

Harry's War Letters

(Document dated: 22.02.2021)

This document contains copies of some of the letters sent by Harry to his sister Ruby during the time he was stationed in India and Burma during the latter half of WW2 (1942-195). After signing up (or was it conscription?) Harry was assigned to the 1st Battalion of the Royal Scots. I do not have the date of him joining up, but we know from the Derbyshire Times of 9th Sept. 1940 that he was already in the Royal Scots.



Derbyshire Times (Dated 9th Sept. 1940)



It is worthwhile to look at what the battalion was doing before being shipped out to India as this gives some idea of where he was during 1941 and early 1942. At the beginning of the war the Battalion deployed to France with the BEF on 21st September as part of 2nd Division. On 10th May 1940, the Germans invaded Belgium and on the night of 15/16th May the soldiers were ordered to withdraw via Dunkirk. Only a handful of Royal Scots made it back to England and, as a result, the 1st Battalion was reconstituted at Bradford in Yorkshire very soon afterwards. It was made up of some 250 Royal Scots, drawn from various sources, and 600 men straight out of initial training. Presumably this includes Harry. The newly formed Battalion moved to Great Driffield to begin training and was responsible for coastal defense over a 50-mile length of the Yorkshire coast. In December 1941 it moved to Burford in

Oxfordshire for further training. On 15th April 1942 it sailed from the Clyde, as part of the 2nd Division, on the transport *Orbita* for an unknown destination. After a brief stop at Cape Town, with some time ashore on training, the 'unknown destination' proved to be Bombay (Mumbai) in India which they reached on 10th June 1942. On disembarking they moved to Poona, inland in the hills.

The first letter we have from Harry was from 9th August 1942 from which we could assume that he was part of this transport via Cape Town to Mumbai.

9-8-42

No 3058994

Pte Hemsley

Morton Plu

H.Q. Coy

1st Batt, The Royal Scots,

India Command

Dear Ruby,

I recieved your Airgraph, posted 9th July, yesterday. I also recieved a post card from Hilda. I expected you to recieve letters before that airgraph as I posted the first one 7 weeks before that. You did not mention Bill in the Graph. I hope his leg is better again. I wasn't too well yesterday, (too much fruit). I had a dose of castor oil for the first time since our Flo and I had teeth out. However I am glad to say I am feeling fine again. I bet Fred had a good time at the place you mentioned, I hoped to go there. However I had a good time where I was. I do not smoke much now although cigs are very cheap, Woodbines are about 10 for 2d. I am glad mother is comfortable now, though I cannot imagine that place as home, I still think of North Rd as home. I recieved a letter from our Flo and Minnie but is is difficult to get Graphs so I hope they don't grumble because I have not written. Give my love to Mother and Hilda and don't worry about me. I've seen less action since I left England than I did in England.

Love

Harry

HOLMEWOOD POSSESSION CASES

COUNTY COURT APPLICATIONS

At Chesterfield County Court on Friday, before his Honour Judge Willes, the Hardwick Colliery Co. were the applicants in three possession cases. Mrs. Perry, 29, Hardwick St., Holmewood, was ordered to give up possession on March 15th; an application against Wm. Smith, 13, Hunloke Rd.,

Holmewood, formerly in the employ of the Company, now in the National Fire Service at North Wingfield, was dismissed; and an order for possession in two months was made against Owen Hemsley, 25, North Rd., Holmewood. All the applications were made on behalf of the Company by Mr. Harold Brown, barrister on the grounds that the houses were urgently needed for employees. Mr. G. Bradley represented Mrs. Perry and Smith.

Harry's parents were evicted from North Road in early 1942. (Derbyshire Times dated 30th January 1942.)

25-6-43

No 3058994

Pte Hemsley

Morton Plu

H.Q. Coy

1st Batt, The Royal Scots,

India Command

Dear Ruby,

After not having written to you for such a long time I should have heaps to say, but I can't think what to write. I am sorry I complained about you not writing. I've received a number of graphs and letters since I wrote that. There was heaps of nice things I could send you while I am on leave but I'm afraid I can't afford to buy them, I have plenty of dough to enjoy this leave and I may send Mother something. If you send anything I may, be able to send some things but I may be miles away from anywhere by the time I receive it. The weather is lovely now but it may rain again any time. I'm having my photo taken but they are very dear so don't expect one. I hope you are all keeping well, I am as fit as I ever was and even though I was in dock twice I was never really very ill. On both occasions I had a good rest that more than made up for my illness.

Love to all at home

Harry



23-7-43

No 3058994

Pte Hemsley

Mortan Plu

H.Q. Coy

1st Batt, The Royal Scots,

India Command

Dear Ruby,

I received your letter card a week ago which you wrote on 21st June. You mentioned that you had sent a graph the previous week but I haven't yet received it. I know you find it difficult to write when other people have told me all the news, but I assure you I look forward very much to hearing from you. I look forward to receiving a few lines from all my sisters but excluding you and our baby (Flo) I hardly hear from any of them. I can count on my fingers the number of letters, or graphs, I have received from the others this year. I don't want you to think I'm complaining but Mrs Paterson in Scotland seems to be more concerned about me than any of them. Well sister this is not a very cheerful letter in answer to the one I received from you, but don't let it bother you. I shall write to you again very soon.

Best wishes to Bill and the Family.

I can hear someone playing a record of Deanna Durbin singing "There's no Place like home". I'm writing to mother.

Love Harry xxxxx

25-8-43

No 3058994

Pte Hemsley

Morton Plu

H.Q. Coy

1st Batt, The Royal Scots,

India Command

Dear Ruby,

I have just received a graph from you, the second within a week. I am very well but rather bored at present I am pleased to hear that father is well again. I am sorry about your holiday being spoiled, I can guess you was looking forward to it very much. Please don't ever mention Hilda in your letters again. We may continue to write to each other, I am not in the least troubled at what has happened. I can't explain to you how I feel about the whole business but there is no need for anyone else to worry. I have many friends I can write to. I have just heard from Bert's wife, this is the first time since I came out here. You can tell Father I'm sending him some cigs and if Bill is lucky he may manage to grab a packet or two before "the old man" hides them. Love to Mother

Your Loving Brother

Harry

17.9.43

No 3058994

Pte Hemsley

Morton Plu

H.Q. Coy

1st Batt, The Royal Scots,

India Command

Dear Ruby,

I have just received an airgraph from you and two days ago I received a letter card which only took eleven days to come. I'm afraid I am not writing as often as I should, I have so many different people to write to. I'm sure Ina would be very pleased to hear from you so here's the address. Mrs Paterson, c/o Blain, 14 McKinley Terrace, Loanhead, Midlothian, Scotland.

I listen to the wireless most evenings, but of course I never heard the broadcast from the Hippodrome if it was on the 8.30pm the time here would be 3.0am. I received some magazines from Hilda this week but I've had no letters from her lately. I do not see many English civilians here, the only women being the few who serve in the Salvation Army Canteen and nurses. I am very well except to my knee which is giving me a little pain now it is rainy weather. I hope you are all keeping well, including Tashy. Love to Mother and all at Home.

Your loving Brother

Harry



A photo of Ina.



On the back of the postcard was written: "This was taken in Jan. or thereabouts. Isn't it a scream. The little girl was nursemaid to the baby and another small boy who would not join the group. The father of the children gave her 2 /s. per month for her services. He had a shop in the Bazaar and called himself "Cheap Jack" but I call him a liar."

2.12.43

No 3058994

Pte Hemsley

Morton Plu

H.Q. Coy 1st Batt,

The Royal Scots,

India Command

Dear Ruby,

I am back in Bombay on leave for seven days. I arrived this morning, whilst it was still dark, after a rather unpleasant journey I did half of the journey in a truck along a very dusty and bumpy road. The second half I came by train but it was overcrowded and I had to sleep on the floor. However I am now here and I mean to make the most of my freedom, but before I began. I decided I'd better clear my conscience by dropping you a few lines. I recieved your greetings graph just before I left. I recieved the P.O. and Xmas card from Mrs Hartsharn quite a while ago. I was going to write and thank her myself but didn't know what to say. Tell her how grateful I am.

I am going now to book a seat for tonight's show in the best cinema in the city and then I'm going to the magnificent bathing pool they have here. It's a lovely day. I'm very well and hoping that you are all the same.

Love to all

Harry



Not long after this letter, the relatively peaceful period was over, and the battalion was soon to be involved in the Battle for Kohima. The Battle of Kohima (together with the intertwined Battle of Imphal) proved the turning point of the Japanese U-Go offensive into India in 1944 during the Second World War. The battle took place in three stages from 4 April to 22 June 1944 around the town of Kohima, the capital of Nagaland in northeast India. From 3 to 16 April, the Japanese attempted to capture Kohima ridge, a feature which dominated the road by which the besieged British and Indian troops of IV Corps at Imphal were supplied. By mid-April, the small British and Indian force at Kohima was relieved.

From 18 April to 13 May British and Indian reinforcements counter-attacked to drive the Japanese from the positions they had captured. The Japanese abandoned the ridge at this point but continued to block the Kohima–Imphal road. From 16 May to 22 June the British and Indian troops pursued the retreating Japanese and reopened the road. The battle ended on 22 June when British and Indian troops from Kohima and Imphal met at Milestone 109, ending the Siege of Imphal.

Kohima was one of the greatest land defeats ever felt by the Japanese Army. Only 20,000 of the 85,000 Japanese who had come to Burma were alive by the end of the campaign. The battle is

forever known as 'The Stalingrad of the East' due to the backs-to-the-wall defence, as well as it being an integral turning point in the war in Asia. 4,000 Japanese soldiers were lost at Kohima and the victory galvanised the British, who were able to launch renewed offensives as the last of the Japanese troops were cleared from Burma and pushed back to Mandalay and Meiktila.

15-3-44

No 3058994

Pte Hemsley

Morton Plu

H.Q. Coy

1st Batt, The Royal Scots,

India Command

Dear Ruby,

I have just received your graph and I think its about time I wrote to you and let you know that I'm still keeping well. As a matter of fact I am very well at the moment. I'm in a wonderful spot. I'm at the seaside, and I'm not here on duty either. I'm in the rest camp where they send chaps who have had malaria. Now don't jump to the conclusion I've had malaria, I'm just lucky in being here for a few days. I was out in a native boat fishing today. I either caught an enormous fish or caught the rocks on the sea bottom, my line broke and I lost my hook so I just dived out of the boat and had a swim. It's very warm in the sea here of course.

I was very pleased to receive the parcel. The blades came in handy of course. I don't know how much the shaving soap and tooth paste cost you but if I could buy them here they would have cost me about 13/-s. The salts you sent are just what I needed to of course I can buy them in the canteen, but would probably pay double the amount you pay.

I hope you don't mind me sending you this photo instead of one of the others, I just didn't have enough to go round. It would be very nice if Ma could pay you a visit, I'll bet she could do with a rest she seems to work very long hours. I hope mother is still keeping well and that father is much better.

All the best to all at Holmewood

Love

Harry

Thanks to the Royal Scot's war diaries, we have a daily update of the battalion's movement from April 1944 to April 1945, where the 1st Battallion Royal Scots were involved in the Burma Campaign. On the 1st April, a couple of weeks after this letter, the battalion were moving to the front from their base in Bangalore. Travelling partly by plane they arrived in Dimapur on the 13th/14th April.

21-4-44

No 3058994

Pte Hemsley

Morton Plu

H.Q. Coy

1st Batt, The Royal Scots,

India Command

Dear Ruby,

I have just recieved your letter dated 7-4-44. This is the first I have recieved from anyone for quite a length of time.

I was pleased you have at last managed to get a house, I hope it won't be long before I am able to pay you a visit.

I am in action against the Japs now, but am very well and getting plenty of the best to eat. I was sorting out a batch of mail yesterday, I went through about 500 letters and never found one for myself. I was mad, it was a good job there was another batch with 3 for me. I recieved one from Flo and one from Mary of Hull. She writes often, but don't start jumping to conclusions, you'll be wrong.

I am sorry father is not well, maybe he will have improved by this time.

I have not yet recieved the second parcel. Did I tell you about the 400 cigs I recieved, I don't know yet who sent them though I think it may have been Hilda. I don't write to her now. If you should not hear from me don't worry and please keep writing. There are times when I can't sit down to write letters but I do look forward to hearing from you.

I hope Bertha and family are keeping well, I should have written to her before now. I received quite a number of D(erbysire) times recently. Well Ruby I'm afraid that is all I am allowed to write about now so I must close.

Love to Ma and all the sisters.

All the best to Bill and Family.

Love

Harry.

By the 21st April the battalion had moved from Dimapur to advance on Kohima. Five days later they arrived at Kohima after heavy fighting. At the beginning of the month the battalion strength was 40 and 830 other ranks (O.Rs.). By the end of the month this was down to 39 Officers and 724 O.Rs.

A good account of this advance on Kohima and what it was like on the ground can be found [here](#)

17-07-44

No 3058994

Pte Hemsley

H.Q. Coy

1st Batt, The Royal Scots,

S. E. A. C.

Dear Ruby,

It seems such a long time since I wrote to you. Every day for the last week I've said "I must write today", but something always crops up or I don't feel in the mood. It takes me ages to write one of these letters. I am very well and am hoping to go on leave soon. If you have read the papers lately you will know what we have been doing, that is if they can find room to write about us now that the 2nd front is opened.

Well the first job we did was to relieve Kohima. I know that was in your papers because I read about it in the papers I received from Bertha yesterday.

For a time the Jap was difficult to move but after a while we finally drove him out and then we began to chase him down the road to Imphal. We very soon cleared them all between Kohima & Imphal. There was one occasion when we were supplied with food by parachute. One hill was white with parachutes and it soon took the name of parachute hill. We were flown part of the way by plane when we came into action it was quite a pleasant experience but it was very cold. I was asleep most of the journey.

Our Ada said that Fred Knight was in India I wish I knew where, I may be able to meet him. Send his address if possible. Was it right that Jim Hemsley is a Pilot Officer.

There's a chap here from Sheffield, he worked for Newbold's and travelled all round our district. It's fun to be able to talk about home to someone who is acquainted with the district.

My love to Mother and all at home.

Love

Harry xxxxx

In mid-July the battalion was stationed at Viswema, a village on the road from Kohima to Imphal. Compared to the previous 3 months things were relatively quiet. On the 18th July it was reported as "Quiet day. DIV CONCERT PARTY visited Bn."



It is interesting to note that the war diaries from May 1944 to April 1945 were written by Capt. RM Crockatt who was the Intelligence Officer (I.O.) for the battalion. Harry was the batman for "Dick" Crockatt during the time in Burma. [Note: A batman is a soldier assigned to a commissioned officer as a personal servant. Duties include acting as a military courier to convey orders to subordinates, acting as an aide-de-camp, maintaining the officer's uniform and personal equipment as a valet, other miscellaneous tasks the officer does not have time or inclination to do.) The photo is of Harry and Dick Crockatt after the war in London.

19-09-44

No 3058994

Pte Hemsley

H.Q. Coy

1st Batt, The Royal Scots,

S.E.A.C.

Dear Ruby,

I don't feel like writing, but I know if I don't you'll think there's something wrong. I did write a letter to both you and Bertha but they were lost, so it must be a very long time since you last heard from me. Well Ruby I have not seen any Japs for quite a long time. Although I am at present past the place where we first came up against them they have kept going so well that they are many miles from me. In fact everything would be fine if I was feeling really fit. There is some really lovely scenery around here and as we are over 4,000 ft. above sea level it is not too hot. Sometimes I can stand outside my tent and see the white clouds lying in the valley below me.

Every morning I wake up and the sun is shining but as the day draws on the clouds come down and it begins to rain. I went to a cinema show two nights ago, it was open air. It was quite a good show but half way through it began to rain. Luckily I had my Great coat with me and I stood in the rain till the end of the show.

I recieved a letter from Ira yesterday so I have just written to her. It must be 6 months since I last wrote to her. She really was very sorry that she was not able to spend her holiday with you. I have recieved quite a number of letters from Mary in Hull lately, she is a great pen pal although I do not write to her very often. It was strange that you, mother and Phyl should all mention Arthur Dicks in your recent letters. He's a great lad, I only wish I had a few pals like him here. Well I must close so till next time love to all the family.

Love

Harry xxx

In mid-September the battalion were stationed at Sangshak on the Ukhul to Imphal road.

The diary entry for 19th September shows "Quiet day. Construction of Information Room (and Museum of Jap material) continues."

Since the previous letter in July, the battalion was involved in sporadic fighting but also having to cope with heavy rain and lack of supplies. On the 31st August the orders were given to open emergency rations and to kill one mule for food!

By the beginning of September, the battalion strength had reduced to 20 Officers and 614 O.Rs.

23.11.45 (Assumed)

No date but must have been the week ending 25th November 1944, which is the date the memorial was unveiled. Also the reference to football puts it at 23^d November

No 3058994

Pte Hemsley Int Sec,

H.Q. Coy

1st Batt, The Royal Scots,

S. E. A. C.

Dear Ruby,

I was just going to bed when I heard someone yell my name. I went outside, fell into the drain, then I found a chap with my mail so I stopped swearing. There was one from you dated 23rd Oct, it has been to Shillong where I was staying last month, but I am back with my unit now so its been chasing me round.

As I said I was going to bed, I often go to bed early here. Its the only warm place here, and there is nothing to do.

However I so enjoyed reading your letter that I decided to reply immediately.

I'm feeling much better than I was last time I wrote I am glad to say. I have not seen any fighting since I went on leave, and I cannot say how long it will be before we have another go. they are unveiling a memorial at Kohima on Sat to the men in our Div who were killed in the fighting. We observed the 2 minutes silence on Nov 11th. I thought it was rather silly, you see, I often think of those pals of mine who were killed here and they are the only chaps I thought of in that 2 minutes silence. I don't think many people think of those who fell in the last war.

We have quite a lot of football here. I watched two matches today. We have a good Blu team, they have only lost about one game in about twelve played.

We are fortunate in having the only piece of level ground in this area so we always play at "home". I was glad to hear mother received that money alright, it should be a great help to her. I think I'll send you something to save for me occasionally. I don't spend anything here, I have almost stopped smoking even.

I haven't written to Ina lately she will think I've forgotten her.

Notice the slight change in my address, (not Mortax Plu)

I think I'll go to bed now it's too darned chilly for writing

Love to Mother and all at home.

Love

Harry xxxxxx

Worth noting that Harry is now addressed as Intelligence Secretary (Int Sec.) The battalion is still based in Sangshak and will stay there until end of December. October and November were quiet months, with plenty of time for inter-company football matches, concerts, films etc., although the

battalion continued to lose personnel due to sickness (see, for example, Harry at Shillong). The battalion strength is now at 31 Officers and 561 O.Rs.



The Memorial mentioned by Harry is sited at Kennedy Hill, on the Aradura Spur, and was unveiled by Lieutenant Colonel Masterton Smith, the Commanding Officer, on 25 November 1944. The Monument is now surrounded by local housing but (in 2017) was reported as being in good order and carefully looked after by the family living around it.

30-11-44

No 3058994

Pte Hemsley

H.Q. Coy

1st Batt, The Royal Scots,

S. E. A. C.

Dear Ruby,

Here I am again to let you know how things are going out here.

You will be sorry to hear I am back in hospital again. I am feeling OK, though so there is no need for anyone to worry. I was troubled with the tummy ache, as I told you before, and all the MO's tablets and medicines did not ease the pain for long so he sent me here. I have been here for a week and I am pleased to say I am being treated rather well, although at times I feel they are trying to starve me. I am on a diet, at first I only had drinks like milk, ovaltine & orlicks but for five days I've been feeding on minced livers or duck, and dry toast, with orange juice or bovril to drink. I'm now ready to face a good solid meal so I hope they will take pity on me tomorrow and let me take my usual meals.

I have not recieved any letters since I last wrote, maybe there are some at the unit for me, it's so miserable not to hear from anyone.

You know I hate writing at any time but when I have to tell you I am in hospital it's worse than ever, but I know if I do not write occasionally you will begin to think all kinds of silly things have happened. It does not seem as if there will be much of the Xmas spirit around these parts this year. I do wish I could be at home with you all. Still it should not be so very long now and no matter what time of the year it is when I do get home to me it will just seem like Xmas.

I hope you are all keeping very well, and I must add again, don't worry about me, I'm doing fine now.

Love to Mother

All the best to Bill, & all the Boys if you see them.

Love

Harry xxxxxx

PS. I'm like father, I hate cats.

25-12-44

No 3058994

Pte Hemsley

Intelligence Sec

H.Q. Coy

1st Batt, The Royal Scots,

S. E. A. C.

Dear Ruby,

Its Xmas Day, things are going fine, My very best pal is standing on a bed singing his head off I'm not in the same hospital as I was when I last wrote. I was sorry to leave the last one as we had arranged to have a good time this Xmas. However things have just turned out O.K. I'm really very topsy as I write this, It's my pals paper and pen. There are nurses and sisters in this hospital and even though there is no mistletoe here, we have improvised, and you can guess the patients are taking this opportunity of the rare pleasure of kissing a girl. I've not got any under any of our imitation mistletoe, I'm getting shy. I've had the best dinner I've had for years, Duck, roast spuds, and all the other things that go up to make a smashing meal, I had two helpings of that then came the Xmas pudding, with cream and custard. The cream was great. I think the matron made that, there was a strong sherry taste to there, for tea we had coffee made by the sisters, and Xmas cake. I'm feeling very full, I don't think I can manage supper. Last night we had what was called punch but that was because we could think of no other name for it. It contained Rum, Port, Sherry, Whisky and maybe other things. At 9.30 the nurses and doctors came round singing carols, I joined them.

It's a long time since I went carol singing.

We were all issued with bottles of beer today & visitors to the hospital brought us a drink.

I do hope you are all keeping well, I'm sorry to say I'll soon be leaving the hospital, goodbye to the white sheets. I'm going to try to down some supper now, back soon.

Well dear sister, I'm back again after sampling a lovely piece of chicken. I'm afraid I can't bother much with writing now, my pal is on his bed singing, talking, and vomiting. I think he's had a drop to much. So i must dry up for now.

Happy New Year

Your Loving Brother

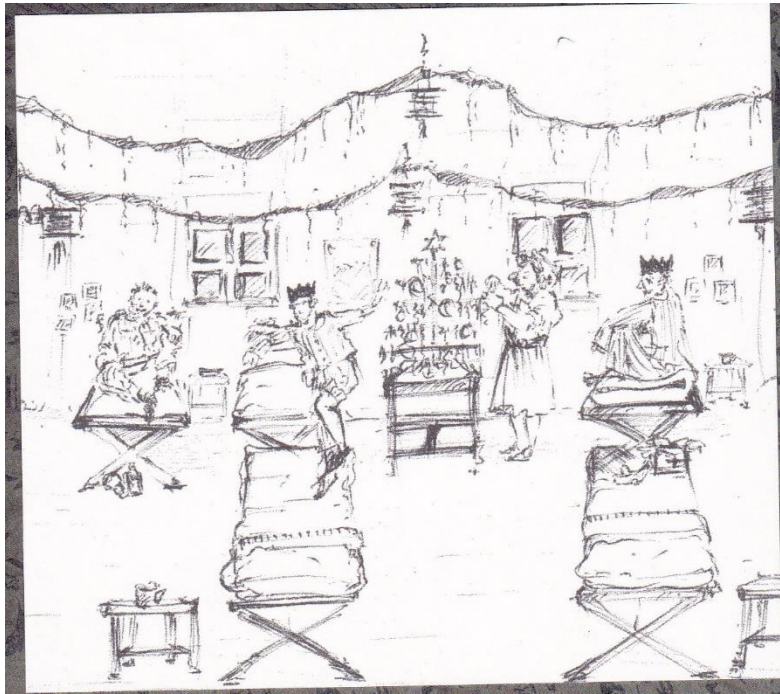
Harry

P. I almost forgot, I received your parcel a few days ago and I must say it contained all the things I was needing. Thanks a lot.

Love XXXXXX

Tues 26th I finished off the day by going to the pictures last night the mobile cinema came here. The picture was "The Adventures of Mark Twain" I sat in a deck chair, it was a lovely moonlight night but rather cold. Its a lovely morning now, I'm just wondering what it's like at home.

Cheerio Harry



Diane's drawing of Xmas in the hospital

In early January 1945 the battalion was ordered to move across the border into Burma (Myanmar) and were back in action against the Japanese. The concurrent Battle of Meiktila and Battle of Mandalay were decisive engagements near the end of the Burma Campaign during World War II. Collectively, they are sometimes referred to as the Battle of Central Burma. Despite logistical difficulties, the Allies were able to deploy large armoured and mechanised forces in Central Burma, and also possessed air supremacy. Most of the Japanese forces in Burma were destroyed during the battles, allowing the Allies to later recapture the capital, Rangoon, and reoccupy most of the country with little organised opposition.

During January and February the Royal Scots battalion was moving slowly south towards Mandalay, crossing the Irrawady river on the 28th February.

6-02-45

No 3058994

Pte Hemsley

Int Sec

H.Q. Coy

1st Batt, The Royal Scots,

S. E. A. C.

Dear Ruby,

I have recieved quite a number of letters from you recently. I am sorry I have not written sooner. Of course I'm sure you will understand, as you will know that I am in action. We are having a few days rest at present and I am very well.

Since we have been in action we have given the Jap a very hot time, he's certainly had ten casualties for every one of ours. I'm sorry to say I lost a pal three days ago. He comes from Staveley, lives quite near our Ada. He was the only one from our district besides me.

I always passed the D Times to him after I read them. I recieved four yesterday one had the photo of Sid Knight in, I hope he is better now. I've got the photos of Alwyn and Newman too. I don't think I would recognise our Newman if I met him.

I recieved 400 cigs from C.W.S. eight days ago.

They came just at the right time as cigs are rather short at the present.

Since I started this letter I've recieved the most welcome news that air mail is now free, so that's one less excuse for not writing.

I read in the paper that the chemist had moved to Heath Rd, but I was surprised to hear about Uncle Joe taking his old shop. Is he doing cobbling there. When I was at home I believe there was already a cobblers next to the chemist.

Who is the J Smith of 16 North Rd, do I know him. He is a prisoner of war, in Germany.

The news on the Russian front is good at present isn't it, I hope it won't be long before they are starting this demob scheme.

I hope you are keeping OK now, look after yourself.

I'm going for a hot bath now, and a clean change of clothes, A mobile bath unit follows us when we advance.

My love to Mother and all, All the Best to Bill

Love

Harry xxxxx

10-03-45

**No 3058994 Pte Hemsley
Int Sec
H.Q. Coy
1st Batt, The Royal Scots,
S. E. A. C.**

Dear Ruby,

I was pleased to hear from you again and to hear that you are much better. I recieved your letter yesterday so it only took 11 days to come which is very good as our Flo sent a air letter card 12 days before yours and I only recieved it yesterday.

It's the 12th today (unreadable) I started this letter, I'm afraid I've been to busy enjoying myself to write letters. I have been swimming in the Irrawaddy river instead of writing to you. Of course I don't think you mind me making the most of these few days rest we occasionally get.

I saw a film show night before last. It was Bing Crosby in "Going My Way" it's a great picture, have you seen it.

Last night we had the Div dance band playing to us. Quite a different nights entertainment than we've had recently. We usually get a bit of artillery fire to disturb our beauty sleep.

I'm pleased to say it's usually our guns which are firing. For every shell the Jap fires I should imagine we send 100 back. I suppose you have been listening to the news lately so you will know where I am. The Chap who was killed was Ken Hardwick, his parents live on Chesterfield Rd quite close to our Ada. His brother was a pal of Wallace. It wasn't him who was on leave in December he is probably in Scotland now. I knew about Wallace being repatriated.

How's the weather keeping now I hope it's much better now. The heat is almost unbearable here I walk about stripped to the waist all day and I'm as brown as a berry.

I don't suppose I'll need teaching much when I come home, but I'm sure it will be very strange at first. I would like to sit in front of a huge coal fire, reading a book, in a cosy room with the snow falling outside. Of course I won't need a chair, I am so used to squatting on the ground like the Indians.

When I come to your house for dinner you must watch me, I may put the knife & spoons in my pocket when I leave the table.

Love to Ma & the best to Bill

Harry xxx

War diary entry for 10th March

10.	THABYATHA	Day spent resting, cleaning clothes. Organised parties to IRRAWADDY for swimming.
1930		Mobile cinema performance.

20-03-45

**No 3058994 Pte Hemsley
Int Sec
H.Q. Coy
1st Batt, The Royal Scots,
S. E. A. C.**

Dear Ruby,

I have just recieved your letter dated 10th March. It is the first I have recieved since I last wrote to you and I was getting fed up with seeing others get mail and none for me. Still, I suppose I get plenty in the next few days, they usually come in a rush.

I am very well, in fact I've never been better. All this marching and digging is keeping me very fit. The sun is just sinking behind the palm trees and it will soon be dark so I must hurry, we don't get any lights here.

I keep on the safe side by not telling you where I am but, if you listen to the news you should know how we're doing as soon as I know. I listen in to the news from London, whenever possible to find the latest progress of our troops in this area.

I have some more photos of myself & the officers to whom I do batman so I'll send them along soon. I have some magazines to send you too. I think you will find them interesting.

It's nice to know you are getting some decent weather now. the chaps in Europe will be pleased. I would hate to be fighting with snow on the ground, it would be worse than the monsoons. If they finish off in Europe very soon It won't be long before I'm on my way home. Sir J. Grigg says that repat will come down to three years then.

Ina will be very pleased if you ask her for her holidays. She mentioned it in her last letter but I did not know how you was fixed. She is such a nice woman, certainly the best of four sisters. 23rd March

23^d March

Well sis, they seem to have managed to get Mandalay without my assistance, I've never been there yet though. I'm going for a look round now. So I must say cheerio Love to Ma & all the best to Bill.

Love

Harry xx

On the 20th March the battalion was on the outskirts of Mandalay. Here is the diary entry for 23rd:

0900	23.	LF 560499	Inter Coy football HQ v C. Day spent cleaning clothes and improving Camp area. Organised parties for swimming. Organised parties into MANDALAY.
1100			One wounded Jap captured.
1700			Inter Coy football HQ 2 v D.

**8th May 45,
VE Day**

**No 3058994
Pte Hemsley
Int Sec
H.Q. Coy 1st Batt,
The Royal Scots,
S. E. A. C**

Dear Ruby,

I've just received your letter dated 30th April. It's a long time since I wrote and I do feel rather ashamed of myself. I have had a very easy time lately, and with me not writing I suppose you still imagine I've been roughing it. If I wish I can go to the ~~unreadable~~ light, in the field, ~~unreadable~~ road. I saw a very good show last night. Two big pictures "Bring on the girls" & "Sensations of 1945". On Sunday I went to a super cinema and saw "Mrs Parkington" with Greer Garson & Gary Cooper. I sent Ma a photo maybe you've already seen it. I look ~~OK~~, don't I. I've sent you some Mags but never sent the photo, it's not very good.

I was thinking of Harold today it's quite a coincidence that you should mention him in your letter. With all the fighting going on in Europe I wondered if he was ~~OK~~. I don't suppose you have heard much from Alwyn, they soon cleared things up in Italy didn't they.

I suppose most people at home are celebrating. I wish I could be there now. Still it shouldn't be long now before we can celebrate my homecoming. I don't want you to expect me before November though.

I may go on leave soon but I may refuse it. These city's of India make me sick with all their horrible smells. I would like to go to some hill station like Darjeeling (you will see a small article about it in the Mags I sent) Where the climate is more like home.

I hope the weather has improved since you wrote. It is very hot here now and most of the chaps are suffering from prickly heat. We occasionally get a shower of rain now. It doesn't last long but you should see it come down. Did you send any fags,

I thought you and Hannah had but I've never received any. You never know I may manage to get home in time for Phyl's wedding six months isn't a long time and anything's possible now that the war is finished. Must see old Grigg about bringing repat down to 3 years

**Love to all
Cheerio
Harry xxxxx**

By mid-April the fighting had finished and the battalion were flown out to Chittagong and then by train to Kanchrapara (near Calcutta) via Chandpur. Obviously Harry was not impressed with Calcutta!. It seems that Harry got his wish to attend Phylis's wedding.

30-06-45

**No 3058994 Pte Hemsley
H.Q. Coy
1st Batt, The Royal Scots,
S.E.A.C.**

Dear Ruby,

I have just received your letter dated 22nd June. I only received your previous letter three days ago as the mail has not been reaching us very well lately. I am in Southern India, I can't tell you exactly where of course.

I am very well and having things very easy but I can't settle down to write letters. I received a letter from mother yesterday telling me she had received the money. I'm glad you got it away for me I feel a lot better now I've got something at home. I may send you something occasionally to put in the bank but of course that depends on how long I shall be out here. If I get the opportunity I shall buy some clothes and shoes before I come home as we don't need any coupons here. Everything is very expensive though, and the quality of clothes here is nothing like it is, or should I say was, at home.

I had a letter from Ira three days ago. She will wonder why I have not answered it as she sent it on 2nd June. If this letter reaches you as soon as I hope you should receive it whilst she is still with you so you can share this letter.

I had a big dinner a couple of hours ago and I still feel full up. I had soup, spuds peas and pork, there was pears and custard for dessert but the dinner was so good I had two helpings and had no room for the pears. I'm getting very fat again, I must do some exercising to get my weight down.

I received the cigs alright just a day after I received some from Hannah. I just finished them yesterday. We have been issued with English cigs lately. Of course I smoke quite a lot, not having much to do but I'll drop it off a lot when I come home. We had six bottles of beer this week. This is the third time we've had it this year so you see we don't get a chance to get the boozing habit.

Tell Ma I'll be writing to her in a week and I'll be sending her something, She would think I should have let her have some of that other.

**Love to Ma & The girls & Ira
Love
Harry xxxxx**

I suppose you show Ma your letters, so I'm writing this bit extra, you don't need to show it to her. She said she was rather tempted to keep some of that money but she gave it to you. She told me she owes 2/10 for coal and that she hasn't any. It made me very miserable, I know I haven't much to worry about but it's bad enough being out here.

That 50 pounds I had was all the money I had after drawing my leave money. I hardly drew any money last year we don't need money in the front line. Anyway I've hardly anything now as I draw my pay every week. Mother must think I'm stacked with money, She asked me to get father a watch, "He's had it" as we say out here.

I am sending her 5 pounds next time I get a pay so she should be alright for a while, I hope. She say's Dad keeps having some bad bouts, I hope it's not with drinking and If I hear He gets any of that money he will hear about it.

She asked me not to tell any of you about what she said but I've got to tell someone I just have to confide in someone when I feel miserable about things. Don't tell any of the others and don't let Ma know I told you

Cheerio

Harry XJOI



References:

- [Royal Scots War Diaries](#)
- [The Royal Scots Kohima campaign](#)
- [The Royal Scots battalions in WW2](#)