

## MS 2004/16

### NORTON, HENRY THOMAS ('HARRY')

#### Overview:

- S.N. 8/3816 Lance Corporal in Otago Infantry Regiment. Sniper and intelligence officer.
- Killed in action on 15 September 1916, at Flers, in the Battle of the Somme.
- Letters from New Zealand, Egypt and France, 1915-16.
- Includes letters to him from his family, who were not told of his death for 5-6 weeks and who continued to write – letters returned marked 'deceased', telegram regarding death and condolence letters.

**Physical Description:** Letters MS & TS (photocopies)

Digital slideshow of 42 letters + photos available.

**Time Period:** World War One, 1915-1916.

**Locations:** NZ - Trentham & Tauherenikau Military Camps; Egypt; France – Somme.

**Points of Interest:** Humour, religious beliefs, NZ military camp conditions and routine, positive attitudes, enthusiasm, confidence and excitement, belief in duty and sacrifice, coping with deprivation, homesickness, longing for wife, affection within family, emotions, initial hatred of Germans, sympathy for young German prisoner, shelling, preparations for attack, life and attitudes of NZ family, growing concern of family, condolence.

Inventory available with information page & biographical notes.

#### Description of Contents:

##### Folder 2

19.04.15 from H. Norton to his wife (from home?) re family matters.

16.05.15 from Harold Gilbert to Lottie & Len, at sea.

22 other letters from H. Norton to his wife and family from NZ Training Camps at Trentham and Tauherenikau 14 June – 11 December 1915, including:

- 14.06.15 – arrival at Trentham Camp.
- 15.06.15 – camp routine.
- 01.09.15 – drill routine.
- 01.11.15 – humorous incident with tent collapsing in a storm.

**Folder 3** - letters from H. Norton to his wife and family at sea and in Egypt Jan-April 1916.

09.01.16 – 11.02.16 at sea from New Zealand to Egypt - 7 letters, 1 card, 1 shipboard chronicle, including:

- 09.01.16 – farewell and voyage conditions.
- 11.02.16 – Suez – description of land and troops.

25.02.16 – 06.04.16 – in Egypt in various training camps – 10 letters, including:

- February [?] – last entry dated 24.02 camp routine.
- 26.03.16 – to son Leonard re expectations of his conduct.
- 27.03.16 – to daughter Jean (“Toddles”) re conditions and expectations.
- 03.04.16 – 2 postscripts – humorous incident & pleasure to be leaving Egypt.

**Folder 4** – letters (x 30), postcards and notes from H. Norton to his wife and family from France April - June 1916, including:

- 21.04.16 – description of billet conditions, countryside, humour.
- 04.05.16 – conditions, selection for special work, endurance test, insistence on cleanliness.
- 07.05.16 – excitement and keenness, growing brutalisation, humour.
- 09.05.16 – reasons for enlistment, religious faith, work in Intelligence Corps and as a marksman, happiness, weight of backpack.
- 18.05.16 – gladness in being there, regaining of nerve.
- 24.05.16 – the strain, having a rest, sniper activities, feelings for baby, advice to wife re baby.
- 25.05.16 – mixed feelings about life as a sniper. Meals and rats.
- 26.05.16 – fired first shot at enemy of all NZ troops in France. Constant noise. Desolation and destruction of towns.
- 29.05.16 – to Leonard – amusing anecdote re sniping.
- 29.05.16 – bucolic description of French countryside.
- 29.05.16 – instructive notes to Leonard and Jean re bearing & behaviour.
- 09.06.16 – shelling, dream of home, longing.
- 15.06.16 – appreciation, religious faith, invocation to prayer.
- 15.06.16 – to Leonard –behaviour and attitude expectations.
- 15.06.16 – to Baby Girl.
- 18.06.16 – 1st section – bathing, attack on German trenches, desire to be involved.)
- 25.06.16 – mundane life in trenches.

Also letter to Mrs Norton from Harry’s friend Du Flau, dated 11 May 1916.

**Folder 5** – 29 letters and cards between H. Norton, his wife and family July - August 1916, including:

- 02.07.16 – Strong wish to get involved. Friend Du Flau cracking under the pressure. Positive attitude.
- 14.07.16 – dichotomy of hatred of killing, but pride to be fighting.
- 15.07.16 – ‘Lord Mayor’ of village, good food, war in the background.
- 15.07.16 – to ‘My dear Little Cuddley Girl’ (his baby) – (?) no photocopy of holograph.
- 19.07.16 – Confidence, bad state of others, lack of change of clothing, pulling a trick with un-awarded leave.
- 01.08.16 – Reverie on nature, swimming, love against background of war.
- 02.08.16[?] – Some question over accuracy of dating. Confidence, high spirits and good health. Looking forward to action. Sending poppy seeds. Belief prevalent that will be home in three months. Interaction with a French child. Beautiful weather, flowers and trees.
- 13.08.16 – Reaction to wife’s illness. Looking forward to return.
- 15.08.16 – Lyricism about French countryside.

- 30.08-09.09.16 – March in preparation for the ‘Big Push’ – imagination of what it will be like. Positive report on physical & mental state. Hopes for promotion. Determination to be neat and clean. Preparations for battle.

**Folder 6** – 2 letters + 1 postcard from H. Norton to his wife and family, September 1916:

- 11.09.16 – postcard to Florence – belief the enemy is steadily being driven back and hopes for the next day. Pleasure at being in the middle of the battlefield and wonder at the number of shells.
- 12-14.09.16 – to ‘Lennie & Jean’ – Work of an N.C.O. Noise of gunfire. Use of German rifle butts to boil kettle. Souvenirs. Discomfort. 14.9 – Preparations for attack the next morning.
- 11–14.09.16 (confusion with dating) – Description of battlefield – ‘wonderful and awful’. Dead Germans. Sleeping in shell holes. 12.09 – to frontline. Brilliance of flares. Extreme noise. Description of dugouts. Pity for German troops in trenches generally and a young German prisoner in particular. Aircraft. Jokes about shell fire. 14.09 – expecting to go over the top at dawn. (Signed for Harry by his friend Reub. M. Newman.)

19 letters from Mrs Norton and children to H. Norton September – October 1916 (all returned).

Telegram from J. Allen Minister of Defence to Mrs Norton reporting death of Harry Norton in action, postmarked 24.10.16.

2 condolence letters from W. McLean Chaplain, 2nd Otago Battalion, to Mrs Norton September and November 1916.

Condolence letter from J. Matthews to his niece Mrs Norton, December 1916.

**Folder 7** – Miscellaneous items including official letters.

### **Other Material:**

**Folder 1:** Includes two letters from Chas H. Matthews to his sister Florry (later Harry Norton’s wife) from South Africa during the South African War, 1901 and 1902.

**Physical Description:** Letters MS & TS (photocopies)

**Time Period:** South African War, 1901-1902.

**Locations:** South Africa: Tryheid, the Veldt near Heilbron.

**Points of Interest:** Canterbury Company, heavy losses through accidents and illness, treatment of prisoners, lack of hospital facilities, lack of comforts.

### **Description of Contents:**

21.03.1900 – from H. Norton to family from London:

- Norton was apparently there as part of a racing boat crew.

05.09.01 – from C.H.M. Matthews to his sister Florry from Tryheid Hospital, South Africa:

- Good wishes for marriage to Harry Norton. Casualties, treatment of prisoners, lack of hospital facilities.

15.02.02 – from C.H.M. Matthews to his sister Florry from The Veldt near Heilbron, South Africa:

- Illness from malarial and enteric fever (typhoid), lack of home comforts.

02.07.07 – from James Aitken to Harry Norton from Mosgiel.