

NORRINGTON FAMILY LETTERS 15 March 1916 to 11 September 1917

Raymond Norrington was aged 20 when he was killed in action on 16 August 1917, during the Battle of Third Ypres (Passchendaele). The Norringtons were a well established family in Epsom and ran a butchers shop in Epsom High Street.

Letters played a major role in keeping up the morale of the troops in the front line. The delivery of mail was always eagerly awaited. Raymond's mother kept many family letters, and the following are transcriptions of all the surviving letters, the majority of which are from Raymond to his mother but also include letters from and to other family members.

I have tried to transcribe the letters exactly as they were written, complete with spelling mistakes and wrong use of apostrophes. The few comments I have made are in italics.

THE LETTERS:

Wednesday 15 March 1916

Dear Old Fred (*Brother Alfred*)

Thanks very much for your letter which I received this morning with Mother's parcel.

Yes I think, as you say, I shall get back to my Regiment quick enough. They seem to want as many men as possible up there. I think there are going to be some big moves made by the Allies this Spring. And I hope they are successful. What say you?

I have read in papers several times about these blooming conscientious objects. I reckon the things they say are just about the limit, I'm going to be one of 'em in the next war. But still I quite agree with you in saying that most of them are white livered jelly bags.

I hear that in all prob you will have a chance of joining up in May. Well! I wish you luck, but still I hope that the war will very nearly be over by then.

I hope that they give the N.C.C. men the sort of jobs the infantry man objects to doing & I can tell it has to be a darn dirty job he objects to. So if I was in charge of them, you can guess they wouldn't enjoy themselves much.

I'm jolly sorry I have not received your cigs., I dont doubt but what they went up the line it seems rather a waste, when I dont get them, but still I hope the man who does get them enjoys them.

The weather has been very nice here for the last few days, but before then, it was jolly rotten, darn cold, the same sort of weather you speak of. I do have a rotten cold but it is much better now.

Rather funny that you & Maggie should both be laid up with bad colds. I hope she is better now, same to yourself.

Fancy Henderson in the Westminsters, how does he like being at Winchester? And when did he join? I quite expect that he will be shoved here quickly, he'll get about 3 or 4 months training & then his times up. Poor devil! when he does come tell him to look out for me.

We have just had tea & tested mother's cake. It was ripping I didn't half enjoy it I can tell. Just like old times to taste some of mother's home made cake.

Well Fred old chap I think I must close now as I haven't much more to say. Please tell Nell that I will write her in a few days. I had made up my mind to write today & enclose it with this but I'm afraid I shouldn't have anything to say to her, I should have to tell the same old tale.

Ta - ta Good luck. Your Affectionate Bother Raymond.

P.T.O. As you were I mean Brother.

Thursday 16 March 1916 (16 March, shown as Wednesday)

My dear Mother & Father

This letter is for you both as I don't think that it is worth writing to you separately seeing that I have the same news for you both.

I received the parcel this morning & a jolly nice one it was to. Just the very things I wanted & by the look of the cake I should think it's grand. We're trying that for tea. I had quite expected having a bit of trouble to get it as you said you were going to address it the same as your last letter, which had not the name of the Regiment. It was a nice surprise.

The isolation is still going on alright, no more cases lately. A few days ago I was almost certain that I was going to have another dose of the measles, but luckily I escaped. I think that we shall start parading again as usual after Sunday, if none of us go to hospital. I don't mind telling you that I'm not going to do more parades than I can help. I don't see rucking about in the sun. What do you think? - Quite agree with me eh! That's right I knew you would.

Some of the boys went up the line to-day including Gay & Reason. Poor old Gay he was quite worried about it, he was afraid he would be funky of it all, but I managed to soothe him, by telling him I was the same, but found very little difficulty when I really got there. It's far worse to be away from it & worrying about it than to be really in it. The fellows take it all so light heartedly, it is really a treat to watch them. They don't seem to care a bit for shells. It's simply marvellous.

Good news! peace declared. (I don't think) no! One of our tent fellows has just been bathing & says that he has suspicious spots on his body. He reckons it's measles rash. What ho!. For another ten days isolation. Talk about active service why there's nothing like it. We slack about in our tents within the sound of rifle fire (on the range) and hear bombs bursting (also on the range) "Some life" I can tell you.

How are you getting on? I always ask this question, but you never seem to answer it. But still no news is good news. So I shan't worry about not hearing.

How is business going? I was speaking about the butchering trade to our fellows the other day, & they all seemed quite certain that it was the most paying game going, & they brought up the same old argument about the fact that people must have meat to eat. But they didn't seem surprised when I told them that they were quite right, but there were such a dickens of a lot of butchers willing to provide the blooming stuff. Then they all swore that all the butchers they knew had managed to make plenty of money. But we had to give up the argument, as we couldn't agree & they didn't understand as much as I did about it.

We've just done a little work -- sweeping out & cleaning up the tents our fellows have just left. Also I just helped to put one of the chaps out of the tent, as he was annoying us. It was a great struggle but we managed to sit him in a nice clean puddle just outside the tent. He is not so annoying now.

Well I must close now. Hoping to hear from one of you again soon. I am enclosing one or two letters for the family.

With best love to you all.

Your Affectionate Son Raymond

Sunday 19 March 1916

My dear Father

Thanks for your letter of the 13th I was pleased to get it, as you can guess your letters are always jolly welcome.

We are having quite a good time & are still in isolation. I don't know how much longer it will last but I don't think it will be much longer. Our fellows keep coming into the Base from Hospital in pretty good numbers. There must have been tons sent down the line sick & wounded.

I received mother's last parcel containing cake & salmon etc., the other week, but two before that have been used by old Dexter & the rest of my pals.

I heard from Dexter yesterday & he tells me that the Regiment is still a good way behind the line & is likely to stay there several weeks.

Ern Pullinger was certainly very lucky in getting back to England so soon. But I'm afraid had it have been the Autumn instead of the Spring he would have been kept in Hospital in France. At this time

of year it is very easy to get home as of course they wish to keep the Hospitals clear for the Spring & Summer campaign.

Fanny Alicks two boys still being at Ipswich, it seems very strange that they should have been standing by so long. To my idea, it is rather silly to send men out who have only had about 3 or 4 months training when they have tons of fellows in England who have been in training practically since the war began.

I hope too, that Charlie gets that job at Sopwiths, not only would it be nearer home, but I shouldn't be surprised but what he wouldn't be able to get home to sleep.

Please thank mother for the Registered letter which came this morning I was getting into an awful hole financially, but yesterday they paraded us & paid us 10 francs, but of course I had borrowed nearly as much as that before, so you can guess there wasn't much left.

Well Good-bye give my love to all at home

Your Affectionate Son Raymond

Sunday 19 March 1916

My dear Nell (*sister*)

Once more I am giving you a turn for an epistle. I am enclosing yours & a letter to Mrs Minnett in Dads letter, for the reason I told you we are only allowed to write two letters a week with the exception of those in green envelopes.

I had a letter from old Dexter yesterday in which he said he had received a parcel for me, which contained sausages, cake, butter, cheese & candles. I suppose that might have been the one that got delayed. He said the sausages went down fine. He has also my primus, so of course he was able to cook them well.

He says that a parcel came for me from Mrs Minnett, as it is no use thinking of forwarding them on to me, I told them that any parcels that came for me he was to get on with. He does not mention having received the parcel in which you put those socks. I dont expect that it has arrived yet.

I reckon I'm missing a lot of good things being down the line dont you? Really I shant be sorry when I get back up there, as you have at least a permanent address, whereas you never know when you will move while you are here.

And really speaking we are spending a most uninteresting time here, we spend most of the day in the tent sitting on our rear portions & when you have nothing to do, this sort of thing is inclined to get a bit boring. But of course I ought to feel very thankful to think that I am out of danger.

How are those saucy socks going on that you are making me? I still have those grey ones you sent me & really they're a treat to wear. I lost those socks that mother had made for me, when I went into hospital but they were almost worn out.

Well Good-bye Nell, write again soon. With Love

Your Affectionate Brother Raymond

Monday 20 March 1916

My dear Mum

The box you speak of in the letter which I received this morning, arrived one day early last week, & I have already acknowledged receipt of it in a previous letter.

I also got the last parcel you sent (No.2.) this morning, & that ham was absolutely great. Do you know? It could'nt have arrived at a better time, as today we had one of the rottenest dinners served up I've ever seen. So we had the ham instead & I can tell it went down a treat. It was an absolutely lovely bit too. I've not tasted such a beautiful piece of bacon since I left England, & the other Boys said the same & as 3 of them have been out here 15 months It's saying something is'nt it?

Wish old Charlie luck, & tell him I hope that he will succeed in getting that job at Sopwiths. I reckon thats a jolly good idea of his, going to see the manager. I reckon he'll get something definite at least. And even if it is a refusal, which I sincerely hope it will not be, it will be settled, & then he can try

for another stunt. Well I do reckon Old Ern P. is jolly lucky in getting down to the Convalescent Camp, he must have come out of hospital quicker than he expected. But still its good to think that he is getting on so quickly.

While I was in hospital I had a talk to the Sister of our Ward, & she said that should I ever go home sick or wounded, & was well enough to talk. If I asked the Receiving Officer, to put me down for a hospital near my home, he would do his best possible. I think that 's worth knowing & also the hospital I do know which I should ask for.

Fancy old Bill Gilks turning up again. I should very mush like to see him, as I dont think I have set eyes on him since I stayed that week with him when he was home for 6 months holiday and I dont doubt but what you'll have plenty of chatter seeing that Old Charlie is at home. And you'd have even more were I at home too.

I think the vest will do a treat it is nice and light, I shant want another vest as I had one served out before going up the line the first time. And thats in quite good condition. I like the handkerchiefs, they are very picturesque & caused much fainting & fits in the tent when I pulled them out of the parcel. But they are just the thing I wanted.

I think I will take your suggestion & write a letter to uncle Fred, I did promise to send both aunt Kate & uncle Fred a letter to let them know how I am getting on.

Thanks very much for the Registered letter, which you sent me so quickly, & and also I hope you will give Fred my thanks for what he did towards my getting it so quickly.

I dont know quite how I am going to cook those sausages yet, as I left my primus up the line with old Dexter as I knew that he would find more use for it than I should, & also I should in all probability have lost it in hospital. But I think I shall be able to wangle round the cook at our cook house to do them for me.

No! I dont think you could do anything better for me in the way of parcels. Mum, they're always darn fine. By the way while I am down the line dont send anything that will mean using a fire, such as cocoa & nestle's milk. When we are up the line they are very useful indeed. You understand dont you?

Do you mind putting some sort of tooth soap in my next parcel, as I cant get hold of any out here, & that's the most convenient stuff to carry.

I hear that our boys who have gone to Winchester have'nt been doing very well lately, as I hear that they have "spotted fever" & measles in the camp, rather hardluck for them. They were the ones who brought it to this camp. Twice I have thought that I had measles coming on, but each time it has gone off. Rather funny, the fellows who did have measles, came out of hospital after 10 days & did not go back to isolation. But we who were isolated because of them are still isolated.

I know that there were plenty of Conscientious Objectors in England, but not here, but I find that we have some out here too. Yesterday a fatigue party of RAMC men were put on cleaning rifles. And one fellow said he objected to the job, as he had joined the medical corp from a Conscientious point of view. He was excused the job, & later I happened to come across the same fellow surrounded by dirty greasy dixies, which he was doing his best to clean. And he did not seem particularly pleased with himself

I reckon by that he'll find that it does'nt pay to be a Conscientious Objector. At any rate I have.

I am glad to hear that the people in England have the idea that the war will soon be over, nearly every man you meet out here is almost certain that this last big attack that the Germans have been making is the beginning of the end. I can even yet see myself spending my summer holiday in England. Bon, eh! (this by the way, is one of the popular sayings out here.)

Well Good - bye, Shall be writing Fred soon, & also Lizzie. It is very awkward, when you are restricted to only writing two letters a week, & you have about 7 or 8 people to write to.

With best love to you all Your Affectionate Son Raymond

Wednesday 29 March 1916

Headed notepaper: On Active Service. WITH THE BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE. Y.M.C.A.

Dear Fred (Brother)

Once more I am giving you your turn for a letter. I do my best to let you all have one in turn, but of course it doesn't really matter who it is to, as long as one does reach home.

Yes, we are still isolated, but we are not having such a monotonous time now, as they have just started to parade us for route marches in the afternoon, and sad to relate we have to rise at 6 a.m. for physical drill at 6.15 a.m. This is the only thing that does not suit our liking, but still it will help to get us fit. The route march we had this afternoon had the effect of rather cracking my feet up again, I think that they had not healed up properly yet, as they are still very tender. But I'm thinking perhaps this short easy marching will serve to harden them. I hope so, as nothing is so terrible, as marching in full pack with bad feet, & you know the full packs we carry out here are nothing like those we used to carry in England for often besides the ordinary stuff we carry what we call a "joy sack", which is a sand bag packed full of grub. Its really a sight to see our Batt on the move, the stuff they carry is marvellous nearly everybody carries a sack, & also has little parcels tied about all over his equipment. But if the march gets tiring something has got to go over board, but its not the grub. Clothing always goes first. I hear from old Dexter they've been having some jolly rotten marches lately. They've been doing 16 & 18 miles a day & he says by the time they've finished they're all pretty well done. I'm glad I'm not there to tell you the truth, as I dont mind them being able to say I got out of that. But I rather object to them saying I tried to miss the trenches, where there's risk.

I'm glad to hear that Charlie's interview at Kingston was pretty satisfactory, & I to hope he gets the job, for then I expect he'll be able to live at home, & he will as you say be more useful. How is his business going? I hope he still has plenty of jobs on hand. By this time I suppose Daisy has got a jolly good idea as to how the clerical part should be carried on.

Never mind about not being able to join up yet. You'll be useful even yet, but take my advice, when you do manage to get away from that blooming job, join a decent Territorial Regiment, as I hear that the other regiments give the Derby men a jolly hot time of it, & you dont deserve treatment like some of the poor devils get. I wish you had been able to join at the time I did, for you miss all that, its jolly hard luck, but if I know you, you'll give some of those devils as good as they give you.

Did I tell you I met Harry Pennington out here, he was just going up the line, when I heard of his being here, a fellow who was in the County Bank & who lived at Ewell told me about him, so I ran up to where they were paraded, & waited till they marched off & was just able to get a few words with him. He had only joined about the middle of January, & had volunteered to come out. But of course as the Artists are now an O.T.C. he will not touch the line much. They only go up for instruction.

I am glad to hear that the loss of his leg has not made much different to Old Tom K. When you see him next just return his kind wishes to me, I mean some more kind wishes from myself, & tell him I'm glad he is getting on alright. I met a fellow who was in his lot & who knew him. This fellow was in the Hospital with same complaint as mine.

Thanks very much for the promise of the cigarettes, its jolly good of you to send them. Since I came down the line I have had a jolly bad cough, & have'nt been able to smoke, but now I'm glad to say it is getting on a treat, & I think I will be in a very fit state by the time they arrive.

Please thank Old Lizzie for her little present of the chocolate. When I get back to England I'll take old Lizzie to have 3⁰ of Pictures & some of her favourite nut milk chocolate. I'm developing a frightful liking for chocolate, I'm always eating the blooming stuff.

Well! Old Sport, I must close now hope to hear from you again soon. By the way Will you see, if you can find any decent Snap-shots of me (kakhi or civil) & just print a few off. As I want some for one or two fellows.

Good - bye & Good luck.

Your Affectionate Brother Raymond

Thursday 30 March 1916

My dear Mother

I thought perhaps I might just as well put a short note in for you. My parcel arrived yesterday, the cake was ripping, and was jolly nice for tea. I've just had some for breakfast.

The physical drill parade was a wash - out this morning, & I hope for every morning. You know getting up at 6 a.m. does not go down very nicely after having been able to lay in bed until after breakfast. I was orderly this morning for breakfast, that means I had to get up at 6 45, to draw the rations, then as orderly, I had to cut the bread, & the bacon, & pour out tea, & wait on the other lazy devils generally, while they rest comfortably in bed. Never mind I shall have my turn tomorrow.

Our Regiment has not been near the trenches since I left them, & to my idea I think it will be a long time before they do see them again. They are the only Territorial Regiment who have been in the firing line since they first came out, so I think they deserve a rest, dont you?

We have been a week in isolation now, since the last two fellows were sent to hospital, & we're now only another week to do. I expect it is going to be a fortnight. Then I expect we shall have to go on that blooming training ground. I reckon if ever there was a little hell on earth, thats it.

Well, well Its very early in the morning, & I have'nt much to say, so I think I had better shut up.

Good bye with love

Your affectionate Son Raymond

Sunday 2 April 1916

My dearest Mother

I was jolly pleased yesterday when the "Line Sergt", told me there was a "Registered Letter" for me, the purse is a ripping one, & should last a good while. I think it would be a good idea to do as Fred suggested, & chain the blooming thing up. As I am not anxious to lose another five francs. So do you mind asking old Fred if he would enclose a chain as he promised, in my next parcel.

It seems very strange, to hear you speaking about having awfully rough weather, when for the last two or three days the weather here has been absolutely gorgeous. Its absolutely great this morning we've got the tent wide open, & a nice cool breeze is blowing through, which makes the heat of the sun just pleasant. Its ripping as you may guess.

But fancy you having snow, rather unfortunate that tile blowing off the roof, I bet it made an awful mess of the cupboard. Never mind, another job for the builder. I should think that that bad weather must have been pretty general, for in all the letters the fellows have had it has been mentioned.

I should think now that you're in such a mess at home, you are glad in a way, at not having so many of us knocking about. But I should think at ordinary times, the place must seem awfully quiet.

How rotten to have Alec on the sick-list, I am rather wondering how you manage to keep the whole thing going. I should think Dad must have a rotten time & I expect Old Nell gets wild about it.

Has Alec only put his arm out? or has he broken some bones? I hope it is not very serious. For it makes things so hard for every one. I suppose by this time Hilda has become quite an experienced butcher. I shant be at all surprised to see her perched up on one of our carts very soon. Just about her stile I should think.

I see in the "Daily Mail" this morning that a zepp was brought down in the Thames on that last raid. Thats the first to be brought down in England & may they do so in tons more.

The last parcel you sent was jolly fine, the cake was a treat, one of our fellows was frightfully keen on it, & very nearly ate the lot. I remember when I was at home, for some unknown reason I used to think I did not like the soda cake, but I must say I dont object now.

That brawn went down A.1., we had it for dinner one day. I like anything like that, as long as its home made. I wonder how one of those meat pies would come out. I should think it would be alright dont you. I thought of that when I was getting on with the brawn and thought I'd tell you, as you asked for suggestions.

By taking on a commission I should certainly have a better time as far as living is concerned. But really we make thinks jolly comfortable, & all the fellows seem quite happy, & really speaking we have a

real good time, taking things all round. There's no worry except that which you like to make & we seldom do that. So at any rate until I get my leave, I shant make any steps towards getting one. I must say living as we are now, would suit me for duration, for I'm not a bit anxious to get back up the line, & shant go until they send me.

I'm jolly sorry I forgot to send Dad a letter or post card on his birthday but you know I seem away from everything, & there's nothing to remind me of these things until it suddenly strikes me.

Now that the weather is getting warm again I think I shall try to get my leather waist-coat sent back to you, & in that case I should like you to send that old army cardigan out to me, which will last me until the Summer is here, then I can throw that away. I'll let you know when I want it sent out.

My ring is a "wee" bit small but still I am able to wear it quite comfortable. I'm jolly glad I've got it now. I suppose Charlie & Fred have both got theirs by now.

Tell Dad I shall be pleased to get a letter from him, I expect by now he has received my last letter.

Well I must close now, as I've nothing more to say.

With love to all at home Your Affectionate Son Raymond

Monday 10 April 1916

My dear Mother

I expect you will be surprised to hear that I am still in isolation, & am likely to be for another fortnight or three weeks, as last Friday another of our fellows contracted measles, so naturally we must have another dose of isolation. Seems as though your wishes that I shall be at the Base a good while are being granted, doesn't it?

Mary & Ella sent me a parcel of chocolates & sweets the other day, they were a ripping change from the plain bars that we get out here. Louise sends me some mags regularly every week, I reckon its jolly kind of them to send these things, dont you?

I suppose you are just about in the middle of your Spring cleaning. "Some" muck about I bet. I'm afraid when I do get back and am able to get back into civilian clothes again, I shall have to invest in some new ones, for I am really getting much bigger & fatter, my tunic will hardly go round me now, & the other day my trousers split, as they were so tight, but as I am not with my regiment I cannot get hold of new clothes.

I am glad Alec is once more on the job, and that things are going on as usual again. I expect you are all very pleased too.

I did not say that I did not like the Soda cake that you sent me. In fact, had not one of the fellows said what it was I should'nt have known, of course I knew it was different to what I usually have, but I ate it just the same & enjoyed it. What I did say was that when at home I used think that I didn't like it, I dont know why because I really liked it this time.

I have not received any letter from Fred with an impression of his ring in. I'm rather afraid that I dont get half my letters, at times.

Yes! I really think that the zeps will soon get the "wind up", if they get many more receptions like they had a week or two back. The papers seem to give a good account of our aircraft guns out here. They seem always to be fetching the aeroplanes down now. I had a letter from Ern Pullinger on Saturday, & he certainly seems very pleased with things. I am glad he comes in to see you sometimes. He said in his letter, that he's made up his mind not to come out here again. I dont blame him either & I admire his taste.

I had a letter from Daisy & also one from Charlie a day or two ago, but at present have not had time to answer either. I had quite forgotten about Easter until Daisy mentioned going up to spend a few days with Charlie. Poor old Charlie, he does seem to have some bad luck, everything turned out to be a wash-out. I can quite imagine how fed up he is about everything.

I expect I shall be receiving the parcel you sent last week, either today or Wednesday you cant imagine how we all look forward to letters & parcels. You can always tell when the post call is played, by the cheer that goes up through the camp.

I had a letter from Frank Churchill yesterday, & he says for some reason or other he has been marked Home Service again. Jolly hard luck that he cant get his transfer into the Flying Corps.

By the way, have you seen anything of old Fred Tickner lately, when you see him next will you

give him my address & ask him to write & send his own along. I should like to have written to him often, but was not able.

Well I have'nt any more to say so I think I must close.

Give my love to all Your Affectionate Son Raymond

P.S. I have just received the parcel. Please thank Nell for the socks & old Fred for the chain. I also had a letter from Lizzie this morning, which I shall answer in due course. We had that meat pie for dinner & jolly fine it was too. Shall write again later Raymond

Monday 1 May 1916

My dearest Mother

Does'nt the time fly quickly here's May here now, I expect the time seems pretty long to you, but to us out here the time goes very quickly & a good thing to.

I am no longer in isolation I came out last Wednesday & since then I have had to parade, so of course have'nt had so much time to spare only the evenings.

I expect you will be surprised to hear that I have met old Tom Burfit here Wednesday. There were tons of other fellows I knew, among them was Ron Ockenden & Sgt Sheppard. Tom & Ron have not altered in the least but Sheppard is much fatter & looks very different. They are all hoping to get leave before they have to go up the line, so perhaps you will see something of Tom, he looks awfully well.

I have not written to uncle Fred yet, but shall do so now that I know what to say.

We have been having some gorgeous weather here just lately but today it has been very thundery, & we've had several showers but of course it was very refreshing & was very welcome as it saved us going on parade this afternoon.

Tonight I am going to a concert at the YMCA. It is one of Lena Ashwells concert parties, so I should think that it will be pretty good.

No thanks, I have got enough money at present, but should I run short again I will let you know (Ahem).

Well Good - bye, will write again soon, with best love to you all.

Your affectionate Son Raymond

Wednesday 3 May 1916.

Headed notepaper: ON ACTIVE SERVICE. BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE. Soldiers' Christian Association Camp Home. Headquarters--Denison House, 296 Vauxhall Bridge Road, S.W.

Dear Mother

Just a few lines to let you know that I am still going strong. The weather here is absolutely great, just like summer, you can guess ours is jolly hot work, still its jolly pleasant.

I received Nell's letter this morning, tell her will write her later. I also received your parcel but have not opened it as I am having it sent up the line. For we are going up again and it would make a lot to carry. So dont forget when next you write to address Rfln R.N. B. Coy 6 Plt. Q.W.R. B.E.F. And will you let any other of my pals know when you see them.

I expect you have received my letter in which I told you about meeting Tom & Ron, I went to the cinema with Ron last night.

I do not know how we are situated as far as getting soap & stuff is concerned, at any rate will you enclose some in the next parcel. Also will you try & get me some troopers Ointment. Its a preventative against lodgers. I cant get it here. If you cant get that, get "Harrison's Pomard".

I will write you again when I arrive. But dont worry about me Mum, the Batt is not in the trenches. Love to you all

Your Affectionate Son Raymond

Monday 8 May 1916.

My dearest Mother

I have just received the parcel you sent me last Friday week, everything was alright except the tomatoes and they were absolutely squashed up. I also received your letter of Saturday. It was jolly decent of you to answer so quickly.

Since I joined the Regiment we have made another move, but it was only a short march, not as long as they have been doing lately. And today we are having off, for a rest. This village is not so nice as the last one we were in, but still we are managing to make things comfortable and you may guess we don't take long to do that.

I don't think you need worry about me for a good time yet, or for some time.

Rather funny that some of my letters should be delayed for so long, for I have never let as many as 8 days pass before writing to you.

If I were you I should try the Stores to see what they are like, for it would save so much trouble for you. But on the other hand, I doubt that such little luxuries would be put in as you put in. Of course I should rather have yours and I will be able to give you some suggestions, as to Summer stuff.

By the way, when next you send me a parcel do you mind enclosing that pair of indoor slippers of mine, you know, the pair I had at Christmas. They will be handy to put on after coming off a march.

Well I must close now so as to catch the post, with Love to you all

Your affectionate son Raymond

Monday 15 May 1916

Dear Mother

With your last letter I received one from Old Charlie. I was glad to hear that that he had managed to have Daisy with him over Easter.

He seems to be having a pretty monotonous time up at Ripon. He does not seem to be able to get any better jobs with all his attempts. But still perhaps it's better that he's stuck up there, or I should say, up the line.

Yesterday I also received the promised parcel from Ada. I think it's jolly of decent of her to send me parcels, don't you?

My word! Things will be different when I get home, I shall hardly know my self. What's this you say about starting the Daylight Saving business? Is it a local or national affair?

I've taken on a new job here now, & am now an asst Company Cook. Just about suits me, for you remember how I liked mucking about on jobs like that. I don't know how long it lasts, but when we get back to the line I shall rejoin the Company.

I hear the new Cinema at the Town Hall is a bon place. It'll certainly make the other two places pull themselves together, & brighten their blooming dull old holes up, to make them a little more attractive.

Well, mother I'll do my best, & write as often as possible now that I am back with the Regiment. But of course I can't write much, for news is very short, & I don't expect you are particularly anxious to hear, what I've been helping to cook daily.

While I am trying to write this, one of the fellows in this Barn is talking like the Dickens & I must say I hardly know what I've written. He's about the noisiest fellow I've ever struck. While he is in the Barn no one can possibly get a word in edge ways. So you may guess we get a bit sick of him.

All my pals have managed to get hold of decent jobs Dexter & Reason are sanitary men, for our Company. Gay is learning to be a Bugler & I've got this job I've just told you of.

Well I must close now. Tell old Lizzie I will write her soon. Good - bye, Mum with Love to you all.

Your Affectionate Son Raymond

Saturday 20 May 1916

Dearest Mother

I hope you got my letter which I wrote while in the Field Ambulance. I came out yesterday & have since been carrying on with my new job.

I expect you will be surprised to hear that our noble Regiment has now sort of been turned into a navvies Batt., for we now have to send out fatigue parties to mend the roads, & also to dig at the Stone Quarry. So of course we dont have time to do our ordinary parades. I dont know how long this sort of thing is going to last, but I hope not very long.

I had a jolly fine parcel from Chamberlains the other day with some absolutely great cakes in it. One was iced. Bon eh! I suppose it was Edie Locke who sent it. At any rate I am writing to her.

By the way, while I was in Hospital for those two days our Q.M. returned the letters which came during that time. So should you get some back, dont get wind up if anyone else has any returned, please explain the circumstances.

What sort of weather are you having at Epsom? If its anything like it is here I should think you find it mighty hot. We do.

How is Dad getting on I hope he's going fit still. Just remind him that its his turn to write.

By the way I got the parcel containing the slippers & other necessities. Dont trouble to send any more soap, for we've got a canteen here now. I can do with some more of that toothpaste though.

This morning, as the fellows had to go out on their "navvying" soon after 6 o'clock, I had to get up at about 4 to help cook them their blooming breakfast. So you might guess I dont feel particularly energetic tonight, but I'm going to do myself well tonight you bet.

Well Mum I think I will close now & will write again soon. Dont worry about me for I dont think we shall be going into the trenches for some time yet.

Good - bye best Love to you all. Your Affectionate Son Raymond

Tuesday 23 May 1916

Dearest Mother

Sorry I have not written just lately but our cooking business is getting so strong just lately that I have not had an evening to myself for the last 3 days, for our company has been out all day and we have had to prepare dinner at 7 oclock for them. Quite a swagger time for dinner!

My word mother, they do muck you about in the Army. Do you know, last Sunday our Company got orders to move to another village some 4 miles away, so that morning we had to pack up the cooker which is a pretty long job, & then slide off to this place. Well when we got there we found that the job which the Company had gone there to do was washed out, so that we were not wanted, so on Monday morning we packed up again and came back to the old place what do you think of that.

I received your parcel yesterday afternoon. I happened to have bought some lettuces yesterday morning so we made a salad with those & the tomatoes & eggs & ate it with the Salmon. "Some" tea.

One thing about being on cooks I dont get any extra fatigues or guards. And I think when our Batt., goes into the trenches, I shall be behind the line to cook for the Company I like that idea & hope it comes off.

Please thank Old Fred for the cigs, they came in absolutely great, & I can tell you I absolutely relish them after the ration ones. The socks Nell sent are ripping, please thank her nicely, then perhaps she will continue the good work & send me some more.

I have not tasted the Christmas pudding Mrs Churchill sent me yet. But you bet I shant take long to get through it. Will you also thank her for it? Also tell Dad I will write him soon for I received his letter the day before yesterday. I think that's all the people I have to thank. I hope I've missed none. Tell Fred & Lizzie that I will write them soon, they will understand why I have not done so before.

We have not heard anything about going into the trenches lately, at any rate we shant go in until we are up to full strength, & that I think will be sometime.

By the way I saw Jack Panter yesterday evening. Rather funny his regiment is now billeted in the same village so I expect I shall be seeing more of him later.

Well I must close now with love to you all. Your Affectionate Son Raymond

Friday 26 May 1916

Dear Old Fred (*Brother*)

I received your ripping long letter with the photos yesterday, so now I'm going to take the opportunity of answering it. I'm sorry I have not written you before, but just lately we have been jolly busy, & have'nt been finished until about 7-30 of an evening, then of course its time to go to bed.

I suppose you remember that Act going through which made it possible to transfer men to & from any regiment. Well! they've soon started on it for we have had a large draft up to us from Tom Burfitts regiment. His company has been drafted to Jack Panter's crush I think its jolly rough on those chaps to have their Battalion split up like that. They've got none of their old officers, & everything is new to them. They've even got to learn our "rifle regiment" drill. But still I suppose we shall soon settle down to this mucking about, but its certainly jolly rotten at first.

Then of course this large draft coming in makes more to cook for nearly twice as many as before, so you may guess we can find plenty to do. But I like this job, & as you say I hope I shall become "some cook". But still I wish the War would finish before I had time to get efficient, for I dont reckon it would last long then.

You seem to be having a pretty rotten time now, what with the blooming girls, & a widely spread office. I can quite sympathise with you over it all. I can guess how fed up you feel with the whole thing. But still look on the bright side, if there is one, for its not much good worrying nothing seems as if it can be done at present. Lets hope for the best.

There's no doubt about those cigarettes being bon. When I smoke them I also have two or three ration cigs in between each one then they last longer. I expect they are jolly dear now, if only we could get decent ones out here it would be great for they are cheap enough when I was at Rouen I could get those packets of 10 Abudlah for four pence & in England we always paid 6 pence for them. I wish we'd got those canteens up here.

I suppose I told you we were in the same village as Jack Panter's lot, & several other Regiments. And now we've got those drafts from Mr Houldes regiment, there are tons of fellows about who I know including Ron Ockenden & old Tom Burfitt.

I should think you have turned over a new leaf now the Summers come round. Rather funny you should take up the same job as old Charlie did. I mean going gardening at the Lady's abode. There, I suppose that is where the gardening is done, unless a garden has sprung up at home. And I dont expect thats happening.

It must be very bon to speak to a decent English girl, or even see one. The blooming girls out here are "pas bon", in fact worse than that, they're rotten. I didn't even see a decent one in Rouen. Give me the English people I look them best any day.

Please wish Maggie many happy returns of the day for me, & tell her not to forget to write some time soon.

I expect you have heard me speak of a fellow named Malcolm, have'nt you? Well the other day the company was out on fatigue, digging trenches, when one of the other fellows accidentally knocked him on the head with a pick. It went in fairly deep & he went to hospital, but I'm glad to say he's getting on a treat now, & is back with the Regiment now.

Well Fred the stew is just on done & the pudding to be made, so I shall have to stop. So ta-ta, give my love to Mother & Dad & Nell.

Your Affectionate Brother Raymond

Monday 29 May 1916.

My dear Mother

I cant say that I noticed that you had not written for so long, because you see I get letters so often from either you or Dad or the others, that I am kept well informed as to the Epsom news.

Yes Mother the parcels come every week on Mondays usually sometimes Sundays. I have just received the last one, the bananas were ripping there're the first I've tasted out here. The only fault with them was that they did not last long.

You remember Harry Chandler, who joined up with Burfitt. He left here this morning for seven days leave. You can guess he was very pleased with himself. He's now one of us.

Last night we had quite a party of Epsom boys together, Stan Peerless, Jack Panter, Tom Burfitt, Harry Chandler & myself. Isn't it funny how you meet people in out of the way places like this.

I'm getting quite an expert cook, at any rate I manage to get black & greasy, so I suppose I am getting on alright. Today we had an absolutely great ration of mutton for our company & my word when it was finished really it looked almost as good as we get at home. So you see the sort of cooking we do. I mean the sort of cooking my partner does. Really though he's a bon cook and he's teaching me rippingly.

We made good use of those bananas, for we have cleaned our boots with the skins. Bon eh?

How is "Fred's Maggie" as you so term her, is she progressing favourably? Also Charlie's Daisy how is she? Sorry I can't ask about Nells so & so is cause there aint one, worse luck (ahem!). I don't know though, perhaps if there was he'd get all the socks.

Well Mum I can think of any more to tell you, things are going on in the usual quiet way, nothing wrong.

So I'll say good - bye thanks for the parcel.

Your Affectionate Son Raymond. Thanks to Fred for cigs.

Sunday 3 June 1916

(Letter dated Sunday June 3rd 1916: but 3 June 1916 was a Saturday. He probably meant 4 June)

My dearest Mother

I was jolly pleased to get your letter of May 29 a few days ago. As you say Alec's Lizzie's letter filled in the gap between your two letters.

You can guess I was very surprised to hear from old Alec, jolly good of him to write, don't you think? Will you tell him I will be writing him in a few days.

I am glad to hear that old Charlie has been transferred to the London Batt., as I think it will be much better for him, in regards to promotion & his work.

As you guessed we are up the line again, but really speaking we are having a jolly good time.

I wrote old Lizzie yesterday, but I'm afraid it was an absolutely idiotic letter but I felt a bit of a chump last night.

Yes Mum, I often think of the jolly good times I've had at the different local shows & fetes, & I'm hoping to have some more times like them soon. Although I am in my 21st year, I'm still as big a kid as ever. The Army won't allow as chap to get old, even the oldest men out here act like youngsters.

I hear that you had had rather a bad thunderstorm a few weeks back. I'm glad to say we've had very little in that line, - just a few mumbles, that's all.

Phyllis tells me she has a new job & that she is now earning 50 bob. I reckon it's about the blooming limit when girls of her age can earn that salary. I reckon it's getting jolly serious, you know, they won't be satisfied with the money that we fellows can give them, when we start work again there I don't know I'm afraid we shall find it better to stay at home & mind the baby, while they go out to earn the daily bread.

I had a short letter from Arthur Saunton yesterday, & from all accounts he is in fairly good health.

Well, I will close now, with Best Love to you, Dad & Nell.

Your Affectionate Son Raymond

P.S. I am near the canteen.

Monday 5 June 1916.

My dear Mother,

I expect you are wondering when I am going to write again. Well, I've done so at last. I have not had much time just recently as we have had another move. This one we did in the dark and my word, it was some job marching behind our old cooker. We have to perform upon the brakes at the back & we couldn't tell exactly when we were going up hill and when we were going down, so usually the brakes were on when they ought to be off, thereby causing our cooker to bang into the cooker in front, or to get bashed into by the one behind. You can guess it was some job.

I hear that we shall soon be coming home, at any rate according to the latest rumour I should think it quite probable.

I suppose you, haven't heard the blooming rumour about the German Navy being done in. I hope its true, what do you say?

Tonight our fellows have gone out on fatigues, (trench digging) & I have got to get up & make tea for them when they come in. I think I have struck very, very lucky in getting this job. For now I miss all this rotten night fatigues & only have got to get up every other night to make tea, which is to be ready at 3.30 a.m. Of course we get plenty to do during the day, but still, when the company has to go out on fatigues it is comparatively a little thing to do to miss a few hours sleep.

The other night when we arrived at this village, sometime near midnight, I had to stop up & boil the ham for the next morning's breakfast, & during that time, I had rats rushing about the whole while. Still I don't mind one or two of 'em but when it comes to dozens, I'm not playing. The devils, they were not half enjoying themselves, bathing in the old farm pond, fighting and rushing about generally, This blooming place is absolutely infested with rats without any swanking. Of course it wasn't quite as bad as I said above, but near enough not to be pleasant.

Well Mum I must close now, with best love to you all.

Your affectionate son, Raymond.

Tuesday 6 June 1916

My dearest Mother

I'm sending my watch to you by a fellow who is going home on leave. Will you send it to the watch makers & have it cleaned? for its absolutely clogged up with dust. There are several things want doing to it. Get Fred to have a look at it first.

I've just received your parcel & got rid of most of the stuff. The cake was a treat.

For some reason or other I'm absolutely up in the air what in the dickens over I cant say. But I was so darned excited I could hardly control myself.

Dont worry about me Mother for I'm quite safe.

The part of line we are in now, has just been taken over from the French & we are making preparations for a little bit of Artillery work. The village we are in is being cleared of civilians, & we are going right back behind the line again. So we shant even see the trenches this time.

Its really awfully sad to see the poor old men & women packing up their stuff. the old girl in the farm house said she had been here for over 50 years, - she's about 80 or 90, & works like the young women although her back is hugely bent



as bad as this.

Well Good - bye With best Love Yours Affectionately Raymond.

Thursday 15 June 1916

My dear Mother,

Just a few lines to let you know that I'm still in the pink, and having quite a decent time except for the rotten weather. I don't think that since we have been here we have had one fine day. You know it makes it jolly rotten for our boys this bad weather. They've been absolutely wet through for days. My word, when I see them going about plastered up to their eyes in mud I cant help thinking how lucky I was to get this job. But naturally on the other hand I cant help feeling that I ought to be with them.

How are you all getting on at Home? I hope you have all been keeping quite well. Please tell Fred & Nell that I will write to them both when we are a little less busy. At the present time I have a jolly hard job to get time to write.

Wont it be ripping when this blooming war is over. I can tell you we're all getting darned fed up with it but I must say I really think that we shall soon see the end, at least I hope so.

Well, I have not much news so I will close now and will write you again soon.

Good-bye Mum with best love to you all.

Your Affectionate son Raymond

P.S. I received your parcel Tuesday. The contents were grand but while I'm on this job don't send Ham, for you see I'm differently situated now.

Sunday 19 June 1916

My dear Mother

I am writing again today to try to make up for the number that you have been getting lately. I'm jolly sorry I haven't written more often, but since I have been on this job I get very little time to write letters.

Tell Nell I received her letter yesterday. I was pleased to hear that you have got my watch alright.

It hardly seems like Sunday morning here, I can never tell what day it is. Often Sunday goes by without my knowing. I bet I shant do that after the war is over. My word I shall be glad when peace is declared, we shant know ourselves shall we? everything will be so strange.

I was glad to hear that Charlie was able to get another leave, I can guess how pleased he was to get home again. I know how I should feel if I managed to get leave. But I hope when my leave comes it'll be the long one, when I dont have to come back here again.

I'm feeling very pleased with myself at the present moment for we've just been paid for two weeks & as before this I was absolutely stony. You can guess it was very welcome.

With Love to you all Your Affectionate Son Raymond

Sunday 25 June 1916.

My dear Mother

At last I'm sorry not to have written before, but its the old excuse not much time to spare. I wrote to Fred two days ago & this morning found the blooming letter in my pad - not posted.

How are you getting on? I hope that you are all in the pink, I am. We've been having some very ripping weather just lately except for the last day or two & they've been darned wet. But today is fine again. It'll seem very strange to us all to get back to living in big towns again, now that we've been living in the heart of the country for so long.

I was talking to a fellow who comes from Sutton a few days ago who knew Keeping, who used to work at the Epsom P.O., He says that Keeping is now a Sergeant Major in the East Surreys. I expect Charlie would have been the same had he have been able to go with his Regiment to India.

We've come down from the line again now & have started mucking about in the same old way with the blooming parades. I'm jolly glad I dont have to do them.

Tom B., is still up in the trenches, he's got a job on the trench pioneers not a bad stunt, I think. Stan Peerless & Jack Panter are knocking about down here, also Ron Ockenden & several other Sutton fellows. You know its jolly nice to have a few of ones old pals with me. It seems more homely.

Well I've got no news, at least what will pass the censor, and it is only those which are worth writing about.

With love to you all Your Affectionate Son Raymond

Monday 3 July 1916

My dearest Mother

Just a few lines to let you know that I am quite alright so dont worry about me at all.

I got Dad's letter the other day, so will you thank him for it & tell him I will write to him some time in the future, but at the present time I feel tremendously fed up that I cant sit down to write much or many letters to any one.

I got the watch the same day as Dad's letter, its a great treat to have it again & it goes fine.

I'm jolly glad to hear that you are going to have your photos done, I hope you'll thank old Fred for me for doing it. For its so jolly nice to have your photos to look at sometimes.

Well I'll say good - bye now Mother. I'll write you again soon so Good - bye with love to you all

Your Affectionate Son Raymond

P.S. I hope you wont object to me sending the enclosed letter in your envelope. If you dont will you give it to Fred & he will undoubtedly do the necessary with it. Only green envelopes are allowed & I have only this reinforced one.

Wednesday 6 September 1916

My dearest Mother

Just a few lines to let you know that I'm still going strong. But getting rather fed up with continuously moving about. When we are on the move like this, the postal arrangements are rotten. Yesterday was the first collection of letters we had had for 4 days. I am writing this on the off chance of its going today.

I received your parcel this morning the contents were bon. The cake Aunt Kate sent me was ripping & I will write her & thank her for it as soon as I get the opportunity.

I only know one of the fellows who came in to see you the other - that was Tyrell he was a 5 Platoon B Company man, but I have not had much to do with him.

Thank old Nell for the letter I received this morning, tell her I will write her when I get time.

I must close now as the post will soon be leaving. So Good - bye with beat Love to you all

Your Affectionate Son Raymond

Saturday 9 September 1916

My dearest Mother

Just a few lines to let you know how things are going with us and that we are still going on strong.

At the present time the postal service is pretty rotten & we very seldom get a collection or a delivery of letters. So that you will understand how it is that you do not often hear of me.

I will write you as often as possible.

I have to parade in about 15 minutes time & have to pack up my stuff so I will close now.

Good bye with best love to you all.

Your Affectionate Son Raymond

After waiting about 3 hours ready to do our job, we were told that we should not be wanted, so I can carry on with this letter to try to make it a little longer.

How are you all getting on at home, I quite forgot what it is like to sit down to a table with a nice cloth on it & of course some decent grub. The fellows are always saying how much they wish for a decent meal, & some civilised surroundings. Not long ago we were billeted in a pretty large town,--- I think I sent you a post card showing our billet. And my word didn't we feel jolly pleased to be able to go into a tea shop & have a decent feed. But as usual we were only allowed to stay for 24 hours, & from there got shoved into a place miles from anywhere, in a valley. We had to sleep out, & we no sooner had settled down than it came on to rain like the dickens, & every one got soaked. I can tell you it didn't give us a good impression of "Happy Valley".

Well Good - bye Mum Love to you all Your Affectionate Son Raymond

Thursday 14 September 1916.

Headed notepaper: On Active Service. WITH THE BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE. Y.M.C.A.

My dearest Mother

I have now reached our base after having been pushed out of hospital and then through Convalescent Camp. The Hospitals are so full up that they cannot pay proper attention to the slightly wounded men and as it is the same in the Convalescent Camp the only place for such as us is at the base. My arm is still very painful and stiff, but of course the wound was only very slight so that I expect in about a week I shall have forgotten it.

I had been expecting to meet Gay down here, but I hear that he left to rejoin the Battalion about 3 days ago.

By the way, my address will be 1st Queens Westminster Rifles, 7 Infantry Base Depot, 14 Camp, Le Havre. B.E.F.

And do you mind sending me out some money, as when I left the Regiment we had not been paid

for a few weeks, and I have no money or any of the stuff which was in my pack. Rather a rotten position to be in. But still I hear that the postal service is better here than it used to be up near the line. Tell Lizzie I have been able to hang onto the scarf until now and have found it darned useful, but I have at last lost it. Please explain that is not a hint to get another but if she would like to make me another for the Winter I shall be delighted to get (I hope you'll ask her to excuse my source).

How are you all getting on at home I haven't been able to get any of your letters for almost 3 weeks & I seem to have lost touch with the civilised world. You see the part of the line I have been in, it was very hard to get the mails or rations up to us. Naturally you can guess the part was pretty hot stuff.

Well mother I must close now but while I am here I will write you often.

Good-bye with best love to you all

Your Affectionate Son Raymond

Sunday 17 September 1916

My dearest Mother,

Here we are again, you see I am keeping my promise & writing as often as possible. I have just discovered that to-day I've reached my twentieth birthday. I shouldn't have known only I wanted to know the date when I started writing this evening.

I am having a jolly good time down here but am terribly short of money. This morning I tried to use my army razor but had to give up, the blooming thing was absolutely hopeless. So would you mind sending me out a light ordinary razor & shaving brush. I'm sorry to be such a trouble but you see all my stuff is in my pack which I left with the Regiment. I expect I shall get them when I get back, or perhaps all my personal property will be forwarded home to you, but I expect it will be some time before the things get sorted out,

I am getting quite fit again now & my arm is much better but still aches a good bit. I don't know what a big wound can be like, a small one is bad enough for me. It doesn't hurt at the time you get hit, it's the after effects.

How are you all getting on at home? And what does Dad think about the war in general? I quite think that we are getting the best of it every where now & am just longing for Peace to be declared. Wont it be ripping when it is all over? The German prisoners say that they are absolutely done & will be glad to see the end as well.

Well lets hope for the best. Good-bye Mother with best love to you all at Home,

Your affectionate son Raymond

Friday 29 September 1916

My dearest Mother

You will be pleased to hear that I am no longer in the trenches, but am having a week at the seaside. Sounds rather strange so I suppose I better explain how it occurred.

About three days ago we were helping in the fighting for the last captured big town we were expecting to get orders to go up into the front line again & of course we had great "wind up". But instead the glad news arrived that we were being relieved that day. Then to cap the whole issue, I was called up by the Captain, who asked me whether I would like to have a weeks holiday at the sea. You can bet I absolutely jumped at the idea, so a few hours after found us - the lucky ones, - seated on ammunition waggons getting rapidly out of the battle area. And I can tell you we are all very pleased to get out of it. At the transport we were dished out with new clothes & started off to the stations very spic & span.

Our camp is situated on the top of the cliffs overlooking the sea, & we have only to walk down to the bottom of cliff & we are in the town. The give us a jolly good time here for we are absolutely free from 10 am till 9 pm and can go where we please - & thats a change.

I am going to get a pass into one of the large towns near here, as this town is rather small.

By the way, did you wire send that money, which I wrote for a week or two ago because I have not received it yet. In fact I have not received a single letter for over a month now. Its very rotten for I seem quite cut off from you all at home. But still carry on writing to my old address - B Coy 6 Plt., - as all my letters will be forwarded on to us here. I am anxiously waiting to get some.

Well I think I had better close now. I will write again soon.

With best Love to you all Your Affectionate Son Raymond

Sunday 22 October 1916

My dearest Mother

We've been on the move again, & are once again in the village where we started last February.

We had a very long march yesterday, but I managed to get a job pulling a cart so that I did not have to carry a pack or rifle & so naturally I finished quite fresh compared to the other boys.

The weather has been jolly cold during the last two or three days, but now we are in an empty house we do not notice the cold so much as when we were in a draughty barn.

I cant write much today as the post will soon be collected.

I hope you are all keeping well at home. I suppose its' nearly time I wrote to Nell & Fred. Tell them their turn will come in due course you might tell Nell I can do with one or two pairs of socks now.

There's just one other thing I want, & that's another primus you said you would send me another some time ago, & now I have lost my old one, I could do with another. I'm sorry to have to keep on asking for all these things, but of course you understand how I'm situated.

Good - bye mother with best Love to you all Your Affectionate Son Raymond

Sunday 29 October 1916

Letter undated: envelope date stamped 29 October 1916

Dear Old Fred (*Brother Alfred*)

At last. I'm sorry I've not written you before this, but I expect you know how things have been going with us during the last 2 months, - we've had very little time to ourselves. But as you have already heard we are now out resting but I'm sorry to say it will not be for long as we are now behind a very quiet part of the line, & are expecting to go into the trenches in a week or so

Before the advance you know, we used to come out for a good long rest every so often. But now there are so many men needed round where the advance is being made, our rest out of the trench is very short, & we finish it off in a very quiet part of the line. I must say I dont at all object to sitting on my rear portions in a trench for a few days at a time as long as I'm allowed to feel that we've no attacks to make.

How are you getting on? Mother tells me that you have been to Kingston for a medical examination. How did you get on? I supposed you passed quite easily, for they seem to be taking practically anyone now no matter what ailments one has. Whatever you do, should you have to go. Dont for goodness sake join the infantry. Its no bon. If I could I'd get out of it today I would.

Did I tell you that I have met Jimmy Hull out here he joined us a month or two again, & is still quite well.

Poor old Henderson I saw him just before we went up into the trenches for the last 24 hours. He was very down as he had lost his pal a day or two before. Since then I've seen nothing of him. I have been going to make enquires about him but I keep forgetting to do so. I hope that he is still alright.

I have often thought from Phyllis's letters that she does not have such a good time as she used of course I expect they are always wondering what has happened to poor old Jack. Its damned rotten for them.

I have been getting my letters regularly again for about a week, but at present no parcels have turned up. Your cigarettes have always turned up just at the right moment when all spun out. At the moment among the ten of us, we can hardly muster more than about 20 cigs, personally I've got one & I'm going to smoke it directly I've finished this letter. After that I shall have to scrounge off other people. And I can tell you I'm getting quite hot stuff at cadging.

I am glad to hear that Maggie is still going strong I often wonder how you two are getting on. By the way you might give her my love. I nearly forgot that.

I am awfully sorry to hear about poor Millie Kingsnorth fiancé. It was the first I had heard about it. How long ago was he killed?

By the way have you seen Ern Pullinger lately. Phyllis told me in her last letter, that he had got his discharge, & has now got a job up in London. He's one of the lucky ones I reckon, - he's done as much as

he can and now he done with blooming war. I wish I had.

By the way, you might tell mother that we all enjoyed the jam she sent me so much that it only lasted for 1 tea time & my pals told me tell her how nice it was. In fact they said that we could do with some more.

I always forget these little things when I am writing to mother, because usually when I write her I've only got a few minutes to spare before the collection. You see the Orderly Sergeant comes round & says that there will be a collection in half an hours time, & I like to write as often as possible so I sit down & just have time to tell her I still live & kicking.

Well I had better close now as we just about to have tea. Absolutely there aint no nice fire to sit down beside & there aint no white cloth. I look forward to having quite a sumptuous meal as my pal Dalley has just received two good parcels. Bon eh?

Well Good - bye Fred Old Chap Good Luck to you. Give my Love to mother & Dad and all at home.

Your Affectionate Brother Raymond

P.S. Please ask mother to shove another writing pad in the next parcel.

Tuesday 31 October 1916

(From Raymond's brother Charlie to their mother. Written on paper headed "Catholic Women's League Soldiers Recreation Hut, North Camp. Ripon".)

My dear Mother

You will be pleased to hear that I had a very good train journey here. I got to King's X by tube at 10 min to 4, and had a comfortable seat. At Ripon station I met another fellow from our hut, which improved the walk to the camp a bit, for it was really terrible weather wind & rain, and I was glad really when I got to the hut. I have managed to get just near the same place again, but the huts are all very crowded now. I set out this morning to try and find Johnny, and at last was successful. I feel sure he is not at all happy, but of course the weather has been bad ever since he came here. He was on guard Sunday, and several men who arrived with him have been sent away to another camp in Northumberland. He is in division 3 (worst cases), and I would imagine he is waiting here for a medical board, for he says he is having no treatment. Col Denny is leaving very soon, and I understand the new Col arrives tomorrow.

I can tell you I was really sorry at having to leave all you good people at home, for you did make me so comfortable, and you can be sure I felt it very much at leaving. I am in the Catholic hut now, and there are crowds of fellows here, and very noisy. I have got back my old job so far.

I am told today that my pay tomorrow will be something like £4-12-0, so that now perhaps you will not mind having a little. I will send it home to Daisy, and you can then arrange it, and she can see to the remainder.

I will write again soon when I have got settled down a bit. I will write to Raymond soon too. I hope Father is better, and that you feel quite well. I think now mother I must stop in this letter, but must tell you how sorry I was to come away, for should have liked to stay much longer. Hoping all the others are quite well I will now say goodbye.

With very best love. Your affec son Charlie

Tuesday 31 October 1916

My dearest Mother

I expect you have already had my letter saying that I have managed to get the MO. changed, but dont send any more, as I have to change them at the civilian P.O.

I must say I'm jolly pleased to hear that uncle has sent me some money for I'm most horribly stony. In fact the whole of our little party are in the same hopeless position. The village where we are now billeted is very small, but we have found an awfully nice little farm house, where we can get anything cooked. We are waiting now for pay day, and then we are going to arrange a dinner. You know, chickens & all that sort of stuff. I told you about the last one we had didn't I ?

I can guess how pleased old Charlie was when his extension of leave arrived, its a very pleasant surprise when you're ready packed up to go, is'nt it?

I'm awfully pleased to know that old Fred stands very little chance of coming out here. One's enough out of one family to be out in this rotten show.

I'm glad my watch is again in a pretty fit condition. I'm quite used to being without it now, but it will be nice to have it again.

We're having the real Flanders weather now. Rain, rain nothing but rain I'm getting rather fed up with it to tell the truth. But its nice to know that we're not still (*several words censored*).

Please thank old Bert for the cigs although I have'nt receive them at present, but I am living in hopes & rations & what I can cadge of the other boys.

We're spending our evening at our little Farm - house, & the boys & talking & laughing & cracking jokes, so that I find it jolly hard to write.

Well, Good - bye Mother I must close now.

Best Love to you all. Your Affectionate Son Raymond

P.S. Do you mind buying me a mouth-organ. We've decided to become musicians.

Tuesday 7 November 1916

My dearest Mother

The primus works a treat & during the last four days its done good service. We came into the trenches four days ago, & the primus reached me the morning we went in.

I have not yet received the parcel but am hoping to do so tonight. I'm glad to say that we're having a very quiet time, & things are quite decent except for the weather & thats blooming awful. But we manage to keep pretty dry, as there are plenty of Dug outs. The dug-out that I & another johnny slept in is quite decent & is called "Snipeville Towers." Its quite a roomy affair we can almost lie down in it.

You will be pleased to know that I have been given a job in the "Salvage Company", & start on the 7th. I am not quite certain what sort of a job it will be, but if it is the same as what other fellows have been to it will keep me right behind the line. So that you will have not much to worry about me.

Must close now as letters are being collected. So Good - bye Best Love to you all.

Your Affectionate Son Raymond

Tuesday 9 January 1917

My dearest Mother

I have very little to tell you but am just writing a few lines to let you know that I am still in the best of health, and having a comparatively good time.

Leave is still as far distant as ever. I think it is a shame that the fellows out here dont get more leave. But still I suppose it is no use grumbling.

I received a box of cigarettes from Old Charlie yesterday. I was awfully pleased to get them. For nowadays I can never have too many.

I also met old Ron Ockenden a day or two back his Regiment is resting in this town. He looks just as well as ever & still as happy.

The mackintosh has been coming jolly useful just recently, for the weather has been absolutely rotten for several weeks past.

I told you that I had had a letter from Rene, & she said that Aunt had sent me some cigarettes, did'nt I? Well the blooming things have'nt turned up yet? If somebody has won them I shall be very sorry. For I dont like having to write and say that they never turned up.

Well Mum, I shall have to close now, as the limit for a letter now is two pages.

So Good bye with best love to you & hoping that everyone is in the best of health.

Your Affectionate Son Raymond

Saturday 17 March 1917

Dear old Charlie (*Brother*)

A few days ago I had a nice letter from Daisy enclosing a photo of your most honoured self. I think it is very good indeed.

But I must say that I think you look much better than you did when I last saw you. You are still on the same old job I suppose I have not heard that you got your 3rd stripe through, so I take it you are still a corporal.

Have you had Daisy up to stay with you lately? I expect you try & wangle it as often as possible, now that it is so hard for you to get leave to visit her.

What do you think about the war? Do you think there is any chance of our seeing the end before the end of the year? It seems as though we are going to make a good hard try to put old Fritz up a loop. I hope that the Allies succeed, for I know we have all had enough of it & will be only too pleased to see the end.

Fancy when I left England, I thought that I should only be out here 3 or 4 months, for people were so certain the war would soon end. But no such luck. I've stuck it for 15 months, & look like sticking it for several more.

We are now in a fresh part of the line, & I'm sorry to say it is not nearly so good as the last place, - no big towns only just poky villages. And the whole of the estaminets have sold out of beer. So you can guess looking at it from that light the place is rotten. But still our little crowd have settled down very comfortably & I expect when the time come, we shall all be sorry to move.

Well I must close now so God bye & Good Luck.

Your Affectionate Brother Raymond

Saturday 12 May 1917

Dear Old Nell, (*sister*)

I suppose it is about time I gave you a turn for a letter so here goes for an attempt.

How have you been getting on lately? It seems ages since I last heard from you, I expect it is because I have been moving about a lot just lately. Soon after I got back with the Regiment, we did a short trip to a village a few miles away.

The country round this part is absolutely grand, so you can guess we have some jolly decent walks in the evenings. Really speaking we're not very far from the firing line, and except for tons of soldiers knocking about here you could hardly believe that a war was on, things seem to be going on quite as usual.

To-day it is our bath day but unfortunately we've got to march about five miles to the blooming bath house, so I reckon by the time we get back we shall be just as dirty as when we started.

I don't know whether I told you that we have all been issued out with tin helmets & I can tell you they're just about the hottest and heaviest head covers I've ever worn. Khaki covers have also been issued for the helmets and when we get all this stuff on you may guess we look some chumps.

Would you mind sending me out some more pairs of socks. Dexter wishes me to thank you for the pair you sent him, they came in very handy.

I received Mother's parcel yesterday. The eggs were jolly nice, only the blooming rats ate half of them. Thank old Fred for the cigs.

Well Nell I must close now, with Love to all at home. Your Affectionate Brother, Raymond

Monday 28 May 1917

My dearest Mother,

Just a few lines to let you know that I received your ripping letter of May 23 yesterday.

I am glad to hear old Charlie has managed to get another short leave. I expect he will enjoy working on his old trade again and I hope that he will be able to get a little back of all he has lost. How is his business going on now? I suppose it is only just going at all! Let's hope that the war will soon end and he will be able to get the business going in working order again.

Fancy old Frank Churchill deciding to take a commission after all this time. I can quite understand

what has made him do it for continual training is terribly monotonous. I had a letter from him this evening, but as usual it was terribly short and he just told me the bare facts.

As far as Commissions go in 'fighting' line, I think Arthur Chittenden has got the pick of the bunch. I don't mind telling you that really speaking a commission in either the Infantry or the Artillery, is not worth a snap of the fingers. You ask me whether it would be worth my while taking a commission. Well this is how it stands as regards the job I am on now. There are a good many points in favour of it. Firstly it is permanent, that is as long as I behave myself. Secondly, we take part in absolutely none of the fighting & work in comparative safety. Although of course we often work quite close to the line, but should Fritz become too hot for us, we can do a bunk to a safer spot, or if necessary go right back, & this is a great point, for I think there is not another section of the army allowed this privilege.

Now supposing I should take a commission in either the Artillery or Infantry, the fighting being so absolutely hard I should reckon myself very lucky if I came through many scraps without catching something. And as regards fighting, I don't mind telling you I have had enough, & don't wish to put myself in the way of any more.

On the other hand, if I did put in for a com. I should naturally be sent home for training. Well that would be absolutely great for I could do with a few months in England again. Also perhaps during my months of training the war would end, & of course that would be very nice. But I don't think there is much hope of that. So I think I will remain just common Rfn. R. Norrington of the Queens Westminster Rifles.

If I could get a com. in the A.S.C. of the B.E.F. Canteens, I should feel inclined to take it on.

I will just try & tell you what our present surroundings are like, & the work that we have to do.

By the way, when I last wrote you I think I told you we were once more out on rest. Well, we had three days of it and then there came an order for us to return up the line the next day. We were not expecting to go that way, as the rest of the Division, it was rumoured, was going further back. And they did, for as we paraded to go further up the rest of our Division paraded to go further back, so you can guess the Salvage Company was not in a very good humour that morning, as it was a frightful disappointment to us. But that was several days ago now & we are once more settled, & I am glad to say pretty comfortable.

We are now billeted in one of France's biggest towns which has suffered rather badly with Shell Shock. The house in which our company is billeted in stands in what I should imagine has been a rather classy square. On one side of the square there has been a rather swagger church, of course to a certain extent it still stands. On the opposite side there is a fairly big nunnery, which has hardly been touched, & just a few of the nuns still live there. These two buildings are the main features of the place, the rest of the space around the square, is taken up by a number of jolly pretty houses & gardens some of which have been hit, & others in fairly decent repair, of which ours is one of the latter. In the centre of the square, there is a large number of chestnut trees, which are now looking absolutely ripping, as they are in full bloom, & the nice green grass all around the trees sets them off a treat. Really speaking the place looks quite pretty. That's the best I can do -as far as my surroundings. Of course all the damage the town has suffered was done when the Allied line was only a few yards outside. Now of course it is a matter of miles. And we are only worried, if ever, by a little shelling or by sometimes an air raid. But those I am glad to say are seldom anything to write home about.

Our work consists of absolutely scouring the captured ground of anything in the way of ammunition, equipment & anything belonging to either our or the German Army. This of course is a long job for in an advance there is always tons and tons of stuff left behind both by us & the Germans. We collect all the salvage from the fields & villages & make dumps of it on the roads & in due course wagons come along & pick it all up & take it to the headquarters where it is all sorted into serviceable or unserviceable. The former is just sent to the various places where it is cleaned up and then sent back to the factories to be remade up. I might tell you that in this way our Salvage Company alone often saves thousands of pounds for our army in less than a month. Well, I shall have to close now as I am getting a bit tired. So good-bye for the present. Best Love to you Dad, Nell & Charlie. Your Affectionate Son
Raymond

PS I am also enclosing a letter for Phyllis which I hope you will send round to her.

Friday 20 July 1917

(Letter to Raymond's mum from Minnie Mann)

'Hillcroft', West Farleigh.

My dear Edie

Many thanks for your letter & enclosure - which is quite correct. I am sorry we were not able to send hamper this week, but have been so frightfully busy picking fruit etc & have both been rather poorly - particularly Willie, but am pleased to say he is rather better today.

How nice for you to have all the boys together! you must have had a jolly time. I should so like to see Raymond.

The time drags on & the war does not seem very near the end, but it may come suddenly - let us hope it will & soon.

I do wish Jon & Ted could come down, but I suppose there is no chance at present? & what about Nell do you think she will be able to come? Tell her I have been picking up 'taters' this afternoon & wished she had been here to help me.

Well dear I must go & do a bit more in the garden now so will say good bye for this time.

Willie joins me in love to you all.

Yours Affectionately Minnie Mann

Sunday 26 August 1917

Dear Charlie (From Raymond's father to his other son Charlie)

It is sad news I have to tell you, we had a letter from Raymond's C2MS this (Sunday) morning to say that he has been missing since the 16th inst and from inquiries made among his comrades he is believed to be killed, we shall try to get more particulars as soon as possible but I don't think there is any hope he is alive. As you may guess the shock to us all has been very great, poor mother is bearing up fairly well but you can imagine the awful blank in her heart, she has lived for her children they have been everything to her, but we have to carry on altho the future looks black. If you could arrange to get leave soon I know it would cheer up your mother to see you. I am writing to Fred tonight. I cannot say more at present so good bye my boy be of good cheer.

Your Affectionate Father E Norrington

PS. The letter from France praised the poor boy he was a good comrade and friend to all the Company.

He was a good boy to us and never caused us a moments anxiety through his own fault and it makes it very hard to part from a loving nature such as his. Mrs Churchill is with us this evening. Daisy is at home with her two nieces.

Tuesday 11 September 1917: Ripon

(From Raymond's brother Charlie to his mother.)

My dear Mother

I am rather behind in writing you this line but cannot offer any excuse only that the time has flown by so rapidly and I have been expecting to have some news for you about moving, but as yet nothing has happened. From the first rumour which I got for the clerk in the orderly room, all carpenters & joiners had got to be sent away I understand to the flying corps, but that fizzled out & the next I heard was that it would be to join another new corps known as the Inland Water Transport, and this I have now discovered through making enquires is for working the transport on the rivers & canals in France, and they say is a jolly good job, special rates of pay etc., but up till now this has come to nothing. I have sent off my parcel to - night, and there is a tin in it which Daisy asked me to return.

Isn't there a great improvement in the weather, things seem quite bright again with this change. The farmers are very busy round here now. The nights are getting much colder though, and we shall soon cry out for our extra blankets for we still have only two.

I keep going down to Baxters in all my spare time, and am away there again to - night after I have written to Daisy.

I expect I should have heard had you got any more news, but all the same I cannot give up hope,

knowing only what you did. I had a very nice letter from Mr Simpson of the Brotherhood. I expect I ought to answer it.

Now Mother as I am writing I cannot think of anything else to tell you, so must close, but will write as soon as I get anything more. Goodbye now best love to all hoping you are well, and looking forward cheerfully for better news.

Your affec. son Charlie

The following is an extract from a local newspaper.

"There is great anxiety as to what has befallen Pte. Raymond Norrington (Queen's Westminsters), son of Mr. E. Norrington, butcher, High Street, in consequence of the information contained in a letter sent to his parents by the Quartermaster-Sergeant of his Company, who, writing, says :- "I am taking the first opportunity to write you concerning your son, who is reported missing during the last action on the 16th. (August 1917) The situation was very much confused owing to the very heavy shell fire. It appears from conversations with some of your son's comrades that he was badly wounded by a shell and was then assisted away, or that he was unfortunately killed when the Company next advanced. There is no one now in the Company who has seen him during the advance. They are all casualties. I have made very careful inquiries, but cannot get any further information than that he was alive when his platoon advanced. There is, of course, a hope - a faint one - that he was carried off the field by some other regiment. Of course, information of that nature takes some time to get through especially when there is heavy fighting. I am more than sorry at the sad news. I knew your son very well and also knew what a good type of boy and soldier he was, one of the best in the Company, and all the Company, including the N.C.O's were his friends. Such personal effects as he left behind in his pack I have sent to you through the official channels. In conclusion, I wish to offer you and his relatives my own sympathy and that of the Company as well. We have lost a good comrade, and you have lost a worthy and brave son. Should any further news come to hand, be assured I will acquaint you". Everyone who knows this popular young soldier is hoping that news will be received to remove the worst fears that can be entertained as to his fate. The letter may preclude any sanguine hopes, but it does not shut out all possibility of Pte. Norrington being still alive.

Amongst the letters were the following postcards:



