

LETTERS HOME

Writing home

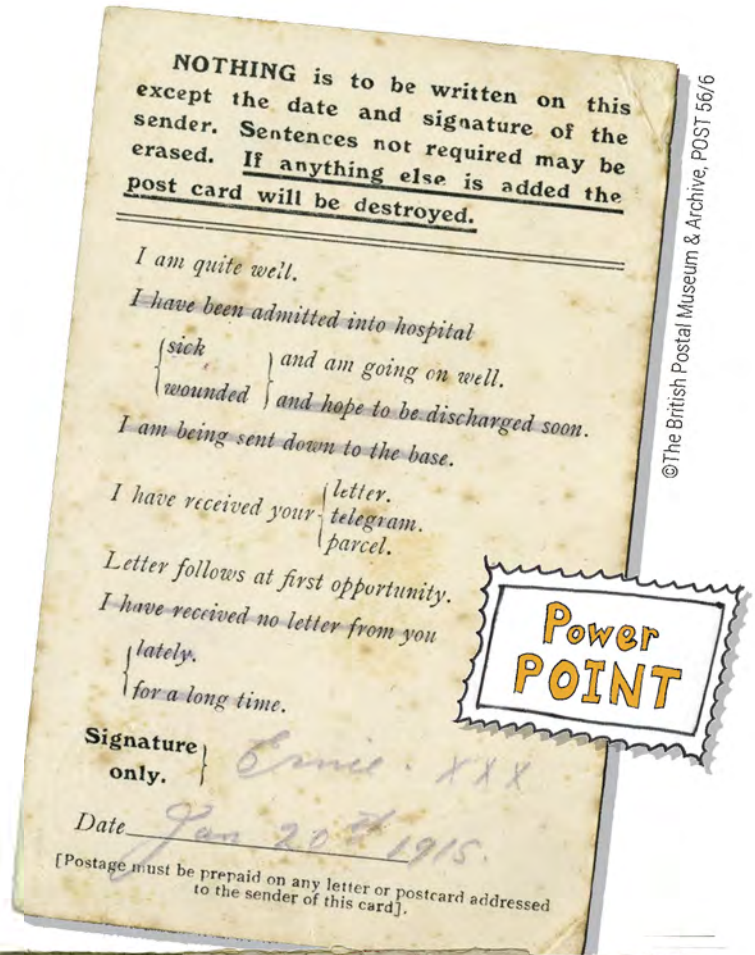
At the beginning of the 20th century, letters were the main way soldiers could stay in touch with their loved ones.

'If a letter from home meant a lot to a soldier when it had travelled a few miles, it must have meant even more when home was 12,000 miles away.'

Major Wilson,
Head of Army Mails in Australia

► A Field Service Card

It was said that the Army Postal Service sent over two billion letters during the First World War. Soldiers were encouraged to use Field Service Cards with simple pre-printed messages that could be crossed out as appropriate and returned for free. If anything else was added, the card was destroyed.



▲ An Honour Envelope

Ordinary letters

Ordinary letters could be sent in special Honour Envelopes. Soldiers signed the envelope to show they hadn't written any sensitive information. These letters took longer and might still be examined by the censor.



Censorship

The censorship of letters and telegrams took place on a large scale during the war on the Home Front, in the field and at sea. The General Post Office worked with the Admiralty, the War Office and Military Intelligence to monitor and control all correspondence leaving and entering Britain to gather information on different people, organisations and military and espionage operations.

► A letter to the Postmaster General authorising censorship

▼ A letter passed by censor



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POSTMASTER-GENERAL TO SUBMIT MESSAGES TO CENSORS.

To the Postmaster-General, and all persons acting under his directions.

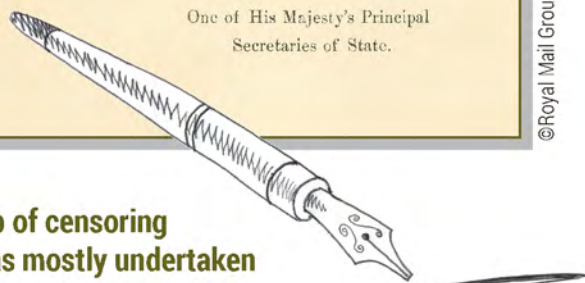
I hereby authorize and direct you in the name and on behalf of His Majesty and until further notice to detain and produce for the inspection of the Army Council their Officers or agents any telegrams transmitted or intended for transmission over the Post Office telegraphs to or from places abroad.

And for so doing this shall be your sufficient warrant.

Given under my hand this 2nd day of August, 1914

R. McKenna

One of His Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State.



▼ The job of censoring letters was mostly undertaken by women on the Home Front



©Reproduced with permission. Graham Mark, British censorship of civil mails during World War I, 1914-1919 (2000)



Parcels

Parcels from home containing items such as socks and food were a big comfort to soldiers. It was estimated that the Army Postal Service sent 114 million parcels during the First World War.

◀ This cartoon illustrates a soldier who had been granted leave and wrote to his wife for the railway fare home - but got socks instead



Newspapers

Newspapers were popular too. Delivery was so efficient that the London morning newspapers were delivered on the day of publication and reached the trenches the following day.

Morale boosters

Sir Evelyn Murray, Secretary to the Post Office reflected that,

'the value of regular and rapid postal service to the morale of the forces was soon recognised.'

One soldier stationed in France, wrote a letter published in a London newspaper saying he was lonely and appealing for someone to write to him. He received 3,000 letters, 98 large parcels and bags of small ones!



Curious addresses

Some soldiers illustrated envelopes to express personal feelings. These were sent to the Tolhurst family and show a change in attitude to the war.

◀ This letter dated September 1914 uses flags to express unity. The middle letter dates from December 1914 and has a more threatening image. The bottom letter was sent to Vera Tolhurst on 11 November 1918

