

Hut E 5, Woodcote Camp
Epson, October 13th 1915.

Dear People,

I got to my feet. The valley was swarming like an angry ant-hill. The Fifth Reinforcements, very chubby clean and peach-blossomy by comparison with our worn and tattered scarecrows, were slogging in with pick and shovel at the new track. Mules laden with water, fatigues with ammunition, Indians, Australians, Māoris, Englishmen, New Zealanders climbed and slid the banks on either side while up the middle streamed hundreds upon hundreds of the New Zealand Army, their equipment and machine guns all complete and the men themselves a fine-looking lot. Wounded were being dressed, telephones laid, trenches dug, bivouacs – I have a confused impression of the crowd, and mugs of water, and countless enquiries about fishing line.

At this point I had better tell you what Sergeant Burk told me when I met him the other morning. He was looking down the slope along which I ran for the last part of my dash. He says it was one of the funniest things he ever saw in his life. There was I, my head tied up, my face half black, streaking by – no hat, no coat, no equipment, and my puttees round my ankles, while all about me phit, phit, phit, the jets of dust traced a moving wave-pattern, till at the bend I gave one convulsive spring, and vanished. He thought they had got me and started to report to that effect which has already confronted me more than once. Here I may also tell a bit of a joke about the whole affair at which I think I know one person will smile. It is about that stone-age curio I have mentioned. Before I left the trenches and Gus and Ollie, I stripped off all unnecessary weight. I abandoned everything except Naylor' patent razor set and the curio. When I reached the Reserve Gully I found that the set in its little case had gone. All that was left was the curio. I had a jolly good laugh.

I wasn't in the least hungry, but I drank a great deal of water with which every one was generous. I went at once to an officer from head-quarters. He like everyone else, was obviously anxious. After the inevitable question about the line holding he hurried to say that at dusk two whole English Regiments would go up and take over the firing line. I may here add that they did go up and that what was left of the Otago Infantry and Wellington Mounteds came back after midnight and fell asleep anywhere. At four they were aroused and told to come up and re-take the trenches which had just been lost. "Curses not loud but deep" and no more move by our men. Then some one said "They are getting our wounded". The men got up to the head of Reserve Gully where the regiments were streaming in. The trenches which the New Zealanders had dug under fire and held for seventy-two hours had been lost in two hours. The pressure, of course, had been heavy. The Turkish Infantry swarming down over the triangle and adjoining slope was caught by the concentrated fire of artillery, machine guns, and rifles, and lost very heavily. The Australians and New Zealanders have never failed each other, but each has been more than once badly let down by new English formations.

But before this reaches you you will have already read the questions put in Parliament about the Suvla Bay Landing and the inception and conduct of the whole "disastrous" campaign. Even the mad

proposal to attempt to withdraw emanating from Lord Milner. The officer cross-examined me and took my answers down in writing, I signing them. I said that I believed our fellows could hold against attacks by equal numbers, even bomb attacks, but that if attacked in force, the position would be lost. I also said that we had not much confidence in the officer there. I then reported to our O.C. Colonel Moore, who was lying wounded in the dugout. Then to the dressing station where Baigent labelled me and detailed to a man to help me to the beach.

Major Luxford was lying on a stretcher, with drawn white face, his thigh shattered by a bullet. He belonged to our regiment but, being helplessly under age, had been lent to the Red Cross. He unrolled my puttees and helped me along, though I didn't need it. When we came to a part of the track that was sniped, I sent him on ahead and ran over it alone. Down at the mouth of the gully by the trenches we took on the first night lay the black and swollen body of a New Zealander who fell then. There he lay, passed and re-passed by thousands every day. Out in the open by the beach, lay the wounded – most of them on stretchers, of which there were thousands upon thousands – Poor wretches calling and calling for help of every kind but generally for water or for someone to carry them to the boats. Stray bullets and shrapnel took toll of them as they lay. I sat down among the human wreckage on the sand by a little jetty.

After a while I was taken into one of a string of boats and put on a trawler. It was dark and I fell asleep on the deck, the first sound sleep for eighty-four hours. I was awakened by a wave which wet me through. We were tossing in Imbros Bay and it was past midnight. I felt very cold, and went down to the crew's quarters. On the table was a half-finished plate of rice and a spoon. I took the **[text missing]** finished the rice and did the same with some marmalade and crusts that were there. Then we transhipped to the Itonus, a transport already crowded with wounded. In the morning we sailed for Lemnos with 950 wounded aboard. I slept with a couple of hundred others on deck. It was a perfect summer morning when I awoke, and the rugged hills of Imbros were falling astern. All around, on every inch of deck, the wounded lay asleep. For a moment the engines stopped, we sprang round and there was a splash, as some poor battered body slid to eternal rest. For my part I think those happy that sleep together a band of brothers and heroes on the hills of Gallipoli.

Then the wounded began to wake and call out. There was not an orderly or ambulance man on deck where by some oversight many of the worst cases were still lying. Every sanitary appliance was hopelessly short. I got a can of water and a mug and went along. Some wounded are intensely selfish, but in general it is here that heroism burns steadiest and most.

There was an Australian Lance-jack who had stopped a bomb. His body was torn in the most terrible – eyes out, hand off, lips half gone, and the whole body pitted. He lay like a mummy, the only part visible being the nostrils and the mouth. He had not been dressed for more than a day. His mind was perfectly clear and he told me something about himself. He wanted to have his arm amputated. It needed the strongest effort of will to keep steady as I poured water between his teeth, for his wounds, through lack of dressing, stank like a dung-heap. This man was still living, though delirious when we came to Valetta, five days later. I do not know what happened after. As I was tending him an Australian, lightly wounded like me, came by with water and stopped for a look. I said "Some of us are lucky, mate", to which the blind man ignorant that I was speaking to another, replied "Yes, we are". There was another Australian, a huge fellow, with a gaping wound high up on the inner surface

of the thigh. It had not been dressed for three days, and then only with a sketch of field-dressing and it stank horribly. He was the most enduring soul I have ever known.

In haste,

H.