

France

[Mérélessart] 21 August

My dear Hazel,

I don't know when or whether I will be able to post this, but I had better write while I have the time and chance. We are at present on trek, making our way by easy stages towards a new part of the line. Our destination is of course unknown, but we rather expect to get into some heavy fighting. We left our old home six days ago, spent one night in the nearest town (no doubt you know by this time where it was - it has been mentioned several times in the official reports). Then we travelled on foot and by train to a beautiful country district, ^{Wardrecques} where we remained several days, getting our strength back by hard drill

and route marches. The country was a perfect picture, very closely settled with plenty of villages, and harvest is in full swing. Saturday afternoon was a half-holiday, and four of us had a glorious excursion to a very pretty and historic ^{St. Omer} town about six miles away. We got a ride both ways on the motor lorries which travel up and down the roads with army stores. There is a wonderful old church there, the earliest monuments of which date from the year 712, but what pleased us most was a siesta in the prettiest public gardens I have ever seen. It was heavenly after three months in the trenches. We got a huge and delicious dinner by the method which I have found best here, namely buying all the raw materials

and taking them to an estaminet to be cooked. You would hardly believe that four of us accounted for twenty flounders, amongst other items, but I admit it without a blush, as I think we were exonerated by circumstances.

Yesterday we had a long train journey and an all-night march, arriving here in the early hours of this morning. This is not such a pleasant district: on parts of the road last night there was not a house for miles; but I think we are marching out again tomorrow. We are in the usual sort of billet at a farmhouse. The men live in the barns, stables and pig-styes, and have their food cooked in the farm-yards in the company cook-carts. The officers get rooms in the

houses. This time I have had the luck to get a real bed-room booked for tonight. It will be great. I am also having meals in the house with my platoon officer, Mr Rout, and faring very well, I assure you. Rabbit and green peas just cooking for dinner - what a life compared with Gallipoli!

No news to hand yet of the R.E. commission. They move rather slowly in these matters. I shall feel a bit shabby if I hop away to England just as our fellows are going into a big smash.

Well, I must close now, with fondest love to you, dear,
from
Becil.

BCB