**John Henry Loftus Reade (1881 -1914)**

MR4/17/308

*‘In 1996 a box containing 538 letters written between 1895 and 1914 by Lieutenant John Henry Loftus Reade was presented to the Manchester Regiment’s 1st Battalion, then serving in Belfast. The donor was his kinswoman Mrs Rosemary Wilkinson, daughter of Dr Richard Brandon of Castletown, County Fermanagh.*

*After some intensive sorting by two members of the Regimental Association, the letters were deposited in their archive which is held in the Local Studies Library of Tameside Council, Ashton-under-Lyne. Loftus Reade was killed in action during the third month of the First World War (28th October 1914) while serving with the Regiment’s 2nd Battalion.’* [Museum and Galleries](https://www.tameside.gov.uk/MuseumsandGalleries/Regimental-Life-of-the-Month-John-Henry-Loftus-Rea)

Letters to mother and sisters at the start of World War 1

**2nd August 1914**

The Barracks

Ashton-under-Lyne

My Dear Girls

Armageddon has come at last I think. Germany seems to be holding on in her way – the Sunday papers say she has definitely declared war on Russia – so that nothing remains now but to let loose the dogs of war. I cannot think that even our present Government would dare hold aloof in the circumstances though Italy seems determined to do so. We shall have a friend in Europe again, if we don’t stick by our own friends now, to say nothing of the unrivalled opportunity of getting rid of the German menace. If Russia, France and ourselves can’t smash Germany and Austria then they certainly deserve to be top dog. And anyway if Russia and France can’t win with us, they certainly wouldn’t without, and then we should be absolutely at Germany’s mercy. We must join in. But we’re hanging fire a bit over mobilizing. The army’s that’s first in the field gains an enormous advantage, and at this rate it’s going to be Germany.

How I am affected personally it’s impossible to say at the moment. I must say I never anticipated being at the Depot when Armageddon came. On paper I serve with the 3rd Battalion, as soon as they are mobilized at their war station on the East Coast somewhere- But I don’t think that can be for long. They can’t afford to employ Regular Subaltons that way. Anyway I am getting my field kit ready so as to be prepared for anything that may turn up. And that reminds me – I wish you’d look in the old house and see if the ‘old flea bag’ that I had in S. Africa is there. It’s a brown blanket sown up like a sack you know. I’m afraid that even if it there, it’s hardly likely to be in serviceable condition, but you might have a look and let me know as soon as you can.

Irish affairs have to take a back seat for the present, but if we do go to war I don’t trust the Nationalists much. What do you think? Do you think they’ll sit down quietly and be loyal citizens until the war’s over? That is the prevalent idea over here, but I think it’s taking too much for granted. England’s difficulty is Ireland’s opportunity.

We got back to Ashton about half past eight yesterday morning. We left camp in black darkness and pouring rain but it was quite light by the time we reached Appleby Station. The battalion will have had a brief holiday, at any rate, before assembling again, as one imagines it will do in a few days’ time. I’ll let you know anything that happens. Needless to say all leave is stopped, so no chance of seeing you at present.

**4th August 1914**

The Barracks Ashton-under-Lyne

My Dear Girls

The order to mobilize has just arrived (5.30pm). We shall be in absolute chaos for the next few days here; besides 1500 regular reservists to be disposed of, both special Reserve Battalions are mobilizing. Both the latter push off to somewhere on the East Coast about next Saturday where we settle down for the protection of the coast.

Whether the Expeditionary Force is going to the Continent or merely going to be held in a state of readiness in this country no one knows yet.

With love

Yours ever Loftus

**Monday 10th August**

Midland Hotel Manchester

My Dear Girls

I am on my way to Curragh to join the 2nd Battalion. Am far from certain in my mind that I shall stay with them. However, because none of the Depot regular officers are allowed to leave the S R Battalions, at present, at any rate. But a War Office wire arrived this morning for 1 subalton to be sent to join the 2nd Battalion at once- and we haven’t a single S R Subalton left: so here I am

Have no idea when the 2nd Battalion will leave, or anything of that sort, but will write to you again. As I say I may be packed back to Grimsby again. Anyway, I send you my medal to look after for me.

Have had pretty strenuous times since last Wednesday. Practically haven’t had my boots off for four days.

**19th September 1014**

My Dear Girls

Just a line in a great hurry. Am going strong and quite fit except for a bit of a cold due to the wet weather. Have been acting adjutant of the Battalion ever since Le Cadeaux where poor old Nisbet was killed. Our mails are the sketchiest things on earth. Got 3 letters from you this morning – the second mail we have received since the campaign started. Can’t give you any intelligence of the campaign as it is prohibited. You probably know more of the war as a whole than I do despite the strict censorship of news.

If you want to send me anything I would be awfully glad if you would send me periodically –say every 3 weeks a parcel containing the following: 3 Handkerchiefs, 1 pair woollen socks, 50 cigarettes, some chocolate

Also what I want above all things is some kind of automatic lighter as matches are almost impossible to obtain. You have all my thoughts. Don’t worry for everything is on the knees of the gods.

**20th September 1914**

My dear Girls

We are enjoying a few days rest in reserve, so I take the opportunity of writing at leisure, but it’s poor work writing letters when there is such uncertainty as to them fetching up. When you write always let me know the date of the last card or letter you had from me, as it’s interesting to me. I am awfully glad to get your letters. Fermanagh is not a very war like county I’m afraid but the new army seems to be getting on very well without them. Until the last few days had not seen any newspapers and had no idea of the enormous preparations that were going on at home. It’s a wonderful time to live through.

My last postcard was sent by King’s messenger & I hope reached you in a moderately short space of time.. Unfortunately that is a privilege which will only come my way about once a month but I will take every advantage of it that I can- but only a postcard is allowed.

Now for the things I want you to send me if you can. The winter will be on us pretty soon and I want some warm clothing- 2 thick vests, 2 pairs of thick drawers are the first necessity. You can get these from Tyson of Grafton Street Dublin. He might also be able to supply a pair of warm gloves- leather with a wool lining or something of that sort.

Then I want you to write to Flight, High St Winchester and ask him to make and forward me as soon as he can a pair of Bedford cord breeches and a service drill jacket of the warmest description he can manufacture possibly with a flannel lining. The only thing I’m afraid of is that with all the rush of the New Army for new uniforms Flight may not be able to compete with the order but you might rub it in to him that people at the front ought to be considered first. By the way I see in the papers lists of officers and men admitted to various hospitals at home. All the seriously sick and wounded are shipped home as soon as possible.

I suppose you read Sir John French’s despatches. We don’t see them till a long time after you do of course, but they are very interesting reading. I do wish our mails worked with a little bit more speed and certainty, but suppose it is unavoidable. Letters from home to be sure arrive with tolerable regularity, but of course it depends on the tactical situation how long it takes to get a mail bag up to any particular unit. Well, God bless you both Love Loftus

**September 28th 1914**

PPS I forgot soap. Please send me a piece occasionally- the first bit as soon as you get this. Also a stick of shaving soap.

**October 5th 1914**

My Dear Girls

Many thanks for all your letters and accompanying business. Yesterday’s mail produced a bunch…Don’t send me any more socks for the present as I am well provided. The sleeping bag is alright – don’t worry about that. Whenever I get it, I get also my valise, which provides the waterproof part. Your news is all very interesting- I wish I could give you some in return but have nothing to tell you except that I am quite fit. There has been a tremendous improvement in the weather the last 10 days which means a lot. Hope it will last. However the winter will be the troublesome time. It’s comforting to reflect that it will be quite as unpleasant for the Germans as for us. Still the good all times were best when opposing armies when opposing armies mutually abandoned fighting and went into winter quarters.

Many thanks for the balaclava cap. I brought one out with me but yours folds up in smaller compass and goes much more conveniently with the many other articles that fill my saddle wallets. Don’t forget to send me some soap at the earliest opportunity. We are well provided with matches and candles which is a great comfort.

No time to write more

Yours ever Loftus

**October 27th 1914 (the last letter)**

My Dear Girls

I have very much lost count of time recently and really do not know when I wrote to you last, except that I sent a field service postcard the day before yesterday. We have been having a rather strenuous and wearing time and sleep has been somewhat at a discount. Apart from that I am still as fit as ever. I have had several letters and postcards from you which have given me great delight. I have just seen a cutting from the Daily Mail giving the full list of ‘mentions’. After all amidst such a list of names, it is nothing out of the way for one who has been lucky enough to escape being hit to find inclusion. Still to know that it has given you pleasure gives me pleasure too. The patent lighter is very successful, also E’s knitted garment which encircles my body as I write. Tyson’s parcel arrived safely but I did not open it as there was no means of doing anything with it just at the time and the psychological moment for donning the garments has not yet arrived. The weather however is getting more and more autumnal every day and the trees are rapidly shedding their leaves. Nights are a bit chilly too so I daresay it won’t be very long before I have recourse to all the warm garments that I have gathered together.

A most noteworthy incident has just occurred – I should think with parallels in the British Army. We are occupying a line of trenches and who do you think should have come up last night and taken over those on our immediate right but our own 1st battalion. I saw a lot of officers in the dark last night but that is as far as present intercourse is likely to go, for no one can move from a trench in daylight without providing a pot shot for the Hun sharp shooter whose business it is to hide himself in trees, housetops, haystacks and suchlike things, and pick off the unwary. Very good at the job most of them are but it’s an unattractive employment to my mind. So that although so adjacent I don’t know that the 2 battalions are exactly going to see very much of each other.

Well God bless you both. All my thoughts that are not occupied with the immediate present are with you always. I wonder if I got Aunt Bessie’s cigarettes, I don’t think so but I got some which I took to have come from you. I suppose she would include a line or two in the parcel don’t you think

With much love

Yours ever Loftus