

1 December 1942

My dear Haze,

I'm afraid this will be rather belated to wish you a Happy Xmas and New Year, but somehow or other I haven't just got down to writing letters over the last month or two.

Many thanks for your letter postmarked 6th August which arrived a few weeks ago, enclosing a snap of Robert John. You'll be glad to know that the others safely arrived with your previous letters. In fact it appears that so far as we can judge by checking up as much as possible, the only mail we haven't received has been from Henry Ellis. John had a letter from him last week, which is only the second since Mrs. Ellis died, and in this latest one Bill mentions having written at least two or three others, including one just after his mother's death, which unfortunately never arrived. I believe he wrote to Het and Nan at the same time too, so no wonder they were worried at hearing nothing at all from him. He also mentioned having sent John a photo a long time ago, but guess it hasn't an earthly of turning up now. It seems mighty unfortunate that it is Bill's letters in particular which have gone astray. However, he made up for it in his last letter as the first budget was of 20 pages, and he has apparently continued it in another. John was very glad to read that he was quite honestly enjoying army life – the best think that could have happened – and he wrote a very newsy and bright letter.

Well, Haze, I think in your previous letter written late in August I mentioned how bonny your young son looked, and I hope he is keeping healthy. Bill said he was a fine kid, and for a man to admit that, well it shows he must be! You're extremely lucky to be in a land of plenty with a child, as over here he wouldn't have so much chance of starting off life with all the best, although even so you'd be amazed at the comparatively healthy condition of the youngsters born in war time and during blitzes. I mentioned in my last letter that I would knit something for Robert, and a month or two ago I bought a pattern of the sweetest little pram suit, and confidently asked for wool, only to find there was no pure wool in the shops, and that when it does come in it is rushed. Yarn is no good at all. I then discovered that it is probably one of the prohibited articles to be sent from here abroad, but haven't been able to make sure on that point, although I've asked them here to find out definitely for me. I don't want to make it, even if I do manage to get the wool, and then find I can't send it – I'd have to have a baby myself! So, Haze, you may get this suit and you may not. I'd really like to get it made and sent if possible, as I know you're even shorter than we are of wool. I think there is plenty about at certain periods, but you've got to be on the spot to get it, and while I'm working I can't be on the spot around the shops. Still, here's hoping.

We received a cutting from my mother a few weeks ago announcing Quit's engagement, and it came as a surprise. Had an idea from various things said by you others in letters, that Quit was fairly serious with her boyfriend, but didn't realise it was all that serious! Anyway from all accounts the man of her choice appears to be one of the best, and so we must congratulate her. She seems such a kid though, although I guess she has grown-up considerably since I last saw her, five years or so ago. A

young friend of hers called in to the office to see me last week – said Quit had asked him to look her brother up, and so he had traced Quit's brother to me! As soon as I saw him, I knew he was N.P. [New Plymouth] and he afterwards told me his older brother worked with me in Moss's office, although I had completely forgotten the brother. Looked very neat and smart in his Fleet Air Arm pilot's uniform, and he thinks the world of Quit and fiancé.

John is "browned off" at present as the wretched Huns won't come over here, and he (like all the rest of the fighter air force) is just praying for them to come. At the moment he is relieving at a station near the coast up Lincolnshire way, and is staying at a dear wee inn in the country, but he gets very lonely and fed-up, although he still enjoys the work; if only the enemy would come over he'd be in his element. I went up this last week-end to see him and cheer him up a bit, and I enjoyed the stay. The little woman who keeps the inn is very motherly and kind and feeds John up as though he were a prize bull! Anyway, I enjoyed the good food, and should have loved to stay there for a month or so, just relaxing by the fire and eating good meals. John gets moved about such a lot too, that he gets fed-up with that. No sooner has he spent a few weeks in one station and got used to the people and conditions, than he is shunted off to another, and so he is continually packing and unpacking, which in itself is tiring.

We were lucky in getting a week's holiday together about a month ago. Lousy weather, of course, but a fine holiday. We went to an uncle of mine in Newcastle and got fussed over, which is awfully nice after living in digs for so long.

We haven't had news of Westie for many months, although a month or two ago a very acceptable parcel arrived from Kenya with his card inside, and containing coffee, sugar and tea. He is a dear, and I appreciated his thought very much. I feel so very sorry for him no getting his N.Z. leave, as he has been treated rottenly I consider, and with his leave he has been unlucky too. I only hope he gets moved up to the Mediterranean area where he'll be with the other N.Z.ers. and so have his share of white company for a change.

Guess John has written or will be writing you about the Katikati business. He is lucky to have you there to take things over now that Merv. has been called up. He certainly didn't count on having to leave all that for this long time when he left N.Z.

Yes, I can imagine the trouble you must have in buying things at home. I suppose you get allowed so many coupons for the baby, but they're not much use when things aren't obtainable, I must say. I certainly think you're wise in buying a pair of shoes for him for later on, as they are things that keep, and I guess he'll soon grow big enough for them.

Glad Eric is busy, and enjoying it. I had an idea you'd find the timber hard to get, but apparently not, although I certainly expected carpets and upholstering material would be scarce.

My brother-in-law who was over here for a few months in summer (although Frank didn't call it "summer"! ) was sent to India, but I haven't heard whether he has arrived, although presume he has as no news is good news, and I'd soon know if anything had happened to him. How I envy him being in that climate this weather. We started winter about four months ago, and we'll have another five worse months to face. I just loath this climate and feel as though I haven't had any sun on my body for years – in fact I'm definitely sun-starved, and feel as though I'd burst into flower if ever I was lucky enough to strike a good summer, or go home to one! It is just soul-destroying this weather, though, not only the cold, but the life-sapping greyness of everything. Makes me shudder to think of it and what we have to face, but so long as there is plenty to eat and some warmth, I guess we'll get through it alright, and then pray heaven we'll only have one more over here before we can go home. All the same, we will be much better off this winter than most of the continent, as at least we have oodles to eat (even though it isn't the luxury food we may long for) and so far as I can see, if people just economise sensibly, there is no need to cut fuelling down drastically.

I'm going to get up to see John as often as I can during the winter, as those are so depressing months it is nice to be together. Travelling conditions aren't so good. I have experience of that yesterday after coming back at night. the train was packed, and the black-out was down and so everything was frightfully stuffy. However, I wedged myself in a few square inches, and then immediately wished I'd stood up in the corridor, as a man next to me let out a piercing snore and kept it up all the way to London despite digs in his ribs from me and a chap on his other side. Then the man opposite joined in the chorus, and damn me if a girl next to me didn't start up with a contral to snore later on. The rest of the occupants were smoking like chimneys, and with no fresh air getting in under the black-out, the air was so thick that after a while I couldn't see distinctly the faces of those opposite me – just as well, as they weren't oil paintings, any of them! Still, it had its funny side, and I tried to forget everyone and everything, including the snores, by becoming immersed in a thrilling "Sapper" book. I suppose John is worth even that experience every time I go to see him!

I suppose you won't be seeing a lot of Rae and Quit now that travelling is so restricted at home. We over here are just asked not to travel more than necessary, but the high cost of travelling alone prevents people from doing it more than necessary. Even the troops have recently been told that they can't have concessions, which means they can't travel so much when they get their 48-hour leaves, and I think it is rather tough on them as it makes life worth living to most to be able to get home occasionally.

Well, Haze, I haven't much more time to add to this, and I don't want to leave it to finish another time, because I know from experience what will happen if I do that! So I'll say cherrio to you all for now, and hope you've all had a fine Xmas together – maybe we'll see you next one.

All the best Joan [signed]

Just a further little note. John told me he doesn't remember whether he mentioned to you in his last letter – which I believe was posted on 13th May – that the cake you sent him had arrived safely. Anyhow, I'm positive it hadn't arrived when he last wrote to you, so you'll know by this that he did receive it safely. He is the limit, but he has been kept busy at the job he is on now, and is fagged out when he has any time off.

I'll get this posted now, so cherrio once again.

All the very best of luck Haze and regards to Andy, Joan [Handwritten at end].