

LE ROSSIGNOL, C.E.

World War I Nurse Letters and Photographs

[Isle of Jersey, England and France]: 1914-1919.

A collection of 54 letters between C.E. ("Ethel") Le Rossignol and her brother, Arthur, while they were both serving in World War I between 1914 and 1919; C.E. was a nurse and Arthur a soldier with the British Expeditionary Forces. Also included are 106 photographs, measuring 1" x 2.5", in an album with additional loose photos, postcards, and military documents. All letters are very good with age toning and occasional small tears from opening. A significant correspondence with related ephemera outlining the trials and tribulations of the Great War. Most of the letters are written to Le Rossignol, referred to as "Ethel," from Arthur who was stationed in France in 1914 while she was training as a nurse on the Isle of Jersey. He was an officer with the 7th division of the army Motor Machine Guns division. In October of 1914 he writes, "I have had a very busy time ever since a week before war was declared, for our men have to go to their war stations and start getting the searchlights ready for anything." A year later he tells her, "Things don't seem very bright at present do they. What a dastardly trick that is of the Germans using poisonous gases." His sister was stationed in Jersey training as a nurse and obtaining her ambulance license. "I hope you like your new quarters and that they are better than the pub. You must be quite skilled now as a nurse, what did the new French surgeon think of you?" Le Rossignol moved from Jersey to England and eventually to France during the course of her service. In a letter from June 10th, 1915 she says, "Our dear blesses [patients] sent us the most glorious bouquets of flowers, and no prima donna on this earth we feel can be prouder than we are of our bouquets. They said such charming things to us, and we go in and visit them and their faces light up with pleasure...it really seems so little that one can do for these brave heroes. As I always tell them they have been our living wall and protected us and we can never never repay them." Spending years apart on separate fronts, they nevertheless kept each other informed. In one letter Arthur writes, "We're having lovely weather just now and everything seems so quiet and peaceful that you can't imagine the horrible killing and worse going on not too very far away -- I wonder when it will all stop." Reporting to Ethel from a fight in April of 1918 Arthur says, "We have had a very strenuous time...our fellows fought extremely well but owing to weight of numbers and an infernal fog, principally fog, we had to give way." Included are C.R. Le Rossignol's photographs from her days in the hospital, among them are numerous examples of wounded soldiers on crutches or in bed, nurses in their uniforms, and ambulances. Ethel writes of her one post, "the hospital is the Hotel Royal there -- a big military hospital, French of course -- and they think they can give us plenty of work.... I think the strain of war is felt everywhere and one just has to keep on saying "Courage" to oneself." She was also certified as an ambulance driver by the Women's Legion Motor Drivers and her license is present. An intriguing and extensive collection of material examining a lengthy tour of duty from the perspectives of both a nurse and a soldier. The casualty rates in the front were catastrophic, and the chances of finding such a complete correspondence that effectively spans the entirety of the war is at least unusual, if not remote. List: 54 letters in envelope 10 postcards Photo album 6.5" x 8" with 106 black and white photographs of nurses, soldiers, and hospitals. 11" x 8.5" Comite Britannique de la Croix Rouge Francaise roll sheet. 13" x 8" Secret 30th Division Order No. 67 form. April 14th, 1918 Three 3.5" x 5" loose sepia toned photographs of a hospital ward and nurses. Two 3.5" x 5.5" Louis Icart color prints. 4" x 5" Adult War ration book 3.5" x 5.5" color postcard of nurses taking care of a soldier. 4.75" x 6" Women's Legion Motor Driver's certification. 11.5" x 9" Church Army Soldiers' Hostel Sick Leave form.