

Transcriptions from Mrs Jeannie Fisher dated **17<sup>th</sup> February 1917**

Letters from Captain Eric Fisher August 1916 to December 1916  
28<sup>th</sup> July 1916

to

Broomlea  
Loftus Street  
Ashfield  
17<sup>th</sup> Feb 1917

To H G Barff Esq.

Dear Sir

Enclosed are further extracts from the letters of my son, Eric Fisher, dating from August to December 1916. I must ask you to excuse the many corrections which were due to as many interruptions and carelessness on my part, only want of time prevents me rewriting it more carefully.

Yours very truly  
J Fisher

Further extracts from the letters of Capt. Eric M. Fisher

France Aug 1916.

Things here are rotten. We put in a couple of weeks in rest reorganizing etc. and gradually moved up close, we will be into it again any time now. The men are in good fettle and feel up to it so we ought to do well. At present we are bivouaced and as it had been raining for a couple of days everything is horrible. There are very few days now when it is not so.

After our last spell in the trenches, we marched back and put in a day or two in billets and then marching at 2 am entrained at 8 am and put in 7 hours in the train. We are now up north again near one first starting point. We had our fill of the "great push" although we weren't in so long the second time, I think it was worse than the first. There were only remnants of the trenches left, the ground being a mass of large craters and torn up over and over again. I was right in the village this time – as a matter of fact was in the cemetery – you couldn't recognise anything left in the village except a few splintered trees. There wasn't even a brick or any mortar to be seen and to get to the aid post you had to go over the open under fire which never stopped. Norman Gibson and Johnson of the 12<sup>th</sup> and I were in the one

2

dug-out and it was a hot spot, only for the fact that it was very slimy we would have been settled over and over again. Every few minutes a shell would land on the roof or at the side and the concussions would not only put out all the lights, but even the primus stove. It was a hard job getting wounded away, the regimental bearers carried down to us, and the ambulance bearers cleared back from there. They had a nerve racking time but did great work. You've got something to be proud of in the men here, even though we may be a bit too free and easy and more or less of a ragtime

army when not in the line compared to some of the regular troops, but I am quite sure as fighters you won't find any better than our fellows. Now we are back again in the rain and mud and suppose will be into the fighting again shortly but for the present are having a spell.

Sept 1916

I live in a hut made out of some stuff like canvas with a little wood about it and the rain races it on and doesn't all come in and the wind blows and some of it stays outside, and the cold, well, I don't know the word for what it does, but it nearly all comes inside and it is terribly cold. I get up in the

3

morning and walk through the rain and mud. I see a few miserable men with holes in their teeth, or boils or something and that is called a sick parade. Then I come back through the mud and stand out in the mud and have a wash and the walk through the mud to breakfast and then the battalion parades through the mud and I shout out "At the halt on the left form Company" for a while, then lunch and more "form Company" and then dinner and a game of cards. Sometimes I go for a ride in the mud for a change but most of the time I stay here because it is too muddy to do anything else. But now Roumania's in, and Greece doesn't know what to do because she can't pick which side will give her the biggest kick in the tail and Germany's nearly beaten and Austria is anywhere and we're kicking about like two-year-olds and doing about as much good, if we can only get Peru and Greenland to come in on our side, the war may possibly finish this side of Christmas ten years. In the meantime it's a rotten job and gives me the willies. ??? I hear is doing all right now, we have lost a lot of officers and men in the last couple of months that's the worst of it.

4

I had a miserable time in the trenches. Imagine the worst you have ever seen or smelt. Multiply it by a large number and that comes near it. I lived in a railway cutting in a miserable little dug-out next door to a store full of bombs. The bottom of the cutting was a mass of black mud, twisted and broken rails, sleepers, empty ammunition and bomb boxes, a few unexploded shells, many rats and much smell. Running up one side was a duck board path and if you stepped off that path in the dark you went nearly to the knees in mud. In a place where all the trenches stank, the king stinker of them all was known as 4711 it won easily. In another trench they were digging a bit to improve it and found two dead Tommies who had been there eighteen months evidently buried by a shell. It was a lovely spot, almost every morning early I would be wakened by shells going about a yard over my head – so it seemed – and used to get out in the cold and wet and have a look round and try to persuade myself they couldn't hit me and go back to bed again. They bombarded us a fair amount but we were very lucky and only had a few casualties. They occupy higher

5

ground than we do and snipe a good deal. It was a rotten spot and we were glad to get out of it. Had news from England that Rex Buckland was killed in Arabia, he was such a fine fellow. But on top of this Bert Stacey told me yesterday that old Norm Broughton was killed. That broke me up and made me feel the sooner we all get killed the better. There was never was anyone like old Norm, everyone, men, women, girls and boys all loved him and it has got me down all right. It makes it all the worse being on the spot here. They are only two of a big bunch of friends I've lost lately.

Oct 1916

There has been somewhat of a break in my letters but I've had no chance to write, we marched back about fifty miles out of Belgium and very glad to get into France again as the Belgians are all mean, dirty and grasping and you suspect everyone of being a spy. After about a week's rest during which I was transferred back to the Ambulance again, we got in a train and travelled all night down to the great push again, it was bitterly cold and still is, and everything is mud, and wet and rotten, my nose is running, feet cold and I've a cough. We were brought up here about 50 miles in motor lorries and when you think of a whole

6

division, probably 20,000 men being transported. So, it is a bit wonderful. There were cars going past for hours and stretching for miles and miles along the road, I've never seen such a number before. Now, this Ambulance had taken over a rest station for the Corps which means practically a hospital for 1500 men and it is the first hospital work I've had since goodness knows when, everything as I said is mud, we are all in tents, the floors are wet and muddy and outside there are about 6 inches of mud, but thanks be, it's a firm base, nit like Ypres where you go up to your knees. Goodness only knows what the trenches are like, probably I will not have to go up this time, but I might. We are a good way back here, but you have to get almost to the other side of the country to be out of range. A couple of days ago the Germans shelled a village a mile away at a range of 15 miles, so the artillery reckon it out. I just dropped back into my place as though I hadn't been away, have my old horse and same batman as before.

Nov 1916

Am at present in bed with a bad cough, have lost my voice too and haven't had a smoke for ages. Paddy Lane was wounded leading a raiding party. Multiple bomb wounds. Painful and disfiguring I believe

7

Have not seen him since Tel-el-Kebir, it's not like Anzac here. We are down South as I think I told you. I had to go up to the line with the bearers out after about five days was sent back and have been in bed ever since. Col Hearne was in charge of clearing and collecting from the frontline, with plenty of ambulance bearers under him. I used to live with him on the beach at Anzac so we understood each other. He is the most fearless man I know and just wanders about as though out for a stroll at home. I hate going out with him as I'm not so fearless and used to feel like running to cover, which you can't do of course. It has got a funny side too, but takes some seeing, the mud and cold and rain were fearful, and it was nothing to be bogged so badly, that you had to get a squad of men to pull you out. The poor horses had an awful time and often get so badly bogged that they had to be shot. It is going to get worse as the winter goes on, so we are not looking forward to it much. The German ??? come over at night, bombed things dropping two into the ambulance without doing any harm and two nights ago they numbed bombed this hospital killing and wounding several. They seem to be following me about. You can imagine how safe you feel sleeping in a tent.

8

I've heard no official details of the way old Norm was killed but Bert Stacey tells me that his battery was shelled out of four different positions and that he was out

amongst the guns and dugouts attending to the wounded and helping to dig out men who had been buried. He thinks he was killed this way. Anyway it's the best way to be killed. While you are busy doing anything at all you worry very little about shells, but when you're doing nothing and are being shelled heavily and you can't do anything but wait for the one with your name on it. It's Hell, there's nothing worse I've ever struck. You feel panicky and it takes all your self control not to show it. The man with no imagination gets on best as he can get into a vacant condition of mind and doesn't worry. Coming on top of Frank ???Coeur's Coen's death and those of lots of others I was very fond of, losing Norm nearly settled me for a while. Billy David and ?Morissey Gregg?? Are in this area somewhere, have not seen them myself but hear they are both OK. It is still cold as charity, the ground never dries and we see very little since it is dark by four in the afternoon and most miserable at all times. I still have a bad cough with a voice like a foghorn in distress, On account of my bodily

9

infirmity I was sent to work in a Casualty Clearing Station – British – I have administered an anaesthetic, seen and spoken with a nurse, sat in an easy chair and seen a piano so the age of wonders is not passed. I wish the d----- thing was all over and we were on our way home. If I write any more I'll start to swear 'orrible. So will stop.

Dec 1916

We have been having some rain – a little cold- and a little mud, the ground has been frozen hard all day, all the puddles are ice and it's as cold as some things I know but can't put on paper, living in tents with cold wet floors makes it no better. It is just miserable and rotten. In a few days we will be going up to the front again to do the clearing for the division and we're not looking forward with pleasure. It was bad enough last time, but now it is 20 degrees colder every day. Still it must be done. Have still a cough and my voice is not all it used to be, but manage to put up a good growl. Has a letter from Walter Matthews who is still with No 3 Aust. Gen Hosp now in England at Brighton while I'm here in the mud.

5

hot baths and every day I lay back in a chair and pay a man to shade me so at present it's a good war. I think we are off to France but will soon know. We have had a quiet trip so far and I hope we get through without excitement.

France

10.4.16

landed at Marseilles and entrained the same day/ spent 60 hours getting here in the train without a break and it was a rotten trip as far as the train went. Didn't have a decent meal all the way and

6

distinctly and have aeroplanes over us every day. It doesn't make us too happy getting into it again, but it must be done. Had a practice with gas helmets yesterday walking through a trench full of poison gas. It's not too good but there again it has to be done. It does make you 'ate the 'uns. Tomorrow I have to go up to the trenches with Tozer, for instruction on sanitation etc.

Went up to the trenches on a tour of inspection and saw more mud and unpleasantness than I've seen for years, of course it rains so much here that I suppose it is unavoidable but it's rotten all the same. At Anzac we had some beautiful trenches and dugouts as the ground there lends itself to digging, but here you strike water at about three feet below the surface, so you can't go in for artistic stunts you just live that's all; or rather you try to live in spite of all the efforts made to land you one. Attended a second poison gas lecture and demonstration and don't like it. Sat for ten minutes in a dugout full of gas. We carry round gas helmets all day ready for it. It strikes you as being a cold-blooded way of carrying on, renewed my acquaintance with shells and their screech sounds just as unpleasant over here as at Gallipoli. Saw Gregg and several other

7

medicos who are with the RAMC Gregg is well and fat and gave us news of Broughton, hope we run across him but there's very little chance I'm afraid. We moved out of our first billets and were a bit sorry to go we had settled down comfortably. My French is coming on a treat and I find I can converse fairly well with most of the people. The old farmer and his wife had a great opinion of our chaps and liked to compare them with the Germans who stayed at the place for two nights. They were strictly just, but firm, requisitioned a few horses and some wagons but atrocities - ??? The evening before we left they asked us in for a cup of coffee in their kitchen, a big stone floored place, with a great coke stove, standing out of a big fireplace a couple of yards into the room. The old man, his wife and son and servant were sitting round the wall and the table was covered with bottles, glasses, cups etc. We started off with a couple of glasses of Normandy Cider which was quite as good as Devonshire Cider and followed that up by a few glasses of white wine also very nice and with a fair amount of bite in it. Then it was time for coffee which is made strong and with which you drink a small glass of French rum. After that we had some Belgian gin as a chaser

8

and the drinks were over. A little vodka and some beer and we would have sampled all the allies. All these were out of different glasses. They go in for that a great deal, even a small house has quantities of glasses and old family China which they are very proud of. The next morning we marched off in the rain and mud to our present billets, here we are not so well off and are within range of enemy guns. It's a funny feeling to go to bed with only a brick wall and some windows to keep out the shells. You don't feel nearly so safe as in a dugout. The mud is awful, you rarely see the sun and then only for a few minutes. Aeroplanes fly over here by the dozens both Germans and ours and the sky is simply a mass of smoke puffs from shells which burst all around them and follow them up for miles. At Anzac we had one anti-aircraft gun and everyone used to look upon it as a joke but it's no joke here. They fire here by batteries where we used to fire one.

May 1916

Since the Australians moved in we have been shaking things up and getting a return from the Germans every night there's a terrible fight now and we're not getting the worst of it either. We have had some alarms ourselves and once at night moved up into position behind the line but nothing happened. There have

9

have been some gas attacks over us which were repulsed all right. The shells they fire are bigger and more frequent than the old Turk used but it's wonderful what local effect they have. I have been living in an empty house in a little tinpot village in which some furniture was left. It is all shattered with shrapnel and one whole shell has ploughed through a door and on of the walls. These places do not have much in the way of pictures except some weird efforts generally of the Crucifixion, but they make up with a profusion of images which my batman finds very handy for hanging clothes on. It is strange to see people living in their houses right up behind the trenches and of course in range. The fields are cultivated right up close also and it is not uncommon to see shells dropping on a field while a man or in some cases, a woman is ploughing it. Of course they get killed and it gives one a rotten feeling to see old women and small children right up under fire. I've been in the trenches some time now and it's not too good as the ground and weather are so wet they are all built above ground and it doesn't take very much to knock them about. They knock a piece of our parapet down and then we try to do the same to them, we build ours up at night and so do they and there you

10

are. That's war – or a bit of war. They snipe us and we snipe them, they fire machine guns at us and sweep our roads and we do ditto, they blow up a mine and so do we and so it goes on, each trying to do more than the other and neither side enjoying it. It's all stupid and rotten and I wish both sides would go home. We have tons of rats here most of them bug enough to put up a scrap with a fair sized cat. They are everywhere and are horrible pests worse than the other vermin which also abounds. We have mosquitos as big as Hexham Greys and flies and small insects in swarms.  
27.6.16

We came out of Support last night in the rain and mud are now in reserve we don't expect to be very long here. Will probably be shifted to a warm spot next as we have received one initiation in a quiet one. By Jove quiet! It might have been before we got there but we have successfully stirred things up and there's a bright little war every day now. Personally I had a quiet time in reserve. No shells falling near our billets, but some of the companies' billets were shelled and they had a few casualties. While you are in a dugout you have a certain feeling of security, very ill founded really, but yet you like it like an ostrich with its head in the sand. There were French people living still in the farm

11

houses we stayed at, an old woman, a young girl, a soldier son back wounded from Champagne and a Belgian labourer. They carry on the farm between them and the girl runs a small pub and shop combined. The men and officers too drink a lot of beer and I suppose really they make as much money if not more than in peace times. It is the nearest place to the firing line that civilians are still occupying but it's a rotten life and very insecure. Things are great at present as far as we are concerned, have moved

back a bit into the country which looks very pretty with the trees in full leaf and the crops nearly ripe. There's a big British attack going on now and we may be pushed anywhere at anytime.

July 1916

Have had four moves since I last wrote, we scarcely stay more than a day in any place now. The night of our first move the battalion was making a raid on the German trenches and I went up to the firing line with them, haven't heard such a row since May 30<sup>th</sup> when we got bombarded so badly our own shells seemed to be going only a yard over our heads and of course the Germans started too. Our fellows got into their trenches in the middle of it and safely back without any casualties so I had nothing to do. When things quietened down we left that was about 2.30 am. The battalion had marched out early in the evening

12

to new billets and there was another battalion in our old ones, so I rode straight on to find the new place. It was a lovely ride cold and foggy, but the sun rose when I was half way, got to the new village at 5.45 and couldn't find my destination as no one was about to enquire of, so went into the 12<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance and woke Percy Wall- previously with 3<sup>rd</sup> ABH – and Austin Curtin and invited myself into bed with them. Got undressed but had a bath as I'd had a sleep the previous night but hadn't had a bath for a week. After they had fed me I found my billet and was right. We stayed there a week and then moved out, put in a night in another place and moved out at 8.30 the following night, got a mile from the station where we had to entrain and spent the night in a field, at least nearly everyone else did, but I found a shed with some Tommies in and had a couple of hours in the straw. We entrained and moved out about 4.45 am put in six hours in the train and then marched till 7 pm that night; we stayed in a little village till 9am next day and came on here and have been here a day and a half. That's the war for the last couple of weeks. It's a good war isn't it? We are in quite different country now previously it was flat country with only about one hill in the

13

whole panorama. This is rolling country like Bathurst heavily wooded in parts and of course beautifully green. The crops are all full grown, the trees in full leaf and there are poppies, daisies, clover and purple flowers like cornflowers out everywhere growing wild and the result is charming. We do a lot of marching and my feet are getting like a blackfellow's with leather soles, one of these days we'll be marching right into the thick of it.

28.7.16

As I predicted a while ago we were into the push and did a bit of pushing ourselves. O God! It was Awful. We kept marching nearer every day and about a week ago marched twelve miles getting into the line about 2 am. We spent a couple of days improving the trenches and then went over. We spent a couple of days improving the trenches and made about 1500 yards and had a dreadful time hanging on to them, but we didn't give way at all and when we came out had kept everything we took. The worst of being with a Brigade and Battalion with a reputation is that you get into all the hot spots and when it's all over the General is very nice, pats the men on the back and then you get ready for another one. Of course our casualties were heavy not only in the attack but after when the counter attacked us and when that failed sat tight and bombarded us for two days. This was worse than the previous

14

bombardment we got. Of course I had a bad time. My aid post was right up in the trenches and a rickety thing at best as there were a lot of wounded there wasn't much rest. Two corners were blown off the Aid post and only one shell came in although hundreds were close round. Tozer was wounded there in the forehead but the last I heard he was doing all right. When the shell came in it was about a yard from me, it picked up two men and threw one outside and the other into the centre killing both. I could see it all through the glare and dust, but it happened so quickly that I hadn't time to be frightened. The Aid post was full of wounded at the time and we were lucky to get off with only two killed. Everyone up there had narrow escapes, but I suppose it's all in the game. The ground is one mass of shell caters scarcely a yard of ground being left intact. There are dead horses with guns, wagons and dead men also strewn about near the front line. But enough of the details. I won't forget them ever I suppose until new ones come to take their place. We came out and have gradually worked back to where we started from and I suppose will gradually work forward into it again. Had my first decent sleep for ten days last night and feel much better, till today felt much like a mouse the cat brings in on a wet night.

The End of the letters