as well as I can how I love you [...] (*another paragraph of adoration here*).

And now, I will end this early morning note by visualising you in your bed [...] Goodnight my love.

Sunday 22nd evening (probably September 1940)

[9 sides of writing] No address given.

Camp

My beloved,

[...] we are miles apart, & I can never see you to love you actively [...] the memory of your beauty is sufficient to inspire the greatest love in the world.

All the boys are going out tonight, they have been gambling all afternoon because it's been raining, but now the weather is clear, & everyone feels happiness, including me, although I felt pretty miserable earlier in the day, it seems that Sundays are conducive to depression, at least it always depresses me with this life, I expect it's because of the memory of the wonderful weekend we have had together.

I heard today that it's pretty definite that 24 hr. leave will resume again next week, & as soon as it does start, it will be a matter of waiting my turn, so cheer up darling, [...].

Will you please send me some more shaving cream, toothpaste, & soap, I'm nearly out of all these things, so please send them as soon as you can, because it seems that I shall have to wait a week before they come through, I think it's perfectly disgraceful the way we have to wait for our letters to reach each other. All the other fellows who live in London, have received their mail, I really don't know why we should be left out, it beats me, but I hope I shall get a good lot tomorrow morning, I don't mind telling you I shall be very disappointed if I don't get them.

It is now dark and I'm on duty again, we have been pretty busy reporting flashes seen S.E., but after investigating we found that there are electrical storms raging in that direction and so we're probably seeing those, for myself I hope it is nothing else.

I managed to get a fairly quiet day in again, & I had a little more sleep than I usually get, although I've been rewarded for this by a headache, it is still with me, & I guess it will follow me thro' the night. I might also tell you that I'm pretty hard up, I have waited for your letter containing the £1 I asked for, because the change I have left over after paying for the special

surprise for you, will carry me to the next pay day, but 10/6 a week don't go very far with this life, what with cigarettes & just a few sweets, & perhaps a visit to the pictures, & I'm broke, & as I say, this week I'm broke extra early, I do hope I don't have to borrow from anyone here, I shall let you know if I do, but your letters should be turning up soon, as long as you are addressing them correctly, I don't see how that can go wrong, it must be that communication is disorganised. [...]

The night is turning out a bit rough now, & I think we are going to get some rain, that's mostly what it seems to do here now, but anyhow I can always get shelter & a bit of warmth when I want it, so it won't be too bad but I guess I shall have to go out again soon, & these periods out will be the cause of a lot of moans in the winter months I bet. Here is Les, just coming home in his car, he has two or three others with him, and they've been out on the booze, so I expect we shall be surrounded soon with a noisy crowd of happy fellows, for an hour or so, they come into the office just how they like, & stay there as long as they like, no one seems to mind in the least, so I think we're in for a rowdy time soon.

It certainly is a bit rough tonight, there is a strong wind blowing & the sky looks very wild, but this should keep old Jerry off for a bit. I have just had a little note from Arthur, it was brought in by our dispatch rider, he is having a pretty easy time of it now, being taught how to deal with a new lot of recruits that have come in, but he says the chances of a stripe are still very remote, so perhaps he's no further forward than I am now, but I still can't see how I can possibly get on from here, although I shall continue to try my hardest, & the fact remains that the experience I gain will be very useful to me after the war, & I hope I should be able to take an office job somewhere, for by the time this is all over, I should be a qualified office worker, as I sit here writing to you, I am imagining myself at the managers desk of some big firm, & that is what I'd like to get more than anything, I wonder what will come to me, of one thing only am I sure and that is your love [...] I know [...] it can & will endure for ever, & you will be waiting for me at the end.

Another lot of fellows have just crept in, they've been out in the section car, & they're over an hour late, a crime for which they would have their evening passes stopped were they to be found out, but they are pretty

slick, they pushed the car along the road, & ran into camp without the engines on, so that no one but us heard them, & they won't be rumbled. I told you we've got a lot of rogues here didn't I?

Our dispatch rider had an accident today, a dog ran out, & bit the front wheel of his motor bike, the dog was killed outright & our D.R. was thrown with his bike into the hedge, he escaped with a few bruises & a badly cut knee, so he was very lucky, we are all agreed that dogs should never be allowed on the road without leads, unless they are under full control.

I expect you'll find this writing a bit hard to understand, but I'm doing it in the dark pretty well, & the writing is suffering, but so long as you read it, I shall be happy.

The boy who is with me this week is the youngest in our H.I., he is 21 and I am helping him, in between writing this, to send a letter to his girl friend in Northampton, he has met one in Belper he likes better & he wants to pack his home girl up, and he is having some difficulty in composing the letter, I'm doing my best for him. He says he can't be serious with any girl yet, & the one he has at home is very much in love with him, but this I doubt, because he hasn't had a letter from her for nearly 3 months, & I think that if she cared at all, she would have written, but that's none of my affair, & so we have composed a short note telling her all about the state of affairs within his heart, & the girl will be relieved of her duties forthwith.

I was shown some shell splinters today from bombs which were dropped here just before we came, & the size of them, great jagged pieces of iron, if one of them hit you, it is terrible to imagine what a mess it could make, I never saw such barbarous things before. It brought home the realities of war to me, & made me realize how brutal & futile it all is, I think the man who is responsible for all this can never be punished enough, he has already taken more than he can ever be made to repay, and I find this thought makes me feel mad.

It is pouring with rain again now, we can hear it on the roof of our hut, & I'm glad of something to shelter under, and as nothing can approach us from the air without us hearing it, we feel we can safely leave the flashes etc. to look after themselves for a while. We have a jug full of nice hot tea with us, & no worries at all, except for my pal's letter, & he's still struggling

with it, he's a decent kid really, but like all youth at 21, very swollen headed, & he thinks a lot of himself, but he knows more about plotting than I do, & he's here to teach me the work, and apart from all this, he's very kind at heart, & I know he'll grow out of his high opinion of himself.

Our cook is a decent little chap, he's a lot older than I am of course, & he seems to have taken quite a fancy to me, he suffers terribly with his stomach, I think he's got ulcers, but the M.O., only gives him some tablets periodically & that's all he cares despite the fact that he's always going sick with pains in his guts. I give him my McLean's occasionally & these give him some relief, so I think that is why he has befriended me. He says he can't think why I write to you every day, & what I find to write about, he only writes to his wife 3 times a week, & has a job to get a page done, we've had many a laugh over his letters home. He's got several kiddies, & I believe very happily married, but he can't write letters. He has already offered to lend me some money if I'm hard up, but I don't want to if I can help it.

I hope you won't love me any less for bringing the question of cash into my letters occasionally, but it plays quite a part in the happiness of the situation, & I find that when I write my news, it will keep creeping in, so don't think too badly of me will you. I'm thinking of you again in bed, I hope you are, I should hate to think of you sitting under the stairs because of sirens etc., in fact whenever I think of you at night, I always picture you in bed, I'm so used to seeing you there at night, that it would be so hard to imagine you anywhere else.

The fellows in our hut, as I told you some time ago, are a rough looking lot, & they were inclined to be amused at me writing home every day, but now they have ceased to be amused, & two or three of them have started to do the same, one of them very sheepishly said to me this afternoon, I don't know what my wife will think of me writing home so often, she'll think I'm mad, but I assured him that she would appreciate it. He's got 2 grown up daughters, pretty girls they are too, so you see my consuming love has some influence outside as well. The S.M. has not been married long, & he rings his wife up 3 or 4 times a week in the evenings & seldom books his call. I always very discreetly retire when I hear him say hello Joan, because I know how I should feel. We also have

a lance corporal here who is on the mechanist staff, he has been married for a fortnight, & he feels pretty lonely I know, because when I felt so bad a week ago, he consoled me & told me he felt the same, & he had only been married a week then, so you see, I know quite a bit about everyone already.

I think I have really reached the end of my news now, I do hope you can read it all, & I hope it will make you happy, it may take a day or two to reach you, as I shall have to wait for funds to buy stamps but when you get it, you will think of me I know, in a hut, with my overcoat on ready for action, & 3 hurricane lamps & a fire, with one man for company, & dreaming all the time of you. [...] So goodnight [...]

22nd September 1940.

[Severely damaged typed flimsy].

Farnah Green, Camp



My very own,

Here I am on the old machine, and I have had a little practice today, so I should be a little better than yesterday. I expect your auntie told you that I called you tonight, I was very disappointed, and I at least have the satisfaction of knowing that you are safe and that is everything to me, but I wish I could get your letters, I miss them very much, the situation seems pretty hopeless to me with regard to the communication side of things, because I was told that you had not received my telegram even, so I can't wonder at you not being able to get your letters through.

I am as you can guess on plotting again, and it is now 02.45 hrs in the morning, although the figures I have just quoted denote that it is morning. I am getting quite an expert at working the time out in the true army style. We have had up to now a fairly quiet night, but still we have a few more

hours to go, and anything might happen, we have been watching through our binoculars, the terrific anti-aircraft barrage that is being put up over Sheffield way, and all night long the boom of explosions is shaking the ground. It's a hell of a war, and I for one will be glad when it's all over, I've had enough to last me a lifetime and then some.

After my brief phone call I feel a little brighter [...] as I spoke I could picture quite easily the little room of Miss Smith's⁷⁸ where the telephone is [damaged] I saw our little [damaged] [...] with its garden and everything else [damaged] [...] I only had about three hours sleep [damaged] ...although at this time I am feeling a bit the worse for wear and I am wondering what I shall be like in a month or two, I guess I shall need all the rest I can get, and I shall have to stick out for all the leaves I can get. These should be fairly frequent when everything is plain sailing again, but how long we shall have to wait for this to come into force I can't imagine, but it can't possibly be long now. (*One & a half paragraphs of adoration*)

How did auntie react to the phone call?.....[damaged] it did not frighten her she seemed a bit nervous [damaged] she said there was raid on, and I guess that [damaged] even more so. [damaged] and in need of sleep, but perhaps [damaged] to get a little more in today [damaged] little boy who is homesick [...] .

23rd September 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp



At last I have received some news from you, three letters in one envelope, I think there must still be some more at Sherwood though, and you say you have not had many of mine lately, I'm sure you haven't had them all, because I've written every day, & if you cannot find one for every date, there are some missing.

⁷

⁸ Next door neighbour

You ask me how I came to get my present job, well, on the day we were due to go out, our old sergeant came & asked me if I could type & do bookkeeping, I said I knew a little about each, and he told me that someone was wanted to do the office work at H. I., & he was finding out the best of us, & it seems I was the best...three other chaps had a go, & I was chosen because I was as good as any of them. I am glad that you have learned that inside office workers get promotion quickly, I can't see how this is, but it makes me feel a bit better about it, because I really am learning to like the job, it is really very interesting.

I'm very glad that no bombs have dropped on our house during all the raids you have had there, I sincerely hope you aren't too frightened, but soon now I shall be with you to give you fresh hope and courage.

You don't seem quite clear as to what I have to do here now, well I'll try to explain, there are three of us, Les, who I did tell you about in a letter that must be lost, he's a B.A., had five years at Cambridge, & a fellow named Jones, we call him Jonah for no other reason than that his name is Jones, and myself. We are known as Telephonists & Plotters, and our work consists of covering work both day & night. You should already know about Plotting by now, because I have explained previously, & we have worked out a system whereby 2 of us are on all night, one Plotting, & one on the R.T., & G.P.O., Telephones. The other fellow does day work. It works out so that we each get a week of day to a fortnight of nights, and when we are on nights, we have to start work any old time after dinner, & go right through till 5.30 the next morning. The day worker starts at 9 & has all his meals in the office until 7.30. The period in the morning between 5.30 & 9 is done by one of the odd job men who are here, there is never very much doing, so it can always be safely left to them. Now you should have a rough idea of our work, we still only get about 6 free hours out of 24, & the 24 hour leaves we get are regarded as rest periods, & I can tell you we need them, after a week or two of this life. I am feeling the need of a change already, & I know my B.P., must be steadily rising, but I'm not going to worry about that, because I shall go sick in event of anything going wrong.

This afternoon we have an inspection of the sites by one or two big shots, everything has to be spick & span, and I guess we shall be kept on

our toes all the time.

I also had a letter from Jack ⁷⁹ this morning, he sent me a little money for fags, I need it too, because I told you yesterday I was broke, & it just came in time. You mention sending me 2/6d, but I haven't got that yet, & I also hope you got the letter asking you to draw a pound out for me & send it on, I want it for something, & please if you get this before you send it, for goodness sake register it, and then it won't be lost & if it is, we can reclaim.

If it comes in time, I hope to bring home the thing I want to pay for, you must send it, because I have already bought it, I am only waiting for the cash.

And now I'll stop talking about money, it's a great source of worry to me nowadays, & I always seem to mention it in your letters, I hope you don't think I'm too bad, but even if you do, I can't help it, it's my only joy in life to smoke & eat chocolate, & send letters, & 10/6 don't cover this always, so if I do happen to want anything extra special, I have to ask for money, & as the post is so lousy nowadays it usually needs mentioning for several consecutive days for I fear some of the letters may be lost, so I know you will excuse me for my weaknesses.

I certainly feel a lot better now I'm settling down a bit, it seems Sundays are the worst, & I'm always glad when it's over. Monday no longer is black, because all the days are the same.

You ask if any of my old squad are with me, & the answer to that is no, I'm entirely on my own, so now you know why I was so depressed to start with.

I am naturally very upset that you lost your watch, but I cannot be cross with you, it is easy to lose things & perhaps by the time you get this letter, it will have turned up again, I hope for your sake that it does. You tell me that I have some more letters you sent to Sherwood, one containing a letter from Bob, well I haven't seen that one yet. I hope it isn't lost. You are quite right about coming here to stay, it would be too risky to make you travel under the conditions now prevailing, & I would never forgive myself if anything did happen to you, so just wait darling and I'll soon be with you for

⁷⁹ Bill's brother

a few days perhaps, but beggars can't be choosers can they? You are very wrong when you say that I can't get home on a 24 hr., stretch, well as you know, we get a bit extra for travelling time, & I'll be there don't you worry all I'm waiting for is the chance to prove it. I know it is a long journey but hitch hiking all that distance should prove very interesting don't you think. Anyhow it will be worth trying, & I shall do it too, so keep your pecker up, & I'll come to you as surely as old Hitler's got his coming to him.

I'm left in possession of the office now, the day telephonist has gone out, and we two poor night workers are to carry on until he returns, but I've got an evening off tonight, & I'm going to the pictures, so this will break the monotony a bit for me, although I shall be on my own I expect.

We are in a bit of a state here today, the water is turned off, & we have had none to wash in, I had to shave & wash in half a mug of water this morning, so we have to rough it even during the fine weather.

A long period has elapsed and I've been typing all the afternoon, I'm really good now, & quite cocky about it too. I shall end my letter now, as I am going to get ready to go out, so good bye for the moment, I'll write you again tomorrow,

23rd September 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed letter (just before 12o'clock).



To the most wonderful woman [...] (one *& half paragraphs of adoration*)

I feel so happy because I have had some letters from you at last. I know there are more to come, but I am quite content now, and all I want is to know that I shall be able to see you again soon, [...]

I have not been back from Belper for long, I was of course very late in, but no-one knows because we got over the wall and sneaked in the hut without anyone seeing us. I went out after all with two other of the fellows

in our hut, and after waiting for them to get ready, we were late going out and naturally enough, late for the pictures, which meant that we were late coming out, in fact saw the whole show round, and after that we had some fish and chips, because we said we might as well be hung for sheep as lambs, and then we had a three miles walk back to camp, but we didn't care a bit and no-one is any the worse off for it.

The picture was not a bad one it was all about gangsters and provided us with some lively entertainment for which we were duly thankful, in fact it was quite refreshing to see something different for a change.

The night is very quiet again over this way, but there have been terrific barrages over Sheffield and Manchester way, they have it every night of the week, we watch it always through our binoculars every night, and it is really something worth seeing as it's something like a good firework display only more deadly I'm sorry to say. We get quite used to sirens and gunfire and explosions etc., so that we just look upon it all as a quiet night, it has to be right over us before we worry about it, in fact my friend here has just said that he wishes something would come over it's getting a bit monotonous sitting here night after night with nothing to report than flashes and lights etc., but I expect that we should get all we want one of these fine days and then we shall have too much of it.

I hope you think I'm improving on this old machine. I think I am anyway, my speed is alarming, and I surprise myself every time I sit down to do a bit of it. Surprisingly enough I still like doing it, I guess the novelty has not yet worn off, and when I am at it all the time I am bound to get browned off sooner or later. But the fact remains that up till now I still like to use the typewriter, and I use it whenever I can, it is especially handy to let you have a few lines during the night hours, and I expect you will appreciate it.

Rumour is still strong about the leave business and the latest is that it will start on Friday next, I don't think there are many more days to be mentioned now and they will soon have to start again, but I believe that there is an element of truth in all these things I hear, and I wouldn't be surprised if this latest one is not true, you don't know how I'm hoping that this is so. I think that the other letters you sent to Sherwood must be considered lost, although there is a remote chance of them still turning up,

but on the whole, I think that is highly improbable, and therefore I shall be very surprised if they do show up again, it's rather a pity because the one containing Bob's letter was amongst the missing ones, and I should have liked to hear how he was getting on, but perhaps you have read it and can tell me some of his news.

This is about the lot of the news to related now, and I'll sign off for tonight my darling so until the morning I'll say goodnight and God bless you,

Tuesday 24 September 1940

Hertford



I'm so in love with you. Thats what the wireless is just playing, but it echo's what is in my heart I can't tell you how much I need someone to love me and make a fuss of me, but I suppose I'll last out till you get home

I received your letters, written on Saturday, this morning you rather impatiently ask for envelopes & money, but you know darling, I sent them off to you the very same day that I received your letter asking for them, so you mustn't blame me if you have to wait for them. If you intend spending the money, do you want some more to get home? If so I'll send some.

Now I expect I'd better tell you about the damage in the town caused by a land mine last night. One was dropped in between Tamworth Rd & Ware Rd, in the gardens. Three houses in Tamworth were completely demolished and many others badly damaged. I went along Ware Rd this lunch time and from the Sarason's (sic) Head to past Kings Mead houses are badly damaged. Some with roofs caved in, and windows and doors blown in or out.

There must be some 200 houses damaged. All the green roofed houses have broken windows & missing tiles, but it is the large houses in Ware Rd & Tamworth that are the worst hit. Three people have been killed and 12 are in hospital. (one of the Wrights are dead, Elsie her name is) Three more of them are in hospital. Their house was completely demolished.

I have just seen Ron⁸⁰. Of course his home caught it badly. There are no doors or windows left (even the inside doors were blown off their hinges). He was standing on the porch at the time with the Browns, but it saved his life, although the concussion knocked them all over. He said that when he went up to his room there were lumps of glass sticking all over the walls which were cracked 4 or 5 inches apart. His dressing tables (sic) was blown to the other side of the room, and his furniture rather knocked about and scratched.

Your mother's windows⁸¹ were blown in, as were those in the rest of the road, but she is all right apart from a bad head.-also the lock was blown clean off her front door, and the window frame has been moved inwards about one inch, leaving a gap between the bricks & the window frame.

I certainly wouldn't have thought one land mine could have done so much damage. (***Note: Ellen Jane Furlong claimed reparation costs under the Government scheme for War damage***). *There follows some correspondence relating to Auntie Gertie wherein Ivy says "something has affected her brain".*

The enclosed letter was received by Dad on Thursday, although he didn't show anyone till today, When Uncle had gone back. He is going to ignore it which I think is the very best thing, but I thought you would like to see a copy It is, of course, so absurd that I won't bother to defend myself against her accusations I am afraid something has affected her brain, and if it wasn't for that it would be really funny. Dad has given me the letter so that I can show it to the Aunts.

I think you type very well, with surprisingly few mistakes. Keep it up darling. I am so glad to hear that you are the best typist there, but of course, your speed is at 50. I don't think mine is that When you reach that speed you can consider yourself an efficient shorthand typist. You should get a pal to test you. If you can do 30-35 words a minute, that will be pretty good for you. However, practice will bring improvements, and you may reach 50 yet.

Now my sweet darling boy Goodbye till tomorrow, when I hope to write

⁸⁰ 85, Ware Road, Hertford

⁸¹ Gas House Lane, Hertford

again (DV.) till then, I love you dearest more & more each day, as I miss you more & more each day, but I am buoyed up with the hope that we will see one another some day again even if it is only for a short time Your loving wife

Wednesday 25 September 1940

Hertford

Pencil letter by Ivy

I'm afraid this is awful scribble. @n you make it out?

My darling boy, Thank you for the long letter written on Sunday. It took me ages to read and I had it started work at 9.30 this morning because of its length. Since then I have been too busy to read it through again, but I will try & do so before I send off this letter in case there are any questions to be answered You will find the S. Cream, and tooth paste enclosed but not soap as it is really not worth its postage & is cheaper to buy on the spot, and anyway its only Tuesday and I am broke & must borrow the money to send this little parcel off to you. So perhaps you will get a tablet & you can take a couple back with you when you come home. You talk coming home in every letter so I suppose you are determined to attempt the journey in 24 hours. I only hope my fears are ill founded, and that you will be able to make it in that time. Your bike is still at my office if you want it (without batteries). I have had your shoes mended for you, and your identity disc is also waiting at home for you. I would send it but would prefer to give it to you, That's why you havn't got it yet.

Aunties & I talked over the idea of letting a bedroom as a bed-sitting room last night. It would help with the rent, and apart from that, accommodation is getting so scarce round here that it is awful to have to turn away people from our office who have been bombed out of their homes, and are seeking accommodation. The Smiths are full ⁸² and are turning people away, so the idea is to sleep 2 people & let the Smiths board them. But its all very much in the air yet. As you know we all sleep down stairs now, so

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² Edith & Daisy Smith, next door

the bedrooms are empty. I will let you know if anything more comes of the idea. It wouldn't prevent us sleeping upstairs when you come home on leave.

Theres such lovely music on the wireless next to my office It is Strauss now. We have had the Blue Danube, and two other Strauss Waltzes, and modern love songs on two pianos and it makes me feel so romantic, which is a pity that a romantic mood should be wasted because there is no-one with which to share it, but I expect you get these moods too, so we are both in the same boat, but each letter that arrives in the morning makes me hope & expect that it will say " expect me home the day after tomorrow" or something like that, and so life goes on. What a marvellous thing Hope is. I think its what most people nowadays are existing on, or perhaps its Faith. I think they are sometimes hard to distinguish. I should think that your mouth organ is probably mended by now. It is over 2 weeks since I took it in to Elliotts. But (money again) I can't go in to see till I get another pay day. Do you still play? I presume not now that you are doing different work. I don't suppose you get much opportunity, but it is a pity to get out of practice again, once you had got into the swing.

I expect you will say practice on the T.writer is more profitable which is true, but it isnt so pleasing to the ear.

You will be suprised (sic) to see all the Londoners that there are in Hertford now (especially East Enders) . You can pick them out a mile away have you ever noticed what curiously hard faces they have all got? I don't think it's the result of these recent raids either.

There is an unexploded land mine in the S.W corner of Ware San. So we are supposed to keep our windows open but it's too cold to do that for long. Anyway it may not go off and if it does we may not suffer any damage, although they are certainly vicious things. Well darling I want to send this off tonight so Goodbye for now With ever (sic) little bit of my love
Your loving wife

Note: On 24th September 1940, a parachute mine fell just over 100 metres from the sanatorium. It became entangled in a tree and failed to explode. The patients were evacuated while the mine was made safe by the Royal Navy. Someone suggested that if the mine was displayed in the Priory grounds, it could

be used as a showpiece to raise money for the "Ware Boys at The Front" fund so it was taken there by council workmen.

It remained there for 5 days until a passing serviceman said it had not been fully de-fused. This caused a panic and it was quickly moved to Brazier's gravel pit in nearby Watton Road (where the Vicarage estate now stands). Despite its proximity to houses, the mine was exploded on 30th September and a large crowd gathered on Widbury Hill to watch. The explosion caused considerable damage; one house was totally destroyed and three more had to be demolished. Several houses in Watton Road lost their roofs and 300 more had varying degrees of damage. It turned out that the mine had been part of a raid which had killed three people in Hertford.

Part letter possibly about 26 September 1940

Waterford

I went to see your mother last night but she had gone to work, so I presume she is all right, and that Gilbertson & Page are able to carry on.⁸³

Ron has just been in to ask if Freda can sleep here at the weekend. As his house (Browns) is pretty well messed up, so that she cannot be put up, I can't very well refuse, and its impossible to get a night's accommodation in Hertford, even at an hotel.

I have started to knit you some mittens. They won't take me long. Perhaps you will let me know what is next urgent on your list of woollen comforts.

Now I shall not post this till tomorrow, as you cannot get it till Monday so I will be able to write some more tomorrow (Jerry permitting).

Now I am going home at 8 p.m. I am going to try and ring you. You are probably half expecting me to. I do hope we shall not be disappointed. It would be so lovely to hear your voice again Goodbye for now darling I love you, but perhaps you will be able to hear me say that in a couple of hours

⁸

³ Gilbertson & Page [Chadwell Biscuits] of Town Granary, Tamworth Road Hertford

Possibly 25th September 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Dearest heart, I am considerably happier than I have been for some time today, because the S.M., is going to try & get us our 12 hrs. extended to about 20 and if this happens, I shall still be able to see you.

Now here is the position, I don't want you to worry about it, if we get permission to have an extended 12 & there is every chance of it being so, the chances are that I shall be off at 4 in the morning till midnight, you see the stipulation is that we must spend the night in camp even though it will be only 4 hours. We have a programme mapped out for the journey home. A bike will be borrowed to get into Derby, & from that point there should be a stream of traffic into London at that time of the morning, I should be home sometime during the morning, & we could have the afternoon together. You see, we must take the 12 hrs, & I should be lost, & even tho' I only see you for an hour or two, anything is worth it, & it will be using my day up & stopping me from going mad by giving me something to think about.

Just been playing crib with S.M., and 2 others and we stung him for 4d., he says he'll play again later on this evening. He's quite a decent fellow really, and so very young, he's just as homesick as I am I think.

This afternoon he asked me if I was doing anything, to which I replied that I was going to write the usual letter, so he said you and your bloody letters, and I said well I can't help it, but really he didn't mean it in a nasty way, & I'm sure he knows how I feel, it will be due to him if our leave is extended, as the boys tell me he's a bugger for getting as much leave as possible.

I know you'll think that I can't get home, in such a short time, but you leave that to me, & of course we shall not get a night together, that's

immaterial to me now, my one obsession is to see you, & if I achieve that I can be happy, until my 7 days leave is due, and that will be sometime after Xmas, so if you like to postpone your holiday indefinitely, we shall be able to have a whole week together, but I leave that to you, all I know is that I'm going to try & see you soon, so look for me, any day, I shall be terribly upset if I don't get the extended leave I expect.

And now my darling I shall end this letter on the happiest note I've struck for some time, I do feel so happy about it & I do hope the adventure is successful, it deserves to be as I am so looking forward to it. I shall pack up now darling, because some of the boys are going out, & they will post this letter for me, Goodnight my love, I'll be seeing you,

TO MY BELOVED WIFE

Fairest girl that 'ere did live,
My saddened heart to you I give.
Take it my love, 'tis all that's left.
Of faith and hope I am bereft.
But love, the greatest of these three
Lives on. It dies not easily.
For you belov'd, it lives alone,
'Tis all I have to call my own.
And now, my sweet, to you I give
The only thing that helps me live.
For wars and arms I care not aught.
You, possess my every thought.
To see you as my daily dream,
Your kisses are my whole life stream.
But tho' the life ebbs very low,
Love still burns through with fiery glow.
Consuming all, enduring all.
With torment now, my heart doth call
To you, my love; deliver me
From demented mind, monotony.
Come as an angel on the wing,
Bring passion, love and everything
To help me conquer, this my test.
Lead me through to loving rest.
Comfort me now with word and thought;
The sweetest is through suffering brought.
Then once again the world can see
How you, and love have rescued me.

25th September 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed letter at 2 in the morning

I'm sending you a poem that I have just been composing, I hope you will like it because I think that it sums up the situation very well, please tell me what you thought of it in your reply. I want to say how sorry I am for being so very upset over the leave news, but then who wouldn't be, I only hope that it did not upset you as much, although that is hoping for rather a lot I'm afraid. I shall keep on trying to see what can be done though, and perhaps in a week or so something might turn up that will surprise us. You see my optimism is returning again although my spirit is very low, and this is going to win us through you'll see if it don't.⁸⁴

My friend and I were discussing the subject of you coming here to stay for your holiday, and he says that although it might be a bit risky to travel, it would be worth it to you to be safe for a week or so, because it really is safer here than at home. He also said that if you travelled very early in the morning, he couldn't see why you should be held up at all by air raids. And so, my angel if things don't improve, I shall ask you to come here after all for your holiday. All the fellows here say that if they had the opportunity to bring their wives here they would, and they strongly advise me to do so, but I think I shall wait for a while and see how things go. I think that if you did come here I should be able to wangle a fair amount of time off, as the S.M. is quite reasonable really, and anyway, no-one can stop you coming to the camp and talking to me over the wall, or meeting me in the fields, so the prospect if you did come is not so very dubious after all, and I know I could find lodging for you somewhere.

My feelings are all mixed up today, and I don't quite know how I do feel about it all, I certainly took the news badly, and once or twice as I thought of it, I very nearly cried, this is not the first time I have been near to crying since I've been out on detachment, it's a hard and lonely life, when

the one you love is so far away. And then again I feel very happy because I know that if the worst comes to the worst I can still have you here. I really don't know what to think it's driving me crazy, I feel half mad already, so I can't say what I shall be like after a year or so of it, but I hope and really believe that it won't last for more than a few more months, and this thought steadies me up a bit.

It's just 2 o'clock (*morning*) now, and you'd be surprised at the way you feel at this time of the day, I haven't felt like it for a long while, absolutely washed up, it's certainly true that humanity is at it's lowest ebb at this time, I'm sure I'm at mine.

It would be so easy to go to sleep, but I must not do that, because good soldiers never sleep on duty and I consider that I'm a good soldier now, although at heart I'm a very homesick and love starved boy, so please send me some more encouraging words as soon as you can.

I'm getting my mail a bit better now, I think I told you that I had three yesterday, but the ones that are still missing are not at Sherwood and I consider them lost, they might of course turn up, but I doubt it, and I am considering them lost.

I am so terribly tired now that I can hardly keep my eyes open, it's a nasty feeling when you know very well that you get only a few hours off at best. I find it very hard to stay in bed after I've had three hours sleep although this state of affairs cannot last much longer.

I really think that I shall have to get outside for a bit, and perhaps the warm night air will revive me. -----I have been outside for a while, and I feel a bit more awake now, although my pal has given way completely, and he is fast asleep and has been for some time now, I really don't blame him because so long as one of us is awake we can get along alright.

This is about all I can think of at the moment but I shall write again to you in the morning so until then my own darling wife sleep tight, I'm watching over you still [....] Goodnight my love,

25th September 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp



Typed letter

Dearest love,

It is now three in the morning and I have been so busy, I am left here on my own, to do plotting, telephones, and to crown all this I've had six copies of a certain thing to type out in my spare time, as if I'd have any. The things I typed were foolscap size, both sides, and each copy was two sheets, all closely written stuff so you can tell how busy I have been. But I'm finished now, and though still on my own, I am making time to send a line.

The reason I'm on my own is because the dispatch rider had an accident the other day and my friend has taken his place, and he had to go round all the site tonight, starting at eleven. He has just finished talking to me over the R.T., and he was at his last call then, he now has an hour and a half's ride to get home, so I shan't see much of him tonight, but this is what I need now, it's giving me a lot of experience and making me very capable. I've plotted and reported two planes, one friendly and the other hostile, a flare dropped from the plane, and numerous bomb flashes, this activity has been livened up by the R.T., set going every hour to keep me occupied, but, as I said, I'm on top of the work now and everything is plain sailing, although I don't know how long for.

The S.M., is going home tomorrow for his twelve hour leave, I've got to call him at half past four this morning, so I asked him if I should get as much out of my twelve as he is, to which he replied that if I really wanted it he thought it could be arranged, so all I'm waiting for now is for my turn to come round. I'm looking forward to it very much now I know what an advantage it will be, and everyone is positive that I can manage it, so of course nothing will stop me now. The prospect of spending twelve hours with nothing to do no longer bothers me, I've got twenty hours with a lot to do now.

I bet you will say that it is an impossibility, but you wait and see, and

then I can say, I told you so. If you look forward to seeing me as much as I am to seeing you, my proposed adventure should make you very excited, it certainly means a lot to me, and I have everything to gain by if it come off and I'm still sure it will.

I do hope you liked my poem I sent you last night, and I expect to hear your opinion of soon, and by the way, you never mentioned the other efforts of me, you know, the fairy story and the poem on a postcard, or can it be that you never received them. I should like to know if you love them as much as you used to, and if you do I will write some more. I often feel like poetry now, and that's why I sat down last night and made that one up.

Do you think my typing is improved at all? Please be quite candid when you tell me, because I need some expert criticism (*sic!*), there is none here, they all think I'm hot stuff, hence my all night tasks, I tell you it does not pay to be too good at any thing in the army, they can always find a use for it, and you are no better thought of for it, but never mind, it might be the cause of me getting on now, although I doubt it.

I was working very hard all this afternoon shovelling sand, and clearing up the camp in general, it gave me a nasty headache, but I've worked it off now, although I know it's my B.P., coming to the fore, because I can feel it in my head, it's all muzzy and my ears are bursting inside, it's because I don't get enough sleep but what can a man do under the circumstances, I've got to keep going until I get really bad, and then I expect I shall have to go sick, and I wonder what I'll get, more aspirins I suppose.

I've just knocked off to make a jug of tea, it's lovely, I must say that I enjoy this more than anything else during the night, we make it two or three times and always there is enough for more than we need, but somehow there is never any wasted, the only thing is, that it makes me have to get up earlier than I would do normally, but it's worth it. Tea is one of the few things left to us that we can enjoy, and so we always make the best of it.

Well my angel, it's nearly four now, and I must call the detachments to see if they have anything to report, so I'll take my leave of you for the time being but I'll be with you in a very short time I hope so Goodbye my darling [...] may God bless you Your worhsiping (*sic*) husband,

Possibly Thursday 26 September 1940

Camp

Undated letter with no Address- (see reference to S.Major).



Dearest love, Here it is Thursday again, How time does fly, and yet each individual day seems to drag.

I woke the S. Major this morning at 4.30 and he's been home I should think for about 6 hours. He lives at Northampton and that's about 70 miles from here, so if he can manage it, so I can also. What an adventure it's going to be, I'm looking forward ever so much to it, & although there is only a few hours at the most to have together, I'm looking forward to it as tho' it were a week.

Saturday is proposed to be my day, & I'm going to make the most of it.

I get your mail pretty regularly now, I received a letter today written two days ago, so things are speeding up. Isn't it terrible about the bomb damage, & Elsie Wright, the prettiest one of the family, it's such a shame. And old Ron has something to be thankful for it seems. I'm glad Waterford has been missed so far, I do hope they don't know it's on the map, it would never do for anything to happen to you, I'm mad enough already. It seems so ironical to think that I'm here to fight for you & yet you are in more danger than I am. There have been no raids since we came here, and it don't seem right that this should be so, we are the people he should be fighting, not you poor defenceless people at home, but he won't succeed demoralising you I know, because such love as ours can withstand all things such as this, and nothing that can happen to us will ever get our tails down for keeps, although we can get pretty miserable at times. But we shall win I know.

I've just been down to the village to buy cigarettes and it's really autumn now, the leaves are all over the paths and the trees are so pretty, I bet you have some wonderful sights at home too, I wish we could share it together, life would be so wonderful again, I can never be discontented with my old existence again, but if I retain the position I have now, I should

perhaps be able to get an office job when this war is all over.

We're going to have a bath parade again tomorrow, and I shall be glad, because only bathing once a week, one gets so dirty. We get free soap & towels to go with the bath, & it all costs us nothing, it's the best part of the week and I enjoyed it.

I hope your Auntie Gertie realises what she's done when she has one of her sane moments, I've never heard so preposterous a story before, & if I didn't know she was a bit off her head, I should send her a very strong letter, but under the circumstances it is best to destroy & ignore it. I'm really very sorry for her, it must be pretty awful to get like that.

Well my darling, I'm having a wonderfully easy day today, I got up at 12 having slept right thro' from 6 for the first time, I had my dinner at 1, and I've done nothing yet, that's because the S.M., is away, he's the one who keeps us on our toes, do you know, each morning he keeps walking in & out of our hut, waiting for us to get up, & as soon as we're out of bed, he pounces on us to do numerous little odds & ends, they're nothing really, but nevertheless, they break our rest period up.

The people around here look after us pretty well, for instance every day almost, the farmer sends his little son up with a bag of apples, or pears, we've had some dam fine pears, & plums & damsons, in fact all we want in the fruit line, my bowels are always free now, because I'm always eating either apples or some kind of fruit, I tell you we get more this way than if we grew them ourselves. Also yesterday, right in the middle of a game of cards, the local vicar came in and asked the S.M., what we particularly needed in the way of woollen goods, as the women were knitting for us. He told them we needed socks & gloves mostly, & today we've just had a whacking great bundle of books & things sent to us, so you see there are still some nice people left in the world.

We played some more crib last night & I stung the S.M., for another 6d, that made 10d I had off him yesterday, he got quite upset about my luck, because they all said I don't care how I play & yet I win, they all want me for a partner when we play now, but I only play crib, the other games are too vicious at the stakes they play for, e.g. in pontoon, they think nothing of betting 2/6 on one card, & last week, up on the detachment one

fellow won 39/6 in one evening, & this is too bad, so I leave it severely alone, I got bitten the first week I lost 5/- & that was a lesson to me, I've kept out of all card games since then.

Well my angel [...] I think this is all I have to say for now and who knows, I shall probably turn up some time after you have read this letter if you get it on Saturday, so look out for me will you, I'll be there, if it costs me my wages,

26th September 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed letter

Darling [...] it seems to me that is a waste of time to have me in the army because I think of else (*sic*) but coming home to see you, my work is purely automatic now, and if it called for any amount of thought I'm afraid it would suffer very badly, but fortunately there is always someone here with me to help me out if I get in a jam, although I am pretty capable now.

Nothing much has happened today, except that we are not to be allowed to take our leave until Monday now, and that rather puts the tin hat on my promise to you to be seeing you on Saturday, but then I think you have probably gathered by now that anything can be done to us in the army, and as I'm getting used to being mucked about now, it doesn't surprise me much.

Anyhow, I think I should be coming home on Tuesday, although this might be easily altered before the day comes round, and I guess you think I'm very mad to even contemplate the thought of getting to you, but I told you that I should make the best of every chance I get and this is one and I'm taking it, so look out for me some time after this letter gets into your hands. I don't know if you will be able to get the afternoon off to be with me when I do get there, but we'll chance that, and I guess your boss will let you have it anyway, he won't be very human if he don't. The S.M., and Les have just come back, they've had over twelve hours at home, so it would

be very poor if I can't wangle eight hours with you, and if you ask me I think that it would be worth it to get even two what you think.

I've got Les in here with me tonight, and he is ever so tired, so we got his bed in here, and I'm doing the same as I did last night, holding the fort, I tell you, I'm getting most efficient now, and I'll soon be able to do this job with my eyes shut.

I don't think the twelve hour leave stunt will last for long, everyone is complaining about it and even our Section Officer says it is an insult to the men, so I hope that soon, when the moon is gone, we shall be on twenty four again. I still can't help noticing the free and easy way of things here, for instance, tonight, I sat at the table doing nothing and the officer walked in, well of course we are supposed to jump to attention, but we just sat as if it was one of us, and he don't care, we can talk to him as if he was just an ordinary private, but then he is a good sort. And later on, when the S.M, came back, we all sat on the chair backs and talked about their journey home and back, as if he were one of us, I find this state of affairs is more condusive (sic) to getting things done though, we feel that we are doing a personal favour which we like to do because they are our friends, and so I think I like this state of affairs best, it takes a bit of getting used to, after the hard and fast ways we were trained into, but after a week or so you get run in and every thing is O.K.

I hope you like me telling you all about little things that I fell (sic) [...]. I enjoy reading all about those which concern you.

We get paid on Thursdays now, and all the fellows, old and young, try to get their evenings off on pay days, and those who are successful always come home as merry as they could be, it's real entertainment to hear them at bedtime they always seem to make their wage get enough beer to make them happy.

I have been detailed by the cook to take a joint of meat out of the oven at half past one, and it is nearly that now, so I think I'll say goodnight to you now my angel, but I'll be with you again in the morning, and so until then, goodnight my love, God bless you,

P.S. (*hand written*) I've just read thro' this, and it's full of mistakes, but that's because of my terrific speed, I timed myself & its 35 what do you think of it?

26th September (1940)

Camp

Undated handwritten letter with no address but date typed on blank back page

Dearest,

Here it is nearly dark, and I haven't written my daily report to you yet. I'm afraid that it will have to wait now until tomorrow morning before it gets posted. But so much has happened today.

This afternoon we had another bath parade, a lorry took us to Derby to the baths, & then we were given the afternoon off till 5, to do with as we liked, well, I got with some of our lads, & had 2 glasses of beer to be sociable, but the others had 5 each, I don't know how they take it. After we came out of the pub, we did something I've never heard of before, we went to Woolworths, & got the girl on the music counter to play our favourite tunes, she said she knew we wouldn't buy anything but she did as we asked, & we all stood round the music counter for an hour, listening to all kinds of records, they played everything we asked for, & it was a very pleasant change. After this we wandered around Derby, & it's a huge place, just like London, & full of life. After a bit Doug & I got separated from the rest, & so we went to a huge cinema, & found a café where we had a coffee & tea cakes, we remained here for the rest of the afternoon, smoking & talking, it was all very nice, but I still couldn't help thinking of you, & wishing that you were with me, & when we finished our coffee, I thought it would have been so delightful to be taking you to the cinema show, but instead of that all I had for company was Doug, & we had to go back to the old lorry & then to camp. By the way, I don't know if I've introduced Doug to you before, he's my age, & tall, he's a leather salesman in private life, his people have pots of money, & he used to own his own house, he's engaged to a very pretty looking girl, & I find they have the same ideals that we had, & they do all that we did while we were

courting, yes even that, & they are very happy. He's ever so brainy, & I find his company very interesting, as indeed I do the other two pals I've made, do you know, last night, Les & I were on, & we got discussing religion first, went from that to science, & we were so engrossed in the discussion that we actually worked over for ½ hour this morning before we realised the time, we both agree that this is obviously the best way to spend the night, as it makes time go so quickly. I find that for a B.A. he is also a F.R.G.S, he is not very well up on some subjects, I mean Ted⁸⁵ used to know about everything but not so Les, his knowledge is confined mostly to the subject he took his degree on, & in most other matters, I can hold my own with him.

I have now acquired by devious means, a tunic with brass buttons, by swapping with someone else, one of my blouses, I have taken the pocket & tabs off my best trousers to make a suit of them, I did that this evening, & I'm going to look really smart I hope when I do get home.

By the way, I've heard a rumour today on which I shall not build too much, that if we are content for a week or so longer with 12 hours, the 48 hrs passes will start again. I do hope this is true, nothing could be more wonderful than for this to happen, but rumours have such a nasty habit of going wrong I'll believe it when it comes, anyway I still can't help hoping , & if it is true, it will be something to look to, & help me over the next few weeks.

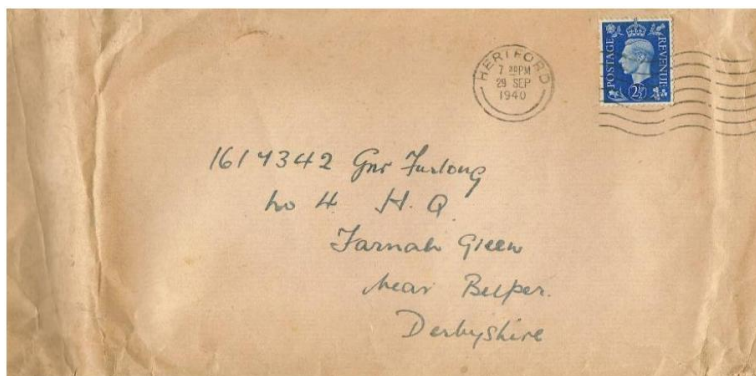
I didn't get a letter from you today, I hope everything is all right, I get terribly worried when I don't hear from you now, because I know you are in great danger, but please God you will always be safe. If anyone hurts a hair of you, I shall go mad & woe betide them if ever I get a chance to get at them. But this is looking on the gloomy side of things and I am rather happy now, because the long period of waiting, the many disappointments, and my terrible bout of homesickness have tended to dull my brain, & now I know that little as it is, we shall get 12 hour passes about every 7 or 8 days, & I shall try to use them as best I can. I feel strangely satisfied, because I intend using them by travelling in various vehicles with Hertford as my destination. 1 hour with you will be worth anything I have to put up

⁸⁵ Ladds

with. I want to see you more than anything on earth, & I'll do anything to achieve this, so don't try to stop me will you. [...]

Arthur is doing alright, his stripe being almost a cert, it's only a matter of time for him, & I wish him luck, but I'm just as good really & I still don't know why my chance didn't come as well, but who knows but what it won't come yet, I've not done hoping anyhow. I shall stop for the time being as this ends today's news, but I'll try to type you another letter during the night, & send it with this, but the S.M. tells me he's got a lot of work for me to do during the night, & it looks as if I'm going to be busy.

I hope you can read all this, but it's awful scrawl really, I am in a hurry you see, because I'm due to start plotting soon, & I want to finish this first, so it's goodnight my love



Friday 27 September-Saturday 28 September 1940

Hertford Heath & Waterford



(Two Letters)

My Sweetheart,

No letter from you this morning! Perhaps I shall receive 2 tomorrow, or are you short of stamps? We seem to be getting our letters better now that the P.O. staff work during warnings. It said on the wireless this morning that the telephone service is also improving.

I had my last 1st aid lesson last night. Next Thursday I think they will be the exams, but I shall have to do a good bit of swatting if I am to pass.

The class, which was attended by about 40 people, has gradually dwindled. Last night there was an attendance of nine. Needless to say the vicar and his wife are two of the defaulters. Probably the raids kept some people away, as the old hall shakes badly when any bombs drop, and I must say that it isn't built to give much protection, and one generally has to come to the accompaniment of gunfire & planes overhead.

It is now 5.30. I wrote the previous page this morning. I have since heard (officially) that there was a mine dropped at Sacombe and Benington, and bombs at Watton last night, so no wonder we heard some pretty loud bangs. I am sending you this week's Mercury ⁸⁶, I thought you would like to see the photos of Tamworth Road.

Do you realize how far you are away? George is in Birmingham and you are much further north than he is. He came home on 48 hours leave last week. It took him 7 hours, only he got held up an extra 5 in London (a contingency that must always be considered these days). However he managed to get back in 7 hours all right. But remember he is not so far away darling. So if you do come home you must have 48 hours, it is hopeless to try and do it on less. I know you'll think I'm a wet blanket but we must be sensible. Can't you soften your officer's heart and get 48 hours. You must see that even if you get through without any holdups (which is extremely unlikely) it is still too far to come for 48 hours.

Now I expect you feel cross with me, and miserable but please darling, don't be, I expect something will turn up and we shall be able to meet. We'll leave it open and see.

I am writing this at the Heath. I haven't been home to dinner, I called to see your mum instead & then came on here, and Barbara & I are actually going to the cinema to see Charley's Aunt (Arthur Askey).

You say you think of me in our bed. Well, my dearest one, I'm not always there as when the guns are very heavy and there are too many planes overhead to be comfortable I sleep downstairs on the floor as I think

⁸⁶ Local paper

that there is more protection from shrapnel splinters downstairs. I wouldn't mind being upstairs if you were there but the aunts sleep downstairs now, although I do go upstairs if its quiet when we want to retire.

Saturday Morning 28 September

Hertford

Goodmorning my darling,

I am sorry I was not able to speak to you last night to tell you [...] but the Exchange told me that no trunk calls at all were being accepted that night, so I shall try again this evening. Perhaps I can book a call.

At any rate I received your letter this morning telling me that you may get 20 hours leave so, of course I feel quite bright & hopeful now, although I am still convinced that you will not be able to spend more than one short hour in Hertford with me. But there, it is obviously no use trying to dissuade you, so I can only hope you are lucky and have a speedy journey home. It would certainly be lovely to see you, only it would be for such a little while that I am afraid we should feel very sad, although it might tide us over till the time when you can get a longer leave.

You mention that I might perhaps come up to see you for a few days. Well that would be very nice and I would like to, except that the trainfare alone would be over £2, so that it is the expense that is prohibitive. However, if you can't get away to come here, I might decide to come & see you, especially if I can let a bedroom & so get a little more money. I have only £15 in the Co-op and should, I expect use the best part of that if I did come up to see you, and naturally I don't want to do that and have nothing to fall back on in an emergency. I expect you will think I am hard-hearted by considering the money side of things when I have a chance of seeing you, but I know that if I don't consider it, you won't.

Did you receive your identity disc all right?

I am sorry you did not receive your letter from Bob. It was to say that he had got married? and had furnished two rooms at Peach's home. Perhaps you would like to write to him & tell him I will find him a little present soon.

His address is

% Mrs Taylor, 13 Mill Lane, Saffron Walden.

I am enclosing a letter from Webby. He seems to be settling down quite well now.

Thank you ever so much for the lovely poem. I really think it is beautiful. You must put it in your little "poem book" which I have still got. There are lots to be copied in. If you ever get put on an easy job where you have time to kill, I would like to send it to you to do.

Now darling, I really must get on with some work. I'm living in hopes of speaking to you tonight [...]

PPS

Ron Doe & his wife Pearl have just walked into my office They are spending the week end at the Heath. So what with them and Freda, it looks as if my weekend is booked up

There are mushrooms on the lawn

Wednesday (possibly 25 September 1940)

No 97001545 Pte. R. Webb

No 7 Section No 4 Coy. N.C.C.

No. 2 S.R.D

Barry Dock

Glam, S. Wales



Dear Mrs. Furlong,

I have written a few lines to William but find that I have not got his address, so would you be good enough to forward it to him when you are sending.

Glad to say that I am just beginning to settle down to army life after 6 weeks. Was moved twice while I was in Scotland then after a month was

sent down to Wales and here we shall, stop to do a spot of work. We have to work at the large food warehouse despatching food etc to various places. It is a fairly good job and am getting on with it very well, feeling O.K. in myself. The only drawback is that we living under canvas but no doubt we shall soon be fixed up in huts. How are things round your part of the world do trust that you have all been kept safe from Air Raids.

We have the Air Raid warnings quite often here, and sometimes the gun fire is terrific. I often think of William when I watch the search lights and wonder how he is getting on with his job.

One misses all the comforts of a good home when they are away and also a Young Lady, but trust that the war will soon be over so that we all can return to our Homes and jobs again.

Trusting you are Well

Kind regards Reginald Webb.

27 September 1940.

Farnah Green, Nr. Belper

Typed letter.



Dearest love,

Here it is two o'clock and I have only just finished my typing, it's been terrible, I've had to get as much typed on to a small quarto sheet as would easily fill a foolscap one, the reason being that there is no large size available, in fact after tonight there will be very little of any kind of paper left, so I don't know what they will do I'm sure, and I don't care.

It's a pretty rough night here tonight, the wind is howling round the hut, and altogether it would be a perfect night for an invasion, but we won't worry about that, because old nasty is afraid to try. We have plotted two

jerries over this night, and also reported a number of beams seen in various directions, but apart from this, there has been very little to worry about. Les is asleep again, in fact I seem to be the only one in the world who is awake, but then I have difficulty in sleeping as it is, so why should I bother about that. I think that I get about four sleeping hours out of the day if I'm lucky, but then I'm not always lucky, and so I average out at about three I should think. I feel a little sleepy now, but that will wear off by the morning, and I shall feel fresh when I want to sleep, but there is a war on and so I guess I'll have to put up with it, although it's very tiring.

I think I mentioned in my written report that I heard a rumour about 48 hr, leave starting again.

I do hope this is true don't you. I've just had a look at the line above and it seems to have a double space, that's because I had to get up in a hell of a hurry and report a target over, I think and hope he was friendly, at least that's what I reported him as, and then when I came back I just slipped the old machine up a notch and carried on and it seems as though I had already done this, but I guess you won't consider this a bad fault..

I am pretty well always on my own now at nights although there is always someone close at hand, but they all go to sleep, it seems that I am the only one who tries to keep awake, but then they aren't in love like I am, and they have no wonderful woman to write to and keep them alert [...]
(whole *paragraph of adoration* here).

I think that I shall have to go and see if the Cookhouse fire is still alight now, and if it is I shall make some tea, and this I know will cheer us up no end.

There is a jerry overhead again, I wonder if he is looking for us, he ought not to have any trouble in finding us because we're always showing lights when we open the door to listen, but they aren't very strong lights and I wouldn't be surprised if they are invisible from the air, you can see by the way that this typing is going that I'm just about at the end of my tether now, I've been at it since six, and it is now three, and in between this I've made plots, and phone calls, and altogether I feel very worn out after a sleepless day, so please forgive the errors, and try to think of me fumbling for the keys and wondering if they are the right ones, I'm so tired now, it's

always the same at this time of the day, and this feeling persists until about four, and then we begin to wake up again.

So, I must stop now, and I'll write again tomorrow goodnight and God bless you,



What an uproar, we've just had an order to stand by to expose, and I've had to run up a terrific hill and turn everyone out, the sentry was asleep because the previous one had not called him, and he has only just got up, we're waiting for the order to expose now, and everyone is almost ready, it is a homing beam we have put out, that is a beam across the ground to direct a plane that has lost its way, so I shall go out when the order comes to expose, I will tell you all about it, but we are just waiting now, and the general opinion is that the order will come in a minute or so to say that we shan't be required, it seems that this is the usual procedure, you would have laughed at the expressions of some of the faces when I ran into the hut and told them to stand by, they are all half asleep, and none of them realised what was happening at first, but they know all right now because they're all out of bed, I bet they aren't half swearing too, three in the morning says one very crossly as I were to blame, but if they do get the order, they will be happy enough, because they're tired of the inactivity, and it will cheer them up, but it seems that we have already had to wait too long now for it to be of any use, so I guess they will be disappointed after all. I am the only one who has had some activity, running up that hill has all but killed me, and my heart is still beating like a hammer, I haven't been so out of breath for years. Well nothing happened after all so goodbye darling,

28th September 1940.

Farnah Green, Nr. Belper.

Darling,

One day nearer seeing you, the more I think of it, the more excited I get, I know I'm going to have a terrific job, but I'm ready to chance it, because I know it's worth it. To be with you is all that I can think of now, & it has seemed years since I saw you last [...]

I got your parcel this morning with shaving cream & toothpaste, & it was just in time, I quite agree with you about the soap, & I have bought some now. I daresay you are always torn between expecting me home & being disappointed, I know how it must feel to you, but we know that the longer it goes on, the nearer we are to seeing one another, and we must get what consolation we can from this thought.

I really can't understand why you always get broke, because you should have just as much money as you always did, surely the Aunts with their allowances give you something now, I can't understand it at all but there, I know you don't waste it, & if you get broke well, I guess it has been spent wisely.

We've just had to shift 4 ½ tons of coal, we get all kinds of jobs to do in the daytime, & you ought to have seen us when we finished, it wasn't much use having a bath yesterday, & the worst of it is, we shall have to wait till next week for another, but army life is like that, & after all, it's work, & work of any kind is welcome to me, it keeps my mind & body occupied, & saves my sanity, of one thing I am sure, if I were allowed to see you for a night or two once a month, I should really enjoy this life, but the mere fact of never being able to see you makes it hateful.

The signal to expose last night never came, & we had all that disturbance and waiting for nothing, & did the detachment boys moan, they were out waiting from there till 6.30 & then were told they wouldn't be wanted, & you can guess how they felt about it.

You wait till you see your new soldier boy husband, in his uniform & belt to set it off, you won't know me, & I bet Mum will be pleased. I'm a

proper old sweat now, & I look like a soldier even if I'm not, so you should have every reason to be proud of me.

We get all kinds of discussions going on in our hut, for instance four of the boys are arguing about who is the best boxer today, they're getting quite heated about it too, but never come to blows. They're a good crowd really, & I can always find comfort in the older ones if I confide in them. The subject has changed to whether the Britons of today are as good as those in the last war, this looks like being a long argument, & I won't say any more about this.

We had a laugh at the expense of three of the boys this week, it was like this, one of them had his evening off & met the most beautiful girl, her name was Doris, well, the next evening Doug & Les went out, & Doug met a lovely girl whose name was Doris, & when he told us about her, it turned out to be the same one that Jones had met the previous night, needless to say they both made dates, & then to crown this, our Cook had his evening off, & met a lovely girl whose name was Doris, & she also was the same one, & we've been teasing them ever since, Doug saw her last night, Jones' turn tonight, & the Cook's tomorrow, I bet she's no lady, & they are all going to have it out with her individually, so I'm very interested to know what will happen.

I've just finished a game of crib, & won again fortunately it's only for small stakes, or else I'm afraid I'd be unpopular, they all say how lucky I am & criticise my method of play, but I only join in for fun, so I don't worry if I win or lose.

Well my darling, I think I've run my store of news out for now, but you shall have some more tomorrow, so until tomorrow, Goodnight, & may God bless you & keep you for me,

28 September 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed letter.

Once again I'm sitting in the office with nothing to do but dream of you [...], and in truth these are the only thing in this life for me, it seems a long way off to the day when I shall see you again, although it is not so far really.

I have been discussing the possibilities of getting to you in twenty hours, and Les seems to think that I'm taking rather risk, he says it will be a long journey to hitch hike, and he would not try it, and so once again I'm rather wondering if I should be wise to attempt it, I shall see better when the time comes. The fact still remains that I want to try and I most probably will, so don't give me up yet will you.

We have had rather hectic time here this evening, the RT set is out of action and we have to move two of our sites tomorrow, and have no communication with them but for the D. R.⁸⁷ and so we had to drag the poor blighter out of bed to go to the sites concerned to tell him to get ready for a move, I'm glad I did not go to a detachment now, because it will be just my luck to get on one of these who have to move, they are in for a rough old time tomorrow if they only knew, and they will do so soon, and that means that they will not get any sleep tonight or tomorrow, they'll be too busy moving all their equipment, and it's such a shame they were just settling down nicely. Army life as I find it is full of rotten setbacks, and the more I see it the less I like it, but unfortunately we have no voice in the matter, and have to grin and bear it. It has of course caused quite a bit of excitement here at H. . and the officer had to be called out of his bed, and the poor old S.M. and they are likely to spend the rest of the night with us working out the best way of doing the job. The officer is here again now, he has just brought me a lot of typing to do, so I shall have to stop this now and get on with his job, but I shall write to you as well tomorrow, so until then my darling goodnight and God bless you....., Bill.

P.S. I have just finished the typing, I had to do it, it dealt with the move

⁸
⁷ Despatch Rider

for each individual site, and the poor devils have certainly got plenty to do, they will get these instructions at about four this morning, and will have to be up and doing straight away, do you know, they are even going to take the cooking range with them, and this means that they will have to chip the concrete from the legs before they can move it. I tell you it's a proper business this moving, and I have got to be in action by five o'clock the same day, regardless of food or sleep or personal comfort, and they always manage it, but I shall still think that I'm best off here. I really wanted to tell you how much I love you when I got the typing to do, and I thought it would be more than it was, and as it has not turned out so I shall now say that you are my heart's delight [...] once again I say goodnight,

Sunday-Undated letter possibly 29 September 1940

Waterford

I must apologise once more Sweet heart for not speaking to you last night by phone. I tried, of course but couldn't get through. I shall keep trying I expect.

Yesterday afternoon I dug up the very last of the potatoes, and I can't tell you how glad I am that it is finished. It has been a long job on my own, but never mind, perhaps the next time they want digging you will be here to help me. This morning I dug up half the shrubbery ready for the winter but when I look at the huge herbaceous border then the vegetable garden, to say nothing of the rock garden, I wonder if I shall ever be able to do it all. Len never comes to help me now when the end of October comes I am going to move the cyprussus tree that is by the terrace. The one opposite is quite dead, so that the one that is alive looks odd, so, if it dies in the moving, well it does. I shall take great care in moving it.

Freda is here for two nights. She hadn't been to bed since she was

last in Hertford. However she is out now with Ron,⁸⁸ and I'm not sorry as Ron Doe and Pearl are coming to tea, and probably Mum & Barbara. Auntie N has asked her Brother and wife to come for a day or two next week. They live in South West London, and you will no (sic) from the wireless what a terrible time the S.W. has had recently. They have had several bombs drop in their road, but, so far their house is undamaged, but they haven't been in a bed for three weeks, and have had no gas for over a week. If they come, it wouldn't prevent us sleeping together if you happen to, come home (needless to say) well, darling it is 3.15 and the Sunday post goes at 3.45, so I suppose I must stop now, and run and catch it. Penny will be pleased. She likes a run Goodbye my own darling I do love you so. Soon we shall be together.

29th September 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp



Dearest love,

Here it is Sunday afternoon, & I've got my usual fit of depression on, I simply can't rest, & so I'm finding comfort in writing to you, & telling you how much I want to see you.

We are supposed to get 12 hours rest every week now, & I believe mine should fall due on Tuesday next, I am as a last resort, going to see the S.M. or our officer, and ask if I can possibly have longer by foregoing future 12 hours, I doubt if this will be allowed, but I'm hoping to touch them, & failing this, I think I shall still try to get home for a few brief hours, how many I know not.

I am writing this at the meal table in our hut, Doug is sitting across the way, also writing, & he's smoking a cigar, it reminds me of Xmas day

⁸⁸ Dempster

afternoon, because all the other boys are asleep after a very big dinner. I can't sleep, or I think I should like to do the same.

All of our officers are out today on the moving of those sites I mentioned last night, & we are spending the day in unmolested peace.

I do feel so unhappy on Sundays, do you? It seems that it's something psychological about it, I don't know what, but each week is the same, & I have to dream of your loveliness to keep me cheerful, & the thought of seeing you once again soon, just keeps me plodding on steadily.

I hope, if I do get home, to bring you the something I promised you, & then you will have something more tangible to remember me by, but I may have to wait some time on the other hand, before it is ready to bring, but we shall see in due course.

Last night was very uneventful from the Plotting point of view, there being only one Jerry over all night, but the sirens were going in Belper & surrounding district all the time, I should think people ignore them now, because nothing ever happens after the sirens go.

Our officer must sleep soundly, do you know, last night he was about most of the time, but at one period he went into his hut to lie down, & after about 2 hours I had to go & wake him, well I went in, & the lamp which was hanging from the ceiling, had fallen on to the floor, & smashed, & he hadn't even heard it, I should have thought it would have made a terrific din, but he didn't seem to worry much.

Every time I look out of the window, I see wonderful views, & think regretfully I'm afraid, of the wonderful time we could have here together if we were on holiday, I do miss you so, & like you, I have my romantic moments, only I always seem to be having them, that's why I'm usually so unhappy [...]

You will probably get a letter from Arthur's wife in the near future, he writes me regularly, & tells me in his last letter that he has asked his wife to write to you, I think this is a good idea, because our friendship will go on after the war is over, God grant it may be soon.

I think you would have some caustic comments to make if you could just take a peep into our hut at this moment, on one side we have the

officer's batman asleep, one cook asleep, the other cook reading, and odd job man asleep, another odd job man asleep, & on the other side we have my empty bed, Doug's empty bed, a mechanist asleep, the D.R. just laid down after a long day's riding, another empty bed, & then just inside the door, a table with three of us, Doug, Les & myself, all writing letters to the ones we are loving & longing to see always.

I don't suppose this picture I have described conveys much to you, but it contradicts all the stories you hear from me, about the army life being so hard, but you see, our work is mostly done at night, & so it's quite natural to see us resting during the day while we have the chance.

I have an evening out tomorrow, & I want to see the S.M. if he's in a good mood, to ask him if I may have my 12 hr. pass as well, & try to get home over night, I doubt if he will agree to this, because he had not been able to spend a night at home himself, & it's very doubtful if he will agree.

Another fellow has just come in, & he's kicking up a disturbance, the table is rocking from side to side, & it's most difficult to write under these circumstances. You see, the fellows get boisterous at times, & have boxing & wrestling matches all over the beds, but this is the only outlet to pent up feelings, & I think it's excusable.

I wrote a long letter to Mr. Gabriel a week ago, but I haven't had a reply yet, I also sent to Len & Ron, & I haven't heard from either of them, I don't think it's worth writing to them any more, if they can't answer in a reasonable time, I shall give the practice up. My brother & I have worked up quite a good service between ourselves now, we each write about once a week, & although there is very little ever to report, we find it helps things on considerably. He says in his last letter to me, that he won't be allowed any more time off till Xmas, but says he'll see about that.

I have started this new sheet darling, & as I write, I am reminded of clean sweet smelling sheets in our bed at home, with you by my side [...] it makes me feel like crying. I'm afraid I'm not a very good soldier at heart, because I take things too seriously, but I can't help it, I feel, & know that I am being cheated of all the love you could be giving to me. Of one thing I'm certain tho', & that is you are the only woman in the world for me, [...]

I hope you will understand all I have written down here, I know that my

writing is a bit sketchy at times, but that's because I always have so much to say & it absolutely tumbles out so fast that I have a job to keep up to it in writing. I guess you'll see that I have acquired the habit of writing the first bit of a word, & leaving the rest to be guessed at, the same as my mother does, but love has guided my pen throughout this letter, as it always does in my letters to you, & I know you'll understand every little word I write, I hope it never bores you to read about the things I tell you, but I don't think it does, [...]

Have you heard the new tune on the radio called "the Breeze & I"? It's a wonderful piece of music, & we sing it night & day, the girls in Woolworths had to play it thro' several times for us when we were in Derby, & every time the wireless plays it we all crowd round to learn all we can of it. There are many beautiful tunes now, with heartbreakingly romantic words, & they make me strangely happy & yet very sad, do they affect you the same, I guess they do?

I think I have said all I have to say for today, but I shall find something else to write tonight when I'm on duty, so until then, I'll say goodbye God Bless you & keep you for me alone,

29 September 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed letter

My beloved,

I think that by the time you get this letter I shall be with you, at least that is what I'm hoping, for my day pass is due to me on Tuesday, and I have asked a favour of the S.M. which he says he will think over, and if it is favourable, I shall be able to leave the night before my pass starts, and will be home any time during the night, I hope by twelve but that depends on how fast I can travel, you may depend that I shall lose no more time than I can possibly help. I have been counting the days of my army career just now, and I find that I've only been away for two months, it seemed ages longer than that, I thought it was at least three, I did this because we might

get a seven day pass soon but the stipulation is that we have to have at least three months service, hence the count up, and I was most disappointed to find the result, because I intended to apply for it, but as soon as I have done the period I shall have a go.

All the boys are out tonight and I'm left in charge of the office again, there are only about three of us in the whole camp, of course this should not be, but when the officer goes out, the S.M. usually does the same, and when he is out of the way, all the boys without passes for the evening, take advantage of it and do likewise, and I can't say that I blame them. I was supposed to go out tonight, but I changed with Les, in the hope that I might pull my little scheme off, I hope it works, but still have my doubts, but anyway I'm coming home, and if I'm late back, well I'll have to take the consequences, and I don't think that they will be too severe after all, but I still hope to do it the fair way if I can.

Thank goodness that Sunday is over, I hate them, I still can't say why, but the fact remains that they worry me, and I'm always glad when they are over.

I shall have to spend a little time on my buttons when I get up tomorrow, so that I can look my best for you, I want you to be proud of me when I come, and I shall expect all the love you have saved up for me to be delivered with interest, because I also have a lot to give you, and it would be terrible if we could not make something of a deal out of this, I wonder who will gain the most, I think I shall [...] it won't be long we shall have together, but such as it is, we will make the most of, life is too short to waste any more of a precious time we can get together, and therefore we shall be thankful for what we get, [...].

I shall not write to you tomorrow, as I want to get this letter in the post first thing in the morning, and I hope it comes while I'm with you, although as I say that is hoping for rather a lot, but then I am always hoping, indeed that is all that keeps me on the go from day to day, and without it I should be sunk, [...] I'll say goodnight to you and may God bless you and keep you safe for me,

Undated letter-Monday
(Possibly 30 September 1940)

Waterford



I am rather worried to know if you attempted to get home on Saturday (as your letter of Thursday's date suggested) and if you got held up somewhere. If you did you must have been awfully disappointed to have had to turn back, but I am hoping that your leave was postponed for a day or two, and that perhaps you will be trying to get home some time this week.

Barbara came over yesterday (with Dad, Ron & Pearl). She was very excited Roy had sent her a telegram to say he was ringing her up at nine that night (presumably to arrange for the wedding). He is expecting to get 96 hours leave. However I told her that it was very unlikely that he would get through, and this morning when I rang her she said she had waited by the call box till twenty to ten, when the guns began to get uncomfortably busy so that she had to hurry home disappointed. She says Roy hasn't, as far as she knows, been able to find a best man and thought it would be a nice idea if you could get time off to perform that duty. When she gets through to Roy she will suggest the idea, and we want you, I will send you a telegram. Of course you may not be able to get off, in which case they will have to think of someone else, but it would be awfully nice if you could, wouldn't it darling?

Now, here's some good news, Ruth has just rung me to say that an Army officer at Leahoe has just found my watch there.

He refuses to take the reward. The strap is broken, but she says it is unharmed. I can't tell you how pleased I am, and I'm sure you will be too.

You ask me in your letter why I didn't comment on your fairy story & your poem. Well I did darling but I expect that particular letter got lost. I said that I hoped you would be able to finish the fairy story soon, by saying that the boy came home a hero from the war, and they lived in peace & happiness ever after.

You ask me also about your typing. Well it looks pretty good and fairly

accurate. I am glad you don't run off the paper now. I hope you always use your margin but of course, I can't tell what your speed is until I see you actually working, but you say it is good, so I will take your word for it. As you say, it would be lovely if you could break away from print after the war, and one never knows what will turn up of course, but you must remember darling, that typing alone won't make you an office worker, you must have other qualifications, but still, there's no knowing what you might learn in the Army, so we will keep on hoping.

Pearl tells me her sister got married last month to a young sergeant of 24. He enlisted with the 23's during all that bad weather. His job is office & telephone, the same as you are doing, so he has got on pretty fast, hasn't he? Every one here seems to think that office workers get quick promotions, so I hope darling, that you are no exception. If you don't get on, I know it won't be for lack of trying.

I will finish this letter later, as it is still morning and work calls-----

Its now nearly six and I have only justed (sic) packed up work, so will conclude this letter with the remark that I shall try to reach you by phone again tonight. I have spoken to the Hertford Supervisor & she told me that it is hopeless to try to put a trunk call through after eight. They just won't accept them, so I shall try at seven, and chance whether you are able to speak to me or not. I'm hoping so anyway Goodbye my darling [...]

CHAPTER FOUR

Tuesday October 1st 1940

Hertford



My own darling,

After you had left me I had a mad desire to run after you, just to kiss you once again, and in a few minutes I did come as far as the beginning of West Street ⁸⁹ on my cycle, but I didn't see you, which perhaps was just as well, and so I went back to try to work.

It was really marvellous to see you again. Even now I can't believe it really happened. All the morning I was in a sort of daze, although I dare say I looked and acted quite normally to you & other people.

I can still smell your smoke on my fingers, just as if you were still with me. Now we shall have to carry cheerfully on till your next leave comes along. I am anxiously waiting to know how you got back & if there was trouble waiting for you on arrival.

You really do look smart in your new uniform, and if it isn't too much trouble hope you will wear it the next time you are home.

Now darling this isn't meant to be a real letter but just to tell you how very very happy I was (and still am) to have seen you again and to thank

The New Recruit



⁸
⁹ Hertford

you for the nice photo you gave me.

I hope the large one will be nicely coloured. Now my darling Goodbye, God bless you

Wednesday 2 October 1940.

Waterford

9pm.



My Sweetheart,

I don't know what you thought of my typed letter which I wrote earlier on today. I feel a little clearer headed now, and as Joan Trapp has asked me to go to the cinema tomorrow at 5.30, I may not have much time to write your letter so I thought I would start it tonight and finish it sometime during the day tomorrow.

I don't know what this writing will be like as Penny is worrying to come up, on my lap and I have just given in to her. Now of course, she wants to help me by biting the pen, and I have to keep dodging out of her way--- there now she has at last settled down--for about one minute anyway.

I want to ask you what trees you wanted me to order from Youngs. I thought perhaps a Blenheim apple, a William pear and two Victoria plums in the way of fruit. What do you say? As for the other trees it will depend on how much ground I am able to prepare but I shall order my willow anyway. I was wondering whether there was anything you particularly wanted me to buy, either trees or shrubs. If I order them all at once, and they take me two weekends to plant, will it hurt the trees, or ought I to give two little orders instead of one large one?

You know my dear, its a good job you cant get your seven days leave just yet, because we are much too busy for me to take a week off from work just yet, but it would be awfully nice if you could get 48 hours. But we mustn't start thinking of more leave just yet, as you've only just had some, and I would rather you put your mind fully on your work (if you can) for a little while or else you will never be a perfect soldier you know.

I am afraid this writing is simply scrawl but Penny's back is not the ideal rest for letter writing.

Some bombs dropped on the line at Bayford last night and so the office boy, (who lives at Cuffley) arrived by LNER lorry to work instead of the more distinguished method of by train.

Barbara still hasn't heard from Roy, so doesn't know if she will be married at the end of the week or not. I wouldn't like that a bit. They will miss all the excitement that we had (do you remember) of counting off the days, and in fact looking forward to the Great day for months.

I'll write more tomorrow, but for now, Goodnight my sweet darling, God Bless you I love you,

2nd October 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

My very own darling,

Here I am back at the same old place, & very gloomy it seems.

You would no doubt be very worried as to whether I got back in time, well, I didn't, but I have been excused, & no trouble will come my way, & I live to try again. In the first place, my absence was due to some damn bad luck, I shall benefit by it though, because I'll know what not to do next time.

Here is a story of my progress, & you will perhaps laugh at my experiences, or you may prefer to cry over it, I know at the time I felt like it, but the memory of you still in my arms kept me from worrying too much.

When I left you, I walked to the Football Ground, and signalled a passing van, which when it stopped, turned out to be Austin's Van, with Bill Drury & Joe Huckle driving, & they were going to St. Albans, well of course that was just perfect, & I chatted to them all the way, & left them in the City, and walked to the Watling St. where I just crossed over to the left hand side of the road & hailed the first van who took me to Stony Stratford, which is nearly half way, he stopped there for a cup of tea, & insisted on paying for something for me too, & as it was about 5 o'clock I accepted. I'm

sorry he wasn't going any further, because he was a decent fellow. I then got on the road again, & a man in a private car asked me if I wanted a lift, I told him where to, & he took me to Coventry. Now here is where my hard luck set in, I know that I should have made for Leicester from there, but the next van that came along, the driver told me I should be better off for striking out, if I went to Birmingham, so I went for a ride to Birmingham, and arrived there about 7. Well Derby is about 40 from there, & I had four hours to spare so it seemed a snip to get home in time, but was it. Do you know, I couldn't get a single lorry going thro' Derby, & in the end I had to take small lifts in private cars & got as far as Sutton, where I called at the station to enquire about trains, only to find that the next one left at 10.45, & as it was only $\frac{1}{4}$ past eight, I decided to try again, & after a lot more little lifts, got to a place called Lidfield, & the people who took me that far were very kind to me, & took me in their home & gave me food & drink, for which I was very grateful.

I then got on the Road again, & had another try, but tho' there was a fair amount of traffic, they would not stop, I learned afterwards that they won't when an air raid is on, but time was now flying, & I had only traversed a few more miles to a little village, & I began to get desperate, the situation was ironical, here was I, only 17 miles from my goal, & no means of transport. I called at a garage, asked if I could hire a car, but there was no one in who would drive me, so I phoned up the camp, told them where I was, & the officer, who happened to be there, told me not to worry about getting in at 11, but to get back as soon as I could. This was all very well, but I still had no means of getting there, so I started to walk, & had gone about 2 miles when a lorry came along, & he actually stopped, & took me to within 2 miles of Derby, well, it was now gone midnight, & I was worn out, so I dropped in at the Wardens Post for a sit down, the wardens were kind to me, & made a pot of tea for me, & tried to find something going in to Belper, but in the end, I had to tell them I was worn out, & I went into the shelter, & slept for 3 hours. I woke up & walked into Derby, I then was able to get a lift into Belper, & I got there at 6 in the morning & by the time I had walked to camp, it was $\frac{1}{2}$ past, I crept in & went straight to bed, & left all trouble till I woke up, & when I did wake at 11, I found on enquiry, that nothing would be said, & I was scot free to try coming home again, which I shall do as soon as I can, I have learned from the experience,

never go to Birmingham, it's most difficult to get out again, but, except for a nasty headache, I am wiser & no worse off for it.

When I woke up, I found 3 letters of yours here telling me all I had already learned from you, & the one containing Reg's letter, so now I can write to him, I also had one from my foreman Mr. Gabriel, but he also had told me all that was in the letter, & did you know that Ginger Aldridge is going to get married at last, it fairly took my breath away.

I haven't much to say at the moment about camp, except that the S.M. is away for a 14 days course, & we shan't see him for a little while, & this fact is pretty obvious, because all the fellows are sound asleep as if they'd been working all the time, but really they haven't & I don't know what makes them tired unless its dodging the column (?).

Well my angel, we have loved & lived, for an hour or two, and I long for the next time I shall come, I don't know if I should be able to get the time off for Barbara's wedding, but I'll try, if you can let me know in time.

I also heard the beginning of a rumour that 24 hr. leave starts again soon, I hope it's right, because that means 36 hrs all told, & now I know the ropes a bit, I can make better progress, & can get to you sooner.

Well, my darling, I still have pictures of you & home, & Pennie, & they live to help me to the next time, & I hope that won't be long. [...] I still have the fresh memory of you and all you stand for, so goodbye my darling,

2 October 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Dearest Beloved,

I am alone in the office again, but my memories are keeping me company, and I have just lived over those few brief hours again. I'm so happy, & yet so very sad, and I was near to crying when I said goodbye. I guess you were too, I know it's hard to part after such a short visit, but next time it may be a bit longer. I have a splitting headache I'm sad to say, & I put it down to the direct result of my last night's adventure. But I'm going to lose myself in my work soon, in the hope that I can partly forget it. Les has been so good to me, & now he's going to do another fellow's job tomorrow

because the man is going on leave, so I shall partly repay him by letting him sleep tonight, much as I'd like a turn myself, but I shall be on days next week, & then I might get a nights real sleep-----I have been so busy during the night that I have had no chance to continue this letter, & it's now afternoon of the 3rd Oct.

I tackled my officer on the subject of being late, & he told me not to worry about it, & in fact got quite enthusiastic about the correct route home, & he gave me much valuable information as to saving time in future, so that's all right.

I allowed Les to sleep all last night, although I could hardly keep awake myself, but I've got a good 5 hours in this morning & if I can keep out of the way, I shall rest this afternoon, & go to the pictures this evening, But I do long for your company, & then I should be looking forward to it, as it is, I'm only going in to drown my sorrows, and yet I'm strangely contented now, I know you are safe & still love me, & that you are more beautiful than when I left you [...]

I had a letter from Len this morning, & he says he is so busy that he has not been able to see you just lately, but that he hopes to get over soon & put a bit of time in on the garden, he sent me some stamps which was very kind of him, as these are a valuable asset in this life of exile.

I really haven't got a lot to say in this letter my angel as I told you quite a bit on Tuesday, but I shall probably try to snatch a few more hours with you next week sometime, but I shall not bunk out overnight, as it's too risky, I shall go out early in the morning & see what I can do. This is mainly the reason why I can't be too unhappy, because I know I shall be able to see you again in a few days, I'm looking forward to that very much I can tell you, & no ordeal is too great to go thro' for you. [...] I shall be with you in a very short time you see, & we shall make what we can of it.

And on this note, I must say goodbye, but I shall be writing again tonight, so until then my love,

Undated Letter Possibly 3rd October 1940.

Farnah Green. Camp

Dearest Love,

I have just come back from Derby, & we had a wonderful bath, then a shower, & then a swim, so I guess I ought to be clean by now, yesterday afternoon Les & myself went for a walk into Belper without leave, we were like 2 naughty schoolboys, but we enjoyed ourselves just walking around & hoping we shouldn't get caught, & we got away with it.

I'm sorry about Barbara's Wedding, as I should have loved to be there, but the officer was standing outside as I was talking to you, & I asked him direct, & he said there wasn't a chance, so that's that, but I was disappointed just the same.

Last night we cooked a good meal for ourselves during the night, it was a mixed grill, being our breakfasts for several days, & I did the cooking, it was really fine & we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves.

I went to the pictures during the evening, & had to walk back over the fields in the black-out & I forgot my torch, I had a hell of a time, & one occasion I nearly fell over a cow, I missed it by about 2 feet, & it thoroughly scared me I can tell you.

It has been a pretty miserable day today, it has been raining all day & nothing looks more miserable than this scenery on a wet day, but I haven't seen much of it so I needn't worry too much, but I was rather depressed to know that I couldn't get off to be at the wedding, but my next 12 hours will soon be here, & I'm all for another visit to you, however brief it may be.

Have you got my bombs yet for the collar of my tunic, I need them if I am going to wear the uniform at all, although I went out without this afternoon.

I can't find anything else to write about just now as I want to get Les to post this to you tonight, so I shall end it now, and write again later when I have more time, meanwhile keep smiling [...] so Goodnight my love, & God Bless You always,

Friday undated letter
(possibly 3rd or 4th October 1940)

Hertford



Today it has poured with rain all day. I was, as I told you going to the cinema with Joan,⁹⁰ but I have cancelled that arrangement as Barbara rang me to say she was being married some time Saturday, so I want to go to the Heath tonight as there will be several things to do., and you can't rely on Mum to arrange anything as you know.

Barbara tells me she thinks Roy's brother will be best man, which I suppose is just as well and it would not give you time to let us know if you could come, and then they might be let down. I'm sorry of course that you are not coming, but you were not sure even then, if you would be allowed leave. I'm not sure whether I shall be able to go to the wedding myself yet as I think "B" wants it in the morning (and as its council meeting morning it will be most awkward for me to get away.) Your mother wants to go so I must go round & tell her the news. Auntie Nell's Brother & wife & daughter are spending the week end with us. They have been having it very hot where they live in Streatham, so are hoping to get a fairly quiet night here. They have had no gas for nearly three weeks. Imagine trying to boil your early morning kettle on an (sic) Valor oil stove. She said it took her five hours to cook a meal.

There was a bomb (oil) dropped at the Heath last night, not much damage, I believe, but I expect I shall hear more about it when I go up this evening.

Also this dinnertime people in Hatfield streets were machine gunned. A number of casualties at the County Hospital.

Now the a.a. guns brought him down at Cole Green, and captured the crew of four who were brought to Hertford Police station. Unfortunately I did not see them.

⁹⁰ On the Thursday

Its turned 5.30 now, and already getting dusk, so now I must fly to the Heath, as I know you wouldn't want me out after the guns start

So Goodbye my dearest heart Keep smiling, I love you so much

**Me: Roy & Barbara Jan & married on 5th
 Order 1940 at the Holy Trinity Church, Little Anwell (Hertford
 Heath).**

Friday 4 October 1940

Waterford

You will see from the stamped heading that I am writing this at home. I am afraid I was so busy at work that I could not write to you earlier. (it is 9.30pm) Wer'nt you surprised to hear my voice this morning? I hope I did not get you into trouble. I did not really expect you to be able to get off but I would not let the chance slip by however small. Anyway it was so nice to speak to you and there was only half an hour's delay in getting through. You sounded so taken back that you hardly had anything to say. I am sorry darling that I woke you out of your nice sleep, but you see time was so short, and Barbara wanted to know at once. Roy came home Thursday night till Tuesday, which is a nice long time. But Barbara has left everything to chance. When I asked her if she had ordered her cake, she said she hadn't thought about it so Dorothy Gaylard? is trying to get a small one at the last minute. She's being married tomorrow and hasn't bought her clothes yet, and expects to go away for a couple of nights, yet hasn't booked anywhere.

I got Dorothy to phone the nearby Trust Houses & hotels to see if she could book a room for them, as I know evacuees had taken most of the accommodation. Do you know that Dorothy phoned twenty places in the course of the day without success and as far as I know they are not booked up anywhere. I don't know if Len⁹¹ consented to be "best man" as I haven't phoned Barbara since.

⁹

¹ Wagstaff

As you know three of Aunt Nell's people were coming this week end. This evening we had a telegram to say they were unable to come and of course the Aunts are very disappointed (in fact I think Aunt N shed a few tears). You know how it is. They had worked hard to get the place looking nice & got in extra food and it really is disappointing for them. After all they don't get much excitement out of life. However, it will leave our bedroom free for Roy & Barbara if they have nowhere else to go.

We may take a lodger soon (I did tell you of the idea in another letter). The Smiths⁹² have been asked to board a dental surgeon from Cambridge who is I think going to work at the County Hall⁹³. They (the Smiths) are absolutely booked up, but would board him if we can sleep him. He would be out all day he has his own car so I think he could suit us very well, and of course the extra money would be very welcome to me. Anyway he is coming to see the Smiths tomorrow so perhaps we shall be able to come to terms. I hope you don't mind this idea, but I would far rather take someone like this than evacuees. Anyway darling, I will tell you what happens.

Its been a nasty day and so cold & wet. Yesterday it rained all day. I went to the Heath & it was dark by the time I got home & so wet & miserable. It made me think of the winter nights when you will be once more coming home in the dark and meet? from Austins, to a nice warm fire & our tea set by it on our little round table. Then we can sit in comfort & have our tea and have all the long winter evening to spend together cuddled up together on the settee, with no nasty thoughts of you having to go away any more. Isn't that a nice thought to look forward to? Perhaps it won't happen this winter, but we don't know. It would be so lovely if it could.

I had your letter this morning telling me all your adventures on Tuesday night. My poor boy, to have to go through all that just to see me for a few hours. Was it really worth it? I thought of you travelling back and hope and prayed that you were safe, but I never imagined you out all night. Still, I suppose we must be thankful that you didn't get into trouble. I hope

⁹² Next door

⁹³ Hertford

that next time you get more leave and so can manage the journey more easily. I can't think why your leave is still only 12 hours. Every one else seems to be getting ordinary leave again now.

By the way what happened about Doris. Did she decide which soldier she liked best after all?

We bought a new wire for our bowl lamp yesterday as Penny⁹⁴ had chewed the other. Auntie N fixed it in and today while they were out of the room that blessed dog chewed the new wire. Would you believe it! We are training her to sleep in her basket at night instead of on the bed part of the time. We have to keep her on the lead to do this, but I think we shall succeed in the end.

Now my darling boy, it's 10.30 and we are thinking of bed so Goodbye my dearest one God bless you and keep you safe for me. Don't forget you're the most precious thing in the world to me, so if you love me, look after yourself and when you next come home I do hope you will be able to spend a night here.

4th October 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed letter.

To the dearest and most precious girl in the world, here I am on the old machine and doing better every time I use it, or don't you think so?

I'm ever so sad about the wedding really, but everyone assures me that I was reaching for the moon, and we should need a stronger case than that to get me leave, so I guess we shall have to be content with what we can get out of them in the way of twelve hour passes, but I actually

⁹⁴ The dog

overheard this, that we should most likely be starting the forty eight hour leaves as soon as the seven day fellows have worked their rota out, and as that will only be about two or three more weeks to wait, I think we may safely look forward to it in the near future. In the meantime, I intend to try to get home every time I get twelve hours, by one way or another, unless I suffer some very great setback, and then I shall have to sit back and wait for the best to happen.

Like you, when I left you on Tuesday, I nearly turned back, but as I was thinking it over the van came along that took me away, and I had to be brave and look as if I wasn't near to tears, although in actual fact, it would have taken very little to do the trick, but now I've seen you and know that I can do so again soon. I don't feel quite so gloomy as I did, and find that I can settle down to things more easily.

This is my last night on night work for a whole week, and I am just about ready for some real sleep, as I begin to tire quite early in the evening now, so I think that it has just changed in time. I am doing the office work this evening while the other two have gone out, and all I have done so far is to type letters to Reg Webb and Len, in reply to all the others that were sent to me.

Len said in his letter that he has was very busy now, but hoped to get some time to himself soon, and then he would put some real work in on the garden, I hope he starts soon, because I hate to think of you doing all that work by yourself, and in fact it is too much for you, and if you can't get any help you must only do what is necessary, and leave the rest and not worry about it, because I can put it right when all this trouble is over, and I hope that won't be so very long to wait.

Two very lucky fellows from our lot have gone on their seven days leave today, and did I envy them, I would have given anything to be one of them, but I am consoled with the thought that mine will come in the dim & distant future, and then it will be my turn to be envied and won't I be pleased.

Les has just come in with a plate full of mushrooms which he has been gathering by the aid of his torch, and they are quite nice ones too, we shall cook them tonight with anything else we can lay our hands to, and

have a damn good feed, you would be surprised at the appetite we develop in the night, and it's only just recently the cook has told us that we could have our breakfasts at night if we liked, and so of course we are taking the fullest advantage of it. If I try to get home in a day or so, I shall try to bring a bit of butter with me as I know it would be very welcome to you in these days of fat shortage, but I won't promise, because he may have got rid of his present stock, and I would then have to wait until he had accumulated some more, but I shall see what he has when the time comes. [...] *(whole paragraph of adoration)*

I must say goodnight and may God bless you and keep you for me safely until I return,

Saturday 5 October 1940. Waterford.

Two important things have happened today Barbara was married and I got my 5/- rise. There were only a dozen people in the church so it was a quiet wedding. Roy's brother-in-law (old Woodley's son) was best man. I don't know if Len was asked or not as I didn't think to ask Barbara. We managed to get a cake and although it was not iced, it was nicely decorated and I will see that you are sent a bit in due course. Dorothy 'phoned 40 hotels to try & fix them up with a room for the weekend but without success. They eventually went to Letchworth to stay with one of Roy's sisters. Mum made me drink your share of the drink so by the time I left at 3 o'clock I am afraid I felt rather dizzy. I had to come away then as the prospective lodger was supposed to be coming to see the room, but he didn't turn up. Perhaps he will come tomorrow I rather hope so, as he

sounds a suitable applicant. Penny has been naughty again. Auntie S washed some gloves to wear at the wedding and put them on the divan preparatory to putting them on. Unfortunately Penny got hold of them and chewed off two fingers, needless to say she got punished but I am afraid she soon forgets slaps.



Now its 9.30 pm and we're sitting round the fire. How I wish you were here. It is a rough night, but all is quite (sic) except for planes going over occasionally & sometimes a burst of gunfire not very exciting for Saturday

5 October 1940-Lt.Amwell



night is it. I am quite sober now as I went to sleep when I got home, although I am left with a headache. Don't think darling that I was in any way drunk. Only thoroughly dizzy. I cycled home all right anyway. I wonder will you manage to get home for the 18th December. Perhaps you may get your seven days then. You will have been in the army just over 4 ½ months then so you should stand a good chance. I am afraid I should feel very lonely if I had to spend that important day alone. I am sending you a photo of the plane brought down at Cole Green. I may cycle over and see it tomorrow.

There was a warning on just before the wedding, but the "all clear" went in time, although we could hear the guns going during the service.

Barbara must have been in a hurry to be married as she arrived 5 minutes too early, so we all had to stand up waiting for

the parson to come in Well now my darling it is 10 o'clock so I suppose I had better finish. There's a damn plane droning overhead and the guns are barking away. We don't mind them, but we all sit more comfortably in our

chairs when the planes have cleared off.

Penny & I send you our fondest love and we both hope you will soon be home again to make a fuss of us both.

Goodnight my dear darling I love you God bless you

5th October 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed letter



Dearest love,

I am now on the first day of my week of day work, I've been very busy too, as the colonel has been here to see how we are getting on, and I was busy painting the fireplace when he came into the office, it wasn't looking too good at that moment, either, but now it's finished and it looks fine. I'll tell you why I had to paint it, last night Les and myself cooked a really fine supper, only the cookhouse fire was out, and we had to do it on the fire in our office, we had for each of us four rashers of bacon, one egg and a lot of mushrooms which I told you about, and of course some fried bread, and you can guess what a splatter that lot would make, and it did, all over the wall to such an extent that the only solution was to paint it as quickly as we could. The sergeant said who's been splashing fat over the wall and I said the cause was due to paraffin from the lamps, and should I try to paint it, and he said that I had better do it at once, and that's how it was I was caught in the act when the big shot came round, but he didn't take any notice, so I guess that so long as we were trying to look clean, and it certainly does look nice now.

It's such a treat to be able to sleep at night, and I certainly look forward to this first night of undisturbed sleep, I thought that I should not like the day work much, but I find that it is quite a change and I am more in charge of things, because I'm pretty well on my own all day. Les has just been showing me a few of the things I have to do on certain days, and it

looks as if I shall have a busy time of it.

I just had a message to say that we have a Jerry plane in our area and of course we haven't seen it, but are all on the lookout although I don't quite know what they would do if it was seen. Our officer is a bit of a sprucer, the S.M. happened to look quite by accident at a letter he was typing the other day to Margaret Lockwood the film actress, and this is what he read we are just in the middle of a terrific air battle, there goes a Heinkel, down she comes, jolly fine Lewis gun crew we've got, there goes another, the noise is terrific with guns going all the time. What do you think of that? talk about swank, and we haven't seen a Jerry for ages, and even if ever we did I don't know if he would be low enough to shoot at, so you can see he was trying to make an impression, and also, how rumour starts, I'm afraid I don't think so much of him for that.

I have decide (sic) not to risk coming out of camp at night when I next come home, because I understand that others have done it too, and the officer told me yesterday that if you can find one concrete case of a man who spends a night out without permission, he will catch it pretty hot, little did he realise that he was talking to one at the time, and so I shall leave at three in the morning next time, and if I'm a bit later getting home, well, I shall just walk in to your office and carry you away, if Wheeler will let me, and if he don't, well I shall just stick all the time and annoy him. I shan't tell you what day I'm coming, but let it be a surprise for you like it was the last time.

I expect you will wonder where the work comes in on this job, as I'm typing this letter to you while in the office on duty, I'm just listening for the phone to ring. I hope you won't find so many mistakes in this letter as you usually do in the ones I write at nights, but I tell you now that if we had a rubber, I should rarely have anything wrong with my work at all, I have to type over anything I do wrongly, and hope it won't look too bad, but now it's daylight, and I can see what I'm doing, so there should be no cause for complaint.

We are now without a sergeant, he's gone away on a course and a sergeant major, he also has gone on a course and the section officer is in charge, and as he's always out, you can guess we do pretty well as we like, and apart from that, it is placing a lot of responsibility on me which I

don't mind, and teaching me to stand on my own feet a bit..

It looks as if I should have turned over a bit earlier than I did, but you will understand I know.

I received a typed letter from you today, and you still say you are in a daze, I must have made an impression on you, and like you, I wonder why your lovely legs ache, I hope it's nothing serious, but I guess I can put that right the next time I see you, or shall I make it worse, and anyhow, if it makes us happy I don't suppose you will mind that for a day or so. I too was in a daze all the night I was trying to get back here, and really it seemed more like a dream than reality, but it was a wonderful dream, and one I would gladly repeat everyday if I could.

Gee, am I having a time of it now, I've just been asked for a return of petrol used for baths and recreation during September, and as the lorry drivers are the only ones who know how much they use and there is no way of getting them, I'm sunk for the moment but I suppose Les will know how to deal with the situation, and then I can carry on. I don't want to make a fool of myself over this job, and you should know how it feels to be left on your own for the first time, and I feel a bit shaky on some things, and I'm naturally a trifle nervous, but by the end of the week I should be as good as the next man.

I hope you won't mind me typing to you occasionally, but I find it so much quicker than writing, I think I have told you that before, and apart from all that it gives me the practice I need, as there is not so much typing to do as you would think really. I'm having my tea while I send this to you, and it consists of toast, celery and if I want it jam, so you can see how well we are fed now that we have settled down. I think the celery was given to us by the local villagers, but it certainly makes the meal interesting and tasty.

One of our Mechanists has got his wife here with him this week, and last night he slept out, we persuaded him to do it, as he was not sure whether he ought to or not, and I said if I had the chance I should take it, and as he will only be down the road about a hundred yards it was worth risking, and in the end he did. I saw him this morning, and he gave me a sly laugh, so I guess he had a good time, he's only been married a month

and all he has had with his wife was the week's leave in which he got married, so this is his second honeymoon.

I think I shall have to say goodbye now because I have lots of things to see to before the officer comes back, and apart from that, I want Les to post this letter for me when he goes out for this evening, and that won't be long my darling angel [...] I'll soon be seeing you again, even though it may only be for a short time, at least it makes us feel nearer to one another, and that is as much as we can hope for at this time, and even more than you thought was possible isn't it? so rest well my precious and I'll be with you again soon, God bless you,

Sunday 6 October 1940

Waterford

Here is Sunday once more, the day you no longer like. I wonder how you spent it. Walking I expect. I am afraid that I have not had a very exciting day either. This morning I moved my cypresses tree and dug four large holes for the fruit trees I hope to order.

It was tiring work. I did try to dig up the new ground down the side of the lawn. I found it terribly hard I am afraid darling I shall find it a physical impossibility to ever dig holes down the side of the lawn large enough to take any trees. I just simply can't get the spade into the ground, although we have had lots of rain and as you know, I don't get any help from Len these days. However I will have another try as I am anxious to have my lime & beech trees growing in the garden. Well then in the afternoon I went down to the village to post the letter that I wrote last night. I got thoroughly wet in doing so, as it has been pouring all the afternoon & blowing a gale at the same time so you know what it looks like across the village when the rain is sweeping across in great gusts. . Not very cheerful. I had hoped to get out for a walk, perhaps as far as Cole Green to see the wrecked plane, but I had to stay in so I read a novel & nursed Penny. Not a very exciting

day was it? and I could have spend (sic) such an exquisitely happy afternoon with you up in our bedroom if you could only have been with me.

I wonder how Barbara & Roy are enjoying their honeymoon. Not as much as we did I know, because their time is too short and I hate hurrying things, especially loving on a honeymoon!! Do you remember our happy times? especially Jersey. Wasn't it lovely? Now as I sit quietly here by the fire and listen to the rain & the wind howling, it doesn't seem possible that we could have done these things and been so happy together and it makes me wonder if they will ever happen again. I don't think it does to rake up old memories when one is alone. They don't bring happiness, only sadness and useless wishes. They are all right when we are together to talk them over, but otherwise, it is best just to live for the day & not think too much.

I am afraid I haven't any news, and feel rather drowsy as I have had a hot bath (having scrubbed my own back) so my darling Bill I will say Goodnight to you God bless you [...]

6 October 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed letter.



Dearest love,

Sunday again, and don't I know it, my usual fit of depression is on me, although it don't seem quite so severe as it usually is, I guess that is because I saw you last week, and am going to see you again soon.

I am just recovering from the best dinner we have ever had in the army, roast mutton, Yorkshire pudding, and potatoes, there was marrow for those that like it, but I did without. The Yorkshire pudding was marvellous, I don't know whether it was a bit of luck on the part of the cook, or whether he is really better than I thought he was, at any rate we had a damn fine meal, and the sweet was apple fritters, I suggested these to him, and told

him how to make them, but when he came to cooking them, he could not understand why the batter came off them, and I'm afraid I couldn't help him either, so we ended up by making another batter pudding with the apple slices in it, and it was really good with the addition of a little sugar, and he is saving some for my tea.

The weather is pretty lousy at this moment, it's pouring with rain, and has been all day, and when it rains here it sure rains, and my evening out tonight too, but I think I shall take it, and go to bed early. Our officer told me last night that he is leaving us next Tuesday, and he is being sent to Scotland, I'm sorry he is going, because I was just beginning to like him, and getting to know his ways, he will be replaced by another one by the name of Floyd, I wonder if it is Ivy Rose's husband, I hope it is, but that is hoping for too much I think, and anyhow, we shall see in a day or two.

Talk about fun last night, you remember that I was on all day and half the night by myself, well after I had finished writing to you, I got an order through that we were to expose our beams for half an hour, and I got very busy on the R.T. telling all the detachment about it, and in less than no time I had four beams going, and did they cause some consternation among the locals, well, I had no sooner checked up on the beams in the sky, and was ready of course to sit back and watch them from my office, than another more urgent message came through to cancel it immediately, as there was an air raid on, and I had to go through the same nerve wracking process of calling all sites and telling them to douse as soon as they could, and you've no idea how dense some of the people are, when you want them to understand at once, but we got them all out in record time and here was nothing more to worry about, and then to crown this, another message came telling us to report any incendiary bombs which fell on military objectives in our area, and I had to pass this on to all sites, and I think it put the wind up some of the new fellows too, because they sounded very shaky over the R.T. but nothing happened, and I think I had all that trouble for nothing, but I can see now, why they all told me that I had a lousy job, and would never have a moment to spare, but I think I shall like it any way.

I have just finished a lot of typing, and if the other fellows had had to do it, it would have taken them all day, and that's probably the reason why

they think the job is hard, but I always seem to have time to write my letters in here, so it must depend on the speed of the individual concerned.

Les has gone home today, and taken the S.M. with him, but their time is getting short now, and they have only a few more hours to spare, but I wish I could go with him all the same, because they always have over twelve hours at home on account of his car, and the fact that they can go directly home, but I mustn't grouse, as I've had a fair spell at home myself considering the distance I am away from you. The time is getting on now, and I guess it will soon be teatime, and then we shall have some more apple pudding, and boy is that good. I've got Doug in here with me now, he came to write a letter, because it's nice and peaceful and he can sit at a table and write properly.

We had our blankets changed today for clean ones. And they have just come back, you ought to see the way everyone is arguing about them, you see, some of them had four instead of three, and they have only got three back, and of course there's hell to pay, but I've got the three I sent and I'm quite happy about it.

I'm a bit worried about our officer, he went out this morning and had not returned yet, and the poor old dispatch rider has got to go out all round the sites yet, and although I have everything ready for him to take out, I dare not send him until the officer comes back for fear he has found something else to go, and as the journey round is about seventy miles, and it would never do to make him go out twice, you can understand why I daren't act on my own, and yet on the other hand, it's pouring with rain, and if he don't soon go, it will be dark, and he'll have a hell of a ride, what would you do? I'm waiting for the officer and being on the safe side.

I have already decided to stay in tonight, the rain is too bad to go out unless one has to, and as I don't have to, I shall do the obvious thing, and stay in. I shall find something nice and romantic to read, and spend a quiet Sunday evening reading, but it could be infinitely more wonderful if you were here to share it with me. [...] (*a whole paragraph of adoration here*) and now my sweetheart I must say goodnight, and God bless you,

Monday 7 October 1940

Hertford



Hasn't it been a glorious day today and aren't the trees turning glorious colours I would so like to have spent the afternoon in the fields & woods with Penny (you too, only that's impossible) I am sure it must be lovely where you are now that autumn is here. I only wish you weren't so far away. I would so love to come & see the beautiful scenery.

I had two letters from you today of Thursday & Friday in which you say you may attempt to come home this week. Well darling, you know best, although how you are going to do it without the night to travel in I don't know. But I do know that I can't stop you if you have made up your mind to try it again. It was lovely to see you last week, only you mustn't be late in again you know and I expect that's what will happen if you come again in such a little time. You were lucky to get off scot free last time. Also you know of course that I can't take time off from work every time, but still, darling if you do get home, no-one will be more happy than I am to see you, but I'm not going to encourage you to do it till you get longer leave.

I am sorry to say I haven't got your "bombs" yet. I was so busy doing last minute things for Barbara I that I quite forgot to buy them. I am sorry. I will get them for you tomorrow darling.

We have just had our sixth warning today, it's 8pm. However, as Cuffley had 15 yesterday I don't think we can grumble.

You haven't said if you have had a chance yet to apply for dental treatment. I haven't heard from Arthur (or was it Les's) wife yet. Where does she live? If she writes to her husband every day I expect she, like me, hasn't much time to write to anyone else.

Have you been able to get your photo yet I am anxious to see it I think I might have one done for you later on, as I don't like you having the awful ones of me in your little concertina case. However I don't like Fosters so it shall wait till I can go a little further afield. At present there are too many warnings to get about much.

Do you remember that fellow Newlands who works under Wheeler for Colne Valley. Well he got a minutes notice ⁹⁵ on Saturday.

Do you know Inspector Francis NSPCC? I know him quite well and he told me the story this morning. It appears that Newlands makes his wife & children sleep on the floor while he sleeps on the bed. "I only have her in bed when I want her" he said. He earns about £20 per month & gives his wife £5 per month to feed himself & her and the children, as well as for clothes & heating. She is going to have another baby. The Inspector showed me a bunch of bills Newland owed. There was money owing for his grand piano, records, a £12-10-0 miniature railway, £15 for rent for the lodge Ted ⁹⁶used to have and £40 for something else. I think there must have been £150 to £200 owing. What a man! Anyway his wife & kids are going off to the Mother's in Northampton today. I can't think how people can live together in such a state. Surely they could never have been in love because if they ever were they would have been so happy, that they would have made an effort to remain in love.

Do you realize that on Dec 18th we shall have been in love for nine years? Surely that is a good test for both of us! ⁹⁷ We are such old hands at it that we shall never fall out of love again now, but only get more in love as time goes on.

O! By the way, there is business as usual today! But if you can afford to bring Ethel ⁹⁸home next time you are here for a night or longer, I should be glad.

Now my darling sweetheart I will say good night. There is a nasty sounding Jerry overhead. Hope he soon clears off. [...] Come home soon, but you mustn't take risks all the same

95 The sack?

96 Presumably Ted Ladds

97 They would have been 17 years old

98 French letter

7 October 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed letter.

Another day nearer to seeing you, and, in fact, by the time you are reading this letter, I shall most probably be with you again for a few hours.

I have the most wonderful news for you too, and it makes all the difference to my happiness here, Arthur is coming out today, and he is to stay here for at least a week, and probably longer, and anyway, he will be on our section, and I shall be able to see him sometimes. I am impatiently waiting for him to turn up, so that I can put him right on all the things he will have to know, and so avoid all the unpleasantness I had when I first came.

Since starting this letter, I have been absolutely smothered in work, and I had to take the letter out and do all sorts of things, but it's evening now and all the excitement is over, except of course for the fact that Arthur arrived this afternoon very late, but I was able to have quite a long chat with him, during which I learned that he managed to wangle forty-eight hours leave, because his town had been bombed, and he had not heard from home for over a week, and because he happened to be in favour at the time, he was allowed to go home and find out what was wrong, but fortunately, everything was all right, and he enjoyed his leave, he told me he had two nights at home, wasn't he lucky.

Two of our fellows have slipped off tonight, instead of tomorrow morning, and they stand a good chance of getting away with it because our officer has gone in to company H.Q. for his last night, and he's not likely to care much whether they are there or not, but all the same, I've got to have some good excuses ready if they happen to be wanted tonight, I only hope they don't, as I got their passes signed for them early, so that they could get away as soon as he had gone, I should think that one fellow from Northampton has nearly reached his home now, and the other comes from St. Albans so he won't be home quite so early, but he ought to be lucky enough to get home earlier than I did.

Arthur brought me some chestnuts from Sherwood, there are a lot of trees there, and while we were together, we often used to look at them and look forward to the time when we could have some, and now he has got

some here I am roasting them on top of our fireplace, and are we having fun, and they're quite good too, but the trouble is, that everyone else wants them too, and they won't last long at that rate.

I really have not much to say today as nothing has actually happened that would be of great interest to you, unless I tell you that I have spent the whole day at odd times on my belt, trying to make it a bit better, you see, I washed it last night, and it got wetter than it should have done, and so I've been pretty frantic ever since trying to save it, and I think I have succeeded, at any rate it looks better than it did, I also ought to tell you that if I don't get my bombs for the neck of my tunic, I shan't come home in it any more until I do get them from somewhere, as I have not been able to do so yet, I shall be sorry to disappoint you, but I don't like borrowing too much and it would be better to wait until I can acquire them for myself, so if I have left it behind, you won't worry too much will you, I must end this very brief note, and I'll be writing again tomorrow I hope, look for the time when I shall be with you again, [...] one day I'll be having that evening by the fire with you again, so dream about it, and pray that it won't be long to wait. Goodnight,

8 October 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed letter.

Here I am back at it again, and you never saw such a change in a place in all your life, you remember I used to scrub and polish every day, well, you ought to see it now, nothing has been touched since I went away, the tables are black, someone having taken the lamps to pieces on them I should think, and the floors, it's enough to break my heart, in fact I have decided to ask the officer to send me out as soon as he possibly can, it is the last straw.

And now darling having got that off my mind, I must tell you all about the journey here, I got to London in good time, and St. Pancras Station is still being used, in fact, it don't seem as though it was ever unused, but they had evidently been bombed again last night because they were all busy sweeping the broken glass up and I saw a truck splintered to atoms

with a car inside riddled with bullet holes, but apart from that there seemed to be nothing to get alarmed about. We had a slow trip though, and at Radlett we had to stop in the station and pull all the blinds down and wait for a half hour while the air raid was on, and I eventually got to H. at half past three, and only just managed to stop the lorry in time to take me back to this hole, or else I should have had to wait till very late tonight before anyone else brought me in. But here I am and never felt so utterly dejected in all my life, [...] you see I have been put straight on duty, although there is another man here now who is going to take on night duty till seven in the morning, so I am spared that ordeal thank goodness.

I seem to be pretty awful at typing now, I had no idea that I could go off so quickly, it has taken me ages to get this little bit done, but there is nothing else to worry about at the moment, so I shall just keep on pegging away telling you all the wonderful things you are to me. What a lovely week we had, it has given me some beautiful memories to keep for ever, and I shall bring them out whenever I feel depressed to cheer me on the way to success because unless things have altered I hope to be still in the same position as I was before I came home to you, and you know what that means, I want a shift, and I hope to get it by asking, I shall let you know how I get on.

You cannot imagine how a place can change in a week, we have a whole set of new fellows here on this site, they are the men who were taken from civil life two months ago, and now we have some of them with us, they are full grown men some of them over thirty, and all from Stafford way, and I am afraid I haven't much in common with them having already talked to one or two. The Battery H. is changed too, when I got there and went to the usual place to report I was sent to another room because there is now another Battalion of all things, installed there, and all this happens in a week, you see, the army is full of changes, unfortunately, not all for the best. But I still have you to think of [...]

I have just had another look round and the more I look, the nearer I feel to running straight back to you [...] the sooner this terrible war is over, the better it will be for all concerned, especially us. [...]

I still have one or two very thoughtful friends here, the boy who has not been married long, has been with me all evening and the lorry driver is

a very decent chap too, he has also been with me for some time, talking in between writing this letter to you, they are very sympathetic, having been through the same experiences themselves, and they are both browned off the same as I am so we are a happy trio. Les has gone in to battery H. tonight to see about his commission again, it seems to be very elusive but I hope he gets it soon he wants it so badly, and I should like to see him get what he wants because he is suited to this particular kind of work he is trying for, and in my estimation he is being wasted here, with his qualifications he ought to be snapped up and used without any more delay.

I'm afraid you will find this letter very sketchy, but that is how I feel, and I am telling you these things as I think of them, by the way, I did not get in to trouble for being late back so you need not worry about that, it appears that I was as early as the rest of them, so that's something to be thankful for.

I had a letter from Ted⁹⁹ waiting for me but there is nothing in it that would be worth repeating, he says that he hopes to get home for Christmas but does not yet know whether he will be allowed to leave the island,¹⁰⁰ so loud mouthed Loris is putting false rumour about again. There was also a letter from Jack telling me all about his visit home, and giving me his new address, he don't yet know of my lovely time at home [...].

And now, I must ask you to be brave and wait as patiently as you can for my next visit to you, and you felt a bit down, just look at the trees we planted together, and think of them in full bloom, and then you will be having me for a week again to share with you all the loveliness of Spring, so cheer up, and I shall soon be with you again even if only for two nights, it can be very wonderful, and if we are very lucky we can have this pleasure every two or three weeks, so really things are not so bad as they seem I suppose,

I have just been talking to the officer, and I told him that this office is a disgrace, he said "is it really dirty?" so I said it was heart breakingly so, he seemed quite surprised that I should think so, but I told him that we should have a bit of a spring clean tomorrow, and when he is in a more talkative

⁹

¹ Ladds

⁰⁰ Probably the Isle of Man

frame of mind, I shall tackle him on the subject of a move, I expect the chance will come tomorrow so wish me luck.

And now, I must end this letter to you, don't think I am too miserable even if I am, because I promised not to be, but I have a rotten headache as a result of travelling, and I shall be glad to get to bed, but it won't be long now, and in the morning I shall feel better perhaps, so I shall take my advice to you and try to be brave and face it all, so goodnight,

Thursday 10 October 1940

Waterford



To-day I feel bright & happy because I have seen you again, not a bit like last week, When I felt miserable because you had to go back I hope you feel happy too. We are so very lucky to have met twice so recently & now we can? forward confidently I think, to you getting longer leave soon so that you can spend the night at home. For the present I am quite content to wait a bit, and my only worry is whether you got back safely & in time, I expect I shall hear on Saturday morning. Also, of course I am anxious to know who your new officer is. It is really too much to hope that he is George.

Give my regards to Arthur and tell him he's a lucky bugger to have spent two nights at home. I expect you will be able to get off for an evening together, so work should not seem too black for you this week.

Anyway I have gained a more normal perspective on things since you came home. When I didn't see you for such a long time, my longing for you over reached all normal proportions and spoilt any other pleasures I might have had. Now I am prepared to wait patiently until you get a little longer time off. We spent a very uneasy evening after you left. Some bombs dropped about nine pm. It really sounded as if the village was being attacked. It rather upset the Aunts and we kept popping into the Hall as the planes came over.

However I don't think any dropped nearer than Tewin (but they must have been large ones) where I believed damage and casualties have been caused but I haven't any details yet.

I forgot to tell you yesterday that Waterford Verney (where Mrs Hills lives) is being sold to a camera and cine-photo making firm. I cant say that I keen on industry coming to Waterford but probably its only a war time measure. This is not general knowledge yet but I learned it through Longmores who are conducting the sale. Wish I could get hold of Mrs Hill. There must be some shrubs & flowers worth transplanting from her garden

Tonight we are to be tested for first aid. I did study last night (in between the bombs) but I don't feel over confident, although I am as good as the rest in the class, and I am wondering if any of us will reach the required standard. Hope its a quiet evening anyway. One can't concentrate if there is much activity overhead.

I am writing this at the Surveyor's office, but as I have some work I must do I think I had better finish now.

Thank you again very much for the beautiful photo, now I can always see you as you really are. I do like it very much and think it is as good as if you had come to London as I wanted you to. Goodbye my darling God bless you [..]

10 October 1940.

Farnah Green Camp

Typed letter.

To my darling wife, Here I am safe and sound, and what you have been waiting for most, I know, is whether I got back in time or not, well, I did, arriving here at five minutes past eleven. I was very lucky on the return journey, but it took me nearly an hour to get to St. Albans. I had luck there though, to get on a lorry that was calling at De Havillands and I saw the damage that was done to the factory, and I wonder that anyone got out

alive, the workshop is absolutely ruined, and looks an awful mess. After I did get to St. Albans, it was easy, I just hailed a lorry, and he was going to Dunstable, and I got out here, and waited by the traffic lights and the first car that stopped, was going to Coventry, well, that was right up my street, because he would pass the road I wanted, and could help me on about forty miles, so of course I hopped in and away we went. We stopped at a Café and I insisted on paying for the food we had, and we had quite an argument over it, but I won by going to the counter and paying before we got the food, the driver was rather annoyed at this, he said he earned more than I did and I should not do it, and then when we finished, he put a penny in a gambling machine, so I said I would stand by him as it was my lucky day, and it was, that penny won 1/6 for him in one go,¹⁰¹ and he gave me half, so we got our food for nothing after all, what do you think of that? It was then six o'clock, and we had to push on, and we made good time to the place where I had to get off, and he wished me luck and showed me the right road and away he went, and I walked exactly a hundred yards and stopped a car that was going to Nottingham, well, was I lucky?

And do you know, we averaged forty five an hour all the way, we often went over sixty, but he was a good driver, and it was a good road, so I did not worry, but I bet you will when I say that we did fifty in the black out, and landed in Nottingham at quarter past eight. I was then twenty miles from camp and I decided not to chance any more, and caught a bus to Derby, and got there just too late for the last one to Belper, but here again I was lucky, and a kindly policeman stopped a car for me, and I got to Belper at ten thirty, and I had a half hour walk to camp, and did I sleep, and I was very thankful for all my good luck and most of all for the prayers you must have said for me, and they were all answered.

I met the new officer he is a decent fellow, and I think we shall all like him, needless to say, he is not our Floyd I thought that too much to expect, but all the same, he is a young man, very tall and good-looking, and brand new from the officer's school, he is a second Lt. and a typical new broom, but nevertheless likable (sic), and I'm sure I shall get on with him all right so long as I shall no longer have to worry about emptying s...t buckets and

¹⁰¹ About £4.00 in 2022

shifting coal, as he has seen through the odd job men, and detailed them for various jobs which cuts us out of the aforementioned jobs, and we are of course very happy about this.

And here is the greatest news of all, the officer was speaking on the phone this morning about leave, and he was making arrangements for the old territorials to finish their leave rota out, and so I asked him how we stood for seven days, as we had been in the army for nearly three months without any leave at all, so he asked the person concerned about it, and here is the answer he got, when these old sweats have finished theirs, arrangements are being made for we new fellows to have some kind of leave, presumably seven days, even though we have only had three months service, and the officer said with a smile, I should not give up hope yet, and you can bet we won't we're all as pleased as dogs with two cocks, pardon the expression, but I think it calls for it.

I was very tired when I got up, but it was worth it, and I'll do it again if I get half a chance, and even Les is going to try tonight, so I have my chance to repay him for carrying on for me now, and if necessary I will lie like blazes for him, although I guess that will not please you, but the necessity may not arise, so don't worry too much will you. I think this new bloke will be more considerate than the last though, and with a bit of careful lying and wangling, we might get his unofficial permission to get away at nights. I was very busy this morning tidying the office up, and you would probably have laughed at the way I was kneeling on the floor scrubbing it, but it looks better for it, and now it's properly clean I shall keep it so, anyhow, it pleased the big shot, he said everything looked spick and span, and I took that as a compliment to my housewifery.

Have I told you we have lost our rubber, that is why there are so many mistakes again, I don't know what happened to it but it certainly is not here any more, and so I shall have to revert to the practice of typing over all the mistakes that I make. [...]

I had two letters from you this morning, one from Sunday and one for Monday, and the one you gave me made three, so I had quite a lot of mail to read, and it made the feeling of being so far away from you a little less depressing than last time, and also I know that if wanted to I could see you again next week, and this combined with the news of our possible seven

days in the near future, makes me feel quite content with my lot for the time being, although I know it could be much better, but I am able to get the best out of it now, and I know that this will please you. I'm glad that you liked my photograph, and I hope it will occupy a place of honour in your bedroom so that I may see you each night, and watch over you all the time, and now, when I am on night duty, you can look at it and think of me taking care of you to the best of my poor ability [...].

I forgot to thank you for the loving thought which prompted you to put chocolate in my gas mask case, I never needed it more than I did when I got to Belper with all the shops closed and I feeling as ravenous as I did, but after a moment I remembered you had told me of the chocolate, and did I think of you all the time, I'll say I did, in fact the chocolate was nearly as sweet as you are [...] .I must say goodnight for today, but I shall be with you tomorrow to tell you all about the things that happen here, so until then, Goodnight, and may God bless you,

Friday 11 October 1940.

Four Winds. Waterford



Dear Sweetheart,

Here it is 9.50 and I haven't begun your letter. I must let you have a few lines, just to show you are not forgotten. It is very quiet just now, although there is a warning out---the fifth today. It said on the wireless that the Midlands were bombed last night. Did you get any action? I am always very anxious to know if you are all right, and I expect you feel the same about me. We heard some bombs drop last night, which were very loud. We sat up in bed, but didn't get up.

However in the morning, when I went to work I found no glass in the office window, and you know what a huge window it is. A couple of bombs had dropped on Longmores School. Some of it is completely demolished and the remainder quite unusable. Guess the kids must be pleased. There were no casualties, but there is very little glass left in the shop windows in

Fore Street¹⁰². Bon Marche windows (or rather boards) have large red labels across them with the words "Blast! Blast!" across them and most others announce "Business as usual".

Peggy Victor's empty windows display a notice "Windows by the Invisible Window Co, Ltd".

It has been jolly cold in my office today with no window. I hope they will soon do something about it, but I expect it will be boarded up, which I am not looking forward to, as it will make the room dark and dreary.

Yesterday I saw a lorry go by with the wings of the German Plane which was brought down near here. They were painted pale blue and the huge German markings were in black & white. This is the first time I have actually seen the markings of a German. Have you seen one yet? Did I tell you about the night before, when the bombs at Tewin sounded so loud. We all hurried into the hall like two year olds, and laid (or tried to lay) on the floor. Auntie Nell, to use her own expression, was scrambling about like an old crab, and we saw the funny side of it, and it caused a laugh.

We had a young man and his wife come to see the room this afternoon. He wanted to fix up for his mother & father.

I am going to ring him up tomorrow as we didn't decide anything today. He really wanted a bedroom & a sitting room, which of course cannot provide. He left his card, and when he had gone I noticed that he was a parson. So we would be glad if we could fix up with his people as they are sure to be quiet, nice people. However, we shall see. I will let you know what happens.

You remember me talking about that nice girl Marjorie Stevens who works at the County Hall. (I told you her husband John was home last week on seven days leave & has only been joined up a few weeks before you) Well Marjorie is afraid she is going to have a baby and when I asked where the slip-up had been, it turned out that when she used to see him at week ends, she "couldn't wait for those damn things to melt" (Kegdels?) to put it in her own words so she did like the other girl & chanced it. Now she's a bit frightened. She is placed rather like me & cannot afford to give

¹₀₂ Hertford

up work. Some people must be in a hurry!!

It's rather late now my darling so I will say Goodnight, God bless you and keep us both safe for one another [...]

11 October 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed letter

Another day nearer to the wonderful seven days leave, I wonder if it will materialise, it will be so wonderful to have a whole week with you and all your charms, I don't know how I shall survive the period of waiting. Perhaps in the meantime, I can get a decent stretch of leave, say forty eight or so from this new bloke he seems as if he will listen to reason, and later on I shall certainly try him out, and see how the land lies, I like him very much, he is very good looking, and newly married, I'm sure that you would love him, he's so nice and clean looking, and he has made everyone so very much smarter in two days, that I find myself wondering what we shall look like here in a week. I have been painting all day long in the office, between answering the phone etc. and the place looks like home, but I despair of trying to keep the floor clean, I mop it every morning, and about five minutes afterwards, it is as dirty as if it had never been touched, no-one ever thinks of wiping their feet on the sacks I provided for them outside the door, and I don't care now whether it gets dirty or not.

I want to go to the pictures tonight, but have to wait here until the Officer comes back from paying out the sites, and he has taken Jones with him, and Les is on a twelve hour pass, so I have no-one here to take over while I go out. The batman tells me that the Officer is going to the pictures as well, so perhaps I shall get there after all if he gets back in time.

There is very little to tell you for today, except that it has been one of the loveliest days for weather I have ever known, it is a typical indian summer, and I find myself more than ever wishing you were here to share the wonderful scenery, it's absolutely marvellous, and we could have such a wonderful time if it were not for this terrible and wicked war. But perhaps when it is all over, we may be able to spend a holiday here, and then I can

show you all the loveliest (sic) places, and point out where we are stationed.

I wrote a long letter to Ted last night, telling him all the news I could think of, and the thing that puzzles me most, is the fact that I can never think of much in the way of news when I want to, but I managed a page and a half on this size paper ¹⁰³ so I don't think he can grumble.

Doug has left today on a seven day leave, and believe it or not, he is going to hitch hike to Bristol, so don't ever worry about me doing it to Hertford any more will you. I think that after all we shall be here for some time now, as all arrangements have been made as though we are here for a long time, the winter at least, and I'm sure it's going to be cold, I feel it already in the mornings, so I don't know it will be like in the real winter time, but I guess I shall get hardened off, and then when I come home you will soften me up again I suppose, but I shan't mind, [...] .

P.S. I am so busy today darling, that I can not find the time to stop and think of all the things I should like to, so perhaps you will wait until tomorrow and I might get more time to do this, I am working by lamplight now, and find it rather plays my eyes up, as we lost one of the lamps, so please forgive any mistakes, and I will be with you tomorrow, love,

Saturday 12 October 1940

Waterford



I wonder how you are getting on I haven't had news of you since you left me on Wednesday. I rather expected a letter this morning from Thursday, but it evidently got hung up somewhere & I expect I will get it Monday.

Today hasn't been very exciting, in fact my life never is now—only on those brief but glorious days when I am able to see you my darling. Williams asked me to come back this afternoon to do letters with him, so I was working till four However I didn't mind much as I was only going to spend the afternoon in the garden. When I got home I took Penny for a

¹₀₃ Foolscap

walk & landed up in Hertford, where I chose a small oak clock for Bob & Pearl. I will have it sent up to his mother & then he can collect it when he is next there. Don't you think that's the best idea. I will enclose a card from us both. I think you ought to write to him if you haven't done so. His mother's address will always find him. While in Hertford I met Miss Onyons who told me that George starts his seven day leave on Monday. As you know he has only been in the Air Force one month longer than you, and it is only three weeks since he was home for a long week end for his brothers wedding.

I came home across the marshes and it was getting very dusk by then, and the moon came up and everything was so still & quiet.

The river hardly seemed to move and the only noises were an occasional moorhen on the river. I felt very lonely & very sad, because it was so beautiful there & quiet, and there I was alone except for Penny with no one to talk to, and nothing to hurry home for, or look forward to, so you see I am not feeling very cheerful tonight, but you tell me you feel the same at weekends so that we can understand & sympathise with one another. I reached home just before the syrens went—for the sixth time today —

Well my darling Bill, this is a short letter but there seems to be now (sic) more news, so I will finish it tomorrow, so till then, [...] Sunday (*note overleaf*) Darling today is lovely & sunny & Barbara has phoned to ask me to play tennis at Ware so I am just going to have my dinner and then I must hurry off. I have been busy in the rockery this morning and have separated lots of plants in the Spring, so now my dear sweetheart please forgive me if I don't write any more, as I would like to post this on my way to tennis so that you will get it soon as possible Goodbye darling [...]

12 October 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed letter.

I received your first letter since I came back this morning, and I guess you got mine too, telling you of all my exploits on the way here. I feel like you do, strangely contented, and quite prepared to wait for a decent leave

which will enable us to spend a nice long time together, won't that be wonderful. [...] one day I will be coming home to you to stay [...].

The camp is looking very clean and tidy now, you can see the improvement everywhere you look, and it certainly is a pleasure to look upon, I wish you could see it, I'm sure you would love it all, and want to stay and see how we carry on our life under these conditions, and you'd be surprised at the success we have too, you've no idea how well we get on together.

I was supposed to start night work again this week, but things have for some reason or other, got a bit disorganised, and I shall have at least two extra days of day work, if not more, so I can pull up a lot of sleep in that time, although we have to get up earlier than we used to now the new officer is here, but it's not too bad, eight o'clock is the usual time, so that is about normal, and considering it is the army, I think that is pretty good, in fact it is quite a gentleman's life we lead. I think I shall have to take this (*letter*) out in a moment, so if the next line is not quite as it should be [...]. I have taken this out and have just got finished everything I had to do including have my dinner, and it looks to me as if I was very lucky, and got the paper in about right I had lots of things to do all of a sudden, you probably know how things seem to come all of a sudden, and then go slack again, well that is how it is here, and now I have a slack period once more, but believe it or not, I've had to take it out again, I guess you saw it this time. .

Poor old Les has not heard from his girl in Ireland for three days now, and he is beginning to worry about it, they are the same as we are, they write every day, and never miss, so something must be wrong with the post. We have just been reminiscing on the supper we had a few days ago when we spoiled the back of the fireplace, and saying that we needn't have worried, because all the people concerned are now gone, we have a new sergeant no S.M. and a new officer, and they were the only people who mattered to us, but still the paint has definitely made an improvement, and gets admired by everyone, the Major visited us yesterday, and commented on it, and I took it for a compliment to my handiwork, but then I'm pretty good you know, so it doesn't surprise me very much. I bet you think I'm getting conceited, but I'm only playing you know, and really very raw

compared to the others, but I am learning and getting better every day.

The weather is perfectly lovely today, I do wish I could be home this week it's too beautiful to think of having to spend apart, but it seems that this is what will have to happen and all we can hope for is that the weather will save some nice days for us when we get together again.

I am getting stumped for news again I'm afraid, and I shall end, [...] can you understand this I am not using the space bar now and I'm sure you will take a long time to sort this out, so I'll start to use it again I hope you will forgive the mucking about on the other page, but I just felt like it at that moment, and so I let it come out to amuse both you and myself.

I really have nothing more to say in the way of news for today, but I shall be with you again tomorrow, please take care of yourself [...].

13 October 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed letter.

My own darling wife,

Here it is exactly four o'clock in the morning and it is no longer Sunday, although I have dated this letter from that day. I have been so busy, and was on the go all day, and then had to change over to nights and keep straight on through the night, and I think I told you that we had a new Sergeant as well as a new officer, well this Sergeant is a far nicer fellow than the other one was, but he is a devil for work, and as there is such a lot of things to do to straighten up, I have been typing and filing all night long up till now, and I've been going all the time.

There is one consolation though, this fellow appreciates all that I do, and gives credit if he thinks it is due, and I think that if he remains here, and if I do as well, I should be able to get on pretty well, anyhow, I like the present system of things better than the old one, I have more to do, and the Sergeant is very reasonable, because he says that I need not have

anything else to do but office work, he thinks that it is a full time job, and it is, the way it is being run now, we are taking all the responsibility that the officer used to take, and because he is brand new, we also have to tell him what to do each day, and he has come to look upon us office boys as the only salvation he has.

I had a bath yesterday morning Sunday, and did we enjoy it, but we weren't allowed to stay in Derby this time, after we had finished however, we managed to have a little look round, and buy some cigarettes and sweets.

I went out last night, and old Jones took me into a "pub" where I had two halves, and do you know, if I had had one more, I'm sure I should have been drunk, I think it must be the atmosphere more than anything else that is responsible for the way it affects me, but the fact remains, that I had a job to walk straight when we came out. I took Les some fish and chips back, as he loves his tummy you know, and he absolutely fell on me with gratitude when I gave it to him, he had been there all the evening he said, with nothing to eat, and then I came with the answer to his prayers, he was all over me, and the officer and sergeant were there too, I think they were a bit jealous of him, and if they had thought of it they too would have asked me to get some for them, but I did not allow for them to be there, and so they were unlucky.

I've got some jolly good tea here, it was made a few minutes ago, and it is the only thing that is keeping me awake, but I have only a few more hours to go now, before it will be time to pack up, and I must say I shall be glad for once. I find myself wishing I was in bed with you, wouldn't that be lovely? [...] I have just been mounting that snap I have of you with Penny, I am going to pin it over my bed the same as Les has over his. I can then show all who look at it what a wonderful wife I have.

In spite of the fact that I saw you only a few days ago, I find myself longing to see you again and I don't know how I can wait for the wonderful time which must come sooner or later, [...].

One of my lamps have gone out now, and I'm sure I'm not going to fill it at this time of the day, so I shall have to finish this letter to you, [...] by the light of one, but even if I had to work in the dark, I could still type [...] .

It's five o'clock now, and I have to go and call two fellows who are going on twelve hours pass, they're both going home to Northampton, and they want to get on the road as soon as they can, so please excuse me while I go to call them-----It's done now, I had to light the lamp in our hut so that they could see to dress, and I guess they will soon be after me for a cup of tea, but they will be unlucky this time, for I have drunk it all, in between writing this to you.

I scarcely know what else to write about now, I have told you all the little things that have happened, and I sincerely hope that you have not been bored by me telling you, because on night work, we are not supposed to do anything but plotting and R.T. and here I've been typing etc. all the time, and I didn't tell you that I'm alone did I. You see, it appears that only two office workers are allowed to a section, and so to cover this, they've made Jones a second dispatch rider, and left the office work to Les and myself, and I flatter myself when I say that this is the more important of the two, or should I say, I hope I don't flatter myself, because I really think that this is an important job, and on this very cocky note, I shall end, because I have one or two things to get ready for the fellow taking over from me, so until tomorrow, goodnight, God bless you,

Monday 14 October 1940

Waterford



At last I have heard from you this morning that you arrived back safely & in time. I am so glad. Of course, you had a good deal of luck, but I think that you made the journey very well, and considering the time you allowed yourself for returning, one would never believe that it was so far.

Of course I am very thrilled to hear that you may soon get some real leave, How soon do you think it will be Two weeks, three weeks or longer than that? Now don't you do anything rash and have it stopped. That would be awful. I do hope you are able to get home before the bad weather sets in. It would be so nice to spend some of the time in the autumn woods and

fields with you.

Of course as soon as I know when you are likely to be home I will warn Wheeler I know it is difficult for you to say with any accuracy but perhaps a little later on you may get to know within a little, as of course it is hardly fair for me to expect to get off from work at a moment's notice. Anyway now we both have something really nice to look forward to, and we ought to feel quite Happy.

Your mother walked over to see me yesterday morning (Sunday). She says George is coming home today to make arrangements for his wedding, so I expect there will be excitement at No. 11 soon. I wonder if you will be able to get to the wedding. Your mother will be disappointed if you don't I expect.¹⁰⁴

When you get a piece of Barbara's cake, will you save me the little card? There is a little bit in the Mercury¹⁰⁵ about the wedding that I sent in. I will show you the cutting when you come home. Barbara, Dorothy and I had a good game of tennis yesterday afternoon at Ware. It was such a beautiful day. I quite enjoyed the exercise, and I believe it did me good, as I felt beautifully warm all the evening and night, while the Aunts were complaining of the cold

Poor Penny had an accident last night at supper time. She knocked over the kettle which I had stood by the electric fire. It was full of boiling water and it went over her back & tail. She certainly let us know she was hurt, poor little thing, and she went into the kitchen & wouldn't come anywhere near the fire again, of course we made a fuss of her, and after she had got over the fright a bit and had a biscuit to compensate her, she realized we were sympathising with her and played up to it. She sat and whimpered and looked as miserable & sad as she could, and you know how sad she can look.

However, our attention was diverted then, as some bombs dropped uncomfortably close and we all hurried into the hall, to sit on the floor on cushions. Auntie Sybil was in such a hurry to sit down, that she tumbled (sic) over backwards, head over heels. She did look funny, I can tell you. Auntie

¹

¹⁰⁴ Bill did attend his sister's wedding

¹⁰⁵ Local paper

Nell, who had not yet managed to sit down laughed so much that I am afraid there was a large pool on the floor and she had to change certain garments. In the morning I found that bombs had dropped in several places nearby, the nearest to us being at Gifkin's House. Two people were killed at Watton and a bungalow demolished at Birch Green, damage to Windy Ridge, and at the Trower's house (where Madeline works) in Bengoe. We don't want many nights like that, they are a bit too close to be comfortable.

The parson is supposed to be ringing me up today to say whether he wants the room or not, but in any case we can't take anyone for a week, as Aunt Nells relations from Streatham are coming this next week end they were coming before You will remember that they were coming a fortnight ago, but owing to her brother having a severe attack of gout, had to put off their visit.

I'm glad the chocolate came in useful. It is difficult to get sweets around here now. Woolworths haven't had any for over a week now. I think they will be still scarcer as time goes on as Mrs Lewis ¹⁰⁶ tells me that some sweet & chocolate factories (won't mention names) have been bombed. So make the most of them while they are available.

I have been home to lunch since I started this letter & saw the bomb crater by Gifkin's. It is just by the river on the Waterford side of the house, and about 20 yds from the road. There is no damage whatever apart from a nasty hole in the river bank

Now darling much as I regret having to stop talking to you, I must get on with a little more work. There is some beautiful music on the next door wireless, which is not very conducive to concentration. Did I tell you my window is mended now.

It looks quite smart –and its much warmer

Goodbye my darling God bless you and keep you safe for me. [...]
P.S Before I seal this I am going to try & buy a T.Rubber ¹⁰⁷. Please tye it to your machine by the Shift key

¹⁰⁶ Probably the sweet shop owner in Castle Street

¹⁰⁷ Typewriter

Thursday 15 October 1940

Waterford



Thank you for your letter of Friday's date. There certainly wasn't much news in it except that the office looked spick & span, and also that you loved me. I am afraid I haven't much news for you except that you nearly lost me last night. A bomb fell at the bottom of the Garden in the little field where we used to get the nice black earth. It was about 150 yards from the house, not immediately below our garden, but a little further along nearer the MacSmiths¹⁰⁸. It was about 10 pm & I was just in the kitchen making toast for supper, when I heard it come whistling over the house.

I threw myself on the floor in the hall, and the house absolutely seemed to rock, but it was fortunate that it fell on very soft ground, and did no damage. There was a little plaster down from a corner in our bedroom, but even that is negligible.

I went to see the Crater this morning. It is about 20 feet across, and fairly deep, but as it is half full of water, it is difficult to judge. It has broken down the hedge, our side of the field. (*As a child I used to play in this crater with my friends-by then it was full of brambles & weeds MF*).

I am wondering if you are all right as it said on the wireless these last two days that considerable damage was done in a Midland town, but it probably wasn't near you but I always wonder.

Did you get your typewriter rubber in yesterday's letter all right? You should find it quite useful— and it will rub out well.

I'll see if I can get you a few more envelopes before I seal this letter. I am sorry I can't put in a stamp, as I have only 2 ¾d in my purse, and I shall have to spend 2 ½d of that on sending this letter off.

I have been to the Heath to lunch since writing the last sentence Pearl (Ron's wife) is there. She arrived unexpectedly yesterday. The

¹⁰⁸ North side

bombing has been bad again at Sutton and as several houses were demolished very close to her house and twenty four more condemned after the weekend raiding, she has come down for a few nights of (comparative) quiet

I have just taken my red dress in to Suitalls to have the bottom picot-edged, so now it is almost ready for the day when you will take me out in it. But I am rather afraid that if these night raids continue, there won't be much activity in the evenings this winter. People don't even like to go out to the cinema

Now darling as I am at the end of the paper & my news I will say Goodbye, God bless you, sweetheart, and keep you safe till we meet again—which I hope will be very soon [...] P.S. All girls seem to have an Army or Airforce badge or brooch of the particular division or regiment that their boys are in. Are you saving up to buy me one?

Wednesday 16 October 1940.

Waterford



Good morning my darling,

Here I am at the Surveyor's office which always means some un-interrupted time in which to write to you. The Surveyor is out inspecting bomb damage, that's why I am quite frequently over here to look after the office.

We had a noisy and disturbed night last night, although thank goodness, no bombs as near to us as the previous night. All the Council houses at Bayford were rendered uninhabitable (more on the rate this will mean) and there were some 20 bombs dropped round Cuffley, also at the Isolation hospital & Amwell cross roads.

They must have been large ones as they woke me up and I generally sleep through anything. We have had three rotten nights since Sunday, and I shall be glad when this hunter's moon has gone. It's very beautiful of course, but I'm afraid one doesn't appreciate it in War time.

I received two letters from you this morning of Saturdays & Sundays dates, and I am very glad to learn that you like your officer & your sargent (*sic*). If they appreciate what you do, I know you won't mind working hard, and its nice to know that you will not have to do much work besides office work. (no more coal shifting) and I do hope the officer will let you have so (*sic*) real leave soon. If he is newly married he will probably sympathetic, and let you go, if it is possible. Where does he live? You say that there are to be only two office workers, Does that mean that you will have to share the night & day work between the two of you? If so, surely that means working longer hours, or does it mean that you are merely working alone, instead of in pairs?

You don't mention anything about Arthur in your letters. Is he still with you and if so, are you not able to see him?

Ron ¹⁰⁹ came over last night for a little while. I sewed some new curtains for the windows of his room, as, of course the others were ruined when the land mine exploded.

Len ¹¹⁰, as usual hasn't been near, although he told Ron he was coming over last Saturday. I have given up any hope of getting help in the garden from him, and I haven't seen Kitty for seven or eight weeks.

We still haven't got anyone for the bedroom, Nothing came of the parson –which, perhaps, is just as well. But I hope to get some one soon Well darling, my little store of news has run out I'm afraid except for one thing which I haven't told you yet, and that is of course **I love you** The green does not indicate jealousy but I haven't any red in here It will be so lovely to have you home again so that I can tell you instead of always having to write it now, but it will be far far more lovely when you are home for good, and we can have our house to ourselves. I wonder if things will ever be just the same as they were before. Somehow I don't think they ever will be. For one thing we shall not be so well off But I am learning now to do with much simpler food. You would be surprised if you could see us

¹⁰⁹ Dempster

¹¹⁰ Wagstaff

on an ordinary day. We never have cake except at weekends and often not even then. Just bread and jam for tea. I must say it came rather hard at first but I am getting used to it now, Although I sometimes wish for something sweet. However I expect that when you come home, we shall lash out a bit.

Anyway once the war is over and you are home, we shall be content to be at home and perhaps not bother much if we can't have all we should like Well my darling I seem to have filled up another page so I will finish now, in case my babbling bores you, so au revoir till tomorrow

5pm. (*Added notes*) Wheeler has just been in. He has got the miseries & says life isn't worth living. I told him he doesn't know when he is well off. I went mushrooming this dinner time down in the little field at the bottom of the lane¹¹. I have got a nice bagful which I am taking to your mother. There are lots more little ones coming up. Aren't they late this year? The middle of October! It just shows how mild it is all my love

16th October 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Dearest love,

First of all, allow me to apologise for not writing for two days. I will tell you why, the day before yesterday I was made to shift 10 tons of coal, with the help of only one other fellow, well, this wasn't too bad if I had slept the night before, but as you know, I'm on night duty, and get very little sleep, and so it went rather hard with me, & then after an hours rest, I had to go on again for another night, I don't know how I kept awake even now, & I was too tired to write even to you, & when I went to bed in the morning I couldn't sleep, until I got up in desperation & had the most terrible headache I have ever had in my life. After dinner I was told I should have to help clean the camp kettles which were filthy, you can tell how I felt with my head, & then I could stand no more, Les insisted on doing it for me, & I cracked up, believe it or not, & I'm ashamed to admit it but I cried with pain, I was absolutely all in, & they began to get worried about me, & made me

¹
¹¹ Vicarage Lane, Waterford

go to bed, & I've only just got up, my head is a bit better, but I've still not had enough sleep, I simply can't get off now, & I think I have had too much work in the past. The officer asked me how I was this morning, & told me I should report sick, & I told him all I got was aspirins and it wasn't worth going sick, because they thought I'm leg swinging, but he told me I am to go sick tomorrow morning, & keep going until they take some notice of me, anyhow, I think he realises he has been driving us night workers too much, & we might get a little more consideration now.

I hope you won't think I'm a baby, believe me when I say I have never felt so awful before, & even now, my B.P., is troubling me, but so long as I can be left alone to get on with my job, I should be alright.

And now my darling, here is some wonderful news, I think, we mustn't be too sure yet, I think I might be coming home for seven days, the week after next, it remains to be confirmed, but the rumours & facts combine to make the outlook fine, & all we can do now is hope & pray for it to come soon. I shall of course keep you informed of all the things I can hear & know, & I will telegram you when I know for certain. [...] I'm dreaming all the time of seven heavenly days with you [...] walking through the woods alone, enjoying God's goodness, and I can hardly wait for those days to come.

I think, from what you tell me of the damage done in Hertford, & to your office windows etc., that you had a very narrow escape, & it was very very lucky for us both that it happened at night, or you might have been badly cut about, & I couldn't bear to think of a single hair on your lovely head being hurt, & please God you will never be nearer to hurt than that.

I should be on a twelve hours pass, but of course after allowing the others to do my night for me, I could do no other than forgo it for the time & do some work here today, not that there is so very much to do now, all the cleaning & tidying is done, & there is no typing for the moment, & the telephones are silent for a change, the officer is out thank goodness, he seems to be unable to bear to see anyone resting, & is not half so nice as he at first appeared, but perhaps when we are cleared up a bit he might relent, & life pursue its normal course once more.

Although I have not written lately, I have very little to write about, I

must apologise for the extremely short letter, & promise you a nice long one as soon as I have a few moments to myself, but as things are at the moment we have to snatch what we can, & make the most of it, so until later today perhaps, I will say goodbye, & try to get this posted as soon as I can,

16 October 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed letter.



I guess you will be surprised to receive another letter from me for the same day, but the truth of the matter is, that both the sergeant and the officer have gone out, and there is only me left in the office, and as there is nothing to do for a change, I felt I could really settle down to get a real letter off to you [...].

I have already dwelt at some length on my breakdown, in the other letter, so will not worry you any further with that, but I cannot make too much of the prospect of our coming holiday, I hear things in favour nearly every minute, and I really think that it is not so very far away, that is, no more than a week or two, you will, of course be informed as soon as I can get it confirmed. I was sitting on the doorstep with Les today, and looking at the beautiful country at the trees and grass, thinking all the time of wonderful walks we shall have with Penny alone as company, we can have another and more beautiful honeymoon, and nothing shall make us unhappy for that week. It seems too good to be true, and even now I daren't hope too much, but now I have a little clue as to the possibility, I can't help looking forward to it a little bit, to the extent that if it fails to materialise, I shall be very upset, but we won't look at it (sic) from that angle, we'll just dream of the wonderful time we are going to have.

I forgot to thank you for the rubber you sent, it is very welcome, and

the sergeant asked me where it came from, so of course I told him, and he smiled very knowingly I thought, but I am trying to get this done without making a single mistake, I wonder if I can do it? it seems a lot to hope for, but I am sacrificing my speed to achieve it, so it might be done. (*but see previous paragraph*) !

I am on till about ten thirty tonight, and then I can go to bed again, they have taken me off night work for a while, but I shall have to go on again soon because Les is having his seven days next week, and that means that we shall only be two here, and the result will be some very hard work I'm thinking, but as the hours pass, I am gradually feeling better, and I think a few nights of real sleep will make all the difference to me. You'll see I had to use the rubber there, and I bet it won't be the last time either. One of the fellows has just returned from a forty eight hour leave he was granted because his home had been bombed, I haven't been able to find out how much damage was done, but I think we are lucky not to have this worry yet, and I hope we never shall, I should hate to have to take leave on these grounds, it would be too awful to think of.

Just finished another spell on the R.T I have a lot of messages to put over, and they are never there when I want them, so I have to wait until they call me, then tell them what I want to. However, I usually manage to get them all in the end, but it's a bit (*space appears here*) of a worry sometimes. I don't know what has happened here, it looks as if the space thing has been moved, but we're back again to normal now, so I'll carry on. I have company now, one of the mechanists, the young one who has only been married for four weeks, he is a decent kid, and we seem to get on pretty well together, but he's very quiet, and therefore the conversation is non-existent if that is the correct thing to say. He has a dog here with him, a terrier I think of no fixed parentage, but it is very affectionate, and we're great pals, he reminds me of home a little bit, I think that is why the boys keep pets.

It's pouring with rain now, and when it rains here, it seems to absolutely fall down, fortunately it is during the hours of darkness, and not so many people will have to worry about it. The fellow I had with me a minute ago is gone now, we just had a call to say a lorry is stuck out in the wilds somewhere, and he will have to go out and rescue it I'm afraid, and I

was just saying the rain would not affect many people, one can never tell, can one?

I think I have turned over a bit sooner than I need have done, but I really thought I was getting near to the end of the sheet, however we won't worry, because it's not my paper, and there is plenty more if I want it, but it's no use writing on with ink, as you've probably seen. The officer found that out the other day when I gave him a bit to write on, and in the end, I had to type it for him.

I seem to be left in possession of the camp now, at least I am left alone in the office, which is very unusual, because someone is always popping in to see how I'm getting on, but I don't mind really, [...] *(a whole paragraph of adoration follows)*

I am beginning to tire a bit now, my head is troubling me again, so I think I had better abandon this letter to, (sic) for now, but I will be with you again tomorrow to tell you how things are going, there are all sorts of little odd things to relate, when I am allowed the time to stop and think them out, and I think I shall tomorrow, because they tell me that I have to go on night work again as Jones thinks he is going on his twelve hour pass, with no thought of anyone but himself, it seems to me that although he is good natured to a point, he is still very selfish, and wants more for what he does than it really costs him, but there I shouldn't grumble, [...] I find myself wondering if you would be asleep now if we were in bed together, do you remember the times that you used to ask me to talk to you so that you could go to sleep? [...] I may be with you in a fortnight [...] I will say goodnight, and may God bless you, and keep you for me alone, and me for you, sleep tight,

Sweetheart of mine
Woman Divine
Meet me in dreams
Our world now it seems
There we can live
And all life can give
Will be ours to the last
What more can we ask
Till this war is won
And the battle is done
Till then my dear love
We'll live up above.

CHAPTER FIVE

Thursday 17 October 1940

Hertford



My own darling,

No letter from you this morning but as I had two yesterday, I cannot grumble. I am afraid I am not in the best of humour today. I will tell you how it is. A land mine has been dropped some where between our village & Broad Oak End, it is nearer Broad Oak End than us. Now Mrs George¹¹², as you know is a proper scare monger, and just lately, as a result of all this activity she has been a perfect nuisance. Anyway, because of this unexploded mine we are told to keep all our windows open. Well, she went round to the Aunts this morning as soon as she learned about the mine and properly put the wind up them by saying that they should get out at once. She has packed a few clothes and was off to the Cherry's? with the dogs & Alan (who is nearly as scared as she is).

Well she rang me up from the Cherry's to say that the Aunts' wanted me to come home at once and pack what I wanted because they were off to the Heath. Mind you, she had heard nothing at all officially except to keep the windows open. Well in about 10 minutes the Georges had cleared off in the car, not even asking the Aunts if they would like their cases taken as far as Hertford.

Well I rang them at the Smiths¹¹³ and said how silly it was to clear out when they had not been told to anyway-the mine is about a mile away I believe. Besides Mum can't put them up as Pearl is there this week, and if she took them in there would certainly not be room for me. So that is one reason why I am bad tempered because Mrs George is a scare monger and causes more worry & trouble than is necessary. But I also feel cross with Aunt Nell.

¹

¹¹² Neighbour

¹¹³ Neighbours on the other side

You know, we all have a case packed. Well when I got home this dinner time she said if they had to get out and I wasn't there they couldn't carry my case. Well perhaps they can't but she also said my cash box could not be taken either. They couldn't manage it think that's very selfish of her. They can manage all their own valuables & winter clothes---surely they could find room for our little cash box. Also they couldn't take Penny as she would pull on the lead too much!!!!

So now you know why I feel cross. Don't you think its mean of them? Sorry to let off all that steam—but as you know, I see no-one at all that I can talk too about things, so I must write it to you. It was a terribly wet night last night—and I didn't know if you might be home, as you said that if you could get away early you would come—so of course I hoped against hope that you might come although as it was such a beastly night, I couldn't wish too hard, as you would have been soaked through getting home
O! gosh I wish you were coming home tonight! I need some-one to rid me of a headache & a bad temper, and I think that you could do both these things nicely.

Now darling, I will finish this grumpy grumbly letter I still love you in spite of everything else—if only I could be near to you!!!! Goodbye my darling, I love you Please come home as soon as you can (to spend a night)

P.S. I am keeping an account of the air raid warnings that we get. So far my list has reached 123.✈

P.P.S. Will let you know as soon as poss if we get any damage from the mine.

PPPs. I know the enclosed will come in useful. You will see that your name & number is on each one

17 October 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed Letter.

Here I am again on night work, and feeling, at the moment fairly fit, but it's only two o'clock, and as I was working this morning as well, I still have a chance to feel not quite so fit, but that's looking on the black side of things.

I saw the M.O. this morning, and he took a lot of trouble over me I thought for an army doctor, but he is a different one now, and seems to be fairly popular, after a thorough examination, he gave me some tablets which he said should put me right, and I find that they are the new drug "M&B" so it will be interesting to see the results. He has given me enough to last a week, and I only have to take one a day, they are full of quinine by the taste that remains, but I hope they will make me sleep, because I'm sure that is what I need most.

I went to the pictures tonight with a fellow who, like myself, intended to go by himself, so we teamed up, and went together, we saw a rather good show, and it brightened me up a bit, for to tell the truth, I was not looking forward to the prospect of a night's work after no sleep all day, but I am to stick out for tomorrow off, and see if I can't catch up on a bit of the sleep I've lost. When we came out, we had arranged for the Section car to pick us up, we found it waiting for us in the main street, and we then went for a joy ride to one of the sites about twenty miles away, and arriving here, we were very welcome, mainly because we had the rations with us, and I met a fellow who is the son of the famous Jellyman, you must have heard of them, they make Kidderminster carpets, he is a very nice fellow and I spent a jolly nice half hour talking to him, and drinking one of the best cups of tea I have tasted lately.

It was then eleven, so we had to make tracks for home, but I must say I enjoyed it very much and I have made an arrangement with the Mechanist with whom I went, that the next twelve hours pass I get, I am going with them on their daily round, it should prove very interesting and I shall learn where all the detachments are situated.

Les is off tomorrow on his seven day stretch, and he is of course going to Ireland where his girl lives, I think he has a very long and tiring journey before him, but if he loves as we do, and he says he does, he will consider it worth while I know. I haven't heard anything more about our leave yet, but the rumour still lives on, and the prospects are fairly good still, so keep on praying with me, and we shall soon be taking Penny for a run through the woods.

I haven't had a lot to do tonight, and it's about time that we slackened off a bit, because the officer is a bit too hot for our liking, but we are wearing him down, and the new broom is losing some of its newness thank goodness. Do you know, Les and I spend four hours every morning, cleaning the office out, we have to scrub the floor, and the tables, dust the shelves and telephones, clean doorknobs, and the R.T. set has to have its woodwork oiled to keep it looking nice and new, we also have two lamps to fill, and clean, and the fireplace to clear up after that dirty blighter Jones has finished his night duty, but I'm on now, and Jones is on in the morning, so I shall have to show him that the mess made at night, has to be cleaned in the morning, and perhaps he will be a bit more careful in the future.

I scraped the paint off the hearth just now, so that we can black-lead it, we find that the hot cinders burn the paint always, and we have to repaint it nearly every day, and as that don't suit us very well, I thought it would be worth the trouble to make a good job of it, well, I don't know if I've made much of a go now, but at least it don't look any worse than it did before, and it should improve with wear, so I'm hoping for the best.

I'm terribly afraid that this letter is a bit scrappy, but I know you love to hear the things that happen, so I am trying to tell them as nearly as I possibly can.

We had a mad scramble this morning, we were told that the Colonel was coming round to inspect us, and old Les and I were at it all the time, cleaning and polishing until the place looked grand, and the old blighter didn't turn up, our officer was very cross about it all, he had to go out to one of the sites to meet him, and waited about for three hours before he knew that he wouldn't be coming, needless to say, he was none too pleased when he did get back here again, but I think a bit of that now and again, will do him some good, because he seems to think that everyone

has got to be waiting for him, and today he had the situation reversed, and I know that it disagreed with him.

I did not receive a letter from you this morning, so I am looking forward to two in the morning, I wonder if I shall be lucky or not, I do love to have a lot of letters from you at once, and then I look at the post marks to see which one to open first, it gives me a lovely feeling of security in life to know that I have someone who really loves me [...].

I do hope you have had no more bombs near you, it makes me so worried to think you are in so much danger, and if I had a chance to transfer to the London area to do some real work in the war, I should do so at once, but that is rather more than I can hope for I'm afraid, so I guess I shall have to endure the thought of you alone in that danger area with none to love you as I do, and watch over you and the least I can do, is to do my job here as well as I can, and hope that it is helping to win us through.

I have just been out to the cookhouse to make up the fire for the cooks, and to put on the water for a cup of tea, the night is a wonderful one, as bright as day, and certainly too lovely to be marred by the thought of war, I cannot understand why such brutes are born in every generation that passes, in such a world as this, nothing should exist but love such as we know, and then what a wonderful place it would be. [...] *(a whole paragraph of adoration)*

And now, I have to confess that I have no more to write about for today, but I shall be with you again tomorrow night, [...] goodnight, and God bless you,

Friday 18 October 1940

Waterford

(2 more months to the 18th December)



I was terribly sorry to hear this morning that you are not feeling well and I don't wonder, with so much work to do & no sleep. I think it is awful

that you are not given the proper 7 or 8 hours each day.

The day workers get it so surely the night workers should have their share too. I think you must have been very worked up to have actually broken down & cried, but I'm sure it wasn't the pain that actually made you do it. That was just the last straw It was that you had thoroughly overdone things and not had that very necessary sleep. Perhaps it will be the cause of you being treated a little more leniently in future. I do hope so. I should hate you to be ill. You must try not to worry about anything as that will only make things worse Anyway, if you get more sleep now, perhaps with the thought of that wonderful seven days near at hand, you will improve & soon be quite all right again.

It really will be marvellous if you do get leave so soon and it will be much sooner than I had dared to hope, as it will be after only three months service.

I'm afraid it no use to say we mustn't bank on it because we can't help doing so, as soon as there is even a rumour, so I hope we won't be disappointed.

I hope you received the letter with the hankys (sic) in. I am always a bit dubious about anything like that reaching you.

I had old Morley ¹¹⁴ up to look at the bathroom basin yesterday, as it was blocked, and we couldn't do anything about it (having no man in the house).

A woman has just been in and asked "was I the minister of Information?" What a laugh.

The land mine hasn't gone off yet. Last night was fairly quiet as it was foggy. It's the very first time I have ever welcomed fog.

I looked at your photo and told you I loved you (as I do every day) and asked you if you were coming home that night. I always hope you will walk in, even though I know the chance is very remote and then when it gets near bed time I think, "Well its too late for him to come now, perhaps he will come tomorrow instead" and so the days go on.

¹

¹⁴ The builder from Molewood who constructed Four Winds in 1937

Well darling thats all my news, I am looking forward to a letter tomorrow to know two things—firstly, how you are, and if you have gone sick and secondly if you have heard any more about the leave Goodbye my love Keep smiling we shall soon be together again and then I'll be able to make you well

18 October 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp



Beloved wife,

Another day has passed, and for us it has been a day of great activity. I slept this morning for four hours, the most I have had for a long time, & then this afternoon we had to move up to the top of the hill, & changed places with the detachment, this is only a temporary arrangement, and the intention eventually, is for us all to be on this office level, that is half way down, but all the same, it meant we had to move all our kit to the top of the hill, a job which was very strenuous, especially as I felt today, but it's all over now, & we're firmly settled now, even though it will only be for a week or so.

Next week I'm going to have a hell of a time, Les is on leave as you know, & now Jones is to go away on a course for a fortnight, this leaves me on my own for all next week, I don't quite see what is going to happen to me, but it looks as if I'm in for a hell of a time on my own, but I guess I shall get over it all right eventually, but I do hope I don't miss too much sleep over it.

I haven't heard any more about our leave yet, I asked the sergeant today, & he hasn't learned anything new either, & so I'm left wondering at the moment, but still hoping nevertheless, & perhaps by the end of next week I shall have something definite to go by. [...]

I shall now have company for my night stretches, the sentries off

detachment, because the officer is now right on the searchlight site, and do you know, as I started to write this, who should walk in but Arthur, he's doing an hour & a half of guard, & we are spending a pleasant little while on our own, I've made some cocoa, we've run out of tea, & some toast, & settled down for a good old chin-wag. We've got the cook here with us too, he's drunk as a lord, & we're having the time of our lives with him, he's making us roar with laughing, & it's better than the pictures, & he's discovered that I took some milk from his cookhouse, even tho' he's drunk, and he insists on taking it back with him, but he made a can full of cocoa first, & it's taken him about 1 hour to do it, and he talked all the time, but it's made now, and we've just managed to get rid of him, I'm wondering now if he'll be back again soon, it's only half past twelve, & he seems to think he's got all night, but he has to get up that hill yet, & I should love to be with him, & see what capers he cuts on the way up. He's a proper lad tho' and we all love him, he's an old soldier, 43 years old, & been to Egypt, India, & many other places, & he's the finest natured man I know, he has often given me his last cigarette when he hasn't any more, for himself, and if he hasn't any whole cigarettes, he'll give his last end of one to you, that's the sort of man he is, his only fault being that he will drink, but really I've heard it said of him that he can't take much before he begins to show it, so I guess it don't cost him as much as it would other men.

Arthur has just left me now, & I shall shortly be getting the next sentry looking me up to see if I have any tea or cocoa, they all know where to come for it, but their company is welcome, as they help me to keep awake, & make the long hours fly quickly by. We have just been discussing the possibilities of our seven day leave again, & both Arthur & myself are agreed that we can't really count on it till we are actually on our way home, [...].

I was discussing the possibility of promotion with the sergeant tonight earlier, & he talks about sending me on a few courses, he says it is necessary to know all the work on searchlights before I can get anywhere, & if I really want to, he can help me on, well, if I get a chance later on, that is when all the leave business is over, I shall take it even tho' it will inconvenience me quite a bit, but I shall win thro' in the end, of that I'm sure.

The officer is not yet back to worry me. He's gone to a dance at Battery H.Q. & won't be back before about 2 or 3 o'clock, and even then I doubt if he will bother to see me or not. He is going to have his wife here with him shortly, so I guess we shall see even less of him than we do now, but we're gradually altering him, & he doesn't worry us much with work as he did to start with. I still like him though, he's clean and very new, but he's very likeable, and I'm sure his men would get a square deal with him.

I find myself wondering how it is I am so lucky, you mentioned a bomb in the meadow beneath us, & all I can say is Thank God you are all safe, and even our house is still alive to tell the tale, bet you were frightened tho', I do wish I were there to give you a little heart to carry on I'm sure you feel the need of me, [...] we can give one another courage, we shall have to manage it seems, even tho' we should die without each other, this accursed war would still demand my services, such as they're worth, and tear us apart as if we were of no consequence. [...]

I hope you are able to read most of this but I happen to be feeling terribly tired, & I'm afraid I can't see too well, but I'm sure you will understand, & at least I can still write. I have told you all that I can think of for this letter, but I shall be with you again next night, and in the meantime, Goodnight sweetheart,

Saturday 19 October 1940

Waterford

(9 pages long).



Thank you for the lovely long typed letter—the second you had written in the same day. I am indeed glad to hear you are beginning to feel better and as the time for the seven days leave draws nearer, I am sure you will feel better still. Isn't it marvellous to think that we are actually going to be together for a whole week. Just think it was August when I last spent a night with you!! August to November we have an awful lot of love to make up, so you must be in fine fettle I presume you will hitch hike home, or do you get a free train pass? I think it would be a good opportunity for you to

bring your civvie clothes home. I have already warned Wheeler that you may soon be home, so that he can prepare to lose me for a week. It will be lovely if the weather keeps fine, but we shall be happy whatever it is like.

We have, as you know three visitors this week end. Aunt N's brother, sister-in-law ¹¹⁵ and daughter. The daughter Edna, who is 34 went for a long walk with me & Penny this afternoon, We landed up in Hertford, and had a cup of tea in Christine's ¹¹⁶. (Do you feel confident enough now that you are in uniform to take me there as well?) . Edna tells me she has a boy (whom she has known for years) who wants to marry her, but she just can't make up her mind because firstly he has stomach trouble, and secondly because she is scared of intercourse-if only she knew!!! Still, I suppose, everyone is not as lucky as we are.

I am afraid that owing to the walk this afternoon, I am too late to post this today, so I will add a little more before posting tomorrow. I am afraid that I can't think very well, now, as everyone is talking, but it doesn't prevent me saying that I love you so very much, darling. I do hope we have a quiet night as the visitors have had a bad time in London. I am sleeping in our bed tonight with Edna. This will be the first time for over a month. Now my darling Goodnight, God bless you sweetheart—all my love till tomorrow-----

Good morning (*next day*) –such a beautiful morning. Len & Kitty came over on their bikes and while Len worked hard in the garden, preparing the ground for more trees, Kitty, Edna & I went out for a bike ride, I riding Len's bike. Len says he is coming over to do more next Saturday while Kitty & I are going to the pictures to see the Private lives of Elizabeth (queen) & Essex. This is a historical film in colour, and the kind that particularly appeals to me. Next Saturday, I think I shall order my trees, or at least some of them. We had a fairly quiet night last night, for which I was very thankful, But I didn't have a good night at all. Penny kept me awake. She just couldn't go to sleep poor little thing. You remember I told you she was scalded in the week. Well it seems to be troubling her now and her tail is

¹¹⁵ John & Monica Barker nee Clarke

¹¹⁶ Tea Room in Fore Street, Hertford

quite red & sore. She kept licking & fidgeting till the early hours last night, so in the end I took her in bed with me, an unheard of thing really, but the circumstances were exceptional. We both went to sleep then. I don't know who was more glad Penny or I.

I think Barbara, Ron & Pearl are coming to tea today, so we shall have a house full-nine of us. I told you that Pearl had arrived unasked in the week & Ron came on Friday for the weekend. From what Barbara tells me Pearl intends staying indefinitely which I think is a cheek. Mum was just congratulating herself that Uncle Charlie had gone, and she would get a little peace. Pearl is a nice girl but, its a bit of a nuisance when she decides to stay on unasked. *(Ron Doe is nephew to Arabella Mabel Cox. In 1939 he and Pearl were living at 21 Tonfield Road, Sutton, Surrey).*

Did I tell you that the mine was safely taken away? They sounded a bugle when it was all over. The Georges are back again now, so they had them move for nothing.

Well darling, now it is nearly dinner time and so I must finish. I want to post this to catch the afternoon post, so that you get it by Tuesday.

God bless you darling & keep you safe [...]

Loose page. [...] I cant tell what your speed is until I see you actually working, but you say it is good, so I will take your word for it. As you say, it would be lovely if you could break away from print after the war, and one never knows what will turn up of course, but you must remember darling, that typing alone won't make you an office worker, you must have other qualifications, but still, there's no knowing what you might learn in the Army, so we will keep on hoping.

Pearl tells me her sister got married last month to a young sergeant (sic) of 24. He enlisted with the 23's during all that bad weather. His job is office & telephone, the same as you are doing, so he has got on pretty fast, hasn't he? Every one here seems to think that office workers get quick promotions, so I hope darling, that you are no exception. If you don't get on I know it won't be for lack of trying.

I will finish this letter later, as it is still morning and work calls.-----

Its now nearly six and I have only just packed up work, so will conclude this

19 October 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed letter.

It is now four o'clock, and I have just finished typing all the stuff that was left to me, I can tell you I've been very busy, and I'm not sorry it is done, in fact at one time I really thought I shouldn't see the end of it, but I've waded through, and have the precious time to write you a letter.

I have been helped in my work here tonight, by the sentries, who have quickly found out about my tea making, and so I give them tea, if they read out to me the stuff I have to type, and that is how I managed to get through it all. Of course the sentry should be outside, but they just go out now and again, and everything has been alright. Arthur was in at one till two thirty, and then he was followed by another very nice boy till four, and now there is another fellow looking for tea, and I think he will be the last to get any, because there is not much left and I'm sure that I shan't make any more.

This job is now left to me alone, Jones goes tomorrow, and Les is away on leave, and until they get someone else in, I'm the boss. I am trying to get Arthur in, and I think we might be lucky. I told you all about the move we had yesterday, and I believe I moaned a bit, well, I shall moan a bit more now, because we had to move back again today, what do you think of that? I can tell you I had had enough by the time we had brought all the equipment down that hill for a second time in twenty four hours, I was worn out. But it made me rebellious because although I was supposed to be on at seven thirty, I went to the officer and asked if I might go out, and he said yes so long as we finished our moving first, so out I went with Arthur this time, and strange though it is, this is the first time we have been out together since he came here. We went to the pictures and had posh seats which cost us 1/2d each, but it was a good show and we enjoyed it

very much. Before we got to the pictures, we paid a visit to the services canteen, and this is the first I knew of it, and so it seems the first anyone knew, because when we got there, the ladies were most surprised and delighted to see us. It seems that we were the first they had had to see them all summer, and they were beside themselves with excitement to get us something to eat, and we only called in there to get a cup of tea and some biscuits, however, we stayed there for an hour to please them, and played the gramophone for a bit, then took our leave promising to tell the others about it all, and believe it or not, no-one knew about it, that's what comes of tucking it round a side street, but I guess we'll go there again.

I had a look in the photographer's window tonight, and saw my picture being displayed to all the passers-by, he's made a good job of it too, it's a full size one exactly the same as the one you've got, so I shall get some publicity now especially as the shop is in the main street.

I'm afraid these old hurricane lamps are not very good to type by, and I don't feel like using the rubber for all the mistakes I keep making [...] I have a wireless here with me tonight, it belongs to the sergeant who has gone away, and it's a portable, a very nice little thing and it gets some good stations too, but there is nothing doing except news in foreign languages now, and when the music part comes on, I shall be in bed, but I don't sleep any better yet, I don't know if the M.O.'s drugs will do any good or not, but so far no good has come of them. I shall go sick again as soon as I have finished the tablets off, and keep on doing it until he really takes notice of me, and then perhaps I shall get some real attention.

Ten to five now, this night has been the quickest I have ever known that is because I have had so much to do, but really I prefer to that way, as it passes the time for me, and that is what I ant (sic) more than anything, but now we have this new arrangement of things with the detachment boys on the same level as us, I don't think I shall be lonely any more.

I think I told you that our officer went out to a dance last night, well, he got home the following morning at five and last night he was telling us all about it, he said he really didn't want to go, but as it was more or less necessary he had to, and he got drunk, it seems that he likes the beer, and

he stayed in bed till midday, he said he was all right till the following morning, and then he felt rotten. His batman told us that at twelve he was flat out on his tummy in bed, and nothing could wake him, so it seems that he is quite human after all, and already he is beginning to relax a bit, and I think he is going to be very popular, so my first impressions were the right ones after all, and I'm glad they were.

I got a piece of Barbara's cake this morning, or I should say yesterday morning, and I can't remember if you told me to save it or not, any how, I haven't opened it yet, and I'm going to save it anyway and bring it home so that we may eat it together and wish for something especially nice.

It seems to me that Len is a bit of a bad bugger now, I really thought more of him than that, and I wrote to him only last week telling him to look you up sometime when he was not so busy and that is the way he does it. We cannot moan about him though because he has done a lot for us in the past, and I am really very grateful to him for that, but all the same, I think he might stretch a point and help the wife of his best friend, I find I am tired of making excuses for him now, and I can only think that he has lost interest, but when I get home we shall get him out and have a real old gang night just once, and then perhaps it will start the ball rolling again.

I think I have said all I can think of for today, and I guess if I had written it all it would make quite a lot that is a drawback I find with typing, it makes my letters to you seem so short, but actually I'm sure that they are just as long as they ever were, [...] One of my lamps has just gone out [...]. I must now end this very inadequate description of my love for you until tomorrow night when I shall be watching over you [...] au-revoir,

Monday 21 October 1940

Waterford



Thank you for the lovely long typed letter of Thursday's date, which I received this morning. It took a long time to get here didn't it?

I wonder how you are darling. I do hope you are gradually getting better. If only I could get through to you in the evenings on the phone. I could have up to date news. However, when this secret weapon comes out to stop the night bombers, that they make so much of in the papers now, perhaps it will be possible to speak to you now & again. Each day I anxiously await a letter from you to see if you know the date of your leave. I'm afraid I am awfully impatient.

We were bombed twice (at least Hertford was) last night and this dinnertime, and it's absolutely amazing how people escape unhurt. I don't think there were any casualties in these two raids. During last night there were dozens of incendiaries dropped on Hertford, one not two yards away from your mother's front door. There was a fire in Kemp's yard in Talbot St., bombs in the pit, (by Gashouse Lane) one bomb by the petrol dump, and in the Folly, and a basket on Hartham, and a delayed action in the jail,¹¹⁷ where everyone had to evacuate at 11.30 at night and sleep the night at the Friends Meeting House. 118

Your mother & sister didn't go to bed, so Edie hasn't gone to work today. George left for Birmingham this morning, so I expect she is feeling rather down today, what with one thing and another.

Well then the second raid happened about 12.40 today. Wheeler was in with me when we heard the first bomb whistling down.

After the third I suggested that we took shelter, so we went to Longmore's shelter (*crossed through*) cellar. One bomb fell on Fordwich Rise, one on Bean Road, one in Wellington St. and one in Duncombe

¹¹⁷ The old gaol was located in Ware Road

¹¹⁸ Railway Street, Hertford

Road, where a house was demolished but no-one was hurt. All I hope is that we have quiet nights when you come home as I should hate to have to spend our precious nights downstairs.

Penny isn't well yet as her burns seem to irritate her a good deal, but she eats just as heartily although she is quieter, so I think she will be all right in a day or two.

The visitors went away this morning and they left me 10/-, which was very welcome. I have ordered so (sic) trees from Letts nurseries with it, as they to (sic) me to buy myself a little present with it. I have chosen a "tree of heaven" (palm like), a red & blue double lilac, two purple beech a red may, two flowering currants and another tree with too long a name to remember, but it has double pink flowers.

This will of course exceed 10/-but still it was a good help and I feel that if we are bombed, well it won't matter if I did waste the money and if we are not bombed, we shall enjoy the trees when we have peace again.

I am going to order one or two fruit trees from Young's, so you can imagine that I shall be busy in the garden.

You will be sorry to hear that Capt. Boys, who was home (at Barnet) on leave, was bombed and is in hospital. Mr. Williams told me that his father (Boy's) was on the lavatory when the bomb dropped, and could be heard above all the commotion complaining bitterly that he couldn't get his trousers up because they were full of plaster.

Esme tells me that poor old Bethal at the Hospital has got to go to Ware San¹⁹ for a spell. Isn't it bad luck. I feel so sorry for his wife, and it must have been a shock for them.

Well now darling, my little stock of news has run out and as it's 10 p.m, I think we will make tracks for bed (if you had been home I should have suggested it an hour ago)

So goodnight my darling. If my writing is worse than usual, its because I am writing this on my knee, but if you can't read anything else I expect you can read "I love you" Good night darling. God bless you [...]

¹
¹⁹ Sanatorium

21 October 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed on flimsy.

To the inspiration of all beautiful thoughts [...] (*two paragraphs of adoration*)

How useless are these words, when my very soul crys (sic) out for you [...]

A picture of blue summer skies is before me, radiant with happiness, ripe, golden corn, waving in the summer breeze, and poppies smiling all the time inviting me to spend a while in the wonder of their kiss.

And here my note must end, for such a wondrous girl as you inspires me to write [...]

Tuesday 22 October 1940

Waterford

I must confess to omitting (almost) to doing something really important this evening. I almost forgot to write my letter to you. It's 10 pm so I expect it won't be a very long one. I expect you think that's very awful of me, but I was so busy doing your balaclava, which I have nearly finished, that for a moment the letter (*to you*) slipped from my mind.

I received your Friday's letter this morning. It had been to Watford. But your "Waterford" was certainly written very poorly so I can quite understand the post officials mistake. You must write the name more clearly in future.

You don't mention how you feel so I expect you must be much better. It is rather nice for you to have the sentries in at night for company, but I am wondering how you are managing with Les & Jones away this week. I sincerely hope they won't overwork you again.

I am pleased to hear that with the sargents (sic) help you have a chance to get on. I hope that you will go on these courses as soon as the

opportunity comes along, even if it does inconvenience you as you say it will. I am afraid I haven't any local news. We have had fog these last two nights, so, thank goodness things have been fairly quiet.

Mr Williams tells me that Mr (*Capt*) Boys has had his right hand badly hurt-and probably will never use it again. It will he thinks cause his discharge from the army.

Penny is a little better today although she isn't herself yet, and quickly gets tired. I think she is still suffering a little from shock.

Well darling this is a short letter but I really haven't anything else to tell you except to ask you to come home as soon as you possibly can. They were playing that tune "In the mood" on the wireless today. I thought at the time that I'm always "in the mood" these days, but it isn't much use. Goodnight my love. God bless you. [...] P.S Have you received your mother's parcel?

22 October 1940.

Farnah Green

Typed letter.

I must begin this letter by apologising for having very much neglected my letters to you of late, but I can assure you that I have not felt like doing much after I have finished the work put for me each night, and even now, it is four o'clock, and I have only just finished, but I am going to tell you all I can and make this one as long and interesting as I can, so here goes.

Firstly, I had a letter from you telling me of a land mine near you, and a general grumble about the people who have let you down, well, I can tell you that I have been very worried about that mine, to the extent that I approached the officer for an extension on my twelve hour pass, and he said he would think it over, but I am in an awkward position, because I am the only one in the office at the moment who knows anything about it, and I had to wait till the sergeant came back from his leave. Well, I asked again today, my pass day, and he said he could not do it, to the indignation of the sergeant, who by the way is one of the best, and I had to spend half the day sleeping to make up for the nights work, and the afternoon I took a

walk, and then went to the pictures, and altogether, I think it was the lousiest twelve hours I have had so far, but the chances of our seven days are still very much to the fore, so I'm not going to grumble too much yet.

And now I will tell you of what I have managed to bring about, Jones as I think I told you, has gone on a course, and in all probability will not come back here again, and Les is on leave which only leaves me. Well, they had to do something about it, and they asked me who was any good for the job, and I plonked on Arthur like a shot, and he is now an office worker like myself, and I think it will turn out to be regular for him. He says he likes it here, and I have taught him all I have had to learn, which makes it easier for me, and when Les comes back, things should be a little better again. I can tell you that I was beginning to feel a little under the weather over this week, I've had two hours sleep out of the twenty four for three days in succession, felt that it was about time something was done about it. I asked the officer if it would be possible to let us sleep separately from the rest of the crowd as they kept us from sleeping in the day, but he only said that it could not be arranged, and that was one of the hardships in the army I should have to put up with, he is not such a nice fellow as we thought he was, and I'm not the only one who thinks so, the sergeant shares my views now, and theses (sic) are that he thinks only of himself, for instance, he lets the poor sergeant do all the work with what help I can give, while he goes out to visit the sites, or to have a drink. The other day he went to a big dinner party at the battery H. and got home at five in the morning, he slept till twelve without waking, and then he didn't get up till the late afternoon, but the work had to be done just the same, and the usual people had to do it, everyone has formed the opinion that he don't consider his men a bit, all he thinks of is having a good time, and at the same time we've got to be the best site on the section, but he don't help.

Well I think I have let off steam about that all right, and I feel much better about it. I also feel better in myself the last two days, it seems that the new drug is doing some good after all, but I need some more now, as I took the last one yesterday, but still my head troubles me a bit, and I'm sure that it is essentially a drug, and as soon as the effects wear off I'm back where I was.

I guess you will get my letter I posted tonight before this one arrives,

and I omitted all news, and devoted it entirely to the way I feel about you, I want to know what you thought of it, [...] if you prefer to have news mixed up with love [...] I know that there are many wonderful things I could be saying about you all the while [...] (*another paragraph of adoration*)

Nearly five now, how quickly the time goes, and yet how slow, it seems as if I have only just started the night, and yet years since I last saw you but I am watching over you all the time, and nothing shall harm you if I have anything to say in the matter [...].

I am certainly becoming a responsible person here, even the officer has to ask me about things, but this has its disadvantages, he woke me up yesterday morning to ask me something, and I had only just got to sleep, and he did the same this morning, so I really shan't be sorry when he has learned all there is to know, and perhaps we shan't get quite so much to do.

The cookhouse fire was nearly out when I went to see about it just now, so I shall have to wait for my cup of tea, if I get it at all, the cooks rely on me to get the water boiling for the breakfast tea, and I have never let them down yet, so I hope the old fire keeps going now. The fellow who gave me the butter, is on leave the same as Les, and as things have altered a lot just lately, and there is another cook, I doubt if we shall be so lucky next time I come home, but I shall see what there is, and hope for the best. All day yesterday the boys were taking down the huts from the top of the hill, and today they have been erecting them down here, so that now, we have nothing on top of the hill at all, which is a good thing really, and now we're all together it will save a lot of running about. I've got to go and call a fellow who is going home today with his pass, but I think I shall finish this letter off first, as it will be too dark for him to do any good, and anyway, he is only going to Northampton, which is a comparatively short journey, so he won't lose much by it.

How is Penny, I do hope that the scald won't make her tail so that it remains bald, that would be awful, but I believe that a severe scald does kill hair growth, so let's hope that it wasn't too bad. Thank you for the hanky (sic), they are just what I need, and the right colour too, I can tell you

I was really pleased to see them. Today I also received the news that the landmine was removed, a thing I'm truly thankful for, but I shall not tell the officer, I'll let his conscience prick him a bit first, and who knows, he may have his wife in the same predicament one day?

You say that Len has shown up again, well, that's just fine and I was so glad to hear it, perhaps they will keep it up now. I want you to tell mum that I got her letter alright, but so far, have not received the parcel she mentioned, but it might turn up this morning, so I should not worry too much about it yet. Give her my love, and tell her that I shall soon be home again, and this time it will be for a longer period. [...]. I must end this letter I have still a few other duties to perform before I go off, and I'm afraid that I shall have to get on with them, so good morning, God bless you and keep you safe for me,

Wednesday 23 October 1940

Waterford

Thank you for your nice long typed letter and the poem you typed and enclosed, which I liked very much. You need never worry about your letters being short They are always much longer than mine, for which I am very grateful.

You will be pleased (?) to hear that we have let the room we proposed to a business man. Let me hasten to say that he is 53, about 5ft nothing and fat, so I don't think you need have any fears about me being swept off my feet by some Don Juan. He came to see the room this morning and is moving in tomorrow (*he actually stayed at Four Winds until at least 1947*). He will be out at business all day, so shouldn't be much trouble to us. Miss Smiths (*next door*) is arranging the meals, so that is a big consideration. I should make from 10/- to 12/- a week profit from the arrangement, (having deducted for electric light etc.) so I do hope to be able to buy a 15/- saving certificate each week. Don't you think that's good? I have started to write this letter during office hours as I shall be busy this evening getting his

room ready, and moving my clothes (and yours) out.

I am going to take my dressing table into the other bedroom, as I can't do without that, and anyway he won't want it. I have taken the castors off the tea trolley as he will need that for a table. He (I don't know his name yet) is a bachelor but has an old mother in Somerset, who he visits every month.

Sorry to fill up my letter with news of the new lodger, but there isn't anything else to tell you today except that as each day goes by now, I get more & more impatient for you to come home. If anything happens to stop your leave now, I shall be so upset that I am sure I shall be ill so mind you do nothing wrong to have it stopped will you darling. I don't think you will be as foolish as that anyway, because, according to your letters, you are every bit as anxious to see me as I am to have you home. I have ordered some more shaving cream for you. so don't bother to buy your own when you come home. I won't finish this now but will wait till I get home this evening when there may be something more to write to you *next page missing*

23 October 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp.

Typed letter.

Please excuse any mistakes you may find, I have only one lamp tonight, and that one is not too good, so I can't guarantee the best results but I know you won't mind, [...]

I have had a very lazy day again, having been able to keep out of the way all the time until five, when I relieved Arthur of his days' work, and took over myself. He should have had the evening out, but instead he stayed by me till ten or later, and the office has been packed all the time with sergeants etc. but they have all gone to bed now, and the only company I have to look to now is that of the sentries, who will persist in popping in every five minutes to know the time, and this always amuses me, because they only do an hour and a half, and they moan all the time, I often ask

them what they would do if they had to work all night, and they can never give a good answer.

I feel rather happier tonight than I have done of late, that is mainly because the sergeant seems to have taken a fancy to me though he don't always show it, he stays here all hours telling me different things that I should know and have never been told, and he goes out of his way to give me work that will make me learn new things, and I appreciate his intentions too, because I have already told him of my ambitions, and I think if I work, and try, he is going to help me, it may mean moving about a bit, but then I am quite used to that, and it will be worth it if I can get on.

I had to find a place tonight just now, in fact that the officer and sergeant have to visit, and they didn't know where to go, so they gave me a reference and told me to find it, and after a lot of hunting, I discovered that we had no map of that area, and it was therefore impossible to use the reference, so I got busy with the old brain, and worked out a reference for myself, and after a few experiments, found it quite successfully on the large map we have, and on being asked for an estimate of the distance, I said fifty miles, and of course at the first opportunity, I checked up and found that the exact distance was forty nine, so I'm not so bad am I? and now I have to put a flag on the spot so that they can look it up in the morning for their route. I'm really very proud of this achievement, because although it was of no consequence, you know what I am like with maps, and I feel that I am beginning to get the better of them, and having got over the first stage, I think I shall feel more confident when asked again.

I had a little parcel from mum this morning, and it contained sweets cigarettes etc. the which I appreciated very much, and if you see her please tell her that I am indeed grateful for the thought she gives to me.

I have not heard more about the leave yet, but I ask every day, and I told the sergeant tonight, that if I don't soon get it, I shall come home the day before a twelve hour pass, and perhaps you wouldn't believe it, but he said that if I could manage it without being missed by the officer, it would be O.K. with him, and he didn't blame me a bit. He was very indignant because I couldn't get an extension on my pass yesterday, which I thought was very nice of him, because sergeants don't usually care much about their men's private affairs, however, this one is different, and I hope he

stays with us. We get along fine in the office now, with Arthur and myself learning more and more each minute, and becoming correspondingly more efficient, and when Les comes back, well, we shall make a fine trio I'm sure of that.

I have just been to the cook house to see about some tea, and I don't know what the night would seem like if we couldn't have that, I expect the water will soon be boiling, and then I shall with your permission, sit back and enjoy a cup of tea, while I watch over you as you sleep. [...] *(a whole paragraph of adoration)*

I'm afraid that I have been very bad so far as a being a soldier is concerned. I made the tea all right, and sat over the fire, and before I knew where I was I must have gone straight off to sleep because I have just awakened, and its four o'clock and I feel lousy. The fire has nearly gone out, and it is very cold and I have acid in my guts, but a visit to the hut is indicated, where I can get warmer clothes, and something for the acid

.....That's better, I am now more awake, and feel warmer and more comfortable inside. I shan't get much sleep this morning because there is a bath parade at nine thirty, and I want to go, which means that I shall have to get up after only an hour or so of sleep, however, we shall be back early I hope, and the afternoon will be mine in which to catch up in, so I shall go and get clean, and take the consequences.

I'm afraid that there is very little more to tell you [...] I really must pack up for today, because much as I hate to do so, there is quite a lot of work to be dealt with yet, and I like to give myself enough time in which to finish, so goodnight Sleep tight my darling [...] goodnight and God bless you,

Undated letter Possibly 24 October 1940.

Waterford



My own darling Bill,

It was a lovely letter I received from you this morning (dated 21st.) Truly a love letter for it was all about how deeply you love me, and how much you long to be with me, that you didn't write one single item of news. Obviously the one really important item of news — when your seven days leave will be — has not yet materialised. So long as nothing happens to post pone it indefinitely, I think I can muster enough patience to wait for you, but it is impossible for me to explain how much I am longing to have you home again. I can only say that I have never felt quite the same either before or since we were married, I suppose that is because we have always been together, and as soon as we wanted to see one another we could gratify that wish.

Now. you can believe it or not, just as you like, sometimes I want you home so much, that I feel physically sick.-----

The new lodger (Mr Smith) arrived this evening. He is the Secretary of the British Oxygen Co., which of course is a jolly good job.

He has, he says, never married because he has devoted his life to his mother, as he is the only child, there was one other son, who was killed in the last war. He was an M.A as (sic) was training to be a clergyman. I am sure he is very comfortably off. Although you wouldn't really know it by his looks. Anyway he seems pretty easy to please and doesn't want a coal fire. He has the electric stove and pays me 1 ½ pr hour while he is using it, or of course 3/4d for half power.

—Supper time, I'm just going to eat my porridge. Excuse me a few minutes-----

That was very nice—I am sorry that my writing is so terrible. I am sitting on the floor, and Penny simply won't let me alone. She insists on sitting on my lap and pushing my writing pad out of the way—It really is impossible to try & write, so perhaps I'd better go to bed and get some sleep before the fun starts—It is starlight, and I am afraid that when the moon comes up, we

may get some activity

So, my dearest darling, Goodnight, God bless you. I do love you so, but I am quite unable to put what I feel into words, specially on paper, so till tomorrow----- Your (and yours only) Blondie.

24 October 1940.

Farnah Green

Typed letter.

To my adorable wife,

Another day nearer to seeing you, and today I picked up an important clue in the problem of leave for the intakes, and that is this, one of the fellows who was with our group, starts his leave tomorrow, ain't that grand, it means that ours can't be very far away, and we are waiting and watching every point now for the wonderful news to come round that our leave starts in earnest. I think when I hear that, I shall go out and get drunk, but when it comes to it I bet I don't, you know what I'm like after a booze up, and I'm better without it.

I got a letter from you today, as I seem to do nearly every day now, the post seems to have improved greatly just lately, and a good thing too, and in this letter I have severely reprimanded you, do you know what you did? You left out the second page, I looked everywhere for it and could not find it, and in the end decided that you had forgotten to put it in, but I was quite happy with the other four (*pages*) they were you and Penny, and that is all I need to help me on my way, you might thank Penny for her kindness in sending me her kisses [...].

We went for our bath this morning, and afterwards had a swim, it was lovely, to be able to swim in the winter is a luxury indeed which I really appreciate, and then as we were given the rest of the morning off, I got my hair cut, which was done by the way, by a lady hairdresser, and a jolly good job she made of it too, but it feels a bit draughty at the back now because she took it rather close, however, I shan't need one now perhaps for a few weeks. After this we went to the usual place:- Woolworths, and

spent the whole morning pestering the girls with the gramophone, but this time we had the supervisor on our side, and we found out that her name is Elsie, and she lives in Nottingham, and is engaged, the other girl is Dorothy, and very quiet, they both guessed our ages, and before we left them they knew we were both married, but they said they had already assumed that, and anyway, we didn't go there to flirt, but we made some very nice friends of them, and we now have a standing invitation to go and see them when we like, and they'll play all the records we want so long as the manager don't stop them, and also, we have the promise of all their worn records for our gramophone which some very kind person lent us, and altogether we spent a most enjoyable morning, but I got very tired before we got back to camp as I had not had any sleep, but I made up for that, I went to bed as soon as I had my dinner, and didn't wake up any more until eight in the evening, so I guess I have not missed any more than I usually do, and anyway I'm seeing to it that I let someone else do the night work next week, as I've had enough to go on with.

You will be proud of me when I have finished the story, to know that I turned the chance of a certain stripe down tonight temporarily, but here is the story:- The officer suddenly asked me if I would care to go on a course for Detachment Commander, well, it fairly took me by surprise, and after I explained to him that I wanted to get on, I accepted it for the time, as an opportunity like that should not be missed, and when the sergeant came in, I asked for his advice, and here it is, he said I should be out of my depth on a course of the description with such a small store of experience as mine, and that I had better hang on to this for the next month or so, and then he would teach me, and I could study in the evenings, and would be more fit to take an examination later on. He said that a stripe would be a worry to me if I thought I should be found out all the time, and I must have experience to hold it, and as he really wants to help me, and the other sergeant agrees with him, I have for the time being refused the chance, but I am assured that it will come as soon as I am really in a position to take it, and I have since found out that it was the sergeant that had put the idea in to the officer, and now they think Arthur and myself are the only two on the whole site who are really fit for such jobs and this is a compliment which I take very seriously. The officer said that I had not much chance of getting anywhere in the office, but at the same time I was getting valuable

experience which others have not, and he thinks that all his future N.C.O.s should go through it as we are, so the future looks pretty good to me, and I shall do my damndest to get where I want to be.

I think the other sergeant would like to see me stay here, he said that I was very suited to this job, but at the same time was the only person he thought really capable of taking a D.C.'s job, so you see I have made an impression after all, and I'm feeling very pleased with myself, and have placed myself in the hands of the Section Sergeant now, and he has started by giving me lessons already, he was here till midnight teaching me about sound, and I am better off for knowledge already.

Please don't think I am getting conceited, I am just passing on the facts as I have them so that you may know that my work is not going unrewarded. I expect poor old Les is on his way back from Ireland now, I bet he don't feel quite so happy as he did this time last week, I know I shan't when it comes to my turn, but that is being very gloomy and I shall not think of that side of it again, all I want is to be with you [...]

And now, much as I hate to send you such brief note, I must say goodnight because I am sending letters to everyone, that is my mother, brother, and my foreman, the sergeant has got some books he wants bound, and I am going to try to get them done for him. So until tomorrow, I will say once more goodnight, and God bless you,

26 October 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed flimsy.

Here we are just about to start on another day, it is six in the morning, and although I should really be on day work, I have done one more night to give Les a rest, he was two days getting back from Ireland, and he was

late back to camp then, so you can guess he was tired, and is downhearted, he is really miserable, having spent five perfectly wonderful days with his girl, but I cheered him up as well as I could, and told him not to worry about work till tonight, and I think he will soon get over it, because after all, it is inevitable that a fit of depression must set in after a holiday is ended.

Our officer told me he had put me in for an N.C.O.'s course tonight, and then I told him what the sergeant thought about it, and the sergeant talked it over with him, and in the end they sent Arthur, because he has the advantage of a bit more experience than me, I said to the officer, that it made me feel very sad to pass up a chance like that, but he said that there would be plenty more opportunity for me, and I need not worry as he had me in line, and in the meantime I must study, so I am now in the throes of theory of sound again, but this time it is far more complicated than the first elementary rules we learned in our training, and it looks to me as if there will be plenty of headaches before I am finished, but I shall of course go right ahead as fast as I can, but I still feel as if I have lost something as indeed I have, I've lost Arthur and just as we were together again, but we more or less level, so I shall catch up with him soon, and may be with him again before long.

I am beginning to look forward to our leave now even though I don't know when it will come, but I know it will come soon, and so we are all dreaming of what we shall do with it, I do hope that I am still here on this section because if I go on a course, I might be held back a week or two and that would be awful, so keep your fingers crossed for me won't you.

Things are settling down nicely here now, the officer has lost a lot of his newness, and doesn't hound us about like he used to, so we just do our job now, and are allowed to rest for the other part of the day, which is as it should be. We are getting another boy in from the sites to take Arthur's place, I recommended him, as he is the boy from Welwyn, and he is a really nice boy, everyone likes him, he was the one who nearly got this job instead of me, and now you see, we both have the job, which is a perfect ending to the whole thing.

He is also selected for promotion when he has had a few courses, I guess we shall both soon be shifted from one place to another with monotonous regularity, for a period, and you will never know quite where I am, but we are definitely staying here for the winter, that is official, and during that time I shall learn many things, and sooner or later shall be in charge of a detachment, I bet you'll be proud of me then.

I have swapped my tunic again for one that I think fits me better, it's a bit tight at the neck, but I'd sooner it were that way than the other, so you will see what you think of it when I come home again.

Arthur and I hope to get out together tonight, because now that Les is back, it should be possible, and I think we shall go to the pictures, as it will be the last evening we shall spend together for some time now I guess, but this I know, we will get together if we possibly can when all these courses are finished with.

It is nearly time for me to pack up now, and I have only to call the sergeants with a cup of tea, soft soap you see, and it will be seven, then I can make my bed and sleep for four hours, and if it were not for dinner, I shouldn't always get up then, but I get very hungry, and have to eat, and so my sleep suffers, but I do get a little more than I used to.

And now [...] I must end this very brief note, and this time you can watch over me, and I shall dream [...] so good morning darling [...]

Sunday 27 October 1940

Waterford

We have just finished our dinner and it is lovely & sunny, so I want to go out while it is nice but I must just write you a few lines first because I would like it to go off today

I did not receive a letter from you on Saturday but perhaps I will get two on Monday. I wonder if you have learnt anything more about your

leave? somehow I don't think you will be home at the end of the week as you originally said you would, or I think you would have been told by now, but still I keep on hoping

I went to the pictures yesterday afternoon with Kitty & called on your Mothers, when Jack arrived for the week end Freda spent two nights here, and Ron collected her this morning-Thelma & Horace are down for the weekend, staying in Bengo. They were looking forward to sleeping in a bed for the first time since the beginning of September. Fortunately we had a very quiet night. Len was over gardening yesterday, and I have been busy all this morning. All the turf is off at the side of the lawn now, and the holes dug ready for the trees, for which I am truly thankful. I hope planting them won't be such hard work.

Penny seems to be quite recovered from her scald and I don't think she will be losing any of her hair.

Will you please forgive me for not writing you a longer letter? As you know, the sun don't stay out for long these days, so please don't mind if I go out now for a little while. I only wish you could come with me But if wishes were horses----- However, I am cheered up with the lovely thought that you will be with me soon, and that thought keeps me fairly happy God (sic) bye my dear love God keep you [...]

27th October 1940 Sunday.

Farnah Green, Camp

My beloved,

Once more a Sunday is here, & the usual feeling which accompanies them is upon me, I wish I were home with you [...] Words are so futile really, they never seem to quite express what I want to say, the truth being, there aren't enough words to describe this love within me, which beats & hammers daily to find outlet in the sight of you. [...] I dare not hope for too much, and yet I dare to hope it will be soon enough to walk in the woods, & cycle along country roads with you by my side, these dreams, try as I will, are persistent & though I try my hardest not to put too much on the rumours I hear, lest I be terribly disappointed, I still hope & pray it will be

soon, [...] do you recall the last time I came home, when it took me all night? [...] & on the return journey you prayed for me, & I successfully got back dead on time, [...] it is now three months since I had to be torn away from all that I love, to leave it in the greatest danger ever known, & to be held here against my will, when I would far rather be there near you, fighting for my own little corner of the world, & proving what it all means to me.

Summer is over now, gone are those idyllic days we spent in the garden amongst the flowers, gone are the rambles on the marsh, with a tiny, brand new little dog for company, gone the gathering weekly of friends, to spend an evening arguing or gambling, little did we realise how precious the memory of these would be to us, in a few short months. And now Autumn is with us, & nearly gone, the trees have shown their wonderful tints, the late summer sun, most beautiful of all its phases, is not so keen to show its face, & yet a day now & then, comes like a memory, to remind me of the past, what delightful things we have known, and never fully appreciated, never again will I take such treasures lightly, & how much more valuable they will be when we can know them again. All these reflections, sad & gay, are born of thinking of you, I see a pretty front garden, a new house, an excited little dog, who despite its size, far outruns its mistress in its desire to reach me, [...] (*almost two pages of adoration follow here*).

To have such wistful dreams as these brings one thing out for sure, we will treasure every moment of our lives together, and never complain of the trivial things which used to give us so much bother, to be with you again is all I ask, & nothing on earth will ever make me discontented with our lot. [...] surely this cannot last much longer, I could not bear the thought of being away for years, it is too awful to contemplate but last as it will, it will never alter my undying love for you, [...] And now, much as I could & would love to stay & write a few more pages, but I want to get this in the post tonight, [...] so goodnight my precious, God Bless You,

27 October 1940. Still Sunday.

Farnah Green, Camp



Once again I write to you today (*5½ sides*) because I had to end my last letter (*5 sides*) before I wanted to [...] words are so futile, & yet they are the straw at which I clutch during this terrible period of parting, God grant it may end soon, it is too awful to endure for long. I was supposed to have had a twelve hour pass today, but things have been so awkward, & busy, that I was unable to take it, and therefore I've had to forfeit it for this time. And tomorrow things will be worse, because Arthur leaves to take the course I nearly went on, it seems we are destined to be parted, but who knows, I might run into him again before long. I hope he gets on all right, because this time if he comes out to our usual traditions, he will get a stripe, & that is what we're both after, but I want to be sure of mine, that is why I have to wait a while, & then you can be justly proud of me, [...] I will stop at nothing to make you proud of me, I know I can do it, & now I have someone behind me, as long as he stays here, I have every chance of success.

We had to scrub the hut floor this morning, but I didn't mind really, as it made something to do, and I am beginning to get very restless again. Tomorrow I shall have to scrub this office out, but this is only a small place, & when it's finished, it will be a credit to me alone, & I always feel a certain amount of pleasure in the sight of any jobs I have just finished. Our office looks a picture at 12 o'clock every day, with all brass work polished, & the telephones dusted & wiped with an oily rag to make them shine, the hearth blacklead now, & everything as it should be. But after 12, it begins to get spoilt, with people continually coming in & out, the floor can't stay nice, & all the other things suffer too, but it keeps me busy during the spare moments, so I mustn't grumble.

We had a game or two at darts this afternoon for a while, but surprisingly enough I was better than I have ever been, & I ended up with 6d ¹²⁰ in pocket, an achievement of which I am justly proud, because I

¹₂₀ 2 ½ p

thought I was rotten, & instead I turned out to be the star player.

There is to be an inspection on Tuesday, & this means more hard work, especially for the detachment boys, they have their huts to clean, & most important of all, their equipment, which is a full morning's work every day, but things are certainly worth the effort expended, if only they would stay like it. I am waiting for the Sergeant to come in now, he has been out all day, & when he does come, I am going to ask him to start me off on my studies, I think I am due for a lot of brainwork soon, but it will be worth it in the long run, of that I'm sure.

The sirens have just gone off here, & there is quite a lot of activity a few miles off, bombs are being dropped with monotonous regularity all round us, & yet they never seem to find us here, but I suppose this is all to the good, although I find myself thinking that every one dropped on us, is one less your way, which is precisely what I wish would happen, I am tired of inactivity, & would welcome a change, but from what I have gleaned from numerous sources, we are to become a permanent war station for the winter, but of course I shall probably have another shift soon, because we always have to go to other places for courses, & I might never come back here again. I shall be sorry in a way, because my absence from you is compensated in some small measure by the beauty of the scenery, and yet on the other hand, I might get moved nearer to you, & that would be just what I wanted, so perhaps it will be for the best when it happens.

I don't know what has become of our seven days leave now, I haven't heard anything just lately, but I expect I'm impatient, & I know it will come soon, but it can't be too soon for me, all I want is to get to you & stay for a time [...]

We are in the middle of plotting a Jerry, Arthur is outside reporting & he's right overhead, this is the second time he's been over already, & he's looking for something, of that we're certain., I wonder if we'll be lucky enough to be really near enough to do some good work, but that's hoping for a lot, I think he's after something far more important than we are, and anyway he'd miss us if he tried to find us.

One of our sergeants has just rung up from his home, he got there on a twelve hour pass, & now cannot return because the raids are preventing

him from getting a train out. He's lucky really, because he will probably spend a night at home now, I know I should, and I expect he will. Things have quietened down now, old Jerry has moved off, & someone has caught it somewhere, it makes me feel so useless, stuck up here doing nothing towards the war tends to make me feel very much out of the war, & yet you, [...] whom I am supposed to be fighting for, are in the greatest danger one can imagine. I hope I shall soon be sharing those dangers with you, I want to be where you are, to comfort & protect you, should the opportunity arise.

Arthur has just gone out to the pub to get our one & only sergeant we have left, a drink, he can't get out to buy it, & so he has to send out for it. By the way, I forgot to tell you that we now have three sergeants on this H.Q. & it's rather more difficult to slip out now even in the evenings, so what it will be like if I feel the urge to prolong a twelve hour stretch, but I have already approached the sergeant and he said if I could get away with it, he would shut his eyes to it, so I might be tempted to try something one of these days if I don't soon get this longed for seven days. [...] I shall soon be in the same state that I had reached when I first attempted to see you, & I shall have another try because I love you enough to try anything again however painful the experience.

I really think I have come to the end of all my news, except that the sergeant has just rung me up to say he won't be in till very late, which means I shan't be able to do any swotting tonight now, but perhaps it's for the best, because it's ½ past ten now, & if I stopped up I should lose some precious sleep, so Goodnight for now, God bless you,

Monday 28 October 1940

Waterford



My own darling husband,

What do you think, I had three letters from you this morning!! It certainly made up for not hearing from you since Friday.

I must congratulate you on being offered the chance of a stripe! I knew

you would get on darling, and now your chance is coming. I am quite sure you will make the best of the next month or so and learn all you can. It must have been very disappointing to have to turn down the immediate chance of commencing your course, but I think you were wise darling. After all you haven't been in the forces quite three months yet so your knowledge must necessarily be rather limited, and I think it's wonderful that you should have been offered the chance at all so soon.

I shall certainly be proud when you get your first stripe and now you definitely have something to work for, and it should make your days more interesting. I'm sorry that you have lost Arthur for the time being, but, of course, if you are both to get on, it is inevitable.

Joan told me today that Howard has been offered a commission. He has not yet decided whether to accept it or not. Joan gets 38/- at present but as the wife of a second lieutenant, she would only get one guinea ¹²¹. It seems a shame to turn down promotion, but it would bring mixed blessings.-----

I went to your mother's this dinner time. She has received your letter. Jack tells me that he is expecting to pay something like 15/- a week for income tax. He earns 2/- an hour and gets between £5 and £6 a week, and is now applying for the full rate of 3/- per hour.

Your sister seems to be getting on very well at her job. ¹²². She made us laugh with tales of the soldiers (and civilians) who try to make dates with her. She said that one who was very pressing was anxious to meet her at the County Cinema after she said she would meet this man at 6pm and he was highly delighted only she cruelly added "you don't mind if I bring my young man with me do you?"

Penny very naughtily chewed up my green hat this morning and also Aunt N's prescription for her eyeglasses. She will have to write for a new one to Margate, and of course pulled a long face about it-saying to Penny "you cost me a lot, what with one thing and another. Two pairs of new stockings at 9/- and now a new prescription"!

That of course is really a bar at me, but I don't take any notice of it I

¹

¹²¹ 21/-

¹²² Bus conductress

am certainly not going to offer to pay for anything that gets spoilt She has no right to leave them in Penny's way. She knows what puppies are.-----
-I'm not quite so soft as I used to be!!!

Our lodger is back from his week end in Somerset. He goes to bed soon after 9pm so I don't think he'll be much trouble I have just heard him moving his armchair (he has one of our large ones in his room) Aunt N remarks "you'll have to get him a large carpet if he's going to make that noise". I'll be hanged if I do! Don't think I'm being mean & petty darling, but she does hate anything to interfere with her comfort—and those sort of little things rankle I'm afraid, 'specially when one is cooped up during these long evenings, and too far away from any friends to get out.

Pearl & Ron (Doe) have left the Heath now. Mum managed to pluck up enough courage to tell them to go, as it looked as if they were going to make it more or less a permanent home, which would have been very awkward if Son ¹²³ came home, so I don't blame her. She has had enough of relations lately.

Well my own beloved, you will think that the last half of this letter is all moans. Sorry darling—I must tell my troubles to someone Please come home soon my sweetheart and make me happy— if only for a few days! I can never remember being so bored with life before. You will remember that I said in yesterday's letter that I was going out for a walk as it was a nice afternoon. Well, I went about five miles. It was all right for the first mile but then the sun went in and I began to feel lonely and rather miserable, and I didn't meet anyone to talk to, so I eventually landed up at your mother's and had a cup of tea with her, before slowly making my way back to Waterford. I found a few crab apples on the way. They were sweet and I enjoyed nibbling them "and that's the most exciting thing that happens in the day"

I have finished your balaclava (which I hope will fit) and I will post it with tomorrow's letter when I have put your name inside. Have you got a wireless where you are now. Isn't reception lousy! After about seven there is a lot of interference! There is before seven in this house. I turned on some dance music after tea and went upstairs for a moment. When I came

¹
²³ Ernie Cox

down the wireless had been turned off!!! Still I suppose these little things are sent to try us.

Time is getting on and my store of news is exhausted so darling I will say Goodnight God bless you. I love you so, and do pray that this new drive to the East won't send you out of England. Do you remember this notepaper? I won it on my honey moon for the prettiest bonnet Happy days!!!

You will be pleased to hear that we have had much less activity round this way during the last week (at night that is) my air raid warning list has risen to 156

Then really goodnight my love-----Take good care of yourself, won't you, because I love you so much-----so very much Your wife Ivy

Undated letter. *Written on the back of shorthand notes taken at a Council meeting.* I was very glad & surprised to hear from your letter this morning that you had managed to wangle Arthur into the office. I do think you are lucky. When you parted from him at Sherwood Lodge, I didn't think you would ever see him again, and here you are, working together again, and in the same job. I hope for your sake he is able to stay for some time, as it is so much nicer for you to have a good pal to work with. It will probably make you much happier. Can he use a typewriter or are you teaching him? I had better not say its a case of the blind leading the blind had I? as I believe you have mastered the machine now. And if the officer's not too nice—never mind, you say the sargents a good sort—so it might be a lot worse. I remember you told me when the officer first came that he was good looking. Well, that's mostly his uniform that makes him so. If a man can't look handsome in one of his majesty's officer's uniforms, then he must be a poor specimen. If you were an officer you would look fine-and very handsome, and the girls wouldn't give you a moments peace so its just as well perhaps that you aren't one, you're quite good looking enough as it is. All girls are attracted by a uniform, specially in war time (even I am no exception) and I'm afraid the poor civilians don't even get a look in. All the smiles and winks go to the soldiers. The ones in Hertford are a cheeky lot. I had to pass about 200 the other evening lined up by the North Station---first one started Hallo Blondie! until everyone of them took it up. You should have heard the row. I should think people wondered what

was happening. However, as this more or less happens every day (on a smaller scale) I am quite used to it. In fact I think I would be disappointed if they didn't look at me—you see, if a girl hasn't got her husband or boy about, she craves attention of some kind. However, if I never stray any further than that, I don't think you will grumble.

Gee Up!



You ask me if I liked your love letter, well I told you in an earlier letter that it was lovely, but I'm afraid I am awfully greedy and if you have the time and are not too tired, I like to hear what you are doing as well.

We are still having such lovely weather I would so like to be able to get out more, but I am afraid that it is dark before I have finished my tea, and I can't tell you how I hate sitting at home night after night with nothing more exciting to do than knit. We don't even have the wireless on when the raids start (which is about 6.45), as Aunt N doesn't seem to like it.

I have seriously thought of ringing up Catherine & Dinah Dixon (two girls that I know at the Old Rectory Sacombe), and asking them how much they would charge me to learn horse-riding. They own several horses. I dare say it would be about 4/- an hour but I could probably afford that once week. One must do something to alleviate the boredom What do you think of the idea?

Freda is spending Saturday night with me. She is to go to Leeds next week with her firm so poor old Ron will be still more lonely. I felt that I couldn't do anything less than ask her down for her last week end, and she's no trouble. It's a pity they can't get married. Well darling I don't know what you will find on the back of these pages I have used. I leave it to you to puzzle out. I don't suppose you will learn much of the Council's private business.

Its nearly 5.30. and so I think I will finish so that this can go off tonight.

By the way how are your financial affairs. Are you managing to keep your head above water? Even if you drown in debts. I'll still have to love you I'm afraid. Goodnight now darling, With all my love

28 October 1940. No.4 Section H.Q

Farnah Green, Camp

Dearest love,

Thank you for the two letters I received this morning, one telling me how much you liked my love letter, well by the time you get this, you should have had another one, & I'll still keep sending them as long as I can get the paper. I was very interested to hear all about the new lodger, & while I still haven't reconciled myself to the idea, I expect it is for the best, anyhow I shan't worry about him any more.

In the other letter you suggested taking riding lessons, well darling, if it will make you a little happier, & I think it will, do by all means take lessons if you can afford it, it should do you good, & I wish I could be with you to see the lovely glow in your cheeks after a ride, I wish I could see you.

We have said goodbye to Arthur this morning, he left about 10 o'clock, & I wonder if I'll ever see him again, I do hope we shan't be parted for long, & as if that isn't bad enough, our sergeant leaves on Wednesday this week, he's going to be an instructor, & will be away for at least two months, so I don't know how we shall fare now. Everyone is polishing & cleaning ready for the inspection tomorrow, & I have been very busy scrubbing the office out, & making all the boards look white, we are now engaged in painting it out, but I have taken a few hours off, because now Arthur is gone, there are only two of us left again, & the days are very long, I went on at 7 this morning, & apart from these few hours off, shall be on the go until 11 or later tonight, so I think I have earned these precious hours off. Actually I shall be glad when I get away from all this to start again somewhere, it is getting very boring here, the life we lead being very uninteresting, but I have heard rumours of Egypt again, & that would be terrible, so I must not complain too much. Anyhow, I think we're here for the winter, & that's some consolation, we'll worry about the rest when it

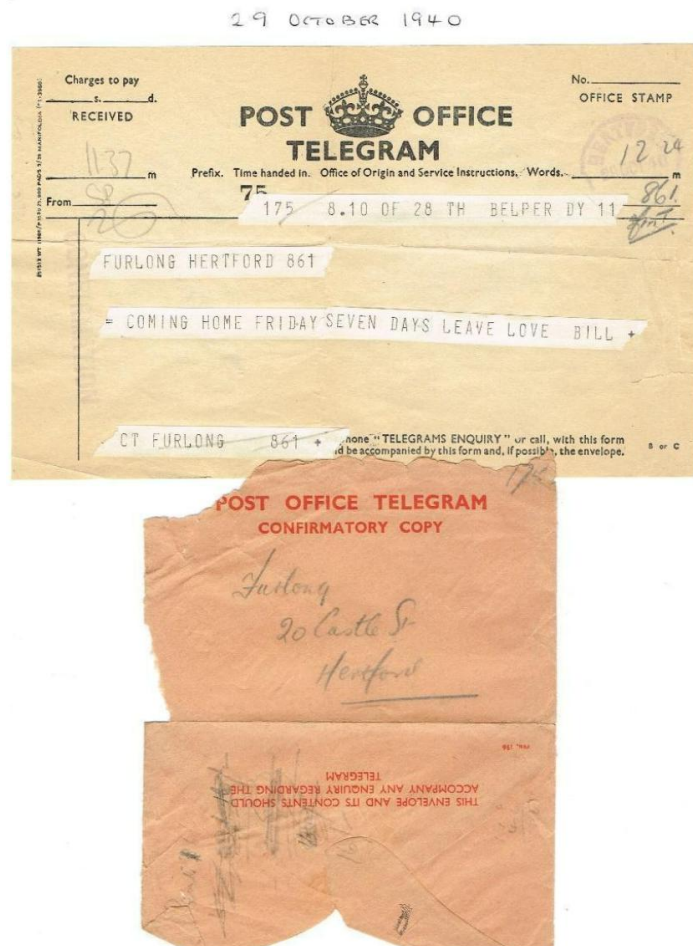
comes, & I think my B.P. should stop the possibility of my going into danger zones anyway, so please don't attach too much to my remark, after all, it's only another rumour.

Our leave still seems to be very remote, but that it will come soon I am certain, but I'm afraid I'm very impatient, just as you are, & however soon it comes, it can't be soon enough. -----

Since beginning this paragraph, a whole afternoon & most of the evening has passed during which time I have been very busy, & strange that I should have ended on the subject of leave, it is now 9 o'clock, & I have just had the greatest pleasure of taking down a telephone message which states that our leave commences from Friday 1/11/40, I don't know if I shall be in the first lot or not, but I doubt very much if I will, because we are so busy & understaffed, however I will telegram you as soon as I hear anything definite-----

another hour gone, I have seen the officer & have reported the news, & he says he will clear the lot up in two weeks, so if I don't see you next week, look for me the week after, will telegram you immediately I know which week.

I have just finished the pleasant task of compiling a roll of all the fellows, who like me are pining for a long stay at home, & I have passed it on to all concerned, they are all as joyful as they can be, & there will be no holding them now, I personally don't care how much work I do from this time onwards, all I want is for that day to come [...] I'm too excited to tell you any more news, so I will just end here, & leave you to be happy in the knowledge that we shall soon be having those lovely walks during the late autumn days, & lovely nights, so Goodnight my love, God Bless you,



29 October 1940. No. 4 Section H.Q

Farnah Green, Camp



Typed letter.

Here we are darling one day nearer to the wonderful time ahead of us, and tonight, the news came through that we are to be allowed forty eight hours leave every fortnight, so when I come back, I shall be able to call on

you fairly frequently in the future, unless they stop it for some reason or other, but the most important to us at the moment, is that we are going to have a whole week together, have you made any plans yet? I don't suppose that you will be able to answer this in letter form, but you can tell me when I get home. What a day that is going to be, when I walk down the garden path to see you and stay with you for a whole week, we must have a lovely time together, and let nothing mar it. [...] I hope you were able to arrange your holiday to suit mine as it would (sic) very disappointing if you couldn't. You must contact the gang, and arrange one good night together, we could have a real binge, and I leave it to you to arrange the night.

The sirens have been busy tonight, but we have had nothing to worry about again, and they are just sounding the all clear so that makes one more uneventful night, I do wish it were so where you are, I worry all the time now I know that you have had so many near shaves that way, but you are from heaven and I know you will be safe, and soon I shall be there to protect you, and comfort you and nothing in the whole world will stop us from being happy.

Our sergeant is leaving us tomorrow, and the officer is taking leave to go to London, so I shall be in charge of the office again, I've had seventeen hours every day this week, and it seems that I can't get any more sleep than we can get when we are on nights but I don't care what happens this week, nothing can be too much. My life here now, is one dizzy whirl, I am left in charge all day, and have become so efficient that I can deal with all the things that used to worry me, and I shall soon be as good as the sergeant himself is at office work. I find myself stumped for news now that I can think of nothing but the time in front of us. [...] Les has just come in, and in a short time I shall be turning in, I think I am doing the biggest half of the twenty four anyhow, so I shan't stay any longer than I need to, and now my sweet, I have to just knock off a list of people due for twenty four and forty-eight hour passes, and then I shall be finished, so until tomorrow, goodnight [...] and God bless you till I come home, and then I hope he will bless us both, so till I see you, take care of yourself,

Farnah Green, Camp

Undated letter (possibly October 1940)

My Darling,

This is just a note to say I love you, it is seven in the morning, and the only chance I have had to write, so please forgive me if I can't write to you so often, but I shall be home again soon, and then I can explain. You must forgive the mistakes too, as I have only just got out of bed, and have only one light.

This morning I have the job of typing my recommendation for promotion out, so that is going along very nicely, and you will be pleased I know, so darling, even if I can't write so often, you will know why, and won't blame me. And now, my sweet, I love you and will always love you, so keep smiling, and I shall be with you sooner than you expect, so just keep on looking forward to seeing me, and I won't disappoint you, goodbye darling, I adore you,

1 November 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

To the dearest [...]

And now to news, as you see, I am still at the same place, but not for much longer I'm afraid, but wherever I am, I can't get away from work, as we are now in direct communication with all the bosses, they now possess an R.T. set, & all day long they have worried my life out, I seem to get more work by being here, than I ever had before, and I'm getting a bit "browned off", as the old slogan begins to apply to me now, about all work & no play. Do you know, I haven't been away from this place for over a week, and so long as we stay here, I'm not likely to get out.

You ought to see my poor office now, it's all littered up with food stuff, and the floor is filthy now, all dirt & oil, what with lamps & petrol; cooker, we get in a pretty fine mess all round, but thank goodness we still have somewhere to sleep, when we get time, & I'm glad we didn't go with the

others, because I understand they are still having a pretty rough time, and very little food, whereas we are getting tons of food sent up each day with plenty of variety too, & we're having lots of fun cooking it, we shall try to make a rice pudding tomorrow, because believe it or not, they gave us five pints of milk each day between four of us, that's pretty generous isn't it, & we have a pound of margarine in stock, I guess we shall get some more tomorrow.

Today we had chops & potatoes for dinner, with fish for tea, & bread & treacle, it was pretty good too, especially as we now get as much tea to drink as we want, it makes us wonder what happens to the food when we're in a big crowd, I'm sure some of it is stolen & sold for money to booze on, we have all decided to demand an explanation when we get back, but I doubt if we shall get any satisfaction unless we could prove something.

Everywhere looks very dreary from here now, there are bits of wood, bricks, & all kinds of ruins kicking about.

Last night Les & myself lay awake for two hours discussing the possibilities of food thieves (sic), & we have worked out a pretty good theory with information we possess, I shall give you details later.

Since starting this letter another day has passed us by, I was overwhelmed by work last night shortly after I started writing, & I'm afraid I had to leave it, but now I have a little time to spare, I am taking full advantage of it, as you see, I am still at the same address, & afraid I sent my telegram a little too soon, because I shall have to wait now for the new address, but as soon as I am sure of it, I will let you know. I really have lots of little odds & ends to tell you, but, I don't ever seem to get the time to do it-----

Another day gone, & I still haven't had time to finish off this letter, I have just cancelled a trunk call I had booked over two hours ago, it seemed to be the only way to get in touch with you, we are so full up with work that I don't have the time to wash properly, what with cooking thrown in, we are up to our necks, & had I known we were staying here this long, I

should not have telegrammed you so early, & now I have not letters to look forward to, I think I had the last one this morning, the one you wrote in pencil while you were in bed, I pictured you there [...] but I'm still here, many miles away from you, & all I can say is how deeply I love & adore you.

Things are a bit quieter here tonight, I don't know for how long, but I'm writing while the chance is here, I stayed in bed this morning till nine, & let the other fellows do a bit of work for a change, because yesterday was a real terror, I was swamped with work, & the annoying part is, that I'm the only one who ever worries about it, I don't know why I should, as it never seems to bother anyone else, but there it is, I can't help myself.

At this moment I am sitting down, with a pair of Gum Boots on, because outside, we are up to our necks in mud, & these boots certainly are a blessing, we should get into a pretty fine mess without them I know.

Les & Charlie have gone out tonight, & we are only three strong here at the moment, but at least it's a bit quieter than if we're all here because they are all singing & shouting all day long, it seems to be the only way to keep ourselves cheerful, but now, one fellow is learning to type, so he's pretty quiet, & the other one, an old sweat, says he is browned off, I don't know why, because tonight is the first time he has ever been kept in since he came to do the office night work for us, & if we stay here long, he'll be kept in again soon, he does no work at all, so I don't wonder at him being browned off, but he don't seem to like work anyway, so I'm just leaving him to it, and anyway he's quiet, so I don't have to worry.

The real reason for our quiet spell here, is because the R.T. communication has broken down, & we can't get anyone pestering us with that for a little while, although we've been waiting all day for someone to come & mend it, however, the longer they stay away, the longer I can have to tell you all I have to say.

I still haven't heard anything about my stripe yet, & I'm really getting very impatient about it, but I suppose it will come along sooner or later, & the sooner it does, well, the sooner I shall feel that the work I do is justified. Les thinks I shall be two up by Feb. I have betted him that I shan't, but he seems to think there is every possibility of it, I hope he's right, but I doubt it

very much, anyhow we shall see as the time goes.

I have found something for the browned off fellow to do, he's plotting, & I have let him take my seat at the table, and I'm writing on my knee now, the same as you do in bed. I do hope we don't get "rouser"? as the D.R.¹²⁴ will have to go out, & I shall be up to my eyebrows in work, I hate plotting these days, it means too much work, we have to sit with the phone on an open line, sometimes for hours, just taking down plots, & sorting out the ones which concern us.

It sounds as though the mechanists are here, yes here they come, moaning as usual at having to come twenty odd miles,-----two hours later, they have finished, & that means I shall be busy I suppose, but I have just booked another trunk call to you, I hope I find you in, or I shall be rather upset, you see I want to be able to talk to you if I can.

I've just had a call from Hatfield, the Searchlight Battery there wanted us, & that gave me the idea that I might be able to get you, so I promptly booked the call, & by the time you read this letter I shall have spoken to you I hope, you see, I am very lonely, & I do so want to talk to you.

Well, I'll just go on writing till I get a ring, it's hard to wait & feel steady, because it means so much to me, we are still three in the hut, but I don't mind if they do hear us very much.

We have just had supper, fried eggs & bread, the eggs we had to buy of course, but they were only 2d each, that's very cheap isn't it, & now I have a nice cup of tea beside me, & I have left all the work that's waiting, while I finish this letter.

We now have 1 ½ pounds of margarine in stock, which all helps to prove certain things to us, & we find that cheese is still issued for supper, because we had a nice chunk here today, we know all about that though, you see, Les bought some bread & cheese at the local pub the other day, & he said it was very much like army cheese, & we have since found out that it was, it appears that the cooks sell a lot of stuff to this man, the way they get rid of it is under the guise of stale bread in sandbags when he comes to collect pigswill, we think there are quite a few things go from

¹₂₄ Dispatch Rider

there, & are rapidly building up a case for them. No-one minds them selling surplus food, but when we have to go hungry, we are going to raise hell if we can only get some proof.

And now to lighter things. How is Penny? I hope she hasn't destroyed anything lately, does she still help you to feel a little cheerful sometimes, I do hope so, because that's why I gave her to you, & every time you make a fuss of her you must think it's me with you [...] here is some good news which I shall tell you over the phone if I can get you. In Feb. next, I shall be home for another 7 days, but it is just as bad news really, because 48 hrs leave is stopped, & I shall have to wait two whole months to see you, that's why I want to talk with you tonight, & by the way, you can write to me again now, at No. 4 Troop H.Q., Horsley Woodhouse, Nr. Derby, that is something I have just found out, although I think I shall still be here, but it will come out to me in good time I know, & at least we can write to each other again, I don't like being without letters, it makes me very lonely, & the prospect of not seeing you for two months makes me very miserable, that's why this letter has been so delayed, I didn't know how to tell you about it, but now I have decided to talk with you & let you know that way, I don't mind writing about it, although if you take it as badly as I did, you are going to feel pretty down for a few days, I have known it for three days now, & the only way to forget it was to bury myself in work, that helps a little-----
---just having a warning here, & also I had a call to say that only priority calls are allowed, so I've booked to 10.30 & told them to cancel it after that, I wonder if I will be lucky enough to get you, or whether I shall be unlucky & have to go to bed without the pleasure of saying goodnight to you. The prospect of not seeing you for a long time is very very saddening, & I don't know of anything we can do about it, I guess we shall have to be brave & manage to survive somehow. And now, I must close this letter, I'm sorry it had to wait so long, but you will know by the time you receive this, whether I was lucky enough to get to you or not, I do hope I can, so now I must say Goodnight my love,

9 November 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

My own darling wife

[...] Well darling, one day has passed, it has been pretty hectic for me, I've been alone all the time, & what with all the cleaning & scrubbing I had to do to get the place something like it used to be, & after a whole day of it pretty well, I think I have succeeded, & I feel much happier about it.

I had the opportunity to ask the officer about my advancement today, & he don't want me to go, so I said if I am to keep this position with all its responsibilities, I wanted it to be recognised, so he's promised to recommend me for a stripe, & I should then hold the position of section clerk, I assured him that I liked this job alright providing it offered possibilities, & he said he didn't want to lose me as I was just getting good, & there was no reason why I should not get on, so I have left it now, for him to recommend me, & if it comes off, I shall stay here & try to make headway, so please pray for my success, & I'll do my best to make your prayers come true. As a matter of fact, I take all responsibilities now, & the promotion is not likely to make much difference to my work, so perhaps it is as well to hang on for a while anyway, because life on a detachment in the winter is not all honey, & I shall be much better off in my cosy little office.

I think we shall be moving again soon, but it is not definite yet when, & so far as I have been able to learn, it will be about 20 miles nearer to you, we are stationed somewhere near Nottingham again, so don't be surprised if I telegram you soon telling you not to write any more till I get a new address, but until that happens, please go on writing, as that is all I have to look for these days.

We have had a miserable day here for weather, it's been pouring all the time, & now it's nearly eight o'clock, & raining worse than ever, I'm glad I'm not out in it, because there is nothing attractive about an evening in the rain.

Les, I understand, is leaving us tomorrow, he has at long last managed to get towards his commission, & it looks as though he will be successful, & about time too, but it means that he will leave me on my own again, & that also means that my work will always be long hours, however,

that's how wars are won I suppose, & so I mustn't grumble I suppose.

How are you getting on now? I'm afraid I am nowhere near to being readjusted yet, & I'm afraid it will take a long time too, I had such a lovely time with you, & this is such a terrible contrast, that I shall never completely settle down again----- a period of 1 hour & a half,

I have been out with the mechanist for a ride to one of the sites about 10 miles away, we had to paddle thro' about 6 inches of mud & water to get to the lorry which was stuck, but we managed to make it go after a struggle, & I had a most interesting trip out, it made a break from the usual routine, and now I'm back again, having had a feed of fish & chips, and feeling a lot better especially as I shall soon be in bed-----

Well darling, I have been to bed, & it's Sunday now, I have already typed one letter to you, & now I'm going to finish this one off, you will gather from this, that I am getting a lot of disturbances during this letter, but really things have become so complicated, that I have quite a lot to see to. I have been talking to the new sergeant today, he seems to be pretty decent, & he thinks we ought to have more leisure, & so he's going to get some more telephonists, & then I shall be able to rest now & again, & the job won't be too bad. I got into a bit of a scrape this morning over a message, but it wasn't altogether my fault, & anyhow, things are straightened out now, & all is quiet, but I worried about it all the time. You see we had two sets of names of men for courses, & later on a message came thro' which cancelled those, so of course I didn't tell the men concerned. Well, this morning, another message came thro' to the effect that one of these lists I had were not affected by the message, which meant of course that they would still have to go, & as I had only two hours' notice to inform all men, & they were late anyway, you can bet I was in a bit of a state, but as I said, it's all smoothed out now, & I've got out of it with far less trouble than I anticipated.

Les has just come back, he is to stay here apparently till he hears further, I think that will mean another long wait for him-----Another long period has elapsed, it is now night again, & the new sergeant has made Les stop in the office, while I have got the evening off, I have been alone all day, & am still unwashed & unshaven, having had no-one to relieve me, & It's a miserable night, so I shan't go out, I'm writing now by

the light of a small lamp that came from Woolworths, it's one of those night lights, & don't give as much light as a candle, so please don't criticise the writing too much.

We have snow here today, did you? it's bitterly cold, & everything is wet & miserable, if we light a fire it fills the hut with smoke, but we have chanced that anyway, it's worth almost anything to get a bit warm. I am all alone in the hut, it's as long as our double room, & what with lack of light & smoke, I can't see the other end, I leave you to imagine what it is really like. All the other fellows are in the cook house playing cards, they do that every week till one of them has won all the wages, & then they borrow for the rest of the week, so I say they're welcome to that kind of amusement, & let them get on with it.

Oh [...] how I want to be with you again (*half page of adoration here*).
 [...] Do you love me as much as I do you? (*another paragraph of adoration*)
 [...] I can always find happiness in writing to you [...]. And now I shall end this note, because I cannot see very well [...] Goodnight,

CHAPTER SI

10 November 1940

Waterford



It is 1pm on Sunday and I am back at Waterford now having been at the Heath since Friday. I was coming home last night, but there was a fair amount of activity, and one or two bombs fell, so I decided to stay where I was. When I arrived in Waterford this morning I found the road by the bridge blocked ¹²⁵ because of unexploded bombs. However, rather than go back to Hertford, Penny and I chanced it. We got through all right, although we had to pass within a yard or two of four bombs by the vicarage—I bet the old parson has got a headache thinking of those—I expect he will get out. Shortly afterwards a policeman came to tell us that there are nine bombs near, the last of the string in the gravel pit above us, so, we have a nice noisy time to look forward to. However as they have all fallen on soft ground, I don't suppose we shall come to much harm. The most annoying thing is that if I want to post this letter to you, I must go to Bengoe this afternoon, and it's a nasty rainy day.

Roy¹²⁶ has given up his job as batman, and is now a signalman. I expect he rather wants to get a few stripes, although Barbara is annoyed with him as it will mean more personal danger than the other job entailed

There was one hour's interval here for dinner— and I don't seem to have any more news for you. I never was very good at letter writing, and I seem to have got quite out of the practice now after having you home. I don't suppose you are feeling very cheerful, as it's Sunday afternoon and I know you don't like Sundays now, and you know how I feel about them. It's stopped raining now but everything looks very very wet. There are pools of water standing on the front lawn, however, it looks as if I shall be able to

¹²⁵ Vicarage Lane

¹²⁶ Nightingale

take a bike ride to post your letter.

I am hoping to get a letter from you tomorrow morning but as the post man will not be able to come up the road, I don't quite know if I shall get it. The milkman did not come this morning so we shall have to fall back on tinned milk, I hope they are sensible and use the top road, or we shall be without tradesmen or letters for perhaps a week or more. I don't care about the tradesmen but I must have my letters. As you see I have finished your gloves. I hope they will fit all right and keep your fingers nice & warm.

Darling, I really can't think of anything more that I want to tell you ("My poor dumb blonde" you will say) except of course that I love you, and always will love you—so now my darling, husband, God bless you, Goodbye till tomorrow—Your very loving wife

10 November 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed letter.

My darling,

It's Sunday morning, and still pouring with rain, I can't remember such a morning for a long time, and I must say that it fits in perfectly with my Sunday mood. There is a Church Parade this morning, and the boys are just being formed up outside, they are going to the local church, but I can't go even if I wanted to, because there must be someone in the office to take all the messages and things that come in, but I don't mind this time because of the awful weather. It seems such a pity, the fellows are all shined up and look a real treat, and then they have to go out in the pouring rain and get wet through again, I bet they are grumbling, as a Church Parade is an unheard of thing when on detachment life, but this new officer has things done differently, he certainly keeps everyone on the hop, and they don't like it either, and what's more they will like it still less from today onwards, because we have a brand new sergeant arrived this morning, and he's got the reputation of being a bit of a bugger, I have met him, and he seems as if he is going to be very efficient and business like, but that is

to be expected, and I don't mind that sort of thing in the least, but I hope he won't be any worse than the others were, and then I should get on all right, and anyway, soon I hope to get my stripe, and then I shall be more on a level with him, I find myself wondering now, how long it will be before I shall get it, I hope it won't be long. And now, having told you all there is to tell about this morning, I will proceed to pass on all the little bits of news I can think of that might interest you for a start Les came back last night and has gone away again today, but he will be back for a little while at least, until all the red tape has been overcome and then I guess we shall be losing him for good, but he will be better off so I guess I must not grumble. Doug is in hospital with a poisoned leg, and has been there for over a week, so it must be fairly serious, as the army never keep their patients longer than they can help, I hope he soon gets better.

I've got George here with me again this morning, he is the lorry driver I often mention, and he is busy reading the paper, having been out since very early this morning, I expect he will soon be having a wash and shave, he says he has not had them yet.

He tried to type a letter to his wife last night, and you should have seen the mess he was getting into, and after about three very unsuccessful tries, he gave it up as a bad job, and wrote one instead, and then he tried to type the envelope, he spoilt three of those before he managed to get one in the right place, but he was happy, so I let him get on with it.

I do miss you, and it seems like an eternity to wait for my next leave, I hope it will soon fly past, as I have very little patience where things like that are concerned, but I shall have to wait in any case, so we might as well make the best of it. [...] Life without you is like a house without fires, it is cold and cheerless. [...] I used to tell you how I loved you when I was at home, but because I was always with you I failed to appreciate you as I should have done, and now this awful war has come to make me know how much you really are to me, and I shall never fail to appreciate you again. I wonder what you are doing at this moment, I can imagine you in a hundred different places, are you at home? Or with your mother, or out for a cycle ride, or perhaps you are just looking out of the window at the trees we planted together, they are a memorial of our love that grew into maturity after being separated for three months, and as they grow, so too will my

love for you, so watch over them, and you can think you are watching over me.

And now, I'm afraid I have very little else to tell you but I shall be writing again tomorrow, and if I am not too busy, I shall write again tonight because that is when I shall miss you most, please pray that I shall soon be able to get home to you again, [...] take care of yourself until I come home to look after you,

Monday 11 November 1940

Waterford



My own darling husband,

Thank you for your long and loving letter which you wrote on your arrival on Friday. I was very glad indeed to hear that you arrived reasonably early, and especially to know that you didn't have to go straight on to night work. I am so sorry that you feel so very sad and miserable. I expect it's only natural, but it won't do any good you know, so you must try to be cheerful, and don't think too much about last week. If you keep your mind occupied with the work of the moment, it isn't half so bad, even if the work on hand isn't very exciting or interesting.

I expect you will gather from this that I am not missing you too much. Well it's true that I don't feel anywhere nearly so bad as I was afraid I would. I expect that's because I don't need you physically yet, and when I do, I shall begin to get depressed again. Still, perhaps you will be home again before it gets too unbearable. Anyway that's what I am going to hope, and if you don't tell me when you will be coming (as you said you wouldn't) I shall have all the excitement of expecting you everyday, after a fortnight has gone by.

Of course, if you are sent on a course before then, I shall have to be patient and wait longer than a fortnight, but you mustn't let coming home interfere with your chances to get on. I know you won't do that darling, much as you long to be back again. And don't forget what you said to me last week. "No. 1 first" Also darling, while I think of it Could you possibly do

something about your teeth. If you can't get any attention, will you go to a dentist in Belper and I will send you the 7/6. The last thing I want you to do is to neglect your teeth. I would rather you lost your hair. I'm sure one couldn't make passionate love to a person without teeth, so I hope this reminder will sink in and take effect

After that little lecture I will try and find some news. It's little enough, I'm afraid.

It's been a beastly day and tonight is just terrible. I got very wet coming home. I had to come Bengoe way, as the bombs have not exploded yet. I went to see your mother & sister first. There is an unexploded bomb at the bottom of G.H (*Gas House*) lane, in those allotments by the Gasometer so they are in the same boat as we are—just waiting for the explosion.

The Aunts are going to London tomorrow and won't be back till Wednesday—wish they had gone last week—wouldn't it have been lovely!!!! Joan is coming over with me after work and will stay the night, so you needn't worry about me only having the lodger to spend the night with. Anyway it will be quiet (sic) a change to have some one young to jaw to in the evening.

I had a very busy day at the office, for which I was very glad, for, as I say, it keeps me from thinking too much. I think that is all my news, but I won't finish the letter till I am upstairs in my own bedroom Then I shall feel more romantic and will tell you whether I love you or not
Now it is 11 o'clock and I am writing in my bedroom by the light of the little electric fire only, and that makes you feel much nearer to me for it gives a lovely soft glow (as you must very well remember) so you can picture me sitting on the floor in my nightie, just adding these last few words to you, and wishing, even if it is in vein (sic), that you could be with me just as you were last week, saying "Don't put the fire out just yet Ivy, I want to look at you for a little while". Well my dear darling, I'm afraid you can't do that now, but I've told you what to imagine, so it shouldn't be too hard, and very soon, for one wonderful night, or perhaps too, it won't be imagination any more.

I do love you so [...] I always feel, once you are gone, that I didn't make as much use of the time we had together, and that perhaps we could have got in more love-making than we did I'm frightfully greedy aren't I?

I 'spect I ought to go to bed now darling, do I'll just put out the light and pretend you're in bed with me. [...] God bless you darling

11 November 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed letter.

My very own,

What a Remembrance Day, I shall think of it for ever as a day of rain and work, it has been raining all day from early this morning, and it's still doing it, and I have had the busiest day I ever knew, the new sergeant has certainly made things move, he is installing new systems which I have been trying to cope with all day, and you can guess how busy I have been by the fact that I have been here since seven this morning, and it is now nearly eleven, and I have only just found time to write to you , and even now I am taking the time off to do it, but I had to tell you, how things are going, for instance, we are definitely moving this week, and it promises to be a very hard shift too,

We have to take all our huts with us, which means that we shall have to rough it a bit I think. And the worst of it is that we shall not be any nearer home, but on the other hand we shall not be any further away, we are going east to south east about six miles, it seems so silly to move that little way, but all the same I guess it's necessary, I'll tell you all about that when I come home, and by that time I think we shall be in our new home.

And now the news, the sergeant has noticed that I am a hard worker, he said so, and he also noticed that I am always in the office so he told me confidentially that I stand a good chance of getting a stripe soon, as I am to understudy him in his job, and he wants me to stay on day work so that he can always come to me when he wants anything, so I think that is a definite promise and a compliment to my abilities. But there is no doubt about it the work is increasing almost every minute and I am some times nearly off my head, but the prospect of getting on keeps me going, and I

shall soon be on top of it all and have the very valuable experience of administration behind me. It seems that I have created quite a good impression on all the officers I have been under, and that they all think I work hard, so I shall just go right ahead and hope for the speedy promotion I look for.

I'm afraid that this note will only be a short one, but I just had to write you somehow, and tell you how I long to be with you again, and all being well, I think that I shall be with you sooner than we thought, but that is providing that the move that is coming off soon does not upset it, and I'm rather afraid that it will a bit, but I still keep hoping that it will be soon, and I try to make it sooner.

And now, I shall have to tell you, because must have heard enough about me to get on with for a life time, so here goes, I must [...] end this very brief note to you [...] because it is noe (sic) gone eleven, and I have to be in here at seven again tomorrow, and I must sleep a bit, so goodnight,

12 November 1940

Waterford



It is 9pm and I am sitting by the fire with Joan. I didn't get a letter from you this morning although I am sure you wrote me one on Saturday. I expect I will get it tomorrow. Did you get my Sunday's letter-containing your gloves?. I hope so, because I think woollen goods are going to be very scarce. I tried all over town today to get some wool for my jumper, which I had long promised myself, but I could not get it When I got home this evening, Penny had been very naughty and bitten & torn the lino in the kitchen. She was shut up, as the Aunts left this morning for London. It is quite a change to have Joan here to talk to instead of them. She has persuaded me to take dancing lessons at the Shire Hall¹²⁷ on Wednesday

¹₂₇ Hertford

evening. They are run by the H.C.C. , and only cost 4/- for the season. They are from 7.15 to 8.15 so I won't be out very late and it will be a very welcome change from sitting dumbly by the fire. Of course it will be nearly all girls, but I dare say we shall get some fun out of it.

It is a beautiful moonlight night although very windy, but in spite of that, we have only heard one burst of gunfire & one plane go over. The bombs in the lane have still not gone off, so we are still using the Bengo Road to Hertford¹²⁸.

I saw Eric Stokes out on Sunday. He was wheeling his baby in the pram, and talking to her. You should have seen the proud father look on his face he had no eyes for anyone else. I don't know where his wife was.

Its now 10 pm darling. Will you excuse me if I finish so that I can get Joan's supper and I promise you a longer letter next time.

Eleven though this is a short one, and I rather feel as if I am neglecting you and putting you on the side because I have a visitor, it doesn't stop me loving you [...]

12 November 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp.



Typed letter.

My beloved,

Thank you for the Gloves, they are wonderful, and I shall love you all the time I wear them, and think of all the love you have woven into them, they will keep me warm and happy all the winter, and I shall also have something to remind me of our holiday, because you were knitting them at the time.[.] I shall soon be home again [...] and won't that be wonderful?

¹
²⁸ Sacombe Road

two whole nights together, to do with as we will, [...].

I have been very busy again today, but I have managed to get through alright, and the work is becoming more complicated, and at the same time, more interesting, so I cannot grumble can I? The sergeant told me today that I am officially Section Clerk now, so I can puff my chest, and chuck my weight about, and he also said that I shall get a stripe soon I hope it won't be long.

They have just dropped bombs east of us, four beauties and the night, you would not think it possible for anything to stay in the air, but obviously Jerry can manage to do it somehow, I wonder if he will get home though, I bet he don't. We have had a very rough day here, and I expect you have too, the roof of our cookhouse blew off, and they had to cook the dinner in the pouring rain, with no roof, but they managed to do it all right. The officer has just got in, and he has been talking to the O.C. of the Battery, who wanted to know if we reported the bombs, he seemed to think that he could catch us out, but I was able to say that they had been reported, and now I have to find out the exact spot they dropped and call him in the morning, so that he can examine the damage. I guess this will be a short letter, what with work and the bombs, I don't get a minute to spare to write to my darling, [...] soon I shall be home with you again, the Sergeant has promised me that I shall be able to have it soon, so goodnight for now [...].

P.S. Good morning Darling, it is now seven the next morning [...] I shall be sending this by the postman very soon, and I mustn't miss him, [...]

Wednesday 13 November 1940

Waterford



I was very happy to get your two letters this morning which you wrote over the weekend (one typed & one written)

I think its awfully good news to hear that you will probably get a stripe for your work at the office. Will it be a paid one? You know, darling you

probably haven't thought seriously of what it is like on an out door job in the winter. It must be pretty terrible you know, and I think that if you can take the first few steps of the ladder in the office, it is very wise to do so. I shall feel a little easier anyway, because I am very afraid of you getting chilled & perhaps ill, if you are out too much in the elements. Now I expect, like me, you are wondering how soon the stripe will come—I expect you will have to wait some little time for it. Don't you work too hard anyway will you darling. I think you do quite enough now. Your other good news about a move nearer home is welcome too. Twenty miles will make a lot of difference to getting home, if only you arnt put too far out in the wilds. However, I hope you don't move for another fortnight, so that you have a chance to get in your 48 hours first. By the time you get this letter, you will have been back in harness a whole week, so before we know where we are, you will be in our bed again with me

I was thinking again today how very lucky I am that you are not in the thick of some great battle. At least, even if we are parted, I am not worried sick every minute of the day wondering if you are still alive. So while you are comparatively safe I am not going to grumble any more. When you are helping to stem an invasion, or invading Germany will be the time to think I am hard done by.

We had a letter from Son ¹²⁹ this week. I don't think you would recognise his letters now. They are beautifully written, well put together, and without mistakes— His balloon caught fire last week (it was struck by lightning). He said they had a fine time hauling in the cable afterwards. His girl has now been promoted to sister in an Edinburgh hospital. Hope he gets a decent job later, or his chances of marrying her are pretty small I should say He says his battery have been adopted by a Glasgow printing works. The employees contribute a small sum each week towards buying them comforts. They are getting them an all electric wireless at the moment. They get free meals at their canteen whenever they want them, and are invited free of charge to their dances and whist drives. So, I think he's pretty lucky, don't you?

¹₂₉ Brother Ernie

I wrote a letter to old Churchill during the course of work today. I wonder who it will be next, Queen Elizabeth or Hitler!!!.

The bombs are still residing in the lane, as far as I know. I still use the top road. I saw some soldiers digging out an unexploded shell in the field where the scrap iron is (*commonly known as the Iron fields leading to Sacombe Road*).

Did I tell you that Mr Smith ¹³⁰ gets all his meals at Mrs Jordan's ¹³¹ in the village? I am glad he is fixed up as it may make him stay here, and he is certainly no trouble.

Do you think I shall have to pay income tax now darling. I think the marriage allowance is now only £170 per annum. I think soldier's wives (sic) ought to be exempt don't you? We are giving enough to the Governments as it is.

The Aunts are back from London, and full of the awful damage. They say London looks gastly (sic) and is very extensively damaged.

I asked Barbara if she would like to come to the dancing classes (I mentioned them in my letter to you yesterday) She said she would but Roy wouldn't let her. Isn't she silly! In a few years she will probably be throwing that up at him. Besides to lay down the law like that doesn't make for happiness does it darling. Goodness knows. you're jealous enough of me, but you wouldn't spoil every little bit of pleasure I could manage to get out of this drab life

I expect you will think this is a rather disjointed letter I have just read it through. You see I just put down my little bits of news as I think you ???. But they just read like bald statements I'm afraid.

I saw Phyllis Hills today. She has the same job as I but at Hertford Borough. She gets 7/- a week more than I do as she gets Civil Service pay. Obviously I ought to get it to (sic), so I am going to see what I can do about it. 'Spect you think you have a very mercenary little wife!!! By the way I have mended our best bedroom clock. The spring wasn't broken after all. Aren't I getting clever!! Well darling I seem to have been writing all the evening so, I just tell you that I love you very very much before saying

¹

³⁰ The lodger

³¹ High Road, Waterford

good night. I'm already looking forward to seeing you again in a short time. Let's hope we are not disappointed Keep you chin up darling. Don't work too hard. Look after yourself to the very best of your ability (remember your my most precious possession). and try to count your blessings each day, and life won't seem half so bad. Remember, I still love you, and whatever happens, or whatever you do, I always will. Goodbye till tomorrow
Sweetheart

Undated letter, Possibly 14 November 1940

Waterford

Typed Letter

It has just struct (sic) me that I am very lucky to be able to write the above address on my letters to you. So many many people who call on me in the course of a day are having to put other people's addresses on the top of their letters and they all say the same thing "There's no place like home". So that's one more thing I have to be thankful for, because it means that when you do get home, (even if it isn't often or for long) you at least have a home to come to and if you could hear some of the people's tales about their homes being smashed you would thank your lucky stars that we did not make our home in London.

I received a long letter from you this morning and I also read the second one which came yesterday while you were home. Its lovely to have such nice long one's but when you say that you are getting tired and gradually the letter gets more inaccurate, it makes me want to cry to think of you sitting up at a typewriter trying to keep awake to write to me, when you really ought to be safely tucked up in bed beside me. You mustn't try to do too much writing at nights darling, and if your pal sleeps, then you must take it in turns to watch so that you can have a rest too. I don't want you worn out you know, so please dear, to try to get all the sleep you can, I know it isn't much but even if you can't sleep, and can only lay down, at least you are resting. I mean this, so I hope you will try and do what I say, or I shall have your health to worry about to add to the rest of things.

I am afraid that I couldn't help feeling sad today although I did not intend to, but your time at home was so short that I expect I shall soon get into the normal rut again. I am afraid you felt very very tired after your adventure. I only hope you are none the worse for it.

O! darling it was so wonderful to see you again, but I didn't begin to realise what had really happened till you had gone again, and today I feel in a kind of stupor. I don't want to do anything or go anywhere. You can see how inaccurate my typing is I feel tired. I expect it is the reaction of yesterday. My legs ache anyway. Now why is that I wonder?

Well darling, I shall have to finish as my brain refuses to function any longer, so although I expect there is some news I ought to tell you, I am afraid I can't think of it. I can only think that I am so in love with you and I am parted from you and I have no idea when this state of things will alter, so goodbye my dearest one. I think I'll go home now. P.S (*hand written*)
DENTIST

15 November 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp-



My beloved wife,

[...] at long last I have the time to write a decent letter, as the other fellows are back from leave, & I have taken the evening off to tell you how much you mean to me but first of all I shall tell you of all the things that have happened since the new sergeant arrived.

He is a really efficient & thorough man, but I get on very well with him, & I like the way he does things, for instance, we now have an excellent system running in the office, & I have been able to learn it from the beginning, therefore becoming a key man, with the result that I had a recommendation for promotion sent in this morning, I'm afraid that Les

didn't like me being put over him very much, he seems very offhanded since he read the report, but I can't help that, as I intend to keep pushing ahead. I'll tell you what the report said: - (Education Elementary Plus. Has proved himself invaluable in administrative work in the Section Office, conscientious & reliable, thoroughly deserves recognition) I expect the stripe. If it comes, will be unpaid to start with, but the sergeant told me that it is a recommendation for a paid rank, & that I must accept, as I should not be unpaid for long, but however long it was, I should take it so as to be able to work when I get home with you, & so that we can be proud of ourselves. I don't know how long it will be in coming, but it shouldn't be so very long if it materializes.

If all goes well, I shall be home with you again soon, I won't say exactly when, but keep looking forward, & I'll be right along, I was to have had it at the same time as the sergeant, but he says we can't both be away together, so I am taking mine earlier, he also said that all his office staff get more leave than anyone else, so that is something to reward my hard work, & I don't mind now anyway, in fact now I am to get something for it, I really like it.

We have just been issued with balaclavas, mittens & scarves, but I shall need all I can get, we were frozen yesterday, & last night with the white frost, we had a very cold time in bed, but today we had an extra blanket as well, so things are getting better all the time. I am now in our hut, having deserted the office for the night, the hut is full of smoke, but it's warm, and that is everything, & I shall go to bed early, I have worked from 7 to 11-30 every day since I came back, but I have learnt & learnt, & now I will no longer be sat on, & I'm going to get a square deal at last.

We shall not be moving for some time yet, but the name of the new place is Golden Valley, ¹³² isn't it a lovely name. It won't be far away from where we are now. All the boys have been out digging on the new site today, but I escape all that now, & am thankful.

Poor old Arthur is still in hospital, he hasn't had his 7 days yet, so he will be sent home, & his leave will take the place of sick leave, it's damned hard luck, but I guess he'll be glad to get home anyway, but there are a lot

¹
³² A small village about 10 miles away

of fellows who have been treated that way. We had a hectic night last night early on, we had to go into action, & we had the worst raids we've ever had round this way, but it was a treat to know that we were getting it instead of you for a change, I can tell you we had some excitement informing all sites, but things went all right, & we got over it O.K. (*page & a half of adoration*). I am thinking of you now, it makes me realize how terribly far away we are from each other, but I have learned to appreciate you, a thing I never did properly before I left you, but I swear that can never happen again I have learned all the things I had to learn, & I shall never forget those things, and now I must end this note but I shall have some time off over the weekend, so I shall write some more to you then, and now I'll say goodnight & God Bless you,

Dreams, lovely Venus, Queen of love
 Sent to me from Heav'n above
 I adore you with ev'ry breath I draw
 And tho', we cannot tell our love
 Each day I long for more and more.
 Close to your breast I am content
 Modelled as venus, for love you were meant
 My soul is consumed with desire
 And will not rest till it is spent,
 Darling, my heart is on fire
 And as I lie, possessed by dreams
 Inspired by you, So near it seems
 That I can reach and hold you
 and kiss that crown of Gold sunbeams,
 I pray that dream will someday be true,
 Your Bill

Saturday 16 November 1940

Waterford



My darling husband [...] They say its wrong for a woman to tell a man that he loses interest when he knows he's got her where he wants her, so she should keep him guessing. Nevertheless, I'm risking that to tell you, once more that I love you. But somehow, I don't think it will make you lose interest, not if your letters are anything to go by.

By the way I didn't get one this morning. The probability is that they are working my poor husband so hard that he hasn't even time to write to his wife. Still, never mind, so long as you are safe, well and happy.

According to your yesterday's letter, 48 hours leave isnt so very far off. So I have something to look forward to, even if the date isnt very definite. I do hope the impending move doesn't hold it up. Do you remember Ted ¹³³ writing to you in a letter some time ago that he envied you your first leave, saying that that was a happiness only a soldier could experience? I didn't think that very much of the comment at the time, but now I realise that what he says is true. It is a great happiness for us both that is quite different from any other sort of excitement we have experienced, and there is a sweetness in meeting & being together that only an enforced separation can bring.

Well, darling tomorrow is Sunday, the day we both feel rather lonely. I don't know what I shall do I'm sure. The weather hasn't been too good for going out anywhere, although it was fine this afternoon, so that I managed to spend an hour or two in the garden. I planted some more spring cabbage plants, and then Ron came over, and he helped me dig all down the side where we are putting new trees, so thank goodness, that job is done. I know you arnt very interested in the progress made in the garden nowadays, but I like to tell you about it occasionally, so that you don't quite forget it.

I am very glad that you are now officially Section Clerk, I hope you

¹₃₃ Ladds

don't have to wait too long for your stripe. But you can never tell with the Army. I wonder if you will get it before Christmas!! Son ¹³⁴ writes to say that he will be home for seven days Christmas week.

We had an awful night last night from about 6.30 till two or three in the morning. There were lots of planes, bombs & guns about so I slept downstairs on the floor, but hope to go upstairs tonight as things are somewhat quieter.

Isn't it terrible about Coventry! It must have been hell let lose (sic). The paper says that from dusk to dawn there was not a two minute interval when bombs could not be heard dropping on the town. When one hears of such awful raids it makes the one we get look very pale & insignificant. By the way we have gone over the 200 mark now in raid warnings in Hertford.

My news seems to have run out now darling so I will say Goodnight, and hope to add a few more lines [...]

The devastating raid on Coventry on 14 November 1940 was the biggest air-raid the world has ever seen. 4,330 homes were destroyed and 554 people killed. At one point during the night 200 separate fires burned in the city.

Sunday 12pm. I have just come in from the garden, having done a little more digging. Its lovely & sunny so I think I shall go out this afternoon with Penny. I don't think I could stick the exciting company in this house all the afternoon and evening. I'm sitting up in my bedroom writing to you as I would rather be alone when I'm doing this.

I can see old Harry slouching across the marshes, and there are some ducks swimming slowly up the river. The trees are pretty bare now but with the sunshine, the view is still pretty.

I think the soldiers are beginning to remove our bombs now, there was one in the policeman's garden and one in Mrs Gratton's? garden besides those in the lane. As I expected the vicar has evacuated, it will give him a little more to think about anyway!

Your mother has applied for the additional OAP. I hope she gets it.

¹³⁴ Brother Ernie

She says she sent you some sweets in the week to stop you smoking so much!! Have they had the desired effect?

My paper is almost used up now darling so I will use what is left to say that I love you, and you only. and I'll never stop loving you.

I dreamt we lost the war last night, but at least it sent you home to me, and we were going to get married!!!.

Goodbye my darling till tomorrow Always yours

PS Please return photo

16 November 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed letter.



My darling wife,

Here I am back at the old machine, and at work again, and Les is going to be moved away from us, it appears that he has been noticed by the Officer & Sergeant, as having been careless and inefficient in his work, and he has really lost interest in the work, I don't know how he expects to get his commission in this way, because if his immediate officer won't recognise him, it goes against him very much.

I think he is a little upset over the move, and he read my report yesterday, and was not very pleased that I had been put over him, but he will soon be away from me and I shan't have to worry about falling out with him, but as a matter of fact, he really is lazy and disinterested, and the officer and sergeant had decided to shift him if he didn't mend his ways, and though I still like him very much, he is very selfish, and lets me do all the work, so perhaps it is just as well that he is going. I now have my old friend back with me again, he is the little welsh fellow I have told you about,

he used to love (sic) at Welwyn but has now moved his home to his mother in Wales, and he really is good company and not afraid if he has to work now and again, and as he is really one of we new fellows and was in the photo you have of a crowd of us, I feel as if I have a real pal at last, add to the fact that I now have the official rank of Section Clerk, with all the responsibilities of the Section in my hands, I am as happy as I can be in the army, that is when I get my stripe if ever.

We have just had a lot of commotion in the office, we had a message through to the effect that there was an unexploded bomb a few miles away, and we were to form a search party and find it, and the officer was out, also the sergeant, so I had to find the officer by ringing all the pubs in Belper and get him back as fast as I could to ring the officer in charge at the other end. Well, when he did get back and ring the officer about it, we found that the bomb had already been exploded, and also they knew where it was, so we had to drag the officer out of a hotel from a perfectly good supper, for nothing, I can tell you he had a good swear about it, and I don't blame him, but that is all over now, and he has gone back again.

I guess this will be the last time you will get a typed letter from me, or at least not many more are likely, as this machine really belongs to a fellow who is now in need of it, it is his own personal property, and we have had it for over a year it appears, and now we have to let it go, I shall miss it I know, because from now on, all orders will have to be written, and as there is a considerable lot of things to be sent each week, the outlook is not very nice, but perhaps our officer will see about hiring one or getting one somehow.

I had a parcel from mum today, it contained some cheese which I shared with three of my real pals, and some sweets for which I am very grateful, also some little cakes, I can tell you I really appreciate it all, so do my pals, I think they are real friends as they never scrounge anything.

I don't know if I told you or not, but I went out with the sergeant the other night, he said he couldn't go out with the other fellows, but I was different, we had a couple of drinks, and then to the pictures, we saw Green Hell, it was the best picture I have seen for a long time, and we both agreed that we enjoyed the evening very much, I guess I shall be able to get out with him again some time, he seems to have taken a fancy to me, and so I shall make a friend of him, he lent me a bob the other day because I was broke, which I thought was very decent of him, I didn't ask him, he just knew that I had no cigarettes and offered to lend me some money till we got paid. Nearly all the fellows are out again tonight, including Les, but I expect he is licking his wounds somewhere now, I feel sorry for him in a way, but it is his own fault, and the sooner he realises it the better it will be for him.

I am not such good friends with the cook these days, he is an old territorial, and they are all looking on we new fellows as being the cause of their being moved, and in a way they are right, you see, we are all very conscientious and take an interest in our work, we also know what discipline means, but they being old sweats, don't care a hang for anything, well of course the comparison is very apparent, and the powers that be select anyone they want for special things from the intakes, I can tell you they are getting very sore over it, and as the cook is one of them, he has grown cold towards me and I'm afraid the extra butter etc. is now knocked on the head, but we don't care do we, so long as we can get on in our army career, that is everything.

Since starting this. I have had to take it out and a whole day has passed during which time I wrote you a letter, but I shall finish this one off for you now. I observed that I had just been running the cook down, well,

this morning after I had finished your letter, he told me that it was warmer in the cook house than it was in the hut, so I went and sat in front of the fire with him for the rest of the morning, and he was as nice as he could possibly be, so I guess he is like everyone else here, they have moods and get over them, he says it is the weather, well, this awful day is enough to make anyone cross, by the way, it's still teeming and looks like keeping on for ever. We have a nice fire in the office, and it is all very cosy, but I can't help comparing it with our home, and the more I do this, the more I long to be with you, but as I keep saying it won't be long now, and you can keep expecting me, then I shall surprise you by coming sooner than you expected. I shall want some bath water when I do get home and then you can scrub my back for me, do you know, I have not been able to bath since I came back, and the way things are at present, I shall have to rely on my leave days for baths in the future, because there are not enough of us to make it possible to go now, however I expect we shall manage somehow. It is five in the evening, and getting dark already, it really has been a miserable day, and I don't want to see many more like it. I think I shall have a go and get some more coal in a minute, that is not a job I like very much, as we have to get our hands very dirty and I washed mine thoroughly this morning, in freezing water, so you can understand why the prospect of dirty hands does not appeal to me. The lamps also have not been filled which means that I have to fill them, another dirty job, however I shall have to do it, for my own comfort, I'm sure I wouldn't do it for anyone else now, as they have obviously forgotten me. My assistant from Wales is busy with me now, he is doing the work, while I write to you, but he is like me, he has to work or do something or go mad, so don't worry about him especially as he is going out tonight while I remain here alone, so you see work is pretty well on the whole I think.

And now my darling, I must end this note, as I want to give it to my mate to post so that you can get it earlier than if you had to wait till the postman collected it in the morning. So I will just say goodnight to you for present,

17 November 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

My Darling,

Sunday morning again, & this time I'm not working, we have evolved another system, & I'm on from 3 till 11 & I intend to stick to it too, but unfortunately Les is going tomorrow, & that is going to mess things up straight away. However, I expect we shall manage.

You ought to see the weather here, it's been pouring with rain for the last two or three days, & we're up to our necks in mud, I can tell you it's utterly miserable, & very depressing, but the prospect of coming home soon, combined with other things, helps to make me laugh at it all. Our old huts, leak like sieves, but fortunately I am in a dry spot, & don't have to worry about the others, poor blighters, some of them have got their clothes wet through during the night, & I don't envy them a bit,

I am reclining on the base springs of my bed to write this to you, we have to roll our mattresses each morning & fold all blankets for inspection, in a very short time we shall be having the officer round to look things over, & I expect I shall have to get up & stand to attention, but he will soon be gone, & then I can get on with this writing.

I have lots of letters to write really, but I know they won't all get done, but I'll try to get one off to Mum while I'm on the job.

Last night I was very busy in the middle of typing to you, & I had to leave it, to hunt through a telephone directory for all the building contractors in & around this place, & then type a list out for the officer, & by the time I had finished, it was 11.30, & so your letter didn't get done all the same day, but I shall complete it when I go on again.

I agree with you about Roy stopping Barbara from going to dancing lessons, I think he is very unreasonable, & as you say, it will come back to him later on, but there, I guess they will find out.

Oh how I wish I could be with you as you write your letters, I can see you in the firelight in our bedroom, on the floor, [...] I do hope nothing will happen to stop me coming home when I have planned to, you see I now have control of all these things, & can arrange mine as I please, which is a

fair advantage. [...] (*almost two sides of adoration here*) I write this note to you amidst such dreary & miserable dejected surroundings, [...] The rain is dripping thro' on to the floor the other side of the hut, [...]

Sunshine & roses, your hair & cheeks, blue skies, your eyes (*another paragraph of adoration*) [...]

Have you ever sat in a really cold room with just a tiny but very warm fire, how you keep to it for warmth, well you are that fire, in this cold & desolate world [...]

My toes are cold, my fingertips too, but all round my heart is very warm, because you are locked up in there, [...] and now, I shall end this Sunday morning note, & when I go on after dinner, I will finish my typed one for Saturday, so Goodbye for 4 hours darling,

Monday 18 November 1940

Waterford



Written in pencil.

I received two letters from you today of the 12th and 15th -----The last one contained quite a bit of news from you and I was glad that you had found the time to write at some length. I hope now that the other fellows are back from their leave that you won't be working such long hours. Its all right for a little while but there is bound to be a reaction sooner or later. I was glad to hear that you typed out the recommendation for your promotion. Now we know that steps have definitely been taken, and there is no more for you to do but sit back & wait events. Don't you think you have had promotion very soon? After all you have only been in the Army three months, you haven't even got your profficiency (sic) pay yet. Its a pity if Les dosen't like your promotion. After all it won't effect (sic) him for long. He ought to be glad for your sake. It is certainly a case of everyone for himself. You can't possibly please everyone.

I have been busy this evening making myself a white crepe de chine

blouse. I thought I could use it for the dancing lessons. You needn't worry about me being out in the raids, because if the evenings turn out to be lively I shall stay for the night at Joan's or Esme's house.

Six of our bombs have been exploded in the village now, but the "Road closed" notice is still in the lane, so I expect there are one or two more still to see to. I don't think any of them went off on their own accord. The BDC (*Bomb Disposal*) have been busy for the last two or three days.

Last night was very quite (sic) and so is this evening I went over to the Bloos's ? yesterday afternoon with Penny. They were taken up with her. They said that of course you must come over to see them when you have your first leave, so that I didn't dare tell them that you had it a week ago!!

I'm afraid I'm feeling a little put out again. I put the wireless on at 8 pm to listen to a programme and came up the other end to the dining room, to get on with my needlework. There were remarks about the silly programmes that were put on the wireless these days, and after about five minutes it was switched off. I had another try after the nine oclock news. There was some music, but it was only allowed to be for about 10 minutes before it was cut off.

Doesn't that sort of thing make you wild. I wish I could shut up the house and become a girl? again. I would have more freedom up at the Heath with the sitting room as my own room. Still I suppose these little things are sent to try us, and I ought not to mind such silly little annoyances when there is so much sorrow and pain caused through this terrible war.

I am anxiously wondering exactly when you are coming home. You say in your letters that I am to expect you very soon, and I am wondering what you call "very soon". Surely you can't possibly mean at the end of this week!! Or do you? At least it is something for me to look forward to. Anyway, as you are not moving just yet I don;t see why it can't be at the end of this week. I don't think I shall make any arrangements to go out, just in case!!!

Well on this hopeful note I will finish for tonight as it is 10 pm. Goodnight darling. I'll write tomorrow [...] Thank you for the poem.

18 November 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

My darling,

I shall only be able to send you a very short note this time, as I am just waiting for a sergeant to get ready, we are going out to the pictures together, & it's just a matter of waiting for the bus, but I knew that if I don't write to you now, I shan't get a chance later on, [...] because opportunities are very rare these days, & I have to take advantage of all the little odd moments I get, [...]

We have been ever so busy today, nothing but rush all the time, even your darling little short letter with its twelve precious items of news, I had to read in odd pieces, I was worked all day, & now I'm taking the evening out to make a break, so once again I'll say I love you, [...] Each day we have to write passes out for men going on 48 hours leave, & each day brings us nearer to my writing my own out, & very very soon now, I shall be coming to you, then we shall have two whole nights together [...].

And now my sweet, I must say Goodnight, & may God Bless you & bring us quickly together again,

Tuesday 19 November 1940

Waterford.

How are you, Still working very hard? I think you must be as I haven't had a letter from you today, so you evidently didn't have much time off at the week-end, or else the post is rather late. I haven't anything at all to talk about today darling. Things go on as usual. I get up (Usually late) hurry off to work, hurry home for lunch, hurry back.

Hurry home to tea and spend a boring evening in before going to bed again about 10. This most exciting routine seldom varies, except perhaps at weekends, when I don't have to hurry to Hertford quite so much and when I can get in the garden for a little while. So with so little variety in my life, I wonder that I find anything at all to write to you about each day, except of course that I still love you. That doesn't vary either but it never becomes boring.

I am leaving my office this Saturday, so if you arnt home by then & I can hardly hope for you so soon, you will find me in next door, and your bike at your mother's.

Don't forget to write to Bob when you have time. When you next Come Home again I am going to pack you off to see Mr. Hudson,¹³⁵ so you can have that to look forward to.

I was looking? you your Herb Gardening book on Sunday, and it gave me an idea for the front garden.
How to you think a pergoda of American pillar climbers would look surrounding the little lawn. Planted round the edge between the concrete border & the lavender hedge. Each climber to have a tall pole, and each pole connected to the next by a rope, so that the trailers can climb along it. Do I make the picture clear. I expect not. I think that it would look very pretty and make the lawn more private. (*There follows a pencil sketch*)
Note in Pencil: There what do you think of my sketches!

19 November 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Good morning my Venus,

How did you enjoy last night? I thought it was wonderful, & wish we could have many more, but all being as it should be, I shall be with you again soon, & then we can do the same things again [...].

I am writing this on the eve of my coming to you, & by the time you get it, I shall either be still with you, or just left, but whichever it is, I shall be with you again in a fortnight or so, & there will be no need to feel sad [...].

It's a lovely morning here today, the weather seems to be trying to make up for all the bad days we have had just lately, & now the sun is shining, & the hills & valleys make a lovely picture, we really must have a

¹
³⁵ Dentist in Ware Road, Hertford

holiday here together as soon as the war is over.

We haven't had much work to do so far today, but haven't lost the chance yet, as all the work seems to come either in the morning, or evening, as we have missed it this morning, we can expect it tonight, but I shall be well on my way home this time tomorrow, so I won't mind about the work. I have an able assistant in Charlie, the Welsh boy, & am having a good old time remembering for him all the things there will be to do while I'm away, but he'll hardly have time to lose himself. Because 48 hours is a very short period really, [...]

Arthur is still in hospital, I had a note from him just now to say he has had his operation, & will probably get a month sick leave after it, although I think he is hoping for rather a lot. And now, there is really very little more to say for now, because I shall be home tomorrow to tell you everything & so I'll say Goodbye for now, & I'll be writing again soon,

Hertford Heath,

Two Brewers

My 21st November Half letter (page 5/6)

I wish you were home to deal with this sort of thing. Its not something I know a lot about, and anyway, its not very nice climbing about in the roof at night. I shall however have to do the best I can in the circumstances. I had a nice cold ride to the Heath at 8.30, but its over now. I had to come as Dad & Mum are quite alone and Dad is rather busy in the pub, so I shall have to help over the weekend. I shouldn't like to leave Mum to his tender mercies anyway.

I didn't get a letter this morning again, darling are you very busy? I know you wouldn't neglect me purposely, but I would like to hear from you a little more frequently. If I possibly can I shall go over to Waterford tomorrow afternoon to see if there is one for me.

We are fixed up at the office now, although we couldn't get a senior shorthand typist as my assistant. However we are having a girl of seventeen starting on Monday and a boy of sixteen as well. I am very glad

as I have been late from the office all this week, and don't get home till about 7 p.m. Now thank goodness it will be the boy's job to see that the letters are all got off to the post. Its all right being the head cook but not bottle washer as well.

Well my darling its 10 p.m. and I must get Dad's supper. I do wish you were home but I suppose if I am patient enough that time will come. So in the meantime, till I can show you how much I love you, believe me when I write I love you so very much

Friday 22 November 1940

Waterford.

Written in pencil (very faint).

It is 10 pm ? and I have just retired to my room together with a cup of tea and slice of cake to write to you before going? to my lonely bed. I am anxiously waiting to know that you had a good journey, and that you got back as soon or before you anticipated.

It turned out fine and sunny in Hertford so I do hope you had good weather too. I thought of you a number of times during the morning wondering how far you had got, and when 3.30 came I pictured you about back at camp again ————— (5 minute interval whilst I undressed)

It is impossible darling now that I am about to go to bed, not to contrast last night with tonight, and I expect you won't be able to help doing the same. Still we won't be downhearted will we? Because there will be a "next time" soon and as I said before while you are in England and not in battle, I won't grumble at our fate, because it could be so much worse.

So I am thankful for what blessings I have. (my husband being my biggest one).

Did I thank you sweetheart for all the little jobs you did for me? I meant to also thank you for the nice badge and specially for the two lovely nights.

Of course I havn't any news, and nothing has happened since you left, but I thought you would like to receive a letter, however lacking in news.

Now my darling, Goodnight—turn over and go to sleep—Did you set the alarm for me?--- Good! Good night my sweet God Bless you!

22 November 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Written in Pencil.

My love,

Here I am back again, & at it already, I have not long been back, having arrived here at ? o'clock (*illegible*). Do you know, I took nearly an hour & a half to get to St. Albans, & was I dejected? Eventually I got to Hatfield, & had to catch a bus from there, I really was miserable, as I was afraid of wasting time, & had just left you, but after I got to St. Albans, I landed a lorry which took me straight to Weedon & there my luck was out again, as the road to Leicester was closed, owing to the fact that several lorries were overturned in the ditch, & all traffic was being diverted thro' Daventry. I tried to get a train, but none were running, and unless I cared to Hitch Hike to Northampton which was out of my way, I had to get on via Daventry etc. Well to cut a long story short, I got to Daventry, & stopped a van driven by the friendliest Jew I have ever met. He was going to Nuneaton he said, & from there to Leicester, & I was welcome to come with him if I didn't mind going with him out of my way a bit. Well, I was fed up, & I took the opportunity, & good job I did, because when we got talking I found that he lived a (sic) Nottingham, & so I stuck all the way, going thro' Rugby to get there, & he was ever so decent to me, paid for my tea, & asked if I had enough money to get to Derby from Nottingham. He used to live in London, & was bombed out of his home, lost everything, & so he took his wife & kiddies to live at Nottingham, & when we eventually got to his home, he drove me right thro' the town to the Bus Station, which was about two or three miles more than he need have done, I tell you, he is the squarest fellow I have yet met on the road. We talked about religion & Jewish persecution, & he couldn't understand why we dislike Jews but if

they were all like him, they would be loved. I shall always remember him, & he says he will be called up soon, so I may have a chance to repay him one day, I shall take great pleasure in doing so. Well, I could go on writing about him for pages, he was a hero, [...]. After I got to Nottingham, I had to Bus the rest of the way which cost me 2/6, but it was worth it, because I was saved a lot of worry, & then my luck was right in, I was starting the $\frac{3}{4}$ hours walk to camp, & our mechanists van went by, so I gave them a whistle, it was dark you see, but they stopped for me, & I got back one hour late, & what do I find, tons of work, & we're in action, we're up to our neck in plotting, & worrying about various reports, & I'm dead tired, I do wish I could be back in the safety & peace of your arms, nestling in the softness of your breasts, what joy I had, & hope to know again soon, but two weeks are an eternity, & the way I feel now, I shall never survive them-----thank goodness-----the order has just come thro' that we are "SLEEPER" which means that we can relax at last, & am I glad, as I expect I shall catch the 7 o'clock turn in the morning, but such is life.

We have pinched Floydies wireless, he's gone out to a show in Derby, & won't be back till midnight at least, so we're having music as we work, I am writing to the strains of When my Dreamboat comes home, how I wish mine were coming home, but I have only just returned, & have to wait an eternity before I can let my Dreams come true again, as we did last night, it is still very vivid in my mind despite my wearing trip back, & I would go thru' much worse for just a look at you, [...] I can't kill dragons to prove it, but I can Hitch Hike, & tho' that isn't much, at least it shows I'm determined to get to you by every available means. I'm afraid I shall die of worry if this war goes on for ads long as they say it will, & I don't know how I shall survive.

And now, I shall end this note to you, because all the evening out boys are coming? round, so Goodnight my darling,

23 November 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed letter.

My darling,

Here it is Saturday, and already I have been here for a whole day, so at that rate I shall soon be with you again. Do you notice how my typing has gone to pieces again, I think it will be all mistakes again before I have finished. I had a game this morning sorting out all the things that have accumulated during my absence, and there is plenty of it, you would be surprised at the way important things are just thrown at the back and forgotten, so I had the job of sorting all of them out and getting things in order again. Les is still here, the sergeant told me that he was approached by him while I was away, and asked to be given another chance, and he was granted it by the looks of things, but it has not made much difference so far. However he will improve I hope, because it makes things very difficult for me if my assistants spend all their time messing about.

You will be pleased to know I saw the M.O. this morning and made an appointment for the dentist, although I don't yet know when I shall be going, I also woke up with a bad head ache, and I asked him for something to cure it, I got two aspirins, and took them on the spot, and I'm glad to say the ache has left me now, and I feel equal to almost anything again, but the thing I most want, is another night with you [...] I have completely recovered from my journey back now, [...] one thing I have learnt is that the next time I go back, I shall bus to St. Albans, it's quicker. I expect you thought I sang the praises of the kindly jew who helped me a lot, but believe me, nothing I could say about him in his favour would be sufficient thanks for what he did for me, and if I ever get a chance to repay I shall be glad, when I come home again, you must remind me about him and I will tell you all about him, although I still don't know his address in spite of the friendship we quickly made, but the world is a small place and the chance might yet come.

The sergeant has gone home this weekend, I hope he enjoys himself as much as we did, although that is pretty well impossible, because I am the only man in the world with an Angel for a wife [...].

I think I shall go to the pictures tonight, I have the evening off, and I don't see why I should not take the opportunity while I can, and then perhaps I shall not feel quite so lonely [...] I shall never get used to being without you, but at the same time I guess I must make the best of it. I think when I get my stripe, I shall have to go to a school later on, and learn how to be a real N.C.O. so that will make a change, although I don't like the idea much, because it means that I shall have to take all my kit and bedding with me, and the thought of all that bundle is enough to make the strongest wilt.

We had a kind woman in here today who brought some sweets and cigarettes for us, and as the sweets were in several paper bags, the office staff took possession of one of them to eat while we work, I'm afraid the boys would not be very pleased if they knew about it, but they don't and the sooner we eat them all up, the sooner the evidence is gone. I also managed to scrounge one of my special bloods,¹³⁶ all about Mars etc. and as soon as there is not much to do, I shall be buried in it.

The officer's little terrier is in here with us this afternoon. He is a playful little fellow, and very friendly because the type of dog that he is are usually very snappy, you ought to see the fat on it though, I should be worried about it if it were my dog, he is barking now, a proper little puppy bark, Les has just given him a sweet, and I think it is the first he has had because he is looking for more amongst the papers in the hearth.

All these little things remind me of home and you, and I find myself thinking of Penny and her antics, I do wish I could be with you over the weekend, we could have such a lovely time, but that is being greedy I know, and yet on the other hand, I did nothing to cause this war, and I don't want to be in it, so it is quite natural that I should wish for all the time I would like with you, you are my wife, [...] and I shan't be happy until I see you again.

We have started our move, some huts are already pulled down, and today they are being re-erected on the new site, so I expect that they will soon be moving us now, and I shall be nearer to Derby and also to Nottingham, so that will give me two places to go from when I come home

¹
³⁶ Presumably comics

again, and that may be soon. When you next visit mum, you might give her my love, and tell her that I got home safely after a struggle.

I can't think of much more to say at this time of writing, but I can promise you some more tomorrow, & I shall take great delight in telling you [...] I will ask you to pray for a Speedy end to all this strife that is upsetting our lives, Goodbye,

Sunday 24 November 1940

Hertford Heath.

Written in pencil.

I am afraid you almost didnt get a letter today as I am going up to Waltham¹³⁷ with Mum this afternoon, and I am now at the Heath & we are going to have dinner. So I can just squeezing in five minutes to tell you that I love you and that we are all all right.

Yesterday I went to the Castle Cinema¹³⁸ (all by my little self). They are now open on Sundays in Hertford from 3 till 9pm I expect I shall take advantage of that when I am at a dead end on Sundays, but I don't know now, whether I entirely approve. I was going to start my letter to you last night in my bedroom, but I had an extra hot bath, and my bed was so warm (from the electric fire) that I couldnt resist getting straight into it and of course, that was fatal, as I went to sleep immediately.

My trees didn't come this week end, so I am afraid they will have to wait another week now. Penny you will be pleased to hear, was "dewormed" yesterday. She was starved for 24 hours and she did look miserable I can tell you. However the treatment was most effective as the dose? found out.

I have just retrieved our passbooks from the Co-op and have been adding up to see how our fortunes are. I was quite agreeably surprised.

¹

³⁷ Cross

³⁸ The Wash, Hertford

They were

Mrs Furlong- Coop £ 17-10-0

S.Certs £ 16-10-0

£34- 0-0

Mr Furlong Coop £28-13-0

S. Certs £25- 0-0

£81-13-0

Don't you think that's quite good, my aim now is £100

Well Now my sweet the bus goes in a very short time, and I would like to post this to you today, although I'm afraid theres nothing of interest in it
Goodbye darling [...]

24 November 1940

Hertford Heath



(Faintly written pencil letter).

It is still Sunday but 10 pm. I am still at the Heath, spending the night here. I thought I would commence another letter to you [...] It seems ages since you went away again darling and yet its only two days. No wonder you say that a week seems an eternity. How soon will I see you again sweetheart? I suppose thats a foolish question, but it's a most important one really, as my life seems to revolve around your leaves. So hurry up the next 2 weeks so that I can start expecting my Bill to walk in once more! It is now 11 pm and I am just going to bed so my darling God bless you I am hoping to get a long letter from you tomorrow.

I am sorry for the tear in the note paper. I sat on it, with my pencil, while having supper and the pencil got pushed through the paper by the weight of me!!

Now once again my own darling husband [...]

~~Monday~~ Another day gone darling Black Monday! But not so black now that it cannot compare unfavourably with lovely weekends.

I got your letter this morning which you wrote when you got back. I was very surprised & sorry to hear that you took so long to get back. Do you really think it was worth it!

I'm sorry the paper is crumpled. I threw the letter on the fire when I threw on an envelope. You can see it's a bit scorched. It is going through the wars isn't it?

I havnt, as usual, any news to relate, but please give me all the news about yourself that you can. You see, you know exactly what I do each day, but I don't know all the little things that happen at your work, so I am glad of all you can remember to tell me. Have you heard anything more of your stripe? I suppose not

Oh I have one piece of news. The Aunts heard from Auntie Gert to say that another bomb had dropped in Norfolk Rd and had blown in the windows & doors at No. 90.¹³⁹

Well darling, I shall say goodnight now. Keep happy [...]

24 November 1940

Farnah Green, Camp

Dearest Love,

Sunday again, but this one has not been quite so depressing as usual, because I had a lie-in this morning till 8:30, & then took over while the other boys went for a bath parade, & when they returned I was able to take the afternoon off, & lose myself in the Mars stories, & I must say they are good, & I successfully forgot all my worries for a couple of hours or so. Now it is evening & I am on again, with a half dozen fellows crowded in

¹³⁹ This is the address of the Aunts' boarding house in Margate

here, talking at the same time, & they're rather a nuisance, but very decent all the same so I'll not complain.

I'm afraid I went off the rails last night a bit, you see I went out with a crowd, & had four glasses of beer, I was nearly drunk on that, & had to refuse many more, I think they were trying to make me properly cut, but I wasn't having any, & I shall choose my company carefully the next time. We went to the pictures in a crowd, & made quite a bit of noise, in fact if you had seen or heard us you would have had a good old moan about us, & when we came out we had some fish and chips, and ate them on the way home, & altogether for me, it was a riotous evening, but the boys said I need more of it, & I don't think I shall repeat it, because apart from messing up my stomach, it's an expensive habit.

This morning the officer came to the office & lent me his wireless to while away the time, it's been going all day and now I'm hearing a lovely Viennese Waltze from somewhere on the Continent. You would laugh, my chair has just collapsed, & only a miracle saved me from going on the floor, but I grabbed the table and managed to just save my bottom from a nasty bump.

Some new orders have been issued about leave, they say if we live over 90 miles away, we are not to go home without permission, but I think I can get round it alright, at any rate I shall try.

George, the lorry driver has asked me to give you his love, so I sent it on to you, but I assured him that you had no room for anyone else's love but mine [...]. Charlie my assistant, has found someone's piano accordion, & he's trying to accompany the wireless with it, & a more horrible noise I never heard, & everyone is singing at the top of their voices, if you could hear us you would think it was a madhouse.

We had a really good dinner today, & the apple pie was a success, we had custard with it & I was given a really big helping, & I actually enjoyed it all, usually I only eat for the reason that I must, but today was different, & as I said I enjoyed it, & was very glad of the opportunity to lie down after it. I expect you will say I shall get fat, but everyone says I'm getting fat anyhow, so why should I neglect the chance to rest when it comes.

I had two letters from you waiting for me when I got back on Friday, & I

have already gone through them twice each now, to make up for the weekend but I hope I shall get another one tomorrow morning, because they are the only link we have to cling to for partial peace of mind [...]

And now my sweetheart [...] I must end this all too short little talk with you, it is all we have to ourselves now, but I still have a fair amount of work to see to, so I really must tear myself away now, or some fellows won't be going on leave tomorrow [...] so I must say goodnight & may the angels watch over you, & keep you for me always, God Bless You,

25 November 1940.

Farnah Green, Camp

Typed Letter.

My Darling,

Here I am once again, and still we have the old machine with us, although I don't know how much longer we can cling to it, but while we have it, I shall continue to use it to the best of my ability. There has been nothing of importance to relate for today, we have been very quiet all the time, and really have got browned off with doing nothing, but it is a change really, and tomorrow we shall be under a whole lot of it again I expect. The M.O. took two of our boys away this morning to hospital, one has a fractured shoulder, and the other has a sore throat, I hope it is nothing infectious because I sleep next to him.

I shall go out to the pictures tonight, but I think I shall keep away from pubs tonight as they are very expensive apart from being dangerous. I shall go with one of the sergeants, and another fellow, I guess we shall enjoy ourselves in a quiet way, but I shall tell you all about it tomorrow when I write.

I was very disappointed this morning, because I did not receive a letter from you, but I blamed it on the post, I'm sure you wrote to me. But I hope to get two tomorrow [...]. I haven't heard any more about my teeth yet, but at least it is receiving attention, and that should satisfy you for the time at any rate, I shall let you know when I have to go to the dentist, and that will mean a trip to Nottingham some time. Our old fire is in a bad mood today,

it has been smoking all day, and nothing I do to it will make it stop, I have been out twice today and swept the chimney, but it's no good, I expect it's due to the wind being in the wrong direction, but at least it's warm in here, and that's more than it is out-side.

And now [...] (*paragraph of adoration follows*). I must end this very brief note to you, I'm sorry it is not longer, but I have to get ready to go out now, and to post this to you so that you can get it early, so goodnight my darling [...],

Tuesday 26 November 1940

Waterford

Pencil letter

How are you still enjoying the good old army life? I hope you are not overworking and are still free from raids. Boredom through inactivity is bad enough, but concentrated death from the skies is infinitely worse.

I didn't get a letter from you this morning, so I expect I'll have one tomorrow. How is Les? Has he gone yet or is he still cluttering up the office. I believe you said he would be on a detachment when you got back.

I am writing this letter at —the office—the new office and it isn't often I get time to start your letters during work hours; not that it matters very much, as they are usually short and full of no news at all. I learn from newspapers that London & South England are likely to experience a severe shortage of coal this winter, so I am going to collar Coe? If I can and get some extra shot by the wall where we grew the tomatoes. It won't do any harm there and isn't likely to get stolen.

When I went to Waltham ¹ on Sunday, we happened to get on your sister's bus ¹⁴⁰ It's the first time I have seen her in action. She has got her new worsted uniform on in gray & blue and looked very smart. The divided

¹
⁴⁰ 310 bus

skirt is so cleverly cut that it looks just the same as an ordinary skirt though I should think they would be a bit difficult to wear for lassies of Dorothy Cheek's build. ¹⁴¹.

She—your sister, is trying to get on the coaches now as she would always be finished by 6.30 ¹⁴².

She & your mother went to St. Albans on Friday—to cheer your mother up as she was very miserable after you left, and Edith brought a lovely old fashioned silver teapot & sugar basin. It is really beautifully carved—the knob on the pot being in a bird of flight.

We had such a quiet night last night that we actually didn't have a warning at all!!

I am now thinking about Xmas presents—not that they will be very exciting but if one doesn't buy early I expect the selection will be pretty poor. Can you suggest anything for your mother?

9.45

O! dear I'm so out of breath. I've just had a good old rough & tumble with Penny! I've been teaching her to jump over the back of the armchairs. Now she's worrying me to have another game, but I tell her "No I simply must finish the master's letter".

You know darling, we're already half way through the first week again, and by the time this letter reaches you the first week will be gone, and as the second week always goes quicker than the first, it will so soon be time for you to be thinking of your next leave, or has your latest experience of hitch hiking put you off, so that you won't bother to come home I hope that won't deter you sweetheart because life (for me at least and I think for you) would become very much harder if I couldn't see you fairly frequently, because you are my love for your? up till there isn't any more room left in me, so you must come home so that I can spend it on you and make room for the next lot.

Now darling Goodnight, your very loving Ivy

¹⁴¹ The London & Country Bus uniform

¹⁴² Presumably this would be the 375 Green Line service

Wednesday 27 November 1940

Waterford

Fairly faint pencil letter.

It is 10.30 & I am sitting on my bed writing to you. I felt I must just say something to you before I go to bed and I havnt had time this evening, at least I was in by 9pm & could have written then I suppose by somehow the words won't come to me with the Aunts sitting looking at me and I would rather wait till I am alone, so my darling, I hope you don't mind the pencil. I haven't any ink in my bedroom.

The dancing classes started tonight and as you know, I have been looking forward to them for a fortnight now. It was very disappointing as it turned out that there would be only folk & country dancing, so I am afraid we didn't join. There were lots of my friends, Joan & her sister, Marjorie & Peggy Prontell? Dorothy Gaylard, Esme, and one or two others. We are all very disappointed. I think my disappointment is mainly due to the fact that I shall not, after all have the opportunity of seeing a number of my friends of my own age once a week.

About 10 of us went over to the Salisbury for a drink instead. But I was a good girl & only had a shandy—not like my naughty husband—4 beers. No wonder you were nearly drunk. I do hope darling that you will remember what you said last week about not getting the “beer habit” although I realize you must have a little fun sometimes.

I received your letters from you this morning, darling and I am glad to learn you will soon be seeing the dentist. I'm glad too that you found that “Mars Mag”¹⁴³. I shall have to get you one from the market so that you can take it back when you are next home. “Next home” O! darling I do wish it were tomorrow. I feel very sad & lonely tonight, and if you see any bleary smudges on the paper, I'm afraid they will be tears, but unfortunately theres no kind loving husband to wipe them away and kiss me into happiness. But I expect the time will soon go really. I only hope your move doesn't hold leave up. I suppose I'm terribly selfish wanting to see you so

¹⁴³ presumably a Sci-Fi

often, when there are some poor lovers who cannot meet once in months!!
I suppose you must have thoroughly spoiled me.

Now my beloved as it 11 pm I suppose I must get into bed to dream, I hope of you. So goodnight my darling Godbless you [...]

P.S . I hope you will write to your mother at the first opportunity.

27 November 1940
Farnah Green, Camp

Dearest love,

Another day past, & nearer to seeing you again, I wonder if I shall have to wait very long, you see, I'm rather afraid of this morning business upsetting our leave, but so far I have managed to keep it going, & I'm hoping it will continue.

They have taken another hut away this morning, & some of the fellows are going, & some will remain with us, although where they will sleep I don't know. It's wicked the way they are treated, for instance, they took the roof off the hut first, with all their beds and kit in it, & then it rained, well it don't take much rain to reduce the beds to a dangerous state for sleeping in, & when they are asked where they were going to sleep for the night, they were told that we in our hut would have to make room for them, I don't know how, we have one foot to spare between each bed, & are expected to squeeze up to make room for four more beds,

I don't know what we're coming to, & the way things look at the moment, we shall be in the same boat very soon now, I think we will be shifted about Friday or Saturday, but keep on writing because I shall notify the post office of our new address.

Everyone was up at six this morning & they will work till 6 tonight it's gruelling work for all of them & I'm jolly glad I am missing a lot of it, although the unpleasantness of moving extends itself to us as well, & I shall be damn glad when it's all over.

And now to brighter things, Charlie and myself were measuring our respective heights this morning, & comparing them to our measurements in the pay book, I found that I have grown 1 ¼ inches, since I was last measured, incredible isn't it, and yet I measured without boots, & it's true so possibly I am getting broader and fatter as well, but it all corresponds anyway. I have just been helping to shift the beds, we have [-----] (about 1") between each one now, I leave you to guess what it looks like, well well, I guess we'll get over it.

I got a letter from my brother this morning, he says they get raids daily now, & if they stay away from work without an excuse, they are fined £1, so it's quite a hotspot to be in, he says he has started to think out one for Xmas, I know I shan't be able to get there, but [...] my spirit will be with you all the time.

I had to sweep the chimney again this morning, it's a blooming nuisance, but it all makes work so I don't mind. We are just talking about our early training days, & are all agreed that though it's only four months ago, it seems an eternity & it does too. You asked me about my stripe, well I don't know any more about it than you, but I'm hoping it won't be much longer, I'm getting very impatient about it, but it will come I know and I must wait.

The hut outside is now an empty space in the field, and all there is left is a pathetic sight, seven beds complete with kit and it has rained on them, I'm really sorry for the owners.

I am now surrounded by fellows who have just returned from 48 hours, and they all look and feel the same as I did, so it's pretty general to feel that way it seems. Charlie will be going on Saturday, I hope he enjoys it as much as I do [...]. Do you realise that a week has passed since I was with you it seems a lot longer but at least unless anything terrible happens it is halfway towards being with you again [...].

And now darling I must end this note, I'm afraid my letters are not as long as they used to be, but there are so many things to do nowadays, that I don't have the time to write to anyone but you, and even you have to suffer, so [...] goodnight my love,

27 November 1940 (*Second letter*).

Farnah Green, Camp



Typed letter.

My darling,

[...] I really do not know how I shall be able to wait for the time when I shall see you again, but I keep on hoping the time will quickly pass. We shall soon be moving now, and I think the best plan for us, is that I shall telegram you when we move, so that you can send your letter to me here right to the last. I shall send you my new address as soon as I know it, so until you get a telegram, please keep on writing here. I received two letters from you this morning, and was glad to get them, but I observe you are thinking of going to the pictures on Sundays, I know that you must get bored stiff sometimes, and that it would be nice for you to go, but please don't think me unreasonable if I ask you not to do it, I feel that it is somehow wrong, and I don't like to think of you doing it, [...] it would be out of keeping with my picture of you on Sundays, I know that I have work on Sundays, but I shouldn't if I could avoid it, and even if I had a chance to go to the pictures I should refuse, so please give up the idea, and manage without if you possibly can, but if you really feel that it is not terribly wrong, well, go ahead, and I shall love you just the same [...] And now to brighter things, for a start, I am doing this with one hand, the other is holding the telephone, I have been like this for some time now, I have to keep like this till I am told the raid I am plotting has been cancelled, this is what I'm hearing;- raid x92 hostile, one aircraft, sound plot on k84 height 20,000, and all the time the plots keep coming in, and I have to look at my chart and see if it is coming our way, and this one has already passed over, I had the pleasure of hearing my own plot broadcast to several batteries for direction, and while I do this, I feel that I am doing something useful at least. One of the fellows on the line has put his wireless on, and I am listening in at the same time, so you see, I have my senses fully occupied. I shall be glad when this is ended-----it has, the plane which I reported as not sounding very hostile, has been identified as a Whitley, so I was

right, and now I can put two hands to the typing again.

They have started pulling our huts down today, and some of the fellows are already gone, but I guess we shall be the last to go, as we have to remain in contact with H. till the other place is fixed up. We had to move to another hut this morning, they started on ours, and all the kit had to be shifted, so now I am back in the hut we started with when we first came here, but that won't be for long I'm afraid. And just as we were getting nicely settled down too, but they do say that variety is the spice of life although I don't think so.

I said I would tell you about my night out at the pictures, well, we went to the pictures, and then I'm afraid I had to go and have a drink with the boys or walk home alone, and we bought some bread and cheese to eat on the way home, the bread was home baked, and very very nice, the pictures were good too, Barricade was the name of the big one, all about Chinese bandits, we all agreed that it was the best one of that sort we had seen for some time. I shall be going out to the British legion Concert at Belper on Thursday, we have been invited by a kindly man in the town, and twelve of us will be allowed to go, I expect Les will want to go too, but Charlie has had his name put down with mine, and as Les has been out for three successive nights, he will have to stay in, I do hope this won't upset him at all.

The all clear has just gone in Belper, the plotters who said it was Hostile, caused the warning to go, and since starting this, I have been told that a Balloon has got loose and is fouling the electric cables, it is causing a lot of flashes in the south, and quite a lot of people thought it was gunfire,

and it looked like it too, and now my sweet I must end this little tiny note, as it is my bed time eleven and gone, and I have to be up at six in the morning, so I hope Les will soon come and relieve me now, and till he comes, I will say how much I [...] love you [...] I shall say goodnight and god bless you, and keep you for me,

Thursday 28 November 1940

Waterford



Another faint pencil letter.

Here I am in bed It is 10.30 and I have just had a lovely bath. I have got the electric stove perched on my stool so it shines on the bed & keeps me nice & warm and I've got a H.W Bottle to keep my feet cosy & your dressing gown to keep my shoulders warm In fact everything is perfect but for the fact that I'm alone so the next best thing is writing to you to tell you just what I'm doing

Did you get my letter yesterday telling you I was feeling lonely? Well I feel a bit brighter today. I went to the pictures this evening, as I couldn't face coming home at 5.30 with nothing to do. I haven't even any knitting as I can't get the wool and no savings on hand & no library book, so I went off to the County by myself so there wasn't so much evening to get through by the time I got home.

I didn't get a letter from you this morning but I blame the postal arrangements for that, as I am sure you have written-----

By the way, my trees came this week. I have put them in a hole complete with their straw case for the time being and I am looking forward to planting them on Saturday.

Thank goodness! Gerry seems to have cleared off at last. He has been circling round for over ½ hour. I was so afraid he would drop his load on our village.

O, darling its so lovely & cosy here. How I would like you to be here

with me and I needn't ask you if you would like the same thing. Still every day is one nearer the end of the war and, in between are the longed for leaves, so I expect we might be far worse off. It doesn't look though, as if you will be home on the 18th. Just imagine spending the 18th December apart. That is certainly something we never thought would happen. Well we shall have to drink to one another alone. But I don't expect we shall feel very happy about it.

I'm beginning to feel a bit drowsy now darling. I expect it's the warmth, so as its past eleven I think I will go to sleep now.

Goodnight my sweet darling [...] perhaps in another week you will be spending two more heavenly nights with me. [...]

29 November 1940.

Camp

Typed letter.



My Very own Darling,

Here we are three of us left at Farnah Green to defend the fort, we have just the office to ourselves, Charlie and I and a Dispatch Rider, we have just finished a nice feed of fish and chips which we sent to the D.R. out for. It is very cosy here, and we are not pestered with anyone at all, and if we get anything important through, we just send the D.R. out to the new place, I don't know the address yet, but I shall find it out soon and send it on to you.

I'm sorry I did not write to you yesterday, but it was the worst day I have ever spent in the army, we two were left to run the office and do guards all day and half the night, all the day we took it in turns to do guard, and had to clean bikes while we did it, and the cold, you've no idea how cold it was, and I was frozen all the time, and then we had to go in to action, and had to sit all evening till 11 o'clock with the phone glued to our

ears, and I learnt more about searchlights in the last two days than I ever did while I was training, and on top of that, we had to mount guard during the night for an hour, I was doing mine at midnight last night, but now all that is over, and providing we don't get Rouser again tonight, we shall be well away, I say again because we have already been in action once tonight but it only lasted for an hour, and we were told to stand easy, so I'm able to sit down and write to you the darling of my heart. You would be very amused at us if you could only see, we have rations for tonight and tomorrow morning, and have to wait for the rest from Battery, I hope they don't forget us, but so long as we get our food and pay, we will stay here for as long as they like to leave us here, we have to do our own cooking of course, but that don't worry us, we like it, and it is really an adventure, by the way, we have a wireless to keep us company, so we are in touch with the outside world still. We have been kept very short of food for the last few days, having only two meals a day, but that is always the way when we are moving, and we are well fitted up now, so I shan't say anymore about the state of affairs in that direction. George the D.R. is busy making us some more tea, we have enough to last for a day and night, so we are taking fullest advantage of it. The D.R. is the most amusing person in the world, he is a broad cockney, you know, he says wiv instead of with and so forth, and he has been manning the R.T. set for us, it's a real scream to hear him, and the things he says, he treats it all as a huge joke, and we laugh all the time he is calling, add to that the fact that he is partly deaf, you can imagine what a joke it is to have him on the RT. He can't spell very well, and is a real duffer at adding up, we have to help him every week when he works out his mileage and petrol, you ought to see his ticket, it's a real picture, all smudges and blots, but he gets away with it, and deserves to, he's a good fellow, but a real character. He has a girl, and we are helping him to write to her, he takes it all as a huge joke, and enjoys himself immensely telling us what he wants to put. We are listening to the nine o'clock news now, can you picture us? beds piled up against the wall, kit bags and cases all under the tables, cooking utensils everywhere, and barely enough room to move around, but we like it, and hope it lasts for a few days till they get settled down at the other place, you see, we miss a lot of work if we wait till all the moving is done, and the way they have been worked is heart breaking. Moving all the huts in addition to equipment, is a

very big job, and most of the fellows who were in the army before the war are all agreed that they have never had to move huts before, and hope they never move again. We have a gun here with us, and five rounds, so we shall be able to stop any attempt at invasion, and you can rest in peace. I can picture you, in our bed & in a week or two I shall be there to give you all you can take [....] I have tons of love stored up inside me [....].

I have just finished another spell on the telephone, I was afraid of it was rouser again but it passed off all right, and I hope we don't get any more, the old phone is a nuisance. Charlie has just gone out to get some coal, he has taken a hurricane lamp with him to see by, I hope there are no jerries about, or we shall attract attention, but we must have coal and as we have no torches, the lamp is the only other thing to use. George has gone to bed in case he has to go out later on, but I hope we don't have to disturb him, he deserves a rest.

I'm afraid that I'm very dirty again, I have not had a chance of a bath since I saw you last, and very little chance to wash thoroughly but we manage, and as we don't get a chance to go out much, it don't really matter, except that a wash makes me feel fresher; we did manage to get a shave this morning, but we had to do it in the office, as the ablution shed is gone, and the water has to be heated on the office fire, but we got enough to manage this most important job, and felt much better for it, but at least it serves one good purpose, and that is that you will have plenty of hunting? to do when I do get home again, you'll like that won't you. How I love you (*a whole paragraph of adoration here*) [....].



And now my darling, I am near the end of my sheet and then I shall have been typing and phoning alternatively for four hours, this letter has been very interrupted but I managed to make up for the one I missed yesterday, and if tomorrow is favourable, I shall be able to let you have another from this address, Goodnight my love, [...], God Bless You,

Charges to pay _____ s. _____ d.

RECEIVED

POST OFFICE TELEGRAM

No. _____ OFFICE STAMP 29 NOV 40

Prefix. Time handed in. Office of Origin and Service Instructions. Words _____ m

From 74 174 11.50 BELPER DY 8 To 861

CONFIRMATION

FURLONG HERTFORD 861 =

DONT WRITE MOVING LOVE = BILL + 861 +

For free repetition of doubtful words telephone "TELEGRAMS ENQUIRY" or call, with this form at office of delivery. Other enquiries should be accompanied by this form and, if possible, the envelope. B or C



Saturday 30 November 1940

Waterford



Twenty five pages.

Thank you for your Wednesday's letter & the telegram. I thought I would commence a letter even if I can't post it just yet. I posted a letter for you on Thursday & Friday, so I hope they will be forwarded to you.

I hope you are comfortably settled now in your new camp. At least the weather is cold & dry. It would be awful to move in stormy wet weather I also note your remarks about Sunday cinemas, and, of course, I won't think of going if you don't want me to. In any case, I was a bit dubious myself and am glad that you have made up my mind for me darling.

I have put my trees in this afternoon. I managed very well as they are only small ones. The nurseryman sent me one short however, my special 5/6 one, so I shall have to write to them----- Barbara & Dorothy Gaylard are over here this evening. They are staying the night as the old man ¹⁴⁴ is in Somerset for the week end-----

Auntie S & I went to a concert in the Corn exchange last night. Mr Williams ¹⁴⁵ asked me to go, as he was in it. It was quite good (and it was free). This is the first time Auntie S has been out in the blackout. Last night also there was a bomb dropped on a house opposite the T. Brewers. Although there were four children in the house (the bomb caught the corner of the house) no-one was hurt. Barbara was in the lav ¹⁴⁶ at the time, and, hearing the earth come down on the roof, decided to stay where she was. Mum dived under the table, but, remembering where B was, rushed out to see whether she was all right, followed by the dog, barking for all her might----

By the way, darling I have heard it whispered that we may get Wed: Thurs: and Friday for Christmas, so if you fo get any choice at all with your leave, plonk for the days immediately following Christmas as I dare say I

¹
⁴⁴ Presumably the lodger

¹
⁴⁵ From the office

¹
⁴⁶ Outside loo

could wangle the Saturday morning and so make five days in all.

Of course if there was any possibility of me seeing you if I came up to Derbyshire-----!! But I hope you will be home soon now so that we can discuss all such questions at least I can look forward next week to expecting you to walk in at any moment, so I hope the new move won't hold you up---

Well darling as it's 10 pm I will say goodnight for now. God bless you. I love you.

Sundaynight, 1045 pm

Another day nearer to seeing you my lover. I am propped up in bed as usual, and alone with my thoughts of you It has been very cold & frosty here all day. Barbara, Dorothy Penny & I went for a walk this morning, but this afternoon we could not be persuaded to leave the fireside, so we spent most of our time after dinner toasting our toes & reading. I wonder how you spent this Sunday- I can't tell you how much I long for the Sundays--- long past now--- when we built up a huge fire & drew the settee up close to it, and spent a quiet & cosy afternoon and evening together, with our tea on the little coffee table—alternatively arguing & loving. I remember that I used not even to wash up afterwards—we used to be so lazy. Now, even when those lovely times come & you are home we can't recapture the same intimacy because alas; we never get the house to ourselves You know darling, you must come home this week as there are already two more jobs waiting for you to day. The plaster over the lounge fire needs repatching, as the smoke is spoiling the distemper again. Also the vacuum wont work for some unknown reason. Aunt N wanted me to send for the N.Met¹⁴⁷ to mend it but I said you would probably be able to put it right when you came home. But she couldn't possibly wait till then, and we must have a man in. So I said that you would be home sometime this week (which I sincerely hope is right) Every time some small thing goes wrong, she wants me to get professional help, which is all right from her point of view as she dosnt have to foot the bills.

Last week there was a fuse, and I wasnt in at the time. She couldn't

¹
⁴⁷ North Met Electricity Co

wait for me to come home to mend it but immediately 'phoned the N.Met for a man. Fortunately the man on Call happened to be Alan G¹⁴⁸ & he very decently said that he would not book the call.

Well [...] it is 11.15 and time I was going to sleep I won't kiss you goodnight darling as my lips are sore with the cold wind & I have got camphor ice all over them---you don't my (sic) do you. [...]

If I get a letter from you in the morning I will post this off to you at once, as it must be horrible not to have a letter for several days, So, in case this is the end of the letter Goodbye sweetheart

Monday (page 13)

I'm afraid it wasn't the end of the letter after all, as although I did receive a letter from you today, it was written las (sic) Wednesday and bore your old address; so now I am writing a few more lines to you, but as it 11.45 I must not be very long.

I've been to Mildred's this evening, fitting my airforce coat. It was horribly cold & foggy coming home, but at least Gerry kept away. I'm sorry that you had rain while you were moving, we havn't had any here. It's awful for the poor fellows whose beds got wet. I do hope darling, that yours was all right. If only you could share mine every night instead. But I am hoping that you will be sharing it with me before another week has gone----- even if it will be the wrong week (I know)----- [...] you'll get a surprise when you come home, as I'll probably want to make a fuss of you. I hope you wont object. You'll have to put up with it anyway, so I won't say any more in case I frighten you off.

I must say goodnight darling and I hope the letter will get posted tomorrow. 'Bye darling Take care of yourself & may God bless you.

Tuesday,

Faint pencil

One more day nearer to seeing you but O, darling, what a difference those words mean to me now! I arrived in this evening five minutes after

¹⁴⁸ Alan George, neighbour on north side

you 'phoned, but I don't think the news has really filtered into my brain---- at least I'm not crying, and I ought to be. I can't tell you how sorry I am that I was out darling, but of course it couldn't be helped. You say no leave for two months. Surely you can't really mean that. There is sure to be leave for someone over Christmas and if short leave is stopped till then, they are sure to resume it for the holidays, and as you were about due for yours, you would be one of the first to get it. Perhaps you are looking on the darkest side of things. I do hope so anyway. Poor darling! I can just imagine how you are feeling, and then not to be even able to speak to me on the phone. If it is really true that you won't be home till February, then I shall have to think seriously of paying you a visit at Christmas. won't I. It would be something for you to look forward to---But till you move to your new headquarters it is difficult to say what the conditions will be so I am not going to think too much of that suggestion. I am sure things won't be as bad as your message suggests, darling and I am sure also that we shall be meeting sooner than you are at present expecting, so, cheer up my sweet, if it is at all possible We are not the only lovers by a long way who will be feeling terribly disappointed, so we won't be the miserablest will we?

There was "business as usual" this morning, you will be glad to know. I had a pretty rough day, but consoled myself that I would be fine for the end of the week, when I expected you might be home, It looks now as if we shall have to go through two more business days before we meet again but as I have already said I am sure that is looking on the worst possible side of things. You will see that I am trying to cheer you up, because you said that you couldn't live longer than 6 weeks without seeing me, but you won't have to I feel sure, so please be "cheered up" for my sake darling, as it bad enough to be miserable oneself without knowing that the person one loves so dearly is miserable too.

It is getting on for 12 pm, so I must lay down and go to sleep. I am enclosing some money for you and hope this letter will reach you quickly. At least I am glad that I can post it off to you at last and now I am going to sleep to forget for at least a little while [...]

Wednesday (Possibly 4 December 1940)

Waterford

Thank you my darling for ringing me up this evening, it cheered me up immensely to have the pleasure of hearing your voice again, even if we weren't able to speak quite as freely as we would have liked. Anyway I felt much happier for it. It made you seem much closer---not so cut off from me. Did you feel better too, for having been able to talk to me?

It still doesn't seem possible that you won't get leave till February, although seven days every three months will be fine specially for those boys who can't get home in 48 hours. On the whole I suppose it is the fairest plan. If you get 48 hours in between, that makes eight leaves a year--approximately one every six weeks, and as four of them are seven day leaves, it really isn't so bad after all. If I do get my three day at Christmas now, I suppose I should seriously consider coming to see you then. I don't think I should come however on Christmas day but would spend that day at home (I must do this). I could come up on Boxing Day (which would be better for travelling) and stay till the Monday This is four days-Thursday till Monday. What do you think of this plan? You could probably find somewhere nice for me to have bed & breakfast (but it would have to be nice mind you) and then I could see you every available minute that you were off duty, may be you could even manage to sleep out one night.

Anyway darling more of these plans later on, but its nice to look ahead isn't it? I am busy making my airforce coat now. It's very heavy & warm, and would be fine for travelling. I find that the badge on the arm (wings with an eagle's head) is American. I'd like to know the history of the coat.

Look darling don't grumble at this short letter but its 12.pm & I have no more paper upstairs, and cannot go down at this hour for more so I will use what space is left to say I love you. Please keep smiling because I love you [...]

4 December 1940. (Address removed)

Possibly still Farnah Green

Typed letter.

Darling,

A few minutes ago I told you I love you, and now I must tell you again [...] we shall have to rely on letters more than ever now, so I shall try to make them take off the awfulness of not being able to be together so often.

First of all let me say that I am feeling a lot happier now I have spoken to you, than I did last night, I had all the boys in the office at the time, but I didn't care very much, as all I wanted to do was to speak to you and tell you how I loved you, which I dared to do in spite of all the company I had at the time. They are a decent crowd of fellows here now, we are all pretty good friends and get on well together, and we must do, because five men living together could easily get on one another's nerves if we weren't very good friends. I want to tell you that Les has been approved by the powers that be or his commission, so I guess we shall be losing him at last, I shall be sorry to lose him really, because although he don't like work very much, I can't help liking him, and I really feel a little bit sorry for him, he has no interest in this sort of work, and anyone who is not interested must feel the same as he does, so I wish him the very best of luck and hope he gets on all right.

We made an oven today, built of bricks, and roasted the meat, but I'm afraid it was a bit tough, but we managed to get rid of it, and at the same time we made a very nice bread and butter pudding, that was a success, and everyone enjoyed it, the only fault being that I made too much, in fact it would have done for ten men, but we get plenty of grub, so we aren't worrying too much, the only thing we have run short of is sugar, we are existing on saccharin at the moment, but the new issue come out tomorrow, so we should be alright again, you see, we give tea to everyone who calls us, and therefore have exceeded our ration, but it don't really matter, we are managing pretty well. I am getting very fat, you will notice a difference when you do see me again, but I feel alright, and that's something. I am busy plotting again now, having the phone at my ear at the same time as I am typing, don't you think I'm clever? We don't have

much activity round this way just lately though, I do hope it isn't coming your way. I am looking forward to that long letter which is on the way to me, I do miss them very much, and shall be glad to hear all the news you must have stored up for me [...].

You seemed to be a little bit hazy on the subject of the leave so I'll explain, the old arrangement was to have forty eight every fortnight, and seven days every six months, now this has been altered and we are to have a seven days every three months, and a forty-eight every three months, each one dating from the last leave we had, the idea is to have the forty-eight making a break between seven day leaves, is that quite clear to you, I don't like it though, and would much rather see you every fortnight, but all the same I suppose a week together is really worth waiting for, and we can have a nice long time together, and even now it is more than some people are getting, so we won't grumble and even if we do, there is nothing I can do about it unless you have a baby, and then I should get a short leave on compassionate grounds, but you aren't going to have one, so we can't wangle it that way [...]. I have given the phone to Charlie now as I want to get on with this letter, it's a terrible night, pouring with rain, and cold and miserable, I'm glad it's not my evening off, I did go to the pictures the night before last, and I was all by myself, I'm afraid that I felt more miserable than if I had stayed here though, so unless I have a companion, I shan't go out any more while we're here. I have been pretty busy writing letters tonight, one to Jack and one to Mum, and now the most important one of all, and I have lots to say too. I seem to be getting on pretty well at my work now, and it is gradually becoming more easy and less worry to me, although I do still have worrying days sometimes, but on the whole I manage fairly well, and if it all goes like this, I shall have no complaints [...].

~~damaged page~~ (where address was torn out) [...] there is a real gale blowing outside and I'd rather be in here than out (*damage*) can tell it's pretty rough but (*damage*) [...] The mud is getting thicker every day and soon we shall be paddling in it I'm afraid, but I have some Gum boots now, they are too small for me, but I manage to keep them on, and they keep my feet dry, which after all is the main thing. I think you would be very amused if you could see us all dolled up in Gum boots, cooking the dinner, and I bet you would be surprised if you could have a meal with us, at the quality of it. We are experts in the art of frying by now, but also, we have

stews, with plenty of vegetables and greens, and as I told you before today we had roast meat, and if we get some flour tomorrow, we shall have a go at making pastry, we have tons of currants and raisins, but no flour, so we must wait till we get an issue, and then try our luck. If we could stay here for a few weeks on this basis we should all be able to send tons of stuff home, we have already got two pounds of margarine in stock, and at the rate of issue we should soon have enough to start a business with, and I can tell you that we are pretty generous with it when we make toast, and I put a ton of it in the bread and butter pudding this morning, so you can tell the racket that goes on at the other cookhouse, we have already put out a few broad hints to the people who might know something about it, and we have told them that we know how much we should have and that there will be a fuss if things don't alter when we get back to the fold, I wonder what will happen. (*paragraph of adoration*) [...].

And now my sweet, much as I hate to leave off, I have still many things to see to, [...] as each letter is read, we are nearer to being with each other again, so keep on looking for the bright side, and soon I shall be with you [...] so I'll say goodnight my darling,

Thursday 5 December 1940

Waterford.

Faint pencil.

I am sorry to say darling that I did not get your letter this morning so I'm afraid I could not post my yesterday's letter to you, so you will get two at once instead. I shall be glad when you are settled in your new home as I don't like not knowing quite where you are. Anyway you should be quite accustomed to the new surroundings by Christmas. It would have been been rotten moving just at the holiday time. You know Christmas will be here in just over a fortnight so if I do come to see you then, will (sic) shall soon be in each others arms again. We mustn't bank too much on it however as I don't know definitely whether I shall get more than one day

for the holiday. Also, you will have to see if there is any chance of seeing me if I do come, as of course it would be no use if you couldn't see me a fair amount would it? I should only be very miserable being so near & yet so far from you.

I am going to make you a little Christmas cake anyway and shall send it if I cannot come to see you.

I strained my ankle today. It is rather swollen & painful but I hope it will be better a good deal by the morning. Silly thing to do wasn't it? Anyway I have spent an evening in today so am resting it. I have spent three evenings this week at Mildreds doing my coat so consider I can skip if (sic) for one evening.

I am not writing in bed this evening, but I'm listening to Geraldo instead. (*an English bandleader who became one of the most popular British dance band leaders*). Funny isn't it, how sweet music soon puts one in a romantic mood & makes one feel so sad—

I learned yesterday that Longmores have just engaged a shorthand typist at £5 per week. I saw the letter so know it to be true. I shall look round after Christmas for something with a larger salary.

The Aunts are going down to Margate shortly to have a look at the house & bring up a few things they need. They are talking of trying to find a house somewhere and having their furniture brought up from Margate. They would then take one or two boarders. So we may be able to let our house yet!

Of course the difficulty is to find an empty house anyway, let alone a suitable one—However nothing would be done till the Spring, for which I am thankful.

I am trying to teach Penny to sit up, but have not met with much success so far. She has learned to jump over the wall now, so that Aunts can no longer keep her in the garden. She is laying asleep on the rug now, shivering all over. Teddy is being used as a pillow.

Well darling I think that is all the news I do hope I get your letter in the morning, so for now Goodnight sweetheart, Keep smiling [...]

PS **Friday** no letter from you today darling, but have just been to your mothers & got the new address from her

CHAPTER SEVEN

Undated letter Possibly 5 December 1940.

No. 4 Troop H.Q

Horsley Woodhouse, Nr. Derby

Bill's first letter from new address

Dearest Love,

Here I am at last at the new address, there was such a lot of trouble by not having the office on the spot, that they decided to shift me today, and now I am in the most awful position I have ever been in. First of all let me tell you that Les and Charlie are still at the old place, but all they have to do is to take messages and put them over the RT to me, and I have to deal with them and send the replies back over the RT to them and they put them through to Battery H, so all it amounts to is that they are my telephone exchange and a nice cushy job it is for them too, I have all the responsibility and worry, and all they do is send their worries to me to sort out, but one thing stands out a mile, and that is that I am the important person who knows what to do, so I'm rather flattered, and I still don't have to do night work so it's not too bad, but I hope we soon settle down here. They have made wonderful progress, we are like a little holiday camp to look at, with a huge car park and all that, and the huts are neatly arranged in rows, we are fifty strong here now, in a nice little cluster for old jerry to bomb, but we are very near to houses too, they are only about 100 yards down the road and the village is a very big one too, about three times the size of Hertford Heath I should say, and on the main road to Derby, so we are really better off than we were at Belper. But the office here is not established yet, I am at present in a hut the same size as the one I left, but (sic) it's not the one I am to eventually have thank goodness, I have no fire here and I am absolutely frozen stiff and the only light I have is one hurricane lamp, but at least I have managed to scrounge a bed, and that is everything I suppose, but all the same I can't help thinking about the fellows I have left behind, they are warm and cosy in the office there, and

now two of us are gone, they have taken their beds in too and sleep on the spot, and they look as cosy as anyone could wish to be, and after coming to this I envy them, all I can hope is that they don't take long to get me settled down. I have not heard much more about my stripe, but everyone seems to think that it won't be long now and I hope they are right, I am very impatient about it all, and apart from that I think that as I am taking all the worry from the officers shoulders they should hurry up and let me have it. I haven't had much chance to have a look around here yet, as I arrived just as it was getting dark, but from what I did see, it is going to be far less lonely than it was before, and that is the biggest thing of all in this life.

We had some fun as we were moving, the sergeant came on the lorry, and he told me that I needed a haircut, so I said I had no money, and he kindly told me that he was going to get one too, and if I like he would pay for it, so of course I let him do that and we got off the lorry in Belper and had a haircut each, and then had a stroll around the town without moving off, he is very nice really, and I get on fine with him, he calls me Bill now instead of Furlong, so I guess we are pals. Charlie has just called me on the RT to ask me how to make Welsh rarebit, I gave him the recipe, and it made my mouth water so along I went to the cookhouse, and asked for supper, they said there is no supper, so I found a crust and toasted it, and asked for the cheese, they said there is no cheese, so I told them cheese was issued this morning, and then they came out with a bit, and the excuse that as they had not much bread they were saving it for tomorrow, I didn't say anything, but I got what I wanted, and already our suspicious talk and suggestions have gone well round the camp, I hope they take a warning from it all ar (sic) they will be in trouble as soon as I get some evidence against them.

And now my darling, I am at Golden Valley, it is a lovely name for a place and sounds very romantic, but without you it might as well be called gloomy valley, because it is no brighter here that it was at the other place, you are not here, and that is all that counts with me, [...]. By the way did I tell you that Arthur had both his 28 days sick leave alright, I wish it were me, he will have time to forget he was ever in the army, and I envy him very much the time he can have with his wife. I am getting colder and colder sitting here, and by the time eleven comes round I think I shall be

frozen to the seat, but I shall have an alteration as soon as it can be arranged don't you worry. I haven't done much in the way of work here yet, just typed a few orders out and sent the dispatch rider out with them and had a talk with Charlie over the R.T. but tomorrow will be the day I bet, there is tons of stuff waiting for attention, and it looks as if I shall be very busy, but at the moment, the more work I get, the better I like it, because it helps the time go, and that is the biggest enemy, I hope it don't drag too much with you [...]. Please excuse all the mistakes there are bound to be in this typing, but as I told you, I have only one lamp and that one is not so hot at that, so I am learning to type by the feel of things rather than by sight as I usually do. [...] *(there follows a long paragraph of adoration)* as soon as it is possible [...] please try to come here unless something wonderful happens again soon and I find it possible to get to you, but though I hate to say it, the chances are very remote, and it would not do to look for anything like that.

Now my sweet, I shall end this my first letter to you from this place, and tomorrow, all being well, I shall send another from here, so until then, I must say goodnight, & God bless you,

Friday 6 December 1940

Waterford

When I got home this evening I found your letter waiting for me. It hadn't come by the time I left for work this morning. However, as you know I got your new address from your mother, and so was able to post off a letter to you. Now I am sitting in front of the fire-warm at last- The wind is absolutely bitter. couldn't possibly rain, and I believe its too cold even for snow. How sorry I am for those poor soldiers who have to spend the night out in the open, and how glad I am that my own husband, is luckily enough to be inside, with at least some warmth & comfort. I am sure that you must be glad now that you did not get put on a detachment, even if it does mean that promotion won't be so rapid. The night was so rough last night that the rain woke me up by lashing on the window. However it was lovely & cosy in bed (only I was alone)

I spent the dinnertime buying Xmas presents only I ran out of money before I had finished. I am not going to get you an ordinary Xmas present but will get you things to eat. (I hope this is agreeable to you). It is very difficult to get much Xmas fare this year, and such things as figs and dates are practically unobtainable---

Barbara 'phoned me up today-she is fed up with her job, and says that when Roy comes home for his seven days at Christmas she will return to Northumberland with him and get a job there. He is expecting to abroad (sic) very shortly, so I don't expect she will be away so very long—George is coming home, Son is for seven days also-in fact it seems everyone except my boy— Still I suppose I mustn't grumble as it is only a month ago since your last seven days---

I am glad you are getting more to eat and if you can prove anything about the food thieves it will be a jolly good thing. I think it is terrible that the men should go short to buy beer for the cooks, and if you can prove anything they will catch it pretty hot. Be careful, however darling, that you don't get into any trouble. You have to be very sure of your ground before you make any accusations.

I can see from your letter that you were looking forward very much to 'phoning me that night. I am sorry indeed that I wasn't in. You must have felt sad & disappointed I wonder how the rice pudding turned out. Was it nice & creamy? Don't get too good at cooking, or you'll find yourself in the cookhouse.

By the way if you 'phone me again & call Longmores number (Hertford 3) I can speak to you privately , although it would take a minute to fetch me (which would be precious if you are having to pay for the call). Or, of course if you wanted to call me one evening I would stay on at the office until, say 8pm. It is so Difficult to say what we want to when there are others listening isnt it?

Penny is laying on the rug shivering in her sleep as usual, and we are all crowded as near to the fire as possible as it is so cold.

My ankle is still painful, but is nothing to worry about. It does not seem to be swollen now.

I suppose you still don't get any baths, but perhaps the new camp will

offer better facilities. I am going to have one before I go to bed. It makes one nice & warm for going to sleep.

Well darling, I don't think I have any more news for you. If there is any particular thing you would like included in the Xmas parcel am getting for you, please let me know and I will try to obtain it. Goodbye to now darling. I hope you will get letters from me regularly again now as, I know how much they can be missed. Yours most lovingly.

6 December 1940.

Horsley Woodhouse, Camp

Written in Pencil

Here I am alone as usual, sitting in the office with freezing feet, & running nose, but at least dry, & very warm inside, because I'm burning with love for you. I find that I ~~was~~ looking on the black side of things when I said I wouldn't be coming home for two months, because I found out today that this new system of leave supersedes all the other leave, which means that it actually starts all over again, & we wait for a period of three months from our first leave under these new conditions and it runs so that I start a 48 leave, and six weeks later I get seven days. The sergeant has tried to work out a new Rota tonight, & I asked him to get me in pretty early, I hope he will, but only 2 ½ % of the Troop are allowed off at a time, & there are 126 men on the strength which means that only 3 men from the whole Troop will be on leave at one time, so let's hope I get mine in early, I shall still hope to surprise you with the exact date.

And now let me tell you that your letter arrived at Farnah Green this morning before I was paid, & the boys sent the D.R. out here with it especially for me, & I thank you very much for the 7/- (35p) enclosed, I am indeed grateful, but all the same I'm sorry for having to send home for it, [...] my excuse is that living on our own for a week, was very expensive, we used to buy eggs every day, & one or two other little sundries, so I quickly found myself broke & had to start borrowing, so please forgive me

this one little time, & I'll try to make it last in the future.

I have had a very full day, having lots of things to straighten out, but I am nearly on top of it all now, so I've packed up for tonight, & settled down to tell you all about myself. First & foremost, thank you for the lovely long letter you sent, I am so pleased to know that you won't be going to the pictures on Sundays, although I thought somehow you would realize how unnecessary it is.

I'm also very glad to know that you manage to smuggle a few friends into our house sometimes, please go on doing just that, & make the Aunties realize that it's our house & not theirs, & as for professional attention for every little thing that goes wrong, just point out to them the folly of spending too much money on the wrong things, they might be glad of it themselves yet.

Now to brighter things, the lads had a bath parade today, but I'm afraid all I had was the pleasure of arranging it, I asked Sergeant to let me go, but he said I had to remain here, so I shall have to try and work one independently somehow in the near future. I think everybody enjoyed themselves, as they all look pretty happy at the moment, but quite a few have gone out again tonight, I expect they'll all be broke tomorrow, but that's not my worry. I'm going out myself tomorrow tonight, I'm afraid that I shall be alone, but I might find a companion before then, I'll let you know what I did. These old Valor Stoves aren't much good, I have managed to scrounge two now, & I have one at my feet & the other behind my chair, but I might just as well be without any, for all the difference they make, but it'll soon be bedtime again, & at least I can keep a bit warmer in there. I must tell you that thanks to my knowledge of how much food is really issued and the fact that the cooks know I know, I am getting

Valor Paraffin Stove 1940's



pretty good food here up till now, I had a bigger dinner than anyone else, & have scrounged supper for two nights running, so it looks as if our hints have done some good after all. The sergeant has gone out to the local pub, & he says if he's wanted I'm to say he's on the spot, because the officer is out too, & he is supposed to remain here, however, nothing is likely to happen, so he's probably as safe as if he were on an official evening out. This new camp is certainly worth seeing, the Cluster Site idea is certainly spectacular if it doesn't prove a success, but that remains to be seen.

I have just taken off my Gum Boots so that I can warm my feet a bit, & I also warmed the Boots before I put them on again, I feel a little better now, but I can also feel my feet going cold again already, so you can guess what it's like in here, you see these old huts however good they are, are always draughty, & with the terrific gale that's blowing now, the wind gets through all the little cracks, and cools off the atmosphere before the oil stoves can heat it thoroughly, & add to that the fact that oil is very scarce at this camp tonight, I have to turn the lamps down low, I'm in a fine state, but all thro', these things that happen to me, [...]

I love you, [...] do you recall our Dec 18th celebrations? how I wish that I could be sure of getting home on that day, but the chances are so remote as to be an impossibility, but we will celebrate it on another wonderful day, when I can get home to you. And now further to your suggestions about staying here for Xmas, I do wish you would come, I know that when I explore the village I shall find plenty of places where you could stay for a few days, & apart from that, I feel sure that Mr. Floyd would allow me to get out as often as possible to see you darling, it would be the most wonderful Christmas present you could possibly give me, & I hope, sincerely that you will seriously consider coming here to see us all, it would be deliciously wonderful, & the way things are at the moment, the only possible break we are likely to get, so start making definite plans darling, & then I'll see what can be found for us.

It's now ten o'clock, & in another hour I hope to be in bed, I have been here for about sixteen hours again, & still there is no sign of my stripe, but I guess I am a very impatient soldier, & not at all the kind who would do for an officer, because I get tired of waiting for a stripe, what would I be like

waiting for bigger promotion, [...] the sooner I'll feel justified for putting all those hours into the work. It can be very worrying, but I find that since I have got away from the phones, it is strangely peaceful, & the longer they stay away, the better I shall like it.

And now [...] I must really say goodnight [...] & May God Bless you & keep you for me always,

Undated letter probably Saturday 7 December 1940

Waterford

Pencil note.

Saturday evening 11.30 pm

Good evening my darling, I am all dressed up ready to go to bed? I must write a few lines to my love before getting into the warm embrace of my two H.W Bottles.

I received another letter from you this morning of Wednesday's date, in which you seem to be doing very well in the food line. I wonder how your pastry & rice pudding turned out. You are getting in some fine practice for the time to When you will be able to use your knowledge at home, and so give me a rest from household duties. I shall be able to say on a Sunday morning "Well darling here's the kitchen, and I want a nice dinner cooked ready for 1 o'clock".

I hope this riotous living isn't making you too fat, although I would rather you were fatter than too thin, and if you feel OK then that's everything isn't it.

It is still very cold here because of the bitter wind, so I haven't been in the garden today, but concentrated on my new coat instead.

Penny has been starved for 24 hours to enable us to give her worm powders. She is all right now I think. I hope so, and I'm sure she does as no food whatsoever for 24 hours must seem like a week to her.

My silly ankle is still a bit swollen, so I am keeping it bandaged. I should hate to have a permanently fat ankle like Mildred got. Don't think

that will happen though. Tomorrow afternoon I am going for a walk with Esme. We thought of going to Bramfield (with Penny) & getting some tea out somewhere.

In the morning I am going to make your cake. I managed to get some cherries to put on it after scouring the town for them —Don't you think I'm a loving wife? I really am darling, even though I don't tell you much of how I feel about you. You do ask me to in your letter but I don't seem to be able to put any of my thoughts into words—but I'm always thinking of you and longing for you. You say you only want me when you are with me, but it isn't so with me and I do wish you could be with me at night, if only for the satisfaction of feeling your comforting arms around me Still perhaps I will at mas.

Have you thought any more of this plan? Or don't you think it very practical? There may not be any houses near your new camp, and I wouldn't come. Even now, of course there is nothing definitely decided and I am waiting to hear what you say.

I see that my watch says five minutes to twelve, so perhaps I ought to wish you Goodnight and creep into bed

There is one thing to be thankful for However sad & lonely I feel, I never stay awake very long. Its a good thing isnt it? Goodnight my love God bless you [...] Remember the rough & tumbles we used to have on Sunday mornings before we got up?

Sunday This is Len's new address (*Watford*) He came over this morning as is starting at a Watford firm tomorrow. He had a row with his boss last week and got the sack. He got two jobs at once in Watford & turned down one at 1/8 ¼ per hour in favour of the second one so at last his (sic) is going to earn decent pay.

Hope you will write to him, 'Bye darling.

8 December 1940.

Horsley Woodhouse, Camp

Typed letter.

Beloved,

Sunday again, and it has been no different than any other day for me, work all the time, till I'm fed right up with it, and feeling very depressed, but still I expect I shall get over it, by tomorrow, It's just that it's Sunday, and the usual feeling is on me, but all the same I wish it were nearer to the day when I'm due to come home, but I don't know the exact day of that yet, so I haven't even got that to look forward to, however, I still have the one thing I cling to more each day [...] it is a grand thing to be in love [...]. Holding you in my arms is the thing that would make me the happiest man in the world, but that is asking too much of the terribly unjust world, and all I have left to me are dreams [...]

I am hoping to get a letter from you tomorrow, the first one to this new address, and please make them as long as you possibly can [...]. Do you know, we now have sixty men on this Site, the most I have ever worked with at one time, and I have all their little worries to see to in addition to all the other things in this office, and being on my own is the worst of it, although I did manage to get an evening out last night, I went out with the sergeants and a corporal, though I can't say I had the best of evenings, because we really only did a pub crawl, but all the same it makes a change and that is what I need more than ever, although you might not believe it, I only had the usual two pints, and this time I did not feel giddy, so I was able to appreciate the evening such as it was. Now, having had the much needed break, I am back to it again, and the officer is going on seven days tomorrow, lucky devil, but it means more and more for me to worry about, so I shall be glad when he gets back. My stripe is still as much in the distance as it ever was, and I am getting very bored waiting for it almost to the point of thinking that it won't come at all, but everyone assures me that a recommendation is as good as a stripe and believe it or not, there is a fellow here who has been recommended the same as I have and he insists on his men calling him L/Bdr already, I think that is a bit hot don't you. I've got George here with me again now, the lorry driver, he has

just come in to do a bit of writing, but he makes company for me, and he's a good fellow, so I don't mind him a bit. I get very lonely here at nights, no-one ever comes in to talk to me it's too cold for them [...] I'm putting my foot down from today, the other fellow who does night duty, is going to spend a few evenings in here in the future, he is an old sweat, and so far has been in the office since I came back from my seven day leave, and has only stayed in two evenings, you see, he does the night work, and sleeps all the day, then slides off at night, so I shall put a stop to that now I have only him with me, and I don't think he's going to like being here for every other evening in future, but he is going to make up for all the time he has had off in the past if I have anything to do with it. I am very short of news today [...]. I will try to dig out some little items that might interest you, for instance, I have had no more to complain about with the food problem, our rumouring has made an impression on the cooks, and they go out of their way to give me a square meal, I have just noticed that the spacing has slipped just there ¹⁴⁹ but that is because the poor old machine is getting worn, so will you please excuse it.

Another thing that has happened today, is that they have now installed a system whereby the N.C.O.'s each have to do a days duty as Orderly sergeant, and they have to deal with all the problems of the men from now on, and that is going to help me a lot, I hope the system lives. You ought to see the camp now, the poor sentry has to march up and down properly now instead of just ambling about, and all the villagers come up to look at us, we are the most interesting thing they have had that way for a long time, and they are very hospitable, I asked one little lad if his Mother could accommodate you for Christmas, and he asked his dad, and now I have to call on them some time, and make arrangements for you, but if I can get my 48 before then, I expect it's too much to hope for to think that you will still come here to me, but that is to be seen. Talking of seeing you reminds me that I still love you [...] I must say Goodnight, I have a few passes to make out for some of the lucky ones, and I must get them before morning,

¹
⁴⁹ In the typing

Monday 9 December 1940

Waterford



Pencil letter.

I am afraid it's rather late to say this (being 11.30) However I must write a few lines mustn't I? I went to Mildred's this evening and came home fairly early at 9.30 with the idea of spending what was left of the evening writing to you. However, when I got in the Aunts were sitting in the candle light looking very glum, and I was informed (rather unnecessarily) that there was a fuse. Well we had supper, and then I looked inside the box of tricks in the cupboard to see if I could find the fuse. There was one box that had twelve little fuses in it, but although I spend (sic) half an hour examining them I couldn't find anything the matter with them. Then, after a struggle I managed to open the "splitter" box and soon saw that a fuse was blown in it. I had a try at mending the thing and was lucky enough to manage it right away.

So you can pat me on the back for having learned how to mend fuses. I mustn't get too efficient must I, or you will begin to wonder if you are needed in the house after all?

I didn't get a letter from you this morning. I do hope I get one tomorrow. I am wondering if you have thought any more about me coming up to see you at Christmas because I don't know that I shall be able to come now as Wheeler says someone ought to be in the office on Friday & Saturday for National Registration which is absolutely mad as the whole of the rest of the building is closing down for the rest of the week. He wants us to do just a half day each which of course would absolutely spoil my chance of seeing you.

However, I told him I wanted to go to Derby for the holiday and so perhaps he will relent. Anyway I shall tackle him on the subject in a day or two, that is after you have let me know whether you think the idea of me coming to see you is a practical one because it may not be convenient your end. You may not be able to find digs for me near you, and I wouldn't dare stay in Derby in case it was bombed. Also you may be on duty most of the time, and if it would only mean perhaps an afternoon or an evening

with you. I would rather not come. So you will tell me won't you darling, if you think its a good idea or not. If you don't think so then I'll put it off & come later on when the nights are a little shorter.

I made your cake yesterday, as I said I would and the top is not burnt. In the afternoon I had my walk with Esme & Penny. It was very cold but we enjoyed it. Esme had been going out with a M Sargent from the Hamshires (sic) since last May. She says she fell very much in love with him, but a month before he was moved (that was in October) he confessed that he was married. Of course she was (and still is) very upset. From what she tells me I believe the fellow as genuinely fond of her and just couldn't bring himself to tell her. She has, of course, not seen or communicated with him since and she realizes that the sooner she can forget him, the better. I hope you're not breaking some damsell's heart too. But I don't think I need fear much about that, at any rate I trust you absolutely, and I hope you do me as well. At any rate no other man? seems of any interest to me, and I expect you feel the same with regard to girls. I sometimes feel the need for masculine company, but as I don't seem to know any nice boys, I just manage without.

I am afraid this letter is even more scrawled than usual. I am sitting on my bedroom floor writing on my knee so before the writing gets absolutely illegible I will say Goodnight darling [...]

Tuesday morning Have read your letter received this morning. Will do all I can to get the leave at mas.

10 December 1940.

Horsley Woodhouse, Camp

I'm terribly sorry I did not write yesterday, but I had a pretty busy time, & even now, I am only managing this in between waiting for action, which we seem to be getting plenty of just lately, but I think that with a great deal of luck I shall be able to write you a decent letter. Do you still want to come up here for mas, I should simply love you to come, but if the date I mentioned holds good, it hardly seems worth it, does it? But we shall know more in a day or two & then we can make a real decision. I must see you soon, or I shall go mad, & I sincerely hope the Aunts do take a house on

their own soon, & then you will be free to follow me if you still want to [...].

I am listening in at the moment to the R.T. There are a lot of things I am absorbing of great importance to us at the moment, I am waiting for the answer to an important message which will cause a great stir among the Detachments when I get the information I require, but according to the conversation it has not come through yet. I must add here that I have a new companion with me now, he is a skilled telephonist sent out from Battery H.Q. hope he doesn't oust me, but he's a jolly decent fellow, & I like his company, but he don't think he's going to be kept here long, & anyway he doesn't want to stay, as he has his wife & baby living at Sherwood Lodge way, & now he's sent out here, he is twenty odd miles away from them, & all he wants at the moment is to get back there as soon as possible, & I don't blame him either.

I received a letter from you today, & I was pleased to get it, I do so love your description of the bed & the cosy fire, but it makes me very sad to know that I cannot be with you at the time you are writing to me, however, I hope I shall be seeing a little of you soon, & please it will be soon, [...].

The postal arrangements here are pretty awful, a woman brings the post each morning from the local P.O. & refuses to take money instead of stamps, so I shall have to have stamps when ever possible, or wait till I do get some before I can send to you. I'm afraid that this letter isn't going to be a very long one now, as the old R.T. is getting pretty busy again, & it's absolutely maddening at this time, you've no idea what a curse telephones are, well at least they do keep quiet sometimes, & the damn thing seems to be going all the time so [...] I shall have to sign off in a minute or two [...] Goodnight my love,

11 December 1940.

Horsley Woodhouse, Camp



Typed letter.

My Darling,

Another Day nearer to seeing you, and what a day, my new assistant had to go to hospital for injections for his veins, and he's been gone all day, so he's been no good to me today, and I have been in the office all day myself again, and tons of work to do too, but I managed to shelve a good bit of it till tomorrow, and I'm hoping that the new fellow will be able to deal with some of it. I did not receive a letter from you this morning, I expect it's the post again [...] Do you know, I have found out today, that the post woman who brings our mail, refuses to take any letter to post at all, that's what you call co-operation, I think she ought to be only too pleased to help us a bit don't you, but perhaps we can get that altered before long, I shall have a try anyway. We've got old Jerry over us tonight, and he's causing quite a stir too, all the villagers are out to see what they can see, but so far all that happens is a lot of A.A. fire over derby (sic), and it looks as if we shall be missed again. I hope he is not heading for you again [...] I'm sorry my letter yesterday was a sketchy one, but I really had a lot to do, and no time to do it in, so I just had to say goodbye little as I liked it. Thankyou for len's (sic) new address, I shall write to him as soon as I get another chance to write to anyone but you [...]. I am without a knife fork and spoon now, it got lost a long while ago, but I have always managed to borrow one from somewhere before, but now the new order is that everyone must have their own, and not leave them in the cook house, so I have to eat my dinner with a penknife, and you've no idea how awkward that is to do, so will you please look out an old set for me, and I'll try to keep them this time for myself. My stripe seems to be as far away as ever, and I wonder if it will ever come at this rate, but I supposed I am very impatient, and it will be her in good time. I have been seeing the M.O. just lately, and he's feeding me on tablets for my blood pressure, but so far with little success, I am now on one each day for a week, and he wants to see me again then, I wonder if I shall be any better by then, you see I had a

wicked headache on last Saturday, and reported sick, and ever since then, he has been seeing me, but he don't say I need a rest yet, so I shall keep on complaining and see if he really does give me a rest some day. No more has been done about my teeth either, it seems to me that if one wants any kind of attention in the army, they have to wait a long time for it. Arthur wrote to me today from his home, he still has three weeks left yet, and hopes to get his Christmas at home, he is very lucky, and I know definitely now that I shall not be there for the Christmas holiday, so you can make up you (sic) mind that you won't be seeing me over that time, but if my 48 works out right, I expect I shall be home round about then either a little before, or a little after, so what will you do about the problem of coming here, leave it till we know definitely I think is the best plan. [...]

At least the war has taught me what true and real love can be [...] How I wish that we could be together on the 18th, what would we do this year, we could go to bed very early, [...] shall we have any drink? or would you rather remain sober [...] . What a dream that is, and what chances of realising them with all this strife on, so all we can do is dream away, and hope they might perchance come true [...] in the meantime, we shall still have our memories to keep us happy, the song goes memories live longer than dreams, and they do help to keep me from feeling too depressed [...]. don't be too surprised if I walk in again one day will you, I shall do my level best to get home befor (sic) Christmas if I can, [...] .

My colleague has just arrived back here, nine o'clock but at least I have got him, and that is something to be thankful for. I have just finished making a piece of toast on the oil stove, and it makes good toast too, doesn't smell or taste a bit of paraffin , I shall do that often now I have found it out, and I scrounged some cold tea and heated that up, and managed to get quite a decent supper.

Poor old Charlie is all on his own at the other end of my R.T., I have just been communicating with him, and he says he is very lonely, but I'm sure he is no more so than I, and anyway I cheered him up a bit by talking to him for a little while, I think they are getting a bit fed up with being out there now, the novelty is wearing off a bit I guess, but it seems to me that they are doomed to stay there for some time yet, as there is no sign of the phone being put on, I shall be glad when it is on, because although it is a

damn nuisance, at least it is not so much trouble as the R.T. has been just lately, I had an hour straight off last night trying to get a message that had just been phoned through from H. . . whereas if we had been on the phone, we should have it straight away, I can tell you, that now I know what R.T. can be like when it is going nearly all day and half the night as well, I think I prefer the phone, my ears are quite sore through listening all the time, but that is something towards the war I suppose, although I still can't see what use we are to the country yet. I still think that I should be doing better work if I was at home making you happy

I am wondering if you will get this letter as soon as you ought to, because I have just remembered that I have no stamps, and if what they say is true, I shan't be able to get one tomorrow, so perhaps this will be late, and if it is please don't blame me will you because I really cannot help it if the old lady is awkward, but if I see her tomorrow, I shall try to persuade her to help us a little.

I can't think of anything more to say now, so I guess I shall have to end, but I shall try to find the time to write again tomorrow, so until then, I'll say Goodnight, and God bless you,

Thursday 12 December 1940

Waterford



Pencil note.

I hope things are still going all right for you at the new camp. I did not have a letter this morning Is this lack of funds or lack of time I wonder. The wireless says that the air raid last night was concentrated on the South Midlands and I am wondering if you were in it. I do hope not. It was still very quiet here although we had a warning during the day. Everyone was so surprised. I saw the Aunts off safely to Margate this morning. They will be staying with their neighbours, the Wallys? who are back for a day or two to see to their own house.

Barbara met me out of work this evening & is spending the night with me. It's a good opportunity for her to have a comfortable bath. She gave in

her notice tonight and is evidently determined to go North with Roy after
 I mas Wish I were going up to Derby with you to stay However that may
 be possible yet, if the Aunts manage to get their house they are looking for.
 ----- this indicates half an hours break----- in which Barbara & I had our
 supper and now I am sitting on the floor in the bedroom and will I hope
 soon be comfortably in bed
 Since commencing this letter Jerry has started to go over frequently & the
 guns are busy. However I think he is only passing over us but someone
 must be getting it pretty heavily. By the way I have bought most of our
 I mas presents:

A nice overall for your mother
 Black magic for my mother
 Cut glass vase for Barbara
 Pyrex dish for your sister
 Stationary for Aunt Nell
 Handbag for Aunt Sybil
 Tie, Handkys (sic) for dad.

Now remains Son, who is an awful problem & Mildred. She is going to
 give us a picture, but I dont know what to give her Do you think a pretty
 flowering plant in a pot would be appreciated? You will not, of course be
 expected to get any present and I shall put the ones I have got as coming
 from us both. ("Just as well", says Bill because I'm broke anyway).

Darling do you realize that Wednesday is the 18th? Nine years ago
 since we first fell in love. That's a lovely thing to think of and ought to make
 us feel happy but I am afraid I shall feel very very sad on that day without
 you, I don't know yet what I shall do on it. I simply can't just sit at home and
 pretend its just the same as other days.

I shall have to think of some way of spending the evening. But I mustn't
 think too much about those sort of things, or I shall soon get miserable and
 actually I am not managing too badly at present. Of course I feel lonely and
 miss you but I have got used to that feeling and I manage not to be
 miserable by not thinking too much about things, and its only when I feel
 extra low that I really get the blues.

And now, as its 11 oclock goodnight my darling love, Take care of yourself for me won't you? God bless you [...]

Friday 13 December 1940

Waterford



Thank you for your letter of Tuesdays date in which you tell me the glad news that you are expecting 48 hours leave on Saturday, the 28th. Of course, I am looking forward to coming to see you, but as you know, it might prove difficult from a work point of view to come to Derby so that if you do get your leave on that date I won't come up to see you, as I would have to start back for home on the Sunday morning, right in the middle of your 48 hours. So darling if you can come home, do so, and if you hitch hike here I will pay your fare back to save you the worry of hitch hiking back. You could catch the train I intended to come by which reached Derby at 1.30 . Would this be early enough for you? It would if you need not get in till about 3 o'clock I should think. If this plan turns out to be the one we use, don't be disappointed because I don't come to see you, because I'll come a little later on, but while the weather is so cold, I think we shall get more comfort & privacy out of our own home, don't you?

Anyway darling, we still can't decide definitely till we know exactly when your leave will be.

I am alone this evening, at least except for Penny. She has got one chair & I have the other. The aunts are coming back tomorrow. We had a warning at 8pm but the "all clear" went at 9.pm so I hope I shall have a quiet night.

I have been decorating your cake this evening, and it looks quite nice. I hope it tastes as good. I am afraid I shall not be able to judge if I don't come up to see you. Just think darling, its only twelve days to Christmas and immediately after that I shall see you. Isn't it marvellous! I have almost forgotten what it feels like, to be kissed and held tightly in your arms, but it

will be awfully nice to learn again. If you come home Mr. Smith ¹⁵⁰ will be away that week end and we could use his room during the day. I'm sure the Aunts wouldn't mind. I seem to get on much better with them just lately. They don't get on my nerves so much, I began to think such awful things about them, that I prayed to God to cure me of it, and low and behold I am cured!!

My prayers always seem to be answered don't they? You know I also asked Him to devise some means whereby Mum & Dad could retire soon in comfort and they are left over a £1000 in Uncle's new will! ¹⁵¹ So you see it is worth while praying & I hope you do pray every night for us, but I am sure that if you love me as much as you say you do, you could not go to sleep at night without asking God to take care of me.

Mrs Webb called at the office today and brought your club money 15/9. I could forward it to you if you want it, otherwise I shall bank it for you. You must let me know which you want done.

Darling its 10.30 and I expect Penny wants her supper so for now I will say Goodnight, God bless you, and I will finish this letter tomorrow, which will be one day nearer to seeing you. [...]

Saturday evening 9 pm.

Good evening darling,

Once more beside a warm cosy fire— to write a few more lines to letter. I am still alone-except for Penny, and have been expecting the Aunts back all this afternoon but it's too late for them to come now, and if they have not been held up somewhere, they could not have got all their work finished and will evidently stay over the weekend. We had a warning early in the evening but all clear has already gone so that we may get a quiet night. I hope so. We have been very very lucky these last weeks.

I received your letter this morning in which you say you that you will try to get home before Christmas but darling, surely it will be far better to try for the 28th. I shall not be at work then as I shall be before Christmas, and we should be able to make the most of our short time together. So I do hope

¹

⁵⁰ Lodger

⁵¹ Arabella's first cousin Elizabeth was married to Thomas Barnes who died in 1940

you manage to get away after Christmas.

I have bought some pieces of music to play at Christmas, as we must have some sort of jollity although I don't suppose I shall have my heart in it as you won't be there. Still if you can manage to get of on the 28th, I will have that joy to look forward to, so that I won't mind too much, so don't fail me if you can help it darling because if you have to come home before Christmas I'll have nothing to look forward to so that I should inevitably feel miserable on Christmas day.

By the way although it is only eleven days to Christmas we still have flowers from the garden. On the mantelpiece there is a vase of pink chrysanthemums. Don't you think that's good? Everything is very very quiet now. Mr Smith is asleep in bed, Penny is asleep on my feet and there is no noise outside at all. I haven't even got the wireless on. But such quietness makes one feel lonely so I think I will go upstairs now & have a bath.

Goodnight for now darling. Look after yourself, since your my most precious possession.

14 December 1940.

Horsley Woodhouse, Camp

Letter in Pencil.

Beloved,

Another week has passed, bringing us closer to seeing each other again, & you've no idea how happy I am at this moment thinking of the lovely ? time I can give you when I call on you.

And now my sweetheart [...] I will try to find some news. Today John & myself both went into Battery H... for a test, to try and win a stripe, but we were at a disadvantage right from the start because neither of us knew a thing about searchlights, having spent all our time in offices, & we were up against all the other fellows, some of who have spent years in the army & who knew all there was to know about them, & yet believe it or not, we

both scored half marks by simply guessing answers, & came about 12th on the list of 39, I reckon we did well, but as there were only a few promotions available, I doubt if we shall get a stripe on those merits, because we were judged according to marks gained, & I doubt if there were that many vacancies, however it was an experience, I shan't forget it either, we were interviewed by six officers, each one separately, & had to drill a squad of men too, a thing we both did well, but when they started asking us about lorry engines & generators we were stumped, because we knew nothing about it at all, but we are going to have another try next time. Anyway, it made a day out for us, which we enjoyed to the full, except the return journey, & that was awful. We came home, 20 or more of us, on top of a lorry load of beds & Bombs for Anti Tank warfare, & the lorry was an open one, & all the time it simply poured with rain. We got our seats wet right through, & when I got back I wrung the water from my gloves, & had to stand over the fire to dry my arse (don't laugh it's serious), & as if that was not enough, we were so crowded that we could not even move a leg, while the driver was a new fellow, who took awful risks often nearly throwing us overboard as we took the corners, But it was an experience, & here I am, back in our cosy little office, sitting with my back to the fire with the R.T. phones on, all dry & comfortable again. I hope you noted the fact that I said we have a fire now, well yesterday afternoon we ran out of paraffin, & as it was so bitterly cold, I scrounged a stove, & fitted it in, complete with chimney, & it's lovely in here now, warm & cosy, no more cold feet.

You will be amused to hear that we now sleep in two tier bunks, John & myself have one between us, I am on the top story, but I must correct myself when I said we now sleep, I should have said we're going to sleep, because actually they were installed this afternoon, & I'm still wondering how I'm going to make my bed tonight, I find that I can climb up with an effort, but to reach up to make it is another matter, & I'll have to leave that to relate tomorrow.

We are going to be tested out again tonight on the R.T. hence my sitting here complete with headphones, awaiting the order which is to be relayed from H.Q., the object being that as it's much more secret than telephone, & so quick as to be almost immediate, & that's why so much importance is being attached to these tests, I hope we get our message

correct, & relay it to time, then we shall be in the limelight. It's a very strange but true fact, we have got on far better without our officer this week, than we ever did with him, so I think we shall give him the sack. I really have lots of work to do, but I don't feel like tackling it after today's adventures, & so I'm leaving it for tomorrow when I hope to be able to be in a working mood once more, so I am shelving it for the time. John has a headache, brought on no doubt by smoke from the fire, so I told him to go out for a walk, which he has done, but I know he won't go far away, he don't smoke or drink, & his wife & kiddie are only a few miles away, & all he thinks about is getting to see them, so I got him permission to take occasional afternoons out to see his wife when he wants to, as evenings are of no use to him. He is a jolly nice boy & I am great friends with him already, although I knew him before I left training, you see he was one of the boys called up with me, only he was kept in B.H. as a telephonist until this week, & now he's sent out here to share my exile, & as I said we're fast friends. His real home is Woolwich, & I think he was wise in getting out of it don't you.

We've just finished a nice feed of chips, & some cold tea which I warmed up over the fire served very well to wash them down, & now we feel satisfied with life. I had a nice letter from you today, in which you told me to write to Austin's, well I might if I have time, but they have so neglected me, that I don't care whether I write or not now, & no-one can blame me for that attitude either. I also noted your comments about coming here for Xmas, & I think it would be as well if you stayed away till later on when I shall need you far more than I do now, because I happen to know just when I'm coming, that is all being well, so [...] please be patient, & I'll come to you as I always seem to, when you feel you want me most. [...] I hope you don't mind my pencilled letters, but the typewriter is too noisy while I am listening, & apart from that, poor old John is fast asleep, he refuses to go to bed, & he's tired out, not being used to long hours, & last night we were up till 1.30 having worked from 8, the previous morning, & the night before that was 2.30 owing to all the activity, & I forgot to tell you, we did illuminate the target (for 2 seconds) & they weren't very high either, but perhaps when our boys get settled down, they will show their mettle & give people something to think about, I sincerely hope so anyway. I'm still wondering how I'm to make my bed, but I guess I'll manage somehow, at

any rate it won't be because I don't try, but [...] I bet ten to one, I bump my head on the roof when I wake up [...]. I am your ever loving, adoring husband,

15 December 1940

Waterford.

My own beloved Husband,

This letter should, I think, reach you on the 18th December. I have no need to ask you if that date strikes a cord (sic) in your heart. It is nine years ago today that we found our happiness,¹⁵² but, alas, we never dreamed that we would have to spend one of our beloved 18ths away from one another. I can only pray that it will be the only one we spend apart.

What lots of things have happened since that wonderful day in 1931--- We learned to love, became engaged, married and made our own little home, and now you are a soldier fighting in the greatest war that has ever happened to mankind, and you are parted from me. Everything has changed since those long past days of "sweet seventeen" even our love, because it has blossomed out into fulness and grown greater as each year has passed. I am so glad we cannot see into the future. Had we known that this terrible war was to come upon us, I think we might have gone mad, and yet, here it is, in all its ugliness (sic), and we still manage to love & smile and even be happy to a certain degree. And when it is all over, and you are safely back home once more, we shall, I know find happiness to a degree undreamt of before, because we shall have learned what it is to be lonely & parted, and to have known the sweet joy of reunion.

Darling I know that you will feel sad today because you are not with me, and I shall be sad too, but when you are home again, and I pray that this will be just after Christmas, then we will pretend that it is the 18th December so, don't think of today as an eighteenth lost, but just of an eighteenth postponed for a week, to be enjoyed to the full in the very near future, [...]

¹⁵² They would have both been 17 years old

Monday 16 December 1940

Waterford.

I received your letter this morning, but alas not in the state that you sent it to me , and I am returning it to you as I received it--- you see it was like this.

On Thursday, when the Aunts left, I told the postman to leave any letters in the shed, but that by Monday the aunts would be back, so that he could use the letter box again by then. Well, darling, I waited all the weekend, and they haven't come back yet, and I expected them on Saturday. Well the postman was late this morning, and I did not meet him, so, true to my instructions he put your letter through the letter box, and Penny chewed it up. I have put it together and think I have been able to understand most of it. From what I can make of it you expect to be home before Christmas and that you won't say exactly when. Also that you will have seven days on January 31st. and that you would like me to visit you sometime before then (I'm not going to promise anything darling), and that you are going in for an N.C.O.s course or examination)I can't make out exactly when) So, if there is anything in the letter of importance that I havnt mentioned you can tell me in your next letter. I am sorry that you are not able to come home as you had first suggested on the 28th, but if you come home just before Christmas, I shall not come to Derby during the holiday. Whether I shall be able get time off later to spend a long week end remains to be seen, as today Rogers the Junior clerk went for an interview for a new job, and Wheeler today showed me a letter from his doctor which says that his (sic) is suffering from overstrain and that a complete nervous breakdown is probably (sic) unless he is given a holiday. If I am left to carry on alone, or with temporary staff I shall go mad myself. The work is always on top of us as it is. And if this does happen, the chances of getting the remainder of my summer holiday is remote. However, that is looking on the black side.

I have packed your Christmas parcel up tonight and shall post it tomorrow so that if you havent received it by the time you come home, you had better leave instructions with a pal to look after it for you, should it arrive while you are away from the camp.

If you know you are definitely coming home soon, please tell me the day, I would rather know so that I can have something to look forward to,

and the Aunts can get some extra food in and I won't make any arrangements to go out. If I don't know when you are coming, I simply stay in, night after night in case you might walk in, When, perhaps I want to go to Mildreds or to the pictures to relieve the monotony of the long evenings.

I hope the Aunts are all right, I think they might have wired me to say they were extending their visit. I have been on my own now for five days. If I had known that they would be staying away all the while I would have asked a friend to come & spend the nights with me-----not because I am nervous of being alone, but because its no fun coming home to an empty house with no-one to talk to all the evening, not even over the week end. Still, I expect they will come home tomorrow. If they don't I shall begin to get really worried.

If you don't get your expected leave near Christmas and want me to come to Derby, you had better phone me at the office, and we will not be able to rely on the post after today because of the Christmas rush. Even then I could not promise to come, as I don't yet know if I can get the whole of the holiday off. I would very much like to come, of course, and if it were not so expensive, I would come anyway even if you had just been home, but as it is, I suppose I must be sensible to stay at home.

I expect you will think my letter somewhat "grumpy" but I am afraid I am feeling rather lonely & not too cheerful so please forgive the tone of my letter, if it isnt exactly what it ought to be.

I think that is all my news. I'll say Goodnight now darling, and I hope my letter tomorrow (if I get one) won't reach me in so many pieces. I shall have to leave a note for the postman.

Thursday 17 December 1940

Waterford.

I am now anxiously wondering whether you will be coming home one day this week as I did not receive a letter this morning, and, as you know, yesterday's letter was eaten by Penny. I have washed my hair tonight anyway, just in case, as I would like to look as nice as I can when you do come home to me.

The Aunts have not come back yet. I received a card from this (sic) this morning saying that they would be home today, so I came home this evening quite expecting to see them. This makes six days that they have been away. However, I have lit a lovely fire this evening, and Penny and I are comfortably curled up in front of it, and I think I shall soon get into a hot bath while I have the chance----- Excuse me for half an hour I think I'll have it now!-----

That was lovely! Now I am back in front of the fire again. Although its 10.30 so it won't be for long. I am just wondering what to have for supper. What would you like darling? Shall we have Welch rarebit, or egg on chips? Perhaps very very soon I shall be saying that to you in real earnest.

I went to see your mother this evening. She seems to think she ought to have heard from you. I know you don't get much time darling but it is essential that you write to her as you write to me, so even if it means less letters for me, darling, please write to her. She sent you a parcel today and I sent mine too, so you have two to look forward to.

Penny very naughtily ate my library book up this morning while I was at the office. I am afraid I carelessly left it on the kitchen table. She did not leave one page whole. I am now wondering if my sins (or hers) will find me out & I shall have to pay for the book.

Wheeler still hasn't arranged about Xmas, but if you want me to come up at the last minute you will have to phone me. Rogers got his job by the way and is leaving at Xmas. I have got rather a sore throat today. Hope I am not sickening for anything. Your dressing gown is nice & warm isn't it? I've got it on now, keeping it well aired for you. The packet of Ethels¹⁵³ are still in the pocket where you left them when you were last home.

Well darling as it is 10.45 I will, if you don't mind, retire for the night, So Goodnight [...] Come & see me soon won't you,---very soon

PPS. Wednesday Wheeler says "work" ½ day at Xmas (Friday) so don't see how I could visit you.

Note: It appears that Bill did, in fact get home for the 18h as can be deduced from the following letters between them.

¹
⁵³French letters

Friday 20 December 1940

Waterford.

In pencil.

My own darling,

I do hope you got back to camp in good time today and that you had an easy journey. I shall obviously await your letter to know how you fared. I have been too busy at work all day to have even a moment to sit and regret that you had gone away again, although I did manage to spare a thought for you several times and hoped you were having a lucky journey back.

I have felt really rotten today My head is aching & mussy? and my eyes & my throat are very sore. I do hope I am better by Christmas I am going to have a hot bath soon and will rub my chest with camphorated oil, (Im looking after myself, true to your instructions).

The wall over the mantelpiece looks just fine now, thank you ever so much for doing it darling. It does make a difference.

I went back to bed after you had left me today (with Penny) and we slept till 8.45, so I was rather late for work. Even so I have been very tired all day, and I expect you feel the same. Never mind sweetheart. We had a beautiful time, didnt we? Nothing can take that lovely memory from us, and although I would like to think of you coming home at Christmas, I don't regret one bit that we spent the previous 48 hours on the 18th instead.

It is nearly 10 pm, so I must get my bath now and in case this is the last letter you receive from me before Christmas let me wish you once more a very happy time and although you won't be up at the Two Brewers singing yourself hoarse, you will probably be doing much the same elsewhere. Only one thing I ask you darling and that is not to overindulge on drink as you won't be able to spend the next day in bed sleeping it off. God bless you darling [...].

20 December 1940.

Horsley Woodhouse.



My darling,

I managed to get back in good time, arriving at Derby by 3.30 after a good old joy-ride all over the county, I had to make a lot of lifts out of it though, & I felt most downhearted, but I arrived here in time for 4.30 tea, & did I enjoy that mug of nice hot tea, but that did not cheer me up at all, & I still feel very unhappy, especially as I have come straight back to work, I'm writing now with the headphones on, & the office is like an ice box, in fact I haven't been warm since I got out of bed this morning, I had to ride for almost 30 miles on the back of a lorry today, & I was pretty well frozen solid, & when they stopped to get some tea, I left them, & got another lift, I couldn't stand it any more, & I think I'm tough. We are in action again tonight, the sky is full of Jerry's, but so far we've had no luck, although the guns are pretty active, & I think a few bombs have been dropped not very far away. I expect if we catch a few of them we shall get a few Xmas boxes, but the way I feel now, I don't care if they do, so long as I only get a blighty one, I should consider it a good thing.

Well, my darling, we had our 18th, & I have some lovely memories to keep me from feeling too bad during these next few weeks, but I see from the letters you wrote that you would rather have had me on the 28th, but perhaps you didn't know we could have the 18th alone when you wrote that, & please don't be too unhappy for Xmas, think of Jan 24th, that is the date, & then you won't mind too much, because it will soon come round, & before you know where you are, I shall have you in my arms again. I must thank you for the 2/- (10p) you put in with the knife & fork, it was lovely of you to think of me like that, but you mustn't send any more money unless I ask for it, & I'm trying hard from tonight to economise in all quarters, & I hope I shall succeed. I had 2 letters & 1 parcel waiting for me from you, & 1 letter from my brother, & 1 from Austins, & Xmas card from Mildred & Frank, but up till now, I have not had either yours or Mums Xmas parcels, the one I mentioned contained the knife & fork, but I guess they'll come in due course. How I wish I could be with you tonight, I'm afraid I shall miss

you terribly at bed time, but I shall try to keep awake long enough to say my prayers right thro', & find comfort in that, & you I know will pray for me too. So please [...] don't go trying to ease your loneliness by talking to strange soldiers, many a life is wrecked with such a simple beginning, & remember, I trust you implicitly, please don't ever betray it, [...]. Thank you for your special 18th letter, it was a lovely one, & I have already managed to go through it twice, I'm glad I was able to get home after all, & arrange it so that we didn't miss an 18th, & please God, we never shall, I'm hoping for the end of all this terror & misery before the next 18th.

The fire here, as usual, is smoking like the dickens, & so we have had to let it go nearly out, & I sit here frozen, I shall be glad when it's bedtime, because at least I shall get warm, although I'm afraid very very lonely. [...]

-----those dashes indicate a pause of a quarter of an hour while we took the chimney to pieces & swept it out, you couldn't see through it for soot, & now we have cleaned it, the fire has drawn up, & at last I'm beginning to thaw, & as I feel warmer, so my misery is vanishing, & the 24th Jan doesn't seem so far away after all so I hope you can feel the same, [...]. Please tell Mum that I got home safely & in good time, you know she worries rather, & this time although my lifts were many & varied, & in all cases lorries, I had had the best journey I've had so far, & believe it or not, it's the first time I've been back in daylight, so your prayers were answered [...]

I don't know if you will get this by Xmas, but I'm hoping it will reach you somewhere about then, & I wish you the happiest & loveliest Xmas possible under the horrible circumstances, & I shall be with you in spirit all the time, although we shall have a happier New Year, because we shall be together, but please enjoy yourself as much as you can, and don't think too seriously of me for the day, & perhaps you will be able to be happy as it's possible to be, remember, I want you to be happy, [...] . I have one more hour to sit here now, fortunately all I have to do is listen, & so I can take advantage & write as I listen. John is busy dodging in & out to find out times of exposures, & we get along pretty well as a team, I've told him to go home as soon as he likes again now, & I guess he'll go tomorrow if possible, he says that I ought to have you nearer, & if things work out right, perhaps you will come one day to live near me, we shall see.

The fellow I owed the 10/- to, was taken to hospital today, just before I got back, so I still owe it to him,-----he's got impetigo, & also one other fellow has the same disease, I hope it doesn't go any further, because that's a nasty complaint, anyhow, as a result of that, we had to send in a list of when everyone last had a bath, & a good job for the person in charge that my name was not there, or there would have been trouble, & I guess now, that we should all be able to get clean at regular intervals in future?

The boys from Farnah Green have now been removed, we are still keeping the place open for communication, but the place was so filthy, & they were getting wild, unshaven & unwashed, so the officer ordered them to come here to live, & they have to do 8 hour shifts there now, & the man who relieves them will go on a bicycle, it's about 3 miles, & I shouldn't relish the task, so I hope that they don't pounce on me now to do a bit of relieving, because I don't want to do it. I've just been swapping "hiking" experiences with the other boys, & we've had a good laugh about it all, & that helps a lot, although we all agree that it's not so funny when we're actually on the road, but we're all agreed that we owe the lorry drivers more than we can ever repay them, they are the gentlemen of the road in every sense of the title, & as I write from this camp, & I think of the lovely time I spent with you & the fullest possible length at home, I can feel real gratitude in my heart for the very rough, but wonderfully generous drivers on the London to Derby road. I forgot to tell you that I came back today by a different route from the usual one I take, & it was more direct, & probably accounts for my getting back to time. The route took me through N'thampton & from there it was a snip, so I know what to do in future, & I find that the old proverb is very true about experience making fools wise.

Jerry is over again, & we are getting some very heavy explosions a little south of us, I'm afraid it seems a bit like Derby, but I hope they've done no real damage, it seems that we are having a bit more fun up this way now, & I'm glad, because it means that you are probably having another quiet night, which is just what I most desire, sleep, the healer of all troubled minds, I expect you are fast asleep by this time, it's 11 o'clock, I know you were very tired last night, & I can well imagine you tucked up [...]

I do hope this letter reaches you before 11 mas, you know I had no idea

it was so close on us, but I shall seal it with a prayer, & God will deliver it to you with the comfort I hope you will find amongst these lines I have been writing ever since I got back. [...] I know in my heart [...] that I must be brave & try to remain normal & steadfast, until this war is won [...].

And now, I must end, it is a quarter past eleven, & our relief has turned up, & I'm very tired, almost worn out, so once again try to have a happy Christmas [...] Goodnight darling, & may God Bless you & keep you always safe & happy for me,

Monday 23 December 1940

Waterford.

Pencil note.

Do you know I received your letter this morning. The lovely long one which you wrote to me immediately after you got back—so it only took 2 days after all— which is jolly good isn't it? I am so glad you got back in daylight, darling. That 8.2 bus is a good one to catch & we must make the effort the next time you come home. 24th January! —That's simply lovely— only 31 days from today. That will quickly go won't it. Let's mark off each day as it passes. Have you got a calendar sweetheart? If not, I send you one.

Thank you for the Christmas wishes, darling. I shall of course try to be as cheerful and happy as I can (no-one wants to see a long face at Christmas) but I can't possibly be as truly happy as I would be if we were together. I expect I'll feel odd man out although we shan't be paired off. Son is home & Roy is expected tomorrow. Jack is home too till Boxing Day. He tells me that he received your letter. The foreman told him that there was a soldier to see him & he went tearing down to see him, quite expecting it to be you. He was disappointed to see a man he had never seen before, who handed him your letter.

Barbara has decided to go North after Christmas. Wheeler was very anxious to get her to come & work with me and offered her 50/- but she won't come, so I recommended Esme & she has an appointment for tomorrow. Hope she gets the job. It will be nice to have a friend to work

with. I have still got a cough But it is a bit better today. Yesterday I went to the Heath & mum gave me some rum to take at night. I really felt worn out with the energy of visiting although I bussed most of the way. So I am afraid I did not write to you yesterday, but went to be (sic) early. Please forgive me darling.

I have been working hard all day but I cannot seem to get on top of my work, although I stayed an hour after 5.30. I do hope you don't get in this state. Its worrying and very exasperating. I called on Mildred after work to take her a Xmas present. I bought her 3 yds of Crepe-de-chine in the end – for a present and she has given us a nice water colour to put over over (sic) mantle piece. Ron ¹⁵⁴ –too has given us a little present—what do you think it is---secators! (sic) He is very anxious to hear from you. I told him you were kept very busy, but please write as soon as you can, and thank him for the secators! I hope by the time you get this letter, you will have had your Christmas parcels. Did you like them? I expect there were several others who shared theirs with you too.

I'm sorry to hear that your friend (to whom you owe 10/-) is in hospital. I suggest you send it to him, as if I know my husband, he'll soon spend it if it's in his own pocket. Although he does say his is trying now to economise. I do hope it lasts.

I'm afraid this letter isn't going to as long as I hoped after all but it is 10.30 & the Aunts are preparing to retire so I had better [...] finish for tonight. We still have our lovely 18th to think of, haven't we, and I am looking forward already to the 24 prossimo? (You'll be home for my birthday) Goodnight Darling God bless you [...]

¹
⁵⁴ Dempster

23 December 1940.

Horsley Woodhouse, Camp

Here I am , at last able to write to you in comparative peace, I am on night work for a little while, & it gives me the much needed opportunity to tell you how much I have missed you since I was last home, & all I can think about is when I shall be seeing you again.

I don't suppose you will receive this until after Christmas, because I had a letter from you today which you posted a week ago, so you may guess from this what a terrible state the postal arrangements are in, & in fact I'm beginning to wonder if you will get my last letter which I posted to you especially for Christmas. I have still not received your parcel which you sent by road, & I'm thinking it won't be here for Christmas, which will be very disappointing for me, as I was especially looking forward to your cake, but at least it must come sooner or later, & perhaps it will be tomorrow, & if it does, it will be to the best really, as I know I could never have waited till Christmas before I opened it.

I have just finished typing out a programme for our Christmas here, & it looks as if we are going to have a fairly decent time----

-----free beer, pork & all the usual Christmas fare, & we are also going to hold a Christmas Party on the afternoon of Boxing Day, this promises to be a riot, because everyone is to be called on to render an item of amusement, & the fellows are allowed to bring their young ladies, so I think it should be a success. I have to go out to tea Christmas Day, a man came to the camp tonight, & especially asked for me, & the Sergeant says I can go for an hour or so, & then return to work, it appears that this man saw me in a pub, & apparently has taken a fancy to me, & he came here especially with an invitation to Dinner & Tea, but no-one is allowed out to Dinner, so I'm let off that much. By the way, I turned down my other tea invitation of last Sunday, I didn't fancy the company much, so I sent an excuse that I couldn't get out, but this new one promises to be interesting, the man lives in a big house just outside the village, & when I next write, I should be able to tell you how posh they are, but of this I'm sure, wherever I get to, if it's in a private house, I shall be very sad & lonely, because it will bring home to me very vividly what I am missing with you, but here is a nice thought to

cheer me up a bit, the leave has been messed about once more, & we are to be allowed the 48 hours once a month now instead of once in three months, so I shall be able to get to you rather more than I ever hoped to, I don't know yet if this will interfere with my 7 days, but if it doesn't, I feel pretty sure that I'll have to wait until the 7 days before I can get home again, but at least we shall have some extra leaves to look forward to now.

John is going to his wife tomorrow, I shall call him at 7 this morning, go to bed till 12. & then take over until the following morning, rather a long spell, but worth it to make him happy, he doesn't go out at all, & I'm sure he must feel very lonely sometimes, so I don't mind helping him. I've had an official bath since I saw you, which made me 3 in the same week, I was so fed up when I got back here that I couldn't face work, & so I went on a Bath Parade, & spent the afternoon in Derby. We had a very quiet time, & all we had to drink was 2 cups of tea, 2 coffee, & 2 milk shakes, all in Woolworths, but we didn't see our usual gramophone girls, I think they have got the sack, because one of the girls behind the milk bar told us that 15 more were finishing up at the end of this week. It's hard luck on them, but I should imagine that they could get another job fairly easily in a place like Derby. In the evening, I went for a ride with the mechanists, we were out for hours, & I had a proper joy-ride, & enjoyed all of it, & then when I got back I took over the night work, as the boys at Farnah Green kicked up a fuss over having to spend the nights alone, so our night bloke has been sent with them, leaving just John & myself here to man the office night & day, & now my one dread is being sent for a spell at Farnah Green myself, the prospect is pretty gloomy, & doesn't appeal to me at all.



Well darling, I know this letter hasn't been a very long one, but nothing new seems to have happened-----wait a minute, yes there was, something very very important, I don't know how I forgot it, last night we were in action as usual now, & we were exposing on a target, & got machine gunned, so our gun went into action for the first time, & we were treated to a tracer bullet display, talk about excitement, everyone shouting, & battery H. wanting to know how many casualties, how many rounds we fired, & many fired at us, we were kept on the run all the time, & up till 2 o'clock yesterday morning, they were still asking questions, so it looks as if

our 3 beams have already started their trouble attracting, but at last it got the cobwebs out of our gun barrels, & livened things up no end, it's the talk of the village tonight. We are certainly getting more activity over this part than we've ever had before, & last night was especially noisy, but nothing nearer than one mile dropped this way, I think Liverpool caught most of it.

I also forgot to tell you that I have an invalid in here with me, the little dog which belongs to Jeff my mechanist friend. Two weeks ago he had to leave a course, & is not likely to come back at all, & ever since he went, the dog has pined & moped until now, it can't stand up, & has developed some trouble with its ears, there isn't a vet nearer than Belper, & I can't get any one to take him there, so I have to nurse him night after night, & I'm the only one he'll take food from now, I do hope he recovers, but somehow I feel he is going to die. He is at my feet now, & getting very wheezy, & I'm sure he's got pneumonia coming on, well, I've done my best for him, I can't do any more for him can I?
(paragraph of adoration here)

And now my sweetheart darling, I must end, I have one or two little jobs to do before 6 & as it's now 3. I must get on with them, so goodnight my love,





28 December 1940.

Horsley Woodhouse, Camp.

Typed Letter

My Very own Darling,

At long last I am able to spare the time to sit down and write you a decent letter, and I expect you will think it's about time too, but really I have been kept very busy just lately, and even though I am now on nights, the work still remains for me, and I am kept as busy then as if I were on in the daytime. Up to this point I have no sleep for over 48 hours, what about that for a record of endurance, I have spent about 18 hours of that period trying to sleep, but I think I am now past it, and all I can do is wait until I get home again with you, and then perhaps you will be able to cure me.

We have managed to have a fairly decent Christmas really, and it certainly was a far better one than I expected to get. Christmas Day I spent in camp till teatime when I had an invitation out to tea and supper with the manager of a colliery nearby, they are very nice people, and though it was rather a quiet tea, I enjoyed being in a civilian home of some kind for a little bit of the holiday, and I have a standing invitation to go there whenever I please, that's what comes of going in pubs, because that is where I first met him. We had a pretty good dinner at the camp, including the usual pudding, and

all the afternoon we were drinking and having a concert, and I'm afraid that by the time I was supposed to get on duty after spending an evening out with my new friend, I was feeling very merry, but I managed to keep awake until the morning, and then I did not want to sleep although I tried for three hours to get off, but in the end I got up, and with Les went out to the village, and did a real pub crawl in search of people who were willing to lend us dishes for fruit and jellies for the guest party we flung that night, and by the time we had got all we required, we are as happy as we could possibly be, and had visited no less than four different homes as well, all of which extended a hearty welcome to us to call there whenever we like, either for a meal, or for a bath, so we were very lucky and I must say that I have never before seen such hospitality as these people are showing round here, it fairly takes your breath away, and we do so appreciate it because we have never had it before. The guest tea party was quite a success, and we had all the things that one usually gets at this time of the year, not a bit like an army tea, but all the same, much nicer. This was followed by a good old sing song, and then party games, the boys were a bit on the noisy side owing to the fact that there was also a lot of free beer to be had, but the games went off quite well, and when the interest died down, we had a dance, and though it was rather a crush, I managed to enjoy one or two although as I danced I thought of you, and how I had very rarely if ever danced with another girl before, it made me feel rather miserable when the dance was over that I could not just escort the lady to her seat and then look for you to go to. But who knows, perhaps I shall be able to take you out to one when I get my seven days leave, and then I can make up for it all [...]

Apart from the party we had I have had a fairly quiet holiday, and of course it has been alternated with work all the nights for me, and poor old John has had all the days to deal with, with the exception of the times when I have allowed him to get out for a breather while I gave up a little of my sleeping time to help him out, but he doesn't seem to mind a bit so long as I let him get home once a week, and neither should I if I knew that I could too [...]. He is going on 48 hours leave next Monday, and I am wondering how much I shall have to do then without sleep, but---guess we shall have an extra man in for that tiem (sic), it will be necessary because I shall be left on my own, but who cares, we are only the office staff, and it

don't seem to matter how much time we put in so long as there are no hitches.

And now I really must thank you for the loveliest parcel any soldier has received this holiday. I got it on Boxing Day, but I guess you will agree that it was just as well that it did come late as I should have opened it long before then. The cake was a real success, and I still have half of it left, having shared it only with my very best friends, and they all agree that it is the best home made one they have ever tasted, and I agree with them, I compliment you on the design of the icing too, it is very sweet in both ways, and I think of the loving hands that made it and wish I could be with you to thank you for it as you deserve----- [...] I shall soon be home again now. The sweets are very acceptable during my long nights work,[...] I don't know who was responsible for the little parcel inside which came from the villagers, but if you will write me and tell me who to thank, I shall be delighted to do so even if my time is restricted, because it was a really nice gift, and the toffees they sent are going down well amongst all and sundry who chance to come in here, and what an inspiration you must have had when you thought of putting Brazils in, I still have a few left, but only a few I'm afraid, and they will soon be gone, and as I think of it, that parcel must have cost you a hell of a lot of money, and though I should reproach you for being extravagant, I cannot because you see you have made me realise how much you wanted me to have a mas something like you were having at home, and you have so far as was possible succeeded [...] I shall try to get home for another 48 before my seven days, but let that be a surprise for you again.

I have been to the baths again today, this night work certainly lets me get a lot more than I ever did before, but gosh I am tired, because I have had very little sleep lately as I have already told you, and we had a swim, but it was good and I would do the same tomorrow if I could.

You will see that I have enclosed another letter I wrote earlier on in the holiday, but I was unable to get it posted, and I am putting it in to let you know that I am not neglecting you by not writing, and to give you a nice lot to read all at once. I had a letter from you this morning, and thank you for the news about the kind of mas you were spending, I hope you enjoyed

the pictures with Son,¹⁵⁵ but I am still thinking what you meant by your very last sentence about not talking to any more lonely soldiers-----yet, mind what you get up to young lady, remember that I am the one you love, [...].

Our sergeant has gone on leave for this weekend again, and John goes on Monday, so I shall be left alone for a little time, and I guess will be very busy, but I shall still try to find time somewhere in the day to sit down and write to you [...]

And now, [...]. I must end because there are more letters to get done, one to Mum, one to Len and Kit who sent me a card for Xmas, and one to the Union for their 5/- P.O.¹⁵⁶ and one to Austins for all they sent, so you can see that I shall be kept going all night, but can devote all the rest of the week to writing to you alone.....Just a little thing I have remembered to tell you before I sign off, and that is that I have bought myself a new pair of braces for a present, you shall see them very soon now, and I hope you will like them [...] so Goodnight my love, and God Bless you,

28th, possibly December 1940 at 05.00hrs.

Horsley Woodhouse, Camp.

Typed letter.

Good morning My Angel,

I am just picturing you asleep in our bed [...]

I am afraid that this letter will be a very short one as I have been very busy all night, having been given the job of painting the cookhouse out during my spell of orderly sergeant, and I must say that it was a rotten job to give a bloke to do all through the night, but it is done now, and at last I am free to write you a few lines. Truly we are paying the penalty for greatness in that we are for ever on the go, and no rest is the order of the day. This morning, when I have finished my period of duty, instead of being

¹
⁵⁵ Ivy's brother
¹
⁵⁶ 25p

able to go to bed, I have to supervise the moving of all our beds first into our hut which has just been freshly painted, they are having a proper blitz on huts this week and a few days , all of them have been spring cleaned, and although they look very nice, I think they have rushed it too much, the fellows have been painting from six in the morning till eleven and even twelve at night, I fail to see how that is helping to win the war, but there it is, they say it has to be done, and that's that, I know that I have been at it all night and am properly browned off with all this show site stunt, it's hardly worth it, what do you think, I know you have some very strange and lovable views sometimes.

Tonight, I hope to be able to get to the pictures with Bob and Charlie to see Judy Garland in Argentine nights, but Charlie is a bit hard up this week and so am I really, but we will try to make it, it does make such a welcome change after all the work we have to get through these days, so I shall have something to tell you about if we do happen to go after all.

I hope I shall get a letter from you when the postman comes this morning, and I sincerely hope that you get the long one I wrote over several days at the same time, although it was only posted yesterday I fear, but at least I will try to make up for it later on, and as you said in one of your letters when remarking on not getting one I have been pretty good just lately so perhaps you will not reproach me too much, [...].

I hope Penny's eye is better now, our poor little Blitz has had or still has, distemper, and it has affected her eyes to such an extent that it is

awful to look at her, poor little thing, the officer is away and so is his batman, so it has been neglected, but I kicked up such a fuss, that they sent it to the vet's at Derby the other day, and though he would not take it in for treatment, he made up a lotion for it's eyes to be droped (sic) on three times a day and then some ointment rubbed in, we had quite a time of it making her behave the first time, but now she knows that we are trying to do her good she behaves herself perfectly, and I do hope that we can cure her. It is really pitiful to see her kicked and bullied about now that she is not very nice to look at, but I for one have given several people a good ticking off for it, and together with one or two other kind souls, we have taken it in turns to look after her, so I hope she pulls through to bite all the people who were unkind to her.

Well [...] I have very little else to add this time but tomorrow I shall be writing at greater length I hope, that is if anything happens to make new with (sic) but if you are like me, it is always news to read "I love you" [...]. so good morning I'll be dreaming of thee in just about four hours if I am lucky,



Sunday evening *Undated letter, written in pencil following a visit by Ivy to camp. Possibly December 1940.* I have only just this minute left you? am still trying hard to look complacent in front of the other passengers and not let them see my eyes too much (I have a handkerchief). It has been lovely to see you so soon. We ought to be very thankful that we have been so lucky. I hope you sleep alright tonight, and feel fit in the morning. In fact I hope I haven't taken too much out of you I am glad now that I got the early train, as it would have been just as bad parting if we had left it till the later one and I wouldn't have had a night's sleep. I expect we shall feel a bit depressed for a day or two, but we shall soon get over it and instead of being sad I'm going to look forward to your next leave. I tried to get up to you when the train stopped a second time but the Guards van was in the way & I could not. Never mind –we should have had to part anyway now that I have seen you once I am more than ever glad that you are not at the other end of the country, and that we have a chance of seeing one another at least once a month. I think that you look very smart in your uniform anyway and I am sure that if there is any chance of promotion in your squad you will be well in the running.

I don't think I shall look forward to work very much tomorrow but at least W?¹⁵⁷ won't be there and I shall have to try and settle down. At least I don't miss you while I am at work except at 5 o'clock each evening when I always think that I ought soon to be hearing your bike bang against the window.

The people in the carriage are a dull looking lot including 2 non script RAF fellows, why I have to travel with them when you could be here I don't know. I really think darling that if you are lucky enough to be put nearer home, we shall have to get a motorcycle? So that I could see you more. At any rate I know it's not good making any plans till you are settled. Please let me know when you get your service respirator. I can imagine you then as a seasoned-looking soldier.

¹
⁵⁷ Probably Wheeler

I am going to post this in Kings Cross when I get there in the hope that you will get it Monday morning so please let me know if you. I have learnt more in this weekend than in all your letters. Its so difficult to say just what you want in writing isnt it? But please tell me as much as you can in them. Well my papers space is running out I expect you will think this is a letter full of nothing but I do love you so darling you know that I'm sure. Goodnight my darling I will write again tomorrow

Fifthpage in pendl I am at home now and it is 10 pm. I have been washing my hair (in case you come home soon I must look my best). Jerry has been hovering around all the evening, although there isn't much noise from the guns. Its very dark, so I hope he'll soon go home.

What I really wanted to say was Goodnight my darling I love you. I can always tell you that even if I havn't any more news to tell you God bless you

Horsley Camp
30 December 1940

Dearest love,

I am utterly dejected, having been here on my own all day with literally the busiest day I ever experienced, & on top of that I am suffering with the severest bout of stomach trouble I ever knew, & I have eaten no real food since Boxing Day, I think it was the beer I had, well, I'm paying very dearly for it now, my stomach is on fire, & I do feel so miserable, I wish I were at home with you, in fact I almost feel like running away again I'm that "brownd off" with doing all the work & worry & getting nothing in return. Well, darling, having got that off my chest, allow me to tell you that John is on 48 hours leave, & up till this point 9 oclock evening, I still don't know if anyone is going to relieve me, & considering I've been here since five this morning, I think I shall have done a fair days work by the time I do get off, & even now I have quite a few things that could do with my attention, but I'm fed up with them all, & so I am going to write to you my darling to try & cheer my miserable self up.

First of all darling, I'm terribly sorry I have been neglecting you just lately,

but I shall not bother so much work in future, its time someone else did a bit of worrying, for a change, so here goes. [*There follows almost a page of adoration*].

I haven't managed to escape from the office since Xmas Day, I think I look like staying here for some time too before anything worth while is due to help me, I'm having a rough old time of it, I sit here my head nodding I can hardly keep awake, all those little wiggly lines you see are where I keep dropping off & nap over the letter & my pen just goes where it like. Please forgive me for letting myself drowse, I just couldn't help it [...] even if I were in your arms tonight, I think I should only go to sleep [...] I'll try to keep awake more when I write tomorrow.

I did not receive a letter from you again today, can it be that you too have been neglecting me though I know the postal arrangements are pretty awful now, do you know if I had posted yesterdays letter in our village, it was not due to be collected till tonight, isn't that an awful state of affairs, I think it's time someone did something about it, so you see I gave the letter to John to post in Nottingham this morning, & it should reach you a lot sooner. I wish I could be with you now my sweet, I can picture our bedroom with its lovely cosy warm light, & the inviting bed, just waiting for us to take advantage of its comforting shelter, how I wish I could be there with you to share the love [...] But that is a dream I cannot realize now, even if I could come home straight away, because by the time I got there it would be morning, & I should miss it all then, so I must just wait until I can have my own bedtime, & then climb up into my top shelf, & sleep, I know I shall sleep, because I have missed such a lot this last week or so, but all being well, I should be able to make up for it soon.

How long have we to go for the 24th now? By the time you get this I think it should only be about 3 weeks, isn't that wonderful, I can hardly bear to think what an eternity that 3 weeks can be, & all I hope is that it will go as quickly as possible.. We are going to make 7 days & 7 nights of heaven out of that wonderful time and all I do is dream of you, [.....] What a lovely thought it is to know that we grew up together, learning about life & love as we grew, [.....]

I have just been down to the cookhouse, & they make a practice of locking up all their foodstuffs, but with the aid of a certain person's key, I was able

to unlock the door & with two other fellows, we regaled ourselves with some nice bread & cheeses, I just felt like it, & this is the first real feed I've dared have, I'm wondering what is going to be the outcome of it now it's inside me, I have run out of McCleans, so if I get very bad, I don't know what I shall do, but perhaps it is beginning to mend, I hope so anyway.

We had the chance of transferring to the R.A.F. this week, for air-crew duties, & if I felt like this two days ago, I think I should have put my name down with the scores of other fellows, I think I should like to be a wireless operator, or something brave like that, I should feel I was some use to the country at least, but perhaps you don't share my views, & I'm sure I did right in your mind at least, by not transferring, although I still feel as if I ought to have tried, you see, the old searchlight business gets very boring, & makes one feel dreadfully useless to the country, it would be so nice to know without any doubt that we were helping the country, but I guess I'm doing more good by remaining alive, so that you can be spared all the worry of losing me, & you know how I adore & love you, that is why I felt I should be doing something more worthy of you than at present. Enough of this talk though, I'm beginning to feel much happier than when I started out to write to you [...]. The commanding officer of the Battery has just walked into my office, a surprise visit, what a good job I was sitting with those old phones on, he's most particular about that, & as it was, I got away with it quite well, he told me to carry on, which I did, & all the while he stayed here, I have been telling you how I love you, but he's gone now, [...] & now my sweetest darling, I must end, as at last I have someone to relieve me. Today's work from 5 a.m. to 11 pm. 18 hours, think of that when you grumble about long hours again, [...] your Bill always.

The above is the last letter from 1940 between Bill & Ivy

At the dawn 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.



Michael Furlong was born in 1944 after these letters between his parents commenced. Here he transcribes the communication between Bill and Ivy Furlong after Bill is absorbed into the searchlight division of the British Army, and Ivy tries to continue living and working normally whilst bombs drop on their home town.

