

Monday 4 December 1916

My dear little Marjorie,

I have only just received your little letter which Mamma sent with hers on Nov 19th. Do you remember that you asked me to be home for Xmas? I only wish I could but there are many more soldiers in our Battery who are more entitled to the Xmas leave than I am, so I'm afraid you will have to do without Daddy this Xmas. Santa Claus will come as usual.

I think your writing and dictation just splendid, and your drawings are getting funnier than ever. I have pinned your crayoned tulips on the wall of my dug-out bedroom beside your photograph.

Daddy is as comfortable as possible. I expect even you would get tired enough to go soundly asleep in this dug-out. It would be a change from your pink bedroom. And how is little Daffodil getting on? I expect you quite enjoy the time when Mamma reads you more about her. It was Mamma's book when she was a girl like you. Write again soon, dear, + send another crayoning to help cover the sand bags.

Heaps of love & kisses, which you must share with Mamma and Betty.
From your ever loving Daddy



Gunner Wilfred Cove's daughters Marjorie and Betty.



A letter from Marjorie to her father.

This photo and letter was found in Gunner Cove's pocket when he was killed in action in 1917.

July 20, 1918

My own beloved wife

I do not know how to start this letter. The circumstances are different from any under which I ever wrote before. I am not to post it but will leave it in my pocket, if anything happens to me someone will perhaps post it. We are going over the top this afternoon and only God in Heaven knows who will come out of it alive.

I am in his hands and whatever happens I will look to him in this world and the world to come. If I am called my regret is that I leave you and my bairns. I go to him with your dear face the last vision on earth I shall see and your name upon my lips, you the best of women. You will look after by Darling Bairns for me and tell them how their daddy died.

Oh! How I love you all and as I sit here waiting I wonder what you are doing at home. I must not do that. It is hard enough sitting waiting. We may move at any minute. When this reaches you for me there will be no more war, only eternal peace and waiting for you.

It is a legacy of struggle for you but God will look after you and we shall meet again when there will be no more parting. I am to write no more sweetheart... Kiss the Bairns for me once more. I dare not think of them my Darlings.

*Goodbye, you best of women and best of wives, my beloved sweetheart. May God in his mercy look over you and bless you all... May he in that same mercy preserve me today. Eternal love from
Yours for evermore
Jim xxxxxxxx*

Company Sergeant-Major James Milne wrote this letter to his wife moments before he was ordered over the top (he had to leave the trenches and take his chances above ground).

It was to be delivered in the event of his death – but luckily James Milne survived and was later reunited with his family.

France, 24 March, 1917

My dearest Emily

Just a few lines dear to tell you I am still in the land of the living and keeping well, trusting you are the same dear, I have just received your letter dear and was very pleased to get it. It came rather more punctual this time for it only took five days. We are not in the same place dear, in fact we don't stay in the same place very long... we are having very nice weather at present dear and I hope it continues... Fondest love and kisses from your

loving Sweetheart

Will

xxxxxxxxxxxx

Three days after this letter William Martin was killed. Private William Martin and Emily Chitticks were engaged to be married at the time.

While he was fighting in France with the Battalion Devonshire Regiment, the couple wrote to each other as often as possible.

Emily was devastated by her fiance's death and never married. After she died in 1974 a note among her papers was found requesting that William's letters be buried with her.

Sunday afternoon, 1 Sep, 1918.

My dear Father,

It is a strange feeling to me but a very real one, that every letter now that I write home to you or to the little sisters may be the last that I shall write or you read. I do not want you to think that I am depressed; indeed on the contrary, I am very cheerful. But out here, in odd moments the realisation comes to me of how close death is to us. A week ago I was talking with a man, a catholic, from Preston, who had been out here for nearly four years, untouched. He was looking forward with certainty to going on leave soon. And now he is dead - killed in a moment during our last advance. Well it was God's will.

I say this to you because I hope that you will realise, as I do, the possibility of the like happening to myself. I feel very glad myself that I can look the fact in the face without fear or misgiving. Much as I hope to live thro' it all for your sakes and my little sisters! I am quite prepared to give my life as so many have done before me. All I can do is put myself in God's hands for him to decide, and you and the little ones pray for me to the Sacred Heart and Our Lady.

I hope that you will not move out of the old house yet. Write and let me know when anything happens. I see that you went to Preston a few days ago. It seems years and years since I tried to get drowned in the canal.

Well I have not much time left and I must end.

With my dear love. Pray for me.

Your son

Frank.

Lance-Corporal Frank Earley was a young journalist from Derby who regularly wrote to his family from the front. The day after writing this letter, Frank suffered a serious wound to his chest and died some hours later. He was 19.

December 25th, 1914

My Dear Father,

Christmas Day you see me still alive, though by Jove, since the 20th I've been having a fairly hairy time. We were sent to a place where the Germans had broken the line. When we finally got under the last cover available we were ordered to make a bayonet attack on the German trenches! It was a criminal order on the part of the man who ordered it.

After 26 hours in water up to the waist I was sent to dry myself with my half squadron behind the firing line. Still sopping wet we were sent off to another lot of trenches and from these I was then pulled out and sent off for a patrol. Every time I showed myself "ping" went a bullet!

However, I finally reached the line of the British Trenches I was making for where to cap all my troubles, I was arrested as a German spy!! It was not until I had been taken before the C.O., with a rifle muzzle in the small of my back, that I was allowed to depart.

Yesterday, we did a 25-mile march I have a pair of feet like balloons and an attack of neuritis and a chill! [...] My tootsies are awfully painful. Well we get well paid so mustn't complain I suppose.

Must stop now, so once more wishing you a Merry and Happy New Year.

Au revoir - Your Loving Trevor

This letter was written by 24 year old Second Lieutenant Trevor Bird. He survived the war and had children and grandchildren.