

## The letters of Lt W M Armstrong, XRH, 1914-1917.

William Maurice Armstrong, usually called Pat, was born on 20 August 1889, the first child of a 'settler' family in Ireland. He had three younger sisters. He was well connected as his mother was a Maude, a niece and a cousin of two Generals.

After education at Eton and Sandhurst he was gazetted to the 10<sup>th</sup> (Prince of Wales's Own Royal) Hussars on 22 February 1910. His regiment was in India at the time and later in South Africa. Some letters in this collection reflect these earlier stations.

He left Potchefstroom for England on 9 October 1913 for leave and was promoted to Lieutenant on 2 January 1914. In April 1914 he attended the Cavalry School at Netheravon.

At the outbreak of war he was still in UK and was taken on as an unpaid junior ADC to Brigadier General de Lisle (the only infantry man to captain his team, the Durham Light Infantry, to win the inter-services polo cup in India, to the acute embarrassment of the cavalry regiments).

Pat Armstrong was appointed ADC in October when de Lisle was promoted from commander of a Cavalry Brigade to command a Cavalry Division.

He followed de Lisle to 29 Infantry Division at Gallipoli in mid 1915, to Egypt for a two months in early 1916, and back to France in time for the Somme. By this time Pat Armstrong had done other jobs, as a Staff Captain and GSO3. On 5 July 1916 he was appointed Brigade Major of 86 Brigade still in 29 Division.

In February-March 1917 he attended the Junior Staff Course at Hedsin.

He was a prodigious letter writer, or had too much idle time for he appears to have written almost daily to his mother, with other letters to his father and younger sisters. Indeed on one day in July 1915 at Gallipoli, he managed to write four letters to his mother, each posted separately.



(Left to right) Lt Pat Armstrong XRH, ADC to Maj General deLisle, Lt Col Sally Home, Chief of Staff, 1CavDiv and Capt Hardress Lloyd, ADC to Maj General deLisle. Photograph taken by Frederic Coleman, driver for 1CavDiv, early 1915.



Some letters from Lt William Maurice (Pat) Armstrong MC (1889-1917)  
10<sup>th</sup> (Price of Wales Own Royal) Hussars.

At the outbreak of war he was in England, on leave, after attending a course at the Cavalry School, Netheravon. His Regiment was in South Africa. He was taken onto the staff of Brig General de Lisle, commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Brigade, and followed de Lisle to 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division in October 1914 and to 29<sup>th</sup> Division at Gallipoli in June 1915.

Hd Qrs 1st Cav Div  
On Service

Oct 14

My dear wife this

I got a long letter from  
you this morning dated Oct 5 just  
as I was starting out. The land  
boat arrived yet but I expect it is  
still with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cav Bde. I wrote  
you a post card yesterday to say I  
had changed my address. The Gen  
got Command of this Division the  
day before yesterday & has taken me  
with him.

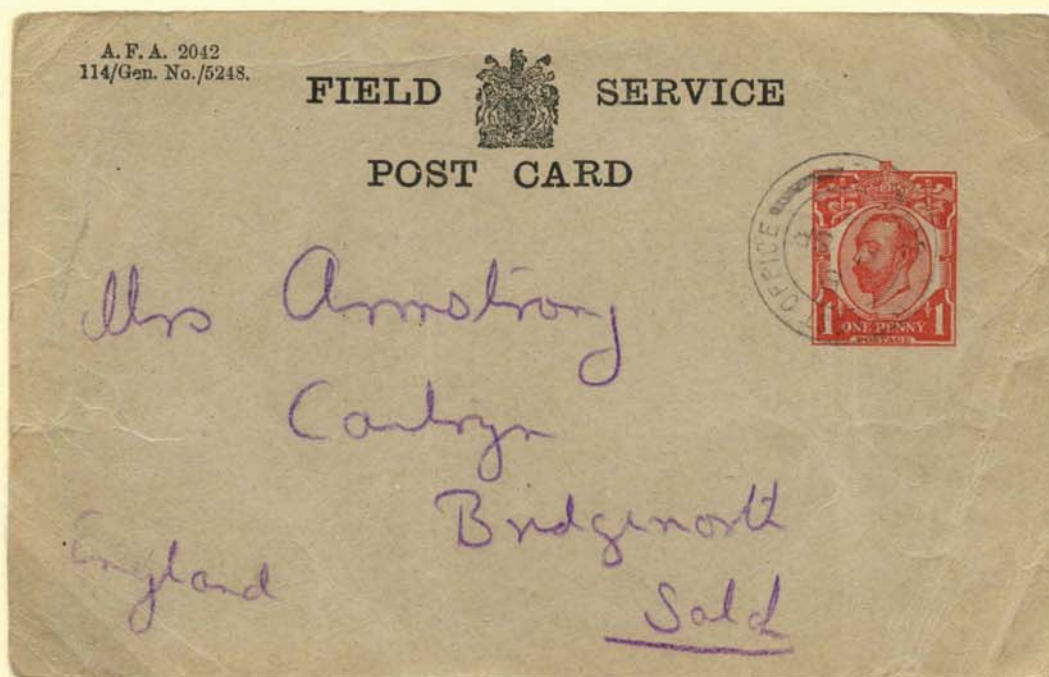
- draw the  
for my family  
buy a lot  
that is all  
on tomorrow

On Service

Mrs Armstrong  
14 Trinity Crescent  
Folkestone  
Kent  
England



POSTAL STATIONARY USED BY BRITISH OFFICERS  
IN FRANCE DURING WWI.



Field Service Post Card with a printed 1d postage.  
This was the early pattern prepared for use before free postage was granted at the end of August 1914. This example used from Army Post Office 32, attached to 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Brigade, 11 September 1914, was using up the stock.



Standard British Letter Card written by the same officer on 17 December 1914, hand carried to London and posted there two days later. The censorship mark, type 1, No.6 was allocated to HQ, 2 Cavalry Brigade.

The writer of these two items was Lt WM Armstrong, 10<sup>th</sup> Hussars, junior ADC to BrGeneral H deB deLisle, commander 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Brigade from August 1914, and he followed him to 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division 12 October 1914, 29<sup>th</sup> Division at Helles from June 1915, to IX Corps at Suvla for a week in August 1915 and then back to 29<sup>th</sup> Division.



POSTAL STATIONARY USED BY BRITISH OFFICERS  
IN FRANCE DURING WWI.

Another type of Letter Card, this without a maker's name.

Jan 6.

My dear Mrs. Mrs.

I sent you a parcel of  
films this morning by Col Budworth  
who is going home. He will look  
them in London so I hope they will  
arrive alright. Will you get a  
couple of sheets of card done & send  
them out. Could you get me a  
book to hold photos. One of those  
books you can stick them into. I don't  
want to stick them into a book yet  
but it is a nuisance having them all  
flying about & so  
I sent out for a new  
it came in to see  
much catch. This  
Helen & I walked

Written 6 January 1915.  
All pages used.  
Censor 1317  
sent in an official bag  
to London

Letter Card.

Jan 1915



14 Trinity Crescent  
Folkestone

Kent



Written 30 January 1915.



A four-page letter to his mother dated 17 October written during the Battle of Messines, 12 October to 2 November 1914

Johns no 0 - two small 8 no 6  
Three fto Hgd Qrs 1st Car Durd  
Oct-17<sup>c</sup> - selected On Service at Columbia St.

We are having another dull day to-day  
 but getting a snow on at last. Our guns  
 are shelling the other side of the river.  
 There is a certain amount of rifle fire going  
 on. A few of these shells burst along  
 a road on the front of us but about a mile  
 away but I don't think they did much  
 harm. I hope we will get good but I don't know  
 but I don't know if these shells are  
 with the kind enough to allow us. I don't  
 like to go out fishing or fishing along with  
 so I think we probably will. It is  
 awfully hard to know what is happening  
 everything is like a dark secret. General  
 comes in a white horse. I don't know  
 one or two and into the water. I don't know  
 the weather is so much better today. It  
 is getting mostly colder. The sun is supposed  
 to day & it is a little warmer.

[illegible]

On Servi

LONDON  
OFFICIAL MAIL  
OCT 19 1944  
6. 24

Mrs Armstrong  
14 Trinity Crescent  
Folkestone  
Kent



Censor mark 1/171  
initialled *WMA XRH*,  
London Official Paid,  
19OCT14, and War Office  
cachet show that this letter  
was carried back to UK by  
an official messenger.  
Some of his letters  
acknowledge receipt of  
letters from home which  
were also carried by official  
messengers.



May 15

Niffe

My dear Mr. Allen.

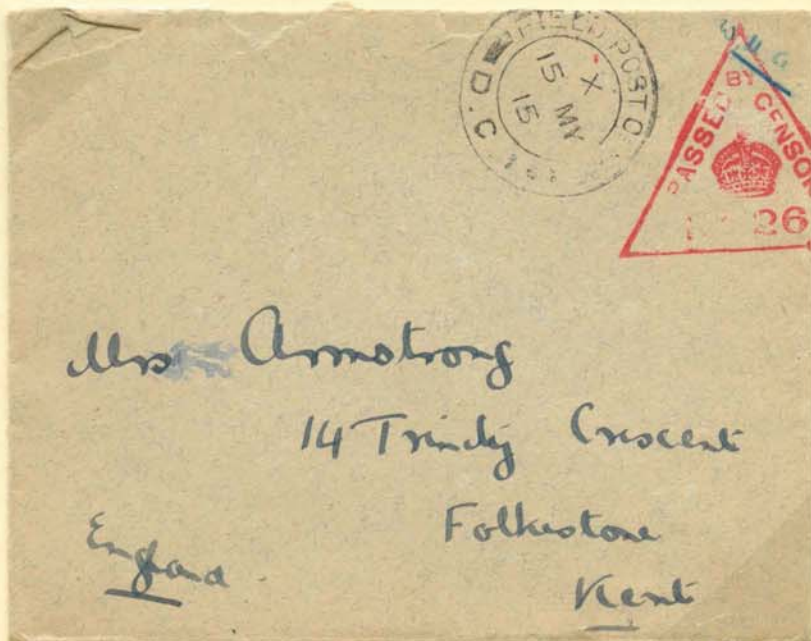
I got back here about 7.30 last night. We were relieved by the other Div. I am just going off now in a car with Alous to see the Rgt a hour exactly what did happen. It doesn't run even about old Clem yet. Show I'm afraid is dead. He was shot in the spine & couldn't be moved, 4 men were killed trying to get him away. No time to write more now. I told you all the news yesterday & will write again to night.

Best love dear Mr. Allen.

Yours loving  
Pat

The Battle of Frezenberg Ridge took place between 8 and 13 May 1915, part of the Battles of Ypres in the Spring of 1915.

These two letters describe the reactions of a junior officer of one of the cavalry regiments engaged to the loss of colleagues while he was serving as an ADC in another Cavalry Division.





16.

Esquebague

My dear Mrs.

We left our little home  
this morning & have come up here. This is  
an awfully nice old house. Built in 1806.  
We have been awfully busy all day. We  
inhabited the Div. the morning - have  
just got back here now. Prudent is going  
into St Omer. so he will be with him.  
Clem is dead & was buried yesterday.  
Stuart is too ill afraid. The other two killed  
on Monday - Stuart. Our casualties  
were 140 men - 10 officers out of 220 men  
& 15 officers. Dreadful incident.

Best love dear Mrs.

Yours truly

Pat

Army Form C. 398.

To :- Mrs Armstrong  
14 Trinity Crescent  
Folkestone



DESPATCH

RECEIPT.

Sender's No.

England

Date ..... hour ..... m.

Kent

Date

hour

m.

Signature :—

**URGENT or ORDINARY.**



Maj General de Lisle has left for the Dardanelles and Pat Armstrong, his junior ADC, is left in Flanders with nothing to do for a week, before also going east.

5 4 3 2  
 May 27  
 My dear Pat  
 I got your letter of the 23rd yesterday & I had no way of getting a letter off yesterday so I write you now. I came into camp on Tuesday afternoon with Perry & Andrew. Harding who went back to the Esquimaux. The Div had a dreadful day on Monday. At about 3 am the enemy started letting off their gas shells at the same time fired a bombard of shells filled with gas. A really dreadful day. The Germans came right back on the side of the line. Our casualties were very heavy & an enormous percentage of the gas was due to the effects of the gas. The line for some

I have nearly finished this one. I hope to write like this. It will be very useful.

A six-page letter. On the first page he mentions serious casualties in the Division from gas. His General has been ordered to the Dardanelles to take command of 29 Division.

Armstrong is unsure of his future and wonders whether he will return to his regiment.

Meanwhile he becomes a tourist.





Lt Armstrong reached the Gallipoli Peninsula at the end of June 1915 and rejoined deLisle as his junior ADC. Most of his letters from Helles and Suvla are missing but the covers show that he was able to write home most days and indeed on 4 July he was able to write four letters to his mother, adding a note on the back of the last "... 4<sup>th</sup> sent today, let me know if they all come together." His mother endorsed the covers with the dates of arrival - all four on 12 July.

Aug 9

My dear Mrs

I have got several letters & things for you which will go off in a day or two. We have had no news from Anzac since yesterday - I'm rather afraid that they must be held up there. It would just make all the difference if we had a big success there but I'm rather afraid that it may develop into a slow like this just ordinary trench warfare. If we could only get the Turk in the open & stop him digging we could give him hell but he's an absolute brute & makes very good & closely arranged trenches.

The General & I had a long walk round the trenches yesterday afternoon, it was rather hot & smelly. Your little bottle of smelling salts was still around whenever I came to a





3.

2.

we Jan 12.

S.S. Minneapolis

U

S My dear Sir,

This letter was written on board SS *Minneapolis* en route to Alexandria. He was writing to his father and described his part in the final evacuation from Helles in the early hours of 9 January 1916.

I haven't been able to  
write to you for some time as no  
boats have been going from Helles. I told  
you how we got away from Suvla  
and then then left one day at Imbros  
and then sent to Helles. After we  
had been there about 4 days we heard

Capt M. B. Armstrong

Moyaliffe

Shurloo

co Jitterang

Irland



Wrote



The 29 Division reached Egypt in January 1916 and in early March, after a spell on the Canal Defences, they received orders for France. On 2 April 1916 they went into the line, in VIII Corps, 4<sup>th</sup> Army, at Beaumont Hamel.

"C" Form (Original).				Army Form C. 2123. (In books of 50's in duplicate.)	
MESSAGES AND SIGNALS.				No. of Message	
Prefix <i>SM</i>	Code <i>JB5</i>	Words <i>38</i>	Received <i>DA</i>	Sent, or sent out	Office Stamp.
Charges to collect			From <i>DA</i>	At	m.
Service Instructions			By <i>D</i>	To	
			By		
Handed in at <i>JB5</i>			Office <i>2112</i>	m.	Received <i>2121</i> m.
TO	<i>86 Bde</i>				
Sender's Number	Day of Month	In reply to Number	A A A		
<i>A1128</i>	<i>11</i>				
<i>Appointment of Captain ARMSTRONG</i> <i>as Bde Major 86th Bde approved</i> <i>as Captain BUCHANAN will</i> <i>return to duty as acting</i> <i>gso when Capt ARMSTRONG can</i> <i>be spared</i>					
FROM	<i>29 Div Q</i>				
PLACE & TIME	<i>9.10pm</i>				

\* This line should be erased if not required.

Wt. 432—M437 500,000 Pads. H W V 5 16 Forms C.2123.

This signal, dated 1 July 1916, addressed to 86 Brigade, confirms the appointment of WMA as Brigade Major to that Brigade. He sent it to his mother, from Divisional HQ, on 3 July.

Note that he is now a temporary Captain, but his official promotion to that rank was not gazetted until 2 June 1917, but with effect from 7 May 1917.



POSTAL STATIONARY USED BY BRITISH OFFICERS  
IN FRANCE DURING WWI.

Two examples of a plain folded letter sheet.

Lt Armstrong used these after 29<sup>th</sup> Division returned to France  
after service at Gallipoli and briefly on the Suez Canal defences.



Written 6 August 1916 to his youngest sister and posted next day



Written 13 August 1916 to his mother and posted next day.

Both of these were marked with the type 4 censor 2813, which was allocated to  
HQ 86 Brigade, and they were posted at FPO 107 which served that Brigade  
during a period of swapping FPO datestamps as part of security measures.

A copy of one of these letter sheets opened out is overleaf



Sept 1.

My dear son Alus.

I wrote you a hurried scribble yesterday but I had the little ache on me & was in poor form. However I dealt with it as a blight like that should be dealt with and had him out. It was that old stink that I broke at Sunday & which Hamish wouldn't crown till after he was. Well the beastly thing started to be naffy so I went & saw the dentist and he said that it was useless to try and save it and that the pain was probably caused by an abscess forming. So I told him to carry on & he begged it out. A medicine performance but it won't hurt me any more. He showed me one of the roots which was in a horrid state with an old abscess forming on the end of it. So it's as well he's gone. It will save me a lot of pain & expense afterwards having the thing crowned. I'll get a bit of a worm yesterday evening as I took back as it bled a bit but I'm grand to-day & having the fact that my jaw is a bit sore I hardly know it gone. I had a busy morning this morning & was in the office till about 3:30. I had to make out various returns & all sorts of odds

over the flying  
a course in signalling  
persuade one of them  
just two hours.  
a staffed course  
that element of  
on the clouds was  
was like landing  
suddenly without any

Mrs Armstrong  
Clodagh

Folkestone

England.

Kent



1 September 1916, from FPO 108, CM4/2813  
This letter describes his first experience of flying, which he enjoyed, but he would not transfer to RFC as one wouldn't have a horse.



May 23.

Dear Mr. Mrs.

Only a note to tell  
you all is well. The Boy is lost.  
I'm awfully depressed.

I will try to write a  
letter later in the day but this afternoon  
I am so I must leave it.

Best love.

Your loving  
Pat



W. H. Armstrong

Mrs. Armstrong  
Cherbury  
Folkstone  
England.

23 March 1917: This was Pat Armstrong's last letter. A young colleague Lt Layard, "The Boy", was missing in no-man's-land and Pat Armstrong had been out searching for him for several nights, taking grave risks. A sniper shot him not long after this brief letter was written.



THE TIMES, WEDNESDAY, MAY 30, 1917.

## FALLEN OFFICERS.

### "THE TIMES" LIST OF CASUALTIES.

We have received news of the death of the following officers, in addition to those whose names have been published in the official lists:—

ARMSTRONG, Lt. W. M., M.C., Hussars.  
DUNLOP, Sec. Lt. W. E. B., Bord. R.  
FLETCHER, Sec. Lt. A. H. F., Hussars, att'd. R.F.C.  
GROVE, Sec. Lt. P. C., Sea. High.  
MIDDLETON, Sec. Lt. T. S., Bord. R.  
POPE, Capt. C. A. W., M.B., R.A.M.C.  
ROSE, Sec. Lt. H. P., Sea. High.  
SHAND KYDD, Sec. Lt. W., R.F.A.  
TILBURY, Capt. A., R.A.M.C.

LIEUTENANT WILLIAM MAURICE ARMSTRONG, M.C., Hussars, news of whose death on May 23, from a wound received the same day, has been received unofficially, was 27 years of age. He was the eldest child and only son of Captain and Mrs. Marcus Beresford Armstrong, of Moyalliffe, Ireland, and Clodagh, Folkestone, and was a cousin of General Sir Stanley Maude. Educated at Eton and Sandhurst, he was gazetted in 1910, and saw service with his regiment in India and South Africa. When war broke out he was in England on leave, and left for the front with the Expeditionary Force in August, 1914, and had served on the Staff all through the war. In June, 1915, he went to Gallipoli, and served with the famous 29th Division, being present at the evacuation of the peninsula, and after a short period in Egypt he returned to France early in 1916. At the time of his death he was serving as a brigade major. Lieutenant Armstrong was four times mentioned in dispatches and was awarded the Military Cross early in 1916.

Per Gillon "29 Division" pp120-121:

"On the 23rd May the 29th sustained a serious loss by the death of the Brigade-Major of the 86th Brigade, Captain "Pat" (ie W.M.) Armstrong of the 10th Hussars. He had been on the divisional staff since the early days of the Gallipoli campaign, and had made his mark on many occasions. His friend Lt Layard of the Borders was missing as the result of the abortive attack<sup>2</sup>, and Pat had been searching No-Man's-Land for several nights and taking grave risks, until a sniper laid him low. He was universally mourned by every one who knew him, from the general commanding downwards. He had an attractive appearance, was handsome and well built, and had a breezy way with him. A Corporal hit off one secret of the hold he had over others by the remark: *Pat was the bonniest officer of them all.*"