



F.E. Kidner
1888-1915

Frederick Elworthy Kidner (1888-1915)

Fred was born at Nynehead on the 16th June, 1888, and christened at Nynehead on the 1st July 1888. In September 1897 he went to Mary Street House School, Taunton (run by the Misses Alston & Rawes). In 1901 he won a Sherborne scholarship and in September went to Abbey House. At Sherborne he was on the classical side and was a School Prefect. He got his house cap at rugby football. In 1907 he took the Higher Certificate in Latin, Greek, Elementary Maths, and Scripture Knowledge (Greek Text); in the same year he won an Exhibition to Worcester College, Oxford.

He was at Oxford from February 1908 to 1911, and played rugby for his college. In 1909 he took Certificate "A" of the Senior Division of the Officers' Training Corps. In 1911, after a course at Wren's in London, he took the Indian Civil Service examination but did not get in. He took his degree at Oxford on December 16th, 1911.

In 1912 he went to Russia and joined his Uncle's business. R. & T. Elworthy Co. Ltd. at Elizabethgrad (now known as Kirovograd in the Ukraine). Elworthy's designed, manufactured and distributed agricultural machinery on a large scale in Russia and Siberia.

Reproduced below are some of his letters to his elder sister, Elizabeth Kidner, and a few other papers.

Worcester College,
Oxford.

Miss A.E. Kidner
Dodhill House,
Taunton
Somerset

14 Nov. 1909.

My dear Betty,

Thank you for your letter.

The College Sports were held yesterday. Nothing very exciting happened; except a dead-heat for the mile which is unusual.

This week I take Certificate "A" and next week 'Divvers'¹. Well I really do not know what to go with, but I must send this letter or I shall be deluged with profane letters from you all telling me to write. I have just looked through this term's letters; there are five of them of which only one refrains from slanging me for not writing. If you would keep my letters and count them, you would see that I write quite a lot.

The other day I bought for 3/6 a 12/6 Shelley. Does anyone want it? Margaret had a birthday the other day.

Your loving brother

Fred.

¹ Divinity

Elizabethgrad
1 July 1912

My dear Liz,

This letter is meant for a birthday one. Many happy returns. Here people do not have birthdays, but name-days. Everyone is called after some saint.

Yesterday we went to B[...] in the new Ford car, which is to be for the use of one of the branches. Edward and Charles Dunlop (John Dunlop's brother) and self. On the way out we got stuck in the mud and had to get a mongil's pony to pull us out.

We might have done worse, as in the middle of the road, the mud was up to the horses' bellies.

When we got there, the fan came adrift and went through the radiator. Two pipes were broken, so we had to take off the radiator and solder them up.

The annual fair is on at present and all the roads are full of bullock-carts and pony-carts.

There is a flying-man here – Zfinoff [?], with a Bleriot. We are having the third wet summer in succession which is very unusual. It is very hot however, and we spend a rouble a week in fly-papers.

I had a postcard from Sybil from Wallingford about a week ago.

I have just made the pianola play Liszt's *Liebesträum*. I find it takes a good deal of practice.

Your loving brother,

F.E. Kidner

Elizabethgrad
17/22nd March /13

My dear Liz,

When last I wrote home, I said the winter is over; but we have had a lot of frost & snow since then, & have had some skating.

There are several holidays in the next few weeks, I think on Friday is the three-hundredth anniversary of the Romanoff dynasty. That is a works holiday, and there is a performance of 'Life for the Tsar' in the theatre, parade of garrison (so-called) and rejoicings.

I think next week is "butter-week" when you eat greasy hoppers called "bliny" – I hear they are something like crumpets, only you eat a lot of them as "zalsouskah" before dinner and are supposed to eat all your dinner afterwards, - and then I suppose it does not matter what happens. Also this is when you are supposed to drive troikas, so I suppose it is quite in order to have snow – it is snowing now. This evening John Dunlop arrives.

Just now I got well caught—had just lit a pipe after dinner and the Leeshins – Meg knows them- came to call – and just as they got up to go another Mr & Mrs.

Nothing is talked of now here except the “Blagotvoretznoe Obshchestvo” or Charitable Soc. of which Aunt Mary is Presidentess, – I am quite sick of it – ask Meg. They are a lot of lazy blighters who have bazaars & lotteries and think the poor get the money.

Helen and Willy have measles.

The other day we had a branch-managers’ meeting and a dinner at the restaurant after, and after that singing – very good – and dancing.

Meg will be sorry to hear the Vyaltseva is dead – she sang at a concert when Meg was here. There were thousands of people at the funeral in St Petersburg and some people injured in the crowd.

Some day this week we are all going to hear Hoffmann - a great pianist said to play better than Paderowski. I shall be bored.

Last night we went to a party at the Youngman’s & played Coon Can² – but we couldn’t, & other games.

Aunt Mary wants one of you to come out with Aunt Jane & Uncle Will – why don’t you? There will then be a fine mob out here.

Please send me a prayer book – I have an old one at home. Don’t worry, but send it one day when you have nothing else to do

Your loving brother Fred.

Please excuse writing but I have been writing like this all the week. I saw your letter to Aunt Mary and note about Mother’s health, which ought to get better in the Spring weather.

c/o R. & T. Elworthy, Ltd.,
Elisabethgrad,
S. Russia.

31/13th April, 1913

My dear Liz,

Many thanks for your very interesting letter written on Easter Monday. I regret to note that you had a cold then and hope you have recovered by now.

I hear you already have the car and have been to Bournemouth and seen Pety who has put on 8 pounds.

I really wrote this letter a fortnight ago but spilt the inkpot over it; this is to be borne in mind when interpreting dates, as I cannot bother to transpose them.

² A card game ancestral to all forms of rummy (Wikipedia).

Uncle and Aunt Jane are here, having arrived at three o'clock after a good journey. Both are looking very well.

We played football this afternoon, having first got soaked through by a storm of rain – the first of the season.

Edward and I go every week to the German reading evening. We are now reading a rotten book rather on "Misunderstood" lines. Do you read any German now? Mrs Weinert keeps us supplied with them. I am reading *Liebelei* by Arthur Schnitzler, which is not bad.

This reminds me that Mrs W. asked to be remembered to Smig in the summer.

Mother says in her letter that Will is coming home on leave in the summer. I am wondering if he could not come out here on his way home or out again.

The boy scouts seem to be going very strong in Kingston. I read in the Times that two from Wellington walked to London to give a message to the Lord Mayor.

You say that you think of writing to Aunt Mary: in doing so you might let Uncle Robert know if you received a letter he says he wrote from Berlin.

I am very sorry to hear that our Aunts at Lagley are not very well, and should like to know if they are better now.

11/24th April, 1913

This morning Aunts Mary and Jane and Uncle Will arrived from Kiev, having started for there on Tuesday. They cannot have had much of a time, as it was the wrong time to go, Russian passion week.

To-morrow the Easter holidays begin. All the English except us have gone to Odessa.

Many thanks about the "English Review", I think it is a very good idea. I saw the number with the Daffodil Fields in it, but should like to see it again none the less. It seems to me that if you take it in I could have the same copy as you afterwards.

Your loving brother

F.E. Kidner

Elizabethgrad,
21/4th July 1914

My dear Liz,

I am writing to you because you had a birthday lately, not because I have anything to say. I hear you went to the Isle of Man races, and afterwards on P.C.K.'s yacht³, so you probably have more to tell me.

I see the Vauxhalls did not do much, but I should not think reliability is their strong point anyhow. The Vauxhall here has been sent to Omsk for

³ Percy Kidner, the Managing Director of Vauxhall Cars

Edward. We now have a Hupmobile, American, and excellent so far, seeing it costs only £300.

Last night we went to see the Count of Luxembourg⁴, by a cast of 5 people.

We have been having several days' rain, so that we shall not be able to get anywhere this weekend.

Your loving brother,

F.E. Kidner

Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated on 14th June 1914 and after a month of frantic diplomatic activity, Germany declared war on Russia on 1st August 1914, and on France on 3rd August. That day the British issued an ultimatum to Germany to withdraw all troops from Belgian soil by midnight or a state of war would exist between the two countries. Germany never responded. Fred left Russia on the 5th August 1914, determined to join up. Here are the brief notes he made on the journey as far as Piraeus:

Friday 25th/7th August

Left E'grad at about 6.30. "Train wreckers" between Trepowka and Snamenka. Met Albert and Mytz at Snamenka.

Saturday 26th/8th Aug

Left Snamenka by the 3.50 at about 10 a.m. Line full of troop trains. Reached Nikolaieff about 10 p.m.. Slept at hotel.

Sunday 27/9th August

Left at 9 a.m. for Cherson. Caranana very kind in getting passport. Must write to thank as did not see him again. Left at 12 p.m. by boat for Odessa.

Monday 28/10th August

Useless to go to Consul-general – Roberts – about anything. Got passport through Jacobs Owen & Co.'s Mr Howells. Made visits. Slept at Lionsky.

Tuesday 29/11th August

Left Odessa on the *Porto di Smirna* of the Soc. Maritima Italiana at 6.20 p.m.

⁴ *The Count of Luxembourg* is an operetta in two acts with English lyrics and libretto by Basil Hood and Adrian Ross, music by Franz Lehár, based loosely on the German original, entitled "Der Graf von Luxemburg". It opened in London in May 1909 and ran for 254 performances.

Wednesday 30/12th Aug.

Reached Constantinople at 10a.m. Went first to the Galata side & had a look round. Then to a café. Then to Stamboul & saw St Sophia & the old market.

Thursday 31/13 Aug.

Went ashore early. Bought books and camera. Town full of reservists. Very fine men. Mobilisation. Came aboard. Saw two French boats *Louis Fraismet* and *Mossoul* leave very full of reservists. Then left ourselves at 6.30 p.m.

Friday 14th August

7.30 am reached Gallipoli. Took photo of mine-layer and of the town. Two gunboats here. Slight collision with German S.S. *Lilly Rickmers* while at anchor. Slight list for ¼ hr. Saw three English steamers and one Italian come up the Dardanelles together.

Left Gallipoli 3.30. Passed the forts at other end of Dardanelles in daylight.

Sighted two warships before passing Imbros. One, a cruiser, came up, I suppose, close enough to see us. Thought I made out her flag to be German.

Saturday 15th August

Reached Bedeagatch at 10 a.m. Taken by Greeks 1913 and given back to Bulgaria.

Reached Cavallo 4.30. Had a bathe. In 1912 hard fighting here between Greeks and Turks. Greek authorities boarded us to find out if a certain Bulgarian officer was aboard.

Heard of England's ultimatum to Turkey demanding dismantle Goeben and Breslau which escaped from Messina and been sold to Turkey.

Heard that Germans had taken Liege and were before Brussels.

Sunday 16th August

Arrived at Salonica and went ashore and saw the town. Trams, picture theatres, restaurants, fine fruit. Self-contained town. Walls all round. Cosmopolitan Jews Turks infidels heretics. Church of St Sophia taken by Turks 1430 and retaken by Greeks 1912. Christian mosaics and pictures unhurt and fresh.

Monday 17th August

Left Salonica at 10.30 a.m.

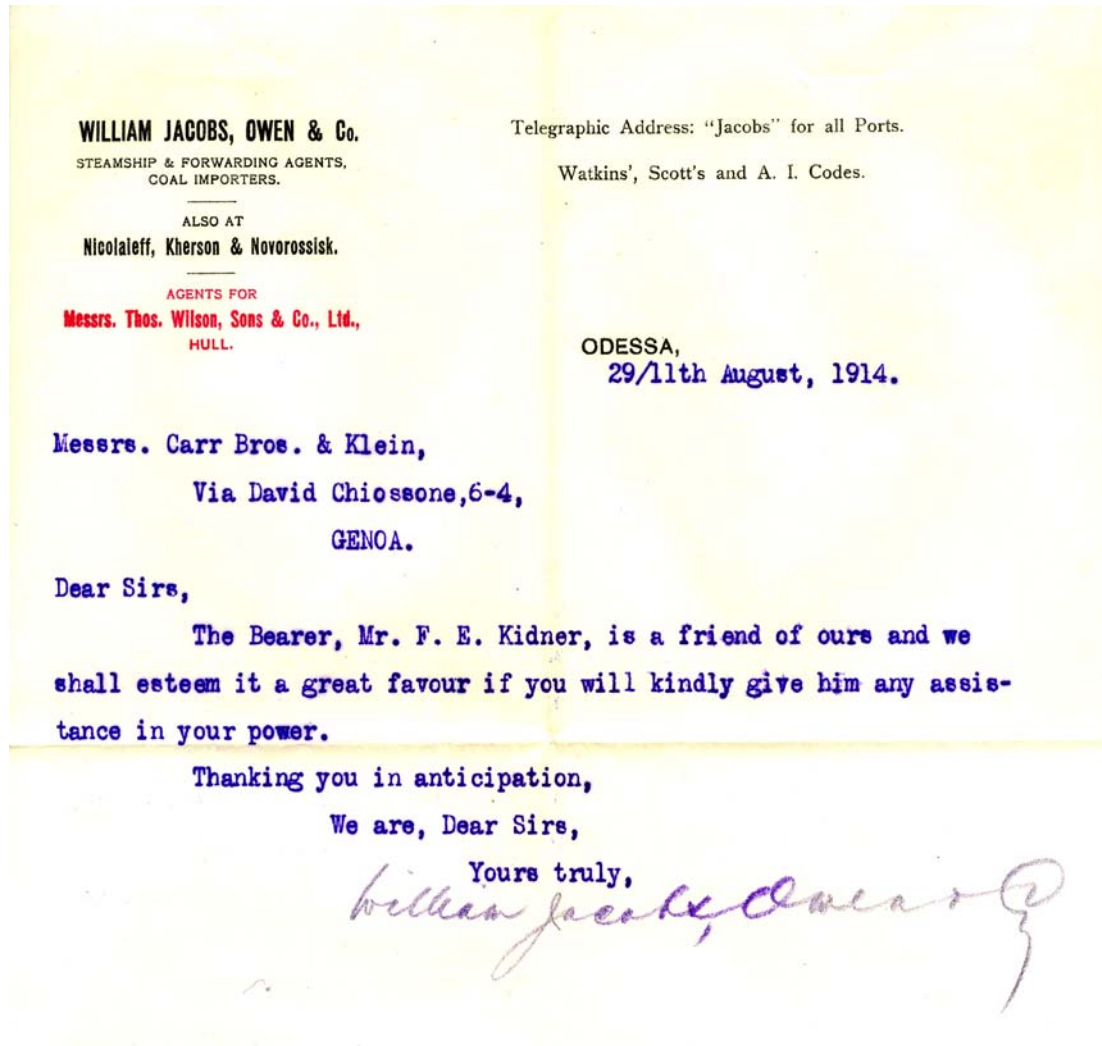
Tuesday 18th August

Athens. Arrived about 5 o'clock. Went and saw Acropolis and Stadium. Had supper and got aboard about 11.30.

Wednesday 19th August

Left Piraeus at 5.30 a.m. Said to be 2 days' run to Syracuse.

Fred carried a letter from his business friends at Odessa:



His passport shows that he travelled from Genoa by the Mont Cenis tunnel; it was stamped at Modane on the 24th August, 1914.

His younger sister Sybil later recalled the story:

"Then he got across to the mainland, through Italy and France; he got through Amiens only hours before the Germans took it. The famous "Contemptible" army was there, and in an estaminet he was able to help a British soldier who was having a disagreement with the owner – language, or lack of it, was proving a barrier, as all the soldier could say was "I didn't 'ave the drink, and I won't pay for it". I am sorry, I can't tell how the matter ended, but probably my brother settled it. And so at last he came to London, but did not immediately report at home. By this time he had collected as he travelled, a little band of English people who had rarely, if ever, been in England; before he did anything else he got them into suitable hotels in a London in which they were strangers.

"He was like that; his diffidence, lack of self-confidence, his shyness disappeared when his neighbour needed help. His next job was to become a soldier. Although both at School and at Oxford he had held non-commissioned rank in the cadet corps, and could have had a commission for the asking, that was not his way. He went round the Territorial Units in London – Queens' Westminsters, Artists, Inns of Court – at all he was promptly rejected when

they saw his spectacles; he was very short-sighted. But he went back to the Queen's Westminsters, and, having memorised the letters of the test-card, he asked for a test, and the trick being unnoticed, he became a Rifleman in the Queen's Westminster Rifles, ...".

He wrote to his manager back in Elizabethgrad:

Shaftesbury Hotel
Great Andrew Street
London WC
29th Aug. 1914

Dear Mr Youngman,

As you see, I have arrived at last. I managed to get off from Odessa in one of the last boats to leave, thanks largely to the good offices of Mr. Jacobs and Willy Jacobs. It was a very interesting voyage, as we called at Constantinople, Athens and Rome, and the weather was perfect.

I crossed from Boulogne on the 27th, & to-night there is a report that the Germans are in Boulogne.

To-night I put myself down for the Queen's Westminsters, so that I am afraid I shall not be back for a bit. Here, everybody is joining. To-day I saw a battalion of City men marching to the Guildhall to be sworn in.

He was training in England until the 13th January 1915, when with a draft company of 3 officers and 245 men of the Queen's Westminsters he moved to Maidstone.

Rfm. F.E. Kidner
2546 Draft Coy.
Queen's Westminster Rifles

c/o Mrs Pearson
104a Grecian St.,
Maidstone

14th Jan. 1915

My dear Liz,

I gather that you and Pater have been putting your heads together and slanging me for a neglectful brother so here goes.

We arrived here yesterday at about midday and have not done much of interest since. We are supposed to be going to dig trenches – real ones – during our stay here.

We – the draft – are probably that is if it is permissible to use the word probably of any of our movements, – going to France "soon".

I am wondering if it will be possible to go and see Mother at Tunbridge Wells. Please write and tell me how long Mother will be there & how she is. I heard from Pater that she is still there. If I get leave I think of going home.

Or shall I go to Tunbridge Wells.

Your loving brother,

F.E. Kidner

2546 Draft Coy.
Queen's Westminster Rifles

104a Grecian St.,
Maidstone
Jan 18th 1915

My dear Liz,

Please don't think I am going to France till I am gone. That is how things are with us. You never know anything except 7 o'clock parade.

Agate, Tolley and self are very comfortable here, as Mrs Pearson does all our cooking, and has just washed us some clothes. She has three sons at the front, so takes quite a motherly interest in us.

The country here is fine. Yesterday we had church parade and a long walk in the afternoon.

We are some battalion now, and it is a pity we can't all go out together.

I am sorry Mother is progressing so slowly. It is no use my making suggestions, as I suppose you know best what is good for her.

I have not written to Mother lately. Should I? Love to Father. Greet Briton and Buster. I am writing to Ruth about her money.

Your loving brother, F.E. Kidner

Southampton
20th Jan. /15

My dear Liz,

We seem to be getting a move on at last. They say we are off to-morrow, but, as I have said before, you never know. I am writing this on the floor of a school, and shall spend the night here, as we are beginning to feel a bit like active service already. At this point our platoon Sergt. arrives and announces we are to have blankets served out.

I asked Miss Searchfield to send off any baggage from Hendon, and to send the keys by post. Please open them and see what there is there.

Miss Pearson is sending home my kit-bag with things that I may want sooner or later. One pair of marching boots is in my baggage from Hendon, and the other in my kit-bag. I shall probably send for them in the order mentioned. Also socks which are in my kit-bag.

This morning we had a fine send-off from the battalion lining the streets and cheering. I will write again to-morrow. Your loving brother,

F.E. Kidner

P.S. Please send me Will's address as soon as you get it. Excuse scrawl.

His diary begins that Wednesday:

Wednesday 20th January 1915

Moved from Maidstone to Southampton. Billeted at Mount Pleasant Schools. This morning we had a fine send-off from the battalion lining the streets and cheering.

Friday 22nd January

Went to Palace Theatre with Agate⁵ and Warrilow.

Saturday 23rd January

Watched football. Going tomorrow. Wrote to Youngman and Uncle Will.

2546 Draft Coy.
16th London Regt.
Mount Pleasant School
Southampton

Miss A.E. Kidner
Dodhill House,
Taunton
Somerset

Sat 23rd Jan 1915

My dear Liz,

Still marking time here. However I suppose we must be prepared for plenty of it.

I sent home my watch yesterday for repairs with a p.o. accompanying it. I should, of course, have sent it straight to the makers, but I hope you will be able to get them to send it on.

I have had your letters saying you will be ready for me if I get any leave, but I think that is out of the question now.

Letters sent to the above address will almost certainly be forwarded, but after crossing instead of Southampton it will be B.E.F. France.

I find I made a mistake about boots. I think only one pair has been, or will be, sent home, and these I shall probably not want, as they are slightly too narrow. However, as they are very good boots you might try and get someone to stretch them across the instep.

We are nearly all quite fit, and a very fine draft, though we say it as shouldn't.

The Artists and H.A.C. drafts who came down with us have crossed already. Now there are us, some Cameronians, Cheshires, Liverpool Scottish and Yeomanry, and London Rifle Brigade.

We shall probably push off together. I am hoping to get there before Will.

⁵ Capt. Harold Agate – killed in action 14th April 1917.

Please let me know what regiments any of the Kingston⁶ lads or others are in, when you have time as it would be interesting if we came across each other. The Burrows' are in the 2nd Somersets I think.

No more to-night.

Your loving brother

F.E. Kidner

Sunday 24th January

Parade in full marching order at 9.15 and again at 1 p.m. Embarked shortly after 2 on S.S. *Australind*. Sailed at 4.15p.m.

Cheered by flotilla of hospital ships in Southampton Water. Off Portsmouth are picked up by two destroyers which are to escort us across.

The guard have orders to look out for submarines. The Cameronians are very musical.

Met a North Somerset Yeomanry man who lives near Yeovil. Sea very calm.

Monday January 25th

On getting up find we are lying near the mouth of the Seine waiting for the tide to turn.

While at anchor, heard that the Blucher has been sunk in N. Sea and that two other cruisers are badly damaged. News from Le Havre. French torpedo-gunboat 302 arrived about noon and circled round us till we sailed. This was at 4 or 4.30.

It is said we are the first trooper to go straight up to Rouen. Cheers and "Marseillaise" at all towns. It is dark. Arrived Rouen about 10 o'clock.

Tuesday, January 26th

Disembarked about 8 and marched up to Territorial Base Depot No. 1. Fine Camp with all conveniences. 3 blankets apiece which were needed. Soldiers' yarns in canteen. Good beer.

Wednesday, January 27th

Still waiting to go up. Inspection by the General.

Thursday, January 28th

Fine and cold. Still waiting. Are to go tomorrow at 5.

⁶ Kingston St Mary, near Taunton in Somerset



(E.D.)

25. ROUEN — Vue générale prise de la côte Sainte-Catherine



Rouen
Thursday Jan. 28
1915

J. Kidner, Esq.,
Dodhill House,
Taunton,
Somerset
England

My dear Father,

We are still waiting here, but are told we are going up to the front tomorrow evening. From accounts given by some of our 1st Batn. who are back here, it seems you can make yourself fairly comfortable up in the trenches. This is a fine healthy place, and the camp is perfect. Of course it is not like being at home quite, but we are much better off than we were at Southampton.

Rest follows to-morrow

Friday, January 29th

Still at Rouen. 6th Cheshires draft went up, also Artists.

Saturday, January 30th

Still at Rouen

Sunday, January 31st

Left Rouen – Rive Gauche at 3.30 p.m.

Monday February 1st

9.15 a.m. heard first shot fired near Steenwerck. (No. 14 Section, No. 4 Platoon, No. 1 Coy. "B" Coy, 16th Bn. County of London Regt. (Q.W.R.), 18th Brigade, 6th Divn., 3rd Army Corps.)

Tuesday, February 2nd

Went into reserve trenches this evening.

2546 No. 1 Coy
16th London Regt
(Queens Westminster Rifles)
British Expeditionary Force

My dear Liz,

I have had two letters of yours forwarded from Southampton. Thank you for same.

I wrote to Father from Rouen but had to remove the second page at the last moment, as I heard that only one page was allowed. We are now up at the front, having heard the first gun fired at 9.15 yesterday morning, after 16 hours train journey. We have a good billet here – six of us plenty to eat and beds.

This morning we were inspected and addressed by our Brigadier who was very flattering to the regiment and hoped we should go and do likewise. The town here is a bit knocked about, but I gather that this happened 4 months ago. There are some of our heavy guns in our rear, so that we may consider ourselves right here now.

Please excuse my worrying you with some small requests.

Some court plaster
A tin of "Sol Vol" – at the chemists
A sprinkler tin of boric powder

There are some more things I cannot remember at present. Please only send quite small parcels.

I have had a letter from Sybil & from Mother. She seems to be getting on much better. No more at present. Love to all.

Your loving brother

F.E. Kidner

The Somersets are not far from us, I gather, but I don't suppose I shall meet any of them.

Wednesday, February 3rd

"C" Coy. man killed in morning. Put his rifle up, then his head. Came out this evening.

Thursday, February 4th

Went up to trenches on left of Houplines-Frélinghien road along tow-path on R. Lys. In listening post. No. 4 Coy. man killed.

Saturday, February 6th

Came out of listening post on left of road Houplines-Frélinghien in evening

2546 No. 1 Coy.
16th London Regt.
(Queen's Westminster Rifles)
British Expeditionary Force
France
8th Feb. 1915

Miss A.E. Kidner,
Dodhill House,
Taunton
Somerset
England

My dear Liz,

Please address me as above, and not to Rouen as this delays letters.

This is "the trenches" so we are not allowed to say where we are.

I always lose letters somehow, as soon as I receive them, so I forget if there was anything you want to know.

Please thank Ruth for the delightful body-belt which I got yesterday.

I am very glad to hear Mother is getting on. I have heard from her, and will write to her soon.

What was the name of Ruth's friend in the QWR?

I am in a fine company and we are all quite cheerful and are having fine weather. I am just recovering from a cold which I caught on my first go in the trenches, and am going very sleepy. We have had fine weather up to now. For stories about the war please see the Daily Mail.

We are told to warn our friends not to publish our letters, so, in spite of its undoubtedly high literary merit, I shall not expect to see this in the press.

Additional order for goods to be sent to this address:

Tin of OXO cubes
Postal order for 10/- (sorry)
Indelible pencil ● ← diameter
A small thin interesting book
Some cheap hkfs
Milk chocolate

Love to all

Your loving brother
F.E. Kidner Rfm.

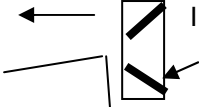
2546 No. 4 Platoon "A" Coy
16th London Regt.,
(Queen's Westminster Rifles)
British Expeditionary Force
France
17th Feb. 1915

My dear Liz,

We are still at the same place as when I last wrote, spending about half our time in the trenches. Many thanks for the parcel, the contents of which were very welcome. I was glad to get some of my own special tobacco, but we get a good deal issued, so that I think in future I had better smoke what we get out here. A few nice cigarettes such as "Three Castles" or "State Express" – not Turkish – would be welcome now and again.

Also we can always do with things for hot drinks, such as Cocoa & milk in tins and "Café au Lait" – Milkmaid brand I think. Parcels seem to get about 4 days to get here. I wonder if it would be any good sending out a tin of cream now and again. You need not worry much about what I said about small parcels, as we are quite stationary here it seems, I don't 'arf want a lot do I?

I believe you asked me what the trenches were like. I did not put any thing about this, thinking you had probably seen enough in the papers. You live in "bag-hutches" – dug-outs which may be comfortable or otherwise and take turns to look out – in day-time mostly with a hyperscope like this

Germans ←  I hope you understand⁷.

You soon get used to waking up at short intervals to turn out. It is generally ■ hours on and ~~two~~ off, but sometimes ■ on and ■ off – this is at night. [censor's crossings out].

It is very unlikely I shall see anyone we know out here. – We hardly see people in the other companies. Please note amended address. This is not my fault. Please always address in full as it saves trouble, – this for all whom it may concern.

I got my watch all right and hope not to break it again. I have already broken two pairs of spectacles and have ordered two more & told them to send you the bill. I am afraid this is not a very interesting letter. The best thing you can send me is letters. I gather that Mother is not yet at home – heard from Sybil yesterday.

We are now resting in billets. Pea soup, roast beef & boiled potatoes, and tarts are nearly ready as it is 1 o'clock. So much for the privations of war.

Love to all, Your loving brother

F.E. Kidner

P.S. If you have received from Westhorpe two pairs of boots of mine, will you please send the older pair to me here. I do not think the postage will be more than 2/-. Please send me also a dry battery for my lamp "Ever-Ready battery No. 1689".

⁷ It doesn't look as if Fred understood how it worked!

2546 No. 4 Platoon "A" Coy
16th London Regt.,
(Queen's Westminster Rifles)
17th Feb. 1915

Capt. W.E. Kidner, R.E.
Signal Service,
Indian Expeditionary Fce "A"
France

My dear Will,

I got a letter from you not long before we left England, which I have not answered. I managed to get into the draft for the 1st Bn. at the last moment. After four days at Southampton, we sailed on the 24th Jan., and after a week at Rouen got up here.

At present we are having four days in billets after four days in the trenches. These latter were very windy and wet, and it looks as if we are going to have a wet night to-night, when I believe we are going digging. Perhaps this is just as well though, as the Germans do not shoot much when it rains.

I wonder if you are allowed to tell me where you are. We saw some Indian troops at Rouen.

Dinner is nearly ready – pea-soup, roast beef, boiled potatoes etc etc – so I will close.

Your loving brother

F.E. Kidner

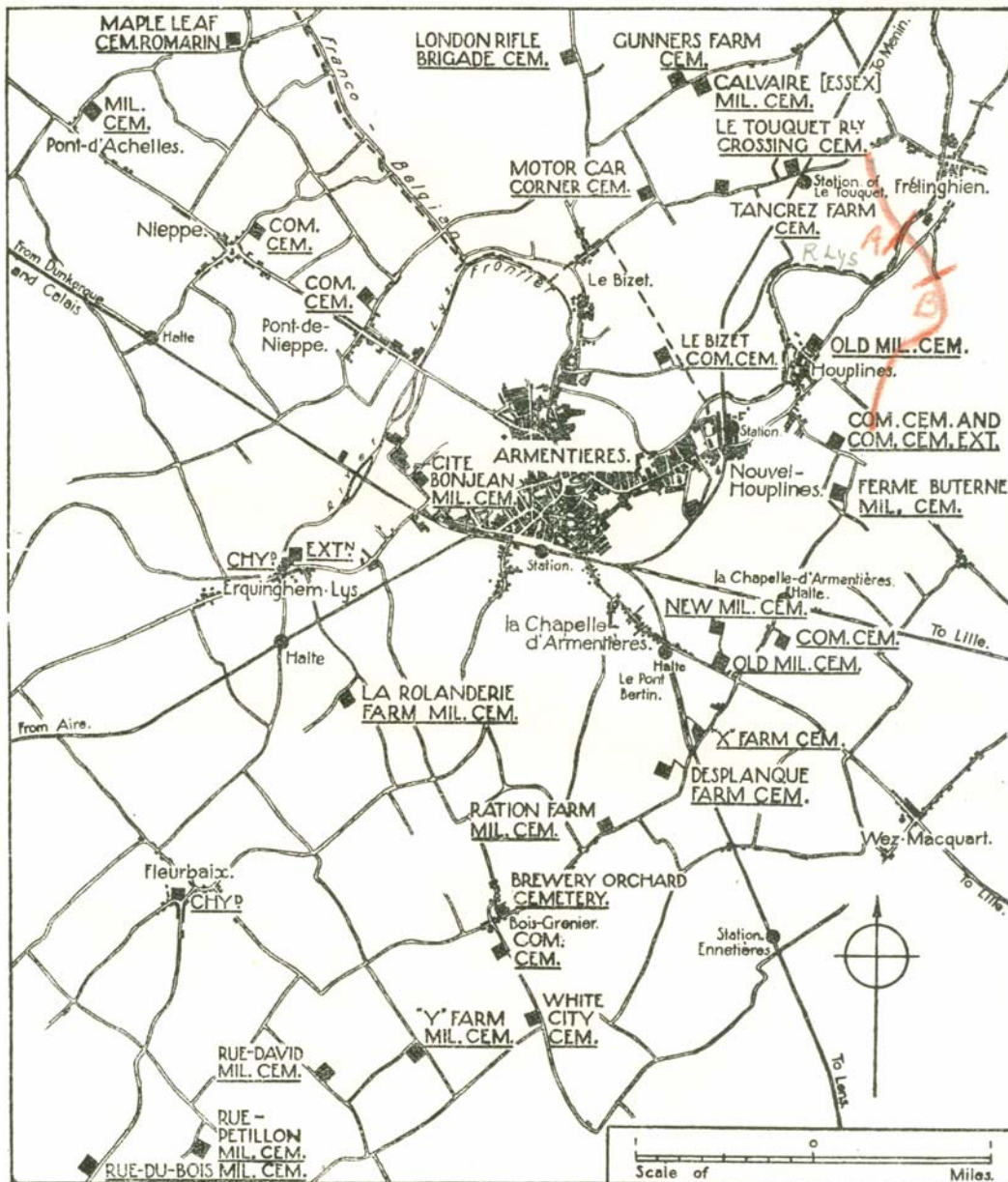


Fig. 1 Map taken from *The War Graves of the British Empire*, showing Cite Bonjean Military Cemetery, where Fred is buried, on the western outskirts of Armentières.

- Front Line February 1915
- Held by Queen's Westminsters

Fred was shot in the stomach by a German sniper on the afternoon of February 19th. He died on Saturday 20th February 1915, aged 26, and is buried at Cite Bonjean Military Cemetery, Armentières. WE Kidner received two letters from Fred's platoon commander. This is the second, surviving, letter:

Trenches
Q.W.R.
March 16th 1915

Dear Capt. Kidner,

Thank you very much indeed for your reply to my letter.

There were many bitter words against the Germans when we heard of your brother's death, we being so handicapped here in the point of returning their fire, the trenches here being so close to each other.

Although your brother had only been with us a very short time he had gained great popularity with all the fellows in our platoon, always doing fatigues with a cheerful grin, & there are always plenty.

He was taken from our dressing station to either the 17th or 19th Field Ambulance, & he died the same night.

The Ambulance is in Armentières & he was buried in the burial ground attached.

Both Ambulances are opposite one another but I haven't been able to ascertain which one it was.

If – when this war's over, & we've both won through – you'd care to make my acquaintance my address is "Ardwick", Inglis Road, Croydon.

Trusting that you'll have the best of luck during the approaching operations,

I remain,

Yours very sincerely,

A. Kingdon Letts

Major Arthur Kingdon Letts ran out of luck at the end of the war. He had transferred to the Royal West Surrey Regiment and was attached to the Machine Gun Corps. He died at Queen Alexandra's Military Hospital⁸ on 5th June 1920, aged 24, and is buried in Brompton Cemetery.

⁸ Kingdon Lett's death was reported in *The Times* on Saturday June 26th 1920. RIP.



Frederick Elworthy Kidner's grave at
Bonjean Cemetery.

Photo by P.J. Kidner.