

Private Collection

Letter from Lieut. Gerald Voisin to his mother, describing the events of April 1918. Gerald Voisin was a pre-war officer in the Jersey Militia.

Letter in pencil. From the field post 11.4.1918.

Censor No 5321

Friday 11.4.1918

My dear Marmey,

Not much news to give you, but I suppose you will look forward to a few lines. We are still in the same camp, but we are shifting tomorrow, about 5 miles further back from here and I suppose we will be in billets. There is no news of Bn., as yet, except a rumour that they were going into action last Wednesday I think.

It is already 6.30pm., and the sun seems warmer than ever. Today has been almost too warm for work, of which really we have had nothing to do. I have been Coy. Orderly Officer and so have had a very slack day. This evening we have had the massed bands of the next Brigade playing ie - One pipe band and 2 fife and drum.

It seems a bit strange to have all this going on just like peace-time, when you know that the others are going through it. In this camp it is just like what you might expect in peace-time. Football going on and good messing to hearten you up. All the officers and men looking spic and span.

The old Hun is still pressing hard and seems to have plenty of resources, still we have no cause to fear. While the Huns are growing weaker day by day, so we grow stronger. They say the Hun casualties are tremendous and that they will not last long after their push has gone to its full extent.

I am sure at home you are full of anxious doubts etc., well out here we take things as they come and really we don't feel a bit upset when we get different news and rumours. The rumour this afternoon is that we have counter-attacked at Armentières and driven the Boche 2 miles past his original front line.

What news of Frank? I suppose he is back at work with the Bn. again. I think it was a good thing he went when he did, otherwise he might have been sent off to France.

Did I tell you that the Bn. who relieved us in the line last time was the 12th Bn. of Frank's Regt. Clift from Jersey used to be in it as Adj. The Bn. had come from Italy where they had the time of their lives. They used to do about one week in the line and 2 weeks out and then after 2 months come out for one whole month. In the front line, they used to get their valises brought up and get to bed in pyjamas. I can't say if this is absolutely true, but I quite believe it. They say the Italians treat them splendidly and they live like fighting cocks for very little money.

How is the food shortage in Jersey? I don't believe you get enough to eat. You ought to see the Belgians along here. They are living in caravans or little mud huts or little wooden shelters made from army packing cases etc. They start a small shop, always manage to do well and lack nothing in the way of food. They get potatoes, meat, sugar and everything in plenty. I suppose it is to these people that we send "relief ships". I think there must be some short-sighted people about at home. Eggs are also in abundance. One shopkeeper told me she sold 400 in one day. Of course I admit there are two big camps here, which can hold a few thousand troops.

*No more news. I am longing to hear news of the Bn. We have about 120 men with us and 12 officers of the Bn. Love to all. Your loving son,
Gerald.*

P.S. Longing to hear from you but can't possibly expect any letters for some time. G.

Private Collection

Letter from Lieut. Gerald Voisin to his mother, describing the events of April 1918.

Letter in pencil. From the field post 15.4.1918.

Censor No 5248

*BEF
France
Monday 15.4.18*

My dear Marmey,

Just after I wrote my last letter on the 11th or 12th I forget which, we got the orders to move, & we were on parade prior to moving off a couple of hours afterwards. We were due to go by train, but as the train went off the rails coming up, we had to foot it for about 4 miles, & then get into the train, where we stopped pretty well all night, although we only travelled a very few miles, to our Di. Hqrs; where we were bivouaced in a field. We had a breakfast there, of bacon etc & had our day's rations given out. Soon after our orders came down & all officers except 2 were ordered back to the Transport lines. Le Bas said he was stopping & I volunteered to remain also, but he said it wouldn't do to have 2 of the same Coy. So Gibson remained. So off we came to the Transport a matter of about 500 yds, & found a billet in an old French farmhouse, which had been evacuated by the inhabitants, & here we are still. There are 8 of us messing here on a small round table. There is straw heaped up all round the room, which we use at nighttime for beds. In one corner is our Mess Cook preparing our dinner & in the oven of the old stove, are a couple of chickens browning nicely, with potatoes boiling on the top, also a rice pudding. You see we are doing well. This afternoon two new officers joined us, Clarke & Lucas, both from the 2nd Bn. We are having 80 Men tonight, I believe.

As you already know, I suppose, our Division has been into action, & as usual our Bn. Has caught it hot. They went up into the line with about 18 officers & 600 men & yesterday morning the C.O came back with 2 officers & 46 men, since then stragglers have come in, & brought the

strength up to about 70. I shall give you details so far as I know. What I am awfully distressed about is poor D'Auvergne, who according to all accounts is a prisoner of war, & it is said that the Germans are killing a lot of the wounded. Now, I'll give you a list.

<i>HQ</i>	<i>A. Coy</i>	<i>B. Coy</i>
<i>C.O (alright)</i>	<i>Capt. Johns (K)</i>	<i>Capt. Stranger.H. (W)</i>
<i>Adj. (wounded)</i>	<i>Lieut. Lainé (W)</i>	<i>Lieut. D'Auvergne(P?)</i>
	<i>2/Lieut. Clarke (W)</i>	<i>2/Lt. Hamel (?)</i>
	<i>2/Lieut. Ingrouille (A)</i>	<i>2/Lt. McAlpine (W&?)</i>

<i>C. Coy</i>	<i>D. Coy</i>
<i>Capt. Dickson (W)</i>	<i>Lt. Windrum (A)</i>
<i>2/Lt. Mortis (W&?)</i>	<i>Lt. Hovil (P)</i>
<i>2/Lt. Stranger. J. (W)</i>	<i>2/Lt. Scott (W&?)</i>
<i>2/Lt. Stranger P. (K)</i>	<i>2/Lt. Rihoy (W&?)</i>
	<i>2/Lt. Street (W)</i>

As you can see from that list, I have something to be thankful for, for not being there. We are still up in the forward area, although we are resting. I am expecting the Bn. To go right back at any moment to refit. Our Regiment Sergt-Major was hit also through the back. Those I have marked (A) are alright. P = prisoner, K = killed, W = wounded(?) means that nothing much is known about them. They may have got back or may have been left on the field & taken prisoner.

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It appears that our people had to retire across a wide field & the Boche machine guns fairly swept them off. A L/Cpl. Of mine said he had happened to look round & said he saw nothing but legs & arms flying up in the air. Today we have had to reorganise into 2 Coys. As our people retired, of course nearly all our wounded were left to the Boche, & so there will be a lot "wounded & missing" or "p of w"

Now to counteract all this bad news, there is the news of today, which is splendid. Gen. Foch has counter attacked on the Somme, & driven the Boche back about 18 miles, which means they are pretty well back on the original front, & up here, the Boche are well held & have had a terrible thrashing today & yesterday. There is news that we have broken their lines of communication in the Passchendaele sector, which means that he

must retire here, as he has already started doing. This morning I saw the French armoured motor cars going along the road. They looked a tower of strength themselves. There is also plenty of French & British cavalry here & they are supposed to have penetrated right into the Huns & done a wonderful amount of damage. They say we have plenty of wire also between ourselves & the Boches.

Now what do you say about the war being over this year. It is going to be for a cert. The old Boche has lost a mint of men, & will sue for peace before very long.

I am sorry to have to say that I have heard Cyril's Regt. Has been completely done in but of course you never know whether its true or not. I am going to find out as soon as possible. Don't think our Bn.is down to about 70. Of course there were a lot of men that did not go into the line, like the 10% & Hqrs, & different odds & ends. I suppose altogether we number about 250, & 19 officers. The C.O. A/Adj. Maj. Wilson (Hospital) Le Bas, 12 officers 10%. Transport officer, Q.Master, Padre. I only brought "fighting order" dress so have no washing or shaving stuffs, until our valises come down tomorrow night. I was glad to get yours of the 5.4.18 the morning I got here. "Yes" but I was a little further down than that, "Vlamertinghe". Yes, Pirouet is pretty bad. Funny that I was saying I should last them all out & I'm afraid my word has come true. Glad to hear you got on so well at Government House. Sorry to hear about Poynder & hard luck on Le Caudey. All this can't go on for much longer. Don't send my coat just yet please. O'Connor has not done as well as he was expected to, I suppose. Glad all the animals & birds are well & I hope you are keeping as fit as I am. I feel as well as ever, but all these casualties make you feel a bit sick. You ask "where is so & so, & so & so" & you are told, killed, wounded etc. No more now.

Love to all.

Gerald