



Major C. E.
Sladden.
Evesham.
Wounded,
third time.

Lt Cyril Sladden

Letter A

HMT Cawdor Castle
Atlantic Ocean,
June 28th 1915

My dear Mother,

I believe our first mail will be dispatched very soon, so I must write without further delay. We left harbour the night after I last wrote to you, but didn't really get on the move till afternoon. We have really been extremely lucky with the weather and so have had quite a respectable voyage so far in spite of the general crush on board. Yesterday the sea was without a wave & we only had the long swell rocking us gently. Earlier the boat was pitching a good deal and a large number of the junior officers being quartered in second class cabins right over the screw felt it. Quite a lot were rather bad for a day or two and for about 24 hours I was off my food and not very cheerful, but kept going and didn't miss a meal. The really trying thing on board this ship is the mixture of smells which is extremely potent in most parts, & very difficult to escape entirely anywhere. I understand that it is not worse than is usual on these ships.

Letter B

Sunday July 18th 1915

Today we are being relieved by another battalion, and move back to the shore, I expect for a day or two. It is a wretched rest camp, very little room to move, but very nearly safe from artillery fire.

Everything is extremely quiet and on our flank nothing to speak of has occurred for a week or more. We were never shelled all the time we were in the trench & so far as fire went we had a p.....[we can't read this word]? of it. The flies are our great trouble & give us no peace at all; they swarm everywhere, prevent our sleeping during daylight (one doesn't get many hours sleep at night) make our meals a nuisance. You might make me a muslin bag to put over my head to fit quite loosely & hang down loosely over the shoulders. It might turn up in time to be of some use, as the flies wont get fewer for a long time to come.

Letter C

Sunday Aug 15th 1915

After midnight on Thursday I got a bullet through my left shoulder. The wound is clean, and the bullet has come out, and I don't think any bone was touched, so it is quite a minor affair. I am writing on the off chance of being able to post, but don't know whether a letter will go. The official news of my wound will probably say nothing about severity or otherwise.

I have just transferred to this ship from a regular hospital ship, & cannot tell where I shall be taken. I am not bad enough for a trip home I am afraid though that is what I should like.

Letter D

Aug 23rd 1915

My dear Mother,

You will by now have got my cable which may very likely be the first news you have had of my getting wounded. I hope the letter I posted a week ago from Lemnos will reach you fairly quickly, but I think it is just possible it won't be sent because the rest of the shipping line & name of the ship was on the back of the envelope. So I will repeat what I said there with fuller details.

My bullet was obtained late on the night of the 12th (the anniversary, by the way, of the day I applied at Oxford for my commission) after an unsuccessful attempt to attack a position reputed to be lightly held, but unfortunately rather more strongly held than we had been led to suppose. The ground was quite new to us, & we had been sent there that evening to carry out this particular job which turned out rather disastrous as all the remaining officers (except the quartermaster who was left behind) of the regiment were knocked out, & a good many men. I was retiring up a hill with a small party of men & a couple of wounded who required assistance, with only a little firing going on, when a random bullet caught me just behind the left shoulder blade & came out at the end of the shoulder. The entrance hole was tiny, the exit about as big as a sixpence. The former never gave any trouble, & the latter is just about closed over now & has been very satisfactory throughout. The shoulder has been bruised and stiff, but is easing already; right down to the elbow my arm is brilliantly coloured in many hues & looks quite alarming bit is perfectly harmless. I wear a sling by day, but almost as much for appearance sake as for use, though it is certainly useful when I walk. From the elbow downwards I use my arm & hand quite freely. From doing very little – though never entirely confined to my bed – I have lost most of my strength, & easily get tired if I try to walk and stand about much; but I am sure I shall soon cure this when I can get myself some clothes & go out a bit, as I hope to do in a few days. It was several miles from the place where I was wounded to the landing stage where I embarked for the hospital ship & I covered the distance walking in several stages broken by prolonged halts at three different dressing stations on the

way, & I got on board about nine or ten o'clock on the Friday morning, having only what I wore on me; and of that I discarded the shirt and jacket which had been cut about past all hope and were very filthy & covered in blood. So I have lived since in pyjamas, and only today have seen a tailor & ordered some more clothes. I think it is hopeless to try to get my kit sent to me; I must hope to (sum run?) up against it when I return to the regiment. At Lemnos we changed ships into a larger boat which had only just been transformed into a temporary hospital ship. My doctor on board there was a man named Sylvester who knew Arthur quite well at the Metropolitan – rather curious I should have run up against him, wasn't it? I was comfortably quartered there with a double cabin to myself, & we were sumptuously fed with many course meals. I wasn't feeling specially well though most of the time I was on board and had a bit of indigestion so the feeling was rather lost on me. I have felt much better since I have been here. We lay some time at Lemnos taking on more cases before moving on here. At the beginning of the journey we were all assured that everybody was going to be taken to England, so that it was rather a severe disappointment when I was selected with a number of the lighter cases to be put off here. Not that I had any right originally to expect to be sent home with so slight a wound, but it was bad luck after there had been every appearance of my coming in for a slice of extra good luck. Today a party left hospital to go onto the same ship to go home – inclusive of one officer who came off with me, which is typical of the army! I think I have just seen her sailing by after leaving harbour, so her lucky passengers will be home about Sunday I suppose.

We are some distance out of Valetta here in a good position up on a hill. If one ferrys across the harbour that lies between it is not very far, but round by road it is 3 miles drive into the town, but that can be done for about a shilling in the local substitute for a cab. It is a convent with a hospital attached, & the convent building has largely been given up to us as well as the hospital proper. It is an officer's hospital exclusively and quite comfortably fitted out. The food is simple but extremely good and well cooked. I have one other officer of the regiment here with me, who is over in the hospital proper where I can easily go and see him. Lord Methuen who is working hard in organizing all the hospital arrangements is a frequent visitor. He brought us some very good news this afternoon concerning the Russian treatment of the German navy near Riga.

My poor regiment has been terribly unlucky especially in the loss of senior officers. I heard last night that poor old Major Barker whom I knew to have been badly wounded, died on his hospital ship just before reaching Malta. So we have had our five senior officers killed & all shot within about an hour the same morning. The remaining company commander was with me on board & has injuries that will keep him out of the field for a long time.

It is ages since I had a letter from home; it is rather a doubtful matter whether some of your recent ones will ever reach me at all, at any rate there is bound to be any amount of delay. So I rely on my cable to produce news for me again as it is quite a quick & frequent mail here. There was to have been a mail brought to us on the 13th, but of course I missed it. The last news from you was dated about the middle of July.

Best love to all from

Your most affectionate son

Cyril. E. Sladden

Letter E

Nov 21st 1915

My Dear Mother.

It is a long time since I wrote, but I particularly mentioned in my letter to Mela some days ago that I wanted her to pass on any news as I was uncertain how soon I should be able to write; so I expect you will know before getting this that I am really back at work again at last. I embarked a week ago today, but rough weather delayed our landing until Tuesday morning, & I ultimately reached here that night.

It was very nice seeing old faces again; unfortunately not many of them but sufficient to make it still the old regiment. All except the quartermaster were away at the time I left, several sick and some we had left in England where we were slightly over strength. I find it quite difficult to accustom myself to the conditions here. By comparison with my later experiences I had come to regard my first trial of trench warfare as a very quiet and peaceful affair – so much so that it scarcely seemed worthy of much reference. But compared with this it

was most strenuous. I really believe you could jump over the parapet and walk about in broad daylight for a quarter of a minute and stand an excellent chance of never being noticed – let alone hit! I don't propose to try it though. I think the wily Turk, having put up plenty of wire is probably turning all his attention to making himself thoroughly comfortable for the winter. We cannot see much of him as the crest of a slight hill lies between our front lines of trench, which are roughly 200 yds apart I should say. Occasionally we get a few shells from our left flank, but there is little more to worry about.

I have been given a company for the time being; so I was very glad to arrive while they were in reserve. Last night we took over the firing line trenches again. I had time meanwhile to find out a bit about things, and pick up the threads. There are heaps of little routine matters to get hold of which vary from time to time & according to the taste of the C.O. & so forth. I may perhaps get put on to the job of brigade machine gun officer; but as I have gone so long without being called upon I am very doubtful whether they will do so now. An officer junior to me is doing it at present.

The rations issued here are very good indeed, far the best I have experienced out of England considering the difficulties involved in supply I think they are excellent.

It is getting decidedly cold, and there has been a biting north-easter the last two days. Luckily I am well supplied with all sorts of warm clothing. By the way, I had a tremendous slice of luck in finding my valise on the beach the afternoon of my arrival. I think it had been sent there by mistake after being labelled to me at Lemnos! Anyhow I have recovered most of my last belongings with it, and have great hopes that a few more may yet be found later on.

I have had some fairly recent letters since getting here; one from Father came today, which was posted about the end of last month. I was interested to hear of his meeting Sgt Bloomer who could tell him lots of little things that one doesn't care to put down on paper. I am very fit, and if active service were never worse than the past five days have been I shouldn't be quite so persistently conscious for the war to come to an end. I have been much more uncomfortable on peace manoeuvres at times. I am afraid I have hopelessly missed your birthday; but you must make the best of this in place of your birthday letter.

I expect the men will do well at Christmas; I hope bad weather wont hold up the presents they get sent them.

Love to all from

Your affectionate son,

Cyril E. Sladden.