

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

February 2024



WAR
TIME
LETTERS
BOOK THREE
1942

A TRANSCRIPT OF CORRESPONDENCE
BY MICHAEL FURLONG.

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INTRODUCTION

It is now 1942 and Britain is immersed in a World War with the USA joining the Allies in December 1941 & Japan fully involved. 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, 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 (a.k.a Ann) 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.

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 (Ann) continues to be 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 someone mistaking the removal of a nipple from Penny the dog for Ivy (Ann), to the digging themselves out of snow drifts, 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 (Ann), possibly to an unhealthy degree and he plainly experienced a feeling of insecurity brought about in part by their enforced separation. These 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. As in Books 1 & 2 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, sometimes left out words of endearment where they are obviously superfluous and add nothing to the story. This may include beginnings & endings as well as all the “x”s and the lavish use of such words throughout.

Interestingly Ivy suddenly crosses her name through on a letter dated 23 February 1942 and signs her name as Ann, and for some time thereafter Bill opens his letters by putting her name at the top, something he rarely did before.

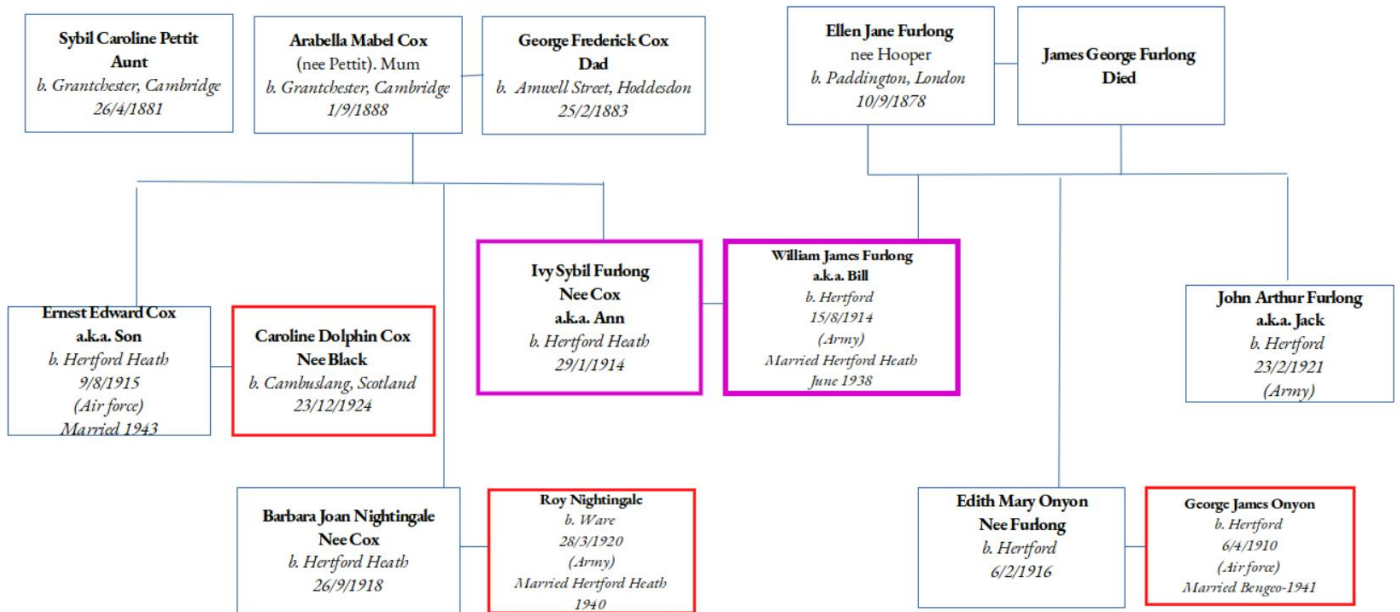
Tantalizingly Bill asks Ann why, but no reason appears in the limited letters we have for her. She maintains the name of Ann until her death in 2005.

Unfortunately this third batch of correspondence comprises only about 26 letters from Ivy (Ann) to Bill, from January to March 1942 with two odd ones in December of that year. We do learn that this is partly due to a paper shortage, as Bill has to use Ann's letters as packaging for little items he sends to her such as oranges, shampoo etc. Also when Bill was moved around he probably was not always able to retain her letters. Each letter varies from 1 to 4 pages, regularly penned on both sides, and because of the paper shortages often written in almost microscopic script. However, intriguingly around Bill's 28th birthday he refers to receiving a twenty page letter from Ann which unfortunately is lost. Most spelling errors have been transcribed as written. Additionally Ivy (Ann) 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.

Luckily we still have a good collection of Bill's letters which number some 118 from January to December 1942. He sometimes wrote twice per day as he frequently worked night duty rosters. This confused some of his date keeping (indeed some letters are undated) but they have been transcribed in chronological order to the best of my abilities. In this batch, some letters are typed but are mainly hand-written, both in pen and pencil, depending upon what was to hand at the time. I have included scans of the original letters as appropriate throughout.

With some descriptive accounts of enemy activity, tracer fire or flames, I have used this symbol ➤ to denote mention of air-raid warning, bombing or aerial combat.

CAST OF CHARACTERS FROM THE FAMILY



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The above two were living at 11, Gas House Lane, Hertford (now re-named as Marshgate Drive, Hertford), but probably moved to Bengo in 1942.

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

Jack married in November 1941 & moved to Worcester with Vera, his wife

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. It seems they moved out of Four Winds towards the end of 1942.

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

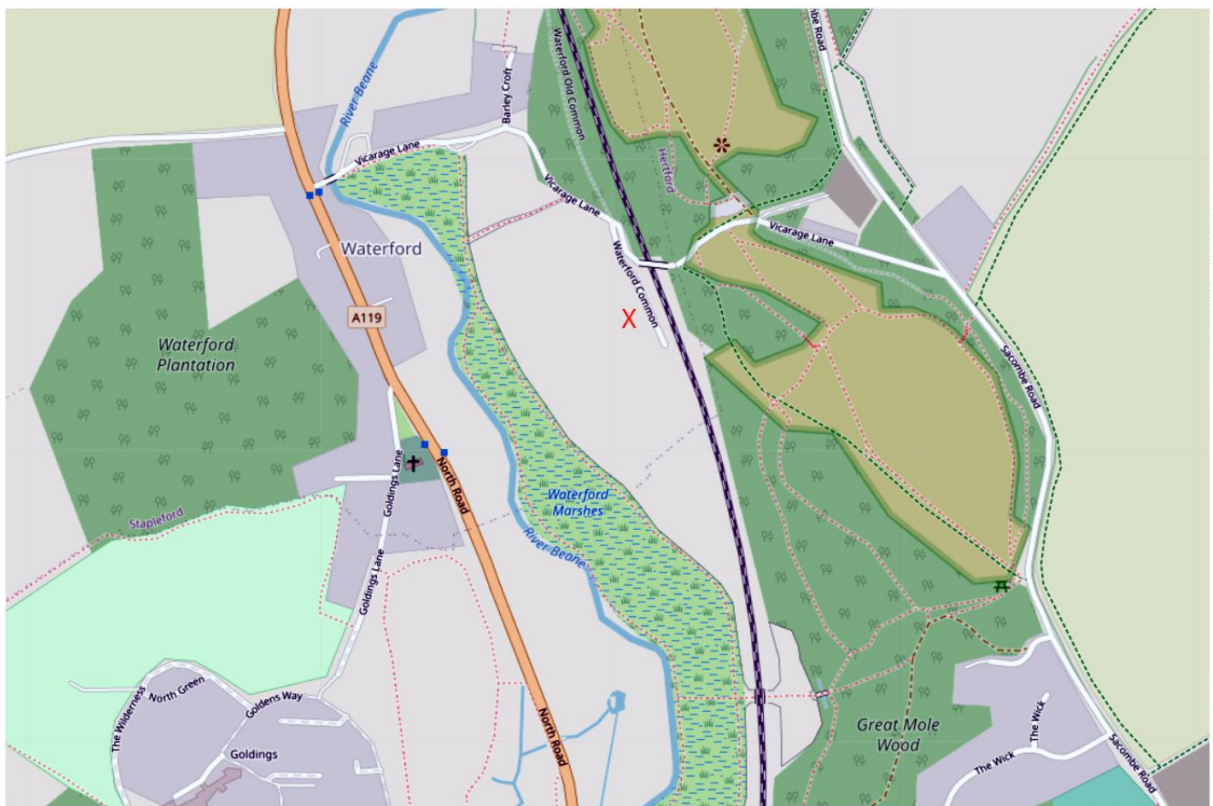
George James Onyon (married Edith in 1941) b. probably Hertford-6/4/1910 (Airforce)

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

WATERFORD MARSHES

Bill and Ivy (a.k.a Ann) 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 1942 is equivalent in purchasing power to about £58.10 in 2023, an increase of £57.10 over 81 years. The pound had an average inflation rate of 5.14% per year between 1942 and 2023, producing a cumulative price increase of 5,710.31%. Interestingly, the inflation rate in 1942 was 7.14 %, whereas the inflation rate in September 2023 was 6.70%.

This means that today's prices are 58.10 times higher than average prices since 1942¹. A packet of 20 cigarettes in 1942 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 1942 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 £5.80

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 £7.25.

10/- ten shilling (or ten bob) –half a £1.00 or 50p, today it would be worth about 29.05.

¹ Office for National Statistics composite price index

CHAPTER ONE

Four Winds

Waterford,

Nr. Hertford

Saturday 8/11/41

I start this book with a letter which I discovered was written in November 1941 wherein Ivy (Ann) refers to Jack Furlong's wedding that took place in that month & year.

My darling,

It is 11 pm & really time I was in bed, but though I can write my letter tomorrow (it being Sunday) I thought I would at last start it tonight before I get into my nice warm comfy bed. (Don't those adjectives make you feel envious, or could you describe yours in the same way?)

Well darling, I hav'nt heard from you lately so I must fill up these papers by telling you what I have been doing.

Yesterday I sent you 20 Players to Thorpe le fallows. I just mention this so that you can check up if you did not get them.

I havn't been to my usual Saturday dance this evening because last night I went with Dorothy to one of Fred Harvey's dancing classes instead. He is running them over at the Tudor Cafe again. Do you remember when we used to go together?

Anyway it was quite good fun--- crowds there of course, just as at a dance.

This afternoon I have been to Enfield with a girl named Winnie (whom you do not know—I met her at a dance) we have been shopping. I decided that I would spend Uncle's coupons on a tailored costume (thinking of the Spring) So I went to Burtons in Enfield & got measured up for one I have ordered two skirts to be made for it as they wear out so much quicker than the

coats A dreadful extravagance isn't it? I had to raid the rent box to do it but, once bought it should last me for ages. I was going to rely on my plum coloured coat and skirt (the one I came to Derby in) to see me through next Spring but I have gone through the skirt with cycling, & although I have patched it neatly, it wouldn't be nice enough for anything other than the office now.

Also today Miss Broadhurst finished my black dress so that I was able to wear it. I think you will agree when you see it that it is very smart. I wore my crystals with it today It shows them off very well. Enough of clothes! I shall bore you to tears, but when I come to think of it, I have nothing else to talk to you about (that's bad grammar) this evening

I see that it is 11.30 so, my darling, I'll say goodnight & I'll see you in the morning ----xxxxxxx

Morning my darling, It is 12.30 I have been up since 9.30 busy doing housework & now I have just come in from clipping back the lavender bushes. I haven't finished yet because it makes my arms ache too much I shall have to do some more this afternoon or next Sunday It is a lovely fine sunny day, but I seem to have so many odd jobs to do that I don't suppose I shall get out except to post this letter

Well dearest, as you may guess I haven't much to add to my yesterdays news.

I forgot to say that I went to the Green Dragon (where she lives) with Winnie when we got back from Enfield & had a drink (only one) at the expense of one of her acquaintances – a major. After that I went round to your mother & spent an hour or so with her, as she was alone. I gave her 5/- to buy some stockings for Jacks wedding.

He hasn't sent her the money for her fare & she is having to borrow it from Edie I do think he might be a little more thoughtful She is rather worrying that she'll get no more money from him when he's married She said she wouldn't mind how little it was if it was sent regularly, but you know that she'd starve rather than ask him for it. Couldn't you, when you next write to Jack drop a very tactful hint?

Well darling, my papers nearly used up, so (if you have managed to read

this far, au revoir till tomorrow---

All my love sweetheart

I am, as always Your Ivy

Four Winds

Waterford,

Nr. Hertford

Friday 2.1.42

My dearest Bill,

Your vests arrived this morning so I washed one immediately & am returning it with this letter. I can then wash the other two at my leisure at the week end.

Kitty {*Wagstaff*} is with me this evening & sends her love (at least the bit she can spare after Len has had his share) She will will (sic) be writing to you very shortly.

You were lucky to get all that cash for Christmas, weren't you--- Britain's forgotten army!! Very far from it if you ask me! What with that & knitted presents from your other girls, I think you did pretty well.

We have an invalid in the house at present---Penny----& does she look sorry for herself. This is what happened you remember I had a box of chocs as a spot prize? Well, I thought I would save them unopened under my bed. The Aunts let Penny into the room during the day & she broke open the box & stole all my lovely chocs. The Aunts then gave her a good dose of oil & that made her ill & gave her (I think) a cold in her tummy. She now sits in the lap of luxury upstairs looking pathetically absurd in a jumper & waited on hand and foot by two doting muses.

By the way Auntie Nellie gave me a lovely big dictionary yesterday --- just what we wanted.

Well sweet this letter is somewhat short & disjointed but I am talking to Kitty (or "K" (Kaye) as I now call her) in the meanwhile & you know how it is when two old women get together.

Give my love to the boys, & save some of it for yourself—God Bless,
(Did you make those resolutions I told you about?)

Lots of Kisses from Ivy xxxx

401 Bty

Militia Camp

Ollerton Road

Tuxford, Newark

Sunday Night

Dear Darling,

Forgive me for my long silence, it has been unavoidable I'm afraid, and this evening, now the course has finished, is the first moment I've dared to relax.

Never in all my life have I been so busy, & never so browned off as I am now, you'll understand why when I've finished I expect it's partly due to the reaction after so much brain fever, but there is also a long series of events which are also to blame. You remember I told you about old Wotton picking on me? well, because I stood up for myself he is peeved, and now has his knife into me with a vengeance, there's no doubt at all that he's an unreasonable bully, and if he feels awkward, well, I'm done for, & it's very doubtful now if I'll ever get that other stripe, despite the fact that I was top of the exam, because if he thinks fit, he can stop it, & I'm pretty worried I can tell you. Added to this worry is the one which always haunts me on courses, lack of cash, and no news of leave.

Next, we are moving, & I shall not go back to Thorpe, instead, I shall go away from here tomorrow, & after a day's lorry ride, end up at a funny little village near Lincoln, & then we have to erect a station & be in action the same night, which means that tomorrow's prospects are awful, & hard. Today (Sunday of all days) we were up at 6.15, & at a lecture by 8, after which we finished the morning off by exams, I know I got at least 75% if not more, because after the papers were collected, they told us the correct answers, so I should get a Q 1 off this course which will add to my laurels, & yet, however good I am, & prove I am, I shall never get on while Wotton is O.C. I really don't know why I keep trying, you tell me.

A word or two about the last few days, looking back a week, I can never realise I knew absolutely nothing about radio or electricity, and now it's all over, I'm suffering from genuine mental fatigue, I feel as if I've just waked from a nightmare of tangled cables conducting thousands of volts, and transformers, valves & aërials haunt me wherever I turn, but I've mastered it, and that's everything, even though George & myself, & in fact all the others, were, for the last 3 days, up till 11 at night, "swotting", we haven't been out once, no-one wanted to, & long past bed time we were on the go, so you will perhaps forgive me for neglecting you, you see, after all my troubles with Wotton, I simply had to pass this course, to prove my worth. The course ended at lunch time with a discussion period, and after lunch we should have had the afternoon off, but I had to help load a lorry with our equipment for the new site, check inventories etc., all in pouring rain, my army gloves I wrung the water from, my overcoat is saturated, my boots let water, & I was horribly wet & tired and dirty, & all this on a Sunday, can you wonder I hate this Battery now? Anyway we finished all this at tea-time, & that was the end of my Sunday, a lot different from yours I'll bet, & now I have a Monday before me with an absolutely awful programme. Reveille at 6.15, a final parade, & then load my kit on to a van which will take us to Troop H.Q., from there we have loads of camp stores to pack on the lorry somehow, which is already fully loaded, & then our own beds etc., & lastly & least important, the men. When all this has been rammed in, we set out for South Carlton, my new address, where we shall arrive sometime after lunch, & we have to get the old Camp in action before dark, a herculean task for a few men, & I bet there's going to be a good bit of swearing done, though by the time you get this, I should be fairly settled down, except of course for training a detachment

of men who are at present worthless, I'll tell you more later.

Well darling, I've had a good moan, I hope you don't mind my telling you all my present worries, but I do feel so upset about everything, & honestly I'm innocent of any blame, life does seem to be so unreasonable these days, please don't be cross any more with me, that will be the last straw.

Now sweetheart, I must say Goodnight, [...]

Your Bill always,

P.S. send all my mail to this address until I tell you otherwise & thank you for the
cigs. I love you Bill.

1617342 I/BDR FURLONG

THE CAMP

SOUTH CARLTON

BURTON

LINCOLN

2ND JAN

Dearest Love,

Sorry I didn't write yesterday, but lots of things have happened since then, & by missing a day I have accumulated quite a little bit of news. Last night we had fun chasing three horses which had broken into our field, & you would have killed yourself could you have seen us. They were playing merry h...l with our telephone lines, & so I turned out the boys & we proceeded to try & chase them in the dark, into the next field.

Well, we got them on the run easily enough, & 3 of the boys were at the opposite end of the field to turn them back, which they did, & herded them straight for my sole companion & yours truly, & there we were, the boys at the opposite end shouting to us to turn them back, the 3 horses galloping down on us, & did we try to turn them back?, no fear, we about turned, & the horses chased us, I beat my assistant by a short head, to the safety of the fence, but I was laughing all the time. Our rodeo was ended by the appearance of the farmer, who had been roused by our shouts & cat calls, & he gently shepherded them away safely. The rest of the evening was spent cleaning up for a concentration we held today, & this morning I heard that old Wotton had paid us a nocturnal visit at 0100 hours this morning, fortunately, the sentry was waiting for him, & he didn't catch us out, & I believe he inspected the site to see how our work was progressing.

Today was one mad whirl of getting ready to go out, going out, & coming back. To start with it was raining, & we were late getting up, & I had a frantic time chasing everyone to get them ready for the lorry, then, when we arrived at our Troop H.Q., I found I was to be an instructor so of course I had a busy day. Whilst at Troop H.Q. I learned some heartening news, firstly, I was fourth on the radio course, which lifts me to realms of power as an authority on the new stuff, & secondly, & most important to you I know, tomorrow I go before the Colonel to be approved for my second stripe, I do hope I suit his lordship, and anyway, I'll start your suggestions for a new year resolution by saying my prayers tonight, & I hope you'll do the same, though probably by the time you are reading this I shall either be a Bdr or not. Believe me, I'm keeping my fingers crossed more tightly than they've ever been.

More disturbing news is the fact that six N.C.O.'s were detailed today for transfer to light A.A. and that's a sure sign they'll go over the other side soon, I told Sgt. Warden I didn't want to leave the Regt. & I shan't be put down for transfers unless he is driven to it, though at best I'm only putting off the evil hour, for 'tis inevitable that we are to go, as I understand we are noted throughout the county as the crack Regiment of S/L's, & you bet that once our men are fully trained in the new sphere its curtains on this comparatively happy existence, however, I guess we shall be no worse off than a lot more happy couples, though I can't help thinking all the time about the shirkers who are still

getting away with everything, & all the big money too.

My day there ended with the pay parade, & then a scrounging tour, during which I was able to “knock off” various items we required here to make us comfortable. Now here we are, back at the old place, & glad to be here, though I understand we are to have these disturbances twice a week, so I guess we’ll get used to them.

Now you can see what can happen in a very short time in the army, & now perhaps life will go on undisturbed for weeks, then suddenly a lot of new things will happen & I shall be giving you more news. Actually I think I’ve condensed it rather a lot, but you’ll gather the importance of it all I know.

Your two letters arrived safely today, one containing cigarettes, & the other, envelopes. The cigarettes saved us all from a very sticky day, & just carried us through nicely to the visit of the N.A.A.F.I. van, when we were able to get in a new supply.

And that darling is about the lot, I’ll write tomorrow a detailed report of all that took place with my interview, I do so hope it is a success, though I don’t suppose I’m likely to say or do anything wrong after getting that far. Oh! By the way, you might be pleased to know I was selected to run a 4 mile cross country race tomorrow as a Battery representative, but this interview has saved me that much, however, I’m glad of the limelight.

Goodnight precious,

I’ll always love you, Bill

Four Winds

Sunday 4.1.42

Bill darling,

It is Sunday afternoon. I spent a lazy morning in bed as it was raining & now here it is 3 o'clock already & apart from getting my dinner (Welsh rarebit) & doing a little housework, I feel I have done nothing. However, Sunday’s

supposed to be a day of rest isn't it.

Penny, you will be glad to know, is much better now & is no longer wearing her absurd jumper. She still has a cold so we are keeping her indoors (which she resents very much)

I hope your first vest arrived without much delay. The others will be following very shortly. They are of course rather difficult to dry with this damp weather. Did you like your two apples?

By the way, if you will return my cake tin, I will make you another cake, & if you would like some more Macleans to go with it, let me know.

I went to see Errol Flynn in "The Sea Hawk" yesterday It is a very good picture, you should try to see it if you can. Do you remember the original silent version with Douglas Fairbanks senior? It has stopped raining now & the sun is shining into the room It makes it look so cheerful. I am glad it's turned fine for I am going to St Margarets soon. Bert Coe has his wife staying at the Red Bull Hotel there for the weekend & he has invited me over to meet her & spend the evening with them I am glad to have somewhere to go on a Sunday. ²

Ron {*Dempster*} rang me up yesterday & asked when you would be coming home, so that we could go up to see them. I told him at the end of this month but said I could not promise a weekend but that we might go up one evening to see them & stay the night. That all right darling?

Well, as usual, I don't seem to have a lot to tell you. Life goes on pretty much the same as usual here I hope you are sent on that ?? course you speak of,

² I think this was actually the Red Lion Hotel in Stanstead Abbots {MF}

only for goodness sake don't make it the end of January

Penny & I (two fat old ladies) send you our love--& will write again to you tomorrow.

Your Ivy xxxxxx

The Camp
South Carlton
 4TH JAN

Water damaged letter

My darling wife,

Sunday, & I am reminded of the commandment which says "six days shall thee labour", the army does not approve of it, for today we have striven mightily, & worked harder than ever before. The mud here is heart breaking on a wet day, & it is hopeless to try and keep the floors clean, though we are ordered to scrub them twice a week. I have had a busy evening? .. here is what I've done, first I washed through?..... laundry, next, I set ?.....the floor, yes, at ?.... all wet now, & probably very unhealthy?... was also very dirty, & as I shouldn't have had time tomorrow, another concentration is on, I had to do it now. Lastly I washed three pairs of socks which makes me think I have had a busy day.

Now you want to know about yesterday's interview. We had an awful day, having been told to be ready at eight, we were eventually picked up at eleven, conveyed to Tuxford, where we ??... off to Sherwood, arriving ?? minutes before our time. We were ushered to the Colonel's office to see the R.S.M who told us to get ourselves spruced up, as the Colonel couldn't stand any untidiness, so out we went & scrounged boot brushes etc., & removed all ?... from our persons, then back ??.... he told the Colonel ?teatime, & so we waited in draughty ?.. hungry, & cold, we had no lunch, no tea, & at ? o'clock, the old so & so said he'd see us, that was five hours waiting, he had all three of us in at once, & the whole

show took five minutes, & all he asked us was how long we'd been in the army, how long we'd held a stripe, what courses we'd had & the ? All of which he could have obtained from records?... The end he said, " courses aren't everything ?... all extremely good, & I shall ? Second stripe, & boy ?.... We were marched ?... faced with the problem of getting back to ?... distance of about 50 miles, & it was 7.30 then, ? off went a message, & whilst awaiting a van, we ?.. the canteen, & had a few beers on an empty stomach. The van arrived at 8.30 & the driver had to go to Shardlow, which is the London side of Derby, then come back to Nottingham to meet the midnight train, & he told us we could either wait for him at Sherwood, or go around with him, well the prospects were so lousy that we said we'd go with him, & as he had a lot of time to kill, we called at the "Griffin" in Papplewick, Jack perhaps knows ?.... Well, my stripes were christened all ?.... had hardly?.....pint , when we were surrounded by ... of glasses of beer, bought for us by three girls & a married couple, they didn't sit with us, & completely ignored us except to acknowledge our thanks, & I was truly amazed & eventually overwhelmed. I understand this is the usual custom in these parts, I know it was the same at Belper, but I never had the fortune to experience it before. We stayed till closing time, by which you will gather that ?... was rather like that of Jack ?..... all the time struggling?... succeeding, & trying to arrange my thoughts. ?... were at Derby by eleven, & proceeded on our way ?.. back to Nottingham where we arrived a few minutes before the train got in, we picked up ?.. B.S.M whom we had been awaiting, & off to Tuxford we went, arriving there at a quarter to two this morning & from there we still had to get to Lincoln, so off ?... another phone message, & we had to ?..... guardroom & by this time I had ?... sufficiently recovered from my daze to realize what a splitting headache I had, & most of all, how hungry I was. Anyhow, we pinched a slice of dry bread? from the guards, a bit of corned beef ?.... Finally the van arrived ?.... memories of moving roads ?.... & staggering in to this camp at 3.30 this morning, being halted by the guard, entering my hut to find a lovely fire, my bed made, & hot water for cocoa, which was made by the guard whilst I got to bed. Never in all my life Have I been so thankful to be in bed, I felt awful & was I glad of McClean's too. I went to sleep immediately ?.... at 7.30 this morning ?....off to sleep ?.....at 9.30 & was I worried ?.... taken full advantage of my lay in & had ?... same, & as I ? out of my hut, they were ?.. sweeping up. I was furious, & told them off ?... we got squared up, & no-one visited us, so it ? doesn't matter. I had

no breakfast, my tummy was upset, & the first meal I had was not till lunchtime, & all this physical inconvenience because they were too mean to send in special transport or us?... I can tell you darling ?... no other qualifications, we earned that second stipe yesterday, I bet we did 140 miles all told, & we all vowed, we'd think twice before going after our third, I shall never forget my second as long as I live, & I only hope it will ?....

Now my darling I have to think about bed, I really need it. I can hear the rain pouring on my roof, it's quite cosy in here despite a wet floor & I wish you could be here to share it (forlorn hope). Before I do got to bed though I have to check some more inventories, & prepare my précis for tomorrow's instructions, so please forgive me if I end now.

Goodnight Sweetheart

I'll always love you XXX

Your soon to be, Bdr Bill

Four Winds

Monday 5.1.42

Darling Bill,

How are you my dear, still plodding along. Remember how you used to hate Mondays? Do you still or are all the days alike now? Last week after the Christmas holidays, I was glad to get back to work, but this Monday, was just as black as usual, & the office seemed particularly dull & uninteresting. What strange things these human beings are!

I received your letter this morning written on Friday. How, I wonder, did you get on the next day with the Colonel. I do hope everything went off as we hoped & that I can now address my letters to "Bdr Furlong"

Today the weather has turned much colder & there is a north wind & a few snow flakes. I suppose this means you will get it as well, so I hope it doesn't last long.

News, as usual, is almost non-existent. Yesterday, as I told you, I went to St. Margarets to meet Bert Coe's wife. We spent a quiet, pleasant evening & after having supper I came home by train & so to bed.----

Well, darling, I will finish this letter now, by sending you all my love & lots of kisses

xxxxxx Your Ivy

The Camp

South Carlton

5/1/42

Letter in Pencil (tiny writing)

My own darling,

Another busy day is over, and consequently one nearer to our much longed for meeting. You've no idea how long ago it seems since we last met, I feel as if a lifetime has already elapsed, and I am filled with a desire to hold you again, to be able to whisper into your ears, to kiss you, and feel the loving softness of you once more. How long must I wait, no-one can tell, for daily we are losing men, & this may completely upset all previous arrangements, however, my prayers, & yours I hope, are all that it may not be too long.

The concentration held today was quite a success, despite the fact that most of the time it was snowing, and this made outside work pretty awful you will appreciate. I was quite pleased with my efforts today as an instructor, & I am gaining experience all the time, but the amount of travelling we do these days,

our sites see very little ?. Tomorrow I go on a conference, Wednesday is another concentration, which only leaves Thursday & Friday to be messed up, however things seem to go pretty smoothly during my absence, which makes me feel that at least my boys appreciate me.

We had two new men sent to us yesterday, & they took one away, and I'm really sorry he's gone, he was such a grand little worker, however, the two who came in his place are more useful operationally, so I guess it's not a bad bargain. I lost one today on leave, and at the weekend, I lose three all at once, & they will be away for 7 days, so it certainly looks as though we're in for a thin time next week, my boys will have no evenings off, and I know they hate that, though it is as I've told them, they've got to make some sacrifices if they want to get home regularly.

This morning (Monday too) I received no letter from you, I wondered why, and though I was fortunate in receiving one from each of the girls at Belper, they were poor consolation for me, my one hope is that tomorrow, I may get a parcel of vests, picture frame, writing pad, and who knows? cigarettes, I wonder if I'll be right.

Oh! Dear, I have lots and lots of cleaning up to do again tonight, these days out are all right, but they do make so much work at night, and I am to be for ever cleaning buttons and polishing boots, but it's making a smart soldier of me anyhow, so I mustn't grumble, and it also serves the purpose of giving me plenty to occupy my mind, a thing I'm always glad of, as it really does help to make the time go better.

We still have no more news of poor Freddie Burgess, though I guess he must be getting along fairly well, or something would have been said, I do hope he's all right. As a result of that accident, we have introduced a course on First Aid into our weekly concentrations, having held the first today, and I found it very enlightening. I've just had a lengthy conversation with the lad who was on the generator when the accident occurred, he's still very upset, though entirely blameless, and I've heard the true story from him, & feel highly honoured, I also know Freddie's statement, which proves this boy's to be correct, for Freddie is obviously one to shield himself, I have advised my lad to tell the truth at the inquiry, & he should be safe, though nothing I can do seems to convince him

that he's safe. He's a rough lad, a pit worker from Stoke, & an absolute wizard on engines, aggressive as hell, & yet seems to have a soft spot for me, & so I get most things done from him as I ask, but he was sent here from Troop H.Q. because they couldn't do anything with him, which all goes to show.

My little family are very interesting, one fellow is very highly strung, suffers from nerves, he works like a nigger for me, & worries about everything even more than I do, & is consequently regarded by the rest as an old woman, and yet he's a grand lad. Tonight I hear that he unwittingly called our cockney lad a Bastard, a common enough word in the army, & one which might have been ignored had another fellow used it, but not so poor Tom, because David, our cockney, asked him if he meant it, & he, not wishing to appear small I suppose, said yes, whereupon David hit him on the jaw & made him apologise, 'They're good friends now, & this story reached me unofficially, so I've cautioned the boys, all 100% lads, to be a little tolerant towards him, explain his health etc., & telling them they will only make him worse, & I really believe they may be a little more friendly now. These are just a few of the minor affairs of a D.C., there are bigger worries as you may well guess, such as Equipment, which is literally worth thousands of pounds, & which if it gets broken would keep one poor for the duration, there's food to check on & ensure everyone gets enough. Training of the men, allocation of work, Inspections of the site by my old pal, cleanliness being a thing I have always to be chasing them for. There's a hundred other things like conferences, repairs, boys with no money, local leave, & little confidences, never before was anything like this in my life, though even now, I must confess that in such leisure moments as this, I really do revel in the power, and I'm convinced that as I become more accustomed to the way of things, so shall I come to like it more.

Now my angel sweetheart, boots & buttons await me, it's gone ten, & I have to be out at five tomorrow morning, I still do guard, it's helped my prestige here tremendously, for no other D.C does such things, but that's my funeral, & the results I achieve are well worth the effort. So please excuse me darling if I end this letter now, I apologise for the pencil, but my pen is busted, & I have to keep mopping up blots if I use it for long.

Goodnight angel

God bless you & keep you safely for me,

I will remain always

Your loving, adoring soldier husband, Bill xxxxxxx

THE CAMP

SOUTH CARLTON

7.1.42



Dear love,

Your parcel arrived this morning, & as always, it was nicely timed, because apart from needing a clean vest, I was out of cigs, & unable to get any, you know of course that I needed this paper. Thank you ever so much for the apples, they really were a gift I appreciated, & I'm afraid I've already eaten them, you're a wonderful kid.

Today was the most awful day in my whole career, I've had Majors, Colonels, R.S.M. & 2/Lieuts here all day, the subject of which was an inspection of maintenance and examination of all men, all of which I should have lost by should they have failed me. My old pal would have held it against me like anything if I had been sunk, fortunately, after a really gruelling day of examinations, cross questions, & clambering over equipment, we passed out top of the Troop, Equipment & Boys as well, including myself. The examining officer tells me, that my stripe is through, but I have not yet been notified, but I do hope that tomorrow night you will be able to think of me sewing on new "tapes", though you mustn't address me as Bdr until it actually happens. Yesterday I was out all day, I rarely spend a whole day here now, it was a D.C.'s conference, & I learned quite a bit too, they're going to be held weekly, so what

with these, & the two ordinary gatherings we already hold each week, I shall rarely be on my site except at night, but as I have already remarked, it makes the time go.

We had a bomber crash a few hundred yards away yesterday morning, it was a blaze, & yet it looked miles away, so far away that I didn't report it, & so of course when it was found to be so near to us, I was in trouble, & had the devil of a job to talk my way out of it, but I think I have evaded the issue so far, though I doubt if I've heard the last of it.

I'm afraid I rather dirtied up those lovely gloves you sent by today's affair, & also my suit, but I've washed the gloves, & my hair, so something at least will be clean about me tomorrow. My goodness Ivy could you but appreciate the huge amount of knowledge I've absorbed since my stripe, I never knew one brain could hold it all, & all the 2/Lts are ever so "matey" with me now, & refer to me as the brainy lad, which is making me rather "cocky" I suppose, but that counts a lot as an N.C.O & so I don't try to squash all my swell headedness. I have asked the Regtl. officers who were here today, to send me on a few more courses, technical ones, of course, & they said they'll see about it, so I might be lucky yet, & distinguish myself even more.

My cigs are lower again, only five left, I've lent most of them to the boys, we have been neglected by our mobile canteen again, so if they don't come tomorrow, we're sunk, so I hope something will happen soon, because it stimulates my brain so, & keeps me going where nothing else ever could.

I'm sorry about Penny, but so long as she takes no harm, she deserves to be ill, I was so pleased when you were given chocolates, & now you've lost them, so she really deserves a good spanking if she were not already ill, however, I guess we'll all get over it.

And now I must make out guard sheets etc., so although this is but a very short note, I hope you'll forgive me until later & I'll remain your prospective
Bdr. Lover

Bill xxxx

*Four Winds**Monday 12.1.42*

My darling Bill,

Home once more & I am sitting roasting my knees in front of my own fire again.

I had a very swift journey home. After leaving you at 8.45 I caught the 9.12 from Lincoln with three minutes to spare At Grantham I had only five minutes to wait---just long enough to go to the cloakroom, & at Kings Cross, I had 15 minutes to get to the local line---so I managed to snatch a cup of coffee. I arrived in Hertford at 1.30---exactly 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ hours after I left you. I should think that is a record---you must travel by the same train when you come home. I had to stand from Grantham to London & the corridors were exceedingly cold.

It is very cold down here now--- it seems colder than where you are! I went round to your mother's when I got to Hertford to have a bite of food & tell her how you were & then I was able to go to work at the usual time in the afternoon.

I am very sorry that I forgot to give you any money when I left you, so I will send you off some cigarettes tomorrow. I dare say they will be just as welcome. I will include 20 Weights or Woods so that you can re-pay Basil (Mind you do).

I have just written a short letter to the old lady thanking her for our weekend.

I do hope my visit cheered you up a bit & will help you along till your seven days. If you really get it in three weeks' time, that will quickly go, darling & you will be home before you realize it. I think we will try and make it a quiet one shall we? You can visit all those you have to visit while I am at work & then we can come home in the evenings & spend the time by our own fireside? Would you like to do that? One evening, of course, would have to be spent at Ron's! I saw him as soon as I got back today. He asked when you were coming home so I don't think we can get out of that.

Well darling I hope your course goes off well & that you come out with

your usual flying colours.

It was so nice seeing you this weekend & now we will pray for your seven days to come quickly-----

All my love darling, Your Ivy

An aside: Don't give my love to the boys—they're not nice enough

The Camp

South Carlton

13.1.42

Pencil letter

My darling,

This course is a lot of b....er, we expected to be sleeping in a warm barrack room with central heating, instead of which we find ourselves in a Nissen hut with stone floor, & only a stove, which went out half way through the night, & were we cold? I'll say

Well darling, apart from little discomforts like this, the course isn't too bad, no spit & polish, no parades, no inspections, all work, mainly lectures & respiration drill, I've worn my facepiece? today, so much that it will last me a lifetime. We are a mixed class, ranging from Gunners to full Leiuts?, & we find it fairly interesting. I understand we are destined to be gas instructors for our own Battery when we get back. I am alone out of our whole regiment, & we have men here who are stationed at Royston, I wish I could swap with them, but I'm not lonely, we quickly become pals, & if you could look in here now you'd see us all doing various things looking as though we'd known each other for years.

I went to say goodbye to the Reigle's for a few days, so that they wouldn't wonder where I was, & thanked them again, the young one tells me that the old lady has taken a big liking to you, & wants to see you again soon, & Anne said she thinks you are beautiful, to which I readily agreed. They insist on my visiting them again as soon as I get back. I'm here until Friday night, & I may have to stay until Saturday, but I do hope I can get back on the Friday.

Please believe me when I say thank you for the loveliest weekend, I feel as if nothing matters now, your influence seems to have remained with me & I don't worry much about things now, even though I pass through the lethal chamber tomorrow, I know I won't die. I do hope & pray that my 7 days will remain fixed for the date we are wanting, I think I shall die if it fails, but we won't talk about that.

And now I must end, I have to memorise a certain sequence for teaching, so forgive the shortness of this note, & I'll write tomorrow my love.

I adore you, you know that now, Your Bill always xxxxx

Four Winds,

Wednesday 14/1/42

Darling Bill,

I suppose you are still at Newark—probably just finished your short course--- & tomorrow--- back to your dreary little camp. How I wish you could be moved to a larger place----- at some headquarters perhaps. I'm sure it would be a lot nicer for you. I do hope the opportunity comes along---- you seem so terribly isolated where you are. With not an ounce of comfort anywhere in the camp. Don't forget to go down to the

³Reigles? Whenever you get the opportunity. If I can think of you sitting in a comfortable arm-chair in front of a good fire, I shan't mind so much---but I can't bear to think of you spending all your evenings in one of your dreary huts this winter.

We have had a fair fall of snow since I returned, It is very cold & the roads are bad--- but so far I have managed to stay on my cycle.

I hope your cigs & vest were waiting for you when you got back---

Well, my sweet, this is all for tonight. I think I shall got to bed & get warm--- the fire doesn't seem to be able to do it.

God bless & sweet dreams. Ivy xxxxx

Four Winds,

Thursday 15/1/42

My Dearest,

I haven't heard from you yet but know that you don't get much free time on a course, so I am prepared for rather scanty news this week.

It is 9pm & I have a nice big fire. Kitty was to have come over this evening but I guess the cold & bad roads prevented her, so when I have finished my letter to you I shall have a bath & go to bed.

So far our water pipes have not given any trouble though lots of people have had theirs frozen up. I am keeping the electric bowl fire going in the roof & am trusting that the gods will be kind to me & not let me have any "roof" trouble.

I saw Dorothy today & told her by the way of a joke how we fell asleep on Sunday night. At first she didn't believe me, and then asked in all seriousness "What did you do in the afternoon then?"

Well, darling, I won't start a second page as I know I shan't have enough

³

I think this is spelt Riegels

news to fill it, so I will just say, "please forgive the shortness of my letter----

Good night my Sweet,

All my love & kisses, Your Ivy xxxxxxx

Four Winds,

Friday 16.1.42

Darling Bill

I hav'nt yet sent off the letter I wrote last night. (it wasn't worth sending anyway) so now I am able to write a little more to go with it.

I received your letter this morning written on Tuesday. I'm glad Mrs Reigles likes me, for if you are in the same place for any length of time, I should like to come and see you again--- Nice of Anne to say I'm beautiful---good thing she can't see me in the morning, just out of bed----she might change her mind then, don't you think?

The weather here is still cold & the snow hangs about, but our pipes are still in good working order,---for which I am truly thankful.

I have just had some hot coffee for my supper---and, o, dear, I have burnt my tongue.

I'm afraid there's nothing to report today--- work as usual & the evening spent doing housework---

So sweetheart, once more I'll have to say "sorry the letter's so short".

Goodnight & sweet dreams my love---

All my love---to the man who goes to bed to sleep-----

Your Ivy xxxx

THE CAMP
SOUTH CARLTON
 17TH JAN

My wonderful one,

Back again, and thankful too, Newark is an awful place now, and though the course was easy, the accommodation was awful, and it's no wonder I'm glad it's over. I should be top, or fairly near, because I know I topped the practical exam, they told me so, in fact I was the only one to pass, & the written exam, though a long one, was fairly easy, so I'll want to know why, if things don't turn out as I expect.

I was afraid I wouldn't be able to come back here, because when I got back to T.H.Q. last night, where I slept by the way, everything was in an uproar, more men leaving, & P.C's ? being shoved around all over the place, but I wheedled round Mr. Lill, & here I am. Your letters & parcel were awaiting me, you're a sweetheart in a million, those cigarettes, & what a peach of a notebook, it will take a lot of writing to fill that. I can only say thank you on paper, but when I come home, well, we really will have those lovely evenings you suggest, & perhaps I may be able to show you just a little of my appreciation. I was pleased to receive my nail tool too, they make my hands so much easier to keep in trim, the buttons amused me, why you sent those I really don't know, it just proves how thoughtful you are.

I have called on ⁴Reigles, & repayed {sic} Basil, I had an awful job to make him take the cigs but I just left them to him, & so he has to have them. I didn't stay long, as we are on air co-op and I had letters to write, but I promised to go down tomorrow night (Sunday) and spend the evening, I do so hope nothing occurs to spoil it. I was unable to get any chocolate for the kiddies whilst I was away, but perhaps I'll have more luck off our own canteen next week, I'd love to show my appreciation somehow. They are all eager to tell me that you had written them, & want you to come again soon, you might come to see me once more, & give me another lovely weekend.

⁴ I think this is Riegels

Now darling, a lovely surprise for you, to cure your Monday blues, would you like me home on Friday 23rd after all? Because that's when I'm hoping to come, I persuaded Mr. Lill to advance me one week, & my name goes in for a pass & warrant tomorrow, what about it sweet? I thought it wisest to grab the opportunity while it was hot, & I hope you agree, because leave is so very precarious these days, & might soon be stopped, so 'tis just as well don't you think? Anyway I'm pleased, & I guess you'll be too.

We have here, about six inches of snow, the roads are so treacherous that no-one calls unless they have to, so I guess winter is here at least, I realised that when I was brought, I had to ride on the back of an open lorry, I nearly lost my ears altogether, but now well my hut is my home, and the fire has made it like a little hothouse, & outside it's freezing like merry hell.

I'm full of gas knowledge now, of course, but it looks as if it's destined to be wasted, for although I'm supposed to be Bty. Gas Instructor from now onwards, I'm staying right here (I hope) because after all who wants to be a Gas Instructor? so long as my troop are well trained, & I'll see they are, I shan't worry.

Now angel, for tonight, please forgive me if I sign off, I know I owe you a long letter, but I have several others to get off too, & so until tomorrow my love, here's goodnight & God Bless You, I really do adore you, I'm sure you know that too.

Your lover husband always, Bill xxxx

Four Winds,

Sunday 18.1.42

My own darling husband,

It is 9 pm & I am afraid I ought to have written this letter to you earlier so that it could have been posted this afternoon, but I was too busy cleaning up the house; chopping the week's supply of wood, etc that I didn't get it done, & I couldn't leave my work till this afternoon as Barbara {*her sister*} was coming over.

She has had tea with me (I made some nice hot scones for tea) & has spent the evening here. At the moment she is bathing & will be staying the night. She hasn't heard from Roy {*her husband*} now for over a week----a sure sign that he has sailed.

I have a lovely big fire darling---you know, the kind you used to make---It is warm & comfortable---I do wish you could be here to share-----Still, at least we have that to look forward to in the very near future, haven't we----and a whole seven days too!! We are already more than half way through January, so we haven't much more than a fortnight to wait now---- happy thought.

Do you realize my dear, that I only received one letter from you throughout last week, so I don't think I need worry about missing this afternoon's post.

Still I 'spect I'll have one on Monday from you to say that you did well on your course.

O, dear Monday & a whole week to get through with no excitement to break the monotony--- do you get that feeling sometimes, or do you find your life more absorbing? Still I have something to look to next Saturday A whole crowd (about 16) of us are going to the Shire Hall, where Victor Silvester's orchestra ⁵will be playing --what a change for Hertford to wake up!!

⁵ Music and dance was very much a part of the everyday lives of many people during World War Two and the post-war years. With so many service men and women away from home, during World War Two the BBC began broadcasting dancing lessons and dance music on the radio in a show called the 'BBC Dancing Club'. The lessons were given by Victor Silvester, a former World Ballroom Dancing Champion, with the music played by the Victor Silvester Dance Orchestra.

Victor Marlborough Silvester OBE (25 February 1900 – 14 August 1978) was an English dancer, writer, musician and bandleader from the British dance band era. He was a significant figure in the development of ballroom dance during the first half of the 20th century, and his records sold 75 million copies from the 1930s through to the 1980s..

Anyway it will certainly be a special occasion for we dance fans Barbara would very much like to go, but of course, she cannot⁶ Well, darling news is pretty scarce, as usual---I haven't done much just lately---being pretty broke this week---which is not surprising after spending last weekend with you.

Barbara seems to be coming downstairs again now, so I will say goodnight, sweetheart, I'll write again tomorrow, if I can think of anything to say----

God bless----- & keep smiling

Always your own

Ivy xxxxxxxx

THE CAMP

SOUTH CARLTON

19th Jan

Dear Heart,

Once more I am able to snatch time from my sleep to write to you, my only darling. Today has been a busy one, we had a concentration, and though it whiled away the day, it's a pretty lousy way of doing it while there's a foot nearly of snow on the ground. However, that's over, & now I have returned to the little old shack, but things have happened since then. Firstly, it started to snow again & now, at 10, there is a real blizzard raging outside, it's rocking the huts, so you can tell how strong. Then I had to get my fire going, & I had an awful job with it, it simply wouldn't burn, but after a bit of gentle persuasion with paraffin, I eventually succeeded. Next came tea, or rather dinner & tea combined. During

⁶ We learnt in previous letters that her husband Roy forbade her from attending such events

which the sentry reported trouble with the Lister {generator}, ⁷well, I had a look, & trudged down the lane, now deep in snow, & deepening as I write, &



examined the old bus, she was getting hot too quickly, so I reported, & was given instructions how to deal with it, & run it for an hour, so back I went, & very soon we shan't be able to get there if this blizzard goes on for long, & I stayed down there an hour, & simply froze, & at the end of that time it was no better, so I gave it up & reported results. Next, I

was asked to procure a full statement from Sammie? About Freddie Burgess's accident, & I have been in here with him for about an hour & a half, wringing the real truth from him, & phrasing it for him so that he gets maximum benefit. Well, we roughed it out now, & he has retired to rewrite it for himself, & we shall send it in tomorrow morning, & now he has sworn that it is the truth, I know he will be all right. Talking of Freddie, I inquired yesterday, & heard that he definitely will not use that hand again ever, & that he will be discharged, I hope this is not true, though it seems to have come from authentic sources. I know this, he has lost one stripe already, & is now only a Bdr. & if he stays in the army, he will lose the rest, because he definitely is in the wrong.

I spent a pleasant evening with Anne & Basil last evening, & I know that will please you, we played Nap, at Anne's request, & she lost about a shilling {5p} while I lost 1/2d so Basil reaped the reward. I stayed there till 11.15 & even then I had to simply tear myself away, so I shan't go more than once or twice a week, because it puts me so behind with my work & letters. We chatted for a long time, touching on air raids & exchanging snaps of happier days, & I find that Anne has travelled a lot, did you know? She certainly was a pretty girl when she was young & blonde, I hope your children won't alter you like that, but I know that can't happen. They think we are foolish to keep putting off a family, but I tactfully withdrew I leave that business to you from now onwards.

Tomorrow I have a D.C.'s concentration, which means another day in the

⁷ Searchlight generators were mainly 110 V dc and typically rated at 24 kW

biting cold, just hanging about, learning a bit here & there, but I'd rather stay on my little site, so that I can dive into the cookhouse when I'm cold, it's so much nicer, but that's what comes of being a D.C.

How dare you tell Dorothy about our weekend, I can remember how you would have been furious had I dared mention such things to one of my friends, it just shows how right I am when I say this war has altered you drastically. I didn't really mind, but I'd rather you didn't discuss such things with your friends, though perhaps we've proved to Dorothy that there's more in marriage than just that, by being content to be together & going happily to sleep. And did it occur to her that I might have been dreadfully tired, & reaction of a wonderfully soft bed is very soothing & certainly conducive to sleep. Just pass these little bits on to her sometime will you, & tell her if she married for sexual reasons only, I'm sorry for her future.

Now my little one, I really must go to bed, rising at 4.20 each morning is no joke these days, & though I might steal an extra half an hour after I'm called, I have to get up to warm the old Generator, & always I have a fear of being caught off guard.

So you will excuse me I know if I sign off here, with a promise of more news tomorrow.

Darling I love you,

Your Bill for ever xxxxxxxx

THE CAMP
SOUTH CARLTON

24th Jan

Dear darling,

It snowed all last night, and this morning we were almost inaccessible from the top road. Fortunately our ration lorry driver was a hardy fellow whom nothing would deter, and although late, he did eventually arrive with our dinner, all covered in snow. The fact that the roads were so bad, prevented the D.C.'s concentration today, for which I was truly thankful, and we occupied the morning with clearing away snow from the paths.

After dinner, we were supposed to have had a Bath Parade, but as it was pretty risky going to Lincoln, we decided to just take the afternoon out, and accordingly borrowed Basil's shot-gun, and another from the other boy's friends, & four of us set forth in search of game. We frightened several coveys of partridges before we could get within killing range, and found that the meadows below here simply abound with hares, & we spent the afternoon stalking these elusive creatures, never being able to catch up with even one, the silly things seemed to see us when we were miles away, & off they went, ears back, running in a straight line, in long loping bounds. We tried all sorts of strategies to head them off, but always they took fright before we were able to take up our positions. Many times we were waist high in snow, and three times today I have changed my socks. I cannot remember such a depth before, one walks along with gum boots almost covered, then quite suddenly a harmless looking stretch lets you down, so that one has to beat a hasty retreat, and find a way round that particular stretch. And so we floundered on, covering miles of ground, & being out nearly all afternoon, but we returned having fired only one shot, and this at a covey of partridge which were never really within range, but we just couldn't come back empty handed & knew that we didn't even fire, & so we just let one go, in the hope that we might be lucky. Needless to say, we were not, and so four tired, but very healthy boys returned to camp, to face gibes thrown at us by our companions. On the way up the lane we talked to Anne at Lane End, who couldn't resist pulling our legs, & then she told us that their pump was frozen, & they had no water, which gave us the opportunity to help her, & we filled both

her & her mother's buckets with water from the camp, which we have miraculously kept from freezing, and thus saved them the job of carrying it any distance for them selves. We were invited to have a cup of tea, which was accepted & thus wound up a very pleasant Bath Parade.

Today I received no news of you, well, I cannot reproach you, seeing that I have been so very ? myself these last weeks, but I hope I get a letter tomorrow, and also hope it will contain cigarettes, we've had neither N.A.A.F.I. nor Y.M.C.A for a week, they can't get here now, & the lady who sells them in the village, has very few left, and so I hope against hope, that you will come to my rescue again as you always seem to darling, & at the right time. Now darling, I hope you know by now, that I shall endeavour to catch the same train which you found, & if I'm lucky, I shall be home on Friday this week, at 1.30 so will you be there to meet me? I'll telegram you at 3007 ⁸if I get cancelled or hung up in any way, & in the meantime I'll pray that very soon now, you will be safe in my arms, & that we have seven days of heaven before us. [...] I know you think I'm quiet these days, & seldom express myself as I used, [...] until Friday, [...]

Goodnight Angel I love you, Bill xxxxxx

OLLERTON ROAD CAMP

TUXFORD, NEWARK

30th Jan

Loveliest Woman,

Here I am at the old place, though I don't know for how long, hence the Tuxford address & until you hear from me to the contrary I want you to keep writing there.

I had an uneventful journey here, but on arriving at Lincoln it was

⁸ Presumably the office telephone number

snowing hard, a real blizzard in fact, & the weather was worse if anything, than when I left last Friday, I did feel blue, & the flakes were so large too, I was like a snow man by the time I got to the station. I called at a Forces canteen for a cup of tea before I left Lincoln station, & this made me late & I missed my bus for this camp, the next one was not due until twenty to seven, which meant a two hours wait, fortunately a lorry driver heard my enquiries & offered me a lift, though I had to sit in the back, but I pulled a tarpaulin over me, & went through the blizzard like this rather than wait for the next bus, which was a doubtful runner anyway. What a miserable place this is too, I can well understand your reaction to it now, & it has depressed me horribly. We're inches deep in snow already, though it's eased up a bit now, & I hope it goes quickly, I'm fed up with snow anyway.

Oh my darling I wished I was back with you as soon as the train got to Bayford, so you can imagine my feelings by the time I arrived here, I want you so very much, to me you are life, & I honestly can't be happy away from you.

I am haunted by Tchaikovsky's Concerto now, I wonder if you are playing it? & will it be to you as it is to me, that is more than beautiful music, a reminder of the greatness & depth of our love, I feel it must do that automatically, for each time it comes to my head I think of you, & the wonder you bring. Now, here I am, in a shabby drab old hut, which looks less cosy than ever before, & still no electricity, I do feel depressed, I think I'll go to bed soon, I certainly shan't visit the Reigles tonight, because it's gone nine, so perhaps darling, just for tonight, you'll allow me to sleep & try to forget my misery, & in the morning I shall awake to remember only the joys of my seven days of heaven. If I don't write much for a day or two, you'll know it's pressure of work, they tell me its been air cooperation every night since I left, please write as often as you ever did, please darling.

Goodnight, you know I love you

Saturday Morning 5.30

I slept till about 4 this morning, then lay awake until my guard came round, it has turned very mild again now, having been raining all night, but the snow is still here in the form of slush about four inches deep, & if it freezes now, well, we shall be in a mess.

I'm writing this little extra note to let you know that I feel more able to settle down this morning, & by tonight I should be quite normal, & I can then go to bed cheerfully. I will write again today as soon as I can find time, & in the meantime I do implore you to keep writing regularly, I saw in your last letter a threat to write only twice a week, that's just too bad of you, I hope you never carry it out, because if you do, well, I shall have every excuse for feeling brownd off.

Now my sweet, I must close, because I'm supposed to be a guard, so until later, keep smiling, you know I love & adore you always.

Your Bill xxx

Four Winds,

Saturday 31.1.42

My dearest Bill,

I wonder how you have been faring today. Isn't it dreadfully cold. I could have cried coming home---The wind has changed to north again & it snows now & again---when it isn't too cold.

I got my other two records this dinner time & have played the concerto through twice this afternoon as well as putting on odd records from it. It takes just about half an hour after allowing for the stops between the records. It was a lovely birthday present darling, and I shall often play it.

I managed to get some hair grips today--- they were 1/- {5p} Pretty dreadful isn't it. Will you give them to Mrs Reigles With my compliments?

The vet came to put Jill? To sleep this afternoon (she has cancer) & so we got him to look at Penny while he was over here, as the Aunts said the wound was a bit septic (old scare mongers) He said she was going on fine and that she

need no longer be bandaged & could lick it without doing harm, for which I was thankful. She must still have the lotion put on daily but it will be easy to catch her unawares to do that.

I was going to tea with Dorothy today & to the cinema afterwards, but it was so cold coming home that I have not ventured out again. Now it is 10.30 & I am going to bathe and so to bed

Goodnight my sweetheart

I shall soon be seeing you

Again-----

All my love & kisses Your Ivy xxxxxx

P.S. I send off your razor for servicing today

Four Winds,

Sunday 1.2.42

Bill darling, Would you like to come to tea with me this afternoon? It is 5pm & I shall soon be laying the table. Not that I have anything exciting to offer you, but perhaps you would like to make some nice toast in front of the fire. It is nice & cosy in here, but outside it is snowing fast. It has been doing so the whole day and the snow is deeper than we have had previously this year. I have swept the garden path twice today but it is still thickly covered Penny & I had some fun this afternoon when we went down to the village to post the letter I wrote to you last night.

I snowballed her & she tried to catch them &, of course, they simply broke into pieces in her mouth. Then she went "snortling" ? in the snow. It was so deep that her head & ears disappeared from view & she got covered in snow all over.

This morning, when I dressed her wound, I tied up her nose & turned her over on her back & she lay as quiet as a mouse while I did it so when I put some more lotion on this afternoon, I did not even bother to muzzle her and she made

no fuss at all. So you can see she is improving a good deal.

I can see that I shall have to go to work by bus tomorrow, though, if the snow continues to fall at this present rate, I doubt if the buses will be running.

How quiet everything is when it snows! There is not a sound inside or outside the house, except the ticking of the clock (which is so quiet that I usually do not hear it at all) and an occasional snore from Penny.

I actually went to the trouble of cooking myself a Sunday dinner today--- for the first time in six months, because I wanted to see what my runner beans were like. They were as tasty & tender as if they had been picked from the garden this morning. I hope your mother found her jar as successful!

I am enclosing your vest with this letter but the pants aren't quite ready yet, but they will I hope, be following this parcel.

Now darling, as it is 5.30, I think I will stop for tea, sorry you won't stay, but perhaps you'll come on Sunday week to tea, will you?--- that's a date then

Au revoir for now my love

God bless--- Always your Ivy xxxxxx.

{Written down the side} DIPHTHERIA !!!!!

OLLERTON ROAD CAMP,

TUXFORD

1/2/42

Dear Darling,

In twenty four hours, the weather has become worse than it was during our last snowy period, & we are now well & truly snowed up. All day long it has been snowing, & outside it's so cold that I nearly folded up each time I had to turn out. Despite all this, we've had to be out in it, last night for instance, we were called to action on a fool's errand & stood about until eleven, seeing & hearing nothing. Yesterday the Lister broke down, & we had hopes of being out of action for the night, but Battery, kindly sent us a lorry for the night, & so of course we didn't get any rest that way. The lorry left us this morning, & during the day we were visited by the Mechs, who have made us exactly as we were before, the only operational site in the Troop with Radio. We also had a visit by the Colonel during the afternoon, I can tell you, he was most unexpected, but he didn't catch us, the boys were too quick for him, & before he was on the site they had all scuttled through the other door of the hut, & were sublimely busy doing nothing when he did see them. His visit seemed harmless enough, & he went away in quite a good mood, so I didn't worry very much about him. Old "Flash" as we call him, has got back from his course, & was on leave this weekend, so I still haven't encountered him, & as I go for my course tomorrow (Monday) I shall avoid him for at least another week. Fortunately you will continue, I hope, to write to the Tuxford address, & so I shall be able to keep up to date with your letters, I really don't understand the army though, here am I, due for a course which starts on Tuesday, & I have to be collected from here at 8.30 in the morning on Monday, that wastes a whole day, I do wish I could have all the time off which is wasted, couldn't I have a lovely long leave, but wasted time & leave are totally different to the army, & so we go on.

I'm looking forward immensely to the course, I have a feeling that I may achieve something by it, & I certainly hope I'm right, though my stars foretell a very trying week, I bet they don't know how trying, anyhow, I shall, with my super brain, get through, & I hope with my usual flying colours.

I called on the Reigles for a half hour last night during a “quiet” spell, & took the old lady’s “Pineate”?, for which she seemed very grateful, & I was also able to get two pieces of chocolate for the kiddies, so my visit was profitable for them at least, & they were very pleased with the recipe for curing rabbit skins, I hope it works all right, or I’ll be praying for a shift again. I want to go down there again tonight, jut to say cheerio to them for a week, in fact all my visits are hello & cheerio, I bet they think I do a lot of moving, but it helps to keep life interesting, & in this respect I seem to be consistently lucky.

I’m wondering what sort of a weekend you had, I hope in a way, that you didn’t dance, somehow I don’t want you to this week, but of course, if you prefer to forget your Bill in other people’s company, it’s something I wouldn’t deny you even though I don’t understand. There I go, I’m sorry darling, but perhaps you know how it is with me, or don’t you understand either. The fact remains painfully true, without you I’m lost, & might as well die, I should certainly lose all interest in life, so don’t you ever leave me will you, & remember, no more Michaels & Jacks, I’m very emphatic about that & if you break this promise, I shall take it that you don’t love me any more, & that really will break me. I mean that, but please don’t let that little imp of mischief which sometimes rules you, make you try it just to see what I look like when I’m broken. [...] you are a provocative little so and so at times you know [...]

I’m just eating a slice of bread & jam, your jam, for my supper, its lovely, & if I close my eyes, I can picture the little table by the fire, & you, my darling, as you anxiously await my verdict, well, I love it, & it’s about as sweet as you darling, that’s the highest compliment I could pay it. Now I must end, please tell me all about Penny when next you write, & I am also anxious to know about relations with the Ogres, {*presumably the Aunts*}

Monday Morning

Six o’clock, & it’s been snowing all night, we literally had to dig our way down to the Lister, I don’t see how I shall get to Tuxford today, but that’s not my worry. I am busy packing again, & a rotten job it is, I’ve got so much kit I hardly know where to put it all, but I shall manage I expect.

I spent a few hours with the Reigles last night, & left the old lady at 12.30, I think you’ll agree that it was too late, but I feel so rude if I break away, what do

you think? They all send love to you, & want to see you again, perhaps you will come again later on, we shall see.

And now I must close, I only wanted to say I love you, & prove to you that I think of you at all times.

Goodmorning Sweetheart,

I'll write later Your Bill xxx

Four Winds,

Monday 2.2.42

My beloved Bill,

It is 10.15 sweetheart. Monday is nearly over. Has it been a good one for you? I hope so. Nothing exciting has happened to me but I will tell you what little there is. As I told you in my letter yesterday—it snowed hard all day, & all night too & this morning there was six to eight inches of snow on the ground--- which is quite a lot isn't it. Anyway cycling is quite impossible so I went to catch the bus. There were fifteen people waiting for it & Ruth George {*neighbour*} & I were first two on. Then the conductress said she could not take any more so the remaining thirteen unfortunate people had to walk. Ruth & I felt very guilty but we were glad, all the same, that we were allowed to ride. Perhaps tomorrow we shall not be so fortunate. If I can get up early enough I shall walk. I wore my slacks to work (changing into a skirt for the office) & so kept quite warm. At mid-day I caught a bus to the Heath & walked back.

It seemed a long time before my fire made the room warm this evening, but it is very nice now. I hav'nt got Penny with me, for, as usual, Mr. Smith {*the lodger*} has pinched her. When he came in the evening & called her, I made her keep very quiet & would not let her go to him. However, he came downstairs with a cake for her, & of course, she made a fuss of him then, so what could I do but let her go. I expect, hussy that she is, she will spend the night with him. It is obvious that she is much better for she was rolling on her back this evening pushing the settee about as she does sometimes when she is playing by herself, so if she can do that, her tummy can't be very sore any longer, can it?

I forgot to tell you that when I lit the fire yesterday I did so with only

three old envelopes! I think that is getting the art of paper saving down as fine as it is possible I should think.

I have just been having for my supper ---- what do you think--- the remainder of the bottled plums—to satisfy my craving for something “nice”. In these days of restricted variety I often long for something tasty (such absurd things as a fruit & nut sundae or an outsize dish of ice cream) but generally have to resort to toast in the end I did not receive a letter from you this morning. Did’nt you write to me on Friday or Saturday?

Today I sent off your vest which should arrive safely a day before this letter.

Well darling, I really hav’ent anything more to write about (except, of course, to say that I love you) I am, in fact, amazed to find I have filled up so much space. So, goodnight now my sweet. Keep smiling. Remember, it is now less than a fortnight before you will be home once more!!!

All my love Your Ivy xxx

OLLERTON ROAD CAMP,
TUXFORD

3 FEB
rd

My darling wife,

As I promised, here I am again to let you know that you are always in my thoughts. Actually, there is little of interest to relate, but I have been wanting to write ever since my arrival here, so here goes. Firstly I want to say that I am as happy as I can be now, I have never before so appreciated barrack life, comfort in full is here, & all day long we are in a lovely warm lecture room, which is just what I love. It has snowed & snowed up here until it cannot snow

any more, & we have at least eighteen inches on the parade ground, & where it has drifted, well, you can imagine the conditions, all the time there are courses going on too, & today the poor devils had to shovel away the snow from their equipment, & have been standing out there all day just as usual, & of course this makes me appreciate my position even more. And what a grand change to have electricity too, so lovely & clean & bright, add to that, central heating, & the day's work from 9 until 5, with an hour for lunch & 2 breaks extra of $\frac{1}{2}$ hour in the morning & afternoon, & you have a picture of this week's programme.

As for the course itself, well today was the first day, & we began with a little exam, in which I did fairly well, getting 85%, which is not too bad really. We covered a lot of ground, & I now have a fair knowledge of electricity and radio, & am ready for tomorrows feast of knowledge. At first I thought I was out of my depth, but after a little floundering & a few questions, I was able to set my course & I think I shall be able to pull through fairly well. The experiments are extremely fascinating, & as every lecture has these, you'll see how absorbing it must be for me. We are getting very good food this week, plenty of it, & beautifully cooked too, and I think by now, you will be happy to see I'm happy, so I'll stop talking for a change about this course, & try a new subject.

I received both your letters quite safely today, and I'm pleased to see that you now have your complete set of records, I shall be waiting to hear it right through, and hope it won't be long before it is time for it, for, like you, I feel as if I've been away a month already, that's how much I miss you, so by the time my leave does come round, I shall be quite ready for it. What a relief for you that you don't have to dress Penny any now, I'm so glad, & I hope it won't be long before she's well again, Poor old Jill, {*maybe neighbour's dog*} it is a shame she had to go like that, I bet Mrs George makes a show too, were there many tears? or has she grown up now.

Thank you for the hair grips, I know Annie will be delighted with them, and it will be my pleasure to present your compliments with them, & perhaps you will come again to stay with them soon, in which case I know you will be more than welcome, they are always asking about you, & tell me each time I visit them, to ask, you to come again, so possibly you will try to come again one day, that is, if I'm allowed to stay there, which I very much doubt, because it is shortly going to become a sort of H.Q. in which case I'm sure to be moved because

they'll need a sergeant there. By the way, I narrowly missed a three weeks course in Wales, if it hadn't been for the fact that I was already registered for this one, I should now have been at the Army Gas School, but they had to send someone else, for which I am truly thankful, because I hate Gas, it's an awfully dull subject, & I prefer this one I have now. There's one thing I have discovered from today's work, my poor education is a definite handicap now, we've had all sorts of mathematical formulae to work out, & never having had Geometry or Physics, I constantly have to wrestle with problems which would be easy if I'd been properly trained. Mind you, lots of the other fellows are the same, & I manage to get the right answers by my own methods, where they don't, but all the same, I should appreciate this extra knowledge now.

Well darling, I feel as if I have used up all my subject matter for today, but if tomorrow is as easy, I promise to be with you again during the evening. I am now going to try for a bath, & if not, well, I've still got the showers, & then I shall go to the N.A.A.F.I. for a nice little supper, so forgive me if I end now,

Goodnight my love,

I adore you Bill

CHAPTER TWO

Four Winds,

Tuesday 3. 2.42

My dearest one,

I received a letter from you this morning telling me that you arrived back safely – for which I am thankful. The postman gave it to me when I met him in the village. The poor man had abandoned his bike & was doing his rounds on foot, for during the night we had still another fall of snow, but today it has been thawing fast all day, so you can imagine what the roads are like. Ruth, Hoffmann ? & I walked to Hertford this morning & I am glad we did for the bus did not pass us till we reached Mill Bridge.

I got a bus home this evening all right, but did not get home till nearly seven & by the time I have lit my fire & had my tea it is well past eight. Now it is 9 & the news is on. I am writing to you early as there is an anti-Nazi play on the radio at 9.40 to which I would like to listen.

Tonight I have also been doing some mending—on my old pink nightie---do you remember it--- the one which wraps over like a pinafore—I thought I would use it when you come home again on Saturday week. I know it is your favourite one!!!!

I sent off one pair of pants & some cigarettes to you today. I'll send the others as soon as they are ready.

Well darling, news is very scarce, so I think I will say goodnight for now---but I'll write again tomorrow---

So Penny & I send you our love & kisses-----Your Ivy

OLLERTON ROAD CAMP

TUXFORD

4 FEB

Dearest Love,

Thank you for your kind invitation to tea on Sunday but, I'm so sorry I couldn't be there, but you see I didn't get the invitation until this morning, and you will agree that was a bit too late. However, I shall consider your further invitation for Sunday week, and I promise to try to be there. Will you promise to be very good if I do come, I hope so, because as you know, I'm very shy, and any boldness on your part would frighten me from any further promises, and I do so want to remain friends with you.

Enough of the frivolity, you must know how I long to be with you, & I cannot really settle, until I have seen you once again [...] one cannot easily concentrate on such things as coils, oscillators & so forth. Nevertheless, I continue to strive, & with luck I might get 70% in the final exam, I dare not hope for a better result, though I shall try my damdest to be top. Honestly though darling, after today's work, I am more bewildered than I ever was on the last course, & that was a teaser, so if I say his one is far more deep than I ever thought possible, will you sympathise with me? and even now, we are to be taught only the simplest of things, so I dare not contemplate a real radio course, which I might get if I get to the top of the class, & it would be a 3 months one too, I don't know if I'd like it or not, but I do know how much I miss a good education now, though these courses are certainly keying me up & bringing me up to scratch.

Thanks for the vest baby, I needed it, as you know, I had a bath last night, & so it will be nice to have a clean change tonight. I shall think of you as I put it on, & imagine you trying to stop me tucking it into my trousers, you little devil, [...] & you sent me some words to a song, lovely words [...]

Well my sweet angel, I must study a bit now, you do want me to do well don't you, so I'll promise to write again tomorrow.

Goodnight my love, Your Bill always

OLLERTON ROAD CAMP

TUXFORD

5th FEB

My Wonderful one,

Another day nearer to seeing you, & I really shall be glad when that wonderful time does come, honestly darling, it seems a lifetime since I said goodbye to you, & in reality it's not a week yet, you see how very essential you are to me, & all the time I'm away from you is spent in counting the very hours until we meet again. I do so hope & pray that my next day will remain a fixture, though nothing is certain about it until I am actually holding you once more, so please put it in your prayers darling.

Have you seen the picture "Kitty Foyle"? I forgot to tell you that when I arrived here on Monday, we had the afternoon to play with, so another boy, a sergeant, & myself, went in to Retford for the pictures. It was a lovely picture, but made me sentimental, I needed you with me when I came out. We had a very nice tea too, went into the best restaurant in town & were for once ultra-civilized. After the show we visited an hotel for a drink, but they had no spirits, & so I just had one half pint of beer & out we came, caught an early bus back, & so to bed.

Today has been a heartrending one for most of us, we're all living in a world of valves & wires now, I do hope I can get on top of them before Sunday, (exam day), though I have no doubt that I shall struggle through somehow as I always seem to. One thing I know & that is, I should be able to tackle something in the electrical radio world when the war is over, & I am going to look out for a suitable vocational correspondence course in the subject soon, I think it's my

baby, and the result of this course will, to me, decide whether or not I follow this lead.

I'm afraid we're not likely to be out much this week, we have too much studying to do, & in spite of the fact that it's all brain work, we get as tired as hell now, do you know, I went to bed last night at ten, and though I must confess I went to sleep with a notebook in my hand, I slept & slept until 10 to 8 this morning, & what a rush it was to get ready in time, we nearly had no breakfast, only a few scraps left, but we got enough to keep going until break time so that's everything. The rest of the day was just ordinary so far as you're concerned, though to me it was a nightmare, but I won't bore you now darling, all you need know is that I'm up to my neck in it.

And now my angel love, I will end for today, there's little news each day so you may have gathered, so forgive me if my letters seem short, but I must be able to tell you how much I adore you, and to me that's everything, I hope it's so with you too,

Goodnight darling sweet wife,

Yours till the end of life's story,

Bill xxxx

OLLERTON RD. CAMP

TUXFORD

6 FEB
TH

Sweetheart,

Just one more day nearer to our next meeting, and how I'm longing for that time you will never know, [...]

Well darling, I don't know what I shall write about tonight, for really nothing of importance seems to have happened, but anyway here goes. Last

night, after I had written to you, I went to the naafi for supper, & we joined in a game of "Housey", well, I won a 6/- prize the first time for 2d, & after gambling for the rest of the evening, I was still 2/6d in pocket, which you will agree made the evening profitable. We've had fun on this course really, you've no idea how many laughs we get out of the radio business, During the day we usually get a period of revision, when the officer just asks questions around the class, we get all sorts, & all sorts of answers too, & the officer is a great fellow, full of humour, he always seems to have a politely sarcastic retort if we're not right, but we learn all the time, & have lots of fun.

Tonight I played billiards with a few of the sergeants, & though I'm an awful player, I got some fun out of it. We then adjourned for supper, & now here we are, back in our lovely big barrack room, & three of the boys, all fellows I've met on courses, have got a mattress on the floor, & they're doing gymnastics, one is going to try a somersault in a minute, I dread to think of the mess in a moment, there, he's had a go, an awful crash, & he landed straight on his bottom, now he's off again, he's bitten his tongue this time, & that's his effort finished with, now the others are trying, & I am writing to a series of awful bumps & crashes, but they're enjoying themselves so I mustn't grumble----- There's a lull now, while they speculate as to whether the injury they might get, is worth the effort, I leave it to them.

Well angel, that's about all for today, Oh! Thank you a lot for the cigarettes & also the pants, you make a good job of things & I want you to know that I think you're a wonderful wife. Now until tomorrow darling, I must say Goodnight, I'll write again tomorrow,

So until then, my sweet, Goodnight

I love you always, Your Bill xx

OLLERTON ROAD CAMP

TUXFORD

*Monday**This is possibly 9th February 1942 {after a stolen weekend following Bill's course}*

Dear darling,

After a most hectic journey back, which took me six hours, I am now safely stationed at Saxilby {*twelve miles from Tuxford*} for a few days. Here is the history of my travels, for I know you are most anxious.

I walked to Stapleford, & not a single thing was going that way, it all seemed to be heading for Hertford, then a little car came along & picked me up, taking me to Stevenage, from there, a district nurse took me a few more miles, & then my luck changed for a while, for having arrived at Baldock by another lift, I stopped a light van bound for Grantham, we made excellent time, doing 50 miles an hour all the way despite the roads, & I arrived at Grantham at 11.30, which gave me a half hour for the remaining 20 miles, but here I came unstuck, for try as I would, I could not get a lift & at 12 o'clock, in despair I walked a mile through the town until an army lorry which was going within four miles of Newark took pity on me, from which point I easily got into Newark, but from there I had more difficulty & it was past 1, you bet I was worried, however, I plodded on, got a lift in a sand & gravel lorry to within five miles of Tuxford, & was then quite resigned to a walk & a lot of trouble at the other end; Fortune favoured me once more, (or was it your prayers) for a big lorry pulled up behind me, & who should it be but one of our own wagons, going right into the camp, well, it was a snip then, I went in on the lorry unobserved, & just put my kit on, went to the NAAFI for a half hour, until the driver had had his dinner, then quite unconcernedly proceeded with him back to my Troop HQ as if I was fresh from my course. On arrival at Troop HQ, I found everything O.K., & the lorry I was with had been calculated to fetch me anyway, & so I was sent here, & all is well (I hope).

The fellow who took me from Baldock to Grantham was guess who? Harry Champion's son, & he is evacuated at Bengoe, & came from there this morning, just fancy our meeting like that, but it's a small world that has no turning, don't you agree?

Well, my love, my adventure has ended happily, & so far as I know, I was not missed, and investigation today has proved that I do go on 48 on the 11th & unless you get a telegram, you may count on my being there, & I shall be there early you bet, I'm a proper time racer? now. It was a lovely treat for me darling, how about you? I would have travelled 500 miles for another such night if I had twice as much time. I'm quite happy too, because I have another lovely weekend to look forward to, so you needn't worry about me being miserable this week however hard I have to work. The sergeant who came with me, by the way, got back at 10 oclock, so in spite of living just half as far away as I do, he was only an hour earlier, & he also escaped detection, so we're a pair of accomplished rogues.

Now my sweet I must end, I shall telegram you tomorrow, I can't get out tonight, but will be in Lincoln on a bath parade in the afternoon, so please hurry up & get well, & I'll be home at the weekend if I possibly can.

I must write to old Joe now, so Goodnight Angel, I adore you always,

Your Bill xxx

P.S. THE WAR ENDS NOV 19TH 1942. AUTHENTIC, (FROM THE SPIRITS)

There follows a poem by Bill in February 1942

One night of love,
 When two hearts are one,
 And I to have & hold,
 When moon, is gone, & starlight grows cold
 One night of love,

When love is all,
 And I recall,
 When at the break of dawn,
 & find my lover gone,
 I'll whisper with a smile,
 I've lived a little while,
 And known,
 One night of love.

OLLERTON CAMP,
 TUXFORD
 16th Feb

Upon Bill's return from 48 hours leave

My darling,

Back again, & this time to the dreary prospect of no more heavenly leave for at least a month, but as long as I can soon find out when I am due again, I shall be able to survive, for you will agree that if we have a date to look forward to, it makes all the difference in the world to our outlook on life.

I had a funny journey back, arrived at Stevenage about 11.30, and after signalling about two thousand cars & lorries, eventually one stopped, a large, slow moving lorry, with a load amounting to about 20 tons. He was an amiable driver, on his way to Doncaster, well, I wasn't having much luck so I hopped on with him, & he took me straight from Stevenage to Newark, saving me the worry of changes, though he rarely exceeded 30 m.p.h., all the time. A typical cockney he was, who apparently had two brothers in the army, hence his outlook towards soldiers, we had a few laughs at life in general, & I found he held very strong views on the far Eastern situation, I had great difficulty in pacifying him. I

learned a lot from him about his own job, & it appears that except for weekends, he very rarely sees his wife & family, & from his tales about his travels I should imagine he must know every road in England. We parted at Newark pretty good friends, & he drove me straight to the bus station wherein was a bus ready to proceed to Lincoln, so I just said cheerio, & we wished each other luck, then I walked perhaps 10 yards, & boarded the 4.30 from Newark to Lincoln. It was a slow old bus, serving all the little villages, & by the time we reached Lincoln I was heartily aware of my return to Lincolnshire, for except to stare at one with unveiled curiosity, the inhabitants are like icebergs. Ah! well, I can stand all that, in fact with people such as these I think I prefer my own company.

I wandered around to the other bus stop when I got to Lincoln, & found I had an hour's wait nearly & it was then 5.30, but did I care? No why should I & what's the use, & anyway I was hungry, having had nothing to eat since breakfast, so I found a café, & invested in a huge meat pie costing 9d & eat it all myself, washing down with cups of tea. By the time I had finished this it was nearing my hour for moving, & so I came on here, arriving just after dark, to find that I am definitely going to be made a travelling gas instructor as from Wednesday next. I enquired about old Wotton's early morning visit, & this site was the only one which escaped, for after leaving here he went to S. Carlton & caught George Platt lighting the cookhouse fire, & he was supposed to be on guard, then he went onto another place, & caught the D.C. cooking breakfast, & washing & shaving in the cookhouse as it cooked, & he should have been on guard, & from this place, he proceeded to the last site, in a beautiful mood by now too, & found poor old Eric Dunmore a Bdr, just making fires, & he had on no steel helmet, & no rifle. Well, you can guess that was old Flash's? last straw, & there three unfortunate Bdrs have to go before him this week to have their knuckles rapped, & every one of those crimes I have already committed myself, & one worse, which you may remember, because you were there, so I fervently thanked my lucky stars & vowed to take no more chances. I have been lucky you know, & I appreciate my good fortune, but if I want to get on, I shall cry enough now, & pull my socks up, though being a "gas bloke" will relieve me I hope, of some of these responsibilities.

We are engaged at the moment in the pleasant task of putting a marker beacon up for someone else's air cooperation, but it's a nuisance really, & nearly

as bad as being in air co-op ourselves, However, I hope to be able to go to bed at a normal hour, & tomorrow there is a bath parade, on which I shall most certainly go, so I shall make my new start in easy style.

There is no more news, but I must say once more, thank you for memories, they will carry me through to my next leave, & when I'm a bit downhearted, I'll just think of last Sunday morning at 10.45, when I found that though I thought I knew all about love, I was mistaken, in fact each time I see you I learn more about it. Gee you're wonderful darling, never have I had such ecstasy before, even when I saw your complete wonder [...]

Now my sweet [...] I must close [...] you know I adore you always,

Your devoted Bill, xxx

Four Winds,

Monday 16.2.42

My own Sweetheart,

By now, I hope, you are safely back in camp, in comparative comfort. It has been a dreadfully cold day & by this evening the wind was like a knife. I do hope you had a lucky journey so that you did not feel the weather too much

It is now past 9 pm. The news is on & I have just finished doing my odd jobs about the house. It being too late to think about a fire I am sitting on the floor in front of the electric fire & when I have finished this letter to you, & had a cup of coffee, I am going to bed to get warm. I have already put two H.W.Bs in the bed for I am afraid I shall miss you very much tonight in bed, & not being able to cuddle up to you to keep warm. I don't think I'd mind you being a soldier if you could come home at nights to sleep, for that is certainly when I miss you

most, & always, of course, an extra lot when you have just returned from leave.

Still, darling, I'm not grumbling---- not so long as you are in England & in good health.

Barbara has heard from Roy while he is still at sea, somewhere in the tropics, where he has been sunbathing on deck. They have excellent supplies of oranges & bananas & he seems to find the sunsets something pretty marvellous. He was sea sick for one day but it took him three days to get over it.⁹

-----Darling—I have been sitting here dreaming & it is now 10 o'clock, so I had better make an effort to finish my letter & get into bed.

With tomorrow's letter, by the way, I shall be sending your vests & some cigarettes--- so look out for a parcel It is all right to send you cigarettes unregistered via Tuxford, or is this too risky?

Well my love, -----goodnight & sweet dreams --- I wish it were last night instead of tonight but then I should still have to part from you in the morning so I'll look forward to your next leave instead--- in one month's time---- then in six weeks' time comes Easter & perhaps we shall find some means to meet again then as well.

Till tomorrow sweetheart----

All my love & kisses Your Ivy

P.S. Please let me know when you want me to send the 15/- for your course

⁹

According to Roy's son Neil, his father ended up in the deserts of Africa

OLLERTON ROAD CAMP

TUXFORD

17th Feb

Sweetheart Darling,

The first day has passed fairly peacefully, but my goodness it is cold, in fact we had some more snow here this morning, honestly, I think I shall crack up if it continues much longer. And do you know, that old so & so Wotton has issued orders that we are not to be allowed fires in the huts during the night, & we have stone floors, well, I shall disobey orders outright for once, & hang the consequence, for you must agree that sleeping under such conditions is as bad as being in Russia, because our huts are not exactly draught-proof, & I for one will not tolerate such obvious bullying, so wait for developments.

Today we went to Lincoln, & had another good bath, so I really should be clean now, in fact I have never had so many baths in such a short period as I have lately, but it really is nice, & I most certainly would be in daily if I had half a chance, you may be interested to know that I bathed in Lavender perfumed water today, & it was “quaite naice”.

Following this I called at the photographer with whom I left your picture, & they made a wonderful job of the re-touching and told me it was not so much my wearing it as the fact that it had been finished badly, however, I was more than pleased with the results, & on asking how much I had to pay, I got a shock, for the girl, or rather, woman, said she couldn't charge me for that, & despite all my arguments she refused to accept anything, so of course I thanked her a lot, & told her I now had a frame for it, which was just as well because she still had been unable to get me one, & I came away considerably richer than when I went in. The picture is now framed & hangs over my bed, & a more wonderful present I have yet to find, the gilt frame suits the gold in your hair and the delicacy of your complexion perfectly, & it looks like some wonderful inspired portrait by one of the old masters. I love it, & even the other boys keep asking if they may have another look, so you have caused a sensation here in the camp as well as in my heart.

We rounded off the afternoon by a tour of all the big stores, you know, Woolworths etc., & in between our visits we called at various canteens for cups of tea & cakes, & it boiled down to a real “canteen crawl” wherein we drank rather more tea than we really needed, but we had fun, & then of course came the now serious problem of obtaining cigarettes, so we forthwith visited all tobacconists with cards in their windows proclaiming the fact that they had none, & in nearly every case, we got ten, & by the time we were ready to leave the town we had managed to collect about forty each, which was fair although we shall need to be rescued again tomorrow by either the N.A.A.F.I. or YM so I hope one of them turns up.

We ended our last half hour there by doing a bit of “slumming”, going round all the “low dives” in the back street & waterways of Lincoln, during the course of which we were able to buy jam tarts & mince pies, which we ate as we explored, & eventually found ourselves at the wharf side from where the buses start, thus ending a fairly pleasant afternoon.

Tomorrow I guess I have to get down to business, for we are having a concentration, at which I commence my career as “Gas Bloke”, & if I’m extra good I may end up on another Troop, though I don’t want to leave this one if I can help it, but anyway, I shall do my best & see how I come out. I posted your letter in Lincoln today, but I don’t know when you’ll get it quite, because collections are funny up here, & from this particular place, there is no collection until 5.30 in the evenings, so of course we hold back our letters until someone is going somewhere to post them earlier, so, if mail seems erratic from here, blame the post darling, because I’m trying to write as often as I can now, as you’ll see by following the dates. By the way sweetheart, envelopes & stamps are my most urgent necessity now, I unfortunately forgot to buy stamps at Lincoln & after I have despatched this note on its way, I am without, so please send me a few if you can, they often help me out of tight spots, & if letters are already stamped they do not present so much difficulty on the posting problem.

I am just finishing up the last of your jam, we had nothing but bread & marg. for supper tonight, & so out came what little I had left, & lo & behold I have a delicious spread before me, every bite of which will remind me of your sweetness, & the ginger will recall last Sunday at 10.45 a.m. remember?

I do hope you are always able to decipher my scribble, & always you may take a permanent apology for it, & the “scrappy” nature of my letters, but like you, I allow my thoughts to race ahead of my hand, with the usual result, but so long as you have no more difficulty than I experience with your letters, I shall have no need to worry.

Well now [...] once more I have run myself out of news [...] I come to the end of another day, [...] a day nearer the end of all this grievous parting, but I'll have something else to write about tomorrow, I hope [...]

God bless you Your Bill xxx

Four Winds,

Wednesday 18.2.42

Darling,

This morning when I got to work there was your letter reposing on my typewriter—though I notice that it was posted as 3.45 pm yesterday—that is very quick delivery isn't it. Even if it had not reached me by the morning post, there is still the afternoon post, so you can go on writing to the office.

You didn't get back very early did you. I hope nothing was said about your late return. You didn't mention whether you called for your photo in Lincoln, so I gather you did not have the time, or else you forgot all about it.

Old Wotton certainly had a fruitful round the other morning, didn't he. I'm glad you escaped, though he is sure to tighten up on the early morning guards after this.

Well darling, it is past 10.30. I am rather late in starting your letter this evening—having been doing odd jobs such as hair washing & so on. I feel tired yet don't want to go to sleep yet I have been listening to some very nice music on the radio & it has made me feel sad & lonely I suppose that is natural after having you home & now that I don't know when you will be coming again Also,

of course, I have been out very very little this last seven weeks & to stay in night after night by oneself is rather depressing. I am so glad the spring is coming again, I only hope that it dos'nt bring fresh successes for the Germans—that's all.

The house is very quiet now. It is 10.45 & everyone but me is fast asleep--- Penny included. I suppose, for lack of something better to do, I may as well follow suit.

Night, night, darling

Keep smiling & remember I love

You---as always & while

We've got love—we've got

everything-----

Ivy xxxxxx

OLLERTON ROAD CAMP

TUXFORD

18th Feb

HEART H.Q.

Time Daily Action Report

TO MY DARLING

0715 hrs Awakened by cook, who produced a nice Cup of tea, The temperature was noticeably warmer this being due to the fact that my fire had been kept alight. A striking change seemed to have come over me, & I felt wide awake and well refreshed, I attribute this to 3rd Group sleep induced by Horlicks the previous night.

0730 hrs	Lighted a cigarette and got out of bed. Dressed Leisurely.
0745 hrs	Proceeded to Breakfast, & ate a hearty meal of beans And fried bread Mk1.
0815 hrs	Washed, shaved, & made up my kit
0900 hrs	Camp inspection, several men had to be hurried up, As there seems to be a marked tendency to hang about During this cold weather.
0905 hrs	Organised maintenance, and supervised work generally
10.30 hrs	Arrival of N.A.A.F.I. van held up work for a half hour, after which came the official break allowed from 11.15 hrs to 11.30 hrs making in all, a nice long break of one hour, a fact greatly appreciated by all numbers, as it allows them to thoroughly thaw out after polishing cold brass etc.
11.30	Carried out training of 6, 7, & 8 as laid down on weekly programme, using casual aircraft for this purpose
12.15	Changed for P.T. five men attended, went for a run about 2 miles, & finished up with five minutes loosening exercise with ball.
13.00 hrs	Dinner. The excellency of Gnr. Probert as a Class II cook is unquestionable, and swill return for the week will be very low.
14.00 hrs	Two men on Dental Parade, and two at baths, having been Detained for guard yesterday whilst official parade was held. This fact left me with one operational member who had to be used for guard, & the cook, who was busy washing up.
1500 hrs	Arrival of training officer Capt. Pheeny, disturbed sentry, cook & myself from a pleasant discussion on life in general, gathered around mess hut fire. He was pretty generous, & merely remarked about sentry having no overcoat. The purpose of his visit was to inspect maintenance generally, & collect any criticisms of D.C.'s on the present system of organisation. Seemed very pleased with general aspect, and departed in fair humour at 15.30 hrs. Heading for the Sth. Carltons

15.30 hrs Busied myself with tidying up minor points around site. Including the pleasant task of hanging picture of my wife in position of best advantage, so that she may be under observation at all hours.

1700 hrs Tea. Salmon sandwiches & buttered scone. Note 1 scone per man only.

1800 hrs Re-arrival of men from Lincoln & Dental Parades

1900 hrs Night manning, controlled exposure from T.H.Q. It was found that using H.Q beam as target we had to depress to such a low angle that whole village received sunshine treatment. A strong protest is expected. Practice and valuable experience was gained by this exercise in 3 beam rule? Tactics, & we were afterwards complimented by Troop Officer.

2015 hrs At this time I have taken over duties from R.T sentry, writing this report during my period of duty. Concentration scheduled for tomorrow, at which I have one hours instruction to give on Gas. Preparation being one of the four P's, time must be given soon to this subject.
On Battery orders Pt. 1 by Capt. Brown, acting O.C. during Major Wotton's four days absence of leave, it was observed that 1617302 Bdr Furlong obtained 73% on his last technical course, obtaining the 5th position out of a class of 14. Carry on Bdr Furlong, you have exceeded the percentage of rivals you hoped to beat, & your reputation for being in the first half dozen continues.

2025 hrs Having come to the end of my Daily Action report, I find time here to make observations. First and most important is that I love my wife [...] No mail has yet come to hand since my forty eight hours leave, [...] I should get one from Battery H.Q. tonight. [...]

2030hrs Time to commence my Prep period for tomorrow, Love & kisses may be drawn from this H.Q., at all hours, every day & night [...]
Goodnight my love [...] Your Hearts D.C. Bill

Four Winds,

Thursday 19/2/42

My darling Sweetheart,

I am afraid I am starting my letter to you very late this evening. It is 11.30 I have been busy reading another of Guy de Maupassant's books and I ought to have put it down an hour or more ago. The lover in it calls his mistress Ivy--- not because it is her name—which is Christian—but as an endearing name. It is the first time I have known anyone use my name as an endearment---Even you scarcely ever use it---not more than you can possibly help.

Thank you darling for yesterday's letter—I get them in one day now---I am so glad that you find your little frame suits my photo--- I thought it would --- and if it has made you happy--- it was well worth the expense. You were very lucky for not having to pay for the re-touching, weren't you.--- Its amazing what a uniform will do, isn't it. Thank you, also, for my dear little valantime—I have still got one--- which is now ten years old. It is a heart edged with lace! Do you remember, or is 10 years too far to look back for something so trivial?

Today being the 18th February *{If it's Thursday it is the 19th-MF}*, I kept making the silly mistake of putting on all my letters “18th December” –it is always the same—every time the 18th day of the month arrives I want to write December. I wonder if we shall be able to spend the next one together I expect the chances are small. I'm sorry darling that I forgot to send you some envelopes early in the week. However, some were despatched today with the one or two stamps I had so I hope you get them quickly Also I hope your vests arrived safely too. Now that I have to send your post through Tuxford I am a bit dubious as to whether they will arrive safely, but it seems an extravagance to register everything.

Well darling I have no real news for you. Life is uninteresting, stolid & boring these days—though it is wicked to grumble at that these days I suppose—but I'm afraid I'm very human & can't help grumbling sometimes. You, I know, are an expert at it.

I see that it is nearly 12 o'clock. I must not lose too much beauty sleep at my age,¹⁰ so my dear one for today I must say au revoir—God bless you. Don't fall in love with the photo will you, or you may fall out of love with me & that would never do.

All my love & kisses

Your own Ivy xxxxx

OLLERTON ROAD CAMP

TUXFORD

19TH FEB

Dearest love,

This letter will probably only be a short one, but as my last two or three have been fairly respectable, I hope you will forgive me.

Firstly, I must tell you that I received your first letter today, just four days after you had written it, that's one of the snags of having to use B.H.Q. address, though I'm afraid it will have to continue for some time yet, as although I still remain at this one camp, I am uncertain as to where I shall go from here. I'm glad Barbara has heard from Roy again, though I guess it would make her sad to know he's so far away, all I hope is that he'll come through safely, & that she will eventually know the happiness we all hope to find. I shall be awaiting my parcel from you, especially as I happen to need the cigarettes rather badly, however, I guess I'll have to wait at least until tomorrow.

How is your weather down that way? ours is really killing, I have been cold and miserable here ever since I came back & each day as I go out I feel like crying, it positively shrivels me up, I find myself positively longing for summer & its welcome warmth.

¹⁰ she was 28 years old-MF

Today has been very slack, & a minimum amount of work was done, though I must say I was not particularly worried about that, & I was extremely thankful when work time was over, so that I could relax a bit.

I heard from Joe today, you may remember I wrote to his private address, well, his wife opened it, thinking it was from an Aunt of his in Lincoln, & as I had embarked on a detailed report of Penny's injury, including the amputation of one nipple, & she, not knowing who Penny was, & thinking it might be my wife, was rather mystified as to the number of nipples you possess, though I hope by now that Joe has enlightened her. He sends his love to you, & hopes one day to see you again. He is at the moment in Wales, & leading a roving, restless & very miserable life I think. He always says he wishes he were back with us.

Dorothy Fletcher ¹¹ has also written, & sends her love, & Basil, & Annie together with their Mother wish to be remembered to you, Annie is delighted with the hair grips, & still hopes she may see us both one day. [...]

Your Bill xxxxx

Four Winds,

20th February 1942

Sir,

Your daily report for 18th ~~December~~ February to hand, on which the following remarks are to be noted Glad to hear the Horlicks induced sound sleep--- an endeavour to get you a further supply has, so far, failed--- so seed potatoes ordered instead.

Dental parade---Do you need to attend this. Must not be shirked if it is necessary.

¹
¹ See Book Two in this series

In tidying up your hit & arranging? my photograph—please remember that I have my eye on you & how many cigarettes you smoke during the day

Exam results. 43% is a good average considering the technicality of the course but 5th is not as good as it might be---why isn't it 3rd? Better results at future courses are hoped for ---after such a high standard being set.

Darling, I am afraid I forgot to post today the letter I wrote to you last night, so they will have to be sent together tomorrow morning. It is already 10.45 . The evening has slipped away quietly & quickly as usual. I went to see your mother & she tells me that Mr Onyon left a sum of over £3,000, {£118,000 in 2024} but unconditionally to his wife, so it looks as if the children, apart from Elsie, will not see much of it. She and her mother have already expressed a desire for fur coats & that

is how it will go. Your mother seems to think that Mrs? Onyon will be leaving the house, if not in March, then in June so I am hoping to get in some good



The Two Brewers, Ware Road, Hertford Heath

work in securing it for my mother. However, I am meeting opposition here, for when it actually comes to talking of moving they seem to be stuck as well as screwed into the Two Brewers, so I have written to Son {her brother} this evening, asking him to write to them and to what he can to make them take the plunge. Cousin Amy from Plymouth (whom you have met) came to visit us today at the Heath. She is in the WAAFs as a telephone operator & appears to like it very much. If you remember, she was pretty fat seven years ago. Now at 20

she is pretty colossal.¹² It is still very cold down here. All today it has been trying unsuccessfully to snow. There was a searchlight up when I was coming home, but it didn't seem like a searchlight. It made it seem like moonlight on an ordinary peaceful night & I pretended to myself as I came home--- feeling very cold--- that it was an ordinary peaceful night & that I had been out somewhere for the afternoon & that when I got in you would be waiting for me with a lovely big fire & the tea laid ready on the little coffee table. Unfortunately when I got in & saw the dead ashes in the grate & everything as I had left in this morning, my imagination wouldn't stretch any further & I had to come back to realities.

Well, darling as it is 11.10 & as I have run out of news & as I still have my hair to attend to before bed, I think I will stop writing for tonight.

Keep smiling sweetheart—work hard, but don't forget, when you do get time off, to play hard too

All my love, Your Ivy xxxxxxxxx

OLLERTON ROAD CAMP

TUXFORD

20 Feb

Darling,

One more day gone by of the long procession towards the end of the war, and how I long for that day to come, only you could really know.

I have very little news for you today darling, the weather doesn't seem to improve much, it snowed again today, I shall be glad when it's all over & we get some nicer weather.

¹²This was Charlotte Amy Pettit a.k.a Amy, daughter of Seth Ernest Pettit a.k.a. Ernest who was brother of Arabella Mabel Pettit, a.k.a. Mabel, mother of Ivy a.k.a. Ann

An awkward situation arose today, I'll tell you about it, the NAAFI girl came, as usual, and she was in the middle of serving us, when the Y.M turned up too, was my face red, & worst of all, the Y.M had a really nasty man with them, who took great offence at the situation as if it were our fault, He said we were regularly served by him twice a week, & had all we wanted, & he didn't see why we couldn't be satisfied, so I had to point out to him that if we relied on him, we couldn't smoke more than one day a week, and I ended up by telling him he could please himself what he did about it, so I guess we shan't see them any more, & I don't suppose we'll miss them much anyway, for all we ever got is 10 or perhaps 20 cigarettes, no matches, no chocolate, no stamps, no razor blades, no soap, & a rotten cup of tea, the NAAFI girl always lets us have 20 cigarettes, & in addition can usually supply us with some of the other articles, though we shall never equal the good old S.A. van of Derbyshire, but the fact remains, we shouldn't miss the Y.M. very much even though they do stop visiting. I got very annoyed about it, I tell you, I'd love to have that pig-headed fellow under me, fancy quarrelling over who shall do us a passably good turn, I'm beginning to believe they must be making a handsome profit out of it, or else why should they quarrel.

Apart from this little incident, life has gone on undisturbed today, I have done numerous little jobs about the place, and learned a thing or two, which is always to the good.

I am busy converting our ablutions shed into a gas cleansing centre, should we ever need it, and have been very occupied with the fascinating job of sign writing, you'd be surprised how good I am too. I've clicked the job for the whole Troop as soon as I can get round, & also the training of the men in Gas knowledge depends on me, so once they get organised enough to run me about, I shall have my hands pretty full.

My first soap coupon came to hand this morning, & as I have enough to last for at least one more week, I send it now, and bind you on your word of honour to buy with it, either soap flakes or powder, so your washing up will be just as easy? Good,



I've started another page, though what I shall fill it with I don't yet know, probably with love and wishes.

By the way did you decipher my last love message to you, I hope so, though it must have seemed a bit of a puzzle to you really, & I bet you think I'm crazy [...]

Now a bit of careless talk, which I hope you'll keep to yourself, we have had a kit check today, a most unusual thing, & certainly very ominous, I hope my misgivings are all wrong, or I shan't know what to do. Please pray for me my sweet, because like you, I'm really thankful to be here in my own country when I could be so much worse off.

Have I told you before that all those letters you receive are written by the light of one hurricane? well they are, it has not been my good fortune to get to a site with electricity yet, & I wonder if I ever shall, but even if it were completely dark, love would still guide my hand, & somehow, I would still pour out my daily story to you, even if I couldn't see to keep it straight.

After I had finished writing to you last night I wrote a long letter to dear old Joe, & another to Dorothy Fletcher, so I am more or less up to date again, though I guess it won't be for long. If you see Ron {*Dempster*} at all, tell him that for once, he owes me a letter, so he mustn't moan if he does not hear from me.

I see you think about a visit at Easter, that is if I don't get home, well, I warn you now, I dare not sleep out again, because accommodation is so far away here, but I shall probably be elsewhere by then & circumstances might be difficult, so we won't plan too far ahead. Needless to say, I want you to be near me all the time, & when you can come only now & then, I'd hate to lose the opportunity so here's hoping. Anyway, I should be seeing you at home before that, & by the way, please tell me when Easter is due, I might, by very judicious wangling, arrange my seven days to coincide.

And with this happy thought, I have reached the end of my letter. [...].

Now it's goodnight, I shall be with you again tomorrow somehow, so until then my sweet, you are ever in my thoughts,

Your Bill always, xxxx

P.S. THIS IS MY LAST ENVELOPE

20.2.1942.

To my adorable wife

Did I ever tell you that you're beautiful
 Did I ever say you were divine,
 Did I ever tell you that I loved you
 And hope that always you'll be mine?

Have I ever said that I miss you
 And long to have you near me once again
 Have I ever missed a chance to kiss you?
 If so, I must have been insane.

Have I ever likened you to Venus
 And told you I would die without your love
 And prayed that naught would ever come between us.
 And said that you were sent from Heaven above?

And did I ever call you my Goddess
 And myself your ever willing slave
 Who would give his life at your request?
 To please you ever is my crave.

Did I ever say you were an Angel
 Sent from Heaven to sweeten my life.
 Enchanting me with love's sweetest spell?
 Until I had to make you my wife.

And have I ever said that I was sorry
 You came to take my heart away?
 And now you have it, is there need to worry?
 Darling, that is for you to say.

Your Bill.

Tom Wines
 Waterford
 Stafford

Sunday 22.2.43

My own darling Bill,
 Sunday evening once more, +
 Vera Lynn is singing to us on the
 Radio. Unfortunately I have
 cannot listen, having not wireless.
 I am a great pity, for there is
 something about her programme
 which could bring us so close
 together if only I knew you were
 listening too.

Barbara + Dorothy have just
 left, having been over to tea.
 Barbara wanted to bring me
 Warsaw concertos + she has left her
 record here for the time being.
 Barbara has received a

see next page:

Four Winds,

Sunday 22.2.42

Severely water damaged letter

My own darling Bill,

Sunday evening once more & Vera Lynn is singing to us on the Radio. Unfortunately I know you cannot listen having no wireless.... *illegible*...is a great pity for there is something about her programme which could bring us closer together if only I knew you were listening too.

Barbara & Dorothy have just left, having been over to tea. Barbara wanted to ...*illegible*... Warsaw concerto & she has left her record here for the time being. Barbara has received a cable from Roy which says "safe & well". So we assume he has arrived at his destination, which must be a great relief to her.

Today has gone very quickly for I didn't wake up till quarter to one, so then I had to get up quickly to do what housework I didn't manage to finish yesterday --- & to make some cakes for tea. Mr Smith has a nasty cold & hasn't been out all day. He couldn't have any dinner (not that I had any, anyway) but at teatime I gave him two poached eggs on toast & some home made scones. Then I tidied up his bed for him & asked him in?, but he is so shy that he wouldn't sit up in bed for his tea till I had left the room. I told him not to be afraid to ask for a meal if he didn't feel well enough to go out---but you know, he won't, he is a silly man.

Dorothy is getting into financial troubles. Her income is about the same as mine--- her husband being a full sergeant. She pays 28/6 {£1.42} a week for her flat, which I don't think is dear, considering it is furnished, but she thinks it is & cannot make ends meet. I must admit that I haven't been saving much lately, but now that I shall soon be getting a rise I hope to turn over a new leaf and save regularly.

Last night I went with Dorothy & Joan & young Ron to the Shire Hall. With Ron was his pal {sic} Charlie Grover, who tells me that he came to our wedding, so you must know him, though I am sure I haven't seen him before.

I also danced with another fellow who told me he used to go to school with you ---I think he said his name was Want or Mean, I can't remember which We had

quite a nice evening, though I must admit I missed my usual friends from the Raf
 { *I assume she means the R.A.F. who were regular attendees at the Town Hall dances- MF*}.

Vera Lynn has finished singing now, and for once she didn't make me cry--- perhaps because I was too busy writing to you Anyway I'm glad I didn't, because although I like her programmes, I don't want to feel miserable. I have taken down one of the songs she sang and am enclosing the words for you with love from me. Since I cannot invent my own expressions I have to use someone else's to convey my thoughts to you.

Well my sweet, I think I shall now say goodnight & have a bath before going to bed. The water is simply boiling, even though Barbara had a bath at 6.

Au revoir darling, till tomorrow

All my love & kisses your Ivy

There follows part of the lyrics as written by Ivy {it is in fact incomplete}

I haven't said thanks for that lovely weekend
 Those two days of heaven you helped me to spend
 The thrill of your kiss as you stepped off the train
 The smile in your eyes like the sun after rain

To mark the occasion we went out to dine
 Remember the laughter, the music, the wine
 That drive in the taxi when midnight had flown
 Then breakfast next morning, just we two alone

{*Then I*} had to go, the time was {*so*} short
~~We both had so much to say~~
~~Your kit to be packed,~~ {*missing*} the train to be caught
 Sorry I cried but I just felt that way

And now you have gone, dear, this letter I pen
My heart travels with you till we meet again
 Keep smiling, my darling, and someday we'll spend
 A lifetime as sweet as that lovely weekend

OLLERTON ROAD CAMP

TUXFORD

22nd Feb

My Dearest,

Would you believe it, I'm back at S. Carlton for the weekend, George Platt having gone on 48 hrs. I was moved here yesterday, and suppose I'll have to go away again tomorrow, but it's been a change, & of course I've seen lots of the Reigles. All the boys here want me back, apparently George is too high handed with them, but he's got nothing to show for it, this site was the filthiest I've seen when I arrived here yesterday. However, I got the lads cracking today, and we have made such a difference that I wish I were staying here again, I'd show them how to handle men.

Yesterday, being half day, I determined to go to Lincoln to see Charles Boyer, in Hold Back the Dawn,

a most marvellous film, but then, anything in which he acts is sure to be good, have you seen it? You ought to.

By the time the show was over I had no time left to do anything else, having to be back before dark does curtail one's time so, but I had such lovely thoughts after the picture that I didn't mind a lot. I spent the evening with the young Reigles, & it was just like going to a second home, you've no idea how wonderful a wireless & an easy chair are when they are normally denied.

Today was rather unusual for Sunday, normally we have to wash, but the programme has been changed to recreational training, and as we had no football I decided to give them a really original afternoon's recreation, so we went to see Basil, who came with us, with his guns, & two ferrets, & we proceeded to stalk rabbits. It snowed hard all the time we were out, & we got just one rabbit, lost one ferret & had to wait an hour for it to come out after having dug half a field up to find it. We were cold & miserable, & I for one vowed never to go out with ferrets again, I'd much rather have a good old do with a gun, but as it was, we didn't have one shot. One thing though, I gained a terrific appetite, & ate a huge tea of bread & jam.

We are compelled to do P.T. now, & this morning, much against the boys wishes, I had them all out with their shorts & vests in spite of the snow, but we didn't stay out long, & I took them into the mess hut, where a half hours exercise, followed by a good old romp with the medicine ball made them all feel warmer & happy.

The vests & cigarettes arrived safely thank you, & cigarettes were especially welcome, it's awful trying to get them up here, people just flatly refuse, even if they've got stacks of them, & in more than one shop window I've seen the notice "Only Regular Customers supplied", which I think is awfully mean, little do they know that we in A.A. have no regular canteen which supplies us, & that civvies are getting even more than we are, Never mind, we shall win.

Supper has just come in, one lovely little fish cake, two slices of bread, & a mug of cocoa, so I spread the fish cake between the bread, add Horlicks or Ovaltine to the cocoa, & hey presto! one damn good supper, but perhaps the combination doesn't appeal to you.

I'm glad my urgent request for envelopes & stamps reached you in time, they arrived yesterday, together with a letter from Ron, to whom I shall soon have to write now. Ted {*Ladds*} also dropped me a line to apologise for not seeing me on my seven days, but knowing the army by now, I do not blame him.

I've had a few quiet chuckles since I've been back here, The boys are imploring me to stay, as if I can decide, & they talk about poor old George behind his back, I hope I don't get the same; Last night they were suggesting a protest against him, to try to get him moved, but I calmed them down a bit, & I hope they do nothing so rash. It's very nice being popular, but I'd hate to get into trouble over it, which is what might easily happen, & anyway they'd soon begin to take me for granted again, so I'd far rather leave them while their hearts are warm, they work so much better for me then, & I can show people results, which are what I want.

I suppose by this time tomorrow I shall be back at Saxilby, unless I'm sent to a new place, which is quite feasible if the other Bdrs turn out as efficient as George, in which case I'll have to go around cleaning up all the time, a thing I hate. I'll be glad when my gas do comes off, & then I'll have a job for myself & no-one can disturb or criticise me.

And now my love I'm going to end for today, so I hope you'll forgive me for another short note, and tomorrow, wherever I am, you'll be hearing from me somehow.

I positively adore you my love,

Your Bill xxxxx

Four Winds,

Monday 23.2.42

SUDDENLY IVY BECOMES ANN

Darling,

I was very happy to receive two letters from you this morning as well as one of the nicest poems you have ever written – I was especially pleased with that. It must have taken you some considerable time to compose it. I have read it several times today already—

And now to answer your first letter first.

I'm sorry my letters take such a long time to reach you. It makes the news so old. But until you get settled again, I suppose we can do nothing about it. Is Saxilby on the 'phone by the way--- in other words, can I speak to you instead of writing one evening. It only costs 1/2d after seven now-a-days. Perhaps there is a pub number which you could let me have & if you said you would be there on a certain evening, I would endeavour to ring you there. Why not consider the idea. It would be nice to talk for three minutes when we cannot see one another. By the way, Easter Monday is the 6th April so you must see what you can do about getting home between the 3 & 6th of that month.

I'm sorry that your weather is still very bitter but we are sufferers in sympathy, for it is just as bad here--- too cold even to snow--& you know how I love to {sic} cold weather.

I could'nt help laughing at being mistaken for Penny by Mrs Joe. I certainly shouldn't have liked to lose one of my nipples & if I had, I am sure you would'nt pass the news on to one of your pals.

And now your second letter, my love---

First of all. Thank you very much. Indeed for your soap coupons. It is very sweet of you, but really you should'nt do it, for you will be in an awkward predicament if you should run out of soap. I hav'nt spent it yet. Do you think they will accept it at the shop?

I hope so, I'll try tomorrow to get some soap flakes.

I see you mention with trepidation kit check, but I refuse to believe this is anything more than routine. Even if it is an unusual thing, it has to be done some times & does not necessarily mean a continental trip in the near future I'm afraid my evening has gone very quickly for I was working till nearly 7.30, so that it was past eight o'clock before I got my tea. I am sitting by the electric fire, as it was not worth lighting a coal fire for a couple of hours & anyway my coal is fast disappearing because of all this cold weather, so I must be a bit careful with it. & Now, I suppose I must finish for I want to put my feather mattress on top of the bed again. I cannot keep warm at nights without it & then that means I cannot sleep & morning finds me still cold. I do miss my human H.W.B.

Well, sweetheart, once more, I'll say, goodbye—for today.

Keep smiling (& don't forget your prayers)

All my love Ivy

Ann xxxxxxxx



Another Valentine.

When life is dull and drear,
 I long to have you near,
 And knowing it cannot be,
 Your picture comes to me
 To comfort lonely heart
 While we're so far apart.
 And seeing it I know
 However far I go
 There can only be but you
 To spur & pull me thro';
 You are my whole life
 My darling lovely wife.
 Your Bill.

OLLERTON ROAD CAMP

TUXFORD

23RD Feb

My Beloved,

Thank you for the two letters in one, which arrived here today (Monday), I collected it whilst on a concentration at Troop H.Q., thus receiving it as soon as if it were directly addressed to me.

You will be interested to know that I am now safely tucked away at Saxilby again, & hope to remain here for at least a fortnight.

By the way young lady, what do you mean by suggesting that my last course results were not up to your expectations, let me tell you that if I'm satisfied, everyone has got to be, because I know my handicaps before I start, whilst others don't. Ah well, I can't be good all the time, but at least I got a higher position & percentage than any other N.C.O. from this Troop, & Nobby Clarke the Sgt., who was with me only beat me by being 3rd with just 3 more marks, so you may be able to see what keen competition there was.

I don't think you should stay up so late at nights reading those books, it will do you no good as far as I can see, & does not even benefit you mentally, however, they may provide useful recreation providing you remember when its bedtime-----

Break here, Mr. Bunce has just been round, he's awfully upset because old Wotton's been on to him about us, apparently he, Wotton, visited all sites this afternoon whilst we were out, & nothing at all suited him, in fact he was in a vile temper, & by vile I mean just that. He's coming round again tomorrow, & if there's no improvement, all his N.C.O.s, on this troop will be stripped, what about that for an old tartar, I told Bunce that if he wanted to bully me he could have his stripes now, but I think I should miss them really, so I won't let go of them unless they are taken. Mr Bunce says he says a prayer every night for old "Flash"? to die, & we all wish the same, anything to get rid of him, what a man.

I said goodbye to the Reigles this morning, & I know they were sorry to see me go, especially the old lady, but perhaps one day I might be back there with them again.

Well, this is a short letter darling, I can find no more news at all, but I guess it's not my fault.

I'm glad you get my letters earlier by having them sent to your office, but I bet young Roy or Joan will soon get fed-up with putting them on your typewriter daily, especially if I manage to keep up the regular supply I'm putting in now. Oh! I forgot, you accused me of perhaps not remembering a lace edge Valentine, I really do remember it well, I bought it at William's in Fore St., & it took me

ages to choose, but the love that was in my heart then was as nothing compared to what I feel now, that's one reason why I make up my own Valentines these days.

And now to a subject dear to both our hearts, leave, I nosed about a bit today at T.H.Q., & I think I shall be home on the 14th of next month, is it a weekend or not? I really haven't been able to find out, yes, it is, I've just worked it out, & it's exactly three weeks all but two days to wait, such a long time, but I guess it will eventually go, although I shall be on edge all the time I know, you are my life now, & anything else that claims my attention has only a second place I fear.

Today, we had to do P.T., in the snow, & the ground was wet & slippery, really awful, & if I hadn't been cold already before I undressed, I know I'd have died with shock. As it was, we're all debating on going sick tomorrow, except that we might get a bath parade, after old "Flash's"? visit, I wonder how we'll get on, bet nothing will be right for him.

Oh darling, these awful times, must be a kind of punishment to me for being unkind & ungrateful to you when I was younger, well, it's really taught me a lesson, for never again could I be as I once was, & always I shall adore you.
[...]

And now I really will have to end, because I'd like to drop a line to Ron, so my love, think of tomorrow, when I face the perfect English swine, but I'm warning you now, if he bullies me too far, I'll hand him my stripes, because even though we are in the army, we still have a will, & I mean to keep mine, heavens, if I get afraid of him, what would I be like when I met "Jerry".

I'll let you know of course, the full results by tomorrow's mail, & in the meantime I'll say

Goodnight my love,

I positively do adore you, Your Bill xxxx

.

Four Winds

Tuesday 24.2.42

'Evening sweetheart. 10.15 pm---nearly bath time—would you be kind enough to come and wash me? I would like to be lazy & simply lie back while you do so! But perhaps you are too busy tonight, & cannot spare the time. Ah! well, I suppose I shall have to be energetic & do it myself, though I don't think I should, having already taken the trouble to wash my hair this evening.

I need hardly mention that the weather is as uncompromising as ever. I expect yours is just the same. Still, I am not cold now, having a nice fire. The radio, too, is playing some really beautiful music & that, if nothing else, helps to lift me above the gray drab pall of everyday life & enables me to see beauty still & have pleasant & soothing thoughts & dreams--- dreams of things past & things to come.

I do wish you could have a radio, --- but there--- if wishes were horses-----!

Today I sent you two packets of Players {*cigarettes*} with your daily letter. I found, to my dismay, that my damn careless office boy, had failed to post the letter I wrote to you on Sunday, so that it was not posted till this evening. This means that you will have a gap of two days in my letters. Please, don't blame me though sweetheart, for I really did not know that he had been so careless. Tomorrow I am going to tea with Dorothy, so it is very possible that I shall not write a letter tomorrow to you. I will see what time I get home. However, as I seldom miss a day, I expect you will excuse me--- specially as I generally have very little to write about--- & that seems to be about the end of the hour glass for today.

I didn't hear from you this morning, by the way, but you have been pretty good just lately, so I am not grumbling.

Keep smiling my dear,

All my love & Kisses from

Your Ann

OLLERTON ROAD CAMP

TUXFORD

24th Feb

Dearest,

One more day out of my army career, and the only interesting thing which happened was a visit by Major Wotton, who had surprisingly little to say, & so I guess I shall keep two stripes for a little longer. We were annoyed because today should have been our bath day, & now we've missed it because we had to remain here until he'd been, and as that was not until late in the afternoon, we were sunk, and now I'm wondering when we shall get a bath, it's really awful to have to go more than a week without.

We went for a short run this morning in lieu of P.T. and the backs of my legs are so stiff now, that I can only walk with an effort, it's awful, & just shows how very much out of condition I was. Nevertheless, P.T. is now compulsory daily, & it won't be long before my muscles are in good trim again I hope, though I can't help wondering what the motive is behind it all.

Tonight we are on air cooperation, & we have been standing by for the last two hours for a target which never seems to materialize, and you bet that when it does come over, we shall be told to engage it when it's too late.

I got busy last night after I had written to you, I wrote to Ted, Ron, & the girls at Belper, but tonight is awful for writing, this is being done in bits & pieces, & when I get a chance to nip in & write a couple of lines I do, & as it's already 10 o'clock, you must forgive me if it seems scrappy & short.

Oh! dear, the 14th of March does seem a long way off, I don't know how I shall survive three weeks of this so unsettled life, & now I have no "civvie" home to go to if I get a few moments off, I'm beginning to forget what a fire looks like, & an easy chair will kill me with its comfort when I do get one ----- the target has been & gone, just as I said, they told us to look for a Hudson, & it turned out to be a Wellington, so I have just one remark to make about army & air force co-operation & I know the news paper will bear me out, it's B... awful,

& there is a lot of room for improvement.

Now it's cancelled, so at 10.30, I can at last make my last mug of Horlicks, & go to bed, so goodnight my darling, you know I adore you,

Your Bill always, xxxxx

CHURCH FARM

SAXILBY

25th Feb

Darling Wife,

I trust nothing has befallen you since you last wrote, it is now two days since I received a note from you, & since using the Tuxford address, your mail has become alarmingly erratic, I don't know whether 'tis the fault of delivery or if it is you, anyway, perhaps you can tell me best, and I do hope it's not you. You will observe that I have dared to have my mail sent to a nearby home, as I think I may stay here for a fortnight or so, and I would be glad if you'll start using it right away, so that I can have your letters first hand.

Old "Flash" was here again today, on a maintenance check this time, & that makes his third visit this week, my goodness he has kept us on the jump, but we get by once more, & now we have only a nocturnal visit to expect, when I hope we shall be alone for a while. He was fairly amiable today, & went away in a pretty pleasant frame of mind, so I guess his indigestion must have been better. I wonder if he does suffer from this complaint, he has all the symptoms, & you'd laugh to hear the various titles he gets, the lads mostly call him "Flash"? but sometimes he is dubbed "??". whilst Mr. Bunce fondly calls him the "Fuehrer"

(is it spelt correctly?). Anyway, he's worse than any dictator, & I fear he would have a short life should we ever go into action behind him in a front line, he would die with a hundred bullets in his back.

Enough of soldiering though, I have little else to write of that could be of any interest, we haven't even a Bath Parade to talk about, though I'm still hoping to wangle one somehow.

An item here which you might like to know, owing to soap & labour shortage at laundries, we may never get a change of blankets again until the end of the war, & on this my action will be as follows—Dettol will be purchased tomorrow somehow, somewhere, & my blankets are in for a daily spraying with a solution of this for a week, & if any of the lads wish to do the same, they are entitled to a free issue from my bottle, do you think it's a good idea? do tell me.

Remember I said my picture of you was in a prominent position? well, the old tartar had a good look at it today during his inspection, although no comments were made, but its softened him down a bit, I do wish you could meet him some day.

I had another letter from Joe today, he sends all his love to you, & seems to be very lonely, poor old boy, he doesn't like his new job a bit, in his own words, he goes daily round on a motor cycle to lonely S/L sites, selling education just like an insurance man, then back to H.Q. to make out reports, I really do pity him in his loneliness, because he really does make a lot of it, says he has no chance to make any lasting friends, and I have made a resolution to write very regularly to him in future.

You'll be surprised to know that I still take my daily run of two miles during the P.T. period, and my legs don't ache quite so much now, I'm terribly surprised & upset at the way one so quickly goes soft, & I still can't think how I managed that cross country race I was in, wonders never cease.

Well, my love, I was intending to make this a fairly long letter, but Mr. Bunce has just been here for about an hour, & my time has gone, he said he had a heart to heart with the Fuehrer, which seems to account for the good mood he was in, apparently we were all discussed, & I seem to have come out favourably, though what the future holds, no-one could dare forecast, & now it must be

goodnight, so until tomorrow then, goodnight darling, [...]

Your Bill

CHURCH FARM

SAXILBY

27th Feb

{Friday}

Dearest Love,

Just a short note to cheer you up for Monday, the day of blues, I know I always welcome your letters, so I guess it helps you too.

I'm sorry I didn't write yesterday, it really wasn't my fault that I didn't, we were on air co-op for 2 ½ hours last night, so I guess you'll understand I was glad to creep into bed when it had come to an unsuccessful ending at 10.30.

Thank you for the cigarettes, they were certainly most welcome, & I love you for it, & as for your mention of a dance, who is this Ron? you went with, I don't know him do I, but I can remember Charlie Groves O.K., & the other fellow you mentioned. I'm glad too, that you liked my poem, it didn't really take as long as you'd think, you see, the feelings & thoughts are always in my head, & once I have a theme to work with, the making of rhyme is easy, [...]

I darned {damaged} in my gloves tonight & then washed them {damaged} as new again now, & I was thinking of all {damaged} into them as I darned, I hope they last as long as {damaged}, I should never mend new gloves then.

Yesterday came two letters, one from Mum, & one from Dorothy Fletcher, who sends her love to you, & she extends an open invitation to us both, to spend our second honeymoon with her after the war, how does it appeal to you.



Mum sent 2/6d, she never writes unless she encloses this sum, & nothing I could do about it would stop her sending this, she adds a P.S. asking me to let her know in good time when I hope to be home again, & she will send me something towards my fare, will you scold her gently & tell her I'll do no such thing, if I want to train home, I'll pay for myself.

Talking of her makes me very wistful, I'm beginning to yearn for you already, & though your photograph is wonderful to look at, it makes me realise now, how much I really need you, & that reminds me of your suggestion of a phone call, the only way is for you to remain at your office one Saturday afternoon, because I never go out in the evenings, no-one does, for the simple reason that we can't, our only relaxation is a bath parade, which was stopped this week on account of the Fuehrer's visit, & Saturday afternoon, our official half day, then you will see how extremely difficult it would be for me ever to have you call me up. However, if you care to stay on at your office next Saturday afternoon, I'll try to get through from Lincoln about 2.30, how's that suit you? That's about all I could do darling, but at least it would be wonderful to speak to you again, & the time to my next leave would not be so terribly tortuous.

Tonight, we are to be {*damaged*} from 10 o'clock onwards, isn't it awful, I wonder what time {*damaged*} get to bed, but we have one consolation, that's the {*damaged*} when I hope to go to see another good picture {*damaged*} the vaguest idea what is showing this week.

Do you still {*damaged*} quickly by having them sent to your office? I do {*damaged*} soon as you start to use this address, I hope my letters {*damaged*} you will not have to be so belated, it's most annoying to know that I have letters from my love awaiting me at Tuxford, & they have to remain there at the army's pleasure.

I'll bet Barbara was happy to hear from Roy, what a relief to know he made the journey safely, & now we must all pray for his continued safety, for he will no doubt shortly be in the thick of the fray. I still believe we are doomed to overseas service, various little things keep happening, & they all seem to be carried out in the sly way which is typical of this army, but these little occurrences all add together perfectly, & although I'm taking a long shot at the answers, which may yet be some months' away, I'm willing to bet I'm right in the

end.

You'll be sorry to hear that all my Horlicks is now gone, & I'm back in the 2 sleep group, although I haven't really felt any ill effects yet, & I'm supplementing this now with the remains of my Ovaltine, which should last me another week yet.

When you have a minute's chat with the Aunts, you might remember me to them, & tell them I still think of them, & will be seeing them again soon. And how is Penelope, is she as good girl still, or does she have to be kept in now, ? I should think her mistress will take her out for evening rambles, the nights are getting lighter & longer, & the weather is steadily improving, today here, was just like a spring day, except that 'twas very cold in the morning. I felt it especially with a stone floor & no fire, though it's surprising how hardened one becomes after a while to the most awful conditions.

About my soap coupon, I hope you managed to change it O.K. I didn't {*damaged*} you could always tell Cook & Drane's ¹³ that your Bill {*damaged*} all, we can change them anywhere we please, {*damaged*} about my being short, I have another coupon {*damaged*} tablet of Lux untouched, so I'll probably have some {*damaged*} though if you have difficulty in using it, I {*damaged*} obtain the goods here, & bring them home.

By the way, in spite of the "dust up" we had with the Y.M. the other day, they have called 3 times this week, which has been our salvation, for no-where in Lincoln can we buy cigarettes, the shopkeepers flatly refuse to sell to anyone in a uniform, aren't they horrid, these Lincolnshire natives?

And that must be the end of today's note, [...]

Your Bill xxx

See next letter

¹³ local shop in CastleS treet, Hertford

Sunday-

This appears to carry on from the previous letter

Darling Ann {note her name}

I'm so awfully sorry about this letter, I should have posted this afternoon, but we were in such a tearing hurry to get out after a particularly trying morning, that I forgot to take it with me, please forgive me, I honestly wouldn't have done it for anything had I been able to remember.

News for today is very brief, we worked like the very dickens on our maintenance, & I crawled into some very interesting places on the lamp today, finding numerous bits & pieces of which I knew nothing before. After this was completed I ordered an early dinner, & we got ready to go out, & found that there was not a bus for Lincoln until 3 o'clock, which rather took the wind out of our sails as you can well imagine. We decided to walk, & the six of us set out with this intention, & gradually the crowd split into two groups of three, the faster ones in front, well, after a couple of miles, we back three stopped a car which took us right into the town, but the other poor evils had to walk all the six miles, & were they tired, & very glad to sit down in a Cinema for an hour or so. We saw "Men without Souls", and a picture devoted to the life story of Leslie Stuart the composer of such old time melodies as "Lily of Laguna" etc., & believe me, it made a damn good picture, & I must say that I enjoyed myself & came out happier.

Tea was next on the programme, & after a ½ hour wait at a very crowded Toc H

canteen, we eventually found a nice cup of tea & cake, & by the time we had consumed these, it was time to board our bus, & we left the town a bit later than usual, catching the 625, & getting back here about 7. It made a nice break, but I came back to earth when I got here, I found that we had been visited again, & instructions were left that we had to have another blitz on maintenance tomorrow, as there is to be another “wind up” check. It’s really awful & yet nice to see someone else worried for a change, but all the same, I hope we get by, for Mr. Bunce’s sake only.

Well my love [...] this concludes the weekend news, nothing has happened, I hope we shall get a peaceful night, so please think of us darling won’t you [...]

Your Bill xxx

CHAPTER THREE

Four Winds

Tuesday

This is the first undated letter, it could be February or March 1942

Dear Darling,

Do you know it is ten minutes to eleven & all I have done This evening is wash my hair, a little sewing & sorting the waste paper. How time goes in the evenings I did, however, also pay a visit to your mothers. She has sold the piano (to the Beechams) & has put the money straight into the Bank. She said she dared not tell you she was going to do it but I said there was no reason why you should mind. They will have a piano at Bengoe & it was the only thing to do. I saw Len {*Wagstaff*} there on my way home He says he gets home at least once each week & is home each Sunday. He was sorry not to have seen you last Sunday, but will keep in mind that you will be home on the 18th proximo & will make an effort to visit us. I also saw Arthur Knight today & he asked me to tell you that he has passed for the Navy & expects to go any day now. Barbara

Barbara Joan Cox-1942. Four Winds



has had another letter from Roy written while he was still on board. He said that a thousand men slept on deck at nights quite naked, & although they wore nothing during the day but gym shorts they couldn't stop the perspiration running off them.

Dorothy too, has heard from John after a lapse of five weeks. He had then just crossed the equator & he said that Father Neptune came out of the sea, so I suppose they had the usual ceremony to initiate the new travellers.

Sir John Anderson said on the radio tonight that coal gas & electricity will shortly be rationed!! We shall have to pull our horns in in this house for with 3 separate inits? My bills are not very light, as you can guess.

He also said there would be further rationing of food, though what it will be, goodness knows except of course, we know we shall soon get less meat. Most people seem to think that potatoes will be rationed. I do hope not.

By the way darling, I suppose I'm asking the impossible but if you see any "DREEN" shampoo about in Lincoln (Woolworths is a possibility) will you please buy it for me? It does make such a difference to my hair if I can use it for washing it. *{I believe it was actually spelled Drene-MF}*

I wrote to Morley¹⁴ today accepting his estimate, so that is definitely settled.

[illegible]

I shall send this parcel off tomorrow (Wednesday) so I hope Tuxford will forward it to you in time for the weekend, as I know you will need the cigs, even if you don't want my silly old letter.

¹₄ the builder who built Four Winds

Well, Sweetheart, I won't start another page as it's rather late now, so, I'll end by sending you all my love & kisses

Keep smiling, (as I do)

God bless you darling,

Your own Ann xxx

Four Winds

Wednesday

This is the second undated letter, it could be February or March 1942

Dearest Bill,

Here it is bedtime once more & although I really haven't any news for you, at least I will start a letter to you even it is not posted of {sic} just yet. Today I sent of your cigarettes as promised so I hope you will get them in time for the weekend.

Isn't the weather kind now--- just like April, or May. Today we have had brilliant sunshine & then showers. This evening before it got dark I tried to do a spot of gardening by digging my tomatoe bed. I must be frightfully out of condition for after working for about twenty I was absolutely tired out & had to give it up---& I had a violent headache which is the reason why I did not start my letter to you earlier. However, I was hearing on the wireless tonight again about the absolute necessity for getting every ounce of food possible out of the ground this year if we do not want to be starved out so I must keep pegging away even if it is for only a short time each evening. Mrs G {George} next door tells me she had been in bed for ten days with a cold. Some people seem to find the time to "lay up" don't they, even if there is a war on. Ruth {George} is in Northampton by the way. I knew it was somewhere near you.

My daffodils are still blooming bravely on the sideboard. They do look lovely. The crocuses are coming into bloom fast now that we are getting mild weather.

Well darling I think I shall try to finish this letter at work tomorrow. I shall probably not be writing to you tomorrow evening as I think I might go to the pictures for a change. Greer Garson & Herbert Marshall are on in "When Ladies meet" & Barbara & other people tell me it is well worth seeing. Anyhow, my dear, for tonight, au revoir

God bless & keep smiling All my love &
kisses Your own Ann —*cont'd*

Cont'd Thursday

Thank you, darling, for your very sweet-- & long--- letter written when you got back on Monday evening & which I received this morning. I was so very glad to know that you had a comfortable journey back & arrived in good time.

As you say, it is worth the money, not to have to worry about getting lifts & getting back in time—of course it doesn't matter so much when you are starting your leave, you have something nice at the end of it anyway you had a very short journey back, didn't you? 11.45 to 5.45 --- only six hours? I am glad! You have very soon started looking forward to your next leave hav'nt you. You know you have quite the wrong technique. After a leave you should be quite happy for at least a week (more if possible) thinking about it. Then & only then when the memory of that leave is growing a little dim, should you begin to think of your next leave & then you will find it is not so very far away & there won't be such a long tedious wait!

Anyway, that's how I manage things so, of course, I hav'nt started to plan for our seven days yet, but there's plenty of time to think about it.

I have been to the cinema this evening to see Joan Crawford, Robert Taylor, Greer Garson & Herbert Marshall Four stars like that can't help

making a good picture--- though even so, it wasn't brilliant. However I enjoyed it and my ice cream!!

Well my sweet, for lack of anything nice to do, I think I will now go to bed, so, once more, God bless you, Bill, Keep smiling,

Remember I'll always be your own Ann xxxxx

PS I forgot to say "I love you"

CHURCH FARM

SAXILBY

1 MARCH
ST

Hello my darling,

Just 14 more days, & I shall, I hope, have the pleasure of being with you for a weekend. How I long for that day. I'm impatient, it means so very much to me now, life is so very bare & black, & still very cold & cheerless. The sight of our own fireside. & the comfort of my own chair, and greatest of all, the loveliness of you, are dreams I dare not swell too long upon, or I know I should be running away from camp. Truly, the soldier's deadliest of enemies has us in its grasp at this time of the year—monotony, one awful day follows another with not the slightest change & no respite, & were it not for the certain knowledge that I have the loveliest woman in the world, still awaiting & loving me alone, I know I wouldn't really care whether I lived or died.

Yesterday was our half day, we nearly didn't get it owing to the fact that an inspection was due to come off, & you can imagine with what feelings we awaited the advent of those obnoxious people; they came however, just before lunch, & by rushing around a bit, we were able to catch our bus, & went to the pictures. We saw a film called Shepherd of the Hills, a western affair with Technicolor, the story was indifferent, the acting poor, & the only redeeming feature was the fact that fortunately, there was some lovely scenery, & we had a fairly comfortable seat in the warm for a few hours. When the show was over, I just had time to get to the Post Office & despatch your Monday's letter & buy some stamps, & then we had a quiet cup of tea in a 'Toc H café, & sit beside a gas fire for a quarter of an hour, & it was all over for another week. Such meek & mild little outings, yet how much they mean to us now, only we really appreciate, & from this you'll easily see what a colossal treat it is to get a 48 hours leave.

At night, we commenced to play Nap, but were rudely disturbed after a few minutes by the usual bug-bear—air co-op & we had numerous take posts & stand easys, during the interval we carried on with our cards. About 11 though, a target really began to co-operate, and we had 3 quick engagements, two of which were highly successful, & we illuminated each time, holding the target until they were out of range, a really good effort on the part of the boys, & it proves our radio? a success.

Today (Sunday) we expected the Fuehrer to visit, & of course we worked

like hell an outward show, & he didn't turn up, not that I minded, except that if he visits when I expect him, I know I can relax for a day or two, whereas if he fails to put in an appearance, I have that worry to come, although I'm rapidly reaching the stage where nothing will ever worry me any more, least of all a mere Major. I suppose I'm being driven to this state of mind, but what do I gain? --- just pure nothing, not even a pat on the back, & even when I know I have done well, up come some more criticisms, & I am becoming cynical, & "don't carish", do you really blame me.

This afternoon we had real fun, some of us decided to be energetic & kick a football about all afternoon, which we did, but could you have seen our antics with a ball, I know you would have laughed almost as much as we did at each other, I had to give in at the end for sheer helplessness with laughter, & I know it did me good. We had an early tea, & I did appreciate even a cup of army tea, for being hot & tired, I can think of no better refreshment. We had a few more laughs over the tea table, one of the lads is full of dry humour, & he was asking about Jonah in the Whale's belly, & he was under the impression that Jonah cut his way out at last, so I of course told him the true story of how the whale was sick etc. Then quite suddenly he said, like old Popeye, he got swallowed by a crocodile once, & Olive Oyl put some spinach in the croc's mouth, & Popeye inside got so strong that he literally tore his way out. The sudden change from sublime to ridiculous was too much for us, & we were at the stage when we could laugh at anything, so you can see what good ?? we got out of this , especially as he caught two of us with a mouthful of tea. Altogether the day went off very well, but tonight I felt terribly depressed, & I can't explain it unless it's due to overtiredness, I was not in bed at 1 this morning & out again at 6.30, then football took away more energy, although I cannot see why I need be depressed. The fact remains however, that this monotony is getting on my nerves [...]

By the way I may decide to phone you on Tuesday, so if you should have this letter by then, please be expecting me will you, I do so hope I'm lucky, & can get through with as little delay as possible, I want to hear you again, there is something reassuring about your voice which can put me square with the world again [...] perhaps we shall be lucky on Tuesday, please don't be too disappointed if I'm unable to do this because you realise by now how many

obstacles there could come between us, but I promise you that if I'm in Lincoln, I shall be calling you.

And now my precious Angel wife, I really must close I have to write to Mum, & Jack, whose address I now have, so if you'll excuse me darling, I will kiss you goodnight, but I'll leave my heart with you as security for another letter tomorrow.

Your loving husband, Bill

P.S. Why Ann? I love you, not a name, although I do like Ann.

{I have emboldened the above and put in red, as this is the first indication that Bill acknowledges the name change-MF}

CHURCH FARM

SAXILBY

2/3/42

Dear Love,

Well Ann, how are you today? quite well I hope, and for your information I am picturing you at this moment with a nice fire, & a pen and paper, writing your daily letter, the time is 8.30 p.m. am I right? I wish I were there, & I shall wish long & strong, though nothing is likely to happen about it until the 14th I'm afraid.

Today, I received two letters, one direct to this address & the first, then another from Tuxford containing 20 Senior Service {cigarettes}, a gift for which I was truly thankful, for it just pulled me out of the mud, you see, the Y.M. didn't come today, & we were relying on it. However, I can now manage until tomorrow, when I shall, I hope, be going into Lincoln for a really first class bath, the first in a fortnight, so imagine me revelling in the tub at the joy of being wet

all over with clean warm water.

So glad you liked my other valentine, but they're not so satisfying as speech are they? and speech is not so satisfying as action is it? But while we can have neither speech nor action, then words written on paper are lovely, and I thank you from the depths of my heart for those two songs of Vera Lynn's which you sent the other day, they meant as much to me as if you yourself had composed them, and I know you meant every word.

We've had a fairly quiet day today, the Fuehrer still has not turned up, so I have that ordeal yet to come, but all the time he stays away I have added to the assets of the site, so that he must see improvement when he does call again. I had all the boys on rectifying various bad places all over the camp, & they have started to trim up the edges of the road, which has certainly improved appearances. Ah! Well, these foolish things, I often wonder how they affect the war, it makes you think doesn't it?

Now darling, I'm enclosing this note with two of my vests this week, but you needn't hurry, I have only just put on a clean one, & can last awhile yet, speaking of washing, I'm so glad you managed to cash my coupon, although the soap flake problem was an eye opener to me, however, if you've managed to get a little extra that's O.K. by me. I hate you to be bothered unduly by this rationing stunt.

You certainly painted a gloomy picture for next winter, but even Stafford Cripps won't shake me from Nov. 19th. 1942, & it will be a negotiated peace too, just as I said as long ago as a year. If, however, you prefer to listen to old "Crippy", you'd better make sure of a damn good crop of "spuds" this year, I will plant them on my next 7 days without fail if you procure the seeds, I do hope you have ordered them my love, & if not, don't leave any more time, or you'll be too late.

One of our boys has just got back from a weekend leave, & the poor devil has to go straight on "plank" which in normal language means guard, it seems such a shame, but there is nothing much else for it, we have so few men, & always when one comes back, one has already gone. Never mind, we haven't much longer to endure I know.

And that ends the news for today darling, being in Britain's First line of Defence is very ordinary, & gives little scope for news, but we may have something to write about one day, who knows?

Anyway, I shall always be saying I love you, my dear sweet Ann, just 950,400 more seconds, and I should be nearer to you than I am now, Goodnight my love, I adore you. Bill xxxx

CHURCH FARM,

SAXILBY

3/3/42.

My love,

What a disappointing afternoon, I called at the G.P.O., as I promised, posted my vests to you, & then entered a call box, & was informed that I would be lucky to get through to you before tea, you can imagine my feelings, especially as I know I shouldn't be in Lincoln even at tea-time, but perhaps I'll have better luck on Saturday, I'm determined to have another try, & I do so hope nothing will crop up to prevent my going out on that day.

I had a fairly decent bath, but we have to take our own soap and towels in future, although even that is worth the trouble I assure you. Having two hours on our hands after this, we decided we'd sit in the pictures for a while, & although we saw only the beginning & end of the main feature, we did manage to get right through a Blondie & Dagwood story, which was very entertaining. And all the time I was thinking about my phone call, wishing I could contact you in some other way, & knowing how impossible it was. Blondie is very like you, she's beautiful, & a typical little modern wife I enjoyed her picture a lot, because I put ourselves in their place, & for once I felt I had really seen you for a while, and was strangely happy after we came out.

Whilst at the counter of the Post Office, I witnessed a typical P.O. girl scene, & I feel I ought to pass it on. Two of the girls were having a "chin wag" behind their cage, & a woman came to the counter for 6 stamps. They completely ignored her, so she asked if they'd mind serving her with 6 stamps, & one of the girls just looked up & said "we're discussing business you'll have to wait", well I felt like the woman, who walked out without waiting to be served, but I chipped in, & said, would you mind if I had some stamps, & got them, although my companions & myself passed some cheeky & sarcastic remarks for their benefit after I was served. I would have loved to shove them into the forces, because it was a cruel snub to that poor woman, & I couldn't help thinking it might have been my mother, Ah well.

During the afternoon we had a visit by the adjutant, although fortunately I wasn't there, he left a few remarks in my visitor's book, but on the whole it seemed a fair report.

We are now waiting for 10.30, when air-co-op is due to start, & go on till midnight, but I'm hoping it's cancelled before then, because I want to get to bed. I have devoted part of this evening to explaining a few radio details to my No. 6 who asked for a little tuition, & I made quite a bit of headway with him too, the question now arises, am I a good instructor or he a rising? Pupil? Perhaps you'd like to venture an opinion.

Isn't my writing getting awful {**YES**-*MF*}? I've just been looking at it, & it's appalling, but like most other things I take pleasure in these days, it has to be rushed, so I hope I'm forgiven.

And now a verse from Omar Khayyam.
 Here with a Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough
 A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verses, & then
 Beside me, singing in the Wilderness—
 And Wilderness is Paradise now.

Do you like it darling? I think it's lovely, & it describes my feelings perfectly, & here I must close, the R.t. is calling, & it looks as if we shall be busy after all, what a joy to be in the "Killer" Belt.

Goodnight my Darling,
 You know I love you, Your Bill xxxxx

CHURCH FARM,

SAXILBY

4.3.42.

My Guardian Angel,

I've been out all day, having left before the postman arrived, & after a wet and extremely interesting time, I have arrived back here, to find all the boys with long faces, and clamouring for cigarettes. The Canteen had let us down, & they hadn't a fag between them. They told me there was a parcel in the office, & I, knowing their conception of parcels, thought it would be just my usual 20 cigs, & I calmly left it unopened until after my tea, having given the lads all cigarettes I had with me. Imagine my surprise & delight then, when I found a huge packet, which on being opened had 10/- worth of cigarettes in it, & were the boys happy? I'll say they were, I could have sold the lot easily, & still be without a smoke myself, so instead, I kept back the decent ones, & they snapped up the rest. Now, I explained your suggestion to them, & they'll buy all you like to send, but 10/- worth is enough at a time I think, & that will just take us nicely through the rough patches, & should I require any greater Cormorants??¹⁵ I'll soon tell you. As for varieties, their tastes are unanimous, if you can get all Woodbine, please do so, except for me of course, & I prefer Players whenever possible. You will be surprised to find the 10/- returned so quickly I know, but we are indeed grateful, & I should love you to keep this up just once weekly, unless I ask for more. All the boys, & here they are definitely nicer than S. Carlton boys, you have my word for it, send their thanks & kindest respects too you for being so thoughtful.

A little of the day's news for you now my love, you deserve a report.

We had a D.C.'s concentration & I was collected this morning at 8.30 & proceeded on the back of an open lorry to a site some ten miles away, by which time I had become fairly cold. However, we had a half hours football to warm us, & then split into small squads of 4, & had instruction on various things we were still shaky about, I learned a lot, and although shortly after our arrival it

¹⁵ This could be Player's Cormorant cigarettes

started to pour with rain, & we were out in it all day, I found it very interesting, & actually enjoyed it, except for the discomfort. Before coming back however, we had to put a cover on our lorry, & what with the rain, the wind, & the size of the tarpaulin, we felt fit and equal for the balloon barrage by the time we had finished. There followed a cold & cheerless ride back to Troop H.Q., where we had to await another lorry to bring us out here, but where I gleaned a little heartening information, subject is LEAVE, here it is, although not absolutely conclusive, firstly, my 48 is down as the 14th of course if as you say, the 14th is Sunday, well then, I shall be home on the Saturday. Next, I have provisionally, 7 days for April 17th which is really one week earlier than I should be, & finally another 48 in May, on the 18th & if all those dates stick, we can look forward with confidence as each month passes by, isn't that good news?

When I got back here however, I had the wind rather taken out of my sails, our radio had gone wrong, & there's something seriously wrong too, & if it is what the experts fear, I've got to account for £20 worth of valves, & the mystery is, it was perfectly all right last night, & was only discovered after I had left the site this morning, I'm a bit worried, but not as much as I should be if I know how it happened. On top of this we had a new S?L ? to erect, & it had to be done as it was what we're to use tonight, & by this time the rain had turned to huge flakes of snow, so it was with mixed feelings that we worked. By now, 8.0 o'clock at night, we have a good inch of slushy snow on the ground, & it's still coming down, so I guess we haven't finished with the winter yet, but although we have run out of coal & coke, I'm not very upset about it tonight, I feel more cheerful than I have done for some time, this being mainly due I think to the fact that I met a lot of my old Derbyshire fellow N.C.O.,s today at the concentration, & we had a lot of laughs. Tomorrow is my biggest immediate worry, we're expecting the Fuehrer round, & owing to lack of wood, I have not yet been able to do one certain thing I was told to in the cookhouse, & he simply will not listen to my plea that I have no wood, because I explained that to him at the outset, & he said, I don't care what you do, but that's got to be done, so I expect a bit of a rocket when he comes next time. Ah! Well, I shall survive I'm sure, & as we have the biggest "shots" in A.A. coming to inspect maintenance on Saturday, he should forgive these minor faults if the maintenance is O.K., we shall see, & I'll render a fruitful report in due course.

I had a letter from Ron today, & he expressed surprise at getting a reply from me so soon, cheeky blighter, anyway, it was nice to hear from him again, he says he's seen Len, & thinks he must be on 7 days this week, has he called on you? if he does, give him my love won't you? A letter came also from someone whom I thought had forgotten me, namely Anne, who is now on the road to Grantham touring Aerodromes with her canteen, so she's still carrying on with the good work, & I'm glad she hadn't forgotten us, I am the only one who keeps in touch with her you see.

The new order for A.A., is that we have to take home with us on each leave, our leather equipment, & gas cape, which means that except for the rifle, we now have nearly as much to carry as the infantrymen, a fact we are well & truly cursing because of the terrible inconvenience to hitch hiking, in fact it's very doubtful if we'll get lifts at all in the faster traffic, but we'll have to be content with the few kind hearted drivers of the slower going lorries to get us to & from our homes. However, I suppose we shall get used to the idea in time, & it will become as everything in this men's army does, just routine, & we shall just take it for granted.

Well now my Ann, I shall have to end here, I have a little clerical work to do on behalf of my site, & so I trust you'll forgive me until tomorrow if I say for now, Au Revoir, but with it, comes all my soul, for it has long been yours to take at will, I love you only, & always will be just your Bill. xxxx

More of Omar

I SOMETIMES THINK THAT NEVER BLOWS
 SO RED
 THE ROSE AS WHERE SOME BURIED CAESAR
 LIES;
 THAT EVERY HYACINTH THE GARDEN WEARS
 DROPT IN ITS LAP FROM SOME ONCE LOVELY
 HEAD.

AND THIS DELIGHTFUL HERB WHOSE TENDER
 GREEN
 FLEDGES THE RIVER'S LIP ON WHICH WE LEAN —
 AH, LEAN UPON IT LIGHTLY! FOR WHO KNOWS
 FROM WHAT ONCE LOVELY LIP IT SPRINGS
 UNSEEN!

And this one:—

THE WORLDLY HOPE MEN SET THEIR
 HEARTS UPON
 TURNS ASHES — OR IT PROSPERS; AND ANON,
 LIKE SNOW UPON THE DESERT'S DUSTY FACE,
 LIGHTING A LITTLE HOME OR TWO IS GONE.

*CHURCH FARM**SAXILBY**5/3/42*

My Dear Ann,

Everywhere is cold, so very cold, there is a good 4 or 5 inches of snow on the ground, & the wind is howling from the N.E. bringing icy gusts of snow in its wake, it seems to penetrate straight through the huts, & despite our little fires, we cannot get warm unless we sit right over them, & even then ones' back gets cold.

I have just finished a game of Kitty Nap, & what is that saying about Unlucky at cards etc? I hope I don't prove the truth in it, for I was extremely lucky tonight, and my only balm? To my conscience is that I might lose as much tomorrow night as I won tonight.

It's been an awful day, snowing all the time, so that we've had to stay in the Nissen all day cleaning up equipment which could be brought inside, & all with no fires, it's really awful the way we're kept without fuel, & tonight we had six little sandbags full of coke sent out to last to some unknown date. And yet at B.H.Q., there are at least 20 tons of coal, awaiting delivery to sites on the officer's order. I really think he must be making his war effort at our expense. Surprisingly enough, I have had so much of this cold weather now, that I feel very little colder than usual, but it is cheerless to have to find your rest & recreation in a non-heated hut, & life seems just dead, so that one loses all interest in the things that should be important to us.

I don't yet know what I'm to do about this big check which is coming off on Saturday, I have lost nearly all my men responsible for the various pieces of equipment, & in their places are those who, although really fine boys, are not much use to me operationally, Anyway, this weather is enough to give anyone the blues, for what can we do outside in readiness for the great day. Such a lot depends on it too, even the Major is sweating, so that means that for once his reputation hangs on me, & mine hangs on the men I get, & if they're pretty

useless in this field, I've got to do the job myself, so just picture me tomorrow morning, whatever the weather, out with the projector, cleaning brasses, & shining steel posts, with frozen fingers & a red nose. I had to fit up a telephone wire this afternoon in a really bad blizzard, & by the time I was finished, my fingers, through two pairs of gloves, were as dead as yours can go.

I have very little more to relate now my love, we're awaiting the arrival of Mr. Bunce to pay us, & need I say how impatient everyone is, especially as the time is fast approaching bedtime, but I guess he will come, & then we can go happily off, to forget the snow, the war, everything, & dream instead, of home, & those we love.

Goodnight my darling, angel wife, remember I have you under observation day & night, I was looking at you at 3 o'clock this morning whilst dressing for guard, so always you are in my heart, I love you so my dear, sweet Ann,

Your Bill always, xxxxx

OLLERTON ROAD CAMP

TUXFORD

8/3/42

My Darling Anne {*sic*}

So sorry I couldn't write yesterday, but circumstance was against me, & I had to spend the whole evening polishing my leather equipment. Here is how it happened, the Colonel visited unexpectedly, & although pleased with everything he saw on the site, he made some scathing remarks about our equipment, & as mine was not even polished & he mentioned the fact, (fortunately not knowing it

was mine) I had to set to & do something about it right away, so that when his complaint arrived at B.H.Q., they would find it O.K. The reason for mine not being done as per orders was that I was on my course at the time the order came through, & when I got back here, I simply could not procure any of the required shade of polish, but being desperate last night, I had to attempt something, and so I leather soaped it all, then rubbed oil in, then stained it with iodine, then polished with Mansion Polish, after which treatment it had become slightly darker, & taken about 2 ½ hours of my evening. At the end of all this, one of the boys produced a half tin of the proper polish, & I did it all again, but at least I have the consolation of knowing that my initial treatment made a good foundation for the real thing, & it doesn't look too bad now. You'll see it next week when I get home (here's still hoping).

I think I told you we had no coal, well, yesterday afternoon I took four of the boys out with me, & we walked across fields, jumped huge dykes full of water, got our boots full of snow, & eventually found a dump of coal somewhere near the railway, & as we already knew of it, we had gone prepared, & we hastily filled a few sandbags, & retreated, labouring heavily over ploughed fields etc. with about 2 cwt of coal between us. We were highly delighted at our success, but about ½ hour after we got back, along came a lorry & dropped 2 tons at our camp, so we had to shovel all that lot into the bunker. We worked hard, & got it done in about a quarter of an hour, & were just congratulating ourselves, when in comes an Army lorry, who on investigation, we found had brought more coal—2 ½ tons from B.H.Q. & he dumped his load, & we had to shovel all that lot into safe storage, talk about coals to Newcastle, & to think we carried our own little bit all those miles because four hours before we had none, I'm still convinced it was a kind of punishment for removing coal without being seen. Needless to say, we still have to exercise caution in its use, for if the Fuehrer came round during the night again, as he might do, & saw fires burning in the huts, we should be for it, although we do have a fire now & again. But last night, my goodness, with 4 ½ tons in the camp, all the fires were out before midnight, & were we cold, so cold that no-one dared get out of bed this morning until very late, & we had all spent restless nights trying to get warm, I'll see that doesn't happen tonight whatever the consequence, I felt awful this morning.

Well, that's yesterday's news, now today's , we had a preliminary maintenance check today by our own Battery Officers, they've got the wind up over this big one which is due on Wednesday next, & they want to reassure themselves. However, so far as they checked us, we passed with colours about 7/8 mast, which means that by the time the real thing comes up, we shall have corrected the faults found, & should be 100%, wish me all the luck you can spare darling, so much depends on it all the way round.

They messed our afternoon off up, so I told Mr. Bunce I should let the men go out tomorrow, to which he readily agreed, & that is what we're going to do, I guess we'll go to Lincoln & see a picture, even though I do not think it quite right, I feel that we honestly do deserve a bit of relaxation once a week, and therefore we couldn't be doing too much harm.

Thank you for your cheering letters, heavens how I need them, & thank you also for the promise to make me as happy as you can when I get home, I shall expect an even happier leave than my last, & that will take some beating, [...]

You'll see I have reverted to the old Tuxford address, that's because I expect to move either Wednesday or Thursday, we shall see, & in the meantime, if you send any more cigarettes & they will be more than welcome wherever I go, please do register them, nothing worth over 2/6d is worth the risk when it's going through Battery, even though some of the fellows are very trustworthy, I'll pay postage if you want me to. These lads here are already begging me to get more, & at the moment we are on Tanners¹⁶ & if you can think of a worse smoke, don't send them. On the other hand, if you care to send more than 10/- worth next time, (providing I'm at this particular camp) I know I can sell them.

What a lovely feeling it is to know we have only another week to wait, & by the time you get this note it will be even less, I don't quite know whether to come by train this time or not, it seems rather a waste of money, but on the other hand, it would be nice not to have so much worry, I'll see how I feel about it at the end of the week.

By the way, I think your £1 is safe for the end of this month, because once again promotion is at a standstill, two new sergeants have been imported

¹⁶ Churchman's cigarettes

into the troop, which means no vacancies here for we old 2 stripers for a long long time, & unless I'm moved to some other troop, or even to B.H.Q., which is possible, as a Gas-bag, my future is very uncertain. However, old Omar Khayyam assures us that tomorrow & yesterday are not worth worrying about, so for once I shall heed this doubtful advice, & forget the future beyond next Saturday. I shall be disappointed if something crops up to spoil it now.

Well darling, they have at last put on the power supplies here, & now all we want is the fittings, & we can have real light again, it will make such a difference to our lives, & it's just like army to fit us up when summer is here, we've been all through the winter on oil, & I guess we shall have to wait a fair while yet before final fittings are installed, but it's a start anyways, & we have that to look forward to.

Now my love I guess I ought to say goodnight, I shall post this letter in Lincoln tomorrow afternoon, & with it a prayer to speed it on its way so that you will get it Monday morning after all, & in spite of my not getting out this afternoon, so until tomorrow then my dear, sweet little Anne {sic}

I adore you, Your Bill always, xxxxxx

OLLERTON ROAD CAMP,

TUXFORD

16th March

Darling Ann, I love you.

Did you like my flowers? I do hope they last a long time, and remind you of a weekend of heaven. They are to say Thankyou for a lovely weekend, and if I could have afforded it, they would have been orchids, nothing is too good for you, and flowers being an emblem of loveliness, I could think of no better way to show my love.

Did you have a nice time darling? I do so hope you did, I know my many failings [...] Now I have commenced to look forward to next month, just think 7 whole days [...]

My journey back here was entirely without incident, I had no time for refreshment, because I arrived at Kings X at 10 to 1 & found a train to Lincoln due to leave at 1.15 & so of course I boarded it, & arrived at Grantham by 4 & after a little wait there, in the train, I eventually landed at Lincoln dead on 5, caught my bus, & had tea when I got here, which was about a quarter to six, & I think I shall always come back that way in future, it's such a relief not to have to worry about getting lifts, & whether I shall be back in time, & I thank you from the bottom of my heart for that.

And now here I am, back for at least another month, with the usual cares & little worries of a detachment, guard lists, bath rotas, & a hundred & one minor details to keep me occupied. I learned today that Mr. Bunce went on 48 hours this morning, & old Fuehrer is on a two day course, so life will be, or should be, fairly peaceful for the next two days.

Tomorrow I have a D.C.'s concentration to attend, but they are usually pretty interesting, & I shan't complain, but we miss our bath parade that way, & I shan't be able to see Carole Lombard after all, however, I guess I'm fairly fortunate anyway, & so I'll say no more about it.

The boys were out on air co-op last night until midnight, so it looks as if we'll get the same again tonight, just as I could do with some sleep too, you know I do feel awfully tired, my legs still ache from Saturday's walk, & my back from that lovely weekend, but I bet I survive.

I'm going to have my supper soon, cocoa & fish paste, not very appetizing after those dainty meals you serve, but I must eat, & that's all there is. I shall be thinking of you clearing up after my visit, & wishing with all my whole heart that I could be there helping you, instead of sitting here listening to a dull old R.T. set. Oh! I do love you so my dear Ivy Ann, [...].

I have just lighted my lamp, what a contrast to our own brilliant home, [...] the soft or bright light at will by a flick of the switch, things always took for

granted, how much more they mean to me now----there you go---I must not be moody, must I? [...]

I shall say my prayers tonight, I have a lot to pray for now, especially about being cynical, & I do ask for you to pray for me too. [...]

The question arises now, about a programme for our seven days, have you any ideas? I expect we have to see Ron again, & is there a dance that week, because if so I'd love to go, & keep sober this time. I hope you'll have the potatoes by then, because they'll be a bit late anyway & I really will tidy up your garden for you, so if you get any ideas, please pass them on, I shall revel in doing anything for you, & by the way, I must overhaul the lawn mower, & see if I can make it go as easily as the Smiths', so will you also have a lot of oil, not too much you know, but enough to wash all the parts in & thoroughly lubricate it, I'm sure I can improve it a lot. And will you have any time off from work I wonder? Or do you intend to wait for the summer, if so I hope leave is not interfered with by then, but it's looking a long way ahead-----

I forgot [...] Now, my Anne {sic}, I shall close, but tomorrow I'll be with you again, & in the meantime I have your picture, please put your spirit in just mine, I need it.

Goodnight my love,

God bless you & keep you safe for me.

Your Bill always. xxxxxx

CHURCH FARM

SAXILBY

18/3/42

Darling Ann,

So sorry I didn't write yesterday, please try to forgive me although I don't deserve it, because apart from winning 5/- at cards, & reading a detective story, I did nothing important. I use for my excuse, the fact that I had been out all day at a D.C., concentration, and was very tired when I got back, so that I felt like relaxation. It was an interesting day, & we had some grenade throwing practice, during which, a live one was thrown for a demonstration, my goodness, what an explosion, & we are all to throw one soon, so I shall feel like a real soldier when that's all over. Over the weekend we are to have some real manoeuvres, and real para-troops are cooperating, which means we're in for a pretty exciting time, & worst of it is that we are bang in the line of defence here, & will have our hands full all day on Sunday, so if I don't get a chance to write over the weekend, you will understand won't you?

Today, I had a busy morning, a concentration was held here, & I was instructing for a time, but we managed to end it by 1 o'clock, & myself & 2 more of the boys went into Lincoln to see "Our Wife" & it wasn't Carole Lombard at all, in fact I don't know what made me think it would be. The other feature was called "That night in the Tropics"¹⁷ & a more exciting & lovely story I have yet to see. I tell you it was a marvellous picture, with Constance Bennett, who looked exactly like you dear, in fact I was with you all the time that picture ran, & you couple this fact with a really good story, & perhaps you'll guess how happy it made me, & it certainly achieved the purpose of removing me from everyday life to my land of dreams.

And now it is evening again, not yet dark, but soon will be, it's 7.30, & at eight we are due to start our air co-op which is scheduled to go on till 10, but will more likely last until midnight, so the prospect of a good night's sleep is a pretty poor one at the moment, although we don't mind that so long as we do see the aircraft.

¹⁷ This was probably Law of the Tropics with Constance Bennett

Now my love my news is short, but I have to tell you again how I love you [...] need I say how impatient I am for the 18th of next month to come round & you too, must, when the time draws near, make some little arrangements for an evening or two out, but not too many mind you, [...]

And now my angel Ann, it's nearly 8 o'clock, & soon we shall be receiving? "Take Post", & so I guess I'd better just end here, & promise faithfully another letter, however brief, tomorrow.

So for tonight my love, my prayers are all for you,

Goodnight, I love you,

God Bless you, Bill xxxxxx

CHURCH FARM

SAXILBY

19/3/42

Darling Ann,

Just the briefest of hastily scribbled notes before I go to bed. I have been "card sharpening" again (don't reproach me please). Here is the reason, we have recently received an order that no fires will be used at any time in our living huts, & the only way we can get round this to keep warm, is to light one in the mess hut, & spend our evenings there, we can't get out, we are only 8 & so of course, cards were inevitable, & my biggest worry is that apart from "Housey Housey", we have no other diversion.

Last night it poured with rain, literally poured, & as usual, the floor of my hut let water, I woke this morning to find my socks floating where I had thrown them down at bed time, my kit bag standing in a pool, & to crown that, I knocked my trousers off their hook, & they got wet, so we had a wet awakening I tell you. We spent the morning digging drainage channels so that we could come up for air during heavy rains, & the lads simply wallowed in it, I'm sure if they'd had paper boats they would have asked for nothing more.

The rest of the day went quickly & quietly, we have plenty of hard work to do on our emplacements, & I kept them hard at it right up to teatime, & then we were able to relax, for owing to the exceptionally bad weather, air co-op was cancelled, & as our huts were so cold, we couldn't get to bed until we were warm, hence the card game by the fire. Even now my feet are cold, & I lay awake last night for about two hours with cold feet, & you know the history of my feet don't you, so guess how cold it must be. Tomorrow is a concentration on which I have to go, I don't like the ordinary affairs, as I usually get a period sprung on me, & I can never really do myself justice owing to the fact that I haven't prepared. However, it will pass a day, & will at the end, be one day nearer to our heavenly week.

It's raining again now, so I hope our drainage system works O.K. tonight, or else we shall be doing the "crawl" again in the morning, please say a little prayer.

Fancy, it's Thursday, & I have not yet received a line from you, so I took a chance on my being moved, & used this address again, but I guess I'll get it all in a lump when it does come along, here's hoping.

And now I really must get to bed, because after taking off two hours sleep to warm my feet, I have precious little time left for sleep, & any time I may be disturbed by nocturnal visitors, we had one at midnight, & another (Duggie) at 5 this morning, so you see what a hell of a life it is. Well, well -----Please send me a white writing pad as soon as you can darling, I'm running very low now, & a few envelopes too would be welcome, I use such a lot of paper one way & another, so do remember, & I'll write lots more, whereas at the moment, I can just about manage two or three more letters.

Now my angel Ann, [...] Bill

Four Winds

Friday 20.3.42

My own Darling

I didn't hear from you this morning, so perhaps you have moved to Saxilby. I wonder --- However, I did hear from Bernard Moreley {*the builder*} who wants to start work here on Monday so I have my work cut out over this week end to move as much furniture from the room as I possibly can. I have already started this evening & the place begins to look rather bare. However, I'm glad he's going to do it early. It will be all nice & clean for you on your seven days won't it?

I hope the weather is nice & sunny next week as I want to be busy washing curtains, cleaning rugs & furniture etc. so if my letters are somewhat erratic during the next few days you will know why.

I went in to see Eileen this morning & she told me she was expecting Sam home today after having been in Iceland for nearly a year, & only married a month before he was drafted. I told her I didn't know how she could be calmly working knowing he was coming & might walk in at any minute. Anyway he is expecting to have 14 days & so she will take her fortnight's holiday now I didn't pay my usual visit to your mother's this evening as I took Auntie Nellie to the dressmakers, so I shall have to make a call tomorrow afternoon instead. George {*Onyon*} is expected home tomorrow afternoon so they will probably be able to come to W.W.W. {*Warship Week*} dance in the evening. We have reached our objective of £175000¹⁸ by the way so I suppose we shall get a little more than that. The results will be announced at the dance. Hertford Heath have done very well. Their objective was £2,500 for a motor launch for HMS Puckeridge —up to last night they had already raised over £8,000.¹⁹ Just amazing where the money comes from

Well darling it is now 10.30 so I think I will have my bath--- if you don't mind---

¹⁸ more than £10m in 2023

¹⁹ £465,000 in 2023

I'm sorry news is rather scanty, but I have mentioned the things I thought might interest you. I hope you don't find them boring sometimes.

Penny & I both send you our love & kisses (licks from Penny) & say goodnight & God bless!

As always

Your own Ann xxx

CHURCH FARM

SAXILBY

20..3..4 [*Red crayon*]

DARLING ANN,

Both your parcels arrived today (Friday), so you need not worry about my welfare at the weekend. So glad you liked the flowers, and quite pleased about Joan's comments, but then she doesn't see you with the same eyes as I do, or know you in the same way, so I suppose it would be difficult for her to understand.

I am enclosing a pattern cut out from one blanket I have acquired, a new one, amongst others which have been exchanged for our old dirty ones at last, so banish your fears about typhus, and decide whether you like the shade for a possible coat, it's the darkest I could get. The size of the blanket is about 2 ½ yards long by about 1 ½ wide, this being only a rough estimate, it might even be a bit larger, so if this should be large enough for you to make a spring coat from, I will gladly manage with three blankets and my greatcoat until I can acquire another, when I shall forward the bill. Please give your candid opinion, I should love to know what you think of the idea, & it really will be a great help to you if you can use it for clothing.

Such news as I have is scant, we had our concentration today, and contrary to the usual boring affair it was a good day off for D.C.s we learned much, and had a grand wind-up with some first class P.T., it did me a world of good. We also got in some instruction on the new power operated rocket gun, I think I told you something about it on our last leave. We arrived back here by five o'clock, and have since learned that air co-op is cancelled, so at least we have a fairly free evening to look forward to, although we still may not go out. I shall be glad when the long evenings come again, then we shall at least be able to slip into the village for an hour or two to get a drink if we feel like it, and that will indeed be a blessing. Soon we hope to start a garden, we have received orders to commence, and so on Sunday probably, will begin another army cultivation drive, with William J in the lead. I don't yet know what we shall grow other than the usual potatoes etc., but I guess I shall get some ideas as we go along, and if I know anything about gardening, ours is to be the first of the bunch. At least this will give me some form of recreation and rest from the usual mental problems which beset my routine work, and I should continue to get a fair amount of enjoyment from my spare moments.

Our officer has just called to pay us, & now the lads are all set for a good old gamble I expect, but I shan't join them tonight, having so many things to see to, and at least one more letter to write before bedtime.

It certainly does look as though the end of March will be on us before I can win my bet, but I still have eleven more days in which to establish myself, so until that date, I shall keep hoping.

Thank you darling for buying my 75/- {£3.15s} worth of certificates, you are indeed an angel in all things, being wise, as well as lovely, adorable & very capable [...] whilst on the subject of savings, I have dedicated that extra 3/6d per week to married men, to the Post Office account, which I haven't touched for months, & probably won't touch again now I'm earning a fair wage.

Also I know you'll be glad to know that I still say my prayers each night, & they're really all for you, and now I must say goodnight darling, but tomorrow I'll be with you again in case Sunday's big do prevents me writing.

Goodnight [...] Your Bill

P.S. £1 for
cigarettes,
hope it gets
you safely



CHURCH FARM

SAXILBY

21-3-42

Darling Ann,

How do you like my new coloured ink? I had to buy some more today, & decided to have green for a change, although I must confess it doesn't look very green in this light. We went to the pictures again this afternoon, & they were the world's worst, awful, old fashioned things, too boring for words. Afterwards I did a bit of shopping, & looked very conscientiously for your Drene shampoo, but with no success, although I never give up trying to please you, so I shall continue to look when I next go to town.

The big exercise starts tomorrow, and tonight the eve of it all, we may be wiped out by paratroops, who will attempt to put us out of action before morning, so we are already keyed up I can tell you. In connection with this affair I visited the local doctor tonight with a view to clearing casualties?, and they knew nothing about it, so of course I had to put them wise, & as a consequence we shall have a stretcher party standing by all day. This was my first acquaintance with the doctor & his wife, two of the

most charming people, and not very much older than we, they kept me an hour, and ended by extending an open invitation to go any time I wished, for a bath, a warm, or to listen to the radio, and they have a lovely home, I think I shall go there sometimes if I am to live here long. They have two lovely little cairn terriers, ever so friendly, & I thought I heard the voices of children upstairs, so they probably have two, just as we planned. I saw in them & their home all that I dreamed I would achieve for you, & by heck I will now, just you wait until this affair is all over. The wife is a paper salvage lady for the village, so of course I had to tell her all about you & though we've only been acquainted for a few hours I feel I've known them always, he's not a bit like a doctor, & really is a fine fellow.

Enough of my romancing, I guess you are quite used to my bursts of enthusiasm for new friends by now, but it's so unexpected these days, & any sign of friendliness shown to us is bound to rouse such feelings, people are not what they were, I assure you, but it helps me no end to find we still have humans in our midst who do know how we feel.

Darling, do you realise we have only 4 more weeks to wait before we are together again [...]

There is no news to relate I fear, I must confess I feel a bit "jittery" now, all the camp is asleep, I don't know where the guard is, & I am all alone in the R.T. hut, & every sound I hear makes me breathe one word, Paratroop, I should hate to be hit on the head as I write to my darling, but it's feasible, however, I'll let you know more about that later.

And now comes the time to say goodnight again, [...]

Your adoring husband, Bill xxxx

Four Winds

Sunday 22.3.42

My own darling,

I did not hear from you yesterday, but I guess I cannot grumble for I did not write to you either

I suppose you are quite settled down into routine again, or have you again had the upset of moving? I am quite up-side-down here at home for, as I told you, I am expecting the builders in on Monday. I have been very busy moving all the furniture out that I could into the hall & kitchen. The sideboard is in the kitchen & the wardrobe, bed chairs & tables in the hall, apart from all the little things that have to be moved out I am leaving the wireless book case & dressing table where they are & covering them up & for this week I shall sleep on the settee. Penny thinks it is great fun & likes me to chase her up & down the empty room, & she slips & slides all over the bare floor & then takes a flying leap right over the settee!

Last night, Saturday I went to the WWW dance. It was very nice with a good class of people 'There ---- you know --- all the so called elite of Hertford. The Mayor announced that the savings total was £201,000 ²⁰& that is not the final figure so I really think we have done very well. I'm afraid they won't get much out of me for the next few weeks for I must now save hard to square the builders

Well darling, as usual my letter seems very short However, if I get a letter from you in the morning perhaps I will have some more to add

So, till tomorrow

Sweet, au revoir

Your own Ann xxxxx

²⁰ £11.7m in 2023

CHURCH FARM

SAXILBY

22nd

{I assume this is March 1942 as it is in green ink}

Darling Ann,

What a day, what a simply awful day, never have we been so put about, & all with no results, here is what happened:- we went out to our O.P.s (operational posts), at 0800 hrs this morning, & it was cold, so very cold, the poor devils had to stay out all day, & I was kept on my toes just going round to cheer them up. And what did we see? nothing, just plain nothing, for nine solid hours we were out sitting in cold, wet ditches, not daring to move for fear of giving away positions, & we saw nothing & heard less, not a soul came near all day, not even one of our own officers to see how good we were. I can assure you our feelings are unanimous.

Enough of that, although there is little else of importance to tell you, in fact precisely nothing, I have played cards this evening, & ended exactly where I started, that is, with 4/1d worth of solid coppers in my left breast pocket, which I save for a flutter. Ah well, such is life. Talking of money, I did a foolish thing I suppose when I sent £1 to you without registering it, so please tell me if you get it safely. I shall be most anxious until I hear further from you. All the cigs are gone now, & if the N.A.A.F.I., does not call tomorrow we shall be sunk, so I do hope they turn up. The state of my finance tells me how I miss that forty free cigs each week though, & when that extra 5/- is taken away I shall be more than grateful for their return, and with the light evenings comes a chance of a drink perhaps in the village, which means goodbye balance, however, I think that after a winter's imprisonment, we do deserve a little fling.

I don't know what there is to tell of now, life is very monotonous really, & even when called out for various things, we know what will happen, it always gets cancelled after a few hours in the cold, or else we are left out

of the picture, so you see, its monotony either way.

Oh! I know, did I tell you I love you? [...]

And I didn't thank you for the lovely little pots of paste, my favourite paste, I had some for supper tonight, & by closing my eyes, I could picture a cosy fire, a little round table, easy chairs, a radio, a dog, and last of all you, to accompany me as I tasted my link with past joys, but I shall only get all wistful if I keep on. I wonder if you are listening to Vera Lynn, I'm with you if you are, because I'm writing during her half hour, & though I cannot hear her, you may rest assured that all the lovely things she says go for me too. And now it's Goodnight, God Bless you darling wife,

Your Bill xxx

Monday, 23/3/42

Well darling, I did have a lovely surprise this morning. I received three letters from you all at once. You should have seen Mr. Mann's face when he gave them to me! Needless to say, I shall not be able to answer them in detail at this moment, for I still have some work to finish, but I would like to say thank you very much for so much correspondence. Also, my dear, I am sending you the envelopes you ask for and tomorrow I hope to send you a writing pad, but as these are at home it is not possible to do so with this letter. I received the £1. safely and thank you for that too. I am sending you 20 Players in return as discount, and I will send the usual parcel of cigs to reach you (I hope) more towards the end of the week. As for the material sample, I think it is a lovely colour and this evening I am going to see my dressmaker to see what she thinks of the idea and to ask her if she will undertake to make a coat from the material. The only thing that worries me is how you will manage with one blanket short and also if you will get into trouble about it. I certainly would not like that to happen. How will you get over the difficulty of saying that you have "lost" one? I am very glad to hear, by the way that you have got clean blankets at last, but not more glad than you are, I am sure.

Well, my sweet, I will not write any more just now as I intend writing latter on this evening, so for the time being, au revoir and all my love.

your

C. Mann

CHAPTER FOUR

Four Winds

Monday 23.3.42

Dear Darling,

As promised earlier today, I am now going to read through your three letters received this morning & answer them. It is 9.45 & I am sitting by the electric fire, on the kitchen chair---- the builder's tressle (or tressel) for a table.

I have been getting ready the big central curtains to go to the laundry, having unpicked the hem in case they shrink (though I sincerely hope they don't) also I have sooted the potatoe patch ready for your seven days.

I called on my dressmaker and she thinks the blanket should make a fine coat and she said that of course it could always be dyed navy if I wished---so darling if you really think you can wangle it, perhaps you will send it to me though for goodness sake wait till you go to Lincoln & only put my address inside --- no letter (in case some suspicious person opens it) then they cannot pin anything on to you. I will then take it along to Miss Broadhurst to have it made up as soon as possible I'm sorry to hear that your clothes got so wet the other night. I do hope you managed to dry them thoroughly before putting them on again.

Did I thank you for sending the £1. For the cigarettes. I suspect that a good bit of that came from your own pocket, so it is very good of you to keep up to scratch & send me the cash faithfully each week. Mother let me have another score of eggs today so now I have got 50 in pickle--- coming along ar'nt I? I am sure they will be a god-send during next winter, I only wish everyone in the country could have the same.²¹

²¹ Isinglass was regularly used to preserve eggs before the 1940s but due to the shortage of fish and fish products during the war years, waterglass became the preferred preserving agent. It is a sodium silicate solution & water glassing eggs involves submerging clean, unwashed eggs the solution to seal off the shell and preserve them for 12-18 months. The result is perfectly fresh, unspoiled eggs, just like they were the day the hen laid them. Ann continued to pickle eggs well into the late 1950s.

Your mother told me on Saturday, by the way, that Jack {*Bill's brother*} does not approve of their intended (sic) move. He thinks it is better to have a house, of any kind to oneself, but I still think the experiment is worth trying.

Well, sweet, this letter is not going to be very long, after all- I suppose because I have already written half my news to you earlier in the day.

I think I will go to bed now and get warm. It has been a nice sunny day, but rather cold and this empty room does not invite one to linger in it because of the sheer comfort---still it's no worse, I suppose, than you get every day of your life.

Goodnight my love----

God Bless----

I am always

Your own Ann xxxxxxxx

Four Winds

Tuesday 24.3.42

My own darling,

I was very pleased to receive a letter from you this morning, for after yesterday's bumper post, I hardly expected one.

I am glad to know that you are still at Saxilby. Perhaps you will be staying there for a little while. I think that it would be a good idea to visit the doctor sometimes (would'nt you find it nice to bath there sometimes?)

It will do you a lot of good to be able to visit a comfortable home sometimes & be able to talk with some intelligent people (no slur intended on your compatriots in your camp) I sent off a writing pad to you today & the day before 20 Players {*cigarettes*} . I mention this in case you are moved and have to chase up your post.

I'm sorry I hav'nt any news for you. I am still in a chaos at home & am writing to you in the kitchen. I shall soon be getting into bed as that is the only comfortable place left. (it is now 9 pm).

I hope your manoeuvres went off successfully. Did you get "annihilated" by the paratroops?

Well sweetheart, I think I will stop now for today ---its one day nearer to our seven days remember!! That ought to keep you cheerful

All my love darling.

I'll write again tomorrow; I hope

Your own Ann xxxxxx

THE CAMP

S. CARLTON

25/3/42

Darling,

Actually I am miles away from the above address, but I am on a Commando course, well sort of, and I shall be back at Carlton on Friday. The object of my move is to teach me the new tactics on the most important site in the Battery, & ultimately pave the way to that third? I shall be grey haired all over in the next fortnight, haunted by officers & all sorts of things, but I'll write more about that.

As for this course, well, it's the best I've had, really tough, bomb throwing, real ones, firing rifle, machine gun & Tommy Gun, a real 100% tough guy course. We have reveille at 6.30 & finish 8.30 at night, so you see what a busy day it is. Tonight we were taken out into the wilds on a

period for field signals, then we were a good two miles from the camp, & completely lost, it was dark, and we were in thickly wooded country, then came the most exciting time of the day, we were started off at five minute intervals, & had to get to the camp, and take the sentry by surprise. I won't go into the awful details of physical discomfort, but just gloss them over, think of crawling in full fighting order through hedges, along ditches etc., & by the time I had approached the camp, I was bathed in my own perspiration, really & honestly bathed, and that's the only word for it, my face was wet all over, & my hair as if freshly washed, well, I waited awhile, & then crossed the road, about a hundred yards from it, wriggled through the hedge, ran a quarter mile along a hedge, & crept into the camp unobserved, then I had to look for the sentry, who after being located was stalked, & I hid behind a few sandbags while he walked past me without seeing me, & then I got up, walked behind him, poked my rifle in his ribs, & said "you're a dead un" & he did nearly die with fright, & I was glad I got him, & it just proves how alert sentries have to be. We then had a shower, & here I am at 10 o'clock, sad & sorry for myself & utterly worn out. You see, I've got the "Flu" a terrible cold, a sore throat & a cough, but I dare not go sick, they might think I'm shirking the new job, & I'd lose my prestige, so I'm plugging on & hoping to sweat it off, which I seem to be doing pretty well so far, but I do feel awful, you know how it is.

Now I must go to bed, thank you for your letters, cigarettes, envelopes etc., & especially loving words, & I'll write again just as soon as I can, but please forgive me if I am erratic, you've no idea what a huge responsibility I'm shortly to take on, & by the way, I tried to phone you again yesterday, but no luck unless I waited an hour, & I hadn't that long left, so here's hoping for next time.

Yours always, Bill xxxx

OLLERTON ROAD CAMP

TUXFORD

Sunday 29/3.42

Darling Ann,

I expect by now you must have really begun to wonder where I have got to, well, I am in reality at S. Carlton again, for a week while George Platt is on leave, but judging from the awful state he has allowed the place to get into, & the fact that my reputation as a spring cleaner still holds good, coupled with remarks passed by Mr. Bunce, I may remain here as D.C., with George as my assistant, & I feel he won't like that much. The fellows here hate him, literally, and will not work for him, & just to prove how they can work, if properly led & not driven, they have made veritable slaves of themselves since my arrival, & this will serve a dual purpose in that my reputation will stand, & they might be able to achieve what they wanted to, namely, to keep me here as their leader. Up till now I haven't decided if I want to be a sergeant over George or not?

I do hope you get your coat material safely, and I have found the means of obtaining another for 10/- do you think it's worth it, & if so, I shall make up my deficiency by failing to pay you the 10/- for cigs this week. If on the other hand you think it's too dear, I can manage on three, & wangle out of it perhaps later when we have to hand in our extra one, but it's a bit cold at nights with no fire.

Up till now, I have been driven nearly frantic with work, & air co-op till midnight every night, that's why I haven't written before, I haven't had a minute to spare, haven't even been to see the Reigles yet, & I feel awful about that I assure you, because they know I'm here, but what can I do, I'm on the go from morn till night, you see, I have five extra men to deal with, a lorry & another lamp extra making a double site actually, which means added responsibilities, then there is a brand new drill to learn, & as it's entirely different from the old, I have a lot to digest, however I cannot see why poor old George gets so worried about it all, he was nearly in tears

on Friday just before he went on leave I understand, the Major had given him a lovely rocket about untidiness & that's where I step in, for I'm the paragon of virtue, so far as a site goes. There I go, boasting again, isn't it awful what a couple of stripes & a bit of power does to a fellow's head, but I guess it's excusable really, after all, I have earned it, & really earned it too, so perhaps it's justified.

Sam Ball tells me that Annie & Basil have informed him that another little Reigle has been ordered, & he was horror stricken because they told him about it, although he is a bit of a savage anyway, & wouldn't understand the finer points, he doesn't seem to realize that if he continues to visit them he is bound to notice it anyway, & it is therefore better to tell straight out.

I hope you are straight at home now, the builders should have finished their operations by now, & I bet the place looks "smashing", I'm longing for a really long look at it when I come home.

My Flu! is still with me, making a week of really awful coughing & sniffing & headaches & sore throat, but I feel today just a bit better, I've worked harder during this attack than I ever work normally, & I think I must be shaking it off now, and I shan't be sorry when its gone either. It's a good job my leave isn't fixed up for Easter because I should have brought it home to you.

I'm just having my supper now, with the luxury of real white bread, we get nearly all wholemeal now, so that when a white does turn up, well, it's a treat. With this white bread I have made a sandwich of my favourite paste, the last of the little pots you sent the other week, & it's a really fine little snack I assure you.

I have acquired an extra towel this week, but I sent it to the laundry first, to get the W.D & newness off, after which I think it will be fit to send home.

My best surprise for you will arrive rather towards the weekend I think, so just watch out for a small parcel weighing about 1lb. I think you

should love me extra when you open it.

As for Mother's move, I shall be sorry to lose a day on the garden, but on the other hand, very glad to be able to help her after all, & it will be nice to get her away from the other 'orrible place, I bet she's excited about it now, isn't she.²² And speaking of her, please pass on all the news, because I honestly & truly haven't had a minute to spare all the week, & even today as you will see, I have only just found time to write you after tea & before air co-op, which starts at dark, & as its nearly that now, I shall soon have to leave this letter or end it.

Strictly speaking I have little real news, but I keep recalling little incidents & things which might be of interest to you, because I have been a bad lad this week, & neglected you awfully so far as letters are concerned however, I shall be in a better position after Friday I hope, when I shall be either moved or have an assistant with me. [...]

Well darling, I have nothing much else to add to this, not even a promise to write tomorrow, because the chances are I couldn't keep it, but I'll write if I possibly can, & in the meantime you must please be patient if you want a sergeant for a lover, & now [...] it's almost dark, & I must fly, so for tonight at least, Au revoir,

I am always your own, Bill xxx

THE CAMP,
S.CARLTON

31/3/42

Darling,

At the end of the week I think I am due for another move, and if it

²² I assume this is Ellen Jane Furlong's move to 135 Bengoe Street, the home of the Onyon family

comes off, do you know where it will be? Yes, Thorpe in the shadows, the place I started from, and I shall be probably, condemned to stay there. My spring cleaning bug has made me too notorious, & this will be my final test, for if I could make something out of that site I should indeed be a genius, however, I just couldn't sit down and let it slide, so I guess I'll make something of it, that is, if I move. The reason for this is that Freddie Burgess may yet come back into action with this Battery, & if he does, he will be brought here to act over George, which will certainly save me a lot of embarrassment, and Mr. Bunce assured me today that I would get my reward.

Tonight is our first free night for ages, and as it is now only nine oclock, it's quite possible that even now we may be called out, although we are all fervently hoping against it.

You ought to see this place now, in four days we have literally wrought miracles, & it is really transfigured, so much so that even the boys who live here always & helped me to alter it, can see the difference, & needless to say I am well pleased, for to have the credit of two really first class sites to my name is something to be proud of. I think that George will marvel at my control of this toughest of detachments when he comes back. Plenty of work yet remains to be done, but it looks as though I shall not see it all completed before I move, but at least most of it will be well under way, & I shall feel I've made a damned big mark.

Today we had our usual luxury, a bath parade, it was lovely & afterwards I went to see Megan Taylor ²³in "Ice Capades", & Herbert Marshall in "Female Correspondent". ²⁴I saw the latter right through & enjoyed it, but the other one, a really first class show & just the thing to help the blues, I had to leave half way through because of the time, & I was deeply sorry too, but there was nothing to be done about it, & I have only part memories of what promised to be a good show. Perhaps I'll finish it off on Saturday if I can get out.

²³ Megan Olwen Devenish Taylor was a British figure skater competitive in the 1930s. She won the World Championships in 1938 and 1939.

²⁴ I think this was "Foreign Correspondent"

I hope you got the oranges safely, please tell me if they travelled O.K., because if I can get some more, I shall send them to you, & it would be no use if my packing were ineffective.

Just received the rotten news that air co-op commences at 10.30 tonight, you see, we're never sure, and with not a night out between leaves, life can become very dull I assure you, but I guess we won't break down under the strain yet, although at times like these one can't help becoming a terrible "browned off".

We are waiting for Mr. Bunce to come & pay us, yes, pay on a Tuesday now, we are nearly always broke by Friday, but I suppose it will readjust itself in due course, so long as we are consistently paid on that day.

I see by your letter that you went to see Gary Cooper in Sergeant York, not a bad picture was it? perhaps a trifle "tall", but nevertheless very exciting and quite entertaining. Then you tell me you have taken to horse riding, O. K., ride, but always try to remember your husband is just a humble Bombardier, & that he adores you day & night will you?

And then the accident to your mirror & hair dryer, clumsy girl, fancy two accidents the same night, you were probably over tired, never mind, 'tis no crying over spilt milk is it & perhaps I could mend the hair dryer anyway, most electric things like that are elementary to me now, & I might even be able to fix the Bakelite somehow so don't give up hope with that until I pass a verdict on it will you?

My leave draws nearer each time I write, & now I look forward to it as near as a fortnight away, although in reality it's a little more than that, I'm looking forward to this more than any other I've ever had, it can be so lonely, & to be able to rest when I want, & to see you day & night for a whole week [...] life is really so bare of human kindness & love for me these days, & the nearest approach I get to it is the rough loyalty of these boys [...]

My Flu is still disappearing, I've had a long spell of it this time, but this morning my nose bled, which means it will soon be ended, & will I be

glad to breathe again, & to be free from an aching head & cough. Poor old Mrs Reigles, has been ill with neuralgia she tells me, & today was out for a while in the sunshine for the first time in days, she still looks the same, & is as charming as ever, I do hope she lives for ages yet, because I really do believe she's as happy now as she is ever likely to be. I took the two kiddies some chocolate this morning, & it wasn't long before their faces were brown all over, but they do enjoy it, & it's certainly worth the trouble to see their little faces beam when I give it to them.

My acquaintance with the doctor at Saxilby was very short lived wasn't it? I didn't even have the chance to visit them once, but at least I now have friends at all the sites, you will remember the Warners at Thorpe, & I shall certainly renew my friendship there if I go, so perhaps life "aint" as bad as it could be after all, & so long as I can stick to good old England I'm reasonably happy.

By the way, if you send any more cigarettes, please send more than 10/- {50p} worth, it's not enough if I'm to be exiled, even here at S. Carlton we have been without, & your last parcel was sold in about ten minutes, so if you could possibly wangle more, so much the better, & we will all love you for it.

And did I say I love you
My darling angel wife
And tell you that I miss you,
Or that you're my whole life
Perhaps you know, or did you?
Though even if you did
I still would have to tell you
For truth ? will ne'er be hid.

Don't laugh, darling I just thought I could write a verse or two & out it came, do you like it? I couldn't do it for anyone or anything else without devoting hours of thought, but for you my darling, the inspiration of all things, well it's as easy as breathing [...] ---- It is now 1 o'clock tomorrow, we've been out 2 ½ hours for nothing,

Goodmorning darling, I adore you, Your Bill, xxxx

THE CAMP,

S.CARLTON

Undated

Darling Ann,

In these days of a paper shortage I found the only possible packing for the enclosed was with your letters, & I have folded them as little as possible, please save them, & it will make more room in my case for your newer correspondence. I hope the enclosed (your most ardent wish) arrive safely. Please let me know if they did, I have carefully arranged them & they should travel, & I'm sorry I couldn't get more, but it will please you I'm sure if you have three for now.

Goodnight my love, the Reigles send kindest regards.

Your Bill xxx

THE CAMP

S.CARLTON

Friday night

Dear Darling,

I promised I wouldn't be too miserable, but I can't help feeling a little bit depressed, everything seems so bare & cheerless here, and the weather is so very cold too, such a contrast from Hertford warmth.

My train arrived in Lincoln at 8 o'clock and as I walked through the barrier a red cap asked me for my pass, I was stupefied, for after being in the army two years, & never having been stopped before, it was a surprise, & then I thought I had lost it but after a few breathless moments turning my pay book inside out, it was found, & I proceeded unmolested, to the canteen for a cup of tea, after which I found that my bus would leave at

nine, so I didn't have such a long time to wait after all.

Now here I am, back in the same old hut, and as I prophesied, the floor untouched since I left so I've got that to scrub tomorrow for sure.²⁵

Quite a lot of work has been done, & I'm agreeably surprised at the progress a week has made, but my cook has been taken from me, & another sent, & the cookhouse is not what it was for cleanliness, so I've got to pep the new man up a bit tomorrow, & he's 100% scotch, I hope I don't upset him.

My first sowing of peas are through, & so are a lot of weeds, so it's going to be a full time job keeping them down.

George Platt is still away, & it seems likely to continue, though I do hope he will soon be back to give me a break.

As I sit here on my bed, I am once again watched over by your lovely picture, [...]

So far I have received no instructions about an interview tomorrow, so I hope to get a free afternoon, as I think I want to spend it sleeping, although I guess when the time comes I'll be out & about Lincoln either at the pictures or touring Canteens, & wherever I am I shall think of you & your evacuee charges, wishing I could be with you wherever you are. [...] I do pray that this horrible war will end when I say it will, so that we may spend a lifetime as sweet as last week.

And now goodnight my darling, [...] Bill xxx

²⁵

Searchlight sites typically comprised a small ring-ditch to provide the crew with shelter during an air raid, a predictor emplacement for calculating the height and range of targets, a light anti-aircraft machine gun pit, a generator and huddled accommodation for the crew. During the Second World War searchlights were manned by the Royal Artillery and were under the control of the Army's Anti-Aircraft Command. Such batteries were often equipped with one 150cm projector with a sound locator and five normal 90cm projectors. It was one of a number of batteries clustered together at this time, spanning parts of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire.

THE CAMP
S. CARLTON

2/4/42

Darling Ann,

Yesterday was April Fool's day, and I shall always remember it as the most humiliating day of my army career. This is how it was, you know of course by now how super important this place is, well, we had an examining board of officers round, and had I been left with my normal team, we should have got by O.K. because they were in a good mood, but that same day my whole radio team, the key men on a detachment, had gone on leave, & I had been palmed off with men who were supposed to know the job, but in reality knew nothing of this sort of thing at all. Well, I turned them out, & we were expected to give a good show of the drill, unfortunately this could not be so with new key men, & we failed miserably, not all my fault, because the team had obviously not been drilled for ages, but the Fuehrer was mad, although strangely enough, not with me, he said it was his fault, & I said it was mine, though he was insistent, & we ended up good pals, but the incident caused an investigation into the leave, & it is found that we are sending too many at a time, & it will now mean a longer wait between leaves, a thing that men will rightly hate & it will kill all our fine spirit we had built up.

I don't yet know the worst about my 7 days, I shall die if it is postponed, and I'm praying and hoping like anything that this will not be so, however, if it is put off for a week I suppose I still must not complain, because fortunately I'm still in England, & am lucky to get leave at all, but it will be a knock that will hurt if I am affected. Keep smiling through darling, & we'll hope for the best, after all, I don't know that they will interfere yet, and trust me to find out at the earliest possible time, [...]

poor old George was so eager to get off now, but he's in the big shot's bad books, & will have to work like a nigger in all fields to get back into favour.

In my individual exam as a D.C. I passed with flying colours, even

distinguishing myself as a good man on aircraft recognition, my weaker subject, we had 3 Jerry planes, & I got them all right. Other questions he had to put, he scorned? & said “you know all that” then quite suddenly, “You know why you were sent here don’t you?” to which I replied, “yes sir, because Bdr Platt is on leave”, but he said “no, to learn Orbit Drill, you’re a good man, you know your job, and the next time I come I shall want to see you right on top of this, with all your men behind you”. Well, I didn’t know what to say other than thank you so I left it at that, & am now saving for a set of sergeant’s stripes. I will have my little joke, but seriously, if I don’t soon get it I shall go on strike while they appreciate my work, that is, if I still have the nerve to do it.

Anyway, today has been better, we’ve all worked & drilled at the right periods, & we’ve done enough digging to cover my garden all over, and all in a day, now we want seeds, so that we can help in the war effort too. I am so pleased the lads have learned to appreciate me, do you know, tonight after tea, I went out to do a bit of digging, & in less than five minutes the whole detachment, 14 men, were slugging away where they left off before tea, & they put in an hour and a half of their own time without even asking me if I wanted them to. That’s spirit, & now they will break it if leave is messed about, because if they get “brownd off”, I couldn’t hold them, remember they never get an evening off, & very little time at all, & yet they keep happy, so I hope the new scheme will not be too drastic.

I want your cigarettes badly here, the more you can send, the better I’ll like it, do you know I was reduced to raking out my rubbish tin today to find ends I threw away days ago, the canteens don’t come here often now, & we were completely sunk, fortunately we were able to phone one of our sites when the Y.M was there, & sent an S.O.S. to which they responded gallantly, & really they were going to give us a miss, but anyway they came, & saved us in the nick of time from a smokeless end.

I have your darling picture before me as I write [...]

My cold is better now, & I get fitter each day, so look out for love

when I do come home again. Home, gee, it seems ages since I was holding you [...]

Goodnight Darling,

I'm your forever Bill xxx

THE CAMP,
S. CARLTON

6/4/42

Darling Wife,

First I must apologise for not writing these last few days, but I guess you must have realized by now how terrifically busy I am these days.

Now, most important I know, is the news that my leave remains untouched, and all being well I shall still be home on the 17th, so keep hoping my darling, and I'll be there.

Thank you and Joan for your very delightful little Easter gift, the persons concerned were very amused, & so was I, and we did enjoy the eggs I assure you.

You will like to know that I attended communion on Sunday morning, taking old Mrs Reigles with me, and she was delighted too, although the parson was the most awful I've heard, he was in such a dreadful hurry to get it over, and I could feel myself getting angrier and angrier with him, until when the general confession came, and no-one could keep up with him, I saw red, & shouting the words at the top of my voice, and very slowly and properly, I was able to guide the congregation of 12 so that they could join in, and there was utter chaos, because the parson was almost ready to say Amen, so he shut up, & waited for us to catch up, and then proceeded in a more proper manner. Never have I

been so mad before, and three people afterwards thanked me for slowing him up, I never thought I had the courage to do that, but it was worth it.

The rest of the holiday was spent in work, more work, and still more work, we're digging for victory now, and I'm digging for another stripe, so we work like Helen B. Merry.

George Platt has not yet returned from his leave, he's gone sick at home, and will be away at least another week, so I have properly taken over the reins now, and as far as I know, will have to remain here for good, with more responsibility than I dreamed or hoped for yet, and definitely over George, who I'm sure will not take it too well.

On Saturday I bought some cream distemper, and today we started in on the huts, & have nearly finished one, you'd be surprised how much cleaner & nicer they look too, and will be so much more pleasant to live in, but anyhow, I'm gradually licking the place into shape now, and it will, I am sure, become the best site in the troop before I'm through with it.

We have planted six rows of early potatoes which were given to us by a new friend, and I have more seeds due to me, so we should contribute quite a bit to the war effort when our garden wakes up. I put a lot of my own time into it too, which is partly why I cannot always write, there is so much to do in such little time you see, but it won't be long now before we have it in hand, and then I'll come back with a flourish. Add to this difficulty the fact that we are never in bed before midnight, and often later, you can well see how awkward it can be, but if I stick it, & don't let it get the better of me as it has old George, then I guess it might be worth while.

I'm sorry I couldn't win that £1, but you hit the nail on the head when you say it's not for lack of trying, but all the same, I have only just become war substantiated for my second one you know, so I guess I was a bit optimistic, and I think you should soon start getting that other 5/- now, so let me know as soon as you do. Anyway, if I had won my bet, it seems to me that you're so hard up that you would have to owe it to me, or shall I take £1 worth of love when I come home. Perhaps you'd like to take on a new bet, that quotes the end of April for a change of office, and

giving me a month's extension, how about it?

I feel a bit blue today, the reason is because I'm envious, yes envious of Sammy Ball, who was told this morning to pack his kit and go back to "civvie" street, he's been recalled to his job at a colliery, being a valuable outside worker on engines, isn't he lucky? I wish it were me, and we all feel the same, although it's not much use wishing in spite of the song.

I wish you could see this place now, I'm really proud of the work done, it's absolutely spectacular, the canteen is as bright and cheery as I can make it, with a bookcase, & nice clean brightly coloured american cloth on the tables, tidy notice board etc. And now we need a couple of nice chairs, and a few railway posters, or large pictures of some kind, and it would really be worth owning, perhaps you could find some big posters that would make nice pictures, do try.

Mr. Bunce was up last night, and he admired your picture, said what lovely little miniature it was [...]

I am very pleased to see by your letters that you stay at home a bit more now, and after this leave, if I put in a good hard week on bringing the garden round, I hope you will try to devote some of your time to keeping it straight until I call again, will you? And how is your horse riding going? Getting good now? I hope so, my wife has to be the best at everything she undertakes you know, after all, I am, so of course you should be, now what about it.

I had to severely reprimand one of my men today, here's how:- he had his wife here for the weekend, she stayed at the Reigles, and I gave him pretty well 48 hours leave, with just the condition that he should be there after dark in case I wanted him. Well, last night I did want him, in a hurry too, because he does a job no-one else knows much about, & so down to the Reigles I went, to find he had gone to Lincoln & wasn't back, & it was dark then, & much later than he should normally be allowed out, then I stared to stew, and we had to do a colossal lot of wangling between us, and if it were not for the boys co-operation, I should be on the "peg" now, but fortunately we were not found out, although Mr. Bunce was here

till one this morning, & the miscreant had crept in to take his place at ½ past eleven. I sent him to his wife at 1, and said I'd deal with him in the morning, which I did, only allowing him to see her to the bus, when he had arranged to take her to the station, & I gave him a bit of my mind, which can be unpleasant, & told him I wouldn't trust any other man & that he'd upset it for all the other lads, & I think I made a fair impression, so they all know just what I think now, & how far they can go.

Now I must retire, this is my first free night here, so I know you'll forgive me if I get to bed early? (11.15) for a change. I love you always

Your Bill xxx

On 6th April 1942, a Hampden aircraft (AT216, 50 Sqdn) from Skellingthorpe, just west of Lincoln heading for Cologne, was wrecked when it crashed at 0034 hrs at Thorpe on the Hill, just 5 miles away, killing all the crew members. It is presumed the pilot lost control as he climbed away from the airfield. Since the outbreak of war 50 Sqdn lost a total of 104 Hampdens. The Hampden served in the early stages of the Second World War, bearing the brunt of the early bombing war over Europe, taking part in the first night raid on Berlin and the first 1,000-bomber raid on Cologne. When it became obsolete, after a period of mainly operating at night, it was retired from RAF Bomber Command service in late 1942.

THE CAMP

S.CARLTON

9/4/42

Darling Ann,

I expect you'll think I am a bit of a blighter, but honestly, I am positively work worn & weary, and the weight of my responsibility hangs so heavy I have not dared to give myself any time. Last night we stayed out until after two, actually it was this morning, and we didn't get up until 10 o'clock, but by the time we had eaten breakfast, washed, shaved etc., half the day had gone, which I normally would not mind, although now, with so much to do in such a short time, with the added worry of another field check at the end of the month, I feel as if I'm being cheated by old man time.

It has rained off and on all day, so actually we have done very little of anything, but I did manage to get maintenance off my hands, and a little bit of outside work, the rest of the day being spent by teaching the lads about Gas, and other subjects they were interested in, and you will have gathered by now, from the tone of my letter, that I am not very pleased with the day's work.

Enough of moaning though, because it won't please you, or cheer you up will it? And after all, a week tomorrow, and I shall be holding you close to me, and telling you all I now have to write. [...]

I visit old Mrs Reigles almost daily now, she hasn't been too well

Gee Up!



lately, her Neuralgia has been particularly vicious, so I drop in each day to chat to her and cheer her up as much as I am able, and it does make a break for me.

Thanks a lot for the cigarettes, they were very welcome, because since I've been here, we really have had a very thin time, and it's just too bad that you couldn't give me my usual supply this week, I hope we're luckier next. I'm glad the oranges were sweet, I tried to get some more yesterday, but without success, so I guess they must have sold out in Lincolnshire.

I hope you weren't too stiff after your first riding lesson, I understand it can be pretty severe, so here's hoping your hot bath helped to keep some of it away, and don't forget, you've got to be good, or I'll lose faith in you.

With regards to your comments on Sergeant York, of course I knew it was supposed to be true, but time magnifies the greatest of deeds, and coupled to the Yankee imagination there's no telling how tall it is, that's why I commented on it, and anyway who cares? I enjoyed the show immensely as you did.

On Tuesday I saw your favourite Robert Montgomery in Meet Mrs. Jordan,²⁶ probably the finest picture I have seen, and certainly the most original story, I enjoyed every second of it.

I'm still searching vainly for pictures or posters for our huts, and now my desires have centred on some linoleum for the cookhouse floor, I wonder if I'll ever get it? I'd love to make it a really grand place, and will if I get half a chance, perhaps you could suggest something to do to a stone slabbed floor that will never look clean, I'd be glad if you could help.

When I took over here, I resolved, and told everyone that I would not let this place and its work get the better of me, & up till now I have very successfully come out on top, but if something encouraging doesn't happen, I guess I'll be as harassed as poor George was, although I'm fighting all the time, and don't yet expect to go under.

²⁶ I think this is actually "Here comes Mr. Jordan"

And now we've got to stand by for some more cursed air co-operation at nine thirty and although the rain is now torrential, I guess it will be just our luck for the weather to clear up soon, & we'll be doomed to stand out for hours waiting for a target which never comes. Well, well, I'll pack up now, because it seems as if I must break into moans, so until I dare take some more time out to write, it's goodnight my darling, I'll be with you soon, Your loving and adoring Bill xxx

THE CAMP

S. CARLTON

Saturday 11-4-42

Darling Ann,

Here is your erratic lover again, I'm so sorry I cannot write so often as I have been, but really, I have no opportunity these days, and try as I will, I simply cannot manage more than my letters to you, and I owe all round too, so you'll see how guilty I must feel.

Such news as I have is very scant, but I'll go through events as they occur to me, and we'll see what kind of a letter it makes. Firstly, George Platt is still not back, and if he doesn't return by Friday next, I'm afraid my leave will suffer, we are the only two N.C.O.'s who can deal with this site, so pray my darling for the speedy return of that worthy. Last night we were kept out until ½ past 3, guess how tired we were, this is beginning to wear us down now, I assure you, and this morning at 10.30, when we got up, I felt simply awful and still it goes on. I didn't get out this afternoon, we had the mechanists here attending to various defects, and I had to stay and see to them, but I shall try my hardest to get out tomorrow afternoon even though I only get as far as the pictures.

You'll be glad to know that I have solved the floor problem for the cookhouse, here's what I did. I washed it all thoroughly, then sprinkled cement on, & rubbed it in with a damp rag, allowed it to dry, & swept off the surplus with a stiff broom, & it looks lovely, in fact no-one up to now has failed to comment upon it, so that's one of my worries dealt with, and daily the site improves until I know it will become a place fit to live in, and I'd still be very grateful if you could wangle some posters or something from somewhere, they'd make such a lovely contrast to the drabness of our huts.

Thank you for 500 cigarettes, a long letter and the promise of thousands of kisses next week, I love you for it, and needless to say, am tremendously grateful to you, and thanks awfully for the commission, I'll need it to pay for distemper. A good half of the cigs are already sold, and by Monday I expect they'll all be gone, that's how scarce they are in these parts-----.

Air co-op upset this letter, and it's now Sunday morning, and as usual, nothing extraordinary has happened except that one Lister was taken away, and a new one has been duly installed, it made a bit of heavy work, but that's all over and done with now. It's been a glorious day, and I didn't get out after all, but spent the afternoon on the garden, and I now have 3 rows of broad beans to my credit, also 6 rows of early potatoes, 1 of peas, 1 of carrots, & 1 of French Beans. Then I have a seed bed full of cabbages, Brussels, etc., so we ought to have a good crop this year if only we are able to get the ground all dug in time.

My boys all seem to be pretty happy, having no complaints, so that side of D.C.'ing presents no worries, it's the training which gets me, I hate it so much as the men do, and of course it's my weak point, but we keep plugging along, and I guess we'll be as good as the rest in due course.

I have been very busy off and on with a new pair of trousers I got yesterday, & they were treated with bleach, as a ?? against gas, & naturally they stunk like anything, so I washed them thoroughly, then hung them out all afternoon & night, & today when dry, pressed & brushed them with a wire brush, & they don't look too bad now, you'll see them when I

THE CAMP,
S.CARLTON

25.4.42

Darling Ann,

I wonder how your trip to Surrey went off, and if your favourite charges gave you any trouble. I was thinking of you at intervals all day long, and now, at nine o'clock in the evening you are in sole possession of my mind, I do so hope you are safely back home again, and perhaps writing to me, & not too tired I hope.

I didn't go to sleep this afternoon after all, but took a trip to Lincoln to see Clark Gable in "They Met in Bombay" a truly exciting and entertaining picture, which you will be able to see too if my memory serves me well. During the interval the organ played excerpts from Tchaikovsky's Concerto, and was I delighted? but it did bring back my leave so vividly, and I felt very alone, missed you terribly I'm afraid, hope you won't reproach me too much for feeling this way.

One nice thing has happened today anyway, guess what? We now have a lovely new wireless set, and what joy music & entertainment can bring to a lonely spot like this, you may well appreciate.

This morning, at 4 oclock, we were called out for air co-op, imagine our feelings, with a really icy gale blowing, and I had only just got properly to sleep too, for needless to say I missed you very much at bedtime, and did I feel tired too? We were kept out for an hour & a half, getting back to bed at five thirty, reveille being specified for nine o'clock, aren't they mean? But we didn't get up till 10 anyway, & very little work got done this morning I'm afraid. However, I hope to have readjusted myself by Monday, & we can get down to real business once more, which reminds me, I haven't heard any more about that other stripe, I do so hope they haven't forgotten me just because I like to come home sometimes, although I guess I'm an impatient kind of guy, what do you think?

One of our lads has his wife here for the weekend, so of course he has a couple of nights off, & I do so envy these carefree lads at these times, they get leave & nights off far easier than I can, & to crown this gift, for gift it is, Mrs Reigles has very little coal, so I let the fellow take some of our precious supply down to keep them warm, aren't I good? But I wish it could be you & I.

Well darling, there seems to be little else of interest to write you about for now, [...] if you are listening to the Radio at any such times as meal times or in the early evenings, I too shall be listening, & we will meet in fairyland to the accompaniment of music we both shall hear. [...] you're far too lovely to belong to earth with its fighting, struggling, inhuman hordes [...] please let me go on being your slave & humble lover, [...]

Goodnight [...] Bill xxx

THE CAMP
S. CARLTON

26.4.42

My darling,

We had a quiet night, and what blessed relief that was you will readily see, I honestly feel quite fit & refreshed again after an undisturbed night, and today the raging, tearing wind has dropped a little allowing us to enjoy the sunshine a little more fully, and being Sunday, we are taking it especially easy. I thought I would commence my letter earlier. It is now nearing tea time and I have written two letters already, long overdue ones I fear, to Dorothy Fletcher and Anne, who seems to be fairly well “browned off” these days. She is a full time girl you know, & only gets home on leave periodically the same as we do, and as she has never been away from home before, I think she feels it rather.

Mr Bunce called this morning, we had a long laugh and chat together about all sorts of things, and I learned some interesting facts about leave from him, which amounts to this, in three months we should get two forty eight and one seven days & he says that although we may perhaps wait a little longer at one time, or even miss a forty eight entirely, we shall get nine days instead of seven, and we may rest assured that in each three months we shall get our regular entitlement of leave, so that sets a lot of fears to rest, including my own, & gives the men the will to work, and everything is just dandy, so I feel that by tomorrow (Monday) I shall be completely in possession of my military? self again, with the old enthusiasm & ability to cope with all comers.

Enough of my boastings, I guess you must have heard all you wanted to about me last week, or did you? And by the way, I forgot to collect your personal report on my behaviour and speech before I left, will you please forward it at your earliest opportunity together with writing pad and envelopes, as I'm getting very low.

The wireless has worked wonders with the boys they shout and sing, & tap dance all over the place, & are a brighter lot than ever before. I'm

rather sad though that none of them like good music, it's all hot stuff, & if I want my favourites, it is necessary to creep out in the still of the night to hear them, although I'm bound to admit that any form of music is better than none, and even jazz has its bright moments.

Whilst I was away, a further 3 cwts of seed potatoes were sent out here, & we've got to find a home for them somewhere, already we have used all available space in our living quarters, and it looks as if the next stride will involve a big lump of the field which adjoins us, but if it helps to achieve victory why should we complain?

I have been studying my men very closely since I came back, they had a free & easy time last week under a sergeant who didn't care a damn about the place because he knew he wasn't staying, & I find that they got very irritable at dusk, because like myself, they instinctively expect air co-op, but during an afternoon much as this one, when I allow them to do as they please, they are different altogether, and at this moment there is one planting potatoes, another cleaning a dirty rifle we discovered, whilst yet another is cleaning the cable drum, & all this is their own time without a word from me, so I should think they're happy wouldn't you? The cook too, seems to be a fairly decent fellow, he made a pail of tea for us this afternoon at three & you can just picture the whoops of delight as the lads left their precious football, the wireless, their chairs in the sun, their letters to home, to drink to victory with the greatest drink of all. Getting quite poetic aren't I? But this weather makes one happy in spite of oneself, and if only the wind which is still as cold & fairly strong, would drop, we should be in seventh heaven of peace today, for Sundays we always seem to be left very much to ourselves, a state of affairs I hope will continue, although I expect one of these days we shall be swooped upon by the big shots who want to know how we spend our Sundays.

Tea has just been brought in to me, here it is, Welsh rarebit, made very cunningly with potatoes to make a lot of it, but very appetizing, bread & jam, & ersatz cherry cake, a really nice meal for the nicest boys, the new cook, however slack he may be in his cookhouse, sure knows how to

prepare a meal, and we like him for it. I chatted to him this morning, & he tells me he is 40, imagine my surprise, when I really thought he had been called up with the 30's but I think we shall be losing him in a day or two, we have too many men here now, & someone is bound to go before long.

I haven't been near the Reigles since I came back, I suppose they think me a bit of a blighter, but I don't get much time to myself, although they won't appreciate the fact, so I guess I'll have to call on them soon just to say Hello.

The boys saved a special "baby" for me, they borrowed a garden fork from my friend in the village, & broke it, then not daring to return it, saved it for my return, & last night I had to take it back, & now we must buy a new one, I daren't borrow anything else, & feel guilty every time I see the man, although why I should worry I don't know. Then there's a spade broken, they flung it under my hut because old Wotton visited them just after it happened, I've got to explain that away & get a new one. All these little things are trying, & getting out of them successfully is part of my training as a D.C.

At times they are very like children, this afternoon, they got their football out, & it was flat, we have no pump, so guess what the devils did? Took it to the lorry, connected to a tyre, & allowed the tyre to pump it up, then they broke the lace, so a hunt was made through absent friends' boots until a new one was acquired, Oh yes, they're villains all right, but their hearts are in the right place, & that's what counts with me.

We got a few laughs yesterday (Saturday) afternoon, before going to the pictures we strolled the main street with no set purpose, "Tich" was with us, he's a little devil for dodging officers, & spots them long before we do, so that we are able to cross over the street before they get to us. Imagine our delight when suddenly out of a crowded bit of pavement a soldier in Officer's Gaberdine bore down on us, who on closer inspection proved to be a harmless R.S.M, but poor "Tich" was too flabbergasted to see this, & up went his arm in a smashing salute, the first he's ever made. We killed ourselves, & so did the R.S.M. Tich looked for all the world like a little schoolboy then & we really did get a good laugh & a further leg

pull from the incident. He's a grand little fellow, & took it very good naturedly, just as he does everything else, & I would rather lose a stripe than part with him now. He got a lot of fun too, out of unfortunate soldiers, some "rookie" in the new gas proofed uniforms, they are so startlingly white in comparison with ordinary khaki, & every time we spotted one, the boys would yell in the crowded streets of sedate Lincoln City "LOOK AT 'IS TROUSERS", whereat the unhappy visitor would go all uncomfortable because he didn't know who said it, & when I think I still have to wear mine, I dread the awful time they're going to give me, but it's all good clean fun, & I can take it as well as I give.

Another funny little incident which occurred. We had to walk nearly all the way into the City, because we missed the bus, & we couldn't get a lift until we were nearly there, but eventually someone did pile four of us in & took us to the outskirts. We proceeded on foot, & were well into the town, when a large car slid alongside us as we walked on the path, the owner intending to do some shopping, but David, one cockney, cheerfully says to the very posh & austere looking gentleman, " No fanks, not nar, we're ere we can do wivart it". Laugh, I couldn't help myself, you know how everything seems funny when a crowd are together, & as we had already had a few laughs this one tickled us a bit more, although the car owner didn't see it that way. Lincoln is a lousy place, cold, inhospitable, & unfriendly, but when we go there, we make ourselves as much nuisance as possible so that we cannot be easily ignored, and that's to be our attitude until they do mend their ways towards us.

And now my darling angel wife, the time is here to close for today, but I'll try & write again tomorrow,

Goodnight Love,

God Bless You, ...Bill

L. Sgt Furlong

THE CAMP

S. CARLTON

30.4.42

Darling Ann,

See my new title? Yes, it's true, I've just finished the tedious job of sewing, but it's worth the effort just to look at them, and now I've got to get a gun over them, or a commission, we'll see later. It was a surprise, this morning The Fuehrer rang me up to tell me about a move involving one of my crews, & addressed me as Sergeant, so I said yes sir, this is Bdr Furlong, so he said, Sergeant Furlong, you're a Sergeant now, well, I thanked him, & got on with the colossal job of moving & crew & equipment, & now, after a very wearying day, I have sewn on my new badge of rank for all to see. I just got my bet in time didn't I? Another day & I should have been too late, so pay up darling, I need it to wet this new stripe.

SGT 1617342. R.A SEARCHLIGHTS



And now, did you get the oranges safely I wonder, I do so hope you did, as it made me so happy to pack them & dispatched them to you, but I hope you won't eat them all at once & make yourself ill, & will you make a lot of marmalade? I guess you will, & when I do get home again I shall expect a good lot of it awaiting me. Very little of real interest has

happened, I've had a two day's Gas Course again, but returned here each night, so was not inconvenienced too much. We have had a lot of enemy call outs lately, & feel the need for tons of sleep, but can never get it. Hope to get a peaceful night tonight. Talking of Gas, please renew your caution re this awful stuff, because we confidently expect this to be used soon, so play safe please my love, remember you are very precious to me.

Thank you for my washing, I needed it, & the cigarettes, wonderful to have Senior Service again. My smoking still remains cut down, although it's not quite so low as it was on leave, but I haven't had to pay full price yet, so it doesn't hit me so far.

Well angel, time is very short again, my evening has gone before I knew it was here, but tomorrow I may be lucky enough to have a really free one, so here's hoping to give you a really long letter.

Goodnight my darling love, [...] Bill xxxx

OLLERTON ROAD CAMP

TUXFORD

2-5-42

Darling Wife,

Here I am again you see, like the proverbial bad penny, and oh! Boy, have I had a hectic time, what with impending moves, promotion, change from fighter tactics to gun ?, air co-op, gas instruction, etc, etc., my life has been simply worked away so that I didn't notice it go.

First, about the move, we may not go now, but the rest of the Regiment have already gone, to the I.O.W., & except for the fact that we really have made the place worth living in, & worked like slaves on it, I wouldn't mind going there myself, however, I mustn't speak too soon, we may go yet. We're still at 6 hours notice. Imagine the responsibility, to

pack up a detachment in 6 hours, you've simply no idea of the work it entails, & we'd be dead beat if we made it in the time.

My old pal the Fuehrer came in to see me yesterday, & I got the best report ever, & today, Mr. Bunce called to tell me about my promotion, & never before has this appeared on orders as in my case, I was war substantiated & then it said having been promoted as acting unpaid L/Sgt., for 21 days will be appointed paid L/Sgt from now, which means I have not had to do my 21 days probation at all, but start right in being paid for it, & from what I can hear, the name of Furlong seems to have occupied a lot of valuable paper on Regtl. orders this week, & I didn't have an interview after all, These things make me very proud of myself, but I have set up a terrific standard of efficiency, & my life will be a very complicated one from now on, as I have to live up to this standard or suffer a very heavy fall, however apart from leave, I've finished with the future, & will now proceed to work like Helen B. Merry from day to day, & become either

(a) a full Sergeant

(b) a B.S.M

(c) an R.S.M.

(d) get a commission

We'll see how long it takes shall we, after all 3 stripes in a year & 1 month, all paid, is an achievement, & there's no reason why I should stop there, unless you want me to.

I see you have had some more riding instruction, I think I'd better take it up, it sounds very thrilling, do you find it so? & it's also extremely healthy for you, keep it up kid.

I should have taken the afternoon off really, but didn't, instead I gave the boys 10/- to wet my stripes for me, & remained behind to build a gas pit, wash 6 pairs of socks, move a projector, straighten up my stripes (which I sewed on lop sided), write a letter to my love, & here it is a quarter to eight, & I'm alone in the camp except for the guard. The rest of the lads I have allowed to remain out until 9.30, so I have taken over telephonist duties, (one of my many achievements, ahem!) so that nearly all the detachment are able to take the half day, aren't I a good sarg! It

seems so funny to be called Sergeant, I can't get used to it after being a Bdr., for so long, & quite lots of people still call me Bdr. then apologise, wait until they call me Sir.

The camp is looking beautiful now, our garden is doing well, & we're still pinching gravel to beautify the place, so that such remarks as were passed this morning by one visitor i.e., "Made to Blossom as the rose?", are common to hear, which all adds to the size of my head as you may well imagine.

Enough of me, I guess you're a bit fed up, or are you pleased with me? but really, if I didn't write about me, there would be little else to say, for I have already covered all items of interest. Please send a pad quickly, this is the last letter you'll get until I receive it, envelopes arrived safely, so all I need is paper, do what you can please darling.

And now I must say goodnight, but I hope to find the time to let you have a line tomorrow on borrowed paper, & I'll soon be home on 48 again (I hope).

In the meantime, remember I love you, & only you.

Your acting/paid/Lance/ Sergeant lover

Bill (signed L/Sgt)

P.S. Like my signature?

THE CAMP

S. CARLTON

5/5/42

Darling Wife,

Once more I will make an attempt to scribble off a note, just to let you know how alive and well I am in spite of pressure with work, training etc. This latest stripe has brought its full share of responsibilities, & if I'm not very careful I may lose prestige among the powers that be, hence my 100% occupied time, I've got to work until the sergeantship is a certainty, hope you won't mind. Our weather now is simply marvellous, real holiday weather, & we work & sweat through it all, & keep healthy, & the men are as happy as they can be, you see, we're on top, & we mean to stay there, ours is the show site now, & we don't get too many unwelcome visitors, they're all pleased, because each time they come, there is something different to see.

I haven't had much time to visit the Reigles lately, hope they don't think I've forsaken them. It seems almost an impossibility that I can be so near to them & yet not have time to see them even once, but there you are, that's the way it is.

Referring to our move which I telegraphed so urgently, it's fallen through temporarily, but will no doubt come off in the near future, say six weeks from now, & it's to be the Isle of Wight I think, that's just as near to home as this is, & much warmer & easier to get away from, & perhaps you might even be able to see me there.

Life goes on just ordinarily really, there is not much of interest to relate actually, but I do want to thank you so very very much for paying up our bet so promptly, I was really broke after paying out for drinks all round, so it was indeed welcome. I'm glad the oranges arrived safely, they really did, didn't they? I want to know, so that I can pack them correctly if I get any more, through that's hoping for a lot, but you never know what an adoring husband can achieve when he wants to.

I think we shall have a Badminton set here soon, outdoors of course, but it will be nice to have a game once more, & I believe I know where to get a handy game of tennis too, which would be simply splendid for me, so have a look at my racket & see if it's serviceable, I may be sending for it soon.

And now my lovely angel, time has come to end this very short note, & until tomorrow, when I hope to scrounge some time off again, I'll say Goodnight & God Bless You, I adore you always, Your Bill xxxx

P.S. Don't forget writing pad & cigarettes, no matter what kind.

THE CAMP
S. CARLTON

7-5-42

Darling,

I had a hectic day yesterday, up at 6, out all morning in scorching sun on a D.C.'s concentration, then whisked off in the afternoon to a Brigade Conference, all about the defence of Lincoln, which they confidently state will be bombed, hope we pull a few down, I assure you we shall be right on our mettle, & just longing for a shot. Today the weather has altered suddenly, it has become cold, & there is more than a hint of rain which we really do not need very much, so I hope it comes tonight, & gives us a much needed break, for to be out till 2 every night for a fortnight straight off is a hell of a tough run, especially when we have to be out the next morning at much the same time, & we're working hard on emplacements too, & painting still progresses slowly on the huts, we really do keep very busy.

The Waafs haunt the camp these warm evenings, most of the lads seem to have found a companion, "Tich" & myself went out the other

night with two of them to collect wood, with our barrow, & needless to say, we clicked for wheeling it back too, they didn't even say thankyou, so I can see they're exploiting their charm, & that's where I back out, although I place no restrictions on my lads, they do as they please until stand to which is about nine thirty, & I think they manage to keep pretty happy.

Just finished supper, consisting of Kidneys & fried bread & the usual cocoa-- not too bad, I enjoyed it anyway, because I felt extremely hungry after being out in the open all day, it sure does give one an appetite.

The question of leave is a pleasant one, however uncertain it always is, & I do think, & hope, to be getting a 48 on time after all, so look out for me one fine day, I'm sure to come, although it will probably be at very short notice.

How's the garden, & Penny? are they both keeping all right? and does the lawn mower still go fairly easily? or has it stiffened up again, I do hope it isn't too hard for you. {see next page for image}

Tell Mum I really will write soon, just as soon as I get things a bit straight, but with a blitz hanging over our heads & the resultant work it brings, & a possible move in the wind, you can imagine how uncertain life is, & how very busy we're kept on one thing & another.

Cigarettes would be especially welcome about now, the Y.M. only let us have ten three times a week, I'm sure there's some black marketing going on somewhere, & quite often they call without any on board, which means we go without, for you know what a lousy dump this is for "smokes", so send what you like, & they'll be snapped up, & don't forget my writing pad please.

Goodnight angel, [...] Bill xxxx



{The above is a photo of Ann & Penny in the back garden at Four Winds looking South with Molewood in the background}

THE CAMP

S. CARLTON

7/5/42*I am sure this is NOT the 7th May but June as Bill mentions Saturday 13th**& the ink is not green!*

Darling Love,

By the time you receive this letter I guess you will have given me up as dead or missing, and I am indeed sorry to have made you wait so long.

First of all I must tell you that I love you [...] And so to news, such as it is. First is work, and as usual, my inevitable complaint about too much night work with not enough sleep, but I will not dwell on that, you have already heard too much about it. On Thursday evening we were compelled to go to a D.C.'s Troop officer's conference, which effectively squashed all chances of letter writing, and they landed us back on sites just in nice time for Take Post air co-op, and the Fuehrer informs us that a similar conference will take place after each call out, although he's been on leave since then, and we've had an evening or two of freedom.

On Friday we held the weekly Infantry concentration, and I had a scorching day of Bayonet instruction, with the result that at the end of it, I had yelled so much that I could not speak, and for two days I've had to whisper to everyone, it was awful, although I awoke this morning, & except for a slight huskiness, am normal again. After the concentration, we had a nice shower, and were given a nice little open wagon to go back in, but on reaching Lincoln, we all got off, and went to the swimming pool. It was delicious, the first bathe of the year, and even in a hired costume, I was able to relax for a couple of hours from the worries of a site, and enjoy myself for a change. We came out round about 7.30 in the evening, after revelling in nearly tepid waters, & basking in warm evening sunshine and proceeded to the S.A. canteen for tea, after which we entered a public house, or hotel, & I had a few whiskies at 1/6d a go, coming out

eventually considerably lighter in spirits, but absolutely broke, although strangely enough, I didn't care at all, after all, I work hard, so, to take your advice, I have to play hard, & by the time I arrived back here, I certainly felt as though I had played hard, for I needed a rest, swimming for the first time in years is apt to be tiring. We hitch hiked home to site, on the back of a Pool petrol wagon, & enjoyed the evening breezes instead of sitting in a stuffy old bus. My rest was denied me though, for we had to stay out until four in the morning, with reveille at eleven, although after nine o'clock, not one of us could sleep, it was too hot.

Saturday also I played hard, I borrowed 10/- {50p} & went out early in the afternoon, to go swimming again, but this time it was spoiled by the fact that we had to queue for over an hour in boiling sunshine, so by the time we did get in, we were more than ready for a swim. We enjoyed ourselves, having two non swimmers with us made a bit of fun, and after a fairly enjoyable afternoon, we went for a hair cut & tea, & this time I did not drink, having already nearly spent all the borrowed cash, instead we took a nice time off for tea, successfully killing time until the bus was due to leave, & I arrived back here so hot after the bus ride, that despite a very short hair cut, I had another wash down with cold water before I could get cooled off. Later on, the weather seemed to break, and a strong wind came up from the N.W. bringing heavy clouds, and to my intense delight, the air co-op was cancelled & I was free to sleep untroubled until seven thirty this morning. Unfortunately, I could not sleep, my old trouble you remember, I turned & tossed about, until in desperation I got up & had a feast of army biscuits & tea, the time was two thirty then, which meant I had already been in bed for three hours, and I didn't feel a bit tired, and even after I had eaten & gone back to bed, I lay awake another hour before eventually going to sleep, & believe it or not I was awake again at six thirty this morning, as tired & heavy eyed as could be, & yet not able to sleep. My theory is that we have been so used to going to bed at three or four in the morning, that we can't possibly hope to sleep before that now until we become accustomed to earlier times, & that will never be, because the weather seems to govern our activities, & you know how well that behaves.

Today, (Sunday) the strong wind still persists, & after the scorching few pervious days, it seems to me, to be very chilly, so that I have been glad to wear a shirt, & it certainly looks very hopeful at the moment, for another night's clear rest? We have certainly taken advantage of the sunshine over the few days it was here, & have been openly defying all dress regulations in that we roam the camp in shorts only, but, as usual, my back has paid the supreme penalty, & because I cannot get Cooltan, or even a substitute, I am losing my skin in tiny white scurfy patches. However, it has not been sore at all, because I exposed it very discreetly & cautiously, remembering past discomforts, & have no regrets, indeed I hope we get some more in the very near future.

I seem to be getting rather run down by all this riotous living though, because my poor old complexion is showing it in the form of spots on my forehead, very painful spots too, so I hope they won't hang about too long, it's most disconcerting these days, when I'm so disgustingly healthy, normally.

I note your remarks about leave in your last letter, and it seems that you, like myself, notice the long drawn out periods between one far too few & brief meetings, at least, they seem to be long drawn out, although in actual fact we are very fortunate I suppose, to see each other regularly, but it really does seem ages since I saw you, & especially at this time of day, I miss you most terribly[...] Well, Mr. Bunce was here today, & as my name has not yet appeared on the Rota, I had a go at him, with the result that all being well, & funds permitting, I shall be home fairly early next Saturday the 13th. Isn't that lovely? and if you are as delighted as I, at the prospect of



48 hrs of heaven, well, we ought to have a grand time [...]

And so my weekend letter draws to a close, for I fear that although I had nearly three days news to relate, it was so scanty that it couldn't make much. Tomorrow promises to be interesting, we have to cook outside in our mess tins once a month, the idea being that we shall be proficient at cooking for ourselves in the event of the cookhouse & cook being bombed, so we should have fun.

The next week should be a fairly easy one for me, it's a "Gas" week, & for once I shall be within my own sphere of knowledge, and at the end of the week, the men will be examined, so I know my detachment should come out on top.

Poor "Tiny" is in here with me, writing to his girl, I say "Poor Tiny", because last week he had a letter from this girl, who he met at Shottle, to say that their love affair must end, & I fear he's taken it very much to heart, however, he's on 48 next Wednesday, & intends to see her as he has spent all his previous leaves with her, & I await developments. Thank goodness my love is not so fickle, [...] I must close for today, more later darling, [...] Your sergeant Bill xxx

THE CAMP

S. CARLTON

10/5/42

Lovely Lady,

[...] Let me see now, what's new, actually very little, but I'll try to collect my meagre store of news, & arrange it into a letter. First, I didn't know you disliked my green ink, & if you watch this letter, you'll gradually see it disappearing, & I shall have to use the green for office work, but I like to do everything just as you would have it. Have you eaten all your

oranges yet? or if so I hope they didn't give you tummy ache.

I found a shoe repairer who raised no objection to repairing my "civvie" shoes, so you see, the Hertford traders are too independent to ever be really big business men.

We went into Lincoln yesterday, (Saturday) afternoon, & stayed until nine o'clock, we called at a pub, & drank a lot of Rum, concentrating on "Tich" who we succeeded in making very lively, so that we had lots of laughs on the way home, but I couldn't make a habit of it even if I liked the stuff, its too expensive.

Today, the Major called, the first visit for over a week, & once again he was amazingly pleased, & while he stays that way he'll let us alone, so of course we've got to keep working hard, and each night there is training & practices lasting to the small hours, so that we get a bit tired on the whole, & when at such times as this, one gets the opportunity to relax, I fear I often yield to the urge, I neglect your letters please forgive this weakness, but my brain gets a bit tired sometimes, & I know you'll understand, & if by way of compromise, you want to cut your mail down to three or four letters per week, well, go ahead, I hate to think of you regarding it as a duty to be done.

Hard luck about George {*Edie's husband*} being for overseas, but I think we are too, various small things still point that way, & as the main body of our Regt. is now at the I.O.W. we have been attached to another Regt., which, if we stick, is more than likely to see the "other side".

You surprised me with your information concerning the affairs of George & Edith, I honestly thought she was in love at any rate, but I guess it must have been the "dance craze" which got them, see what I mean?

This afternoon I went to a football match, being compelled to attend by our new Troop Sergeant, a bit of a blighter, but I just settled down in some long grass & went to sleep, so at least I got some good out of it, but I don't admire the principle do you?

Yesterday, we visited the cinema as usual, & saw "Shadow of the thin man" which was good entertainment, & as they also had a new organist, we got 3

good hours of fun for our 1/6d (see, we're posh when we go out).

I didn't thank you for the writing pad, and enclosed cigarettes, lovely to have my favourite brand, hope you send some more soon, but they're gone now I fear.

Continuous exposure to sun & wind is making me very tanned, & I really do look disgustingly healthy, & feel it except for the ever present tiredness, & I get very few headaches these days, so I'm sure I'm A.1. now.

The worst thing to happen to us since I was last home, is the fact that our bath parades have been cut out, & we now have to get clean as best we can on Sites, & until one day late last week, I hadn't had a bath since I left home, it's a bit thick I think, but Battery have laid down so much training and work to be done that time does not allow for it, so now of course the only change we get from monotony is the usual Saturday afternoon, which I don't often miss.

In spite of the fact that people now call me sergeant quite naturally, I still cannot get used to the title, & now I have achieved these coveted three stripes, I feel very little satisfaction, certainly there is not the thrill I had with my first one.

I wonder if I go higher whether this feeling will persist? But perhaps my position will come home harder when I am next in battery, because I shall have to use the Sergeant's Mess, & that will be a bit of an honour, & an expense.

Poor old Mrs Reigles is very ill, her usual trouble, an acute form of Neuralgia, known as "tic douloureux" {*now known commonly as Trigeminal neuralgia*}, which often drives people to suicide, she has not eaten or drunk anything for five days now, & this morning when I visited her she was no better, & is taking Morphine pills, so I very much fear she will not recover, unless she

can eat something to get her strength back,²⁷ I feel awful about it, because all I can do is sit & answer her questions which she writes on paper (she cannot talk), & it's annoying to be so young & healthy, & yet be helpless to do anything for her. I shall go to her again just as soon as this letter is finished, and hope she is better, I have prayed for her each night, for she is in awful pain, & all in the right side of her head, but so far my prayers have been unanswered, surely some mercy is due to her, she's such a wonderful old lady.

Are you looking forward to seeing me again? [...]

Still no news of George Platt, he must have seriously hurt his leg to take all that time in hospital, & I very much fear he will be a Gunner again when he gets back, & even now Mr. Bunce talks about sending me another assistant so that I can get out some evenings, & I think it's about time too don't you? with every other site on the Troop fitted out with 3 N.C.O.'s I have never yet had an assistant since I was D.C., perhaps I am unpopular with N.C.O.'s, I don't know or care much, my men like me, that's all that really matters.

Just had supper, & we caught Dave Austin in the Drying Room having a bath, he was absolutely nude, & immediately a battery of stirrup pumps & fire buckets were brought forward, & the poor devil was sprayed intermittently with jets of icy water, he of course splashed back, & you ought to see our mess hut now, it is a mess.

Well darling, that's about the lot for the weekend, sorry I didn't write on Friday so that you could have a letter on Monday, but you know why now, & will, I hope, forgive me.

Goodnight my darling [..] God Bless You,
I am always your Sergeant Bill. Xxx

²⁷ In fact she did not die until early 1945 at the age of 82

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CAMP

S.CARLTON

Tuesday

Darling,

Thank you for your letter of Sunday's date, it was more than welcome, it was expected, and had it not materialised, there would have been trouble young lady, for every Monday morning I look forward to a letter, & this week was the painful exception.

However, since you're too busy dancing and sunbathing to bother about your poor hardworking husband, I guess we'll say no more about it, but just you wait until I get home again, I'm going to spank you hard. (I'm only kidding really).

Today for me, has been exceptionally hard, we had to move our Lister {generator} & you know what they're like, & then the power cable needed moving also, making a ton of heavy, heartbreaking work, and now, tomorrow, the Projector is to go away, and another will be sent out, meaning more hard graft, but I guess it keeps us busy, & while we are so engaged, there's not much time for home sickness.

We were out until three again this morning, and on top of that, had to get up at ten, which means very little rest was obtained by the men, because if allowance is made for guards, they get about four hours, & that's in two pieces. However, they seem to be getting along the same as myself, so I guess I shouldn't complain, after all, I don't do guard duties these days.

My friend the Fuehrer was out again today, picking faults here & there, but on the whole he seemed fairly satisfied, & I think I got away with the encounter fairly well, I'm beginning to realise he's not worth worrying about anyhow, and so I don't bother myself much these days even if he is mad.

Glad to know my sister {Edie} may be getting a new job, hope the money

is what she wants, it looks as if she's making progress too doesn't it. The hours seem to be pretty good too, my goodness, what wouldn't I give for a similar job.

I'd like to know what you've planned for the weekend, but actually would rather you kept it a secret [...] whatever you arrange, I will gladly fall in line with [...]

Strangely I'm excited more than usual over the prospects of seeing you again, it's always lovely, but this time it will be particularly sweet for several reasons. Perhaps the weather, perhaps because I've been overworked [...]

Well darling, there's little more to say, I see from your letter that you are getting tanned, while I'm losing mine, my whole back has skinned, & I've got a dirty brown mark where it leaves off at the neck too, but maybe we'll get more sunshine soon, & I can quickly put it to rights again.

And now my love I must say goodnight [...] I shall always be just your Bill

The Camp,

S. Carlton

12/5/24

Darling Ann,

Thank you so much for the cigs, for the very first time, they were not an immediate necessity, but I know they'll go in a day or two.

For the last two days we have had incessant rain, and the temperature has dropped alarmingly, so that it is really and truly very cold while we are outside, although the rain is more than welcome, the gardens so badly needed it.

Last night we were free for the first time in weeks, and I went to bed early, but I had an awful nightmare, which, if I could remember all details, would make

a wonderful thriller. Twice I awoke relieved to find it was only a dream, but on going to sleep again, continued right from where I left off. It was all about you being stolen from me by some Monks who took you to their haunted Monastery together with two other girls, and the hair raising events which followed in my vain attempts to rescue you, turned my blood cold. Twice I succeeded in finding you, and left you for a moment to clear a path for our escape, and each time I went back for you, you had been spirited back to the Ghost Monks. I was driven to distraction by horrible thoughts of what might happen to you, but I did not finish the dream, so I know not whether you are safe or not.

And this morning I received the news that one of our Utility cars smashed up on the way to Newark, killing my very good friend George Hearn, who you may remember my mentioning from the Derby day. The driver, a Hungarian A.T.S. girl, & another fellow, are not expected to live, it's awful to think that one doesn't have to be in the front line to meet with a violent end. Poor George, married not twelve months, and his wife pregnant it is rumoured, don't some folks have really hard luck.

Well darling, I think that this letter must have been very depressing to read up to this point, so we'll change the subject, and talk about you shall we?

I see from a letter received this morning that you took another evacuee on his way Saturday, you're a valiant little war worker, and however little you may think you do, I'm convinced that if everyone was as victory minded as you, we should soon be on top. And speaking of the war, I should think you are very happy since Churchill's speech on Sunday, it even inspired me, & gave me confidence in my forecast for Nov 19th of this year.

Now if I were you, I shouldn't get involved with any dates over the weekend, I may decide I want to do something about that baby you speak of, so just keep your fingers crossed will you? And don't eat all the marmalade. By the way, I hope you only used the skins of the oranges, because I sent the fruit for you to eat, & I wanted you to have them all, hope you did.

You'll be glad to know that old Mrs. Reigles was much improved yesterday morning when I visited her, , although I haven't seen her since then, and she has such sudden changes that I cannot say for sure how well she is today. I think the Morphia she has been taking has probably helped her along.

Glad to know that you have planted some lettuce, and not in the shrubbery, although you omitted to say where you had planted them, and I hope your efforts are well rewarded. Have you seen any potatoes showing through yet? All ours here are through, and broad beans, peas and carrots too, although we have about two hundred weight of potatoes yet to plant, which means a lot more digging, but so long as we are able to stay and reap some of the benefits, it will be well worth the efforts expended. We have a row of strawberry plants too, but I doubt if there will ever be over one red one left at any one time.

You said George is, or was, home again, he gets plenty of leave doesn't he? Wish I could be as lucky, for unlike he is, I am deeply in love with my wife, and consequently only half alive whilst away. And I bet he doesn't go abroad either.

At the moment my living hut is in an awful mess, we are repainting it at last, cream, and a lovely shade of light green round the bottom, which when finished, should look really good, and that will complete the whole of the camp painting then. The rest of the huts look delightfully clean, and this inspires the occupants to take a pride in their appearance, so that my camp is now a model of military cleanliness.

Tomorrow I guess I'll have to go to another boring D.C.'s concentration, I never learn a thing these days, they cover the same old subjects week after week, and really is a waste of time going, the only advantage is that I can sometimes get oranges from a little shop nearby, which makes the effort worth while if I meet with success. Ah! well, such is life.

I heard from Dorothy Fletcher today, the first letter for weeks, and she tells me she now drives a tractor in addition to her other numerous duties, but that she has to go for a National Service interview this week, I should think she's safe enough where she is wouldn't you? She tells me that dear old Shottle camp is now to let, but that some A.T.S., officers came to look it over recently, and the obvious surmise is that it will soon be occupied again, this time with women. And I'm sure they'll look after it far more conscientiously than its more recent occupants, who, I understand let it run pretty wilds. I should love to go there again for a look at the old place, I remember how lively she looked in her spring dress. [...]

Seriously though, your letters are the loveliest thing that happens with this dreadfully monotonous life, I'm sure if there were a pub in the village I'd go off the rails sometimes, when I didn't have news of you, that period for nearly a week, life seemed very empty, and I missed your letters very very much, they're all I have, so please write just as often as you can, it makes life so much easier? for being here, surrounded with bare floors, no fires, hounded daily by officers, is no picnic, and words from home are doubly welcome.

Before I end this letter, I would like to remind you, if you ignored Churchill's warning, about your Gas precaution, please do take your respirator with you wherever you go, & buy some anti-gas ointment from the chemist, they all sell it, you simply must not become a casualty, and no-one can prevent this dreadful thing happening but you yourself, so please, for my sake as well as your own, be prepared at all times and wherever you may go, CARRY YOUR RESPIRATOR, it doesn't matter what people think, and don't ever run away with the idea that Hitler won't use gas because you want to go to a dance, or the pictures, or for a walk, let others take risks if they're foolish enough, but you, my only treasure I ever wrested from the world, must be wise, & so safe, remember, I love you, and if anything ever happens to you, I shall not bother to go on living, and I don't mean perhaps. Very little else remains to write in this letter, it's the longest I've written for some time I think, that's because for once I have some real time to myself, and most of the men are out, so that I may sit alone in the office, and under these peaceful conditions I can apply myself wholeheartedly to writing to my beloved.

When you next visit my Mother please pass on any news you think will interest her from my letters. I get terribly behind with all my mail these days, so that she, with others become sadly neglected, & tell her I really will write just as soon as I have time to breathe, but I think I explained to you when last I wrote, that what little time we do get to spare, I often yield to the urge for rest, & neglect my letters since I landed at S. Carlton, I shall be glad when they give me an assistant, that's the worst of being too capable, they see I manage quite well alone, & so long as I don't go wrong, or complain any way, they'll let me stay alone, state of affairs I do not really mind except for the fact that I like a little leisure occasionally, well well, we shall see.

And now goodnight my darling Ann, I am always your Bill (L/Sgt)

The Camp

S. Carlton

Monday

{I think this may be 18/5/42}

Darling Ann,

Here we are again, Sunny South Carlton, only it happens to be pouring with rain (thank goodness) I do hope it continues all night, and then I may get some sleep.

Well darling, I won't say I feel happy to be here again, although it wouldn't make much difference if I were, because I'd still have to remain. At last I am to have an assistant, the fellow who took over for the weekend (Bill, Bdr. Brooker) is going to remain here with me, and we should do pretty well together I hope. You'll hear more later as to whether it's a success or no.

My journey here was monotonously uneventful, I tried to sleep, but couldn't do more than doze, which only makes one feel worse, and was very glad when I got to Lincoln. I helped a charming blonde WAAF to her train on the station at Lincoln, who was most profuse in her thanks, and that's the only exciting thing which happened.

When I arrived back here I was in trouble, the new officious Troop Sergeant was waiting for my return, to tick me off for being late, and I got a proper dressing down, & in spite of my telling him it couldn't be done much earlier, all he said, was that if I couldn't get back on time, I shouldn't be allowed to go on leave, and now, just to be awkward, and because he's made me mad, I'm going to find out just what rights we have for travelling time, and insist on getting it. My only difficulty is that I'm not sure to whom I can address my inquiries, however, love will find a way, and I'll let you know how I get on.

The cook had a good supper on the go when I came back, my favourite scallops, and boy, did I tuck in, yes, even at the cost of my waistline, ----- and

now 'tis bedtime, still raining (thank goodness) and I fancied something nice, when suddenly I remembered, Cafe Aulait, an inspiration if ever I had one, so off to the cookhouse on a Commando raid, and here I am with my coffee, it's lovely, & once again I'm at home with you drinking our night cup, [...] Thank you a thousand times for a lovely weekend [...] Bill

THE CAMP

S. CARLTON

DATE 20/5/42

Darling Ann,

Just one day I had an assistant, now he is gone, and it looks as if I'm destined to be on my own once more, although I'm so used to working for myself now that it won't make much difference. Too bad though, because Bill Brooker & Bill Furlong would have made a perfect combination.

This first day back from leave has not been too bad, and has served to help me pick up the threads where I left on Saturday. We were threatened with a visit from the Colonel, in fact the Concentration was cancelled because of it, but he failed to put in an appearance, although it is rumoured that he may yet turn up tomorrow.

I saw Mr. Bunce today, & he says his wife is doing well, and he now has a son, apparently his first, & he vows it will be the last. I talked to him about me getting "ticked off" last night for being late back, and as it was the first he'd heard of it, he thought, as did I, that it was a bit thick, & he believes we are entitled to some kind of travelling time allowance, so I shall pursue my inquiries. I had a letter from Ted {*Ladds*} this morning, it contained nothing of real importance, just written to prove he hadn't forgotten me, so I shall reply tonight. He says May is now on work of national Importance in Cambridge, the Government would not allow her to stay at the Library, & from the way he writes I would imagine she is in some large factory. He also had vague news of

the scoundrels Collins Bros., & informs me that Sid, has to go before another tribunal because of failing to do Agricultural Work as ordered. Charlie, it seems, has lowered his dignity sufficiently to allow him to do this type of work, so I hope Sid gets it in the neck well & truly, he deserves to wake up soon.

I had my wish granted last night:- it kept on raining, and we had a clear night sleep, but they have taken steps already to see that we have no such luck tonight, for air co-operation is laid on for 11.30 until heaven knows when, so I shall still be in bed (I hope) tomorrow morning when you are hard at work.

I can hear the wireless playing in the Mess Hut, Henry Hall's Guest Night, & before that we had Roy Rich, with some very nice music. It is a typical early summer evening, the birds are singing, the sun is not yet set, the weather is mild again, in fact, if it were not for a war, and you could be with me, I would be sublimely happy. But, there is a War on, and I cannot have you with me, so naturally instead of being sublimely happy, I am, inclined to wistfulness, and have to seek comfort in constantly looking at your picture, my only link with a distant heaven. This, and my memories, are all I have to keep me sane and normal.

Thank you a million times for a truly Golden Treasure I found in my haversack this morning [...] one of your Golden Curls is indeed a gift fit for a king, and I am no king, rather I am your slave, and as such I was suitably thrilled when I found it [...]

Now goodnight my love [.. .]

Your Sergeant Bill xxx

The Camp

S. Carlton

22/5/42

Angel mine,

Sorry I couldn't write yesterday, but at least I am able to give you a line or two tonight, so that you shall have a letter on Monday morning.

So far I have only heard from you once, & that was when you sent my vest along, I wonder if you are neglecting me, or has the post gone wrong? Anyway, I confidently expect some news of you in the morning, and if there is none, my goodness young lady, you're for it.

Yesterday was fairly quiet, but I feel it is only the lull before a very big storm, in the shape of a terrifically big field check in early June, or late this month, and if it breaks too soon, I for one will be unprepared, so just keep your fingers crossed for your nice kind sergeant will you? or he might be losing his latest stripe in a hurry.

I applied for a form yesterday so that I may make over another 5/- a week to you, it seems that I have to do this if I want you to benefit by my promotion, and you should commence drawing it in about a fortnight. We managed to get a free night last night (after midnight) but I did a guard from 2 till 3.30 because we are short of men, so you will see how very little sleep I got, and I really did feel tired this morning.

Today was concentration day, all infantry stuff, and I figured quite prominently with instruction on field craft and patrols, and despite the fact that I had no chance for prep I did pretty well, and I think, and hope, that besides enjoying themselves, the fellows learned a thing or two. When this was all over, we were marched, or rather, I helped to march us to a new bath place, the R.A.S.C., depot, near Lincoln, where they have twelve showers, and although we do not feel that showers get us as clean as a proper bath would, it was refreshing and certainly got me a lot cleaner.

We arrived back on site at about 5 oclock, just in nice time for later lunch, and to dodge a very heavy storm, which will, I hope return later tonight so that we may have yet another night to ourselves. Aren't I wicked? if I had my way, we should have bad weather every night, but that's all because the training stunt is overdue in this Battery.

I heard a rumour today that one of we two remaining Batteries, are to rejoin our regiment at I.O.W. I wonder if we shall be the ones, I doubt it somehow, and I really don't know whether I want to go or not, I'm quite happy here, so long as I can get home quite regularly. Another rumour followed to the effect that nearly all the N.C.O.'s will be sent to Wales to train the A.T.S. who

are being prepared to take over our work. This latter may be true, for already quite a number of our men have gone to perform this task, but it looks a bit grisly for our future, I foresee an inevitable transfer to the infantry to build up a sufficiently big army for invasion of Western Europe when the time is ripe. Ah! Well, for King & Country I suppose should be my theme, so I will not forward my opinion on the subject.

The wireless is playing dance music, and I don't know whose band it is, but for once I am enjoying it, because it's simply pouring down with rain again, and this lighter kind of music tends to brighten one's outlook at the appropriate times, such as this. Imagine me if you can, in a small, bare but clean wooden hut, whose only furniture is a bed, on which I sit. The patter of rain on the roof is a comforting sound at any time when one is inside, but under these circumstances it is even more so, then add to this the accompaniment of nice music supplied by a dance band playing the latest batch of very tuneful music, can you wonder I feel strangely at peace as I write to the most wonderful woman in the world, [...]

I adore you always,

Your Bill xxx

P.S. 10/- on account. Please forgive delay, but rest will follow soon [...]

The Camp

S. Carlton

24/5/42

Darling Ann,

I have just finished listening to a complete recording of Tchaikovsky's Concerto by the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Toscanini. A marvellous recording of the loveliest of music yet made, and a nice treat for me,

indeed, Fortune must be smiling on me today, for I have had several visitors here today, including my friend the Fuehrer, and all have been exceedingly pleased with all they saw. The Concerto upset all the boys here, they don't understand music, and were therefore very put out about the awful noise, it drove them all from the mess hut, and when, half hour later, Dave, the cockney came in to switch it off, and found me guarding the set, he nearly came to blows with me, and informed me that I was driving the whole detachment mad. Well, after that, I agree with you in all that you care to say about them. There is just one thing I want to know now, were you listening too? I imagined you would be, and, as always, this wonderful heavenly music brought you, & home, very much nearer to me, so much so that I feel I have been home on the briefest of leaves. [...] now once again the camp is given over to jazz, which to me, after what I've just heard, is vulgarly maddening, but we all have our tastes, some good, some not so good, and I therefore will refrain from further comment.

Fancy it being Whit Sunday, we'd never know it here, for today has been as hard, & probably harder than any normal working day, in that we spent the whole afternoon making a net ball pitch, which is by no means yet finished, but there is always a redeeming feature about lots of work, and that is, that it keeps "nostalgia" away, and so I really welcome it, which is one reason why I like this site, there is tons of work yet to be done whichever way I turn.

I had your letter yesterday, and am pleased to see you are mixing with the best people these days, but don't let it turn your pretty head will you, for your husband is still only a humble "Sarg" in "Ack Ack", which doesn't amount to much in that social sphere [...]

Too bad about my sister {*Edie*} being fed up with catering for herself, I didn't think her as helpless as that, what would she have done then had she made the same start as you with married life? I hope that attitude changes after this war when things have to be rational again, and people stand on their own feet, but then, she's not had to fend for herself yet, so we mustn't really blame her. Anyway I hope you both enjoyed the dance on Saturday night, you should have, if it was the first for some time, but I also hope you both behaved yourselves & went home alone; I'm wondering.

We've had plenty of rain here since I got back, and last night it was particularly heavy, so heavy, that at midnight I had to get up and move my bed, because the roof was leaking, and the drops on my pillow awakened me, it's all in a days work.

I didn't go out Saturday afternoon after all, there were too many little jobs about the camp to do, and Mr. Bunce was visiting anyway, so I should have been here. In spite of this, I feel I didn't miss much, for as you know, Lincoln offers very little to nostalgic Sergeants, except pictures, and in the summer one is apt to get a bit "brownd off" with that.

Well darling heart, this is my fifth letter to you since I last saw you [...]

Humorous interlude while one of the boys came into the office to collect soot from the fireplace, to put on sleeping "Tinys" nose, but they woke him up as they did it, so of course we saw a terrific upheaval for a few minutes as a vengeful "Tiny" took toll for the outrage.

Our garden is making huge strides now, the showers & sun are working miracles, and each time we have a visitor, they are forced to comment on the forwardness of it, we shall soon be digging new potatoes, & picking broad beans, not that I shall eat the latter, but I've promised my share to Mr. Bunce, who is, he says, passionately fond of these, so here's hoping it's a good crop.

Now my darling, I have run out of news, but I'll write again tomorrow [...]

Goodnight my love. [...] Sergeant Bill

*The Camp**S. Carlton*26/5/42

Darling,

Life has been so full of worries these last few days, that I really have had no chance to do a thing for myself, and worst of all, no letter to you.

However, now, at 10 oclock, I'm daring to start one as I eat a very belated supper, hence the rather scratchy writing.

Things have not gone too well with me these last days, practically no sleep, a field check looming large in the very near future, and honestly I'm afraid of it, they never were my favourites, although I always got by when there was only myself to worry about. This time, however, the result of ten more men reflects good or bad on me, and I'm terribly afraid, because the men have been terribly irritable, due to the lack of sleep and over training, & now they really are disinterested, & don't care whether they help me or not. Last night was particularly trying, I'd had a busy day in the cookhouse, I'll tell you about that later, & in the evening I'd had occasion to go to a farmer on business, & he insulted me so much for no reason, that I had a hard job to control my temper, & naturally I was very upset about it all. Anyway, that's in the hands of the Fuehrer now, & he will take it out of the farmer all right, which makes me glad I controlled myself.

I went to bed at 12.30, having waited up until then on a false errand about air co-op. Imagine my annoyance when at 2.15 I was awakened for that very thing, & we stayed out until 5 & had to get up again at 9, work out how much sleep I've had, & now tonight we're awaiting more of it. The fellows are beginning to criticise me behind my back I find, & I'm weary, war weary through having no time off, I lost my assistant the day after I got back from leave.

Now about my cookhouse duties:- our cook is on leave, & I have had to put Dave Austin in his place, well, he's just a novice, & so yesterday after two days really poor food, I told him I'd help him with dinner, which I did, & I

turned out some highly successful jam tarts with perfectly lovely custard. This was such a success that I decided to give them a good supper, & we spent two hours frying scallops, & each man got such a huge plateful that we couldn't get rid of all we cooked, & they really were delicious, but coupled with my other work made it a very busy day, so today I just made a milk pudding, which was acclaimed to be the best yet, but I'm awfully extravagant with milk, butter etc. However, they all enjoyed it. Tonight, Dave came to me, & said, "I've got to make fish cakes for breakfast, will you tell me what to do", so I made his fish cakes for him & left them all ready to fry in the morning, the only mistake I made was to make too much mixture, & after making a dozen fair sized cakes, I still have enough stuff left for a dozen more, so we're going to put them on for tea. You ought to see them, they look properly professional. Here is my recipe for 11 men, two tins of red salmon, about 4 lbs of potatoes, & three slices of toasted bread, rolled into crispy crumbs under a rolling pin. Turn out the Salmon & mash very thoroughly with a quarter pound of butter & milk to give required consistency. Mash potatoes & mix in the fish etc., adding flour if too? Sticky (as mine was). Anyway, they shaped up all right, & when they got their overcoat of breadcrumbs stuck all over them, they really did look the goods, all we have to do now is to fry them & see what they taste like. Well, darling I want to go on writing & writing, but I'm afraid that if I do, I shall miss what chance of sleep I've got before midnight, & as it is now 11, I'd better say goodnight & God bless you, please write often, I do miss your letters when there are none, & need encouragement now more than ever before, so help me out. [...]

Yours always Bill xxx

P.S. By the time you reply to this, the first Field Check will be over & I shall either be disgraced or "cocky". The burning question is "will my luck hold"?
Bill

*The Camp**S. Carlton*28/5/42*{Tiny writing here}*

Dearest Love,

When day is done, and the shadows fall, I think of you. How true this is, each day at this time, when most of the normal work and worry is gone, my thoughts fly *{to you}* at home. [...] I had no news of you this morning, & needless to say was just a little crestfallen [...] I suppose your business & social activities have kept you very busy [...] I'm a little bit jealous.

Glad to know Mum is having such a good time, & you are certainly right when you say it will do her good, I hope they make her stay a long time, a real holiday is something she's never had, and it simply must be doing her heaps of good, and as for my sister, she too will benefit by standing on her own feet a bit, not that I blame her in any way, but the experience really will be good for her.

I must apologise for the use of green ink again, my blue has met with an accident, & was spilt all over my lovely scrubbed floor, so that I've had to scrape it with a knife to get the worst off, And being the only blue ink in the camp, I am driven to using green until I get out again.

Last night was beautifully wet and stormy, and I was able to get in the first full nights sleep since my last leave, I was in bed at 10, after a bath on the instalment plan, and slept undisturbed except by the storm, until 8 this morning, and I need hardly say much better & brighter I feel for it. [...]

I saw Mr. Bunce today and had a go at him about my long promised assistant, I told him I was showing signs of wear, so he said even if he couldn't give me a permanent one, he would see that I got a temporary relief now and again, so that I might have a night off about once a month, just fancy once a month, no wonder I'm depressed at times [..] I shall eventually persuade someone to help me I suppose [...]

Poor old Mrs Reigles is still very ill, and unable to speak, and so I do not visit her now, because my presence always makes her forget she must not speak, with the result that she brings on more pain, whereas if I visit Basil, and enquire daily from him, this fault is eliminated, and she will get well sooner, [...]

Three days ago, Basil brought a pigeon up to the camp, It was half dead with fatigue, and was very hungry, it had its usual rings on the legs & belonged to the national Union of Racing Pigeons. An elastic band was also round one leg, which may have carried a message, & so we called up Battery about it, and after lengthy questionings, as to markings we found its name & address stamped under the right wing, which proved it came from Blackburn. We were instructed to hang on to it at all costs, which we have done, in a tea-chest with wire netting, and I must say that its diet of quaker oats & rice have done it a lot of good, for it is now quite strong and well again. This morning, after two days of questioning by all sorts of high authorities, during which time the poor bird has been turned inside out, we were told to hand it over to the nearest Police Station as soon as possible, so now it awaits a trip to Lincoln, which is the nearest place to here. It has provided quite a laugh although some of the lads let their humane feelings get the better of their sense of duty, and would have let it go if I hadn't restrained them.

Life isn't particularly exciting or interesting these days really, I had trouble with one of the lads the other night, he refused to obey orders in action, & I told him he was on a charge, I firmly intended to do this too, but by the morning I had cooled off, though I didn't let him see it, & I decided to have him moved instead, which he has got to know of I think, for he has been a model soldier since then [...]

You see darling, although I may be considered weak over this issue, if I start making charges, my prestige is gone, & if that goes, so does my efficiency, for in this game, all depends on having the men with you, [...] I'll let you know how he turns out.

Call that excitement if you care to, [...]

Now goodnight darling heart,

I'll write again soon, Yours as ever Bill.

The Camp,

S. Carlton

29/5/42



Darling Ann,

Thank goodness this week is nearly over, never in my whole career have I suffered such a nightmare of work and complaining men, twice this week I have had minor mutinies to deal with, and since I dare not use force on them for fear of losing support it has been a most difficult business to tackle. However, that phase seems to have passed, but the mood has taken me now, and I become mutinous, so much so, that Mr. Bunce saw it yesterday, & he said I must come out for a drink, which we did, he used the car especially for me, & took me to a nice little hotel at Saxilby, where we stayed until closing time, & then brought me back to camp. We were both drunk I fear, I especially, and noisy with it too, I could have ticked the Brigadier off had I seen him. Anyway, it just about saved my sanity and was the obvious cure. Normally, had I been allowed to sleep, I could have recovered by morning, but at half past one in the morning, I was awakened for hostile raids, and the action of getting up in a hurry caused me to be violently sick, after which I felt better, and proceeded to sit over the office fire for an hour until we were given stand easy, when I went back to bed, fixing reveille just two hours later than the official one laid down (we got away with it too). I awoke with the most awful hangover, the usual head & sick tummy, so that I didn't feel like taking the afternoon off, & I went to bed instead. Now, at

seven o'clock in the evening, I am absolutely in the pink, & ready for anything. I've let the whole bunch of boys go out until eleven, except guards, & I don't care who complains. Mr. Bunce is in a similar mood, and he says he has been "boozing" all week to avoid going mad, and could see I was in the same boat, and decided to save me, which he did. We talked about various things, commissions among other things, and he says the reason for the prolonged training period for cadets these days is because we have too many officers, and they're not required, so I refrained from mentioning my ambitions in this field. We then talked about music, & I was pleasantly surprised to find we had similar tastes, his favourites are mine, *Madame Butterfly*, *Barber of Seville*, *Tchaikovsky*, etc. One thing stands out vividly through the haze of alcohol which held my mind, and that was the discussion of such lovely music in the drab surroundings of the lavatory, sublime & ridiculous came together so to speak, and looking back I am unusually amazed. It has given me something to smile about anyway, although I'm flat broke now, I'm fully determined to do it again just as soon as I can afford to.

Tomorrow I have the especial honour to conduct a concentration for cooks, on Gas (that awful subject on which I am a minor expert now) and the fact that I am running the show on my own, gives me some feeling of satisfaction, and after finishing this letter, I must settle down to some serious prep, so that I put it over convincingly & forcibly.

This last fortnight has brought very unsettled weather, storm & gales, of which you seem to have had your share, and unfortunately, they do not always come at night, which is a pity, because it is my only respite, and this evening is no exception, we've had violent thunder storms all day long, now the sky is beautifully clear & the sun shines, so that we have every chance of a full night's activity, but I guess we'll survive, anyway, I'll try, but I do wish you'd make your letters more loving [...]

The first field check comes off on Monday or Tuesday, & my confidence of two days ago seems to have deserted me a bit, not for my own knowledge of course, but for the men under me, I do hope you're keeping your fingers crossed, so much depends on it if I am to remain a "Sarg", and when it is all over, I shall definitely report sick, I would do it now but for the fact that I should be shirking the coming check, & I never was a "shirker", so I'm knocking along on one

cylinder, blood pressure at about 200, and hoping for the best.

Just imagine, it's only a fortnight ago since we sat together at the cinema, it seems years, [...] Someone is singing "Over the hill" on the wireless, and though I should be ashamed to admit it, I have tears in my eyes, now I'm really crying, she's singing "When day is done", and I'm always sad when I hear that, I wonder if you are listening too? [..] Enough of sentimentality I imagine you will call it that [...]

After six weeks of wrangling with Q.M., I have eventually succeeded in getting a lovely clean suit of clothes, and they fit me like a glove, just as if I had been measured, so it was working at the Q.M., each week, changing trousers & blouse weekly until I got satisfaction that did the trick, they got fed up with me I expect, anyway, I'm satisfied now, & all I have to do is get some more stripes sown up to make me a really smart soldier for special occasions.

It's a simply marvellous evening, perfect, except for a war, but even that wouldn't worry me if I could have you here to share it [...]

And now goodnight my love, I have more work to do Oh! I forgot, didn't you know tomato plants should be staked as soon as they are planted? [...]

Your Bill always

The Camp,

S. Carlton

31/5/42

{Tiny writing-MF}

Dearest heart,

The last, and loveliest day of May is dying, bringing forth what? Only God knows, and he in his great wisdom has seen fit to keep the future from us.

In the delightful, scented cool of this late Spring evening, my thoughts are uncontrolledly turned to you, [...] How I wish we could be together now; for to watch the sun go down amidst a glorious display of Spring splendiferous, whilst birds call goodnight [...]

And now at midnight, as I watch the moon rise over the hill, [...] may I sleep? not so, for man controls my destiny as much as Fate, and I am condemned to sadness till the smallest hours of morning before I find relief.

Goodnight my love,

My soul is yours always,

God bless you darling, Bill

*The Camp**S. Carlton*3/6/42

Darling Ann,

One more day towards the endless period of waiting we seem to be doomed to, before I may see you again.

The weather here now is as perfect as could be, in fact ideal holiday weather, with horribly fine nights, resulting in tons of activity, but we all seem to have become accustomed to it now, although our sleeping allowance is suffering terribly by it. The field check is over now, bringing temporary relief to overworked men, and N.C.O.'s but the presence will be increased in a week or so, for an even more important one is in the offing, I shall be glad when it's all over, because the strain is too great, I am a nervous wreck (about).

These last two nights, or rather evenings, we have had organised water fights around the camp, throwing whole buckets of water on each other, running away to be faced by a Battery of stirrup pumps, it is great fun, but we made such a mess everywhere, & we always seem to start fully clothed, & then change to shorts when we're wet through. However, it lightens our spirits considerably, which, after all, counts more with me than anything else in this cursed life.

Now, about you, I see from your letters that you think you are becoming a snob [...] I don't mind what you do, or how snobbish you become [...]

The wireless is playing "When the day is done", that tune seems to haunt the air almost every evening at this time. I wonder if you are listening? [...]

Glad to know Mum is home again, although I feel she should have stayed if she felt she wanted to, Anyway it must have done her lots of real good, give her my love & tell her I'll be home again soon.

Now I must close, the place is full of home Guards, exercising with us, so for now darling, Goodnight, Please write often, I adore you, Bill

*The Camp**S. Carlton*15/6/42

Ann Darling,

Once more, to the racket of jazz, as I sit on my bed, I'm writing to you. I arrived in Lincoln soon after five, and had I so desired, could have been back here by six, but I was not prepared to "hitch" just because of a crotchety old sergeant, instead, I had a hearty meal at the S.A., canteen, and leisurely strolled around the town, cashing my Bond Interest while I was there, eventually taking the usual bus out, which brought me here by seven, or soon after, and although the sergeant had been here himself at five o'clock, nothing has been said, so it looks as if I'm getting away with it.

The weather here was precisely as I left it on Saturday, cold, & pouring with rain, and as I expected, all over the weekend they have been resting, now, I suppose we shall get a callout tonight because I'm back. However, I'll not complain, because of a wonderful weekend, and the sweetest memories will be with me now whatever misfortune befalls me.

I discovered several new things about you this last time, firstly, you are not half the snob you think you are [...]

From reports received I gather the Troop has had a fairly hectic weekend at the Fuehrers expense, but this site seems to have come through unscathed, at least I've heard no bad reports, and they all passed the gas check, so at least that's one feather more in my cap. Many things are yet to be seen to, but given the time, I should succeed in producing the best detachment both for training and work.

It's still raining here, & will, I hope, continue all night, for, like yourself, I am in need of sleep, [...]

My watch is still ticking over, but it gains five minutes in every hour, which makes it one hour fast in every twelve, & I can see I'm going to have an interesting time trying to put it to rights, but I hope I shall succeed, for my other one seems to be beyond repair now, I expect its worn out, it was very old you know, & I suppose army life doesn't suit it, anyway, I'll have an estimate given

for it when I take my wrist watch for its glass, & if it's too much, I'll sell it or something.

Oh dear [...] I can't help seeing the bareness & drabness of the camp [...]

I picture you now, at nine thirty, busy tidying up after my cyclonic visit [...] By the way I didn't thank you enough for financial aid, but you know I'm grateful, & I shall be sending you £1 shortly as a part repayment for your loan, [...]

Well darling, I've turned the sheet over, but I fear just to say goodnight, for I have not been back long enough to have any news, give my love to Mum & Edith, [...] God bless you always, Your Bill

P.S. More envelopes darling please

The Camp,

S. Carlton

16/6/42

Lovely woman,

How are you today I wonder? [...] I have been very energetic abolishing all the double tier bunks on the camp, and fitting small legs to the springs instead, which makes quite a neat and comfortable little bed of them, and much nicer for all concerned. The majority of the boys had to attend a concentration, but I escaped today, and put in some much needed work on the site. These concentrations are all very fine, but they do interfere with our activities, so far as keeping things nice are concerned.

On the whole, I have managed to keep very interested all day, and have not allowed myself time for thoughts of home, until now, with the sun setting in a sea of clouds, and the bird songs at eventide, my days work done, [...] I must be as brave as a real Commando , and wear a grin, [...]

Our noise campaign seems to be bearing fruit already, for we have had

complaints from three sources today, a fact which affords me quite a lot of pleasure, and I bet the folks who stopped the WAAFs coming down here would prefer the small noise they used to make, instead of what they're getting now nearly all night, for my boys are very determined, in that one of them was listening to America at four thirty this morning, much to the disgust of our enemies. I'm wondering now how soon it will be before we're all in gaol, but I don't care, the people here shouldn't be so lousy to us.

We got our rest last night, no air co-op, and it looks pretty promising for tonight so far, although we have been warned already, however, I think the weather is on our side, and we should get a nice ground mist about midnight, at least that's what we're praying for.

The B.S.M. visited us today, and he seems to think this a lovely little site, and as everyone else is, was impressed by the forwardness of our garden, he transplanted a few beet, while he was here, and it struck me as being very funny to see a sergeant major playing with Beetroot, does the idea amuse you? He's a good sort though, and told me never to worry about the Fuehrer, as he is always complaining of something. He recalled the time when he was a sergeant, and the Fuehrer his Troop Officer, he said he was just the same then, and his bark was really worse than his bite. As for Mr. Bunce & the sergeant, I have neither seen nor heard anything of them since I got back, so you see how much bother I am to them, they know I can keep my end up.

Well now, my darling lily wife [...] I seem to have used up all the news again, so until later, I will sign off with a smile [...]

Goodnight my sweet, [...] Your Bill.

The Camp,

S. Carlton

18/6/42

Hello Darling,

How are you? Just As lovely as ever I know, but in good health too I hope.

Since I've been back, we've had nothing but rain, but that's really all to the good, for besides rain during the day, it has also been pretty unsettled at night, which has given us some much needed rest.

Today we had a pleasant surprise, in the form of a trip to B.H.Q., to see the picture "Next of Kin" and by Jove it was certainly well worth seeing, and should serve as a lasting lesson to all who saw it, I know it did me good.²⁸

Mr. Bunce told me today that I shall be going on another course soon, June 24th to be precise, but where to, or for how long I don't yet know, the subject is Camouflage of all things, and I'm thoroughly disgusted with their choice of man? for such a subject, I like technical things, and the prospect doesn't please me one little bit. There is one redeeming feature, though, I shall be relieved of responsibility for a period, however short, and be assured also of some clear nights' sleep (I hope). Anyway, it must be a fairly important course, or they wouldn't send a sergeant would they?

Thank you for your letter, which I received this morning, it seemed such a long time coming, although I'm getting used to asking the Postman daily for letters & receiving none, but I do wish I got more [...] I noted your remarks concerning the money I promised to send, and despite what you say, I feel that it was an expensive weekend for you, and I intend to repay some of it, somehow. I remember your remarks too about George always coming home by train and costing my sister money, [...] I don't intend to be a drag on your finances, you've far too much to bother you already, so, £1 will come along in due course. [...]

²⁸Released by the famed Ealing Studios in 1942 The Next of Kin graphically illustrated how "careless talk" in England almost wrecked a daring British commando raid.

Already I have commenced picking Tiny's brains re painting etc., and he says I need at least £200 {*about £11600 in 2023*} to start, but that I should easily get a job first with a decorator, & considers that in six months I could be pretty efficient, he's very helpful, and lets me into lots of little wrinkles that one normally would not dream of. Thanks for turning out text books on the subject, I hope some useful ones come to light, I can use them, & who knows? perhaps this approaching course may even be useful.

And now, when you can, will you supply me with another writing pad, & a good lot of envelopes, I should have a bit of time for writing when I'm away, at least that's what I'm hoping, so don't forget my sweet will you?

Now goodnight my love, [...] Bill always

The Camp

S. Carlton

19/6/42

Darling Ann,

Today has been simply marvellous from the weather point of view, glorious sunshine all the time, & we've been on a Gas Check. It was very interesting from my point of view, and I had the rather unpleasant job of heating chemicals to make gas for the Chamber Test.²⁹ Fortunately it was only tear gas, and apart from severely smarting eyes, I am none the worse for it, but it's certainly pretty potent stuff this G.A.P. I had fun making the boys open their eyes while they were in, and I bet they blessed me.

After this rather hectic day, I went for a much needed shower, which freshened me quite a lot, and then came back to draw some much needed cash, after which we were brought back here.

I have learned today that my approaching course is a really good one, and will probably be at Oakham, I understand that it probably only lasts a week, & if

²⁹The gas chamber is a room that has a controlled concentration of tear gas

its as good as I'm told, I guess I shall want to stay on, so let's hope it's all as promised, then I shan't mind the break.

We've had no air co-op since I got back, although that hasn't stopped the powers that be from warning us, so that we have to stay out till midnight before we know whether it has been cancelled or not, but at least what sleep I have had, has been undisturbed, but tonight doesn't look too promising, & I wouldn't be surprised if we break our lucky run with an all night "do".

Actually I have very little news for you my dear, the Fuehrer will be round sites tomorrow, for a "fine tooth comb out" in his own words, so I expect to have a hectic morning. However, whatever he finds fault with will only be trivial, and I'm past worrying about him anyway.

Tomorrow afternoon I'm going out to Lincoln to do a bit of shopping, I've got several things I want to get, including something for you, I hope it will be obtainable, for I have set my heart on getting this certain something for you somehow.

I've just drunk the result of an experiment in my research department:- coffee made with real ground coffee too. Where did I get it? well, I told the WAAF's last night (they're getting brave again) that I fancied some coffee & we never had an issue, so, tonight they brought along a whole tin of it, and I had a go. It wasn't too bad, but certainly not a patch on yours, however, it satisfied my craving for tonight, and as I go on making it, I think I should improve don't you?

Mr. Bunce has just left the site, he's out paying the men who missed pay parade, & by the look of him, and judging by his behaviour, he had been having a few drinks at every port of call, not that I blame him, but he still has Saxilby to do, and that's lousy with "pals", so I guess he'll be tight when he gets back. He's going home for the weekend, & says he doesn't want to go really, because he's not in a very good mood, & he hates going home in a bad mood, I tried to cheer him up a bit, but he wouldn't have it, so I'm just hoping he'll cheer up on the way home.

Well my angel heart, it's time I got ready for air co-op, yes, we've clicked tonight, but at least we're sure of some sleep afterwards now, so please excuse me if I sign off until tomorrow or Sunday, and in the meantime you'll have this

for Monday, so goodnight darling, I positively worship you.

Yours always, Bill

The Camp

S. Carlton

23/6/42

Letter written on Bill & Ann's 4th wedding anniversary

My own darling wife,

Four years ago, the most wonderful thing in this life happened to me. You became mine, and as each of those four years have passed, my love has grown, until now, I really do worship the very thought of you. Never have I had cause to regret one little moment of those heavenly years, the memory of which can bring me nothing but joy. [...]

We built a garden, I can see it now, as we wandered together exploring the beauty of nature in the form of flowers we so carefully planted and tended.

Weekends too, were always a joy, for we had two complete days and nights each week during which we never need be apart.

So many things, some small, but all lovely, are in my memories, to be treasured till I die. [...] I send you Pearls this time, and could I afford real ones, I would gladly make them yours, [...]

I love you darling Ann,

Always your Bill

Militia Camp

Oakham

24/6/42

Darling,

This is the loveliest place I have ever been in, and I'm only here for three days, it breaks my heart to think I'll have to leave it.

I am in a room with 2 other sergeants, a lovely big room, with a wash basin & hot & cold water, the windows look out on beautiful country, and everything is peaceful. Now I am feeling the benefits of my stripes, the sergeant's mess is like an officers place, complete with tablecloths, & these quarters, with polished floors, are equally luxurious. As soon as we arrived here we went for supper, and followed up with a show in the Naafi with Bing Crosby in the "Road to Singapore", & this rounded off a lovely arrival. Attached to this block are four bathrooms & I shall take full advantage of them tomorrow you bet.

I understand that this course will be a nice easy one, all lectures, no polishing, or parades, just the sort of thing I like, but I wish it were longer, I have to go back on Saturday, & though I've been here for just three hours I don't want to leave, however, I guess I'll get over it. We're all sergeants on this course, representing officers, for when it was originally intended, & when we go back we shall be Regimental Instructors (perhaps).

I came here by train, right down to Peterboro' & then back to here, & when I return I have to go back to Nottingham & await transport from there. One thing is good, I have at least 3 undisturbed nights before me, a rare pleasure indeed, especially as {*name censored?*} is in the limelight again now, and I have had a succession of nightmare nights since.

Well now darling, I'm writing in bed, & now I shall try to sleep, your picture is beside me, I take her everywhere, & I shall feel very near to you tonight with such pleasant surroundings, don't write here, I'll be back at X soon & your mail can await me there,

Goodnight my love, I worship & adore you always, Your Bill.

*The Camp**S. Carlton*25/6/42*{Despite the address above, Bill is still on his course}*

Darling Ann,

I listened to 25 minutes of Sandy's half hour in a W.V.S canteen at Oakham, and I'm fervently hoping that your request was not contained in the first five minutes which I missed.³⁰ I must confess to being a little disappointed when nothing was said for me, but he must get thousands of requests, and we may be lucky anyway, some other time. At least I was able to speak to you, which was an untold joy to me, & I hope, a pleasant surprise for you. There was no delay, I just asked for your number, & got it, and was the direct answer to my little prayer before hand.

I'm so glad you liked the necklace, & if it looks as nice as I picture it will on you, then it was worth the effort to get it. [...]

About the course, it's a wonderful place, as I've already mentioned, & this morning we had tea brought round in bed, what do you think of that? no wonder I want to stay here. The course itself is entirely lecture and films all day for 2 ½ days, just the kind I like, we just report to our lecture room at 9 in the morning, have 10 minutes between each period, & half an hour for elevenses, then on till lunch time which is of an hour & a half's duration, finishing the day at five. The actual subject of camouflage as presented to us is intensely interesting, & we are getting some unusual slants on it, which should be very useful to me at least. The object of the course is to act as assistant Regimental Instructor, to an officer, who in our regiment is my one time Troop officer 2 /Lt. Floyd, now with another battery, so I might get a promotion & transfer in order to work with him in the near future, not that old Wotton is likely to let me go, but one never knows. We have one Sergeant Major with us as a student, & most of the others are full sergeants, I always seem to be ranks below my fellow students whenever

³⁰ S andy Macpherson (theatre organist) started hosting "S andy Calling" in February 1940. It was a series designed to connect military forces with their families at home. Listeners could write in with a song request and a message for a loved one –and they did so by the thousands.

I go for courses, which leads me to believe (a) promotion is cheap in other units, or (b) I'm good, which do you think? Anyway I'm going to be genuinely sorry when Saturday comes along, because I really don't want to go back now I've settled in, & we even talked the NAAFI girl, a complete stranger, into selling us ten Woodbines between two without a coupon, which shows how much influence a sergeantship has, my goodness, now I feel it was worth the struggles, we're waited on hand & foot in the mess, with A.T.S to cook for us, & three stripes in a camp like this commands tons of respect, then there is the tea in bed stunt, when an orderly comes round to waken us, what more could one ask? And I have to leave it all, to go back to my poor little site. Ah! Well, such is life.

About my leave, I have specifically asked for the week commencing July 13th but whether or not I shall be lucky is another thing, for as I have already said, I'm an important guy again now, but I'm hoping it can, & will be arranged, anyway, I shall pray for it to happen, & you please do the same.

Now darling, I'm going to say goodnight, these three or four nights here are the first good rest I've had since my last seven days, & I intend to take full advantage of them, and I know you won't mind, so until tomorrow then my love, it's goodnight & God Bless you, & may we meet within a fortnight,

Yours always, Bill

The Camp

S. Carlton

26/6/42

Dearest Ann,

This letter will only be a short one I fear, mainly because there is little about which to write, and partly due to the fact that I have been to another picture show in the NAAFI called "Men are not Gods", all about actors, and based on Shakespeare's Othello. It was terrific, and I enjoyed every moment of it, very thrilling indeed. I think it was a very old picture judging by the clothes the

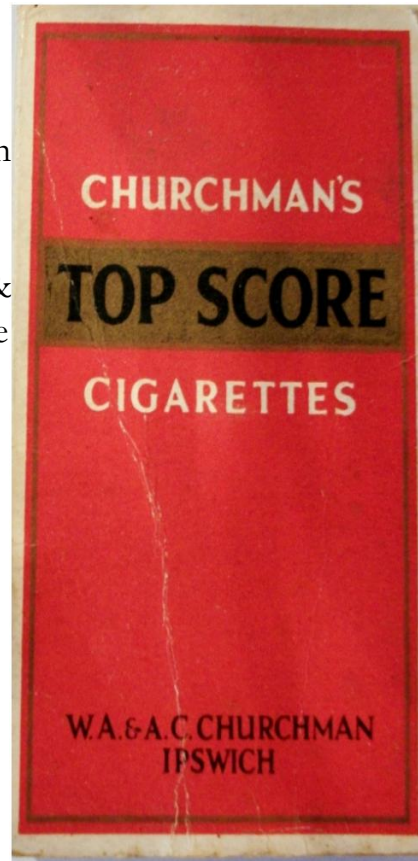
women wore, about 3 years old, but since I had not seen it, I enjoyed it as if it had been just released.

You would laugh if you could see me now, I'm in bed writing, and for my final "snack", I'm eating a 3 day old cheese sandwich my cook provided me with for travelling, I hadn't the heart to waste it, so being a model citizen, I'm dutifully consuming same, but it's tough going I assure you.

We talked the NAAFI girl into letting us have 20 "Top Score" tonight, so we're managing despite the shortage in this camp for students, even though we have no compass?, and now we're stumped for matches, everyone has used all existing supplies, and tonight I split my last three & made six, four of which are now gone, but we have another idea, we just short circuit two batteries with some fine gauge wire, which gets red hot, & we have a light.

Today's lessons were as interesting & varied, and we covered all angles of the subject, although I must admit that being inside all day, watching mostly lantern slides & files, tends to make one very drowsy, & it's as much as we can stand by five o'clock. Nevertheless, I shall be extremely sorry to leave, and only wish there were some way of staying on, but I know there isn't.

Well now my darling sweet lovable Ann, I'm going to slide down into bed, smoke a rare cigarette, & lazily dream of you, I must make the most of tonight, as it will be my last one here, I return Saturday afternoon, so please think of me back at the old place when you're reading this on Monday Morning, & in the meantime, keep praying with me for our seven days. Goodnight my dearest, Yours always,



*The Camp**S. Carlton*27/6/42

Darling,

I guess when you see thus writing, you'll think I'm drunk, well, I am, but still able to collect my wits enough to write to my darling & realise how much she means to me. I am in Battery H.Q., being forced to spend the night here after my course, & being a new sergeant, I've rather pushed the boat out as they say, and am now well & truly in debt actually, but it's worth it, I feel fine. I am now in my "bunk", in the sergeant's quarters, and it's fine, to be a sergeant is to be treated like a lord, & I like it, especially the tea in bed stunt.

I arrived from Oakham at Nottingham at seven oclock tonight, to find two pretty A.T.S. awaiting me with a car to take me back to this place, & we had a very pleasant half hours journey. I then had to call in the mess to see what my next move was, & found I had to spend the night here, which didn't appeal to me at all, but after a few drinks with the rest of the fellows, I just had to admit the prospect was not too bad, & now I'm in my quarters the prospect is definitely good, especially as I shall have an undisturbed night in front of me. I have a date with Freddie Burgess at 10.15 again in the mess, but I fear I shall be entirely unable to cope with the beer which will inevitably flow. However, I guess I'll survive, & anyway, I must break out now & again, & this is definitely an opportunity.

I am sorry my course is over, but will nevertheless have to settle down again, although I'm hoping that this latest course will bring about a move for me, but what the chances are I don't yet know.

Most important to me at the moment is my approaching seven days, I'm praying like anything for that to happen [...]

I had an hours wait at Melton Mowbray on my way back today, so I explored the place, & from what I saw of it, it was very nice & I wouldn't mind being there ever, but I'll give you more detail tomorrow when I feel less dizzily, *sic* so until then darling, goodnight, [...] Bill

The Camp,

S. Carlton

30th June



Dear Darling,

By the time you get this note I guess you'll be wondering what on earth has silenced me for three days, well, a number of things actually. You remember my last letter in which I said I was drunk? well, the following day I returned to Site with a nice little hangover, and although I had very little to do, I just didn't feel like doing even that, and in the end, Tiny & myself, curbed our restless spirits by starting work on a model Junkers 87B dive bomber, made from scrap wood. The reason for our commencing such a task is because we are compelled to enter a competition held by Battery for the best models, and, strangely enough, after we had really got cracking, we couldn't leave it, and we sawed & cut & wittled {sic} all Sunday afternoon and evening, & the same the next evening, until tonight, I have the completed model in front of me, looking something like the picture from which we copied it. I found it a very fascinating pastime, & will probably make another one soon.



The whole of Monday daytime was intensely exciting for us, we had a trip to the seaside, for Lewis Gun practice on real targets towed by a Hurricane, & it really was a thrilling day, & most wonderful to see the coast again, and for obvious reasons I cannot tell you more than that.

Last night we were called out for Jerry at 3.30, but were back to bed soon after, and then today, I took a trip to Battery to see the dentist, I had my teeth scaled, and funnily enough, after I had left, I developed the most intense ache in

my wisdom tooth at the top left, which, on investigation, proves to be loose, decayed & bleeding, and of course I've been messing it about with the result that I now have a really good dose of old fashioned toothache, which means I must see the dentist again on Friday & get it removed, I hope it doesn't give me too much trouble till then. I was annoyed to think he had not discovered it while I was there, for it must have been obvious had he examined my teeth as he should. However, I must just grin & bear it until Friday I guess, so think of me with toothache until then will you, & the prospect of having it out with an army dentist doesn't appeal much either.

At eight o'clock tonight, the next most interesting thing happened, the Brigadier strolled on to the site, & blessed well staged an hour talking to me about various things, although he is the grandest bit of red tape I've met yet, & well worthy of his position. His inspection of the site was extremely thorough, including his personal cleaning out of a drain, in which he plunged his arm up to the elbow & got all dirty scummy water over him, so I had to provide soap and water when he'd finished. Mr. Bunce & myself, killed ourselves watching a Brigadier in beautiful battle dress, on his knees in water & up to his elbows in dirt, but the old blighter proved his point, & succeeded on getting quite a lot of dirt from it, so you see how far seeing a D.C. has to be. On the whole, I got away with the encounter pretty well, and as he left he congratulated me on my site, so I guess I was O.K. Nevertheless, I was relieved when he left, but at least he's a real gentleman, & it's a pleasure to have him as a leader.

Well angel, that's about the lot I think, except that we had a case of Scabies on the site, & I had to inspect every man minutely for further traces, but we are all free so, although each time we think of it now, we itch, & I'll have to keep a close watch for the next day or so.

All your letters have reached me safely, including your especially typed one for the 25th, and it was all I could ask for a letter, and quite a sufficient birthday gift, or should I say anniversary gift. By the way my leave is fixed for the 13th subject to operational requirements, which means that I should be safe in telling you to fix your holiday for that date, & whilst I appreciate your efforts to plan a perfect holiday, don't make it too full will you? I want to be able to have you to myself some of the time [...]

Well darling, it's nearly eleven now, and we have air co-op at midnight, so I know you'll let me make my bed now, & get prepared for further activity, so Goodnight my love, & God be with you until we meet again, [...]

Yours always Bill.

P.S. Air co-op has been cancelled.

The Camp

S. Carlton

July 2/42

My wonderful one,

Tonight I feel depressed, and I blame it entirely on the situation in Egypt at the moment, in fact, if we go on losing as we have been, my tail will be very much down. I guess we shall have to open up a new front soon, and then I bet we get all the fighting we want, which though does not help my depression one little bit.

Enough of such miserable thoughts [...]

You remember I told you about the Brigadier's visit to this site, well, he apparently toured the whole Battery on that day, and gave the actual Battery an excellent report, and out of that he chose our Troop as the best, and whom do you think ran the best site? Well, I can tell you I was pleased when they said I had been especially mentioned in the report, and that the spirit of my men was exceptional, so you see, my rather eccentric methods are definitely proved by this. As a result of this report, I was visited by the Fuehrer yesterday, who told me all about it, and he came out especially to see what had pleased him so, and believe it or not, but I know I detected just a bit of jealousy about his demeanour, although you will say I imagined it. Anyhow, he had not one single complaint, the first time he's ever visited and gone away without having a moan however small, so I must be good, although I can take a nasty fall from such a

height if my luck doesn't hold, so I won't crow too much.

The 6/- you sent for my wire netting was indeed welcome, but since it is unobtainable now, I think I should have asked at least 10/- for it even though we had no use for it, however, it will certainly push me through a "rough patch", and I appreciate your thought in sending it. Our capital seems to be creeping up all right, but I don't know why we say "our" capital, its all yours, & we shouldn't have a penny were it left to me, so darling, I salute you as a real little wonder worker, & I'll try very hard to make it up to you when this horrible affair is over. By the way, have you had any luck with books or courses for my new business yet? I don't seem to make much progress this end, and the Army do not run such correspondence courses I fear, so I cannot follow it up unless you can meet with more success. Anyway we will discuss this at length when I come home.

Now our site has come back into the limelight both operationally & otherwise, I have a pretty hectic time, and a detachment of seventeen men, in fact I'm almost a young officer, and old "Flash" yesterday said I must have a second in command, he said they were relying entirely on me at present, which after all is very foolish, for if I should crock up or anything, they'd be sunk, so I guess I'll get my assistant at last. I come in for a fair share of knocks from the other D.C.'s now, about having so many men etc. etc., but I just let it ride as a rule, & go on jogging along.

We painted, or rather I painted our little model aircraft today, & it looks a perfect replica of the original, & I am really proud of it. I think it should win the first place, although I guess there's bound to be a lot of keen competition, anyway Tiny & myself treasure it so much that we made a special box for it to travel in, so that it will come to no harm, so keep your fingers crossed for Sunday, the judging day, & incidentally our Annual Battery Sports Meeting, so perhaps you'll spare a thought for us on that afternoon will you? and I'll give a detailed account on Monday, so that you know exactly what happened.

The two WAAFS with whom I was so friendly have now moved back to their 'drome, and before they went they gave me another lot of coffee, a tin of red salmon, and a tin of Pineapple, the latter I think I'll save & bring home to you, for I'm sure you'd enjoy such a luxury wouldn't you? and if the salmon is of any use, I'll bring that home too, what do you say?

Well my darling, I guess I'll close down now, but I'll write again tomorrow, so keep your lovely chin up my sweet, we'll soon be together again, and remember always that I love you alone,

Your Bill.

The Camp

S. Carlton

6/7/42

My darling Ann,

By now you will no doubt be severely reproaching me for not having written these past few days, and I am extremely sorry that it had to be, for what with shifting equipment, Drills etc., I have really had my hands tied, so that even my afternoon off was spent working, a fact I strongly resent, but could do nothing about. Anyway it is now Monday, and I have time to tell you all that has happened from then onwards. Friday, the outstanding event was my visit to the dentist, who excels Mr. Hudson for painless extraction, it is absolutely astounding, & except for a slight Ache in the evening I suffered no ill effect, & was actually chewing army biscuits on the gum the next day, & a cleaner job there never was. That same evening after I got back, we were visited by our Training Officer, & I had to get all the boys out to go through our special Drill, but we passed muster, and were later on called out for the usual air co-op, which ended rather earlier than usual, and we were all safely in bed by ten thirty.

Saturday we got up late, and being official half day, very little was done except for the essential maintenance of course. I allowed all the boys to pack up early and get away to Lincoln on the two oclock bus, but had to remain myself to compile various records, & make amendments to standing instructions etc. etc., things which really were imperative & important, and by the time I had waded

through this, it was almost supper time, & I was so tired that I went straight to bed, firmly intending to write you on Sunday evening when we got back from the Sports meeting, but that was not to be, I'll tell you why as you read on.

First of all, the day was gloriously hot, and the actual sports meeting an unqualified success. We commenced with a ceremonial Parade and Inspection by the Fuehrer, after which he made a pretty speech, & the rest of the day was ours. We then had dinner, consisting of sandwiches, & a mug of tea was provided. At two, the sport started, and there certainly were some very exciting races, & I am surprised at the number of really good athletes there are among us. I was entered for throwing the cricket ball, but could not equal some of the perfectly marvellous throws of some of the better men. I was also in our troop Tug of war team, & had we won the toss, we should have won easily, for we started off by pulling on the wrong side of the rope where the ground was slippery, & lost, then we changed ends, & won, making a draw, then because we had to go back to the bad end, & although we tried hard & fought for it, we lost & were knocked out of the contest. There were one or two very amusing competitions including, an unique obstacle race, & the usual three legged race, in which the A.T.S. figured largely, I must say it was extremely enjoyable, & was a very pleasant break from the monotony of site life, & by the time the prizes were given, everyone was well worked up, and very enthusiastic. Our model JU 87B dive bomber won second prize, & we got 7/6d ~~for~~ which I had to go up, & collect it from a lady who had consented to give the prizes. Needless to say, Tiny & myself were highly delighted, & felt that our efforts were not in vain.

After the prize giving, everyone was served with high tea, consisting of "Spam", cheese, green salad with radishes & onions, & pork pies, a pint of beer, & as much tea as we could drink, a diet you will agree must have been calculated to harden off the tenderest digestion. Following this, we should have been taken back to sites, but the Officers extended an invitation to all Sergeants which said you will attend a party in the Officer's Mess at B.H.Q. & arrangements will be made to ensure your safe return in time for air co-op. Well, I shall never forget it, it cost nothing thank goodness, but the liquor which flowed was enough to sink a Battleship. I, myself, drank $\frac{3}{4}$ of a bottle of whiskey, & then I fear lost all sense of proportion, & could barely exercise my usual control of mind in such circumstances. I remember very little of the journey back, except

that all were as drunk as myself, & when, at last, I was dumped back here at midnight, I was pretty helpless, but damned noisy. To make matters worse, we got Take Post for air co-op, & my poor old number six had to try to do my job as well as his own, I having settled myself down under a tree & gone to sleep. I had lain there in this semi conscious condition for about two hours I think, when I suddenly remembered I was No. 1 and heard lots of shouting amongst the boys, who really were hopelessly lost without me, so I got up, was violently sick, & had a go at leading them, but they grabbed me & tried to put me to bed, and it took two of them all their time to get me to my hut, & when they left me there, I got up again & went out for another hour & half with them, during which time the haze cleared a bit. I was sick several times after that, but I managed to collect my wits enough to convince them I was capable of doing my job, though I fear most of it was done as I sat on the grass. We got stand easy at four oclock, & I couldn't make my bed even then, so I just rolled myself up in my blankets & went straight off to sleep, awakening early this morning with the dirtiest hangover a man ever had. It took me all the morning & numerous cups of tea & aspirins, to recover, until now, at nine oclock in the evening, I begin to feel more myself again, & wondering if it is worth it. I know I shall never forget it anyway, & I bet I'm not alone either.

We had a nice lunch today, which I was able to keep down, new potatoes, which we grew ourselves, greens, & roast mutton, followed with stewed gooseberries & custard, this did much to bring me back to normal, & tonight at supper, I was absolutely famished, & ate two whole lettuce & a lot of cheese, so that I believe my tummy must be right again.

Well, now darling, I hope you won't be disgusted at my orgy, it was a "stag" party, & after all, one rarely gets the chance to see inside the officer's mess, so I'm not really sorry I went, because it's a better place than the Sergeant's Mess.

And now, my angel, I'm filled with other happy thoughts, namely, seven days of heaven, for my name is definitely on the leave list for the 13th which means that exactly a week from today I shall be able to hold you in my arms, [...]

And now my love I'm going to end, I want to listen to Sandy {*on the*

wireless}, for I know you'll be listening too, & it's just possible he may have a tune for me, which would make me very very happy [...] Goodnight [...]

Your Bill

The camp,

S. Carlton

8/7/42

Dearest Love,

Wednesday, that means just four more days to wait until I can know again the thrill of holding you in my arms, [...]

I see you have made a few "dates" for that week, but if the weather is as nice as we hope it will be, we should have a perfectly wonderful time. You haven't yet told me if Catherine's husband is a sergeant, an officer, or a mere Private, so I shall not know how to treat him unless you give me this information, what about it sweet?

I noted with favour your approval of my success as a D.C. especially as my encounter with the Brigadier, and today Mr. Bunce visited whilst I was away, & apparently told the boys that this was his best site & the most reliable set of fellows, that is the real reason why we're left on our own as much I guess. However, this state of affairs suits me, & as it also suits the lads, we shall work to uphold this standard. Actually, at this period, I am the most notorious sergeant in the Battery, for being a Gas Instructor I have become known by all, & then the Brigadier's visit was given plenty of publicity & I benefited so that the officers sat up & said who is this Furlong? and now, as a result of my recent course, I have been made assistant to the Captain, & we have to put the whole Battery in order for Camouflage, which is no small task, & I have to have plans & scale models made of every site in the Bty Area showing what it should look like, by the 14th of this month, heaven knows how I can do it, for so far no attempt has been

made to even think about it by my assistant Captain, so it looks as if it will hang fire until I've had my leave.

Well, well that's one drawback with being too good, but it has its advantages I guess, because I am looked up to by everyone now, & the officers have faith in me if I'm detailed to deal with something, although there are still lots of weak spots in my defence which will have to be adjusted before the end of the month, (another field check). However, I've given up meeting trouble half way, & it will do for? me to worry about it when the time comes, in the meantime I can only do my best, which at the moment is better than anyone else can do, so I should be satisfied, but I'm convinced that the success of an N.C.O. depends entirely on his men, & if they like him, well, he's made, & I owe my progress mainly to this detachment of men. I would love to know that promotion from this stage was as accessible as my present rank was, but that all depends on time I guess. Anyway, I know we shall not be in England for the duration, & when we do get abroad my progress should be quicker.

I bet you think I'm awfully swell headed, well, perhaps I am, but if I know, or think I'm good, the resulting confidence in myself makes me really so, & I can push on, so you see there's a method in my madness.

And now you have all the news such as it was, so for tonight darling, I must say goodnight, [...] Yours alone always, Bill.

CHAPTER SIX

The Camp,

S. Carlton

July 20th

Dearest Love,

I'm trying to smile, but honestly darling, every time I think of you, or look at your ever so real picture, I feel I could cry, and I really believe I should if I were alone, but fortunately I have been presented with an assistant during my absence, who is now sharing my hut with me, so I cannot give vent to my real feelings. To add to my woes, there is a field check tomorrow, it seems to me that I can never manage to miss one, but I'm not a bit worried about it this time, I don't care much at the moment you see.

My journey back was very dull & tiring, the train was absolutely packed, & I had to stand part of the way, & the rest I spent sitting on my suitcase in the guards van, but I managed to snatch a few winks, & arrived at Lincoln fairly fresh.

And now, it's bedtime, air co-op is off, so I shall be able to rest tonight (If I sleep). I know I shall be tormented with thoughts of my last night at home with you, and wishing and longing to have you with me. It was a really wonderful week, and despite my few grumbles, I wouldn't have had it any other way, because I enjoyed each individual outing as it came along [...]

Now darling, it is late, I have been busy picking up threads so that I can make a good show tomorrow, and the time has simply flown, so I'll work away another month in the same manner until before we realise it we shall be together again, and with this promise I'll say goodnight for today, but I'll write again tomorrow my darling. [...]

please forgive me if I left a lot of mess for you to clear up, I wish I could help you, but that cannot be, so I'll just thank you, straightening my shirts etc., & re-hanging my trousers, & you know every thought is a loving one,

Yours only for ever, Bill

The Camp,

S. Carlton

21/7/42

Darling Ann,

The field check is over, and it looks as though we shall be free from any great worries until next week now, when the really big check is due, and with any luck at all we shall escape that one altogether.

It has been a gloriously hot day today, a typical summers day, and apparently the first fine day they've had up here since I left seven days ago, so we know the weather is not general, & it's quite possible that you've had it wet all day. Anyway, my boy's spirits were at their best, & I feel sure we did pretty well on this small, but important check today, & we should get the results on Thursday.

At the moment, my hut fairly reeks with the pleasant odour of Dettol, I have dosed all my blankets with it, for my heat spots still itch, & having conversed with an ex patient at our hospital who was a Scabies case, I think I have the symptoms, and so I decided to simply drown myself in this very effective cure, & it's a good job I like the smell too, for it's hanging about long enough.

I am at the moment enjoying a cup of coffee which I have just made for myself, & it's rather nicer than usual, which must mean I'm getting better at the job, Anyway, it's nice to take a cup at bedtime, especially if I expect a call out, as tonight, for I feel much fresher when I waken.

We have had a pretty lazy day really, for apart from maintenance, I have allowed the lads to "muck" about until the check was over, & when it was over, we just sat about & discussed the various questions we had been asked, until teatime, which ended today's work so far as I was concerned.

I put my petrol lighter into order too, & it works every time now, so I shan't have to worry about matches any more, although I guess I'll smell of petrol a bit now, but so long as it's confined to my khaki, I don't suppose you'll worry will you?

Our successes here are still continuing, for today I read in Bty. Orders that we won fourth prize in the gardens competition, which gives us 5/- to spend on a football bladder, which is the most needed thing at the moment, don't you think we're good? I do, for we hadn't even tried to win a prize, just shows what it does to be in the limelight.

Although I have used my usual address, you had better write to Tuxford after this, & start reading between the lines in my letters from now on, remember our code? let me know when you reply to this, so that I can pass on what I want to, & send that one direct to me.

You will please to note that I have quickly settled down again, & now today is over I feel that I have actually benefited from my leave, & am able to carry on a lot longer, & I actually felt cheerful today, although I don't know why, perhaps it's because I have such a wonderful wife, & know how she loves me. I miss you terribly, but that is inevitable, so I have tried to adopt your policy of looking on the bright side, with fairly good results so far. [...]

Sandy McPherson has just come on the wireless, it must be eleven o'clock, & I can hear him plainly as I sit here writing, I know you will be listening, so I feel very close to you now, how I shall remember these moments when this awful war is over (Excuse my pen, it's misbehaving).

And now to rest for one hour, during which I shall be thinking of you as I listen to Sandy, then out at midnight until when?

Goodnight my Angel Ann, I shall be watching over you as you sleep, & if you see any beams in the sky, think of your own Bill.

{Note here that Bill suggests addressing all correspondence to Tuxford-he mentions a code}

Ollerton Road Camp

Tuxford

Newark

23/7/42

Darling Ann,

At the moment, I am suffering from a severe attack of that peculiar kind of Flu' & I feel pretty rotten, my neck is stiff, & I have a terribly sore throat, so that actually I'm not at all cheerful, especially as we have no cigarettes, & no possible way of getting any at least until tomorrow, & you know how I am without cigs.

Well, I must admit that's a pretty miserable opening for a letter, but spiritually I am all right, so you need not worry too much about me, & it's a good job I'm not depressed, or I should be a sorry sight. However, I am still cheered by memories of my recent leave, [...]

Such news as I have darling is indeed very scarce, I got my watch back today, & it was only 3/-, which included a new glass, & regulating, I think that was very reasonable don't you? but I have yet to see if it will keep good time, so will not be over pleased until it has proved itself.

The weather here is certainly very unsettled, yesterday rained all day & was very cold, & today has been cloudy & raining with intermittent periods of sunshine, although on the whole I cannot say that it is real holiday weather, certainly not the kind to enjoy a stay, perhaps indefinitely at some such place as the destination of our other half of the Regt. But I guess it's pretty hot there, & I know there's a fair amount of fun if one could call it that. There is just one thing wrong with it so far as I know, 48 hours are non existent, & one has to be content with longer, but less frequent visits home, & by the way I hope the significance of this is not lost on you?

Work goes as much the same as usual, but we are taking it out of our garden now, today, we had new potatoes, which have grown to enormous size, & peas, & tonight we had a stew made with our own carrots & onions, we are

certainly taking plenty out, so that whoever else succeeds us will not be very lucky. [...] although we always look busy to visitors, we haven't done much in the way of serious work this week.

I shall probably send my suitcase home by rail in a day or two, with several odd items of kit which I don't want to lose, so keep a close look out although I'll try to give you warning when I'm sending it, & I guess it will take a fair while to get there too.

I guess this letter must seem awfully disjointed to you, but I hope you are able to make sense of it, & don't forget my advice about the way to read it in my previous letter, because in these days one never knows into whose hands they may fall,³¹ so you understand the shortness & absence of real news, because there are so many things I cannot write, so be wise darling & use imagination until we settle our own way.

And now I fear it must be goodnight, in a little over an hour we are due for air co-op, & as I don't feel too fit, I guess I should get a little rest beforehand, so until tomorrow my love, [...] Bill

Tuxford

25/7/42

My Darling,

Life is very trying for me at present, I'm suffering from Tonsillitis, and will have to go sick tomorrow. It's a very painful complaint and makes one feel weak & generally rotten, I never dreamed I could get such a complaint. However, I guess I must have been careless somehow, & this is the result. It would have to happen this week, because I am offered the job of acting Troop Sergeant, and if I'm detained by the M.O. I shall lose the opportunity, a thing I'd hate, because it's a chance I never expected, and I know I could do it, so I'm hoping my thrice

³¹This refers to Bill's mention of a code

daily gargle with Dettol will meet with approval, and I'm allowed to go on working.

I see by your letter that you seem to have difficulty in reading between lines, well, after this one, try the first letter after every full stop, & see what you can find, although by now you should have arrived at a solution.

The question of mail and addresses arises again now, remember I told you to start using the Tuxford address? Well, that's only good until about the middle of the week, and then you must stop writing altogether until you hear from me again, and I think it should be a new address, anyway, we'll see.

Actually there is tons of news, but I cannot disclose its nature, which rather leaves me at a loss for enough to make a decent letter, & I feel this especially over the weekends, because I like to write you long ones, but I guess you'll understand. [...]

I do feel rotten [...] but I intend to rouse myself enough to take a much needed bath [...] especially shall I need this if I am detained at hospital tomorrow, although I sincerely hope that will not be. By the way I have sent my suitcase home by rail today, with various odds & ends in it, you might have to sort out when it arrives, & you'll find several pairs of "civvie" socks which need darning, so I'll be very grateful if you'll see them right. The P.T. Vest, I put in because I wondered if you could use it for any kind of winter clothing, though if you do, I fear there is no way of obtaining another, they have stopped cash purchases now.

Reverting to our code, you'll find a word in each paragraph, and no more, and really you should have no difficulty in deciphering my love messages? How about a try out -----

I found out that my watch was not all it should have been after its long stay at the jewellers. As it was, however, I have since been able to play about with it a bit, and it now works reasonably well. Despite my efforts though, it still gains a little, and I have to alter it daily. [...]

You are now wondering what you will read next I suppose. Of course you have every reason to wonder because almost from the start of this letter, I have said I had nothing to write about, & yet I keep writing [...] did you decipher my

message? Here it is---I adore you

Well, darling that's about all for today I fear, [...] if you get a letter which starts off with beloved, you'll know you must read between the lines remember [...] Goodnight my darling Angel, Yours always, Bill.

Tuxford

27/7/42

Darling Ann,

I am writing from a place I never dreamed I should come to –Hospital. Apparently my suspicions about Tonsillitis were not ill founded, only it isn't exactly what I thought it was, instead I find I have a perforated ulcer in my throat, & they seem to take it very seriously here, and tell me I'm good for at least a week's stay, probably more, a prospect which does not exactly thrill me, for my treatment seems to consist of Cascara, Gargles, & painting my throat with some form of iodine, which is certainly doing good. It's very annoying that this should happen right when I had hopes of an early advancement in responsibility, but who knows? perhaps it's all for the best, & I may be spared lots of unknown setbacks.

I didn't sleep too well last night, which may have been due to the strange bed, but more likely due to the hardness of it, for despite the fact that this is a hospital, my bed at camp is definitely softer & far more comfortable than this one I now have. As for the hospital itself, it's a very nice place, with an extremely capable and solicitous staff, at whose hands I am receiving absolutely 100% treatment, and I know I could be no better cared for in "civvie" street.

Enough of my ailments [...] do my letters still puzzle you with their veiled allusions? Or have you arrived at a satisfactory solution to the problem, if you have, keep hold of them, because it will happen in just over a week I expect. How is Penny? still keeping you happy? I do hope so. [...] with all this time at my disposal, I still cannot find sufficient subject matter to make for an interesting

letter [...] at the moment I am dying from boredom, having already solved all the difficult Jigsaw puzzles, & read all the papers, there is nothing left to do except dismantle the wireless, which I'm going to do in sheer desperation soon, I can't do much harm because it doesn't work at the moment.

I do wish you were here, life would be so much sweeter, and I could certainly do with some love now especially to help me over my disappointment with the Troop Sergeant's job, but I guess I'll get over it myself. [...] Won't it be heavenly when this horrible war is over, and we may start afresh on our disturbed life [...] I read in the papers today how sixty thousand people clamoured for a second front at no matter what the sacrifice, and all of them civilians, how lovely it would be to gather them up & place them on a second front to do the dirty work themselves, I wonder how many would change their tune? quite a few I bet. [...]

And now I must close until later, goodbye darling, I love you,

Bill

Tuxford

28/7/42

Beloved,

Many weeks seem to have elapsed since last I saw you, and yet in reality it is little more than one week ago [...] Very little has happened since I wrote yesterday, except that I believe there was a big "ticking off" for the Battery yesterday owing to careless talk, but people should be more careful. [...] I want to scream, so far I have pieced together four Jigsaws, read two books, six newspapers, played solo? And won sixpence, written three letters, eaten six meals, shaved twice, gargled heaven knows how many times, and taken fourteen M&B tablets which contain Cascara, can you wonder I want to tear the place down.

Previous to coming in here, my throat was painfully sore, but now, after only two days treatment, all pain has gone, although the ulcer is still there. On the face of it, I seem to be perfectly well again, but the M.O. & nurse looked pretty grave this morning when they examined me, and judging from conversation, I rather gather I'm due for quite a stay yet. Something tells me that I shall go completely crazy if this lasts for more than a week, I am not used to such an inactive life, and this fact is proved because I can't sleep [...] we were inoculated again this morning, so I guess there'll be stiff arms before the day is out. [...]

There is little more of interest to relate about my hospital career for today, [...]

Feeling the effects of my inoculation already, it looks as if I'm in for a tough time again. Old soldiers never die though, and I'm sure I'll live to tell the tale [...]

Your own Bill

Tuxford

30/7/42

My darling,

Thank you very much for regular letters, they are stars in a dark world, for never have I been so heartily depressed, hospital life definitely does not agree with me. Actually I am getting well again so far as physical feeling goes, but my ulcer persists, and I'm to be detained at least until Sunday, a prospect which does not meet with my approval. [...]

I wrote to Mother yesterday, I know that will please you, how is she? and Edith. I'd be glad to know, I don't know when I shall see them again, [...] don't forget your letters come under the same scrutiny as mine do. I know all this secrecy, after our usual openness must puzzle you, but I assure you it is very necessary if we are to do our little bit towards the war. [...]

Remember I told you about my suggestion to the Navy about an anti submarine mine? you thought I was “pulling your leg” didn’t you? well, I enclose their reply just to prove how true it was, although I fear the result was disappointing as you will see. [...] my mighty brain is already at work on something else. By the way, will you keep the enclosed letter for me, I may need it for reference later.³²

Well now my angel wife, this letter was destined to be a short one owing to lack of news [...]

And now Au Revoir until later, Yours always, Bill

Tuxford

1/8/42

My Darling,

I’m still in hospital, although I have a feeling I may be out by Monday. My ulcer is almost cured, and I am now finished with M.B 693, which means I must be on the up grade. They are giving me a tonic three times daily, which is staining my teeth and tongue absolutely black, but that is no matter, I guess it’s making me fit again and I’m eating like a horse.

³²Unfortunately this letter from the Navy is no longer available

Your letters are arriving regularly [...] As for worrying about me, don't. For in spite of the depressing fact that I may not see you for months yet, (I shall get no sick leave), I am not going abroad, which should still give you lots of comfort [...] Does your horse riding cost such a lot? I wish you would go more often, even twice a month is better than your present scanty trips, would it help



if I sent 10/- {50p} a month to you? I want you to be happy you know, and I can spare it if you'd promise to use it for riding [...]

Up to now I have read 6 good books since being in here, the authors are H. de Vere Stackpool, two very intriguing tales, Eden Philpotts, & two of P.G. Wodehouse screamingly funny. Jigsaws no longer console me [...]

I seem to have suffered a good deal from headaches since being here, one every day [...] I've managed to get at least 3 days rest out of the seven I've been confined, and it must have done some good, although my legs are wobbly & my head dizzy when I get out of bed. [...]

There isn't much exciting goes on in a military hospital, we had a bit of a rush two nights ago when a lorry overturned with men in it, only one was detained [...] Two more came in last night, both inoculation cases, poor devils had had a march of 15 miles in hot sunshine with full kit on top of inoculation,

& there were two who fell by the wayside, but it's surprising what a bath and a good night's rest has done for them, & I guess they'll be hard at it again in a couple of days' time.

One thing is fortunate, we have a wireless now, I told you I was going to take the old one to pieces the first or second day I was here, well, I did, but obtained no result because there were burnt out condensers, but they brought a new one here that same day, and relieved out monotony.

And that's about all for today I fear, [...]

I adore you always, Your Bill for ever

P.S. All the nurses here are middle-aged, but very nice, have no fear. And blanket baths are definitely out, although I think an enema is more embarrassing don't you? I saw my pal get one yesterday.

Ollerton Road Camp

Tuxford

2/8/42

My darling,

I'm writing from the sergeant's Mess, having been discharged from hospital this morning, and now awaiting transport back to my own site. You'll be glad to hear that I'm fit and well again, that is, except for the usual feeling of weakness which always accompanies the first few hours out of bed. Somehow I feel terribly depressed at leaving now, I had just got to know everyone, & was settling nicely down to hospital routine, thus reaping untold benefit from my enforced rest, however, I have been pronounced cured, & made my exit at ten o'clock this morning, since when I have kicked my heels about awaiting to get out of here.

It is now three in the afternoon, and simply pouring with rain. I spent the

morning reading all the papers & drinking with well wishers. I lunched here, after which I joined in a game of skittles, & then followed the example of the other members of the mess, settled down for a nap with my feet up on a chair. For an hour I have dozed pleasantly and then, awakening, I sought a cup of tea, and found two, after which, it seemed as I am destined to spend the rest of the day here, thus stealing my letter writing period from me, so here I am now, alone at last, in the mess, my peace broken only by the wireless quietly playing, & the bouncing of the table tennis ball in the next room where two of my friends are engaged in a duel to the death.

I think I'm lucky, I shall still be able to "click" the Troop Sergeant's job for a few days on my return, as events which should have occurred last week have been postponed until this week so, all being well, my opportunity will not be lost after all, unless they think I shall be too run down to do it, however, you'll know all about that in my next letter, which should be written from Troop H.Q., we'll see.

With regards to various other exciting and disturbing things are now happening to us, do not write any more to me after you receive this letter, until I write you to let you know my new address, you have been warned.

I do hope your weather at home is better than this, for if you had decided to spend the weekend somewhere with Katherine, I fear it has been well & truly spoiled, so I am hoping it isn't general, after all, we do seem to get more bad weather here than you at home. I shall be interested to know what you did, & with whom, & your weather, so pass it on darling, I'm dying to know. [...]

What do you think of the war situation in Russia now? the more I study it, the more depressed I become, until now, I am most unhappy, for I know it will affect us surely & horribly soon. I wish I had been content & blissfully ignorant, I was much happier that way, but there it is, I realise now what makes you worry at times, and you have all my sympathy. One thing stands out a mile, and that is when we have cleared this mess up, it must never happen again, we cannot afford such huge sacrifices in humanity, prestige, and ideals, and as I think on these things, I am filled with a longing to get at Jerry, & have done with it, I am at last fighting for a definite cause, I'm fighting for freedom in it's true sense, a sense in which I had failed to regard it until now, so I say, let the war go on until

we are ready to strike, and when that time comes, as come it must, I for one, will be ready to send my aggressor to the hell he came from.

Well, that's how I feel, after two years of suspended animation (as I prefer it) and it's an unpleasant thought to me as I reflect that civilization as we know it, can so easily be discarded, reducing men to little more than savages again, my only consolation being in the thought that it will not last long enough to completely bury the fine culture we once knew.

Enough of my outbursts, but you see how I really feel now [...] I would have no compunction in killing an enemy [...]

The radio is now playing "Indian Summer", that lovely lilting tune, so very like summer, bringing back to memory vivid pictures of walks beside the river with you, watching the sunlight as it's light reflects from the ripples, the happy laughter and splashes of children [...] listen to the bird songs, & a walk in the garden with you beside me, admiring the beauty of nature in the form of lovely flowers. [...] one last glimpse at the peaceful village {*Waterford*}, with its little church, as it lies snug in the valley, surrounded as it were in its blanket of pine trees, calmly awaiting the night with its fragrant beauty, bringing dreams of an equally happy day to come. [...]

And now I shall end darling, it is four o'clock, & my utility has arrived, so until later, [...] Your Bill always

{Typed letter dated Sunday -date unknown}

Dearest Love,

I am just going out for a change, but I had to take this chance of saying I love you, so here goes, I love you, and last night I had the time of my life trying to get my bed made, but after about a quarter of an hour I managed it with the help of John, and slept very well indeed, so I shall not mind it so much tonight, I am going for a walk now, and I might drop in for a drink somewhere, but I doubt this, because I shall be on my own, but I guess I shall enjoy it in a quiet

way, and must have a break sometimes, as I think you will agree. So now my sweetheart, I am going to say Goodnight, and God Bless You, I love you always,

Your Bill

Tuesday 4/8/42

{Letter with no address, but obviously Bill is returning to S. Carlton after compassionate leave}

Darling,

You'll be glad to know I'm safely back, and the only trouble I had was getting my ticket at Hertford, in fact, if it hadn't been for my compassionate leave, I couldn't have got one at all, the clerk said they'd had orders to examine all passes, so I guess I was very lucky.

I caught a fast train up, first stop Grantham, & then straight to Lincoln no stops, arriving there dead to schedule, but I know you'll be pleased when I tell you I had tea cakes in London, Grantham, & Lincoln, so I wasn't a bit hungry, & what's more, I had a seat all the way, so it pays to travel late.

My legs still ache like anything after my forced march & I'm very tired (it's midnight & I've been packing) so I know you'll excuse the length of this note, but I think more than ever now, that it was worth it, for to get proof from your own lips & body that you love me, is something I would go to the ends of the earth for.

I must confess to feeling very like crying on my way back, & as the miles went by, so did my spirits sink, until now, with the knowledge of the next two days of hell, I am at the very edge of depression, although I cannot fall in, because of my glorious 12 hours with you, lovely memories, coupled with humour, & they'll pull me through.

We've got to get up early in the morning, & so my sweet, I'll have to skip any more details until very much later, & as this is the last letter I shall be able to send for at least two days, I'll say again I love you, I thank God for you, for after this hectic 48 hours I have just one thought, I know no doubt about Him?, all my prayers have been answered, & I have faith & proof, as I cannot be shaken again.

Goodnight my dear [...] Please keep smiling bravely, [...]

Your Bill always & for ever.



Bill moves to the Isle of Wight

A.A. Militia camp

Northwood

Nr. Cowes

I.O.W

Saturday 8/8/42

Darling Ann,

I guess by the time you actually receive this letter you will have begun to think I have forgotten you, but in actual fact this is the first opportunity I've had since my arrival here, so I hope you won't be too harsh in your judgement of me when you answer.

My first question is about you, are you quite well & happy now? I do hope so [...]

I don't know whether you will detect a change in my manner of writing, but I'm having to exercise a great deal of caution & thought as I write, you see, all mail is censored here, and I am restricted for subject matter until I become accustomed to this style of correspondence. You will readily appreciate, I hope, that such things as weather, surroundings, conditions generally, and location, are entirely forbidden, and even if I wrote about them, they would never reach you, & I might incur the wrath of the powers that be, and so it looks as though my letters will become even stricter, and certainly news will be almost non-existent, so that for the most part I shall be restricted to asking questions. I understand that even kisses are banned at the end of letters because they may contain some mysterious code (I can't imagine how) and anyway, I shall put my usual supply at the end, & you must tell me if they were crossed out. *{they were not-MF}*. In short there are a hundred and one restrictions, and thousands of rumours, so that if I listened to, & believed everything I heard, I would not dare to write at all.

Well having unburdened myself this far, I will proceed to puzzle out some harmless but interesting news (if I can) [...] on the subject of my well being, I'll

drop a hint, it's about cigarettes, our supply is not so good, which is as I expected, so would you see what you can do for me darling, I would appreciate it. Also, would you send on my blue bathing trunks, complete with belt which is kicking about home somewhere [...]

And that, darling is about all for now, but at least you know I'm alive & well, [...] Yours as always, Bill xxxxx

Militia Camp

Wednesday Aug 12

My Darling Ann,

Once again I'm writing from the interior of a hospital, I've been here three days now, having been brought here by my old enemy, indigestion. You probably remember me remarking about my tummy in my last letter, well, for three days after that I put up with the most awful pain which eventually drove me to seek medical advice, and here I am with Gastritis, which by the way, is rapidly disappearing, thanks to another good M.O. and the motherly care of V.A.D.'s who never seem to tire of making a fuss of their patients. [...] I expect to be discharged in a day or so. [...] I have made several friends... they may help us be together sooner or later, for I understand that it is possible for a soldier to have his wife with him, and once I get this matter clear, I'll let you have full details, and may be able to arrange your accommodation at the already mentioned friends. [...]

Well darling, in about three days time I shall be twenty eight, and like yourself, the prospect does not altogether please me, [...] Since being in bed, I have read through two Wide World magazines, and one novel by Sax Rodman? [...] actually there is very little choice of good authors, so I suppose I'll have to be content with a Murder for the next 24 hours, but at least it keeps my mind occupied. [...]

And now darling, it's time to close this very brief note [...]

Your own Bill always,

*Militia Camp**Northwood*15th Aug{*Bill's birthday*}

Darling Ann,

Your letter and parcel containing a cake arrived today, and as I see they were not posted until two days ago, it appears to me that I shall be kept considerably more up to date with news than you are likely to be. As for the rest of the mail you mention, namely cigarettes birthday card, etc., I have not yet seen them, although I understand there is another postal delivery later on. You mentioned not being able to find my belt belonging to my trunks, well, I distinctly remember seeing it when last home, on top of your wardrobe, a white one, I wonder if it's still there.

And now thank you darling a thousand times for the cake, you've no idea what that means to me, for, as you probably know, I'm still in hospital, and we rarely get supplies, in fact it has become quite a "lark" to save & secrete beneath newspapers, slices of bread & butter from tea in order to have something to eat with our nightly drink. You can imagine what a luxury it will be to eat a luxurious home made cake between us for two or three nights, although I rather expect to be discharged tomorrow, my tummy is now completely normal again, except for the inevitable and apparently incurable acidity.

Now to deal with as much of your letter as I am able. Firstly, I see you did notice the change of tone, but I didn't think it such a severe change as you say, however, you'll notice I think, that I am becoming gradually normal again, having got partly used to the idea of sharing my letters with other than you, although I shall never be quite the same. I see you observed that my first letter was not censored, that's because I used the official envelope which goes straight to London, & stands a good chance of not being read, but even that's not assured. Unfortunately, we only get one of these envelopes each week, and all other mail is first censored by our own officers, who, when finished, pass them on to

London for further censoring, thus, an ordinary letter will take about six days to reach you, and when writing, we have the unpleasant feeling of sharing confidences with our officers, who, although sworn to secrecy, & entirely impersonal, must nevertheless absorb some little bits at times, and this fact effectively cuts out another subject if we feel inclined to discuss them, namely officers. Now do you see why I was so reserved with my first letter, I hadn't then received my green envelope, & was therefore writing to you quite prepared for Mr. Bunce to read it, and you must admit it's not very nice to have officers you know reading ones mail. However, once a week, I shall promise you a really long and interesting letter, because I don't mind if it's censored in London, I shan't know or see the person who does it. And that, I think is a full explanation for you, & should suffice for as long as the war lasts, because conditions are exactly the same overseas.

Now for your questions, I see you ask some rather awkward ones, about accommodation etc., & all I can say there, is that the address is not exactly where I am, and as for accommodation, it most certainly is not a patch on what we left, in fact, conditions are awful, I can tell you fully when next we meet. As for weather, I distinctly remember saying I couldn't mention that, but I shouldn't think there's much harm in saying that it hasn't been too good. And beauty spots, well, I haven't had a chance yet to visit anywhere, having spent most of my time here in hospital, but I certainly do intend to relive some of the wonderful Blue Lagoon memories we made together here. [...] I never dreamed I would ever come here again alone, least of all under these conditions [...] As for my journey here, I didn't, at the time consider it wise to recount, suffice to say that it was extremely tiring, & conducted in true British Army style i.e. bound up in red tape, so that it took twice as long as it need have done, but on the whole, it was quite successful, & certainly uneventful from our viewpoint, & went off without a hitch.

I'm glad you've made some more jam, I love your home made products, and biscuits too, please save some for me, because I hope to get a 48 soon, I hear they are being revived again, & if this is true, I shall soon be able to hold you again, although I understand we shall be more restricted with regards to times, & will not be allowed to leave before the pass starts, & must be punctually back, however, I at least, am compensated by being nearer to you, & I don't think I

shall lose much.

With regard to your inquiries about people being allowed on the island, I have heard a rumour that if we can obtain a written permit from our O.C. so that you may produce it at the boats, you would be allowed to visit, also, I have heard it said that men have had their wives here without even that formality, but in the latter case it seems to depend on the authorities on duty at the time of travelling, & is a bit risky, but actually, it seems that soldiers wives are not discouraged from visiting, & it should be fairly easy to arrange if rumours are true. I shall of course make further inquiries & let you know in due course, because I too would love you to spend the rest of your holiday close to me, and I think I ought to be able to “wangle” a little time out to spend with you, because I still have my assistant with me.

Well my angel, this is certainly a nice long letter, quite my old self aren't I? but so far, I have no green envelope, & it's going to give the M.O. or Mr. Bunce (depending on whom I give it to) quite a headache to read through all this, especially as my writing leaves much to be desired, but perhaps by the time I am ready to post, Mr. Bunce will have turned up here at the hospital, with my wages I hope, & the necessary envelope to carry this speedily on its way to you.

So glad you eventually got your umbrella back, I was thinking of it two or three days back, & wondering, and thank you for giving Ted my new address, although I bet he'll wait for me to write first, but I may get a shock, who knows? After all, I'm convinced he has more time for writing than I do.

Last night a dance was held in the building over this, & I felt very sad [...] perhaps you were dancing on Friday, were you? If so, it will explain my sadness, for we couldn't help hearing the music & the happy boisterous laughter as we lie here, & all the time I was thinking of you [...] I'll bring my letter to a close, & on my twenty eighth birthday, spent in a military hospital, I will say goodnight my love, I adore you more each day, you are my whole life, & soon I pray, I shall be with you again.

God Bless you darling, & keep you safe for me.

I am yours alone & for all time, Bill

Militia Camp,

Northwood

Aug 18th Tuesday

{Typed Letter}

Darling Ann,

I guess you will be surprised to receive a typewritten letter from me after all this time, but I have temporarily moved since being discharged from hospital, and the fact that a typewriter is available has tempted me to try my skill again.

Firstly I must apologise most humbly for the scarcity of my letters these days, I have no real excuse other than sheer laziness, probably caused by lack of energy, I always seem to be tired these days, and the fact that we are only allowed one of the official green envelopes each week, so that all other letters we write cause our officers a hell of a lot of extra work. [...]

On my discharge from hospital, I received your beautifully long letter, the twenty page one, ³³and it was most refreshing to catch up on all the news, and this was accompanied by the birthday card, and the parcel containing my bathing trunks, so you will see that they did not get here in time for my birthday after all, (it was Sunday) [...] The cake, which I received whilst in hospital, was almost eaten the same night that it came, but the patients who shared it with me really appreciated it [...]

I see that you had another flag selling day, and apparently successful too, you certainly manage to keep very busy, [...] Fancy Mother's sisters paying a visit³⁴ they sure seem to be mending their ways, I wonder if they would have condescended to come if I had still been home? Remember it was I who really caused all the bother. I'd be glad if you will let me have a detailed report of this

³

³ Sadly this letter is missing

³

⁴These would have been Ellen Furlong's 4 spinster Hooper sisters, Edith, Kate, Maggie & Lottie who lived in Wembley.

visit, and your opinion of them, and if Mother was happy.

And that seems to be about the lot, [...]

I'm afraid that my typing has deteriorated over the last few months, but if I stay here for long (don't ask where) I shall try to get a lot of practice in with letters to my friends, and it's so much easier for the Censor to read. I can hear him chuckling.

Now I have exhausted all my news, such as it was [...]

Goodnight Darling, all my love,

Yours {signed by Bill and Mr Bunce acting as Censor}

Militia Camp

Northwood

August 19 Wednesday

My Darling,

Once more I'm in the writing mood, and I intend to try and give you a decent letter for a change. You know, of course, that I am out of hospital, but I'm still under the M.O., and visiting the Dentist too, there are several repair jobs to be done. Apart from that I am quite well, and most certainly happy, because I'm having a week or so at H.Q., which is considerably more comfortable than my own site, we have electricity, hot and cold water, and every modern convenience, including which we are only a few minutes from a most marvellous swimming place, so that I am at last able to swim daily. Mr. Bunce, after seeing my swimming, immediately entered me for the Regtl Sports which are to be held tomorrow, and, actually I'm not very keen, because you know I dislike competitive sports, however, as I'm the only entrant from this crowd, I shall have to try my hand to uphold our honour in the field, although I rather fear I have not had sufficient training to do a lot of good. [...] I am still trying to get

leave for the weekend 22nd but if it comes off I shall send a telegram so that your mysterious dates can be cancelled [...]

Another very happy subject is that of your proposed stay here, 5 days I think you said, well, I mentioned it to Mr. Bunce, and he says he will endeavour to get permission, & it should be fairly certain, so now all we wait for is your preferred dates, but I guess that will wait until I have been home when we can discuss fully the prospects [...]

What do you think of the raid on France? ³⁵I feared it might be the beginning of a Second front, & even now it might turn out that way. I dread that day, & as soon as I heard the news this morning my heart nearly stopped, & now I eagerly listen to the news as each bulletin is broadcast, it means so much to us I'm convinced, & I'm positive we should be in the thick of it almost immediately. Break here for supper, I eat all my meals in state now, sharing another sergeant's Bunk, and though it pains me to think we get more than the men, I'm bound to say we live extremely well & I like it, & after all, three stripes should carry privileges, & it is with this thought that I salve my conscience.

And now I must close darling, it is getting very late & we are bound to have a disturbed night, which fact compels us to go to bed early, in order to get much needed rest, so please excuse my sudden departure, [...] Bill

³⁵Operation Jubilee or the Dieppe Raid (19 August 1942) was an Allied amphibious attack on the German-occupied port of Dieppe in northern France, during the Second World War. Over 6,050 infantry, predominantly Canadian, supported by a regiment of tanks, were put ashore from a naval force operating under protection of Royal Air Force (RAF) fighters. The port was to be captured and held for a short period, to test the feasibility of a landing and to gather intelligence. After less than six hours, mounting casualties forced a retreat. The operation was a fiasco in which only one landing force achieved its objective and some intelligence was gathered.

*Militia Camp**Northwood*25th Aug. Tuesday

My Darling Ann,

Once again we are reduced to letter writing for comfort, but at least we have a few hours of heaven to look back on [...]

I am now back to my original detachment, and so far, quite happy, especially as the Farmer's daughters are now so kind & friendly towards us all, I had coffee at the house this morning, and they certainly are extremely hospitable.

I don't yet know if I shall try to fix your accommodation with them, because they seem to have quite a houseful, but at least they should be able to let me know where I shall meet with success, & by the next time I write, I hope to be on to something definite, [...] I dare not contemplate the possibility of a refusal to grant you permission to stay. Mr. Bunce told me today that the application must be made in writing, and that will be my very next task, so wish me luck darling.

You'll be glad to know I made a very quick journey back here on Monday, and the train from Hertford was the quickest I've ever known on that line, so that I had a full hour to spare in London, however, if one is to get a seat on the train, it is almost essential to be there that much in advance, and I was thus able to do my journey in comfort. Before I moved back here I had a swim, & spent the afternoon lazing in the sun, yes, it was actually a decent day, so that it very pleasantly broke me in to grim reality again.

This place seems to have become worse since I was last here, I'm referring now to the flies & wasps, & it's a real effort to eat one's food without being stung, in fact I had to eat my sweet at lunch time walking about & dodging them. Even now, I am surrounded by the pests, & though entirely alone, the air is full of their buzzing & droning, & I am continually waving the over curious away. I picked some mushrooms today, so that breakfast tomorrow should be interesting, they tell me that there are plenty in surrounding fields, so I shall get some more tomorrow morning, that is if I can get up early enough. I didn't seem

to enjoy my lunch much, the food, however well cooked, never seems to be palatable after I have been staying with you, & it's usually several days before I can settle down to army diet again, & I wouldn't be surprised if my poor old tummy doesn't start protesting before long. One thing about food though, we're getting tons of fruit, what with gifts of plums, and my boys "scrumping" for lovely apples, & rations of fruit, we're having all we can comfortably manage, & should certainly keep healthy enough.

I didn't sleep too well last night [...] a straw palliasse on the floor, is enough to keep anyone awake, but I guess I shall become accustomed again in time. These dark evenings are a pest aren't they? ³⁶I've allowed some of the lads out for the evening, but by the time they're dressed up to go, it's almost time for them to be back again, & after the long evenings of leisure they have experienced throughout the summer, I think they feel it quite a lot, so that they are rather miserable at times, but they'll get used to it again I know, after all this is the third year of war, & what we've managed once we can do again.

And now darling, all the news is gone [...] I shall write again very soon [...]

Au revoir , God bless you, Bill

P.S. Sorry I'm late couldn't post before Bill

³⁶ I assume he is referring to Double British Summer Time here-MF

Militia Camp

Northwood

Saturday August 29th

Dearest Love,

Since arriving back here from leave, I have only written once, this being mainly due to the fact that for a change I have been kept pretty busy with all sorts of odds and ends, However, now I seem to have finished at least for the time being, & since it's my afternoon off, I decided to give it up in order to catch up on all my mail.

This week I have received three lovely letters from you, one from Dorothy Fletcher, and a belated birthday present of cigarettes & stamps from Brother John & his wife, so it looks as if I have a full time job on my hands to catch up.

Firstly I propose to ease your mind regarding your holiday, and so far results are very encouraging. I inquired from the Farmer about accommodation, & he says he's certain he can get you fixed up at the neighbouring farm, which is about two fields away from here, & if we are successful, it will be fairly convenient to risk a night or two out, so I hope we shall be lucky. He cannot tell me for sure until Tuesday next, but that still gives us plenty of time. My application to the Colonel went in yesterday, & I should have about a week to wait [...]

I see by your last letter that you met Ron, & he doesn't sound very happy, however [...] I think his misfortune [...] is probably due to his own fault [...]

I've been swimming each day since my arrival back, & trained like anything for the Regtl sports to be held soon, & my latest achievement is a beautiful racing dive, thanks to the P.T. Staff Sergeant who came to watch us today, he was very helpful, & by the time he had finished, I was about perfect, so that I hope to make a fair show when I'm needed. I can do a pretty fast length now, & should stand a fair chance, so please wish me luck.

On Thursday last we had to go to the Regtl sports meeting, but it was a glorious day, & the sports were good, so that in spite of our protests at being

made to dress up for it, we enjoyed ourselves immensely, & met tons of old friends, including that worthy George Platt, who has now returned from the recent four months in hospital. Apparently his trouble was fluid under the knee, & had it been much more serious he might have managed his discharge, and judging by the way he spoke, I think he was rather counting on it, however, he wasn't very lucky, & is now assistant to my old pal Freddie Burgess, a state of affairs I don't think he very much likes.

Today I watched a very unpleasant task carried out, namely the shooting of the mother of our puppies, she was a nice old girl too, & I felt very sad when it was too late, but she killed chickens & had caused lots of trouble, so as soon as the puppies were old enough to fend for themselves, we had to get rid of her, & today we saw the fulfilment of this decision. We are keeping the only bitch of the litter, a dear little Brindled one, & she really is the prettiest of the bunch, [...] we shall periodically have litters to drown, but we shall try to keep her on the straight & narrow if possible, & avoid spoiling her by too much petting.

Interruption here while Mr. Bunce conducts his weekly inspection, & I have secured two men's leave for them [...]

The lads seem to have settled down well now, all this week I have allowed four each day to go out & help with harvest, & they have earned about £5 between them, which divided by eight makes a nice addition to their pocket money each weekend, & in addition to this, I know they're happier in the fields than messing about on site doing nothing extra special. Even this afternoon, when they should be off, they're hard at it, & I hope the farmer will pay them extra for this sacrifice of leisure, but he's a decent fellow, & should come up to scratch when actual payment comes off.

Well darling, I seem to be at the end of my letters so far as news is concerned [...] And now for a day or so I must say Au Revoir my darling [...]

Your Bill forever,

*Militia Camp**Northwood*September 1st. Tuesday

Darling Ann,

I hope by now you have received my second long letter since my return [...]

I received a note from you today written in pencil whilst you were at Streatham under the influence of drink, & my goodness your writing certainly was wobbly, I'll have to remember Martini when we are able to go out together again. [...] today we held our annual swimming sports, & believe it or not, we pulled it off at last, & won the cup. I was in two swimming teams, & got two prizes of cigarettes, not that I actually deserved them, but just that I happened to be chosen for the team, anyway, I'm ever so glad we were able to shine at last, because usually the old Battery is out of the running for sports, and it's quite refreshing to be top for once.

We have lost Mr. Bunce today, he left for good during the sports, & I had very little chance to talk to him, but he said Goodbye, & I'm very sorry to see him go, I shall miss him a lot, although our new officer is quite a decent fellow I know, because I have already met him, so the loss is not as bad as it could have been, and I hope he'll turn out as well as Mr. Bunce.

Now I suppose you want to know about your proposed holiday, well, everything is going on quite successfully, but negotiations seem to be painfully slow, & I now have a form to fill in & send away, which means you are not likely to get your certificate until the very last moment owing to delay in the postal system, although you need not worry unduly, because it's pretty certain to say that you will be allowed to come here, and I do hope you will manage to extract those extra days from Mr. Williams. From this you will gather that it is quite in order for you to go ahead with your arrangements, & you may rest assured that I shall send on everything you need just as soon as it is all fixed. The farmer here has been very helpful to me, & fixed, I hope, accommodation for you, & I

should get confirmation in the morning, which if at all favourable should be very nice for you, because the house is on the main road & looks very nice from outside.

I inquired about riding for you, and so far as I am able to ascertain, there are facilities here, namely a riding school fairly handy, & also some other person who might oblige, although so far, I fear I have nothing very definite to give you, & should I not be able to enlarge on this when I next write, you may please yourself about bringing your kit, I think, if you did bring it, you stand every chance of using it, so I leave it to you darling. Needless to say, I am looking forward tremendously to your stay here [...]

And now my darling, it's getting very late [...] God bless you

{signed by Bill and the new officer acting as censor}

P.S. Kisses are censored as you know, but I'll give you real ones soon.

Wednesday

Darling,

Since writing, I have not had an opportunity to post, & this afternoon I have definitely fixed your "digs", & found out that you will probably, in fact almost certainly be able to go riding if you wish, as you will be almost on top of the riding school, & although I forgot to ask the lady of the house if you may bring Penny *{the dog}* I think you could if you really wanted to, because she could stay here at the camp at nights, what do you think?

You should get along quite well with the people you will stay with, & they'd like to know if you prefer your meals alone, or if you care to eat with them, I ought to tell you there are only husband & wife & one child (which I didn't meet), so I leave it all to you. Au Revoir Darling.

{Signed by Bill & the officer-censored}

**The following letter was written by Caroline Dolphin Black, upon her
engagement to Ernest Cox (brother of Ann Furlong)**

{3 Ardoch Gardens}

Cambuslang,

Scotland

11.9.42

Dear Ann {sic}

I first of all, want to thank you and all the family for the lovely card which you sent Ernie & I, to congratulate us on our engagement. Ernie told me when he came off leave that he had not told anyone in the family of our coming engagement, so naturally, the card came as a great surprise to me. Even when Ernie saw the card, he could not believe that he had told you. I think he must have been trying to tease me, if so, he certainly succeeded.

Since our engagement we have been busy indeed, visiting friends etc. I really shall be glad when the excitement all over. The worst of it is, I receive all the congratulations from my friends to pass on to Ernie.

Although I live in a fair sized village, most people know me, so you can guess the hectic time I have had these past ten days, hence the reason I have not had time to reply to your card sooner.

Ernie has bought me the most beautiful ring. It is a three stone diamond ring, eighteen carat gold, set in platignum {sic}. The stones are set across. There is a band of platignum {sic} underneath the diamonds, which reflects the sparkle from them. It has a very high setting, it had to be as I have rather a large hand, & a small ring would not suit me. One lady remarked to me that I had better wear my gloves, otherwise my ring would be stopping the traffic. From this you will gather, just what a beautiful ring it is.

I'm afraid it is rather difficult writing to a person one has never met, although Ernie has often told me about you. He told me your husband was in the Army, & also Barbara's husband. You will feel much lonelier than I do at present, as you husband is not stationed near you. It is grand having Ernie stationed only three quarters of an hour's journey from my home. When Ernie is

not on bass *{sic}*, I can always go over & see him. When he was in Cambuslang, it was even better for us, as he was only five minutes walk from my home, or at the most, ?? minutes ride in a bus. I often wonder how I shall feel when he is posted from here.

Still Barbara has to be content with Air Mail & Air Graph letters, so I shall not have to grumble.³⁷ As for writing I don't know what I shall do with Ernie. You know yourself how often he writes home. His excuse is always, oh! I haven't anything of interest to tell mother & father. However, when he does go away, which I sincerely hope will not be for some time, he will soon learn to write letters regularly.

At the present moment, I am over at Ernie's site, & he is sitting here beside me waiting for me finishing this letter, so I had better go. Give my very kindest of regards to all at home & thank them once more for the lovely card.

Yours very sincerely,

Carrie (aged 18 years)

P.S. Love from Ernie to all, this includes me too.

³⁷ Air Graphs were a form of correspondence used during World War Two, where letters (messages) written on a printed form were microfilmed for transmission and delivered to the addressee as photographic prints in special airgraph envelopes.

*Militia Camp**Northwood**Monday Sept. 21st*

My own darling,

Back again to letter writing, but at least I have the memory of nine days and nights of leave to help keep me happy [...]

There was some unpleasant news awaiting me when I got back here just now, and here's what happened, I leave you to judge how lucky I am. On Saturday night, three of the boys were out late, & old Fuehrer called round, & the first person he wanted was me, what a good job I was on official leave, then he found out that three men were missing, as the rest of the gang were on air co-op, so of course that made him blow up, & the three poor devils who came in at nine thirty were on charge, & have been tried & remanded for C.O.'s orders, which is a serious affair. Not content with this capture, he called again at two o'clock in the morning, & his second in command followed soon after, & apparently our site was not the only one at fault, for a sergeant is up for the count, & will undoubtedly be stripped, and he only took an evening out, damned hard luck I think, but can you imagine my feelings when I heard all about it, I'm convinced I was born under a lucky star. My biggest concern now is, what will happen to the three unlucky boys from my site, they have a good story, but I don't know if the Colonel will swallow it, that remains to be seen, but at any rate, none of them have ever been convicted before, & they should not receive too heavy a penalty.

I had a speedy journey back, but it rained all the time, so that it was none too pleasant, & I didn't feel in the least inclined to stay out once I checked in from the boat, & I came straight here to find all the boys out to a cinema show at Troop, so I've settled down to write you now, as I must get on with my Heinkel after tea, or else it won't be finished in time. [...]

I expect I shall slip across to see Mrs. Guy? sometime tomorrow, just as a matter of courtesy at least, so I'll tell you all about them in my next letter [...]

I'm just wondering how I shall sleep tonight, it will seem so strange after nine or ten days on a comfortable bed & you in my arms, I'm sure it will take days to get used to again, especially as I have just caught a nice large flea jumping about near my bed. I think I shall use the powder you bought for the puppy, it seems to be the only thing left that will keep them at bay. Ah! Well, the war can't last for ever anyway, & even if it does, we shan't, so why worry.

Actually, I have about finished all my news, & such as it was, was very depressing don't you think? [...] I'm going to say cheerio

You may be amused to know that as I changed into my working clothes, there was a strong smell of Rendells³⁸ everywhere, I really must have a wash down tonight. And now I really will close down [...] I adore you



Your Bill only

³⁸Probably Rendells pessaries, used for family planning

Militia Camp

Northwood

Wednesday Sept. 23

My own darling,

I think I promised to write you at least two letters this week, & so far it looks as though you may even get more, that is providing I can find enough news to make them up. [...]

You will be glad I know, when I tell you that I am settling down to normal routine far easier than I thought I should, but mainly I think because there is so much to be done now on our new quarters, & that most certainly keeps my mind well occupied, and on top of ordinary work, I have the task of getting our site back into favour after the weekend affair. By the way the punishment they got was far easier than I expected, namely seven days pay stopped, & although they think they're hard done by, I still say they have a lot to be thankful for.

Unfortunately their tails are down, & I have to cope with resentment now as well as boredom [...]

I had a long chat with Mr. Bunce yesterday, & he tells me that the sergeant who was charged, lost one stripe, & was lucky to avoid a court martial, because it was not his first offence. I remarked to him how lucky I had been, & he only realised it as I mentioned it, & was so relieved we both had a good hearty laugh at my narrow escape, & thanked the powers that are, for my 48 last weekend, or I would surely be a Gunner by now. Speaking of ranks, I see George Platt has at last achieved his third stripe, so I gather he must have altered his tactics quite a lot since the Carlton days, & a good job too, because I honestly expected him to be taken down rather than promoted, so here's wishing him luck. My little "Brindle" has a very large tail now, & I am told that a Vet may perform the operation even now, so I think I shall take the plunge before it really is too late, [...] I gave him a thorough dose of the powder today, ³⁹& it sure does knock 'em cold, so I guess we have at last found the means of keeping them down. By the way, I've forgotten where you bought that powder, would you mind telling me

³⁹I assume this is flea powder

again where I may procure more.

I have seen Ruth, & paid for your Varnish, it was only 11 ½ d {5p} to which I had to add the price of my tooth powder [...]

This evening early, I spent a half hour or so hunting out my winter woollies, pullovers, etc., for it has become bitter cold since my arrival back here, & in a day or so now, I feel I must start wearing them, so the winter is nearer than we realise I'm sure, & I don't particularly relish the thought.

So far, I have received no news of you, but then I guess you haven't had my letters either, [...] And now goodnight again, but I shall dream of you my angel, I love you.

Yours always, Bill

Militia Camp

Northwood

26th Sept. (Saturday)

My Darling,

Since last writing to you I have received two letters both of which were more than welcome for several things have happened recently to make me feel depressed, not really serious things, but you know what our conditions are, & it doesn't take much to upset me.

Firstly, I had another medical on Wednesday, with a view to upgrading to A1., & for the first time in the army, they tested my "pressure" properly, which resulted in the knowledge that I was upgraded last time & should not have been, & since the M.O. cannot himself put me back to B.1. where I properly belong, I have to go before a medical Board in the near future just because the last M.O. was careless, & I may get graded even lower than before, a really awful thought.

To add to this, I got a couple of inoculations, which made me really ill, so that I am only just recovering, & that made me so low that I have contracted an awful cold. Imagine my feelings therefore, when despite these ailments I still did “guards” because three others had been inoculated at the same time, to find that I was “run down” behind my back for making a fuss just because I did an occasional guard. This was said because a certain person, the evil Clewley?, that is the red faced one who looks like Satan, had received a ticking off from me for staying in bed after he had been called. Naturally, I called the whole gang together, gave them my candid opinion of the lot of them, & now do no guards, & in addition, I’m having the offensive one moved. Well now, you can see why I was depressed can’t you? But fortunately these things cannot last for ever, & already I’m feeling better, so that in a day or so, everything will be normal again I hope.

In your Wednesday's letter I noted with sadness your remarks on the “harvest moon”, yes, I too saw it at its best whilst on guard, & Thursday night, a most peculiar night really, because it was so showery & stormy, I saw two simply marvellous Lunar Rainbows, perfect as one seen in daytime, so that despite the cold, my inoculation & chattering teeth, I enjoyed it [...]

I see Mr Guy ⁴⁰ each morning, & chat with him as a rule, he told me of your letter yesterday, & seemed quite delighted to think you remembered them. As for myself, I fear I have not yet revisited them, mainly because I dare hardly leave the site after the awful row last week, but all being well, I should find it easy to do tomorrow (Sunday) afternoon, & if I’m invited to tea I shall stay.

My cigarette problem is partly solved, but I must be honest with you this time, & tell you that I haven't dropped below seventeen in a day, which is just about half normal figures, however, before long I guess I can adjust still further [...] the whiskers begin to look untidy, but only an interview with the Colonel will make me trim it now, although I simply must control it at the ends somehow ⁴¹[...] would you mind if I brought both gloves & coupons with me when I’m next on leave, or risk sending a coupon book through the post? It depends on whether you will require it before then I guess-----

⁴⁰The family name of Guy was common in the island

⁴¹Presumably his moustache

Sunday

It's been very quiet today, but the weather has been kinder, so that we were tempted to go swimming, but we found the water horribly cold [...] it was pleasant in the sunshine, & combined with a run, on which Brindle insisted on accompanying me, I think it has restored me to almost normal again.

Little Brindle has been very good today, & is shaping well to my words of command. She now knows what I mean by "sit down" & "stay there", & she dare not stir until I almost implore her to follow me, We gave her a little swim, & she didn't shiver a bit, so I guess it did her no harm, & now I have just de-flea'd her again, so that she's a really sweet little girl. The Vet is going to call one day next week, with a view to removing the offending tail, so I guess I'll have a bill to foot 'ere long, but she'd worth it.

George gave me another haircut today, & this time he has almost cut it too short, but at least it will last a bit longer than usual [...] I washed it afterwards in a Drene shampoo which the cook had by him, so now I look really military.

And that's about all for today my love, [...] Goodnight my darling

P.S. {*written down the side*} If you really love me, help me to buy a portable radio, or suggest a way. I think I can raise £5 towards it-Bill

*Militia Camp**Northwood**Thursday, Oct. 1st**Slightly water damaged letter*

My Darling,

This letter is being started at the absurd hour of six thirty in the morning, but I very much doubt if it will get finished until sometime later in the day. You probably wonder how on earth I could get out of my bed at such a time, but I assure you it was not a question of choice, and so, after an hour or so of guard, here I am with a half hour to spare before Reveille. [...]

We've had quite a few visits from the Fuehrer this week, and he seems to be slowly but surely shedding his summer behaviour, and reverting to his more normal bullying, bad tempered self, so that his last two visits have been fault finding ones. However, I am compelled to admit he doesn't bother me much these days, and however much he rants, I quickly forget.

And now for some really nice news, at least I hope it won't upset any other "dates" you have, here it is, seven days leave commencing October the thirteenth, which is exactly three months to the date from my last one, [...] there is a new Disney production showing at the New Gallery called "Bambi", and I am determined to see it, what about it? [...]

Well darling, the time has crept on, and it's seven thirty, which means time to awaken my "rebels", I always give them a half hour these days [...]

Actually there is little else of interest to relate, except perhaps a moan about camping at this time of the year, you know, mud, wet socks and cold feet, but that will soon

be ended I hope, & we shall be in comparative comfort once more. I'm wondering now, if we shall eventually have electricity, or whether the fuel rationing stunt will prevent such a luxury, we shall see.

And now I shall end for today, and as this letter will be Regimentally censored, you'll not find the usual kisses at the end [..] Goodbye my love

Yours always {*signed by Bill & K. O. Bunce*}

Militia Camp

Northwood

Tuesday. Oct. 3rd

Darling,



Thanks a lot for the typewritten letter just received, I agree with you that the postal services do seem to be speeding up, and it's certainly about time too.

You'll be pleased, no doubt, to learn that today I faced an official Selection Board, & passed, & I now await the three days ordeal at Winchester, & heres hoping I shall be fit enough both physically & mentally to pass with at least an average category.

Before this, however, it is necessary for me to produce my Birth Certificate, which I hope you can secure immediately, & forward to me, together with the enclosed form duly filled out by the most influential person you can find, who has known me for at least four years, and then it will be up to me, & I do hope you're keeping your fingers crossed. It's a big surprise to know that your aunts will soon be leaving, but actually I cannot honestly say I'm sorry about that, however, it will certainly make things very awkward for you to carry on, unless

Mrs Wallace or some similar person is still available to help you out, otherwise I fear it will be more that you can manage. This, as you say, can be discussed fully when next I get home, & I still hold out hope for the weekend.

As for your new pastime, to which you have been introduced by the Mayoress, I hate to say it, but I sincerely disapprove, [...] ⁴² Another, more cheerful letter came from Mother today, in which she seems to have included quite a lot of advice about being impulsive etc., perhaps she's right, & anyway she ought to know me I suppose, & so I shall attempt to follow her advice for the future in all things besides love.

And now, my love, although this letter is extremely short, I fear it will have to end, the sirens are going & you bet we get a call out soon. [...] Yours as always,
Bill

P.S. No kisses allowed this time [...] {signed by Bill & K.O. Bunce}

Militia Camp,

Northwood

Monday, Oct. 5th

Darling Wife,

I guess by now you must be wondering what had become of me, for it is at least four days since I last wrote to you, but I assure you I have been simply up to my neck in work on the new camp, drains to plan, huts to move etc etc. so that I have often worked right up till dark without realising it. However, we are fairly well straight now, & are supposed to move over in the morning, although I don't quite yet see how it can be done, because I shall be out all day, & half the boys will have to report sick with their vaccinations.

⁴² I think this was to act as a dance hostess (see page 273)

I spent the whole of today at the above address, examining various numbers to ascertain the standard of training, & I shall be on the same thing again tomorrow, a most boring process I assure you, & it looks as though we are doomed to a winter full of such training, unless Jerry comes to the rescue & supplies us with the real thing.

On Saturday afternoon I dared to go out for the first time since you left here, & I managed to get your gloves, although I fear they insisted on taking the coupons, the remainder of which, I shall bring home next week, it hardly seems worth the trouble & risk of posting just to gain about two days, [...] After purchasing said gloves, I went to the pictures with "Tiny" to see once more *Reap the Wild Wind*, & it thrilled me just as much as the first time, so I considered it worthwhile, & we finished up in nautical style by having a fish & chip supper.

Sunday evening, Bill & Ruth invited me out to the "Sloop", & although I tried to get permission for a pass, the officer was just not in, so, greatly daring, I just went, and spent a most enjoyable evening, although drinking very little.

Ruth has a very severe cold, & should be in bed I think, but she says she couldn't endure that, & so she just seems to plug along. By the way, your gloves were not left at the Sloop, so now I'll try the bus office at the next opportunity just to see if we can catch up with them.

Bill Sims is going on leave tomorrow, & as you know, he lives at St. Margarets [*Stanstead Abbotts*] so I think I'll ask him to post this letter for me when he gets home, & that means you should get it very quickly, so here's hoping he doesn't forget it.

Little Brindle still has a long tail I fear, it looks as though the "Vet"

wouldn't bother about a soldier's dog, & so she continues to look sweet at the front, & absurd at the rear, however, she's training fairly well, & promises to develop into a really obedient little dog. She has just pushed her way into the tent, having found her own way up from the farm, & is now settling down on my bed for the night, & thanks to the powder, we need no longer worry about her passengers. [...] I have a new programme of training which completely overshadows all previous outrages, so that it looks like a nightmare of air co-op, night training etc. just as usual where our Battery is concerned, we cannot escape the deadly monotony of no raids, which always seem to follow us. However, I must not complain, we could be lots worse off, & I'll be with you in just a week's time, so who cares?

And now goodnight [...] Your Bill,

CHAPTER SEVEN

Four Winds

Wednesday 7.10.42

My darling husband,

Thank you for the very recent news of you received this morning i.e., the letter written by you on Monday & posted locally by Bill Sims. Nothing exciting seems to be happening at your end, does it. I note you are complaining about the monotony of training again, but I am glad to hear that you have now moved into huts. That will be a great improvement over canvas, specially if you are getting as much rain this evening as we are. Its simply teeming down.

In the mornings we get very heavy ground mists--- more like very wet fogs, which generally last till mid-day & which return as soon as dusk falls. Life under canvas in these conditions must be most unhealthy.

I note you say in your letter of Monday's date----"I'll be with you in just a week's time". From this I deduce that you will be home on the Monday although you mentioned the 13th in an earlier letter --- which is Tuesday.

'Fraid I had'nt been to work today. I did arrive at the office this morning but found work impossible & paid an emergency visit to Mr Hudson {*dentist in Ware Road*}--- the second in three days He gave me some more "pneumonia" treatment & then I went to the Heath & spent the rest of the day dosing {sic} on the settee up there. I returned home before dark feeling lots better & now I only hope the good effects are lasting. Mr H. says that I have still got the infection, so I hope I don't pass it on to you again next week.

I did tell you in an earlier letter that I was going to buy you something for your birthday, didn't I? It seems that the particular thing I want is not obtainable, so it looks as if I shall have to disappoint you I'm awfully sorry darling. Perhaps I'll be able to get a substitute

Do you know what I've got sitting on the table--- An orange---! Your mother gave it to me. I don't think I shall eat it yet awhile I'll wait till I can appreciate it to the full. At the moment what food I do eat is swallowed more or less whole, not that that hurts me---- having an iron digestion but one cannot

taste the food very much

Well my sweet, I suppose it is the last letter I shall be able to write to you, so let me wish you Bon Voyage & God speed & till you are safely in my arms once more, I send you all my love & kisses---

Your most loving Ann xxxxxxxx

There now follow for four or five letters from Bill, after returning on 20th October from what was obviously a somewhat unsuccessful 7 days leave. It is noticeable that in a letter from Bill on 29th October, he mentions that Ann has not responded to his desperate, hastily written notes. Not only does he talk about dying, but also that she no longer loves him. I have only included short excerpts to maintain the historic flow and spare the reader much unnecessary dialogue. MF.

Militia Camp

Northwood

Tuesday Oct. 20th

Dear Ann,

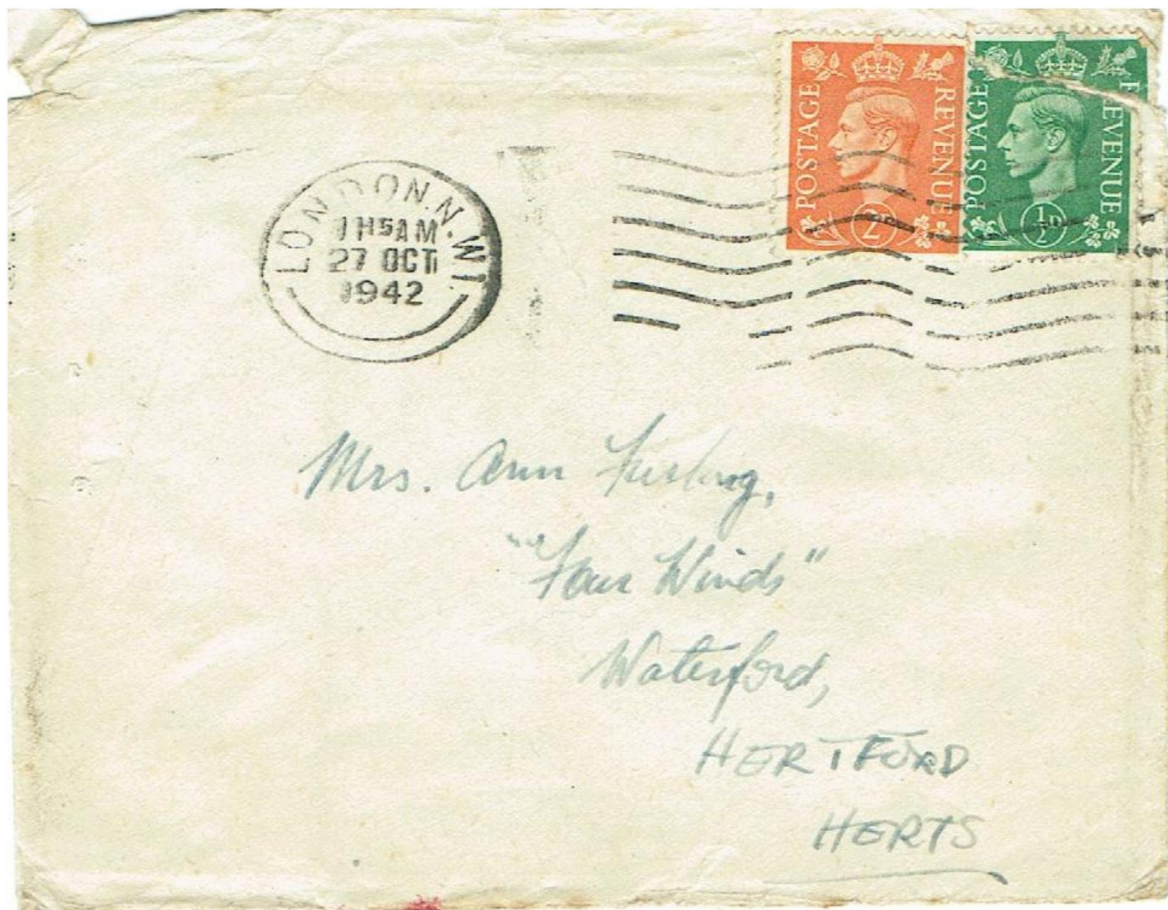
Just a note to let you know I have arrived back safely, and also to tell you, that if you are so inclined, you may continue writing to this address, my course has been cancelled, and I am now Troop Sgt., and so far I'm not particularly happy about anything. Fortunately, a Troop Sgt's job is packed full of responsibility & work, so that for the few days I am here at H.Q., I shall have little time to think or worry over any of the things which might make me unhappy.

I had a most miserable journey back, it started to rain in London, & didn't leave off until I got right into camp, & I was soaked to the skin just walking from the bus to my site. I didn't even get time to change before I was whisked away to

this place which you know so well, having spent one or two afternoons here of your holiday. [...] you must realise how low I get at the end of a leave, I need cheering up, not quarrelling with [...] you say you don't know what I expect of you when I get home. Firstly, I need love, lots of it, I used to get it when I first became a soldier, but unfortunately you became accustomed to my frequent homecoming so that you forgot I could never get home enough. You have seen something of the life we lead, & have remarked on the absence of love & sympathetic kindness [...]

Another thing you have overlooked, an N.C.O. has very few friends, real friends I mean, & therefore leads a very lonely life. You have met some of my men, you know their mentality, well then, what would you seek when on leave? Our sexual life has suffered too, remember, I keep straight [...]

Goodnight, Bill.



Militia Camp

Northwood

Monday. Oct. 26th

My darling,

How to commence this note I hardly know, for after receiving your letter, I too have to admit that you seem to have ceased loving me, but at the same time I feel I am on the brink of a disaster I would never forgive myself for, should it happen. Therefore, whilst I have been slapped sharply to my senses, I implore you to at least try to remember me as I used to be, & if you succeed, you'll realise that half of my remarks were meant only in the heat of the moment. [...] And now, the thing which has also registered, because I happened to mention our sexual life, you accuse me of no longer loving you, would I? [...]

Now darling, I hope you'll get this letter very quickly as Tiny will post for me, & please remember me as you know me, eleven years should have been sufficient, & I am now no more than a very sorry little boy, & very unhappy.

Yours Bill.

Militia Camp

Northwood

Tuesday Oct. 27th

Darling,

Just at the moment I am very much "on thorns" to know exactly how you are feeling towards me after the recent upheaval. Sleep was out of the question last night, I couldn't stop thinking; all sorts of things, mainly self criticism, but all to no avail, I cannot settle my mind about you until I hear from you again, in reply to my last hastily despatched letter. [...] It is hopeless for me to appeal to

you in your present state of mind, I know that, [...]

Mother sent me cigarettes today, & says she has spent some time with you at Waterford, she's ever so sensitive to us, & realises something must be wrong, so, if you feel you'd like to confide in her, do so, she'll be happy helping I know.

And now I shall close, it's near to midnight, & still no sleep here [...]
Goodnight Ann Darling, [...] Your Bill.

Militia Camp

Northwood

Weds. 28th Oct.

Darling Wife,

I wonder if you will have received my other letters when you receive this one, I hope so, for you must have missed me an awful lot in the recent past owing to eccentric letter writing. Now, however, the long evenings are closing in on us, and tonight for instance, we are free for a while at least, & so I felt I would write yet again this week, although I cannot exactly state what hour I shall finish this note. [...] perhaps I may be hearing from you again on Friday or Saturday, I do hope so, for the suspense is awful, & it seems years to have to wait. [...]

This is destined only to be a very short note, but I trust you will really welcome it after all, because I know how I'm waiting for your next letter, so please be a little kind to me, & answer these, my last three letters.

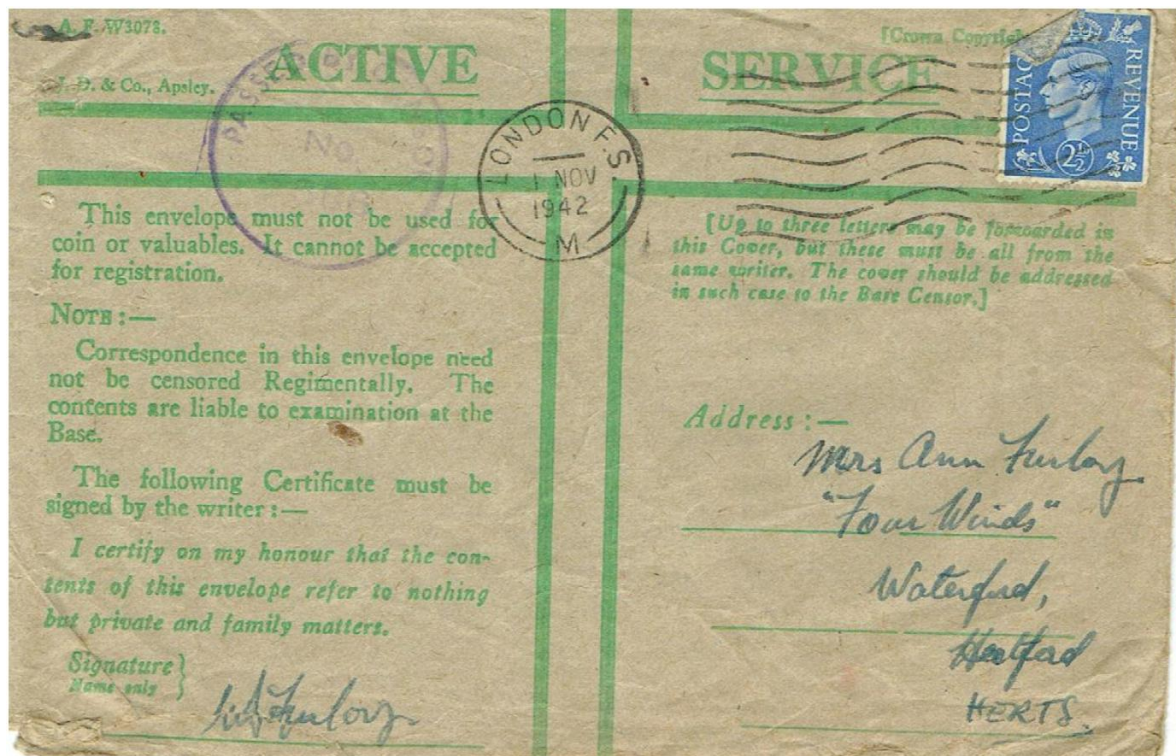
Our days are very strenuous now, being organised to fill every minute, and includes drills & marching, P.T. apart from the ordinary training we normally do, so that by the end of the day, which varies according to the call outs we get, we are genuinely tired, & glad to go to bed, & if only I had peace of mind, I know I'd be healthier now than ever before. You'll observe by this how extremely conscientious I have become, and I feel better for it, & strangely, the men do not resent having a businesslike D.C. any more than a free & easy one, in fact I'm

sure they like it. At the moment five of them are asleep, although not in bed, so I feel I have achieved something else, they are no longer at a loose end in the evening, it will be a shame if they are called out later on. Things are a little brighter for them now too, for I am in a position to let at least one man out each night, & may even get a night off myself one day, and as their leave is well cared for, I do not feel they have much cause for complaint.

Now that is about all for today, but tomorrow I know I shall write again, so until then, my only love, please try to believe in me, & I'll prove I'm worth it.

Goodnight my darling,

Your Bill,



Note the above image for an official "censor free" green envelope containing the next letter & the declaration on the left hand side. N.B. Stamp cost 2 1/2d {1p in 2024}

*Militia Camp**Northwood*Thursday, Oct. 29

Darling,

Another short note to tell you how much I love you, and in spite of the fact that I have received but one letter from you since my arrival back here, I live in daily hope now, although if nothing arrives tonight I fear I shall have to continue this uncertainty until Saturday. [...]

A disturbance & delay here caused by the arrival of Mr. Bunce with pay, & he also brought a letter, a wonderful letter, which has released me from the depths of despair & made me probably the happiest man in the world, [...]

The Colonel came to visit us yesterday, & he stayed talking with me for a half hour or more, at the end of which time he said he would like to have me on his "list" for a commission, & that I must now make a formal application to the Fuehrer, who is now almost that in nature to me. I told Mr. Bunce, & he is delighted, & will make my application for me. So now, my next ordeal is a formal interview with the Colonel, which if successful, will be followed by a three day psychology test, & if I pass, I'm on my way to Sh?? or Sandhurst. There's just one thing though, my chances of coming back to searchlights are very small, & I shall probably be posted as an officer in guns or tanks, or something a little more bloodthirsty, I wonder if you will mind that? Anyway, my information is very hazy at the moment, & I can let you know more after the next development.

Tomorrow, Saturday, I shall have a photograph taken for you, & I suppose it will be a fair wait, because of the fact that there is not a Jerome⁴³ Studio on the island, but that will not deter me, & you shall have your picture.

Little "Brindle" is now completely free from her guests, & is a really beautiful little dog, & very, very intelligent. Some days ago she entered the camp

⁴³During the 2nd World War, because the UK Government saw Jerome Studios as a morale booster, they were able to continue receiving photographic material supplies, and catering to the greatly increased business. Soldiers and their wives, or sweet hearts, wanted to swap photographs when they were parted. See page 299 for a Jerome portrait.

with an egg in her mouth, & I took it away from her intact, & told her to bring another, which she did, but this time unfortunately, it was the dummy one from the nest, & as we know the farmer would miss that, we had to return them both with the full story as to how we acquired them. She's wonderful company and very affectionate, & all the visiting officers now look for her to play with. Our Major was most annoyed the other day because her nose was dry, so it seems that he realises she really belongs here.

I hope you have received your gloves by now, I know you would be needing them, that's why I had them posted as early as I could get them off, please tell me if they suit. Mine are "beauties", they fit perfectly, & are ever so warm, I have been very grateful for them this week, because it's very cold here now during the night, so that we risk the wrath of the powers that be & have a fire each evening. The face flannel is a boon too, & despite the fact that I thought it would be too smooth, it does its job perfectly, & I must admit I feel better for it, I have discovered a wonderful new soap too, Yardley's lavender, it costs a 1/- {5p}, but my goodness, how clean & fresh it smells, & I am now a convert to a good toilet soap, it's worth the extra cash.

As for my "sweethearts" at the farm, I see very little of them these days, having very little available spare time, but occasionally I chat with Bill, & have been invited out again this Sunday, I think I shall accept if I can wangle the evening off.

We are getting smart & efficient now, what with drills & P.T. & general organisation, Today we had an hour drilling, & the boys are getting like guardsmen, & then a run in full kit to the "Folly", a quick drink & a run back, it works wonders with them, & we feel as fit as fiddles, I shall soon be able to run all the way home. Talking of home, I have to think of leave, & although we are not officially allowed short leaves now, I shall try to arrange one for the middle of November, but don't count on that, because it may upset my Christmas holiday. However, you may rest assured that I shall continue to pursue my policy of taking what I can get when I can, because I too, believe it will not be long before I'm sharing the fate of Roy & Alf Payne, so here's hoping very fervently for success, & we will make up for all we lost on my last leave.

We are still sleeping on floorboards, but at least it's much better than

being under canvas, although I'd be happier if we could get hold of enough wood to make our beds with. However, we cannot really complain, there are so many people worse off than we are. The lads still keep very late hours with their card games, but I have abandoned it, solely for that reason, we get too little sleep now, & I fail to see its' worth, even though it kills monotony. And by the way, would you please send our Maths book at your earliest convenience, I shall need the knowledge shortly & it will occupy my little bit of spare time very profitably-----

Another break while we do a spot of night manning, but we no longer "muck about" as you saw us do one night, it's a serious affair now, & we do the job properly. Fortunately we had a bit of bother, something went wrong, & we spent best part of the time repairing the lamp, but at least it saved the majority of the lads from having to stay out in the cold, & I think they were glad even though I wasn't. It's now getting on for ten o'clock, so I think I'll do a bit of reading, I've acquired one of Edgar Rice's Mars books, I find I've read it before, years ago, but it makes quite good reading still, & so I'm wading through it a little at a time just to keep my mind working.

And now my sweet, it's time for me to say Goodnight, I shall be writing again very soon though, so until then, remember I love you, yes, I really do, you'll see,

Yours as always, Bill

Militia Camp,

Northwood

Saturday. Oct. 31st

Darling Ann,

Another day nearer to seeing you, and unless my interview with the Colonel upsets plans for my future, I sincerely hope to wangle a short leave for next weekend.

Here's the layout, -- I'm due for a month's course at Rhyl, as an assistant Battle Instructor, commencing on the tenth of November, & if this does hold good, Mr. Bunce promised me a short leave before I go, & I am plumping for next weekend, so please keep your fingers crossed darling, & I'll certainly try my hardest. The only snag is, that being due for an interview, the Battery Commander might consider it wasting a good course to send me if he is likely to lose me, & may send someone else, in which case my excuse for an early leave will be washed out, however, here's hoping for the best, & the best that could happen is that I shall see you next week.

We had a visit from the Brigadier today, & he seemed well pleased with us. Like all Brigs & "big shots", he was a real gentleman & a thoroughly human person, & when he left, I had the impression that I had just finished a very pleasing interview.

I have been asked to choose a branch of the army to which I shall be posted after the OCTU course, & on my officer's advice chose Light A.A. Guns, with a second choice of the Intelligence, but I hold very small hope for the latter. [...]

There's very little else of importance to write about today, unless I complain that I have only received two letters from you since getting back here, [...] I'm looking forward to a bumper crop next week [...]

We have very cold nights now, & have run completely out of coal today, which means we have to cook by wood for the next few days, as our new issue of coal is not yet due. However, apart from miserable evenings, we are managing

pretty well, & at least we have the consolation of knowing we are doing our “bit”, because our fuel entitlement, has been drastically cut, & well we know it.

How is Mother these days? have you seen her lately? She’s very anxious about us I know for sure, as she has mentioned it to me, so please reassure her as soon as you see her again. I shall be writing her again this evening, just to keep her cheerful, she has been very good to me this month, seeming to know I needed attention, so please cheer her up with me darling.

And now I must close darling, but remember I’m with you in thought all the time, & if I can possibly scrounge any more green envelopes this week, I shall be writing you again very soon, I hate my letters to be censored by people I know.

Goodnight my darling & very precious wife, I really do adore you,

Yours ever, Bill

Militia Camp,

Northwood

Sunday. Nov. 7th

My own darling wife,

Only another twelve days to the end of the war, at least according to my forecast, and it will certainly be very interesting to see how many months or years I am out. Wouldn’t it be lovely if it did end on the 19th? I think I would go crazy with joy to know this awful unreality were at last ended. Even now life is nothing more than dreamlike to me, only unfortunately not a very pleasant dream, in fact it is “nightmarish”, and so I say it once again wake up to normality.

Just lately I have been very busy studying Current Affairs, it being necessary for me to become absolutely proficient in this subject if my commission is to materialise, my only difficulty lies in the fact that hitherto I have been absolutely disinterested in such things, so it is extremely difficult for me to catch up with, although I must confess equally absorbing.

Life here goes on with much the same monotony as ever, & after all the rain we had, you can imagine the mud which surrounds us, it makes me more unhappy than anything else in the army life. Our boots are caked with it, our trousers, & since our beds are still on the floor, you can guess how clean we keep our blankets.

However, I know we could be much worse off, & if I get that “pip” you want me to have, I’m positive I shall be abroad very very quickly, & I’ll bet I long for good old English mud then.

As you may guess, I was bitterly disappointed about my leave this weekend, but it was not due to lack of trying. It seems that since my course is cancelled, I must await the normal span of time [...] I can promise you, I shall be home within a fortnight of your receipt of this letter unless my other negotiations prevent it, [...] once an Officer, I shall never again be sure of regular leave whilst in England, & I understand that when I’m a Cadet I get no leave at all during my training [...]

Thank you for your letter which I received yesterday [...] I see you are anxious to know about the radio set I was working on, well, I did not bring it back with me, surely you must have known that? you saw me on the train & know exactly what luggage I had. Nevertheless, I wished as soon as I was back that I had brought it, for we are still without a set, although I have managed to acquire batteries. It’s a hell of a shame we have to go music-less throughout the winter, & to receive all our news days late, for we only get papers twice a week, so the next time I come home I definitely shall bring the set with me, regardless of the fact that I may not stay here long, it will make a nice parting gift to the lads.

I forgot to tell you about a rare treat I had last week. I accepted an invitation to the “Sloop”, & as we entered, the opening bars of Tchaikovsky’s Concerto, and they played it right through, you probably heard it yourself last

Sunday. It was wonderful for me, & I enjoyed that evening because of it. It's funny, but always on Sundays I have an urgent desire for music, & never can it be sated, that's one reason why I'm determined to get a radio somehow.

What do you think of the war news now? it's about the most cheerful since the start of hostilities I think, & I understand that people in "civvie street" are going mad about our victories, is this so? or are our sources of outside news unreliable & exaggerated.

I hope you can understand all this scribble, I started off at the table, but it got so cold that I moved to the fire, & now I'm writing this on my knee, hence the scrawl.

Yesterday I went to Newport to have that photograph taken, & I was once again doomed to disappointment, for the one & only photographer the town boasted could not do the job owing to shortage of material, which means I now must wait until next week, & try again in Ryde, & if this fails, I shall wait until I am again in London, & have a really good one taken.

I saw a good film, very exciting & funny, "My favourite Blonde", & I have not laughed so much for a long time, so my afternoon was not entirely fruitless.

And now my darling, I must close for tonight, it's very late, & I'm so sleepy but I'll write again very soon, even though Mr Bunce will have to read it. [...]

Your Bill



Militia camp

Northwood

Wednesday Nov. 11

Darling Wife,

Thank you for all the mail I have received this week, including Birth Certificate etc., & you need not worry about it being sufficient for the purpose, I think it will serve its purpose quite well.

The Maths Book arrived safely tonight, & now I can get down to some serious work, & I assure you its more than necessary. Up till now, my preparation for the coming ordeal has consisted of catching up with the war, and

a severe course of physical training, consisting mostly of tree climbing, & rope work, & if the way I feel is anything to go by, I sure needed hardening up, I ache all over. I think you said you had been reading about the psychology course, would you be able to trace the source of your information and pass it on to me? I want to know exactly how I must train, & what to expect, so if you can supply a newspaper cutting, I'd be deeply indebted ----- 'Terribly long break here, caused by supper, followed by the most Technical discussion I have yet been involved in concerning electricity, until now from sheer loss of sleep, the lads have retired, & left me to my theories, which I once again pack carefully away to continue with this letter.

I was very annoyed about Nell's⁴⁴ trick with your engagement ring, I think she is about the meanest woman I ever heard of, & it certainly does seem about time for their move if she could stoop so low. ⁴⁵ However we can afford to treat them with the contempt they deserve now, & I feel this is about the best way out of things. I have just been looking at my shins, they are absolutely raw & certainly very sore, caused by my tree climbing efforts, anyhow, I'm quite efficient & daring now, & hardening up a lot. My hands too, are sore & covered in blisters, & I have chipped lumps off all over the place, they're painful, but if I must work as hard as I can to pass my next test, then I certainly need to put up with these little disadvantages. -----

-----Thursday afternoon. I got so involved again last night with another discussion, & then came the time for study in Geometry, (I have borrowed a Euclid), so that it was midnight before I realised it, & I was so tired & sleepy that I decided I would have to finish off today. [...]

I notice you have made no further mention of the dance hostess business, are you doing as I suggested, or continuing without telling me about it, I do hope not, I have been very unsettled lately through our differences, and I can't hope to study efficiently with a restless mind can I? [...]

All the boys are working at the moment, I feel a bit mean, writing while

⁴Unfortunately we do not know what Nell did

⁴⁵There is much correspondence about the departure of Ann's Aunt Sybil & Nell, her companion-see Book 2

they work, but I do my share I feel sure, and so I shouldn't think they'd mind an awful lot. Tiny & another fellow are busy laying drain pipes. Two more are painting inside the hut, two more are camouflaging, & Tich is messing about with his lorry, so contentment and peace reign over the camp, for as sure as they have work to do, the boys are quiet.

The weather has bucked up a lot these last few days, but it gets awfully cold at nights now, so that I have allowed a fire in the hut for several evenings now. We burn wood, which we collected in the lorry some days ago, so that it does not use any extra fuel, in fact we save fuel, because yesterday we all cooked our own dinners outside on a wood fire, you ought to have seen some of the concoctions there were too, but everyone seemed satisfied, & anyway, we get so hungry these days that we would eat almost anything.

And now I really must close, work calls, and I feel more & more guilty as each moment passes, so until tonight I'm going to say Au revoir, [...] Your Bill

Militia Camp

Northwood

14th November (Sunday)

Beloved,

My correspondence of lately has not been so good, mainly because of study, & various other moves in the air. On the whole though, I have managed to cover a lot of ground one way & another, & I'm sure you will realise my latest ambition is bound to steal our time.

Very little of interest has happened so far as you would be concerned [...] beginning three days ago, when I last wrote to you, we go back to Thursday, although that day was no different from the rest [...] Each man received 10/- {50p} from the farmer for services rendered during the previous week, which added to their wages, makes them very wealthy this week. My own share of the

proceeds came to 5/3d, {27p} which happened to be the odd amount, but I didn't do any work, & so I rarely take their cash. Between Thursday & Friday, I put in some very intensive work on Algebra, & a model aircraft, Messerschmitt 109, which I am entering for a competition, and it is one of my weaknesses I fear, to become entirely absorbed in these tasks, forgetting all else, & I went late to bed both of those evenings, & when I say late, I mean late. [...] I went to the Cinema on Saturday to see Claudette Colbert & Rudy Vallee in "Palm Beach Story", & I don't know if you've seen it, but it was a lovely story, & made me realise how much I really need & miss you, [...] Give Mother my love, & tell her the news when next you visit her, especially about the leave point. Evidently, from your letter typed on Friday, you are worried on my account about having to go overseas, if I take a commission, well darling, if it comes, I cannot stay with this unit, & officers are too plentiful in this line now, so a transfer is inevitable, & its an absolute dead certainty that I shall be sent to a fighting unit if I get through, especially as my medical category is very near to A1 now, so you'll just have to accept that as one of the disadvantages of following opportunity. ⁴⁶

To get back to events, today, being Sunday, & there being a minor national celebration, we ran down to the "Folly", (the pub by the river) & drank three quick doubles, so that I was very dizzy before we left. On leaving, we ran straight into Mr. Bunce, who had come all that way to collect me & take me to see a new site I'm to take over, & I had to have two Sherrys {sic} with him, so that by the time I had been in the car a few hours I was very drunk, & very cold, being clad only for running, but I successfully examined the place & it looks a lot more civilized than this. Mr. Bunce was quite amused at my state of course, but he would have made me worse still had there been time I know. Our little dog came with us too, she always runs at our side when we go out, & she seems to take to car riding just as well, this being her first trip, I'm contemplating bringing her here soon until I settle somewhere again, because I hate to leave her to uncertainty. [...] Referring to your letter again I see you make some mention of

⁴⁶Bill never, in fact earned a commission, but remained a Sergeant throughout the rest of the war.

that Whiskey I said I could get, well, it seems to have suddenly become very scarce, although I still hope to procure one before Christmas, & if, as you say, you have a bottle of Gin, we sure should manage a “binge” if I do get home. Old “Mac” has gone out tonight to try to get my share for me, so be careful to save your bottle until we may open them together. [...]

And now I must turn to my studies, I have just mastered Equations, & am about to enter into the mysteries of Quadratics, & even though I may never need these subjects for my Army career, I shall continue to study now, and I find it a very absorbing pastime which may also prove useful after the war. [...]

There will be lots to tell you about, & we certainly have a lot of lost ground to make up [...] so we’ll both keep our fingers crossed for it to happen soon,

Goodnight Precious, [...] Your Bill.

Militia Camp

Northwood

Wednesday Nov. 18th

Darling Ann,

If you received my last message, you will have gathered that we no longer live at our previous address. I am not at liberty to tell you our exact location, but if you can remember the Shottle scenery, you will be able to picture our present camp, only this time the nearest farm even, is twenty minutes’ walk, and as for real civilisation, such as a village or town, I believe the nearest spot is about three to four miles, and there are certainly no bus services. However, the view is absolutely marvellous, & the air, although extremely fresh, is very healthy, so that already I have noticed a change in my appetite. Our new home is certainly an improvement on the old place so far as personal comfort is concerned, for

although we are in the wilds, we have our own electricity, & water supply, a completely self contained camp with even a bathroom & water heating plant, so you see, even the most awful looking places have their compensations.

I received your latest letter yesterday, in which you complain of lack of mail, & inform me of the weekend outlook. Well, if I can, I shall still come home, I'm dying to be with you again regardless of Blood Transfusions & the rest, & if you're not feeling too grand, perhaps you would appreciate my company for the weekend. This may be upset anyway, because at the time of writing, we are painfully short of men, & leave has for the moment been temporarily postponed. Mc Coffrey?? is on leave now, due back Saturday, & unless our officer feels confident about him carrying on, I'm doomed to wait even longer regardless of whether I want to come or not. Will you draw your conclusions from this? and assume that unless I send you a Telegram, I shall not be coming home? It seems we are being well & truly punished for wasting our last leave, because I am not sure when I may get home again, I just keep hoping [...]

I'm glad the Aunts had the decency to come & thank you for your 2 ½ years of hospitality, but now they are really gone, you must never weaken enough to allow their return, I'm sure the conditions they enforced on us has been partly responsible for our short tempers, and now you have been settled your other living problem, I think you should be much happier, & it will certainly be much nicer for us both when I get home again.

The boys seem to have settled down fairly well despite our isolation, & they are at the moment engaged in various pastimes such as darts, cards etc. One or two like myself are writing their first letters home, and Mac the cook, together with Bill Sims have the evening off, so they've gone exploring for the rest of us to find to drink, I'm sure they'll be sober when they get back if only because of the hills.

Well darling, I seem to have exhausted all my news again, there are so many things here I would love to tell you about, but I just mustn't [...]

You understand about the shortage of mail I hope, because I think I told you that I hate having my letters censored by our officers, & therefore they are governed by the number of green envelopes I can scrounge. [...]

Your Bill always

A.A. Militia Camp

Northwood

Tuesday 24th Nov

Dear darling,

It is dark, and the autumn mists are in the hills, outside, the world is a sad, mysteriously eerie place. Up here, seemingly miles from any other human being, completely ignorant of any sign of civilisation, I feel strangely contented, for now I have all I desire, a wireless, a fire, a dog, & a bed. Add to this the immeasurable joy of happy memories born on my last stay with you [...].

Can you picture us? high up in the hills, in a little cabin tucked among the trees. Inside it is very cosy, with a nice log fire, & a row of beds on which the boys are resting or writing. The radio is giving us "Those you have loved", & dear little Brindle is asleep at the foot of my bed, with a sergeants blouse thrown over her, you couldn't wish to see a more lovable sight. She was so glad to see me back today, & made more fuss of me than Penny does, I don't see how I can part with her even though everyone else wants her now, so don't be surprised if I bring her home at Xmas, [...]

Enough of the dog now, [...] I had a really nice journey down, and made friends with a wee Scotch lassie who was dead tired, having travelled from Glasgow without a real meal or sleep. She was being called up, & is entering the W.R.N.S. married, and has five brothers & one sister in the forces, & her husband in the Marines, so they're a really patriotic family. [...] we got really

friendly, I said goodbye after putting her right for her destination.[...] that's the only exciting thing that happened, I didn't even get criticised for being late returning from leave.

As I walked up from the railway station to this place, I felt my spirits drooping as I climbed each foot of the hills, so that by the time I was nearly back I was almost ready to cry as I thought how desolate the place looked with the sun already setting, & the leaves almost gone from the trees swathed in mists, miles & miles away from "Four Winds". And yet, now I'm here, as you will have detected, I'm happy [...] I had a more wonderful leave... now I can settle contentedly to work & wait for my next leave, which I still pray will be at Xmas.

And now my darling, I must close down, I have had to abandon this note several times, for air co-op, & it is now past ten, which means my bed time I have a guard to do at five o'clock in the morning [...]

Goodnight my dearest love, I shall miss you, but I'll be with you in dreams, Remember, you are my life, Yours always, Bill.

P.S. x from "Brindle"

A.A. Militia Camp

Northwood

Thursday Nov. 26th

Darling Wife,

Nearly a week ago since I was home, isn't it amazing how quickly the time goes. We have had a fairly easy week so far as training and operations are concerned, but of course the usual round of cleaning etc. has occupied our days very effectively, keeping us occupied thoroughly. I have been practically the whole week experimenting with our water heater to see if we could get a continuous supply of hot water for nothing, & so far in three nights the whole detachment have been bathed in the hottest of water, which has also been on tap during the day for washing etc. I have used a combination of wood, coal dust, & clinker, which I just stick back on top as we rake it out, so except for continual attention, we have used nothing that would upset the war effort, & are much more comfortable in the bargain.

It is pretty late actually for me to start letter writing, I have just completed a bit more of my Algebra course, & believe it or not, I had almost forgotten in a week, all I have just learned (or thought I learned). However, a little revision soon put me right, & I am now ready to go ahead as from tomorrow evening. [...]

It's amazing how quickly one goes off form physically too, I get out of breath easily again, so it looks as if I shall have to pull my socks up now we're settled, & get well & truly down to it.

The wireless is on with music for workers, & they are playing "Night & Day", I wonder if you are listening? I know it is your favourite [...]

So far I have not heard any more of my immediate future, [...] I'm still striving like anything to be fit to pass anything that I encounter [...] I should be bitterly disappointed if I fail.

I have started a cigarette cutting down campaign, & so far I am achieving a fair measure of success, which if I manage to keep it up, will save me lots of

cash, I'll let you know of my progress (if it succeeds).

It's bitterly cold up here now, & when this wind blows, it fairly rocks the huts, we are told that when the wind gets really strong, it is impossible to take a dinner outside the cookhouse, because the wind just blows it off the plate.....we will prove this by experiment. Talking of dinner, old Mac is excelling himself these days, & we've had some marvellous food. Len Bull caught two rabbits today in his snares, & we had baked rabbit for tea, so what with one thing & the other, if we don't take plenty of exercise, I for one will be putting on weight soon. The peanut butter is rapidly dwindling, because I eat it for tea each day, just one slice, but it won't last much longer, so I guess peanut butter will be relegated to the realms of pleasant memories ere long.

And now my precious, I really must end, I would love to go on writing but just haven't the time, you see, I have to do a turn at guard, we've only a few men here, & as I always do the same each morning, namely 4.45 to 6.30, I need to get to bed early most nights [...]

Your Bill

A.A. Militia Camp

Northwood

Sunday, Nov.29

Dearest Heart,

Anne Shelton is just singing "Anywhere on Earth is Heaven", and how that fits my present mood [...]

Did you appreciate my phone call yesterday? or would you rather I had not, I know it must be awfully annoying for you to have Wheeler standing at your elbow at such a moment, but perhaps you could give him a lesson or two

on tact before I call again.

That was my Saturday afternoon treat, for which I cycled some miles, but to me it was worth it, for to be able to speak to you makes me feel that you are not so very far away [...] (Victor Sylvester this time, “Anywhere on Earth”, it seems to have become my heart’s theme song, and consequently haunts me all the time). I wonder if you are listening? or whether you’re attending the private dance this evening, I’d love to feel you are home now with the wireless turned on as you write to me, because always when we are listening to the same things & doing the same things, although miles may separate us, I feel infinitely near to you [...]

Mr. Douglas came to see us yesterday, & he it was who told me that I was getting a S/L ? commission after all, apparently under these circumstances my recent up grading means nothing to the War Office, & I am still B.1. to them, & therefore not fit to be a “tough guy” however “tough” I may feel. Anyway, I don’t actually mind, mainly because of you, & partly because I’m more sure of my ground on this subject [...] My training goes on slowly, but very surely, & my latest fever has been concentrating on correct speech, for I find this life has a tendency to make one forgetful, & so I am now very conscious of my words as I speak. The Algebra has had a rest for two nights, whilst I read newspapers from Front to back, & I’m certainly learning faster than I dared hope for, although whether it will all stick I have yet to see.

So far as real news is concerned, I have none, we are very much left alone here in the wilds, plenty of military traffic passes, but no-one ever stops, so that if anyone other than the ration of lorry drivers, or a D.R. turns up, it becomes a rare & special occasion. Needless to say, we like this state of affairs, because it’s grand to be left alone for a while, & I know the boys enjoy this freedom from interference. They are all in bed & fast asleep, having spent a whole afternoon chasing rabbits & eating a good tea & supper it’s all they want to do, and so, after listening to Churchill, they all turned in, & I alone remain out of bed & awake listening to Victor Sylvester very quietly as I write. Did you listen to Churchill? if you didn’t you certainly missed a most inspiring, & by far the most optimistic speech yet made. Things certainly do seem to be going well for us & will, I’m sure, continue to do so now we have gained full momentum, & it sure ought to fill everyone with determination to hurry up & get the job finished as quickly as

possible, I wish we could do something more active towards that end.⁴⁷

Brindle is hunting around for somewhere to settle for the night, she always gets restless at this time, & tries everyone's bed until she reaches mine, then she quiets down & all is peace until my turn for guard comes round., We get lots of fun at reveille, she runs all round the site with me, & as I uncover & shake each man, she jumps up & licks their faces until they're wide awake, I know she loves this because she's always so full of life, & never misses her chance to accompany me. We didn't catch any rabbits yesterday, but we sure had fun, & came back very tired, & all the dog wanted to do was sleep, & I don't wonder, for she must have covered ten times the distance I did. Taking all in all, I'm enjoying this return to isolation, it's healthy, and peaceful, & very conducive to study & training. [...]

Well my angel, time has flown, & it is now 11.30 which means I should be in bed, because I still get up at 4.45 each morning, [...] And now my love I must say goodnight, & retire to sleep, [...]

Yours always, Bill

AA. Militia Camp

Northwood

Wednesday, Dec. 2nd



Sweetest loveliest wife,

I adore you, & already I am pining for your company although only just returned from a weekend. [...]

Actually I am very short of news for this letter but I simply had to write

⁴⁷In a broadcast heard worldwide on November 29, 1942, Churchill described the Allied victories in North Africa including the defeat of Field Marshal Rommel by General Montgomery at the second Battle of El Alamein and the successful American-led landings in Algeria and Morocco. Churchill also referred to the "bright gleam of victory."

you, [...] Thank you sweetest for my pyjamas, they did arrive on the Monday, & I am very grateful for them, & the cigarettes, just that little extra thought [...] as for a dressing gown, I shall not need that yet [...]

You may be interested to know that we rescued our little cat from the old site today, Len Bull had to go to the Dentist, & on his way back he called at the farm & collected her. She arrived in a sandbag, none the worse for a five miles cycle ride, & she's settled down ever so happily with us, & needless to say Brindle is delighted to have her playmate with her again. We have another pet, I will introduce you in this way:- In the office, where the floor fits badly to the wall, is a big crevice, over which someone has chalked PERCY, ↓ and each night at intervals, PERCY the mouse looks out with his bright eyes, to see the night telephonist.

He's a smart little fellow, because although we now have three cats & a dog, he survives, to take his nightly reconnaissance, & so we have adopted him as one of the family, & I believe he now comes on the ration strength. Tonight has seen our first bit of action on this site in the form of air co-op first, followed by a hostile call-out right in the middle of supper, but as usual, nothing happened, so once again I had to put the safety catches on our gun & go back to dreams.

I observed from your recent letter that you danced again on Saturday night, that means two in a week, I hope you're not overdoing things, & you certainly seem to get as much attention as ever, [...] I say you become more attractive & don't get a day older, surely you have enough proof now. [...] what about a couple of records [...] pay a visit to Elliot's, [*record shop in Ware Road, Hertford*], & get some of those good needles while you're at it, [...] Speaking of gifts, is there anything you would like? I mean apart from a photograph which I don't seem to have much luck with, I'd like to have a few suggestions.

You were right about the wireless upsetting my studies, but at least my mind is fresher & more up to date [...]

We spent the whole of today sawing wood, it's surprising how much we burn, because we must have fires, & no coal is allowed, so although we should do it in our own little leisure, I usually have a one day blitz each week & get enough logs to supply our needs. We also cooked outside with wood today, which means a further saving was effected, I think we're getting tremendously

economic, don't you? After all, six hundred weight of coal per month for ten men is pretty good I think, & we manage fairly well on this, although we seem to be the only ones who do.

Give my regards to Mother, & tell her I'll be writing this weekend, & while I remember it, I have only about ten sheets of notepaper left, would you send another pad soon please.

I shall, I expect, be phoning you again on Saturday, would you please tell Wheeler to kindly take a hint this week & stay away, or perhaps there is another number I could call on future occasions where you would find more privacy [...]

And now bed calls me, I've been on the go all day from five until now, eleven, that's eighteen out of the twenty four, so I know you'll understand if I say goodnight & God bless you; until tomorrow then angel, [...]

Your Bill always

Thursday evening

Sweetheart,

Since finishing yesterday's letter, I still have had no time or opportunity to get this posted, & so I shall add this short note to the existing one, and as Mac the cook is going on leave in the morning, I sincerely hope he will post these for me in London, thus enabling you to receive them in good time after all. ⁴⁸

Things have been pretty quiet again today, but I have been quite busy because I'm running a small course on radio for the fellows who know nothing about it, & incidentally it's doing me a lot of good too, so that I am quite an authority on the subject now, in a small way.

I mentioned that we had our little cat back, well, she had a bit of an accident today, her first day back with us, this is how it happened. Mac was nursing her in front of the fire, when suddenly she saw a mouse at the back of

⁴⁸The envelope was, in fact postmarked Northampton- 5th December

the stove, so she made one leap from Mac's lap & landed right on top of the hot stove, poor little thing, she did burn her paws, they're very blistered now, & very painful I'll bet, but she didn't seem to mind much, so perhaps it doesn't hurt so much as we think. And whilst on the subject of fires, I too had an accident. I was standing in front of the cookhouse fire, until I thought I'd move a bit as it was getting rather hot. As I moved, I detected burning, & on looking behind observed a smoke trail proceeding from the seat of my trousers, so I promptly put my hand there & got it burnt, but I put the fire out, to find a large hole in my trousers, & the tail of my shirt about three inches across, on the left cheek. My goodness, what a scare it gave me, I had all sorts of awful visions of being unable to put it out in time, & I sure know now it's wisest to keep away from the fire a bit, but it's funny really, & I'm number one subject for a joke now.

Your letter containing envelopes arrived today, & I see you appear to be quite excited & envious about Esme's wedding, [...] I know just how you must feel to see wonderful lingerie & other expensive gifts, but at least we had our own house & furniture to start off with, which after all is something more useful & lasting. Will you please offer the happy couple my felicitations for the great day [...]

And now my love I'm closing down, I may not have an opportunity to write or 'phone over the weekend [...] Goodnight sweetheart [...]

Your Bill

*A.A. Militia Camp**Northwood**Monday Dec. 7th*Letter written from Winchester

My own darling,

It is not my intention to write a very long letter tonight, because I am very, very tired. You will see by the Postcode where I am, & in case it's not quite clear I'll tell you I'm at Winchester, and tomorrow I return to Northwood a made or broken man, which, I shall not know until at least two days after my return.

The course has been all that it is rumoured, namely, most strenuous, until now, at nine o'clock, I feel as though I've been taken apart, mentally & physically, & put together again. Actually, I would not have missed such a chance for worlds, & even though I don't pass, I shall at least know I was given a fair trial, & will also know my weaknesses.

I arrived here yesterday (Sunday) at twenty to two, & at ten minutes to, we were hard at it, all brain work until nine thirty in the evening, by which time I honestly didn't know if I could ever think clearly again. However, I survived, & today was actually the worst of all, For at eight thirty we were up to our necks in mud dealing with all sorts of situations, details of which will be passed on in due course. We then had to construct a raft, & get eight men over a river, & my goodness what a current there was. We all got wet through, because all the drums we used had been carefully punctured, & so we were half under water all the time, but it was surprisingly warm. Once the raft turned turtle in mid stream, & the three men who were on it were well & truly soaked, but fortunately I managed to stay dry. After lunch we were literally torn to pieces mentally by the Psychiatrist, and then two Colonels, & if they don't know all about me now, they never will. This was followed by the high spot of the course, namely the obstacle course, during which one man fractured a wrist & sprained the other, & another fellow had a sprained ankle. Here again I performed the most amazing feats, things I never dreamed I would do, for instance, jump a river twelve or fourteen

feet wide, climb a tree, & jump out at least two yards to catch a rope & swing over a ditch. The catwalk over a river was probably the worst. We had to climb a tree, from which a steel cable stretched right across the river diagonally to another tree, & the only support we had was a rope, & in the middle, over the deepest part of the river was a carefully arranged tree branch, which, if one had ones back to it, would surely put one off balance. Fortunately I went over the right way, & having landed high up in the tree the other side, met two planks suspended at a nasty sideways tilt & slanting to the next tree some yards away, this I dared not walk, & so I crawled, & having jumped safely down proceeded to jump streams, climb high walls, wriggle under nets, etc until I hardly know how to move, then to finish up with, a mile run uphill all the way to home, to write a message we had to remember. My time was 28 minutes, & the record is 24, so you will really see how fit I'm getting, & after accomplishing all these feats I feel tough I assure you. We all had a wonderfully hot shower, & tea, & then back to brainwork, consisting of problems & speeches on various subjects, I also had to write a letter or article on a carving fork, not more than a hundred words, you try sometime. We've had all sorts of tests, filled in all kinds of questionnaires, until we almost feel like Psychiatrists ourselves, but now, except for a final interview by the whole Board collectively, we shall finish in the morning, & I have to go back to the Island, there to await my sentence. One thing I'm positive about, I shan't escape an O.C.T.U ⁴⁹because of my comparatively short army career, so the best result I can hope for is Average, which is a "C". However, this is supposed to be pretty good, & I set my heart on that. Believe me, if I fail I shall be heart broken, but I mustn't fail.

As for leave, if I pass, you realise what will happen, & the very remote chances of Xmas leave I suppose, but anyhow, we must keep praying, for I too have set my heart on it, & will also get drunk, but please darling, if you do get drunk, do it at home, or leave drinks alone completely.

And now my darlingest love, for whom I have already gone through fire & water & mental torture, & for whom I would die, I must go to sleep & rest my aching, & very bruised & grazed body, but think of me back at Ashey⁵⁰ in the

⁴⁹An Officer Cadet Training Unit (OCTU) took either civilians or other ranks and trained them to be officers.

⁵⁰I assume this is his "secret" location {MF}

wilds on Wednesday, & pray with me for success, & also Xmas leave.

Goodnight sweetheart mine, I really do adore you,

Yours always, Bill

**{The image below is a 1942 No. 7 War Office Selection Board,
pre-printed postcard, Winchester. It has been colourized}**

A.A. Militia Camp

Northwood

Friday, Dec. 11th

My very own darling,

Forgive me for not having written before this, but I was too tired & depressed to take interest in anything after my ordeal at Winchester, for, although I do not yet know the result, I fear very much that I failed, not, I hasten to assure you because I was any worse than anyone else there, in fact I know I was better than a lot, but they attach too much importance still to the question of education & the old school tie stuff for my peace of mind. I did not like the atmosphere of the last interview, in the final summing up as it were. Mind you, I may be entirely wrong about all this, but I have been very depressed because of it, and only a glimpse of you, or the news that I passed, is likely to completely banish it, so prepare yourself for some miserable letters if I don't pass. Should I fail, please try to believe that it's not my fault, I did all that was put before me as thoroughly & efficiently as any other candidate, it's just that I wasn't lucky with my parents' circumstances whilst I was young, & had I thought for an instant what a serious handicap this was, I very much doubt if I should even have tried. [...]

I hope this news will not make you as unhappy as I, but I simply had to tell you how it strikes me, [...]

The weather now is pretty lousy, there being a hurricane blowing & lots & lots of rain, but then this island seems to be continually immersed in rain, so that we have now become quite used to it. I mention the weather with some trepidation, but the censorship has now been suspended from here, & we can put where we like, & I hope, write what we like, using of course, discretion, and so for all of us, a great load is taken from our minds.

The writing pad, & map, arrived safely, both of which are more than welcome, and although at the moment I do not feel exactly like study, I have nevertheless been keenly interested in seeing the world in one piece, & not a little

surprised at the proximity of everything, it will be a vast help to me from now on. [...] Your reference to the wireless programme on Sunday brings me realisation that I missed something good, for as you know, I was busy with a psychological test miles from here.

Anyhow, when I arrived back here, I found that the radio was out of action, a valve burnt out I believe, so we have had a music less & news-less week, I don't know when or where we shall get a new valve from, & so the prospect is pretty lousy.

The boys went out "wooding" this afternoon, & I think they have got me a spot of bother to look forward to, for, the blighters were not content with collecting dead wood, they took a cross cut saw, & cut down a few nice big tress, which was all very nice, only they got caught in the act, & the keeper said he would report us to our Brigadier, which he undoubtedly will do, so the outlook is a bit black. Nevertheless, the lads were undaunted, & brought home the wood, & regardless of all consequences, cut it up, & we now have a neat pile of logs to mark the adventure.

Bdr. McCaffey has gone home for seven days compassionate leave, his brother was dangerously ill, & now I have good old Charlie Jenkins with me, & his cheery & efficient company is doing me a world of good, I shall try to keep him.

On my way back to this site on Wednesday, I passed through our honeymoon place, & saw lots of familiar sights [...]

And now darling, I seem to have used up all my news [...] You will be pleased to know that I do not do guards at the moment, but I assure you, when I do, it is because I can't bear to make these lads stay out longer than they need, & although actually I am not compelled to do it, I just can't help myself, that's why I do not complain, it's my own fault.

Goodnight darling, [...] I shall write again on Sunday [...] Your Bill always.

A.A. Militia Camp

Northwood

Monday Dec. 14th

My own darling wife,

Only a week to go before we know whether I shall be home for Christmas, and so far the chances are even. Your plans are apparently to fill the time up thoroughly with outings with Katherine, well, I don't mind, in fact I appreciate your efforts, but don't overdo it will you, remember we want some of the time to ourselves, don't forget the fifty fifty basis, namely we please each other, & you know what I like.

I'm very interested in my Sister's efforts to buy & run that business, & now that she finds she cannot be released, I'm wondering if she'll be wise in securing some other persons services, she may lose on the deal [...] ⁵¹

As for the matter of Whiskey, I might be able to get one or even two bottles, if I had the money, you seem to think I have plenty, but I assure you my budget is hard to balance now, so if you can get me some cash through by Saturday, I'll go to Ryde & try my best, so it's up to you now my love. [...]

It will be nice to see my Brother again, I do hope I can make it, it means such a lot now to be able to get together with all our families. We certainly must go dancing on Christmas Eve, I long to go to another one with you, but I don't suppose I shall have improved by inactivity in this direction. [...]

Thinking seriously for a moment, I still do not know the result of my course, & the very delay gives me cause for doubt, I do hope it's not failure. Mr. Bunce refuses to believe I failed anyway, so I manage to keep my chin up a bit, it's nice to know anemone here believes in me.

Last night I went out from here, with Mac the cook, & Bill Sims, we went to a "pub" about four miles away, an hour's walk over the fields, & oh boy, did I have a night, I forgot all my worries & got well & truly drunk. I insisted on dancing all the way back as I sang "Spurs"? & when I did get back I was soaked

⁵¹ We do not know what sort of business this was, but just after the war, Edie did open a general store in Bengo.

right through to the skin, it had been raining & I had no coat, but I didn't notice it. On arrival here, I proceeded to liven the camp up, & there were bells ringing & shouts all over the countryside at midnight, but all the boys enjoyed it, & said I should go out more often. I paid for it though, because later on I was sick, & my tummy has been awful today, add to that the fact that I am now well & truly "broke", I guess the price was pretty high. [...] And now here is a little bit of news I acquired, it is a record of a B.B.C. news broadcast of some time ago:-

"It is learned from the British United Press early this morning that a large number of Italians have taken Cascara on the border of the Sudan, & are now hurrying towards the banks of the Nile.

The British H.Q. Cairo, while admitting that the Italians have taken Cascara, express their doubts of their ability to hold it. This would appear to be confirmed by the latest reports that the Italians are evacuating all along the line, and the strain on their rear is tremendous? The Italians however, have tried to suppress this, but it has leaked out in several places, and there is very strong evidence that a more wholesome respect is growing for the historic scrap of paper.

The following information has just been received from H.Q. Cairo:- it is understood that 10,000 Jerries have been rushed to the Italian line. That is the end of the news"

How do you like it? Good I think, that's one of Charlie's little jokes.

You'll be pleased to know that I got to a photographers in Ryde on Saturday afternoon, & should have a few pictures for you when I come home. I don't know what they'll be like, but I'm hoping for the best. Bill Sims is on leave tomorrow, & is posting this letter for me, so don't worry about the postmark will you?

And now my dearest love, I really must close down, my bed calls me, but I shall be "dreaming of my wife's Christmas" because I love her so. Goodnight [...]

Bill

A.A. Militia Camp

Northwood

Wednesday, Dec. 16th



Dearest Love,

Eleven years ago you came into my life to stay, & I need hardly say they have been the most wonderful years of my life, years I shall never regret. [...]

I'm happy this letter will reach you on that day, Dec. 18th, for I cannot be with you this year, the first time we have failed to celebrate together since we met [...] you can now safely assume that I shall be with you for seven days commencing Dec. 22nd, and I shall only telegram if this fails for some awful reason [...]

At the moment I am in pretty poor health, having a most awful cough, caused I think by getting constantly wet & not being able to ever get really dry, & the fact that we had a hostile raid the other night & were called out in such a hurry that I had on only the barest necessities which did not include socks or blouse & scarf, so I guess that's what caused it.

Too bad about Len {*Wagstaff*} having to go abroad, I'm ever so sorry about that, & we certainly must try to see Kitty & cheer her up. As for Ron & Freda {*Dempster*}, I had no idea it was so long ago since we stayed with them, but just the same I feel we shall be cramming too much if we go on making "dates", remember the "fifty fifty" basis, you like going out, I like it too, but I also feel just as happy at home. However, we'll see about this last visit, I suppose it partially comes as a duty call, for it seems that although we are the best of friends, Ron does not fully appreciate what it feels like to be an exile granted a weeks reprieve [...]

It's been raining all day, & so we all got busy with distemper & converted the cookhouse into a cosy & clean place, a place of which I can now be justly proud, & though it's not properly finished yet, I'm considering it as done.

Now it's bedtime, & I think I'm going, we've no cigarettes or tobacco, & so there's no pleasure to keep us awake, but remember darling I shall be dreaming of you, & on the 18th I shall be with you in spirit. [...] I love you Ann,
Your Bill.

{CHRISTMAS LEAVE HERE}

A.A. Militia Camp

Northwood

Tuesday 29th Dec.

My Darling,

Once more we're back to letter writing, and with this my first to arrive after my return from leave I enclose the photographs. I do not like them a bit, the cap has spoiled them in every case I think, but on Saturday I shall get some more done, this time without a cap. Anyhow, perhaps you won't be so critical as I am, & may find one which will please you, they are the three best out of six, & I shall destroy the rest. Give one to Mother, & Joan may have the other [...]

I had a peaceful journey back, up to Liverpool St. I played cards with a Battersea boy who was introduced to me at Hertford by Trevor Sherman? We played "beat your neighbour" & "snap", quite exciting for him of course, but not quite the same as "Nap" or "Pontoon" was it? The blasted train went all round Stratford way, & I had just ten minutes to wait at Waterloo, couldn't get a seat anywhere, & the carriages were packed, but after we had been going a while, I

went to the first class compartment, and sat in comfort & open defiance with two naval officers & crotchety looking old lady, and I went to sleep, & I didn't wake until we were practically at our destination. The boat was absolutely packed, I've never seen so many people, & it was very apparent that the visitors' ban was off until March, it seemed as though everyone was going there in one big crowd.

We arrived at Ryde at six o'clock, & had a cup of tea, then took our train to the nearest village, & my goodness it is cold here, it's so very much more so than at home, the wind cuts right across the hills, & by the time we had found the camp we were almost frozen stiff, it was so cold that even our brisk walking couldn't warm us. Anyhow, we have a nice warm fire in the hut, & I haven't to go on guard until 6.30, so I hope to get a little warmth & rest in tonight, but I didn't realise it was so bleak up here until tonight, I wonder we survive.

According to reports, the boys had a very good Christmas, counting by drinks they must have had a good time, because they had 61 pints, & that's enough to make anyone merry I should think, so I needn't feel selfish about my wonderful time.

And now it's getting towards bedtime, I seem to have spent all the time telling you about my holiday, & now I find it's past eleven, so I will take advantage of a very windy night & get to bed early.

Before I go though, please let me tell you that it has been the most wonderful leave of all, & I shall think of it in the dark days ahead as something to dream of [...] Goodnight my only love, I adore you always, Your Bill

P.S. Second thoughts I send 5 pictures, take your pick. The other one I shall burn it's awful.

Bill

A.A. Militia Camp,

Northwood

Wednesday, Dec. 30th

Darling Wife,

My first day is successfully over, & taken all round, I haven't had such a bad day. It has been terribly cold, freezing all day long, so that we have been glad of all the woollies we have, & everyone has had two pairs of gloves on, & we needed them. We managed to keep our bodies pretty warm though, because most of the day has been spent sawing wood, & as you know, that's pretty good exercise. Just before lunch we took a stroll across the fields to see what was over the hill actually, & we can now walk there instead of going to the other village to get a train, & it should take no longer. The only drawback is that it's got to be good weather, otherwise I fear it will be a bit muddy.

Tomorrow, Charles & myself will be taking a Gas exam again, I mean we shall be the examiners, and although we are not very keen on it, at least we are going out together, & we should find time to stroll around our honeymoon village & perhaps take a drink, although I haven't forgotten my promise, & it may only be tea, unless you raise the ban for a new year's drink, anyway, we'll see what happens.

I think you would be very amused to see the boys in this cold weather, we are dressed in our Jerkins, with huge scarves, gloves, & the most original



headgear, namely the Commando's well known woolly cap which look very much like a large sock drawn on. We've all got them, & today at lunch, in our mess hut, I could not help thinking about Snow White's seven dwarfs, the headgear is precisely the same, & Tich looks as much like little Dopey as anyone could, & certainly our existence is very like the Dwarfs were, all we need is a Snow White, how about it my angel.

You may not believe it, but I have only just finished two solid hours at Shorthand, & for my first attempt I have not done too badly, because I know the consonants inside out now, & tomorrow night will go on to the next lesson.[...]

What do you think of the photographs? I'd like to know, actually I'm hoping you won't be so dissatisfied as I, but I shall still get some more taken whatever you think.

It's certainly nice to have Charlie with me here, the first time I've had a real friend since I was a D.C. & we do get on so well together, he's so very cheerful & helpful, I shan't mind the month's wait to my next leave so long as he can stay with me. Bdr McCaffrey of course has been moved to T.H.Q. & it will do him good to work a bit & he'll certainly learn a lot. I hope I don't get any courses shoved on to me when my next leave is due, that would be awful, because I do so want to be with you on your birthday, & I shall most certainly try my hardest.

And as this is probably the last letter I shall write this year, I now wish you a very happy new year [...] Whatever happens, I know now that we shall always be in love, & as the years go by, whether we are together or parted, I feel that love will go on growing until we die.

I start a new page, & a new year, by saying I love you [...] And now my dearest heart, I hate to have to say goodnight without kissing you or seeing you, but I really must go to bed (guard at 4.45 in the morning) I think of you dancing somewhere & please spare me a thought as we enter the new year, I shall be awake, dreaming & planning our future, wondering how I can become worthy of you.

Goodnight darling, [...] Your Bill.

{Bill finished the year with a poem-see next page}

DECEMBER 1942

To Ann.

Another year has sped away
 From our threescore & ten.
 A year of moments grave & gay,
 A year of fighting men.
 A year of frightful memory,
 A year of strife & strain.
 But as I sit in reverie
 There breaks a soft refrain.

-11-

New Year is here, inspiring hope,
 Bidding each one look on,
 To leave behind the past, & grope
 Towards the peaceful Sun.

-11-

Optimist Future beckons near
 Revealing youthful charm.
 Courage comes, & with it dear,
 Serene & peaceful balm.

-11-

For who can say as we look out
 To all that lies before,
 They know not respite from the doubt
 Which ever follows war.

-11-

And so, my love, on this first day
 Of Nineteen Forty Three,
 I wish you PEACE, & who shall see
 We may not soon be free.

-11-

Your Bill