

## **Transcriptions from Mrs J Fisher dated 16<sup>th</sup> February 1916**

### **Letters dated 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1915 to 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1916**

Broomlea  
Loftus Street  
Ashfield

To H E Barff Esq,

Dear Sir,

Enclosed are further extracts from the letters of my son dating from 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov 1915 to the evacuation of the Dardanelles. Those brave boys want a more able pen than my son's to tell of their noble deeds and sacrifices, still such as it is, I sent (sic) it along to you most willingly.

Yours Truly,  
Jeannie Fisher

Feb. 16<sup>th</sup> 1916

Extracts from the letters of  
Captain E M Fisher No 3 Aust Gen Hospital.

Anzac 3.11.1915

In orders the other day we were told the 7<sup>th</sup> Nov was the last day for Xmas mail, so a happy Christmas in spite of everything. Am continually running across friends here, Tozer, Tebbutt, Single, Stack, Stacey. Beith. Thompson, Frizell. Sandy Wilson, Paddy Lane, Frank ?Cren ?Crew and dozens of others. Occasionally go and feed with one of them and most afternoons go for a walk somewhere. One afternoon went up to see Lane and ?Coen just behind their firing line had a great reception from the Turks. As soon as I got there they sent a lot of stick bombs. These are big shells about 2 ft 6 in in diameter they have a pole fixed to the base about 5 ft long and are fired out of a trench mortar. You can see them coming all the way, but have no idea where they are going to ?lot till they start to drop. Five fell in around the dugout but did no damage, there was one which we were sure was going to fall right amongst us. Lane was in front of me in a sap, he wanted to dodge back and I wanted to dodge forward and neither of us could pass the other. All the while of course the d----d bomb was dropping straight on us. At the last second literally and actually we both ran back. I dived under a ledge about 3 ft high and felt all the time that my tail part was projecting so much that it couldn't be missed. Anyway it fell about 3 yards away from me, and I thought it was

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“good night nurse” but it didn't explode. Everyone then screamed with laughter and cheered derisively so that it was heard a mile or so away. As Paddy said we'd joke about it later in the University Club, but it was no joke at the time. Thought I was doing well too in getting away from the beach that day as they gave us about 40 shells over before I left. Strange to say without doing any damage, no one was hit, although one landed in a dugout and buried its occupant up to the neck without hurting him.

That was only two dugouts from mine, a little too close to be pleasant, but that is the nearest they've got to me yet, otherwise things are very quiet and work goes on as usual. Our food is still fair, but monotonous, when we get fresh meat it is always good, but bully beef, rice and jam become monotonous. Potatoes are unknown onions being our only fresh vegetable. One of our cooks is an expert forager and his latest prize was some cabbage. It was funny the way he got them, he has an eagle eye for anything lying about and spotted these 3 cabbages on the beach. He went down and said to two men standing there. "Where the H—are the rest of the cabbages gone?" He got an answer. "I'm d---d if I know I never touched your ---- cabbages!" "Gorstruth, a man can't leave a --- thing about this beach" and so saying he lifted them, and brought them up. If we get things on the menu

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scarce, it is never advisable to ask too many questions. You soon get to have a special set of elastic morals here and your vocabulary – especially words of invective and vituperation and exclamation – undergoes extensive alterations and additions. Of course we all hope these changes are not permanent, but will disappear when we get back to civilisation! The weather here is beautiful now and has been so for a week since we had that cold snap, but I expect Christmas will be cold and wet. Still we ought to be able to hang it out all right, having plenty of warm things and we are to get sheep skin vests and other things issued to us when the weather gets cold enough for it. I've a comfortable little dugout and have made a few additions since I got it, a table, a seat and a bow window of sand bags, it is water tight and will stop shrapnel and anything except a big howitzer shell but am not looking for that. Jack Massie I hear is going on all right he was shot through the left shoulder but is convalescent now. He will probably have a good rest now and may get leave to go to Australia. It is quite on the cards anyhow. Great changes have occurred at No3 Aust Gen Hosp since I left nearly half of the officers being invalided away somewhere including Col Fiaschi. I don't understand why I have been left here so long

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but don't mind as this life though stagnant is much less monotonous than that at Mudros. There is nothing much doing, a German aeroplane came over and dropped a bomb the other afternoon, but it fell harmlessly into the sea. The Turks seem to have more ammunition as they are sending over more shells now, but it is curious what little damage they do, unless they hit you and then there's no doubt it is rotten to see even killed and wounded, but it's good to be able to do something for them. The men are ???bosker, they are wonderfully cheerful, always playing jokes on each other and on the Indians and Ghurkhas, and the wounded are so uncomplaining and cheerful too that it makes one marvel. \_\_\_\_\_ I don't know who your authority is about the climate and conditions at Lemnos, but you take the word of a man who has been there and has very little good to say for it. The cool breezes that you read of do not blow in the hot weather when they would be welcome, but now when it is as cold as midwinter on the Blue Mountains they are getting breezes that blow their tents over. The medicinal earths must have disappeared as the place was a mixture of disease, flies, dirt and blasphemy when I left. So stop thinking how fortunate we were to be sent there and say to yourself three times a day after meals "Poor Devils".

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Things are quiet here just now very little happens beyond occasional bombs being thrown and odd corner shells. There is very little rifle fire only odd snipers being at work and the single reports from their rifles sounds just like a the noise of a ball hitting bat at an empty Sydney Cricket Ground. Occasionally the machine guns fire 6 or 12 rounds at Lord knows what, their noise being just like the quick reports of a motor bike. Sometimes on rare occasions, one side gets a scare and opens with everything available and then the big guns chip in and the ships come in closer and start a terrible din for an hour or so, no one will know anything about it and probably there are no casualties. I am at a Beach Dressing Station, we have to see a few sick in the morning and attend to beach casualties, these are usually shrapnel wounds. A gun drops 6 inch shrapnel over here at any old time. The first one usually bags a few but after that there are no casualties practically as everyone is under cover. This gun is the famous Beachy Bill. There is another a French 75 that fires high explosives, it is much worse as you have no time to get to cover, for by the time you hear the shriek of it, it is past you. Happily it usually drops in the water but when it hits anything solid there's a terrific crunching roar and bits of things fly everywhere. This chap

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is called Whiz Bang or Quick Dick. From the beach here you can see Imbros and Samothrace and on clear days Bulgaria across the Gulf of Saros. The sun sets behind Imbros and a rule the can beat anything you ever saw on our own Blue Mts.

Anzac

28.11.15

We are having the time of our young lives here, I don't think. Imagine my delight on waking up early this morning, feeling terribly cold, to find the ground all white with snow and a blizzard blowing. It really looked very pretty but no one was in the mood to appreciate nature. All day long we have been walking about in frozen slush and our feet though not wet have been very cold. During a big gale a little while ago the seas washed into our dressing station and it was decided to shift it. Work is proceeding slowly and the station being insecure, we have to work in a tent in a gully. You can imagine how cold it is. A new road being made above mess dugout necessitated its removal also and for some days we have been working hard making a new kitchen and mess in one and the result is very satisfactory, we have been labourer, carpenter, tinsmith and everything else, the structure was luckily finished yesterday before the snow came. It is dug into the side of

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the hill to about 5 ft deep, the walls built up with sandbags and the roof timber with sandbags in top to stop the shrapnel. It is not a bad effort and in the cold weather was most welcome as regards keeping us warm. Now we have our meals in here and tonight have a coal fire in a brazier – the coal quietly removed from a on the beach – and a big kerosene lamp which came from a wrecked tug so we don't mind the wind and snow, outside for the present but fuel is going to be very scarce soon, so I expect we'll get full of the cold before we're finished. Our food supply suffers when we have rough weather, as stores cannot be landed, so we get tinned stuff and no fresh meat or bread, but still this cold weather stimulates your appetite and the quantities of food which are absorbed would open your eyes. I feel very fit and can do my day's pick and shovel work with the best of them. We haven't had much news here lately, but know things are not too good generally, but we try to keep cheerful and succeed pretty

well, though our tempers get a bit on edge with the monotony and uncertainty and the language of everyone has become more Australian than ever. I suppose you have noticed mine rather degenerated lately, but civilisation and comfort will make a big difference I think. We often discuss over our bully and biscuits what we

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would really like for a good feed and everyone seems to prefer a real good substantial meal to delicacies.

Anzac

11.12.16

The weather here is extremely cold. We have had several severe gales and one snow storm which covered the ground and laid about for days. We had a hard freeze the temperature being down to 14 degrees below freezing point 18 degrees of frost so you can imagine it was pretty cold. There were several cases of frost bite the Gurkhas (sic) getting it badly and conditions in the trenches were hardly bearable. To make it worse the water-pipes burst and we were on quarter rations of water for some days. This means you wash, shave etc in half a cup of water and are not able to get much warm food which means everything in cold weather. But since then we have had warmer weather and more water and food so things are better that way but the Turks have more guns and ammunition and we have been getting it hot ever since. Things are pretty bad just now and are going to be a sight worse in fact, the future doesn't bear thinking of. We have to live like animals, in the present, and if your thoughts get wandering off the next meal and your bodily comfort you have a bad time. But still if I had remained in comfort and safety I would have felt ashamed for the rest of my life of being

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a squib and you would have been ashamed of me too. Yesterday we had a great sight, a battleship, two cruisers and two monitors formed up fanshaped and shelled the Turk position on our right for a couple of hours, pouring in broadsides one after another. We climbed the hill to the top and watched them bursting. You could see huge bursts of flame and clouds of dust, bushes and stones being thrown up, of course the noise was tremendous the whole hill shaking with the reports. It is cheering to hear the din and know there's something doing, but you get very cynical and ask each other if you think it's any good. Don't take it from this burst of pessimism that my liver is out of order, for I am in disgustingly rude health but this life makes your brain degenerate into a mass of meat with no ability to think beyond the dose of castor oil and your next meal, while you become the most perfect machine for attacking and absorbing huge quantities of food at any hour of the day or night. You get past caring for cleanliness and wash at infrequent intervals, as it is too cold to swim now. Change your shirt and socks when your friends complain about you, and no longer worry about lice or fleas, as they are omnipresent. Good manners have gone overboard

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and your morals have become so stretched as to be unrecognisable as such. You see a newly arrived man with clean collar and uniform still clinging to the obsolete beliefs of the past and you sadly say "Once I was like that." There are Egyptian labourers here, who spend all day playing at work, and the other night one of them found a bomb which he thought was a lamp. He carried it to his dugout, invited six friends to come, sit and observe him light it. It went out but he was persistent and lit it again and

it didn't go out and we spent a couple of hours picking out pieces of bomb and removing useless portions of toes, feet, hands etc from the seven of them. These humorous little interludes make life worth living.

Mudros

Dec 21<sup>st</sup> 1916

A good deal has happened since I last wrote. Am back in the rest camp well and fit. Have seen the 3<sup>rd</sup> Aust Gen Hosp fellows, had a meal with them and got quite a reception. At the time we knew nothing definite about evacuation and only got rumours from time to time. I said then the future didn't bear thinking of as it seemed as though they were only cutting down the troops to a minimum to hold on to the place, and with the

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Turks getting new guns and new and much better – from their point of view, worse from ours – ammunition was too a jolly good chance of having a big fight and spending Christmas in Constantinople. We used to see troops moving out and nothing being landed, and we were the only Ambulance left with the first Division and it looked as though we were to have the honour of being left in the final fight. All this time we used to be shelled day and night, the Turk was using bigger shells which would wreck any shelter or dugout and used to cause a lot of damage on the beach. I told you we were moved to a new dressing station, and had made a new dugout to mess in. well the few days and nights before we moved up, the shells were falling much closer to us than ever before and in quite unusual places. One night we had seven within fifteen yards of our dugouts and one in particular very close, another yard higher and to the right and it would have been “good night nurse” to four of us as we were at dinner. We never felt safe when we went to bed but used to discuss it and decided to sleep in the old spots for the d----- things had to get in your dugout to get you, if they didn't we were all right, and further our dugouts were warm and cosy, but we often used to wake

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with one exploding just in front, or over us, curse the Turks for about five minutes, then go to sleep again, You get very fatalistic and soon realize that you might get killed at any time, in any place and when you've decided that you're all right. Well one day we heard definitely that the place was to be evacuated and all became ?sore and blue and depressed. Personally for a couple of days I walked about, or sat and played patience and couldn't be bothered taking cover hoping I would get shot. It sounds foolish known but at the time my mental condition was not quite normal I'm afraid. Then of course in the middle of it old Paddy Lane came to see me. He was in the rearguard and in any case would be one for the last off, and stood a good chance of stopping one and wanted to say goodbye in case. That almost finished me. It was a rotten feeling, but Paddy was such a cool customer about it that I felt I couldn't admire him too much. Still we all began to feel a bit brighter, but the suspense and strain of the last few days was terrible, every minute you expected the Turk to drop to it that we were evacuating (and not landing more troops as he evidently thought) and plaster the beaches with shells, and the more you discussed it the worse it looked

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But night after night went past as usual without anything fresh happening. They were evacuating ammunition, mules, carts and stores of all description and breaking up the stores of rum, wine and brandy etc. etc. and destroying others. The place was in shambles and you could get anything in the way of clothing or equipment you wanted, but when you had it, you couldn't carry it away, then one night we got orders to leave. It was a simple process and consisted of turning out the camp and walking out with a few things in a pack and my blankets and leaving everything else. We marched to the wharf with the shells screaming over us all the time and got there safely. After a short wait we embarked on a barge, but for some reason waited an hour and a half at the wharf, getting stone cold and watching the shells burst over the water just where we had to go. This sort of thing was not exactly soothing to the nerves especially as we could hear the bullets just going over our heads from Walker's Ridge and popping into the water just ahead of us. At last we got word to move and strange to say the shells stopped and we heard no more bullets while going out to the ship and got safely on board. I found an empty seat and went to sleep at once, waking up only when we reached the harbour here.

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We got ashore by night and after being homeless for a couple of days got a camp of our own and settled down. Every night here, we used to see fresh troops marching in with the same story of everything quiet, and the evacuation is now completed most successfully, everyone got away, there was no rearguard action, and only a few casualties, the Turks have not got much in the way of plunder as practically everything was brought off or destroyed. So now everyone is cheerful and pleased at night you can hear songs in all the lines. I haven't seen Paddy yet but take it that he is quite all right. Will look him up as soon as possible. The weather held up most beautifully till to-day, the night before last being the final of the evacuation, but now it is raining and cold, expect it will remain so for three months now. I am still with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Field Ambulance and will remain with them I expect, all our movements are uncertain. The day after I got here, I walked out to Thermos hot springs and had a bath. It was very nice to feel clean again after not having had my clothes off for five days. Your story about General Birdwood is not quite the Anzac edition but will pass. His dugout was in a rotten position and shells used

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to drop round it every day without going in and Birdie never shifted although most of the rest of the staff did. This is what made everybody so keen about him. When he left Anzac and went to Imbros as GOC Beachy – one of the guns they used to shell the beach with- put a shell in his dugout and blew it up.

Cairo

Jan 3<sup>rd</sup> 1916

After a week back at Mudros we got orders to 3 a.m. to pack up and get, we did so and landed down here spending Christmas on board the transport. We are now about 40 miles from Cairo, out on the desert with nothing to do or see. Of our future movement I know nothing. Am up here on a couple of days leave, but am unused to civilisation, sheets, tablecloths, baths, bars, etc etc feel very strange.

End of Gallipoli section.

15 pages