

Paul Middleton

HERO

AT

WAR

LETTERS

Nov 1915 to Apr 1916

written by
JOHN SEYMOUR LINDSAY
DCM

HERO AT WAR - LETTERS
NOV 1915 TO APR 1916

Edited and Published by
Paul Middleton

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FACTS ABOUT THIS BOOK

This copy of Hero at War - Letters Nov 1915 to Apr 1916
contains 67 letters



FOREWORD

John Seymour Lindsay DCM (JSL) left a fine record for us to read. He wrote hundreds of letters to Mildred his fiancée then wife, and Frank his brother, describing his experiences and feelings, sometimes candidly but more often hiding the reality. I have shown every letter with a full transcription.

This Fourth Volume of Letters takes us from November 1915 to the end of April 1916 and plots his journey up to Poperinghe again via Cassel, Bergues, Gezaincourt and Magincourt sur Canche and his rapid promotions to Corporal, Lance Sgt and Sgt, and to the offer of a commission. In mid March the London Gazette published his Citation for gallantry with the award of his DCM (Distinguished Conduct Medal).

The letters passed through the military Censor so it takes us some time to decipher where he actually was, but in hindsight and with some important clues it is possible to trace his career. He experienced devastating losses of his friends, he showed great bravery and privation, but above all what shines through is his enduring love of art. Maybe this saved his sanity. Among the platitudes of comments on the weather and his physical state, his letters continually refer to his sketching of colleagues, the trenches and the nearby villages. He obviously was well respected by all ranks in his Battalion – probably because of his age (in August 1914 he was 32) and his eccentricity.

Read his entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, which can be found at the end of this book. Here you will be convinced that he was a true hero and polymath.

Paul Middleton 2013

Chronology

FIRST WORLD WAR

Sept 1914 Private No.1006 5th London Rifle Brigade 2nd Battalion
16 Dec 1914 Served in France Theatre of War
Jan 1915 to Jul 16 1915 1st Battalion
12 Mar 1915 No.3 General Hospital, Le Treport.
12 Mar 1915 Transferred to Convalescent Depot
May 1915 Second Battle of Ypres
26 May 1915 Transferred to Base Depot Rouen
16 Jun 1915 Licence granted and married
Mildred Ethel Williams (died 1948)
at Holy Cross, St Pancras, London
Aug to Nov 1915 Cassel, Caestre and Poperinghe
11 Mar 1916 DCM (Distinguished Conduct Medal)
awarded to L/Cpl John Seymour Lindsay
for action on 3 May 1915
July 1916 Battle of Gommecourt
19 Jul 1916 Sgt gazetted with direct commission as
2nd Lieut at Bienvillers
Sept 1916 wounded and invalided home and then served
with 3rd Battalion LRB
8 Oct 1916 2nd Lieut wounded
23 Apr 1917 1st London Reserve Brigade, including LRB,
moved to Aisne Barracks at Blackdown
19 Jan 1918 Lieutenant
9 May 1919 Received Great War Invalided Certificate

Chapter 1

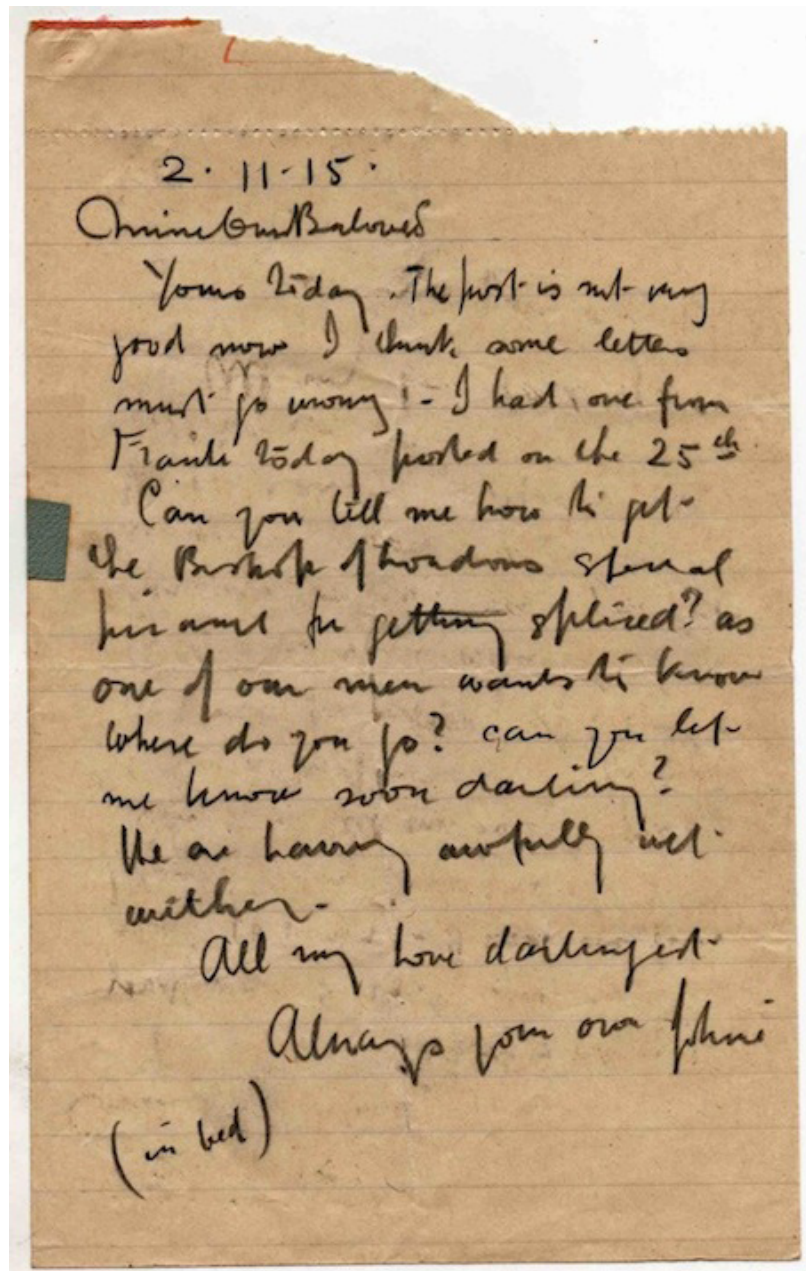
Letters 1 November - 31 December 1915

Poperinghe, London and Cassel

For a period of ten months, between November 1915 and April 1916 we have 67 communications in the form of letters and postcards concerning JSL, his wife Mildred, his family and his military situation. What can we glean from these about his way of life, his hopes and his aspirations? We get a strong sense of despair in some of his letters when he *looks* at the chaos all around him, and the lives of friends that are lost. We will never know whether he ever sensed there would be an end to this, but we do know that somehow he survived for an incredible 22 months on or near the front line of this horrendous war.

Ten more months of front line warfare. It is hard to credit with all the carnage, that JSL managed to survive relatively unscathed in serving his country. At the end of November 1915 the brigade of 26 Officers and 751 Other Ranks marched to Poperinghe 7 miles west of Ypres along dreadful roads. On arrival they were allocated billets and the CO and Company Commanders inspected the trenches at Voormezeele and St Eloi. They were very wet and in a shocking condition, so hard work was needed to make them liveable. The rainfall was incessant, the River Boolaardbek rose 6 or 7 feet overnight and all the dug-outs were flooded. For the Battalion, December was divided into Tours of about a week each, moving from place to place in the Poperinghe sector of the Front. The Tours were sometimes affected by heavy bombardment – on to the Ypres to Lille road for example, many lachrymatory shells were fired. *(Ed: The lachrymatory shell makes your eyes smart, and the Germans apparently considered this a great auxiliary to high explosives and shrapnel. The shell when it lands seems a 'dud', which is a shell that has failed to explode; then it blows out a volume of gas).*

Some time between 28 November and 10 December JSL managed to get a short leave in London with Mildred, as he talks on the 11 December about his return rough crossing in the dark and on the next day, his very good journey up to No.1 Cassel. (Ed: The other towns were 2. Bourbourg, 3. Bergues, 4. Wormhout and 5. Watten). He also talks of awaiting some filled up papers from Mildred. Presumably these were about his possible commission.



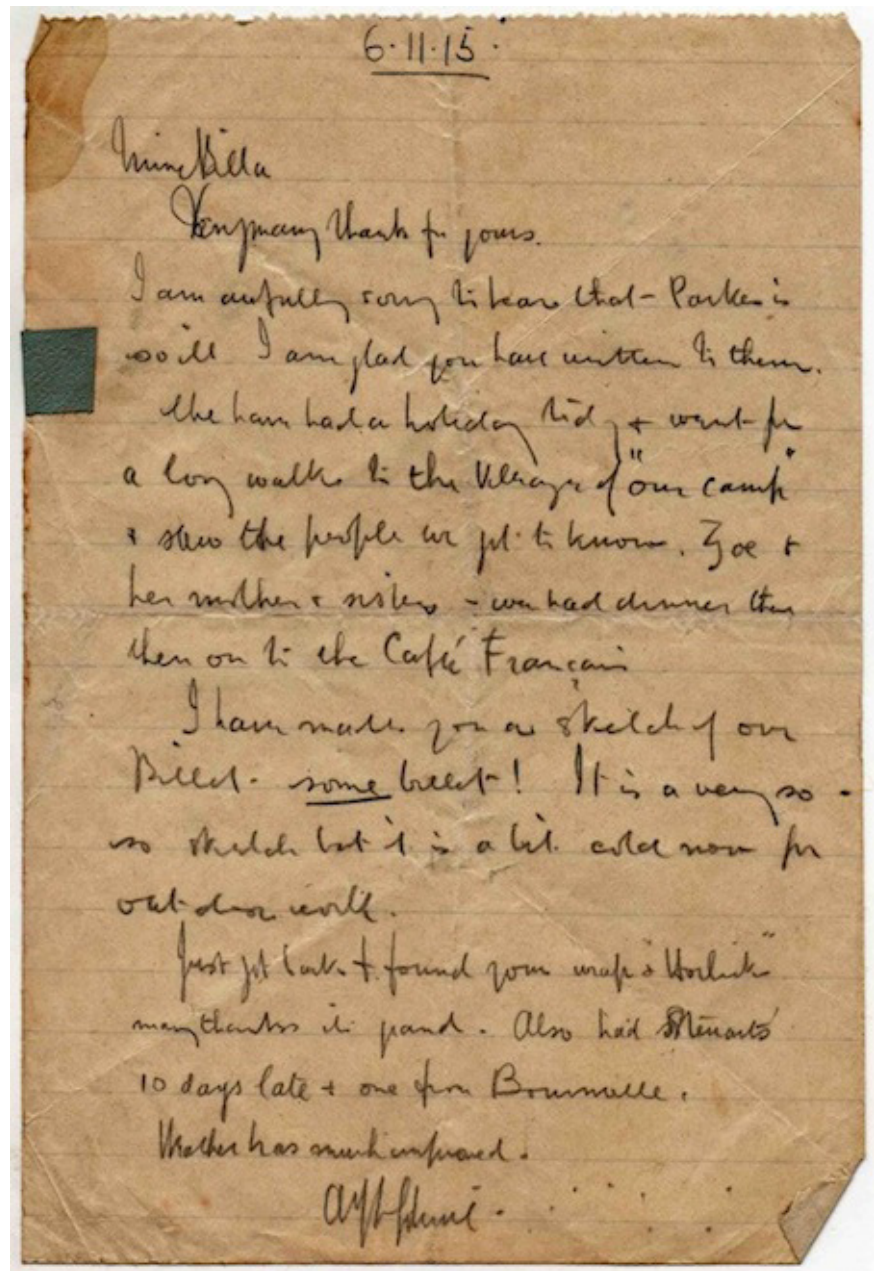
2 November 1915

Mine Own Beloved

Yours today. The post is not very good now I think some letters must go wrong. I had one from Frank today posted on the 25th. Can you tell me how to get the Bishop of London (?) spend his arms for getting spliced? As one of our men wants to know where do you go? Can you let me know soon darling? We are having awfully wet weather. All my love darlingest

Always your own Johnnie

(in bed)



6 November 1915

Mine Billa

Very many thanks for yours. I am awfully sorry to hear that Parker is so ill. I am glad you have written to them. We have had a holiday tidy and went for a long walk in the village of 'our camp' and show the people we get to know. Zoe and her mother and sisters – we had dinner there then on to the Café Français. I have made you a sketch of our Billet – some billet! It is a very so-so sketch but it is a bit cold now for outdoor work. Just got back and found your wrap and 'Horlicks' many thanks its grand. Also had Stewarts' 10 days late and one from Bournville. Weather has much improved.

AYL (Always Your Loving) Johnnie

10.11.15

Mine Billa

Many Thanks for the wrap it's just A1. The tobacco has not turned up yet. I had some good cherries from Barnstable today. We are still working many miles behind the line. The weather is getting better. What do you think of our billet? Has anyone in England sent you some photographs, small ones! I am in the best of health & have been ever since I recovered from jaundice. Holliday is also very fit & is getting his stripes. I am now out of (?) block and rubber. I must drop a line to John Lane & thank him. I made a drawing of a girl at our (?) today and did it as a commission but she posted me 3d. !!!!!!!

AYL Johnnie

Can you let me have 2 7x10 blocks + two Bs also 1/2 doz envelopes please. Reeves not Rowney or W & N. Channy X depot - know what I use.

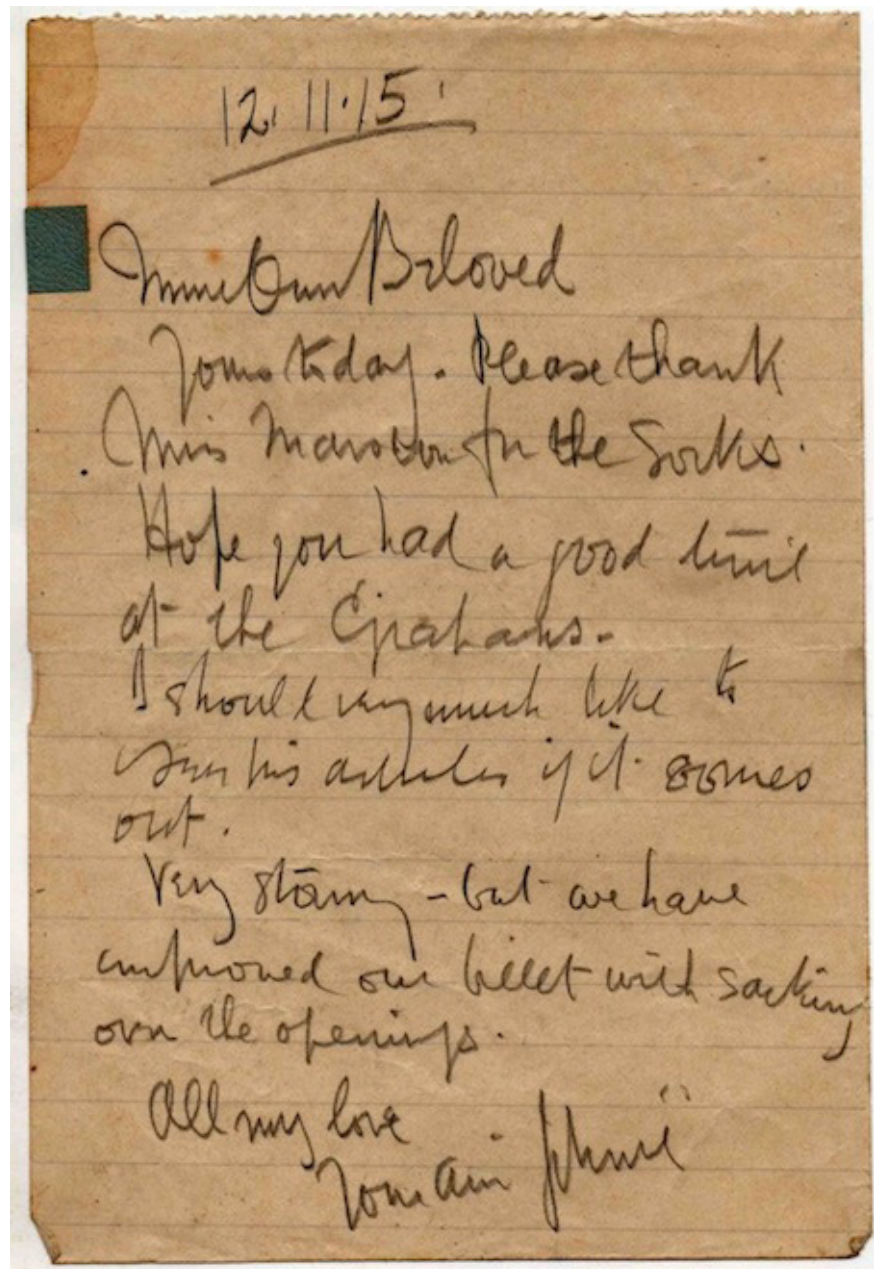
10 November
1915

Mine Billa

Many thanks for the wrap it's just A1. The tobacco has not turned up yet. I had some good cherries from Barnstable today. We are still working many miles behind the line. The weather is getting better. What do you think of our billet? Has anyone in England sent you some photographs, small ones! I am in the best of health and have been ever since I recovered from jaundice. Holliday is also very fit and is getting his stripes. I am now out of (?) block and rubber. I must drop a line to John Lane and thank him. I made a drawing of a girl at our (?) today and did it as a commission but she posting me 3d. !!!!!!!

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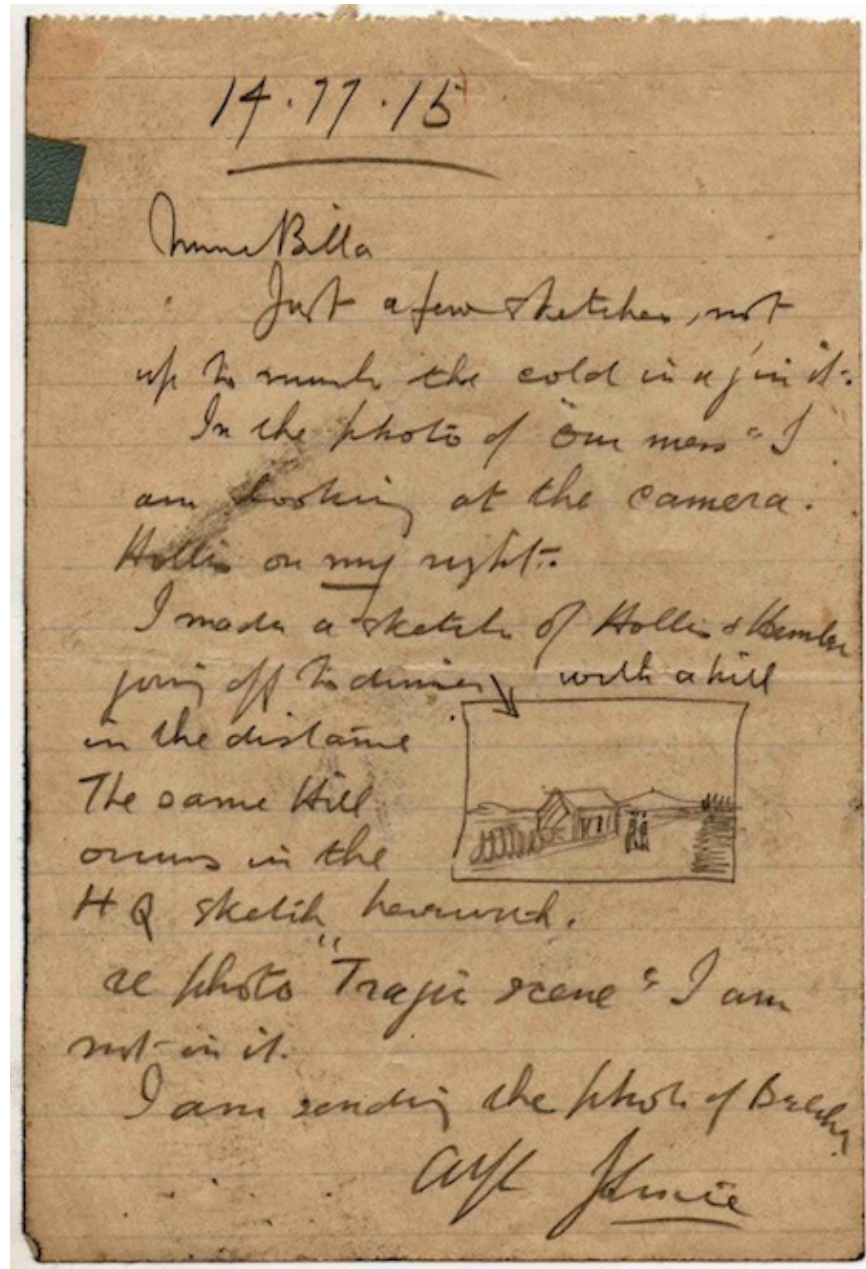
12 November 1915

Mine Own Beloved

Yours today. Please thank Mrs Marston for the socks. Hope you had a good time at the Grahams. I should very much like to see his articles if it comes out. Very stormy – but we have improved our billet with sacking over the openings.

All my love

Your Own Johnnie

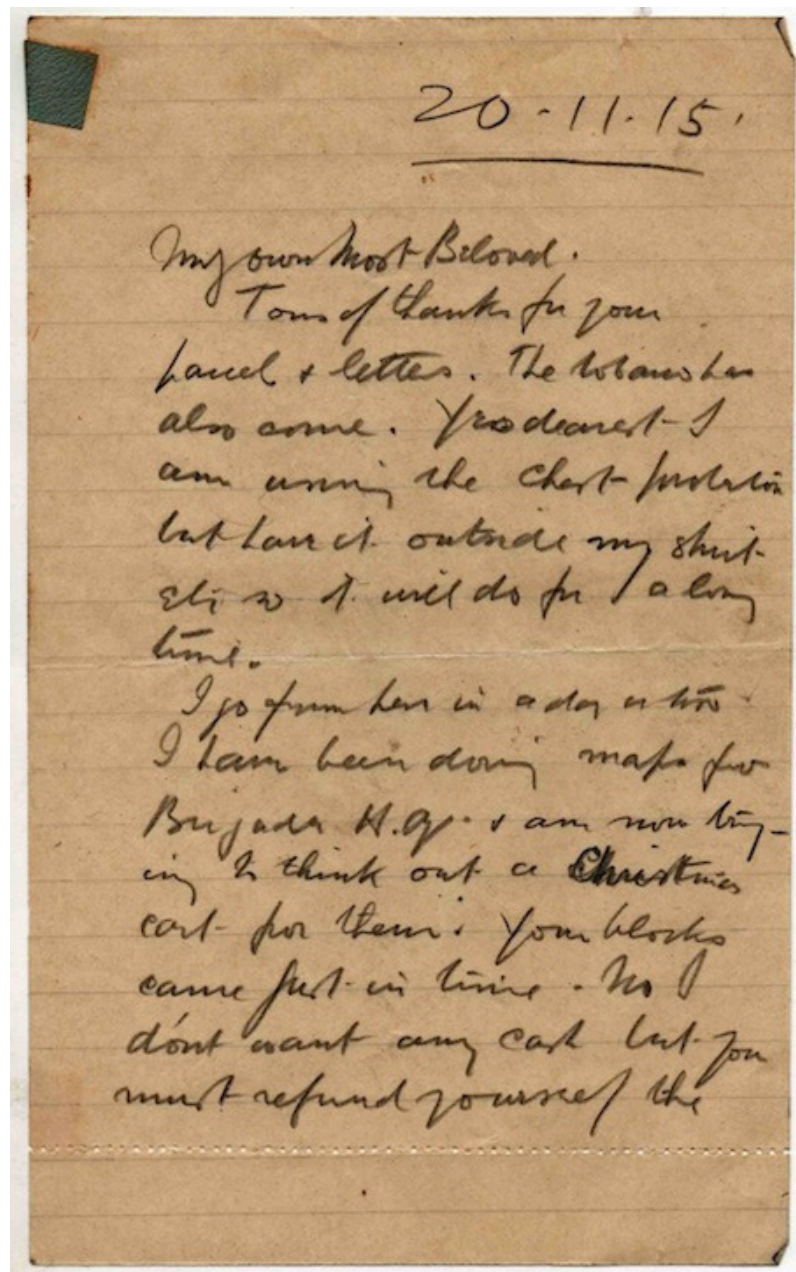


14 November 1915

Mine Billa

Just a few sketches, not up to much the cold is (?) it. In the photo of 'our mess' I am looking at the camera. Hollis on my right. I made a sketch of Hollis and Hembury going off to dinner with a hill in the distance. The same Hill occurs in the HQ sketch herewith. A photo 'Traffic scene' I am not in it. I am sending the photo of Belcher.

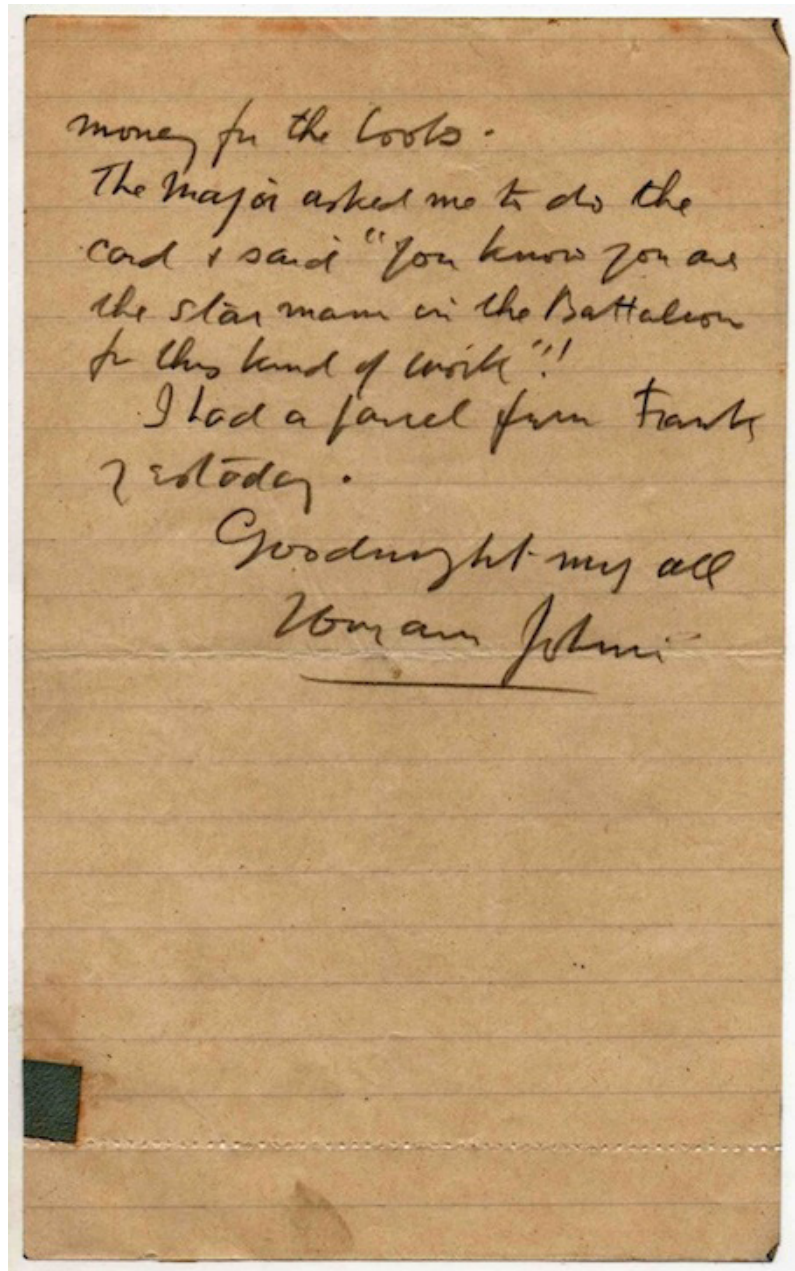
Aye Johnnie



20 November 1915

My own Most Beloved

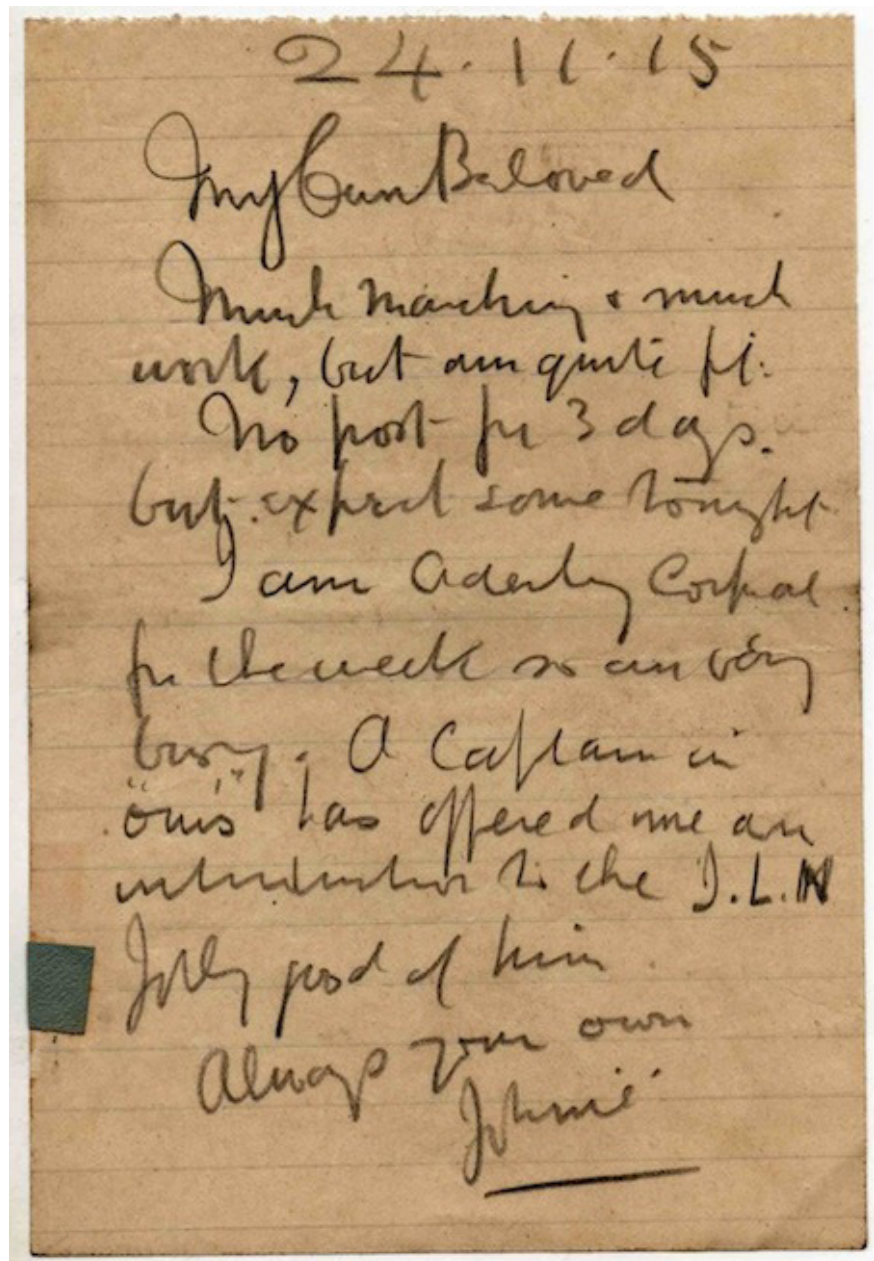
Tons of thanks for your parcels and letters. The tobacco has also come. Yes dearest I am using the Chest protector but have it outside my shirt etc so it will do for a long time. I go from here in a day or two. I have been doing maps for Brigade HQ I am now trying to think out a Christmas card for them. Your blocks came just in time. No I don't want any cash but you must refund yourself the money for the books. The Major asked me to do the card



and said 'You know you are the star man in the Battalion for this kind of work'! I had a parcel from Frank yesterday.

Goodnight my all

Your own Johnnie

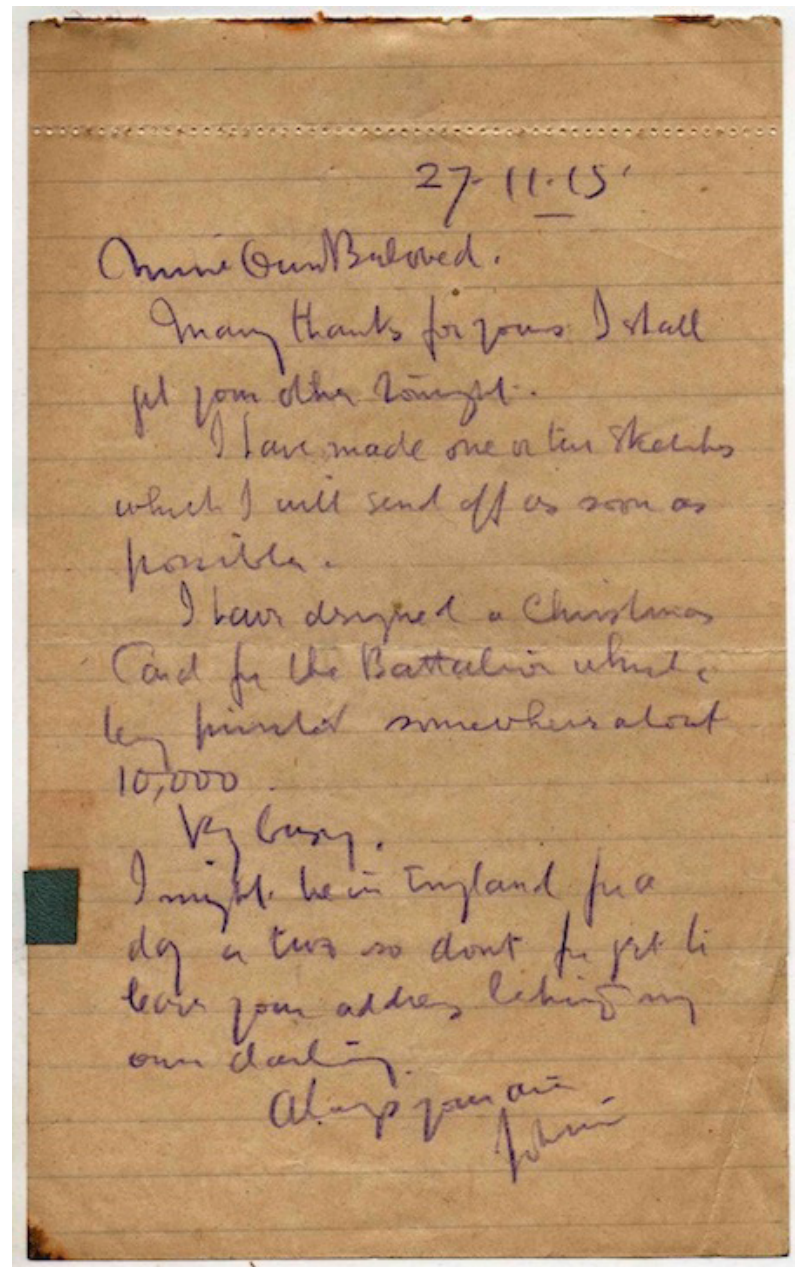


24 November 1915

My Own Beloved

Much marching and much work, but am quite fit. No post for 3 days but expect some tonight. I am Orderly Corporal for the week so am very busy. A Captain in ours has offered me an introduction to the ILN (*Illustrated London News*). Jolly good of him.

Always your own Johnnie



27 November 1915

Mine Own Beloved

Many thanks for yours I shall get your other tonight. I have made one or two sketches which I will send off as soon as possible. I have designed a Christmas Card for the Battalion which they printed somewhere about 10,000. Very busy. I might be in England for a day or two so don't forget to leave your address behind my own darling.

Always your own

Johnnie