

Zeitoun

3 April

My dear Hazel,

I wonder how and where you are spending Easter. You are not likely to be at the tournament: it is at Auckland this year, I think. We are unfortunately still in the same place, but I really believe we are moving next week. At least the Colonel has been talking about three days' heavy fighting as soon as we land, and the sergeant-majors are engaged today in weeding out the unfit (we are over strength, and some men will have to be left at the base with the reinforcements). So the rumour specialists are at work again, and it is said that we are leaving about Wednesday. Whenever things get a little too slow we always get a rumour to brighten up our hopes. Not that we are so very keen on getting to the front. I know we are supposed to pretend that we are, but now that our first enthusiasm is over, I think most of us are quite willing to keep our skins whole. But we would give anything

to get out of this. The heat, and consequently the food, is getting worse and worse, and the flies and filth are awful. We are getting up very early (4 o'clock reveillé as a rule), and that makes a long weary day of it. On the other hand, we are getting plenty of leisure in the middle of the day, when it is too hot to work, and I am never short of a good book to read. I took to gambling for a while, but never found much pleasure in it, and it has no further attractions for me. I am very lucky in that way: none of the ordinary vices are in my line.

I don't know that our routine work has any interest, but I have nothing else to tell you about, so I will just give you this last week's programme. Monday - rifle exercises after breakfast, divisional review by Sir Ian Hamilton after an early lunch. I suppose he couldn't come at any other time, but they took us out in the full heat of the day, and the dust was the worst I have known it. The shower baths are the best institution in camp.

Tuesday - attack practice in the morning, five till twelve, and night outpost work in the evening. Wednesday - street fighting over at Mataria from six till nine in the morning, and a review march in the evening, 6.30 to nine. Thursday - route march five till twelve. We covered fifteen miles - it doesn't sound much, but we were struggling across desert and along rough, dusty canal embankments, and finished by marching at attention through Zeitoun. A very healthy life, you see - a grand life in a way, but just a little too rough and comfortless.

Yesterday (Good Friday) was a complete holiday, and proved to be a notable day - I suppose you will have seen the shameful news in the papers. I am glad to say that I had the sense to keep right out of the riot. I was in that quarter of the town when it started, but I went away for dinner and then home to camp. There is no doubt that the conduct of our troops was degrading and disgraceful, and though the "red caps"

(military police) appear to have been rash in opening fire when other measures might have been better, still our men were absolutely, in the wrong. When I got back to camp, I was "booked" for the picket which was being sent to town, but like Hamlet of old (he was an awful rotter, you know) I couldn't decide which way to act, so I just slipped out of it. I didn't want to fire on our men, yet I certainly had no sympathy with them. However, luckily there was no further violence, and the whole thing was over by ten o'clock.

I had spent a very happy day before that, in spite of the shock of seeing a poor Arab boy run over by a car full of mad Australians, and instantly killed. I went to the zoological gardens, out at Giza, in the morning. I had somehow missed going there before, when everyone else went, so I had to go alone, and spent one of those unsocial days which are so much to my taste. The zoo contains a complete collection of African animals and birds, many of them strange and interesting.

The gardens are also, to a certain extent, botanical, and are beautifully laid out. There are miles of foot-paths of mosaic work, consisting of coloured pebbles set in cement, and many beautiful groves of trees. The ride in the tram is also a very enjoyable one, with a view from the Citadel to the pyramids, and many glimpses of the Nile, which, after my first disappointment at its size, I have found to be a very picturesque river. I returned to town for a late, delicious lunch, and spent the afternoon in the bazaars and book-shops, with a rest at the Soldiers' Club.

Today and tomorrow were to be holidays also, but it has already been announced that there will be no leave after noon tomorrow (because of our departure, say the gossips), and I think it will be stopped today also, on account of the riot. However, I am getting my letters finished early, in the hope of getting to town this ~~evening~~ afternoon.

There is a large French and English army at Alexandria, which is to be the

base in the operations at the Dardanelles. I met Mr Chrystall, an ex-student who is with the Naval Brigade, and had two days' leave to come to Cairo. I don't think you knew him. He used to be captain of the college football team, and after finishing his engineering course went to Cambridge, and from there to Nigeria, where he joined.

I don't think Bob Livingstone will return to New Zealand. He actually likes this place, and wants to get a government post here.

We got no mail this week: it is only fortnightly again. I hope we don't move too soon to get the mail due on Tuesday.

I am enclosing two photos - one a little informal group, the other of our company scouts. Unfortunately I have a half-grown moustache, which I couldn't bear to sacrifice even for the photos.

The bustle and excitement has been steadily growing all the morning. I must go and see what is doing. Good-bye, my own darling. With best love from Cecil.