

Transcription

Copy of a letter by George Francis Murphy from Wandsworth, London, England 8 August 1916.

No. 3 London General Hospital  
Wandsworth London SW  
8th August 1916

Dear Girlie,

Here I am loafing away in London, whilst opportunities for scrapping are going by the thousands. It is rotten luck. My left leg is quite O.K. and I can use it, but my right leg is still out of action. – My shoulder threatens to play up again, too, - they can't find the piece that went in there, even under X Rays. Maybe it is under the shoulder blade. But beyond being kept out of the fight a little longer, I will be O.K. There is no permanent injury that can result. – I've been trying to trace Cecil, but so far have had no success. He is in London somewhere. – We quite a number of the Bgr here.

My word, it is a glorious battle. – We were in it for 14 days, and nights. – I'm sorry Cecil did not get down there, but probably the lists will cause others to be thankful he did not. But a man can only take his chance, - when I was hit, I seemed to lose all sense of danger, and though the dirt was showered

Page two

over me, I did not seem to care what happened for some time! We had a good trip in the train, (one fitted out by Princess Christian.) The nurses in France are wonderfully sympathetic – they mostly belong to the Territorials – a force formed two or three years before the war, - all specially trained nurses, - and mobilized immediately on the outbreak. There are others assisting, - V.A.D, St Johns Amb. and Red Cross. – Dr Spencer Young (of Sydney) is attending me. The Queen of Portugal is nursing here, - (see Sydney Sun May 21<sup>st</sup> for a/c of hospital here).

We had a good trip across the Channel, - and then by rail from Dover to Charing Cross. Thousands were watching our removal from the train, - and as the car passed, someone said, "It's an Australian", and they fairly buried me in flowers; roses, carnations – all sorts cigarettes, newspapers – everything. The nurse with me thought she had lost her patient, and said she'd never seen so many flowers showered on a patient before. I said it was probably owing to my good looks, and as I hadn't had a shave for 5 days, she cordially agreed. But it is a bit tough on visiting days, (every afternoon) – I generally go to sleep, else I'd

Page three

get the "blues". There are one or two others who see no visitors either, - strangers in a strange land.

After an hour's spell, I resume. – Harold Page has just been in to see me, - he is looking well again. This is his second wounding. Jack Paul was O.K. on the 29<sup>th</sup> July. – Australia can get ready for a big shock when the lists get through. But one can't make omelettes you know.

How are the little ones? What has Boyo to say about the Germans now? And how many teeth has the young woman got? It will be your birth day soon will it not? I hope to be out of hospital ere then, but everything depends on whether they decide to operate or not.

I did not tell you of the leaning Virgin at Albert. It is a more than life size of the Madonna, holding the child above her head. The statue is on the tower of the church and was supported by a steel

framework. Shells have cut away one side of the framework and the statue now leans over at an angle of about 130° from the perpendicular. The boys promptly

Page four

christened it "Fanny Durack".[\*] – As you know I saw the cathedral at Amiens. It is a wonderful building ? with age. – It is well protected and undamaged. – Rheims I've not yet seen, nor the Cloth of Gold at Ypres, though I've been near both. I was wounded just after the capture of Pozieres, whilst out reconnoitring the N.E. of the town. – The country is very like that you can see in the middle distance from our back door, but with dense woods of from 15 to 20 acres. Where the fighting is going on there is not a blade of grass – the ground is one huge network of shell holes, 20 to 25 feet across and from 4 to 8 ft deep. There are bits of rifles, cannons, horses, men spread everywhere and over all is a ceaseless rain of shells. How anyone lives through it is a miracle. I was hit several times about the body before I was finally laid out, and a map I was looking at was riddled – one gets quite used to it, or else collapses entirely. Our aeroplanes, which usually fly at anything over 6000 ft fly now a few hundred feet up only, and the old Hun fires at them all day.

Page five

Well, Girlie, no more just now, and keep the notes on the battle & lists out of the local rag. You can say what you like about other things, but no aeroplanes, &c.

Good bye for the present, Dear Girl, send love Mother, Pearl & all at "Kensington" and for your own dear self and little ones, all loving thoughts from

Your loving

Geo.

[\*] During World War I, the statue of Mary and the infant Jesus on top of the Basilica of Notre-Dame de Brebières in Albert, Somme, France, was hit by a shell on 15 January 1915, and slumped to a near-horizontal position. Australian troops nicknamed the leaning statue "Fanny", in honour of Fanny Durack as it resembled the swimmer diving off the blocks.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fanny\\_Durack](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fanny_Durack)