

1 Oct 9th 1915

Jacks experiences
when wounded at
2nd battle of Ypres.
My Dearest Kate

I Ward
3rd London Gen Hospital
Wandsworth S W

I have just received your most welcome & long looked for letter. I got a card from Will & a letter from Jim earlier in the week I also got Bee's letter with yours this morning so you see dear I have had quite a good mail from Victoria this week. Well dear you asked me to give you an account of my experiences since I was wounded I sent you some cuttings from the Daily Mail giving the experiences of some of the boys in Germany & I think I have told you some of mine but I will endeavour to give you a fuller account of my own. Did you get the last letter I wrote before I was wounded? It was a good long one & put in a sealed "Active Service" envelope so that it was not to be censored I wrote that one on the same day as we went into action April 22nd but I am afraid that & all the mail for that day was left behind as the officers hadn't time to censor them. We had two batteries of artillery in a field adjoining our billet at the time & they kept barking away & the Germans were putting some shells over trying

2

to put them out of action. They succeeded in setting fire to a farm where one of our companies were billeted. So soon we could feel the gas coming over us & it must have been bad in the trenches as it made our eyes water even that distance away. Then the Algerians ~~beg~~ began to come in twos & threes, soon after that we went out in Platoons at 50 yds interval & 150 yds distance. That was to avoid the shrapnel as much as possible, presently we came to a field & by this time it was quite dark then we started to dig ourselves in that is we started to dig small trenches long enough for us to lie in each man at his own trench. After a while an order came along that we were to stop this & go to Brigade Hdqrs for orders. We stay there for some time & were ordered to go to the Batt Hdqrs at the trenches. I must tell you that we were in reserve at the time we were called out. The 8th Batt relieved us in the trenches & we were supposed to have gone back on the night of the 23rd. We went to the Batt Hdqrs & it was some journey. Here we got some supper issued & stayed there for a couple of hours & no smoking allowed as it would give us away to the Germans. From there we were ordered to go to some place just outside of the village of St Julien & dig ourselves in again. It was getting near daylight by this time so we had to get ~~an~~ move on. We laid in these trenches all day Friday & were shelled all day but the range was about a hundred yds to long so no damage was done. Friday night we ~~g~~ dug another trench about a hundred yds in front of where we had been laying all the day. I ~~to~~ was in charge of the last ~~last~~ Listening Post being the senior Plt

"A Listening Post" has to go out some distance in front of the trenches & lay ~~perfectly~~ perfectly still & find out what they can about the enemy & report on it. As a rule one of the men has a wire on his wrist or attached to him & a system of signals is arranged between them & the man at the other end of the wire in the trench. For instance if they were to see a German Patrol they would signal it & if they thought they could handle them another signal & if they wanted help another & if a general attack was to be made they would signal that they were coming in in a hurry. Listening Post duty is done in reliefs two hours at a time & it's a dangerous position they have to be out longer as it's too dangerous to change reliefs too often. This is a nice job on a cold wet night as they have to lay perfectly still & only speak in whispers, it's pretty bad for a fellow that has a cough. The stars shells are going up all the time & light the whole place up. I remember being on Listening Post once & a star shell went up & pitched before going out right in front of us. It was exciting for a while until the light went out. We dare not look up as the light shining on our face would give us away so we stick our noses in the ground the smell wasn't too pleasant either as on a mile of that front there was over 30,000 men buried there. We were expecting a machine gun to open fire on us so I ~~suppose~~ but nothing happened so I suppose they didn't see us. I hope ~~that~~ you won't get tired in reading this I guess you have read so much about the life

H

in the trenches that you know as much about it as I do. We will go back to the night of the 23rd of April when I got back from Disturbing Patient Post. I was nearly frozen & there was no rum for us that morning. The Good Templars & the goodly goodlies tried to stop the rum issue in the trenches. I should like to put some of them there on Bovril or cocoa & then try rum our issue was about six dessert spoonful. It was real good rum & if that was going to cause intemperance God help us. Col Hart Mc Harg was wounded on the night of the 23rd & died about an hour after. His mother has been to see me several times since I have been here. After he was wounded that left Major Odium in command at Adgdis & Major ^{Dyng} ^{Hall} ~~Odium~~ in the trench. As soon as it was daylight the Germans began to shell us again but the range was still long we wondered when our artillery were going to reply to them but it appears they were either put of action or had no ammunition. After some time they opened fire but very feeble to what the enemy's fire was & they were firing short range & our own Shrapnel was bursting almost in our own trench. Major Dyng Hall sent a messenger back to Headquarters to say the artillery were firing short. The same messenger came back with the order for us to fight a retirement. You should have heard us swear then. Instead of retiring we wanted to go at them we didn't know then that they had broken through in several places we were up in the salient just out of Ypres & were almost surrounded when

5

we started to retire. Our trenches ran up ~~in~~
like a letter V almost, something like this 
we were right up in the point & so had them
in front & each side of us. Up to the time the
retirement started I hadn't seen a German
we opened fire on some building's in front of us
where we thought some snipers were. I forgot to
tell you that when we were going into action on the
22nd some artillery were going to take up a position &
one of the men on a limber had a market basket with
three or four dozen eggs in it. They were getting smashed
up going over the rough road so he handed them out
to us & we took them along with us. We hadn't got
any chance to cook them on the Friday so we had
some raw. Sat morning I had a good breakfast
of fried eggs as we had a chance to cook them
in the trench. Well to get on with the story we
retired along the trench which ran through a
hedge & just after we had got through it I saw two
of the boy's helping one of the Serp's Collinson by name
through the hedge. He had been wounded. I got out
of the trench to give them a hand & when we
had got him through he wanted to lay down
so I took off my pack & put it under his head
for a pillow. I had everything in it including
200 cigarettes & the pair of socks you made me
but there was no time to take anything out.
Then I left them as I couldn't do any more &
tried to get back in the trench again. First
I ran to a shell hole where some of the machine
gun teams were then on to another ground
where some more of the boy's were. I stayed

there to get my breath & have a few pots at
 them. One of the boys who laid beside me
 there got a bullet right through the head
 He just gave a twist & grunted & he was kaput
 as the Germans say. I got some of his blood in
 my face. I left there & got in another shell
 hole for a breather. I remember that well as
 it was ~~half~~ half full of water & I got drenched
 then I started to run again & got shot through
 the knee so I had to crawl ~~the~~ if I wanted
 to go at all, eventually I took my great coat
 off as it was hampering my progress & the
 Germans were coming on faster than I could
 crawl away from them. I got to a ditch over
 which ran a little bridge. There I sat on a pack
 which some ~~of~~ fellow had thrown away even
 then the water came up around my waist &
 my bad leg was under the water the whole
 time. By this time our artillery were covering
 our retreat & they must have been reinforced
 as the fire was much heavier. I stayed in
 the ditch until dark under cover from our
 own artillery. as soon as it was dark they
 stopped firing & I crawled out of the ditch
 & tried to get through the Germans to our own
 lines as by this time they had captured the
 part of the trench which we had been holding
 & were driving our boys back farther, well after
 a while the rain came down in torrents
 & I got drenched to the skin I got as far as
 some road & found a German sentry here

I was in awful pain by that time & felt so miserable that I wished ~~that~~ a bullet would come & finish me off. I was groaning & making an awful noise but the sentry didn't take any notice of me & just as day broke some Germans came out & dragged me on a plank & put a tuft of grass under my head & one of them put a blanket which was drenched over me & gave me some cold coffee out of his water bottle which I was very grateful for. Then I went to sleep with the blanket over my head & the sun came out & dried me a little. Then our artillery opened fire again & woke me up I laid for some time until a shrapnel bullet came through the blanket & just missed my nose so I thought it was time to beat it again so I started to crawl again. It was a lovely day on the Sunday & the shrapnel was bursting all around the caps & pieces of casing whizzing along the ground all around me I thought "it was my birthday I can tell you". Of course I couldn't crawl very far & had to keep resting. I slept in a turnip field on the Sunday night. They were the previous seasons turnips & had not been gathered in so they stank pretty badly as they were rotting. Monday morning I started to crawl to some old buildings thinking perhaps I could get a drink as I was pretty thirsty by this time. On the way I came to a shell hole full of water & the temptation was too strong for me so I took ~~one~~ one of your letters out of my pocket & used the envelope as a cup but I didn't drink much of it as it tasted of rotten turnips & wasnt.

at all once. after a ~~while~~⁸ while I came across
a chap's equipment & searched the haversack
& tried the water bottle without success so
I continued on my journey but I never got ~~that~~
far as the buildings. Some Germans came along
& two of them picked me up. They were young
fellows & were alright to me. They took me
to a cross road & put me in a building &
brought me water to drink. I had to wait here
for the ambulance men. After a while an old man
with a beard came along without a stretcher. He
tried to make me walk & got a thick stick & ~~and~~ caught
hold my arm & then he would take me on his back
by turns sometimes he let me go altogether & I had
to ~~it~~ put the stick in the pit of my stomach &
swing myself around as well as possible & it was
painful all the while he was saying "Rouse" to me
& calling me an "English Swine". I think the old
men are much worse in their hatred to the English
than the younger ones. On the way to the dressing
station there were some of their cook wagons
so I begged some more coffee from them. The
journey to the dressing station took ~~that~~ ages
it seemed to me I suppose it was because I was
in so much pain as when he was carrying me
on his shoulder my leg was swinging along &
when I was walking it was worse. They were
very good to me at the dressing station &
gave me as much hot pea soup as I could
eat & some coffee. I had a field dressing
put on my leg there as I had nothing on it
up to then. From there we were carried
across some fields & put in motor ambulances
& taken to a railway station & put in
box cars on some straw & taken to

a place just out of Roulers I was put in a building on some straw until the Tuesday morning then I was taken to a tent where they had some beds for us. On the Wed they operated on my knee & put some tubes in it to take the discharge off up to the Wednesday when they operated on me I had only a field dressing on my leg & that was only from the Monday night. Friday morning we were taken out & put in some open railway trucks & taken to Roulers where we were put on a hospital train & taken to Oudeney arriving there Sat evening about 7 o'clock. They had two old buses drawn by Frenchman for ambulance but they were not enough for all of us so they got some brewery wagons for the rest of us. These arrived about nine o'clock we had to stay on to the platform for two hours much to the amusement of the crowd which soon gathered around. Finally I was put on one of these wagons & taken to the camp hospital & that was the worst part of the journey as the jolting of the wagon caused us so much pain. Well dear I think I have told you about all the what happened to me after I got in the hospital until I came home in a previous letter so I won't bore you with any more of it. I am getting along fine now but have not been through the operation yet I guess it will be another month before I am operated on I had some

Skin grafted on my stump last Wednesday
 I think I mentioned that in my last letter.
 Please don't worry about me dear as I shall pull
 through alright now this operation is not at
 all serious & as a rule not painful. In Germany
 they used to do it with a mallet & chisel & no
at chloroform. No dear I didn't get the letter you
 mentioned in your letter. As you say I can afford
 to miss my birthday letter. In fact rather than
 go through what I have been through again
 I'd miss your letters for a whole year & that's saying
 something I can assure. No I didn't lose your
 letters as I had them in my tinic pocket
 also the pocket book with your photos I
 used to read your letters over quite often
 in Germany & wonder when I should see
 you again but "now we shant be long"
 I am looking forward to "Der Tag" when
 I shall see you again. I have no souvenirs
 for you dear I did have some in my pack
 before I was wounded. I have got one for
 my self which I shall never lose. I was
 sorry to hear that Neeta was so sick when
 you wrote & I hope she is much better by
 now. Leave it to me about getting on our
 Island I think I could manage it alright
 I think Aunt May would like me to stay
 in England I haven't seen mother yet
 she is coming on the 23rd she has it

said anything on her letters about it; but it will take a lot of persuading to make me stay here I hope to be able to go around & see them all before I go back & I shall try to see Jim on the way through Canada as I haven't seen him for 10 years. I am sorry to hear that your brother's arm is not right yet but it may be just as well for him as if he was sent back to the front he might fare worse. I shall be pleased to see your sister in law but they have to get a pass from someone in the hospital before being admitted. We are only allowed one pass out at a time & Aunt Mag has mine. If I knew when she was coming I could get the pass & send it to her. A lady came to see me last Wed & was refused admittance of course that all depends on the man at the gate they are supposed to see all the passes but none bothers about it inside so they needn't be so particular at the gate after all. Another batch of exchanged prisoners came in here on Thursday night but they were none of them so ~~very~~ badly wounded as some of the boys that came the same line

as I did I wasn't the worse by any means
 & I was so thin when I came here that I
 could almost grip my leg with one hand
 around the thigh. One day in Germany
 the doctor hung his hat on my hip
 bone & laughed at it. I felt like going
 for him weak as I was. That will
 give you an idea how thin I was but
 I have put on some flesh since coming
 here & when I can walk on crutches
 I shall soon get strong again. Well
 Dear I am afraid you will get tired
 if I start another page & 13 is an
 unlucky number so I will close with
 heaps of love & tons of kisses x x x x x
 x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x
 x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x
 x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x
 x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x
 x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x x
 Yours Ever Loving

Keep the home fires burning Jack through the dark cloud
 Though your heart is yearning ^{Shining} Turn the dark cloud inside out
 Though your boy is far away Till your boy comes home
~~He~~ he dreams of home
 There's a silver lining "Are we down hearted" NO