

Cairo

2/6/40

Dear friends,

There is a lot of dirty work going on. France crushed, Italy in for the jackals work, Britain bracing for terrific times, Egypt cut off from the world & we are. You will imagine us on the Libyan frontier, sweltering in the desert, close to action.

We'll wine not, at the moment. We're doing important enough work and having an interesting time, but living in near luxury. My HQ. are in the Kasr el Nil Barracks, I occupy part of the old Khedivial palace, sharing two rooms with a Scots Guards Major, having meals on a mahogany table on the balcony above the Nile, a charming scene with moonlight on the river, candles & palms. By midday I have visited the companies, done anything required in the orderly room and am free to sleep or play. 3 afternoons this week I've played cricket; this I'll write letters. It is not quite a demoralising life, rather a very pleasant respite. & it is quite unexpected.

It is difficult to write without offending against censorship requirements. You will realize that we are isolated here, have had

only this Mail for many weeks & couldn't get home at present if we wanted to. Today we hear that the 2nd Echelon has arrived in England & of course that introduces some odd complications. We are a little envious of them, though to do us justice, only because we are afraid they may see fighting before we do. After all we were the first and ~~old~~ tenacious of our little privileges & although we feel very forgotten & hear from many sources that these latter people are much better quality & don't include nearly so many wops, heathens and bankrupts (a good many of us did desert our mines & families its true, 30 of my 40 officers in one unit alone) still we consider we are entitled to do the first fighting. We don't really feel so bitter, but for the moment if we are worried & disappointed. We really did think better of the Egyptians than to leave us alone like this for so long - 10 days I suppose it is.

It was an Italian Lieutenant-General whom our armoured cavalry captured the other day. They caught him in the Italian back areas & he is very pained. The British Battalion with us has to supply guards for the prisoners, a ridiculous job to have them on, but they have had some fun with the General. He has been roaring like a bull at his perfectly good treatment, thinks he should be being on parade at the Continental, has been hunger striking & generally acting like a goat. No doubt he is disappointed but a lot of other reavers will have to put up

with disappointment. I should expect the Italians, with German help, to have a real crack at this country before very long & we will have all the fighting we want.

It is curious that that is not a figure of speech merely. We have no illusions but are really anxious to get going. There was a thrilling scene in the picture theatre at Maadi Camp the night Italy declared war. About 800 men there, an officer of Lieut W.C. came on to the stage & got silence. "I'm sorry to say Italy has declared war." In an instant every man was on his feet. There was a spontaneous roar, not a split second's pause or hesitation. Then everyone was told to get back to his unit & off they went in all directions all running & delighted. But there is a grim note in them & as I remember saying at the farewell in Hongkong they mean business.

By the way, the official photographers came round last week and I believe that the photos will soon be in Auckland weekly & your Lance as well as at the pictures. The infantry shown are 20th Bn & you will understand why I sometimes appear proud of them. I think you will find your humble servant in the one of the Bn in close column of companies.

"We have had 4 months good training here and have done it honestly. We can march, however hot, can dig, in fact we get below ground almost in a twinkling, can handle our numerous &

Complicated transport weapons, can shoot - about
 400. are marksmen, can go without sleep & can
 sleep in the heat of the desert sun, which is harder
 & as important, can drill, far better than even I've
 seen N.Z. troops do peace or war. We have rid
 ourselves of the weathlings & wasters and all we
 want is a few line wounds. So far I think the
 best thing mine done as a battalion was to put up
 the camp for two British battalions, some 180 ^{small} mangroves
 & over 100 hell tents, temperature about 125° in the
 sun and a blinding khamsen all day, not only that
 but to clean out their morning huts, purpase vegetables
 & cash & meal & then meet them at the siding with
 transport & band. The British Brigadier wrote to
 say that in all his experience he'd never known
 anything like it.

Generally, the troops are acquiring a very
 good reputation here. An R.S.C. sergeant was sent
 with two loaders & explorers for Engineers near the
 frontier. Off he went, about 300 miles desert road
 crested in the evening. Engineers had gone on -
 would be at a certain map reference - only some
 stones among other stones, 80 miles on. Off again
 checked the map reference - a party there said
 R.E.s were 40 miles further on - actually in Libya,
 couldn't cross desert at night. Would try & diet,
 duly delineating explorers to 120 miles past-delineating
 point.

Called away.

Next day.

I was called away and have been very fully employed. For a little while we thought to me might start business and it was good to see the alacrity with which the men got ready and their great eagerness. Also to feel myself quite cool & burning over with good humor. But nothing came of it. However last night we had an air raid warning & everyone says there was a hell of a row, searchlights going at top @ AA batteries in full swing, but I slept through it & only heard this morning.

For weeks past & increasingly today people have been streaming out of Cairo. Every few minutes carts loaded with furniture pass our posts & the crowds in the streets are appreciably smaller. I was out at Maadi this morning & came back through the head city 'Old Cairo' & there is a tremendous difference since I was there a week ago. Alexandria was well bombed last night & again this afternoon.

Paris Mail letters from Jimmie & Ruth, dated June 6th were more than welcome last night. Letters have a high morale value so help to keep me up, but it's not yet any one writing anything but Paris Mail.

Things were bad enough when they wrote. I often think of Jim twiddling his fingers and getting nothing but bad news.

Do you remember in the lecture on European Armies that I gave last year I said that the spontaneous power efficiency of the German Army was the dominating factor in Europe, that the French seemed to me to have become too wedded to the defensive, thanks to that unfortunate conception, the Maginot line, that the Russians were probably clumsy & inefficient & that the British & Norwegian armies, among others, were inefficient. I can say I told you so. I refrain from recasting my notion of the Italian Army. I we should be trying it out before very long. We've come through an incredible series of disasters, we must be near the end of them.

Nothing much in the way of reliable news. It is hot & getting hotter. I'm simply smothering with the effort of writing. Maadi Camp is the oddest sight, scattered over square miles & everyone with his private hole to go to. There we have been working very hard to dig our air raid shelters. Very little leave and no sight-seeing. Heard from Rex just before the great offensive started. Hope if alive will hear from him a not soon, though it would still have to get here. One parcel & a lot of mail is in England with the 2nd Echelon.

With kindest regards to everyone.

Howard on Kip

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Egypt.

If I have more than good of some of you to help with with wood as you have been doing.