

Cairo, 14th. March, 1915

My dear Judge,

I was delighted to get your letter, although I was very sorry to hear of Mrs. Ferguson's ill health. I trust that she is restored to good health by now.

We have all been working very hard here indeed, and the troops are exceeding all anticipations. You can imagine how upset everyone is by the extraordinary stories that are circulating throughout Australia about the conduct of the Division. The real facts are as follows. For a short time after we landed the men were naturally attracted by the novelties of Cairo. With 20,000 men it can be easily seen that some would play up for a bit while their money lasted. Think of a country where there is no control of liquor traffic, and where in the native quarter brothels are as numerous or more so than public houses in certain country towns, and you get the explanation at once. Seriously I wonder that there was not more looseness than actually existed. Bean wrote his letter to the Australian papers with the very best of intentions – to prevent the people from being deceived by the lies of those returned as unfit to serve. Unfortunately some persons have tried to read between the lines of his letter – always a dangerous thing to do – and have cruelly imagined that the force was undisciplined, and that the officers were not doing their job. I say, and say deliberately, that the Division is a show of which Australians ought to be proud: the discipline is strict, the men are well-behaved, the training is good, and the officers really do run their jobs well. If anyone tries to tell you otherwise, don't believe it. It is a bit annoying, to put it mildly, to feel that people at home are doubtful and dissatisfied and critical, when we who are here know that they have had false and in some cases malicious accounts given them.

The men are all very keen and work like Trojans, and they deeply resent some of the things that are said.

However, there is no use in getting warm about it. It is sufficient to say that the Division is far in advance in point of training and discipline of what we might reasonably have expected.

As for the 1st. Infantry Brigade, I really do think that New South Wales might be proud of it. I have had very little trouble in keeping discipline. The Brigade is now a living organic unit with a firmly established esprit de Brigade, so to speak. We have been complimented upon the state of our war equipment and upon the nature of our training. I need say no more.

Young Street is quite well again, and is doing duty with his Battalion, so there is no need for his father to be anxious.

Good bye.

H. N. MacLaurin.