

Charlie's Letters Home

'I nearly got blown up yesterday'

There is no doubt that Charlie was involved in some intensive fighting after he arrived at the Western Front in the spring of 1916. Despite this, his letters only occasionally refer directly to the fighting and the dangers that he faced, including the time when a shell landed near him. He also talks at one point about the excitement of seeing tanks in action for the first time.

'Please send me a pair of thick woollen gloves'

In many of his letters, Charlie asks for extra clothing from home – gloves, socks and vests for example. His family and acquaintances from Medmenham also sent him a regular stock of food parcels – everything from eggs to potted meat, cake, chocolate, ham and pigeons, all of which were clearly appreciated.

'It is a nice country out here'

Despite the demands and pressures of the War, Charlie makes frequent references in his letters to the countryside around him, to the work of the French farmers and the wildlife that he sees. His reflections are often combined with his frequent questions back home about the gamekeeping – for example, how the pheasants are doing and how many rabbits have been shot.

'Sorry to hear about George Gardiner'

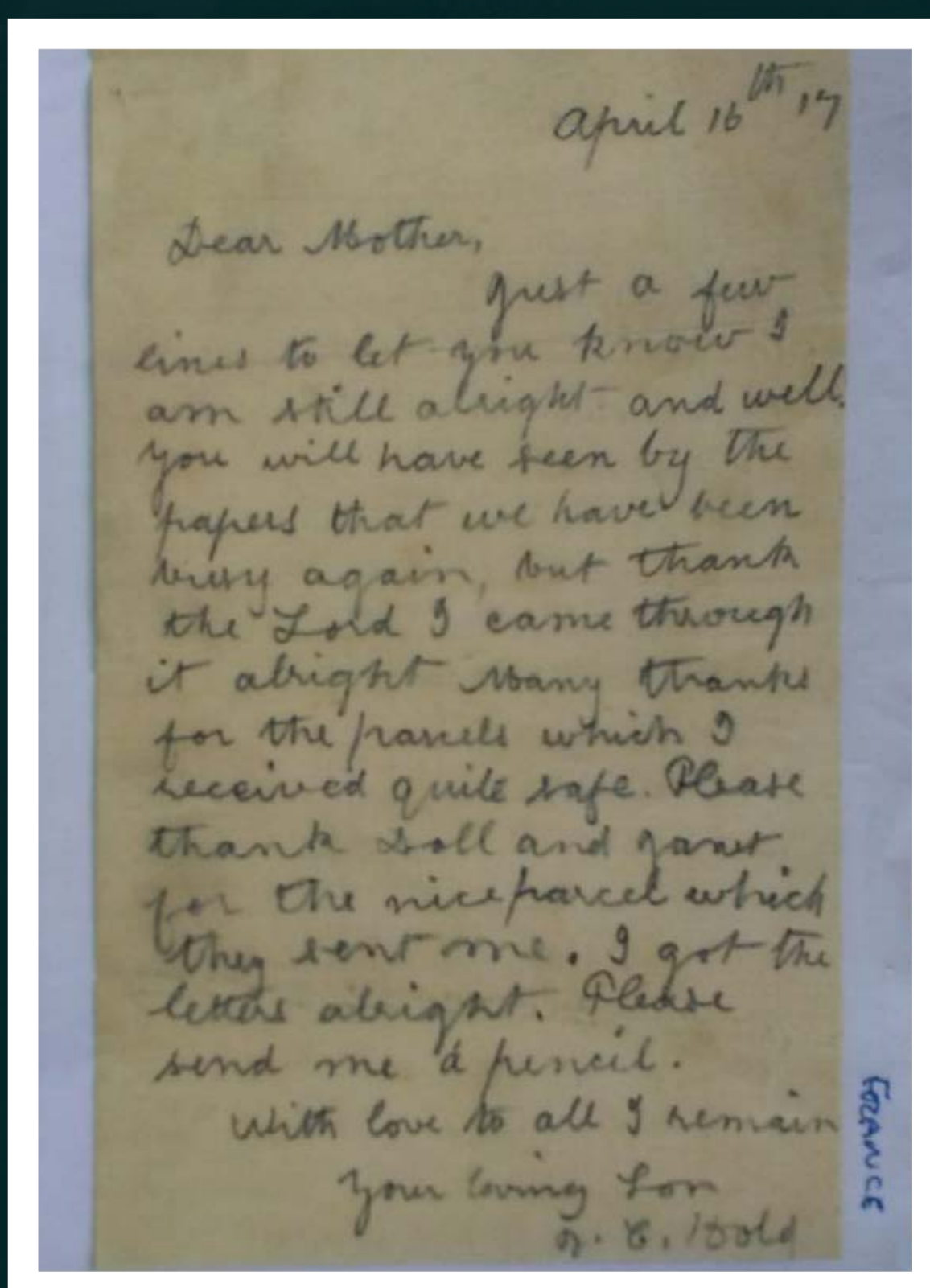
Charlie frequently asks in his letters about old friends from Medmenham and is clearly affected by the large numbers who were wounded or killed. At one point, he rather bitterly complains that he wished he could swap places with one of his friends who has been invalided out of the army due to a wound.

'You must not get down hearted'

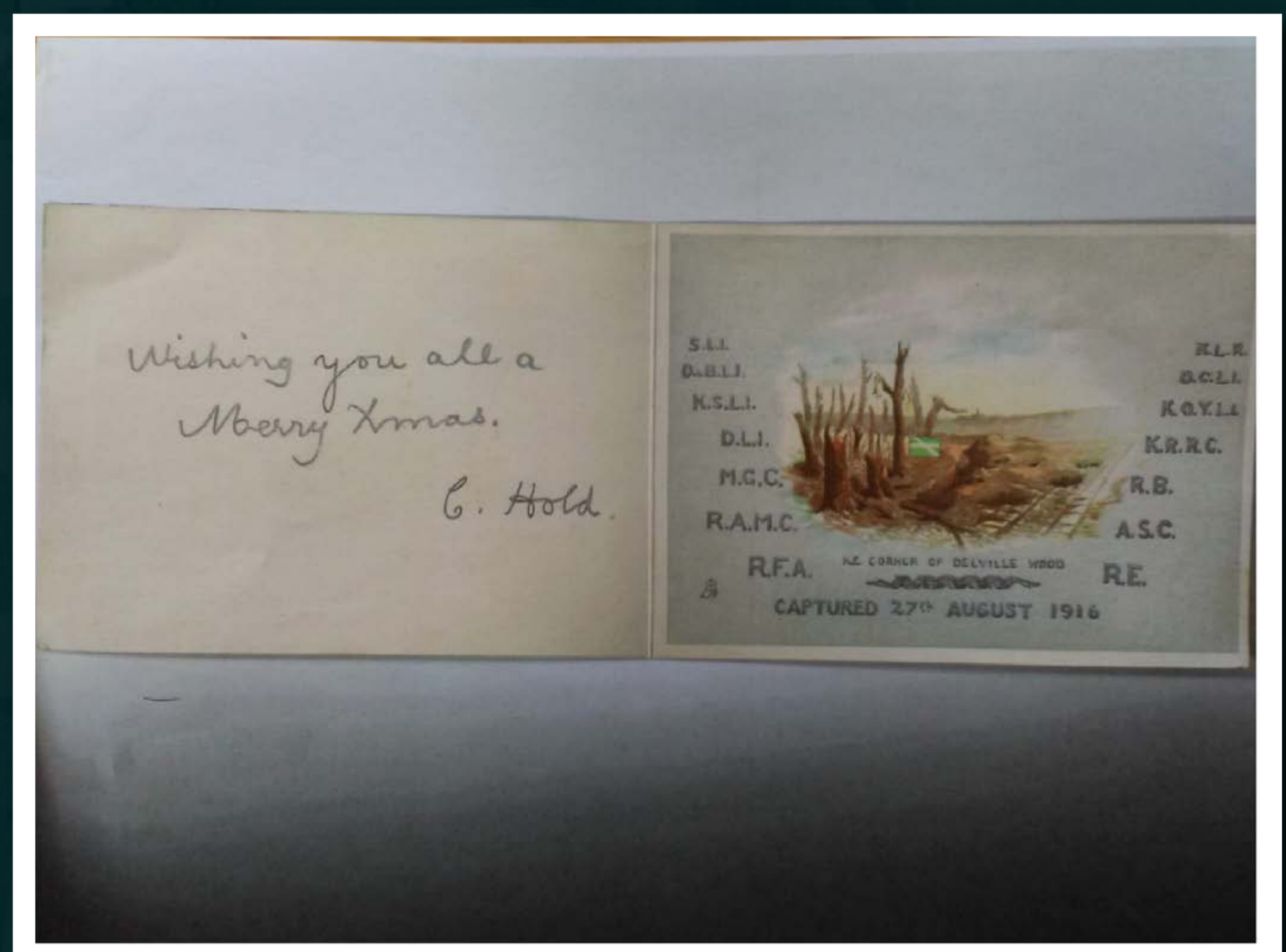
Charlie sent letters at irregular intervals and he acknowledges at times the anxiety this must have caused his family. Despite his reassurances to them about his safety, the impression created by his letters is that Charlie was increasingly upset by what he had seen and experienced and wished for the War to end so that he could go home.



Charlie c.1915. Photo reproduced courtesy of Special Collections, Leeds University Library.



An example of one of Charlie's letters. This one was written on 16th April 1917, when Charlie was serving on the Western Front. Photo courtesy of Special Collections, Leeds University.



Charlie's Christmas Card home, December 1916. Photo courtesy of Special Collections, Leeds University.