

[~~front~~^{2nd} line] 23 May '16.

Dearest Hazel,
I am writing from the trenches
once again, after five months of peaceful training. It is not exactly pleasant to be back again, but I am quite a good soldier now, and don't feel any nervousness or strain from the presence of danger. But then the danger, in the state of quietness prevailing on this front at present, is nothing compared with Gallipoli. We have had a few casualties from shell fire, and must expect them to continue, but on the whole one feels pretty well at ease, and then on Sunday night we go back to town and comparative luxury. We have had three days here in the second line, loafing all day and working away at trenches and shell-proof shelters etc. at night. If it were not for the scarcity of sleep we would be quite comfortable. I have never yet mastered the art of taking my sleep in fragments, and it is the worst part of the job of platoon sergeant that one is ~~never~~^{hardly} left alone for more than half-an-hour at a time. Tomorrow we move into the front line, and stay there four days. We expect an easier time there, much less work but perhaps more strain and discomfort. The Germans are several hundred yards away directly in front of us, but just on our left

they are within fifty yards. We are at the most advanced point of a big salient, so that the Germans are on three sides of us, but a good distance away. The country is perfectly flat, with a good many trees still standing, and very long grass and wild flowers. To get to our nightly work from our present bivouacs we have to walk about half-a-mile up a sunken foot-path (one could hardly call it a sap) floored with ~~the~~ wooden gangways. It is safe enough in the day-time, because the trees and hedges block the enemy's view, and anyhow he has to keep well down himself; but at night the snipers climb trees and make themselves a nuisance, and the machine guns are mounted up on the parapets and make things rather lively at times. ^(overground) There are no real trenches - they are breastworks, raised above the level of the country, and with plenty of open space at the back - infinitely more comfortable than our deep, narrow, L dirty trenches on the peninsula.

Your last letter was a lovely one, dearest - so bright and happy and loving. You are just a very dear, good girl to be so good to me. You will be home for terms

holidays at present. I do hope you are spending them sensibly and having a perfect rest. I sometimes want very badly to see you once again, but more often I feel rather hopeless about it. This rotten war will last for years yet, and the worst of it is I have lost all my illusions about the righteousness of either side, since I came here and found that the civilians spoke very highly of their treatment by the Germans. It was mainly the stories of German "atrocities" that led me to enlist, and now I find they were a pack of - exaggerations. Well, I suppose we must win now we are in it, and my eccentric opinions will not interfere with doing my job.

Don't you worry about my looks, by the way. I am neither gray nor bald, I assure you. Perhaps there are a few wrinkles, but you shall judge by the photo which I hope to send you next week - if it turns out well enough to satisfy my vanity. I got a nice uniform made in London, so it should not be such a rough photo as the Alexandria one. I have mislaid your letter, and I forget what else was in it to reply to, but I know you gave me some awful cheek which no doubt you intended to put me

in a rage, but I only laughed, and liked it, because it came from you, and I love you. Oh yes! it seems I said something stupid about you being vain, and from the way you replied about my remarks being very helpful, to I do believe you took it to heart. I hope so anyhow, so there. It is very bad for you to be told you are the dearest girl in the world, and I believe I am responsible for that sweeping statement, so if you are a little bit vain, the blame and the remedy rest with me. So there's a little sauce for the goose.

I must stop now, my hazel, and see to these good men's food, so good-bye for the present, dear.

With lots of love from
- Cecil.