

St. Andrew's Military Hospital. Sliema. Malta  
26<sup>th</sup> May /15

Dear Rene  
As I haven't written to you for  
some time now and as the present time hangs  
pretty heavily on my hands - or to be strictly  
accurate on my hand as I have only the use  
of the one I am writing with - it is up to me  
to let you have a few lines.

I hope you have seen the list of casualties  
long before this reaches you and indeed that  
yours truly got in the way of a bullet;  
couldn't help it really - didn't see it coming &  
to tell the truth. I had survived a fortnight of  
the scrapping including our terrible baptism of  
fire on the first day we landed of which doubtless  
you have had the accounts in the paper: this is  
a day I don't like to talk of yet. Well, after  
10 or 11 days up at the first landing place -  
Kaba Teppe - and when we had occupied a strong  
defensive position which the Turks couldn't drive

as out of, though to do them credit they  
 tried hard enough, we embarked on mine-sweeping  
 boats went about 8 miles down the coast to the  
 extreme end of the Peninsula where the largest  
 body of the Allied troops British & French were and  
 landed there. up to this time there had been no  
 Australasian troops here but the New Zealand  
 Brigade & the Australian 2<sup>nd</sup> Bde (that is no Victorians  
 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Battalions) ably (him) represented the  
 Colonies. Our numbers were sadly depleted as neither

the N. Z's or ourselves had much more than 50%  
 of their original strength but a few reinforcements  
 from Egypt arrived in a couple of days &  
 strengthened us a little. We were General Reserves  
 for two days, that is we occupied dug-outs  
 a good distance behind the firing line till we  
 were wanted. On Saturday morning (8<sup>th</sup> May) we  
 got orders to move up. Previous to this a most  
 terrific artillery bombardment had commenced.  
 English howitzers, Australian 18 pounders, the famous  
 75 mm. French guns & the heavy guns of the

British warships on both sides of the Peninsula  
made it a very inferno - for the Turks.  
The air simply quivered with the rush of shells  
over our heads and the way bits of the landscape  
went hurtling thru the air round the Turkish positions  
was beautiful to watch. Huge clouds of dust & smoke  
indicated the burst of the heavy gun's Lyddite  
projectiles which explode on percussion (or when they  
strike an object) and little fluffy balls of white  
smoke like a wad of cotton wool, ~~with a~~ <sup>bursting</sup>

fifty feet or so off the ground showed where the  
shrapnel shells with their rain of shot were  
sweeping the trenches. We advanced in open  
formation a mile or so forward across deserted  
fields of grain & open green spaces covered with  
glorious wildflowers - poppies, buttercups, marguerites,  
daisies, irises & dozens of others I couldn't name -  
making a beautiful scene with a clear blue sky  
& brilliant sunlight over all, the picture only

(4)

being mangled in places by a dead body here & there: we had seen so many of these that we passed by them without comment of any sort except to remark that it was high time they were buried. We advanced into the shelter of a creek where we made dugouts in the bank & cooked our dinner. About 3.30 or 4 we were to advance & the 6<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> Bns went forward: there was a perfect hail of bullets dropping round by this time not directed at us but at the firing line further in front. Experience has taught us by this time that the firing line is about the safest place of the lot in an action as most of the bullets are so bad shots that the shot go over the firing line but do damage among the supports & reserves further back. Indeed before we had left the shelter of the bed of the creek a chap alongside me sitting on a sod of dirt suddenly fell forward without a sound into the water: poor beggar he had got a stray bullet right above his head.

(5)

Things were dropping pretty frequently as I found when I stood up to get a shovel from the top of the bank & thus exposed my head & shoulders. A stray came humming viciously along, struck the ground some few yards in front & then ricocheted on to my right shoulder but being spent had as more effect than to make me get under cover quickly. Then we were given the word to advance & soon left the shelter of the creek for the danger zone where the bullets were humming like angry bees past your ear or else flicking up little spurts of dust on the ground, too near to be pleasant. A few wounded & dead dotted here & there reminded you that some of the bullets had found their mark. Incidentally I might put down here what I have always felt right thru the scrapping: you might see dead & wounded Turks, English Tommies, Indians & other of the Allied troops lying on the field in their own blood but nothing moved me

more than the sight of an Australian who was either wounded or else had passed in his regimental number; probably because he wore the same uniform as yourself.

To proceed, we had to cross an open space as bare of cover as the palm of your hand and only dotted here & there as I have said with bushes. Getting across this in safety we stopped for a breather in a trench, manned by Indian troops - Punjabis - then on again at the double, literally running for our lives, rifle in one hand, pick or shovel in the other (these were to dig in with when we reached our objective) & our equipment weighing hundreds of pounds as it seemed, with your knees wobbling with fatigue, your throat parched & the consciousness that the next bullet would find its mark instead of going in between your legs or zipping past your head.

Another line of trenches, more Indians in it.

(7)  
Another gasping dash into the shelter of a small  
ditch and then another long long rush across  
ground which was too plentifully sprinkled with  
the bodies of our men.

Long before this the Turks had seen our advance  
& sharpshooters were bursting everywhere to say nothing  
of Lyddite shells which tore huge holes in the ground  
amid clouds of dust & yellow smoke. Our company  
was lucky enough to have most of these bursting  
behind them as they advanced but some of the  
poor beggars must have got them.

The seemingly interminable run across three or  
four hundred yards ended in the last line of  
trenches which was the firing line before the Australians  
of New Zealanders made this advance which I am  
attempting to describe: the N. Zs were on our left and  
a French regiment on our right.

Thinking over things later, I came to the conclusion  
that I must have thought I was in a race when  
the advance was on as I got ahead of my own

⑧  
Ground I was mixed up with other battalions of our  
brigade.

While having a breather in this last trench before  
advancing to the new firing line about three  
hundred yards ahead, I found myself alongside  
Billy Catron, Joe's brother, who has been promoted  
from sergeant to 2nd Lieutenant, and whom I hadn't  
seen for months. However word came for some more  
men to get forward & taking my courage in both  
hands & my rifle in the other, I set my teeth  
(~~at~~ at Blitzy) and prepared for the final dash.

I don't know how any of us ever got across that  
last space, and indeed many of us didn't; there  
were bodies everywhere, British & Australians but you  
didn't have time to think of them now - it all passed  
like the flash of a cinematograph - but afterwards it  
all came back to you. I fell down for a rest  
halfway among a little group of dead and wounded  
& then up again & with one final burst like  
a winning dash in a half mile gained



(4)

my objective - our firing line which however was crowded with men! fortunately I was lucky enough to find a vacant place & squeezed myself in between two others. When I had recovered my "fleeing breath" which I thought had gone for ever, I asked the range which was 300 yds & started to make a few "hukish widows" if I could. The Turks were strongly entrenched this distance in front of us but our naval guns were doing marvellous shooting: it is a matter for amusement to see how, two out of eight, they can drop their shells on an invisible target miles away with astonishing accuracy. In this instance the ships were about 5 miles behind us & yet they were shooting over our heads & dropping their shells right on to their trenches just in front. A slight mistake & we would have been blown to bits by our own shells. However the poor Turk got all the benefits this time: it must have been hell in their trenches - we could see a perfect rain of shrapnel bursting right exactly in their trenches.

There was no cover where we were, the ground being flat & sparsely covered with small stunted shrubs with here & there a bigger one which no doubt concealed a "bush" sniper. As soon as you reached the firing line, you fixed your bayonet in readiness for either a charge against the enemy or to resist one of them, and then took out your entrenching tool to dig yourself in a bit & get under cover. I flayed away a few rounds & then having nothing to fire at in the way of "bush" - the sharpshooters "keeping their heads down" as the phrase is - started to escape the dirt up in front of me as a protection. I must have lifted myself up a little from the ground in doing so for in about three seconds I felt as if someone had thrown the Melbourne Town Hall at me & hit me in the shoulder & back. The force of the hit pinned me face down on the ground stunned for a few moments & then when I lifted my head blood gushed out of my mouth in a stream & as I felt rather painful in the region of the back

(11)

I concluded shrapnel had hit me there & I knew by the blood I was hit in the lungs so thought I had thrown a screw & was concluding my career. My first thought was not of home & loved ones curiously enough but a sort of peaceful feeling came over me & the thought ran through my mind "how easy it is to die." The chap on my right turned me over on my back & took off my wet equipments meanwhile assuring me that he couldn't see any blood on the back of my tunic so I knew then it was a bullet & that it had come in the front & gone out the back. The blood had stopped coming out in a stream now & I was only coughing it up but the stunned feeling had passed & it began to be painful somewhat. I thought I would have a little revenge if I could so tried to fire a few last parting shots but couldn't lift my rifle naturally as my left arm was powerless. There was a Captain of the 8<sup>th</sup> Bn near me under whose charge - as the nearest officer - I was & I told him that I didn't think

I could do any more. He said I had done my bit & that if I could get back it would be the best thing to do: by this time I had given up the idea of dying & thought if I could get back to the cover of the trenches & get my wound dressed it might be more comfortable than my present position. Accordingly I said goodbye to my comrades, none of whom I knew personally tho, holding my gammy arm up started back: felt pretty sick but when your back is turned to the foe & the air is full of the vicious buzz of bullets you can make pretty good speed & I managed it with two wots low route and at last tumbled over the parapet of the trench into comparative safety. They were mostly Englishmen of the Naval Division here with a few of our chaps & some French troops & fortunately I saw one of the chaps out of our Company who came along to me & dressed my wound. I had to have my clothes slit right down the back from the neck & a blunt knife made

slow work of a tunic, khaki shirt or a flannel  
 shirt but at last they hacked them off and dressed  
 it with the field dressings we all carry which are  
 sufficient for two wounds: it consists of a small  
 pad of cyanide gauze on a cotton wool pad or a small  
 roll of bandage which however is no good for a  
 body wound as it isn't long enough to go round.  
 I had a small round hole about as big as a lead  
 pencil <sup>on my left shoulder</sup> in diameter, & a bigger one at the back of  
 the shoulder blade. By this time the sun was  
 just setting & its blood-red rays tinged the faces  
 of the dead who turned their face to the sky for  
 the last time. Word came along that there was a  
 dressing station down in the creek so my pal  
 helped me down to the next line of trenches both of  
 us expecting every moment to get in the way of  
 one or more of the ravine bullets which were  
 still falling as thick as bells on the first of the  
 month. This was about the only time I felt any  
 great anxiety about being hit but I thought

that a chap had got enough for one dose & would perhaps be benefited by a rest from the trials & troubles of war. At any rate literally threading our way between the bodies of our brave luddies who had done their "little bit" for the Country, we reached the second line of trenches where I was amazed to find myself among a lot of our Company & began to think that my training in running had led me to get somewhat ahead of my own crowd.

Here was comparative shelter & I walked the remaining half mile or so to the dressing station in Company with a pitiful procession of groaning forms on stretchers, others who limped along with or without assistance, wounded helping the wounded and all making the best of it. Guiding shouts led us to the field dressing station which was in the shelter of a dip in the ground and where the Army Med. chaps & the stretcher bearers took the wounded to the doctors where they received what aid they could give them before being taken to the Base

Hospital on the Beach. <sup>(15)</sup> I don't think the scene I saw there will ever fade from my memory. It was now dark & cloudy and coming down into this little hollow towards which the slowly moving lines of stretchers & wounded converged you saw at first dim lights moving round lighting up a face here & there but getting closer you saw lines of men laid out some on stretchers but mostly - because the stretchers were wanted for the return trip - lying on the ground.

The majority of them bore their pain stoically but some howl about so that you wondered how they existed moaned for water or to be put out of their agony. A little group round a wounded man, doctor and a couple of orderlies, the temporary bloodsoaked bandages tenderly unwrapped & the light of an electric torch on the wound and you turned away with a taste in your mouth. One gets used to seeing blood but when you see some of the wounds

(16)

caused by the soft nosed bullets which those  
inhuman devils use you taste blood & long to  
avenge your fallen comrades with the point of  
the bayonet. It is a notable fact that the  
Aussies & Australians have made several bayonet charges  
against the Turks but we have never reached them  
yet with the steel; they don't wait. They are  
plucky enough behind entrenchments but they can't  
stand a charge. But to resist to wounds,  
they clip the nose off the bullet which when it  
strikes a man spreads & makes the most awful  
ghastly wound imaginable. Of course this is  
prohibited by the rules of modern war but the  
Turks & Germans - there are many of the latter with  
the Turks - care nothing for rules: expect they  
will be introducing poisonous gas against us soon.

I got back to the dressing station, I saw  
that there were so many serious cases here that  
I decided to try & walk down to the Base



(17)

Hospital on my own & got another walking case  
to accompany me: the way lay across broken ground  
thru fields, across ditches & creeks & after stumbling  
along a little way in the dark, we decided that the risks  
of losing our way or of being shot by our own troops  
were too great & we turned back. An Englishman gave  
me an overcoat as my clothes were cut about so much  
that they hung round my waist & it was getting bitterly  
cold as it always does here at night, so I got back  
to the dressing station & laid down with the other cases: the  
pain was bad enough when I was standing but lying  
down was agony & as I couldn't get up once I laid  
down I had to persevere to wait till some one came past  
& pulled me into a sitting position. After an hour or  
so a party was made up of a couple of stretcher cases  
& a dozen or so walking cases to go to the beach and  
the procession started off with a guide so I joined it.  
Don't forget the procession in a hurry, dark as you  
had and the unevenness of the ground giving me  
effusive thrills in the shoulder every time I  
stumbled

(18)  
which I managed to do pretty often. The distance  
was nearly three miles when the lad I wanted to  
lie down in a field till the morning but luckily for  
me some chap shot in the hand urged me to stick it  
out a little further and I stumbled on till we reached  
the road where we could see a lantern shining a few  
hundreds yards on & at length reached another dressing  
station for serious cases that could travel no further: I  
stopped here & got a drink of water & laid down till  
about three oc in the morning trying to find a position  
which wasn't painful & composing a new Hymn of Hate  
against the devils that shot me. However the worst  
was to come & at this time they harnessed up their  
horse into some ammunition wagons which incidentally  
are without springs & after laboriously getting into a  
sitting position on the hard floor, experienced the most  
agonizing ride I ever want to experience over a rough  
road for a couple of miles or so. At length we reached  
the Base at 4 oc. were taken into a large tent where  
we were taken over by two doctors equipped with big  
acetylene lamps like a buggy lamp,

had one bloodstained uniform cut off from wounds  
 dressed: walking cases had to lie out in the open  
 as the wards were full, 694 cases having come in  
 this night alone. However they adjudged me a stretcher  
 case & I was put in a ward where there was hardly  
 room to walk in between stretchers & given some morphine  
 which however didn't have any effect. There were some  
 awfully bad cases here, an abdominal case being  
 on either side of me each of them calling pitifully  
 for water which however the poor fellows couldn't get.  
 As they didn't have enough stretchers however, the walking  
 cases who could get down to the landing stage on  
 their own got away on the Hospital Ship first &  
 we laid here from Saturday night till Tuesday  
 morning. By this time my internal bleeding had  
 stopped only hurting up a little when I coughed -  
 a painful process: hadn't been able to sleep yet,  
 the only position I could obtain any relief in  
 being that of a sitting position, bowed forward  
 with my head resting on something.

a few of the poor beggars had snuffed in the interim  
 one abdominal patient being refused water waited his  
 opportunity when the orderly was absent crawled off  
 his stretcher & drank out of a bucket of soapy water,  
 the other patients being powerless to stop him:  
 he paid for his folly by dying two or three hours  
 later. One chap was hit in with his brains shot out  
 but still lingering on: I sat & watched him die  
 with absolutely no other feeling than that of indifference  
 at the time: your brain gets numbed with the  
 sight of pain & suffering & effort. On Sunday  
 morning a German Raube came over & dropped bombs  
 on the hospital - the dirty dogs - but a couple  
 of them were fizzes one of these dropping at the door  
 of a tent without exploding, and another hitting  
 the edge of the cliff nearby. They have absolutely no  
 respect for the Red Cross & the best snipers  
 make a specialty of picking off stretcher bearers  
 & A.M.C. men. Well I got down to the  
 landing stage & who should I see but

Joe Cotton sitting waiting for the next boat-load. He told me that when he saw me he had to laugh at the sight I presented in a pair of trousers, boots & socks, minus my puttees with a slouch hat on & a bloodstained hospital shirt, the whole ensemble set off with an awful look of misery. Don't doubt this later as I felt very miserable and at that precise moment was cursing the Kaiser in a minor key. Found that Joe had got a bullet thru his left knee just at the kneecap making a clean wound hole both sides & was quite cheerful. We were put into the navy cutters that were ~~sent~~ <sup>sent</sup> hot alongside in tow of a pinnace and then taken out a few hundred yards to a trawler - or rather an ex-trawler - for there are dozens of these little steamers performing the hazardous occupation of mine-sweeping round here: this boat took us out a mile or so alongside a large mail steamer which for the nonce was acting as hospital ship. This was R.M.S. "Royal Breeze" a fine boat of 12000 odd tons formerly on the Atlantic between England & Canada but engaged as a transport, and a couple of hours later she had her full complement of wounded - about 490 - the stretcher case being hoisted on board in a flat wooden tray by means of the

ranch and about 12.00 we began the journey to  
 Alexandria. I had got off my stretcher as it was less  
 painful sitting up than lying down and found it was  
 possible to walk about slowly. After we had had our  
 names, regiments & nature of wounds recorded they gave us  
 dinner, the best meal we had had for many a week  
 and didn't we enjoy it. I must explain here that I was  
 on milk diet the first couple of days but got so  
 nervous that took the opportunity of the coming of  
 a strange orderly at the base to say I was on ordinary  
 diet & found that solid food did me no harm.

The wounded officers had saloon cabins on board  
 & the men had second & third class cabins - two in  
 each. I was put in a third class cabin with a  
 chap from the Royal Scots Regt who had got a bullet  
 wound in the leg. Who can describe the comfort of  
 having a real ~~bed~~ bed & a soft pillow to lie on  
 with nothing to worry over: it was a foretaste of  
 heaven altho I hope Paradise won't be so inconvenient  
 as to make it necessary for someone to lift you up  
 from lying to sitting positions & vice versa.

I think we timed 14 on the voyage of two & a half days to Alexandria: as there were hostile submarines we pursued a zig-zag course & traveled without lights at night. However we reached Egypt safely but found that so many wounded had come in before us that hospital accommodation was taxed to the utmost & there was nothing for it but to take us to Malta, which after two days in port here, they did. There were only three doctors including the ship's surgeon & 16 orderlies to look after close on 500 wounded so you as a "pro" can appreciate the magnitude of their tasks especially as these were operations & had abdominal & head cases who must have needed almost constant attention. My wound hadn't been dressed for 8 days now, since the cursory examination when I was first brought in & the pain was getting unbearable: ~~it~~ couldn't sleep at nights for it and used to have to wake my bunkmate up to let me & I would try to read or walk about the passage. At last the doctor got round & took the dressings off me: as I had been bleeding all this while it was only four or five tremendous pads of cotton wool over the dressing which had saved a mess & how

There were soaked the blood was trickling down my back. He examined me and said I had a shattered shoulder: I had long ago come to the conclusion that there was something beyond a mere bullet-hole and felt greatly relieved when I got the dressing removed my arm put in a sling.

Well to get off these subjects we arrived at Matua about three days later coming in sight of the island in the dawn of a glorious morning very picturesque it looked in the early sunlight.

I know that ere this you are wondering what has affected me that I should be writing at such length and writing what must be jolly uninteresting stuff too but time hangs heavy on my hands and thought that being in the "perfection", a description of the hospital side of war might help you to wade thru what is one of the longest of my literary efforts.

So I hope I haven't bored you, old chap, but page 24 does seem a huge number to have done at tho they are only small pages.

It has taken me days to write as much as this, having a spasm every day or so.



All the inmates of our ward here had their photos taken in a group. I hope to be able to send you one by next mail or probably this one if it comes along in time. Well just ask you here in case you see any of my people don't let them read this as the description might be too detailed for them. I just told them I was hit in the shoulder that it was a slight wound. So it is but omitted to say that the bullet had touched my leg & smashed my shoulder: you won't enlighten them on this will you. Rene there's a good girl? of course you are welcome to tell them anything else especially the fact that I am having the time of my life now with no worries, good food & the whatever romantic ideas I may have had - called mostly from novels I admit about nurses (Army ones - I hasten to add) & their soft and soothing presence etc etc, have been rudely dissipated, for our nurse, rush wildly round, tear the bandages off you, rip off the dressing (several shudders here) & do you up again in record time. When they are not doing this they are grousing about something or other or making the orderlies' lives a ~~hell~~ I mean hospital on earth. I will grant you that there are nice ones somewhere. Believe for instance eh?

What I would like most now is the collection of letters which must be chancing round the map somewhere but which something darkly hints it would be better to abandon all hope of. Your regiment loses sight of you once you are wounded and indeed you are off their roll as a "casualty".

As I write this there are persistent rumors of a great event in the campaign we are all engaged in. ~~which~~ which will change the current of events considerably but cannot mention anything less vaguely than this for fear of that omnipotent old git - whom I always imagine with white whiskers, spectacles & a huge pot of paint - the Censor. Only hope the rumors are true anyhow.

To get away from the all-pervading subject the war (damn it) - hope that you are well & chirpy & that your fellow - or rather sister nurses & yourself still banish hell care with a discreet ray now & then but must express my severe disapprobation with the bathroom episode as described by you: naughty girl!

Must all your people are in the best of health & be sure that you remember me to them when you write (if you ever do)

(27) (Les Walker)

Have not seen my pal since the first day we went into action over five weeks ago. Lost sight of him in the first advance & was told that he was wounded either in the leg or foot but not seriously. Effect he is at Alexandria.

Wish you could be here to see the beauty of the scene spread out before us as we look from the windows of our board. The brilliant sunlight & the intense blue (see several words) of the Mediterranean with glorious pink splashes of Rhododendrons in the foreground make a picture that is quite Italian in its setting. Indeed everything here looks Italian to me, even the people can't be distinguished in looks from them.

Considering we are only about 60 miles from that Sunny land, the resemblance is not remarkable.

Looking in the other direction - that is from the back windows - an even more beautiful scene is spread before your eyes for you can discern the Cantin.

As we are only allowed a hot a week & can't buy eatables or drinkables (beer being included in the latter) it won't be long before this sacred building becomes a shameful blot on the landscape. We can only assuage our grief by smoking ourselves to death,

The kindly Red Cross Society ladies having provided us with a sufficient quantity of cheap cigarettes to achieve this end with ease, facility & precision.

But they have been very kind to us, joshing apart, and have made us several little gifts from time to time.

Remember me to Mr & Mrs Dickins if you go out to see them & any other friends of mine down in 5 long that you know including Nurse Graham.

Don't know her but know her brother Alf so that will please me.

Will be getting back into the field again soon

so that letterwriting on my part will be at an end tho not permanently I hope and will look forward to more of your letters. They will make arrangements no doubt for us to get them in the trenches as in France.

With best wishes & regards  
from your old pal

Don't tell any of our people I wrote you so much.

Best

FR 85/139  
Australian  
War Memorial

571 W. Geelong  
Australia

— ON ACTIVE SERVICE —



VICTORIA



VICT

Nurse I. Seuling

~~Geelong Hospital~~

49. W. Geelong  
E. Edmondson

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