

No. 1 N. Z. General Hospital
Brockenhurst, Banto
10 October '16.

My dear Hazel,

Next to receiving letters from you there is nothing I like better than writing to you, provided I have plenty of time and am not feeling too dull. At present there is no prospect of getting a letter from you, so I am writing to you really before my time. I was afraid of spoiling you or I would always have written more than once a week. I am dreadfully afraid I will spoil you when I come home.

I forget exactly what I told you about my wound, but it is not so very bad. The toe part was shattered and had to be removed to prevent gangrene. The operation was very successful and it is doing splendidly, but of course that was not a regular

amputation and it can't be left as it is. So I am to have another operation as soon as the foot is perfectly clean and healthy, and that will give me quite a good foot for walking. It is good-bye to football and such frolics, but it won't make much difference to ordinary occupations, so I am quite resigned to it and even thankful - that it is no worse.

I had come to believe that I had a charmed life and would never be wounded, and as far as Fritz or the Turk was concerned I believe that was so, for I have a notion it was one of our own bombs that got me. We had gone up beyond Flers on the night of the 24th, and occupied a new trench, ready for the attack at noon next day. I was

digging with a shovel in the bottom of the trench when I was suddenly struck. It may have been a "whizz-bang" shell from straight along the trench, but I would hardly have got off so lightly, and besides they can generally be heard coming, so I think it was a Mills bomb lying half-buried. But I can't explain what caused it to explode. A blow with a shovel wouldn't do it, unless the bomb was defective in some way. However, even a bomb should have smashed everything within five yards, so I guess I was lucky - the shovel must have borne the brunt of it.

I have just said good-bye to Peter Parr. I shall miss him very much but I am jolly pleased

all the same. Thanks to Canon
Burton, he has been appointed
a chaplain, and has gone up to
Borncurch, where he will be
stationed for a time. He has
come to see me every evening,
and brought me fruit and chocolates,
so naturally I regret his going, but
I am sure he will be better suited
and will be a great success.
Stan. McCallum is in another ward
with a fractured thigh, reported
to be doing well. Three of my
company officers are in the officers'
hospital here, but so far as I can
find out Ben Saxon is not here.
I have just seen the news of his
brother Jack's death. This must be
a terrible time for the people
at home.

Of course I have lost all my belongings again, but the only thing that mattered was my diary, which I had kept pretty fully all the year. Anything like that had to be left behind when we went into action, otherwise I would have had it in my pocket with my pay-book and your photos. I hope the man who gets it will send it on to me, because the censorship was so strict in France, and there were all sorts of things, especially at Armentières, that I couldn't tell you about at the time. After we left Armentières, during our long round-about journey to the Somme, we had some most enjoyable times, which I would have liked to tell you more about. These were the stages of the trek - Armentières, Steinbecque, Wardrecque, St Omer, Abbéville (by train), Mérélessart, Airaines, Coisy, La Chaussée, Albert, Fricourt, Mametz Wood.

We only stayed at the very small villages, four days at Wardrecque, twelve at Mérélessart, four at La Chaussée. I got one day at St Omer (I think I told you about it) but that and Boulogne, ^{at Hazebrouck} were the only big towns I ever saw in France, for Armentières could hardly be counted as an ordinary town. While at La Chaussée I paid several visits to Picquigny-sur-Somme, a small town but very pretty and interesting. France somehow always appealed more to my imagination than any other country, and now that I know it slightly I am more in love with it than ever. And I met such nice people there, especially at Armentières, Mérélessart and La Chaussée. We reached Fricourt (the old German front line) on Sept. 10th. The 3rd (Rifle) Brigade went right on next day and

took over the trenches between
Delville Wood and High Wood (the
latter was then partly held by the
Germans). The 2nd Brigade went into
reserve at Mametz Wood, and we
(1st Brigade) remained four days in
camp at Fricourt, supplying big
fatigue parties every day ^{and night} for the
front line - a six mile tramp each
way. I had a good look round behind
the lines - Mametz, Contalmaison,
Montauban, Bazentin, Longueval.
All the country that has been fought
over is simply ploughed and
shattered, every inch of it. The
German dug-outs are wonderful works,
but more safe than practical, for
it must have taken a fatally long
time to get up out of them. I also saw
a demonstration by the tanks, which
up to then had never been in action.
On the night of the 14th we went up to

Mametz Wood, and next day the advance began. The first line of German trenches was taken by the 2nd Otago Battalion, and the rest of the day's work was carried out by the 3rd Brigade - two more lines of trenches, part of Flers village, a sunken road, and another line of trenches. All this was brilliantly carried out, the total advance being just over two miles; but it was found that the British on either side of us had not been able to do so well. They cleared High Wood and the remainder of Flers, but could get no further, so our fellows had to withdraw from their final objective to a position just beyond Flers and the sunken road. Our day's work was carrying ammunition. We got through Fritz's half-hearted barrage wonderfully well, having only seven casualties in the whole

a taste of hell, and nothing but the strain and excitement ever took me through it. I had a peculiar faculty for working on when other men were exhausted, and doing without sleep or rest day after day, but it was unnatural and the reaction came as soon as it was over. So I collapsed as soon as I knew we were going off to Lemnos last September, and again after the evacuation. The business of killing has always been terribly distasteful to me, and serious as my injury is I am thankful to be out of it with a clear conscience - and my life.

I have had quite a lot of callers so far. There are several of our company here, walking cases, and they come to see me every day. Then

there are several High School
(Simaru) old boys on the staff,
besides other men whom I have
met in the army or in New Zealand.

Well, the light is not very
good in the evening, so I will
close now. This will probably
find you in the midst of exam-
troubles, so I hope you will not
give yourself any extra worry on
my behalf. I assure you I am doing
splendidly and am well cared for.

With lots of love to you, dear,
from
 Cecil.