

**FROM DUG-OUT AND  
BILLET: AN OFFICER'S  
LETTERS TO HIS MOTHER**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649116171

From dug-out and billet: an officer's letters to his mother by Anonymous

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Cover @ 2017

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**ANONYMOUS**

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*From Dug - out  
" and Billet :: :: An  
Officer's Letters to His Mother*

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JULY OF  
CALIFORNIA

*London: HURST & BLACKETT LTD.  
PATERNOSTER HOUSE, E.C. : 1916*

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## From Dug-out and Billet

DEAR LITTLE MAMA.

Don't stare. It isn't such an odd beginning when the reason's given. The other day in billets a Frenchwoman showed me a letter—oh, the pride of her!—from her soldier son. Being in French, and *provençale* at that, I couldn't get the hang of much of it, but it began with, "*Chère petite Maman.*" Ever since, it has struck me that "Dear Mother" is much too staid away to address you. If that big baby of a man, who's doing in Boches with sanguinary enjoyment down Alsace way, can use an affectionate diminutive to his big Maman, surely I can do the same. She, *Maman, marchande de tabac* in the North, is the largest woman I have ever seen. She has three

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*From Dug-out and Billet*

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chins, no waist, the arms of a prize-fighter, and she weighs fourteen stone if an ounce. Yet she is Piou-Piou's "*Petite Maman*," and no higher than his heart. No man's mother is.

So that's the reason why I've taken a leaf out of Piou-Piou's letter, dear little Mama, and I wish I had half his vocabulary of *chéri's*, *ange's*, *mie's* and *mignon's*. There's no doubt about it, the English language curdles a proper expression of sentiment.

I'd give anything to be able to say something to buck you up properly, but I'm afraid I don't know how. Ordinarily, I'm a rotter at letter-writing, as you know. After weeks of handling an entrenching tool (I generally do my whack at it with my Company) my fingers simply can't get a grip of a pen. I'll do my best, except to give you a diary of the usual stuff about hand-to-hand encounters, wild charges and other heroic deeds. I bar all that. You can get it out of the papers if you want it. No man can really



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*From Dug-out and Billet*

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describe what he's done under fire. He doesn't know anything about it while it's going on, and afterwards he'd be bound to give a wrong impression of it. I'm doing my bit, or trying to, and there's an end of it.

What I'm concerned with most is yourself. I know you're going about smiling and doing the innumerable things of everyday life that women find to their hands. But I'm equally jolly well sure that the smile comes off at night and that your prayers are pangs. Also that you lie awake in the darkness and wonder where on the bare earth—somewhere in Flanders—your "brave" boy is lying. And in the morning you wake up from an hour's troubled sleep, feeling like a bad egg, and put on the smile again to go down to breakfast with instead of an appetite. I know you do.

Don't worry. The facts don't warrant it. Most days the fellow you're grouching about is undergoing nothing worse than healthy

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*From Dug-out and Billet*

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exercise that makes him hard as nails. They may be long hours, but they seem short. When he has time to think it's of you—and dinner. The A.S.C. provides the latter, and generally speaking does it famously. You can't expect them to write your letters from home as well!

And don't for a moment imagine there's any discomfort in a bed on what you call the "bare earth." I've heard men who have been home on short leave say that a spring-mattress and pillows kept them awake. When bye-bye time comes round you roll yourself in your blanket and in a moment are sleeping the sleep of the healthy just. Hours of it. Honest! With ordinary luck you get all the sleep and rest you want and wake up fit as a fiddle, shake yourself like a dog, and start another day of alarums and excursions.

Fellows with bad nerves or weak tummies go back home and talk weirdly of what they've undergone—sufferings and want

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*From Dug-out and Billet*

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of food. That sort would say the same thing of a hard run with the beagles. The sufferings of all except those who try and stop high-explosives with their heads don't amount to more than blistered feet or the gall of a pack-strap. And you can be happy though hungry, so long as you don't have to make a hobby of going without food. Backwoodsmen and cattle-punchers far from the sound of war frequently have to wait for their dinner until they can get it, and go without if they can't.

Of course it's war, and some war at that, and it provides sights enough to disturb fastidious tastes. But, oh, believe me, we enjoy it! We're out here for England, home and duty—or is it beauty?—right enough; but don't make any mistake, we do our fighting for the love of it—for the scrum of it. The Boches only fight for hate, which is why a good many of them squeal at the sight of the merry bayonet. The German is remarkably like the villain of