

THE BLIGHTY CRACK.

How few are the troops at some stage of the Campaign have not wished for a "Blighty". For the relief from nerve strain, for the rest from the monotony, of the sight of the ever-present khaki, for the companionship of British civilians, for the food, the recreative gaiety of life in Blighty. It may be when the shells are raining thickest, when "Billjim" has ceased to duck, when he is in that grim, jogged and pugnacious mood, which is dangerous to the Hun who comes his way.

Our Brigade well remembers the blow it received so unexpectedly at Dicoebusch on 11th Sept., when a shell (a lucky one from Fritz's stand-point) accounted for 43 casualties. It descended among the 26th Battery at breakfast time. All hands were on the spot as the guns had not gone into action in the new position. Officers and men alike rallied round their comrades, and in spite of the continued shelling, rendered first aid, attended to every want, and, in every way sought to help those who were unable to help themselves. It was a splendid example of comradeship, of the unity between Officers and men, of that spirit of combination, which was responsible for the prevailing good-fellowship, and so instrumental in the Brigade's success as a fighting force. In a very short space of time the wounded were removed to the Dressing Station, thence to the Casualty Clearing Station, where system and thoroughness are paramount qualities. It is the C.C.S. which handles the great inrush of more or less seriously wounded when a stunt is in progress. The Doctors and Nurses with the XRay operating and other equipment are magnificent. It is here that we went "over the top", or in other words, saw the Merchant of Venice at the Theatre when Shylock gets his pound of flesh.

The first sensation after coming out of the anaesthetic is an appreciation of the comfortable bed. How many long months is it since we were between sheets? A Battery cobbler is in the next bed, also just been "over the top". "How are you Harry?" --- "Tres Bon. Do me for the duration!" --- "My oath. A man who wants more than this would ask for flowers on his grave or portholes in his coffin!"

Then comes the Nurse; a real dinkum civilised English girl. "Bon Jour Ma'mselle. Avez-vous"----We suddenly remember and look sheepish. "How are you feeling now?" And she smiles. "A drink?" "Most certainly". "Port wine, champagne, stout or hot milk?" First we think it's "kid-stakes" but "jerry" that it's dinkum and say ---- "Cold water".

A few days pass, our temperature drops to normal and we join the convoy. The stretcher-cases are placed in a long row awaiting the ambulances to take them to the station. Aboard the train and we are between the sheets again. A sleeping berth "buckshee". Last one was between Sydney and Melbourne and cost ten bob.

Next we find ourselves at a General Hospital on the coast. We are puzzled at the Nurses arrayed in white from shoes and stockings upward with the exception of a little red cross on the chapeau. The young Doctor wearing a silver bar on each shoulder, a hat like the Maorilanders and U.S.A. on his collar, comes in casually smoking a pipe, and sits on the bed. So we are in an American Hospital. An Orderly comes to the bedside. "Say Pard. Have you seen any of the States Chaps up in the line? You're an Australian eh? A guy in the ward over the road comes from Australia too. I changed him out of his blues into a Yankee uniform and we had a night in the town. Champagne? I guess we did?"

Sammy has been charged with opening conversation by "I guess we've come to finish this war you started three years ago". We have not met that Sammy. From our experience he is keen, free, of fine physique and modestly realizes the gravity of his task. The young Doctor, eager to glean knowledge from any source, joined in the conversation, remarking:--"You chaps who have been there know. One can't get much from the papers!"

A word for the Australian Red Cross. In each of the various Hospitals we have been in, the Australian Red Cross has been ably represented. Even the Tommy Hospital had a Sister specially appointed to issue Red Cross gifts to Australian patients. Every conceivable article for the comfort and convenience of the troops is available for the asking.

After the elapse of several days we are once more in a convoy. The train pulls up right alongside the boat. We are somewhat chagrined to note that the stretcher-bearers are German prisoners. When several cases are placed aboard the boat without rough handling or being dropped into the sea our fears are allayed. The little Hospital Ship makes good headway across the Channel and in little over an hour, we sight the renowned white cliffs of Dover. In no time we are in England, travelling in an excellently fitted Hospital Train, among English orchards, fields, hedges and above all, English people.