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20th Regt
N.Z.E.F.
Middle East Forces.

752/6
Western Desert
4/12/40.

My dear Jim,

I'll address this to C/o M. Canby as suggested & hope you will remember me very kindly to all the boys. It looks to me like a good party. Last year I looked over towards D'Naville Island and wondered if you would by any chance see the convoy but the morning was misty & we passed well clear of land.

Your latest two letters, Nos. 11 & 14 were waiting when I got back from leave two days ago & were as welcome as ever. Many of us are finding our correspondence dwindling with the passing months, though mine has not, and it's good to see your first nearly every week.

I had a very good leave, spent a lot of money, saw nearly all my old friends recently arrived & others left at home, thoroughly enjoyed myself & was unfeignedly glad to get back. It shows what a good manager I am that I left Cairo with 10 partners only, having scandalized the portier & by giving him only 1 pt. tip for carrying my luggage out, but I couldn't afford any more. Ross my driver had 7, knowing my belated 0, we renamed our resources and bought 5 cakes & 3 oranges at the Halfway House & were glad to have a clean run for 300 miles & reach the battalion in time for dinner.

I spent a good deal of time at Maadi, lunched with Alvin A & B messes & with the 1st Regt, had dinner with the 26th, our sister battalion, who made a special night of it & with the Medical Corps

at Helwan, & with the General at the Turf Club, had a very merry dinner party with Pallcuttwards, Mrs Daff & Miss & another even brighter with Parkinson & Miss (C.O.s of 4th & 6th Field Regts) after Helioptis Races, did 10 miles of a route march with the 6th Bde, lunched with the C.O of the Officers Training School, took a couple nurses out to dinner & the pictures, had morning tea with Father McKay, never went to bed before two or got up later than 8 & generally had a hectic week. Coming back into Cairo after dinner with the 20th driving by myself I kept on on for what seemed an unusual time & finally noticed the Nile on my ^{right} left. On all previous journeys from Maadi to Cairo the Nile had been on my left so I stopped to investigate. I couldn't straighten out the geography so carried on & arrived safely back at the outskirts of Maadi, whence of course, by keeping a sharp eye to see that the river played no more tricks, it was easy to get back to Cairo. Very busy driving in a blacker out - is one explanation.

At the races here, all the horses are little Arabes, a lot of them grey, the crowd consists of British & Dominion soldiers of a hundred different regiments uniforms, Greeks, Gypsies, genuine shaggy sheikhs, about 10 descriptions of herantines and many smartly dressed women of whom only a small proportion behave as if they would pass a virginity test. You can place bets from 20 ft. upward & back you win a place, for the first two horses on for a double. The 6 races are run very close together & all is over in about 2 hrs. The general opinion is that most of the running is dishonest, it certainly looks it, only smallish crowds attend, there are tremendous bars and as one and all the soldiers have a drink between all races and one is constantly being importuned it is doubtful whether

The Methodist Conference would approve of the proceedings, but it was very good fun once in a while. The Robinsons struck a double @ got 838 pt for 20, but hasn't got them now.

We are doing more training than digging now & practicing attacks rather than defense which is a sign of the times, thanks largely to the Greeks. Yesterday we did an attack under a nice barrage of live shell kindly supplied by the same. The Robinsons from 16 guns. It gave me a queer nostalgic feeling for old forgotten times to walk forward under the whizzing shells. In the afternoon it got very cold & the ~~the~~ wind came up & we came in marching knives on a compass bearing with visibility about 50 yards and our mouths full of sand. In fact the weather has become damned cold & four blankets plus greatcoat are only just enough.

Adjutant just called to say we have to supply another platoon for aerodrome guard - which company? A. Cy, that will leave B & C intact, D is away and one other platoon of A, it's a fair devil, everyone is calling on us for patrols & escorts @ guards, the sooner we are out of this the better. There is in fact a rumour that we are to be relieved by Xmas & will go back for Divisional exercises and a holiday over Xmas. Hope so, I'm getting annoyed about all these bloody guards etc.

Have been having a good deal of reorganising about. Honnwell & Spier, my two senior majors have gone to Base jobs, leaving Jim Burrows & I. I've made Cameron adjutant instead of Kempthorne & while changes were on made several others which surprised one or two folk, won't interest you but will do good probably. H.C. Cy has

been getting a shade slack but with Spiers, Humphreys & S.M. Burch replaced by Lee, Cameron & Sgt Brooks it will shortly be back to standard. Sickness returns are very slack & for some months our figures have been the lowest in the Bde. Even on leave the men are behaving perfectly. McLean who did 84 days detention for numerous crimes between Jany & Feb, & seemed likely to be invariable returned from leave last week in good order so far no changes have followed him. Lally sent out early noon & was on Amritsar Day when I gave him 21 days for failing to double when so ordered & demanded back for Ct-Mtl for being 10 minutes absent from his AA post. He got 90 days.

The men are well fed & clothed, are in extremely good health & scarcely go sick. Their letters are a good guide, I receive abt 50 every week and it months since I struck a quare. We have the advantage of a long time as a unit without fighting, giving everyone the chance to learn his work & to fit in, but it really is wonderful how smoothly everything goes, whatever the conditions. We had a draft of 100 men from the 3rd Rgt this week. They are a good lot. I think they are trained but there is an immense difference between them & the older hands.

Sunday afternoon -

Censuring letters the other day I came on this. One boy writing to his girl friend described how he'd saved his water allowance for days until he had enough for a bath. Then he said, I worked up as far as possible, then down as

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far as possible and then I worked Possible.

Sunday afternoon, a lot of
bombers about some distant camping but
all managed to come working. Went to Church
Parade this morning, very poor man, then
spent some time walking about & working out
a practice company ^{at} on part of our position.
After lunch walked some miles to our neighbour
battalion, the 18th, Gray was out so walked back
have just had some afternoon tea.

Our camp is amazingly comfortable.
Everywhere mines got dug in to shelters, apart
from the trench work, all our cookhouses are dug
in & everyone meals under cover. We are quite
 snug for any weather so are bound to be shifted
soon. We had heavy rain last week and a
few dug outs were flooded but everyone was able
to keep dry. Another rain would do no damage.
A lot of trenches got stuck in loose sand turned
into mud but they are all out now.

Have been playing chess quite a lot
in these long evenings. I can beat anyone here
provided I don't get careless.

Another day or two before I need
port this so I'll knock off I hope you have had
good fishing up to now.

Monday.

I'll proceed a little further, it will
do you good struggling with my walking. Nothing
has happened in the meantime. Pat Smart
managed to get tight last night & for reasons

cleaner to him than than later decided to take his friends - from another By - home per Breen Cannon. He then decided for similar reasons to stay the night & arrived back this morning both he & the Cannon wearing a derelict & shame-faced look. He was rebuffed to perhaps only 6 days pay but his candour saved him. Then I pottered about, spent a couple hours working out & going out for this practice attack & as long in selecting a mountain range in the wild country in front of our wire. Planes have been very busy all day but nothing has come near us.

A month or more ago the whole attitude was different & we expected a desperate fight. But our old acquaintances, 1st & 2nd Libyan Divs, 62nd & 63rd Metropolitan, 1st & 2nd Blackburn, Libyan Armoured Div, have come no closer & gradually the time is changing. The practice attacks now. When, a while ago, they were expected daily, we were going to put in a furious counter-attack and I had the main staff with the 20th. It was a real desperate show though we would have made a hell of a dint - I couldn't see us getting back. But I had the whole Bn wound up to go & it has been bitterly disappointing as the weeks have passed without anything. Now the talk is that we won't be used until the whole Div is assembled & trained to our pitch and we are very annoyed with Bernard & ^{with} Western Desert Force, who at this moment we suspect of having a show on while we wait in reserve. The air is full of rumours of an advance but we are still twiddling our thumbs. This has sort of hunched me out, I'll write more tomorrow when we may know what's happening.

Tuesday.

We are almost speechless with indignation. We are

Camps Reserve, Camps Reserve! for this show and so on
 won't get into it at all. And a fortnight ago it
 was to be largely our show & we were practising with
 the tenters. Oh well. I'm sure there must be some
 decision of the N.Z. Govt that we are not to be
 used until the blizz is complete & God knows when
 that will be with the 2d Ech. still in England. The
 only consolation is that the Cumies are not in it
 either. It just doesn't bear talking about. The
 rit looks at one another as glum as fish.

Very nasty blizzard today. Can see
 about 50 yards & dad is reeling in. Just nearly
 fed up. It's quite impossible either to work or dig.
 I will probably hold up the advance a bit. And cold,
 all meaning oncoats. Would much rather be
 home in the garden.

Our Xmas Mail should come
 up soon. We have ordered great spreads for
 the tenters for Xmas day, but if still here will
 be rallied in detachments on amoducane eli guards,
 that is if mine not guarding prisoners when people
 take! Had better stop. I'm not in a very
 good humour for the moment.

I hope you have a jolly
 good voyage. It would be a treat to be listening
 to the birds up behind Bulmer. This desert
 full of bonny birds at present, a lot of them
 migrating. The natives have a net-sound every bush
 in fault & when the birds land exhausted from crossing
 the sea they get their feet tangled. Sprouting unpleasant
 of kedamin. A nice little robin is an honorary
 member of the crew. No fish about now.

Kindest regards to everyone

Kip.