

9 July 1940

Dear Haze,

I told John I'd write to you for him as he is too busy just now 'swotting' and really hasn't much time to spare.

You know I presume that he is actually training for a pilot I suppose? Anyhow about three weeks ago he had to report at Uxbridge where he remained for a couple of days getting his kit together etc. and then he 'phoned me to say he was off to Cambridge, so I skipped work for an hour and went to see him off, so I saw him for the first time in the King's uniform! Well, apparently they had a tough time for a while getting vaccinated and inoculated, and between times having to drill, attend lectures etc. and John was heartily fed up last week having had a third inoculation. However, they get 48 hours leave each time and once that time is over they feel much better. Unfortunately too, the first few nights after their arrival they had air raids in Cambridge, and consequently they were up half the night in shelters. This meant that with so much loss of sleep through one thing and another, the poor chaps were wrecks of their former selves, and eventually they decided to let them stay in bed during air raids unless of course they became too severe. They are very lucky really where they are, as John's crowd are in St John's College, Cambridge, which is one of the University Colleges, and they are very well looked after. Their meals are prepared by the college cooks and consequently the meals are much more appetising than they were at Uxbridge, when they had meals dished up to them more like pigs food. John says they don't give them quite enough to eat, although they all prefer things to be that way than to have the Uxbridge meals.

I went up to Cambridge over the week-end as John had 'phoned me to say he could see me for a few hours each day. I stayed at some digs near the college and met quite a number of the chaps. They are a jolly decent crowd – most of them have been to Cambridge or Oxford, and a few to Eton, and although quite a number of them have never done a day's hard work, they are a good crowd, and John is very happy there. The one thing he's worried about is the fact that the others have had so much more schooling and he feels he won't come up to scratch as regards the exams and swotting etc. They had a maths exam in a fortnight's time, and although most of them will pass with flying colours, the poor unfortunates who don't will be kicked out of the air force. It would break John's heart to leave now as he is terribly keen on the idea, and his only chance (according to him) is to sit next to one of the brainy ones and get a little free help! However, for his sake I hope he gets through, but that isn't all. Once that exam is over, they sit for another stiff one, and this happens all the way through the training. They get 'turfed' out all the time, so by the time the six months training is up, very few of the original crowd remain. If they get thrown out, they are given the chance of becoming air gunners, observers, or ordinary air-crew men, but John hopes to get a transfer to the N.Z. army if he doesn't

manage to keep in the pilot's lot. I don't know whether I'd be more pleased if he passed his exam or if he failed, as it's the toughest life of the lot.

They won't have any leave until Xmas or when their training is through. They get every night off from 6 until 10, or rather every day except when they are on parshot duty which is almost every other night. I think in their spare time they drink beer, but John has been more concerned with his maths in every spare minute he has had so far. They only get 2/- a day for quite a while, so that doesn't allow much beer at the present price. Of course, they can't live on the cash they get, and most of them have plenty of money to splash around. Those who haven't got private incomes or allowances from their people, often have their salaries made up by their firms if they are fortunate enough, but John was working on A.R.P. [Air Raid Precautions] before he joined up, so it's just too bad for him. However, he's got his wife working!

I am flatting with a couple of girls at present. They had a flat below us at 30 Belsize Sq. and one of their number got married, so they moved to a smaller place. When John found he had to go, I made arrangements to flat with the girls and I've been there now for a few weeks. They're both grand kids and we get on fine together, so it suits me too, as I didn't like the thought of staying alone. It may not be for long though as once the bombing starts in earnest here, we'll be evacuated straight away, so just now everyone is living from day to day, not knowing where they'll be the next day. We've been darn lucky so far though, in London, as we've only had one air-raid warning for many months past, and then no damage was done to London itself. Still, it's sure to come, and we've got to be prepared.

John and I managed to get up to a farm about 90 miles north of London where I have some relations, for a few days before he had to report. We went up laden with John's things as I'd decided I didn't want too much stuff to carry about with me if I was going to be suddenly evacuated. We had a quiet few days on the farm and enjoyed the rest and fresh air. John had been working hard at A.R.P. for months and needed a break, and so did I.

I can guarantee you don't know much about John's doings (I'm afraid this letter will seem all 'John' but I know you're interested in that word!) as I know his letters and the scrappy news he writes. He writes the barest outlines of what had happened and expects people to imagine the rest. However, for a long time he's been on A.R.P. work, and this year he was given a job in charge of a station. He had to organise everything and get things running smoothly. He thoroughly enjoyed the whole business, especially ordering people about, and as soon as he had got one ambulance station in working order, he was given another one to tackle. His hours were the worst part of the job, as he'd go off at 8 in the morning and often stay there until midnight running practices. A.R.P. is an important part of London's defence, and for a long time past it's been in a deuce of a mess, but the Councils are waking up a bit now and getting the right type of person to run them. If John hadn't volunteered in January, I think the Council would have had him exempt from active service as he was doing a good job on A.R.P. and it is very essential work.

Trev Bellringer and a pal of the lads, Geoff Amooore, have been in Egypt for some time, but we haven't had a word from either of them. Also, we don't know if Gordon Saunders is still alright – I certainly hope he is. One thing Gordon very rarely writes unless he wants something done or is calling, so that means nothing. You'll know more what had happened to him as Gwen will certainly have heard. I always scan the R.A.F. casualty lists to see if any name is known to me but thank goodness I haven't seen one yet. I think Gordon should be lucky as he's that type. What was Gwen's ring like? Gordon was staying with us a couple of nights when he decided to wire the money over for her to buy it. Actually I think it was the wisest thing to do as if he'd sent a ring from her it may have gone down. Gordon was very proud of the photo he'd received of Gwen, and I agreed it was very good although I'd forgotten what she looked like. Talking of photos too, I liked the one of Rae – she had become much older and sophisticated looking, or is it just the hat!

I believe you are working at the Bank again Haze – I think you're wise as things are so unsettled in wartime, it's good to have something definite to do, although I hope you're not so overworked as you used to be.

We saw that chap from Boots in Wellington – I forget his name – who came over here on leave. He stayed with Harold Morey for a while, and certainly seemed to have enjoyed his stay in London. Harold is about the only N.Z. lad we know who is not in some service or other over here, and I think he's feeling very lonely without the boys. He has tried again and again to get into the medical corps of the N.Z. army but they told him he's too old. He's a nice lad Harold, and it's hard to think of him as being older than we others are. He's extremely good-natured and I enjoy looking him up now and again.

They tell me you're living in some new flats past the St. George – I seem to remember them being built. One forgets very easily, and lots of my Wellington memories are faint and far away, especially with all the recent happenings here. However, I hope it's not going to be long before we're back again. I thought seriously of offering to look after some of the evacuees being sent overseas, as I reckoned it would be nice to get a trip home and back again, but decided I'd rather stay here.

We are noticing the shortage of men about London now. For a while it wasn't very noticeable, but now they are either young boys or older men. In the offices the girls are gradually taking their places too.

For the past fortnight London has been swarming with ANZACs, and everyone has been giving them a good time. Their uniforms attracted attention, and the lads sure knew how to get the girls! I have an idea I saw young Tom Avery in the Strand one day, but it may not have been him but someone like him. I was in a bus so couldn't make sure, but otherwise I haven't seen anyone I know. I think most of the chaps I knew went to Egypt with the first lot.

We have an idea that Westie may be in Egypt too now, as although he couldn't say anything in the last letter we had from him, we gathered from several things he said the he was being transferred

there. I hope for his sake he has been, as he hated West Africa, and he'll be very glad to see the N.Z. boys in Egypt.

Well, Haze, I won't ramble on anymore, but I hope you'll get some news out of this of your young brother. If he doesn't write himself shortly, I'll drop you another line. Cheerio and all the very best to yourself and Andy. Yours, Joan [Signed]