“The country *(France)* is exceedingly pleasant. In it India is forgotten. I do not wish the war to end soon. I should like to die in this country and I have no intention of returning to India. If you want anything, write to me. May the Holy Guru *(the founder of Sikhism)* save me from India. I hope you will answer this quickly, telling me you are well. I am in great comfort as I am always away from the squadron. Tell Basant Kaur from me to look carefully after the children and have them well-schooled, fed and clothed. There is no need to think of the cost. She can spend as much as she likes on them. But I have no hope of seeing them again – nor do I wish to see them. For I have found a good opportunity of sacrificing my life and I hope to pay my debt with loyalty.”

Extract from a letter dated 4 January 1916 from Sowar Natha Singh in France to Sapuran Singh, Lyallpur District, Punjab

“The Sikh roars like a lion on the field of battle,  
And yields *(gives)* up his life as a sacrifice:  
Whoever is fortunate enough to be born a Rajput *(Indian warrior)*Never fears the foe (*the enemy*) in battle:  
He gives up all thought of worldly pleasure,  
And dreams only of the battle field:  
He who dies on the field of battle,  
His name never dies, but lives in history:  
He who fronts the foe boldly in battle,  
Has God for his protection:  
Once a Sikh takes the sword in hand, he has only one aim: victory!

A poem dated 18 April 1916 from Dafadar Nathan Singh of the 2nd Lancers in France to Sowar Puran Singh of the State Cavalry, Jind State, Punjab

“Brother, I fell ill with pneumonia and have come away from the war. In this country *(Britain)* it rains a great deal: always day and night it rains. So pneumonia is very rife. Now I am quite well and there is no occasion *(reason)* for any kind of anxiety… If any of us is wounded or is otherwise ill, Government or someone else always treats him very kindly. Our Government takes great care of us and we too will be loyal and fight. You must give the Government all the help it requires. Now look, you my brother, our father the King–Emperor of India needs us and any of us who refuses to help him in his need should be counted among the most polluted sinners. It is our first duty to show his loyal gratitude to Government.”

An extract from a letter dated 15 January 1915 from a wounded Sikh in hospital in England to his brother in Amritsar District, Punjab

“The German is very strong. His planes sail the clouds and drop shells from the sky: his mines dig up the earth and his hidden craft strike below the sea. Bombs and blinding acid are thrown from his trenches which are only 100 to 50 yards from ours. He has countless machine guns which kill the whole firing line when in attack. When he attacks we kill his men. The dead lie in heaps. England is full of wounded. No man can return to the Punjab whole. Only the broken–limbed can go back. The regiments that came first are finished – here and there a man remains. Reinforcements have twice and three times brought them up to strength but straightaways they were used up. The German is very strong.”

An extract from a letter dated 15 April from Gyan Singh at the Indian Army Depot in Milford-on-Sea, England, to his brother in Punjab

“What you say in your letter about not being disloyal to the Emperor *(King George V)* and it being the religion of Sikhs to die facing the foe – all that you say is true. But if only you yourself could be here and see for yourself! Any shrivelled…fellow can fire the gun and kill a score of us at our food in the kitchen. Ships sail the sky like kites. Wherever you look, machine guns and canon begin to shoot and bombs fly out which kill every man they hit. The earth is mined and filled with powder; when men walk upon it, the powder is lit and up go the men! There is no fighting face to face. Guns massacre regiments sitting ten miles off. Put swords or pikes or staves in our hands and the enemy over us with like arms then indeed we should show you how to fight face to face! But if no one faces us what can we do? No one stands up to fight us. Everyone sits in a burrow underground. They fight in the sky, on the sea in battleships, under the earth in mines. My friend, a man who fights upon the ground can hardly escape. You tell me to fight face to the foe. Die we must – but alas, not facing the foe! My friend, the cannons are such that they throw a shell weighing twelve maunds *(12x40 kgs)* which destroys the earth five hundred paces round about where it falls. We are in France. It is very cold country… It is a fair country and the people are like angels. All they lack is wings… The fighting is along a line of 300 miles. England, France, Italy, Belgium, Russia – these five are on one side; Germany, Turkey, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria – these five on the other. The battle sways evenly balanced. None can kill the other. When it ends there will be peace. No one knows when this will be.”

Extract from a letter dated 18 October 1915 from a Sikh of the Field Post Office 13 (possibly in France) to Mahant Partab Das in Patiala State, Punjab

“The attack came off on the 10th at seven o’clock in the morning. We fix bayonets and look towards the enemy. The enemy trenches are two yards off. They have been well built. In front is barbed wire and we are not expected to attack here. With a shout to our Guru *(the founder of Sikhism)* we hurl ourselves forward. The enemy’s bullets scorch our heroes while machine guns and cannons spread their shot upon us. We leap the wire entanglements and overwhelm the enemy, killing some and capturing the rest. On the 10th we captured 1050 Germans and took four lines of trenches defending the city of La Bassee. Here from the beginning the enemy have been very strong. On the 10th and 12th we took two miles of enemy position. Next day at five o’clock the Germans attacked in eight lines. There was fine fighting on the battlefield. Eight lines of the enemy were destroyed. We also suffered great loss in killed and wounded. On that day no one took thought of his friend and the slightly wounded man made his way back himself. If severely wounded, a man lay out in the battlefield. When the sun set in the evening, the rain began to fall. The wounded were picked up and sent back. The enemy attacked fiercely but were beaten back with great loss. We did not give up our trenches but pressed the enemy very hard. They could not recapture their lost lines. From the 10th to the 25th the German lost 70,613 men.”

Extract from a letter dated 5 April 1915 describing the Battle of Neuve Chapelle from a Sikh soldier of the 59th Rifles in a hospital in England to his brother in India

“I pray to you my brothers, Hindu and Musselman *(Muslim)* to join together and break the English lock *(the British hold on India)*. There is no withstanding Germany. Germany burns up all (who)come against her. Let no army come from India. Soon there will be a mutiny in India. Let you men join and put an end to the English. Germany marches forward dealing death. She has put Belgium to death and a half of France. Very soon she will be the death of England.”

Anonymous letter post marked Vancouver, Canada, 4 November 1914, addressed to a Sikh soldier (Note: there were anti-British Indian nationalists, among them Sikhs, living in Canada who sent such letters to Indian soldiers that supported German propaganda; they wanted to encourage a mutiny among British Indian soldiers)

“Be strong and fear not. Maintain a cheerful heart. Do heroic deeds. Let not your courage fail to show the spirit of a brave soldier… Trust in the everlasting God. Other hopes are vain.”

Extract from a letter dated 6 March 1915 from a Sikh in hospital in Brighton to his brother in France

“In the last two days our people have driven the enemy far back and have taken about 3000 prisoners. The enemy are now very frightened. When our men without a thought for their own dear lives and in loyalty to our own dear government reached the enemy’s trenches, the Germans in fear threw down their rifles and came running towards us with their hands up. Now we hope that victory is very near, I expect that you will see your son very soon.”

Extract from a letter dated 13 March 1915 from a Sikh officer to his father

“Do not be anxious. If I die you will profit greatly, for (*the*) government will give (*a*) pension. Why should you worry? If I live then government will give us more.”

A wounded Sikh soldier in hospital to his wife in India 1915

“I pray (to) the Guru *(the founder of Sikhism)* (that) I may return home. I do not know for certain but I expect so. For I was hit on my trigger finger and the third part of it is cut off. So I hope I shall return neither to the battle nor to the trench. I have twice escaped the bullet and I'm ready to do loyal service again. Since none of us fear death, the Guru has hardened our hearts to stone. Not one of us who went into battle took any thought of his home or his brothers. It is good for a man to die in battle in this way.”

Extract from a letter dated 21 January 1915 from a wounded Sikh in New Milton Hospital, England, to his brother in Amritsar District, Punjab

“Thousands and hundreds of soldiers have lost their lives. If you go on the field of battle and see corpses piled up on corpses so that there is no place to put hand or foot. Men have died from the stench. No-one has any hope of survival, for back to Punjab will go only those who have lost a leg and arm or an eye. The whole world has been brought to destruction.”

Extract from an undated Sikh soldiers’ letter

“Do not be anxious. If I die you will profit greatly, for government will give a pension. Why should you worry? If I live then government will give us more.”

Extract from a letter dated 1915 from a wounded Sikh in hospital in England to his wife in India