

The Dickebusch wagon lines were in open and well worn paddocks situated near the main Dickebusch-Ypres Road, and marked by dugouts and humpies and tents that soldiers improvise out of nothing for their comfort.

The main roads were jammed with marching batteries and hurrying transports, and it was difficult to see a piece of land that did not bear some of wars symbols, either men or guns or horses, and often all three.

The first night at the new wagon lines, brought us suddenly back to the fact that we were at the war. The enemy put over a number of rounds of H.E. and also gas, with the evident intention of harassing movements on the road, which movements became, if anything, more active after nightfall.

But the morning of the 11th. September was to herald in a day of mourning for the 26th. Battery, nay, for the whole of the Brigade, for verily, the Brigade was one in comradeship and sacrifice.

Early morning "stables" were over, the horses had been watered, groomed and fed, and the men after a few dips of fingers in shell-hole water, gathered into subsections and awaited the return of the detailed mess-orderlies with the breakfast. All the batteries were settling down to their morning meal, bent on enjoying it to its full, because of the proximity of the Ypres sector with its perils and its work. The 26th. Battery were in the midst of their breakfast, right sub-section grouped in front of the Quartermasters improvised store. Suddenly the well known and ever dreaded whistle was heard, the shrill whistle of the deadly shell so reaching its way through the cool autumn air, where would it drop? Ears were alert, but eyes were intent, on the 26th. Battery, as instinct and experience said, that was the "lobbing" place of the big projected, and too true, Alas. It lobbed there, and in a second, forty two men were casualties, eleven being killed outright. Still there was no panic. The casualties were taken to a line a hundred yards distant, and there attended to before being taken away to clearing stations.

I must add a word in praise of one of the casualties. All were wonderful fellows, plucky, smiling and enduring; but one deserves special notice here since he was one of the originators of the Yandoo - Bombardier Eric Harding, M.M. A man of sterling qualities, happy natured, fearless of heart and strong of body, none were more respected than he, it was not strange then to see him, this bright autumn morning, lying on his bloody stretcher, his leg shattered in several places, laughing, yea, laughing with his mates, and cheering all up by his seeming nonchalance and good cheer. The Doctor remarked that it was one of the most remarkable cases of fortitude that had come under his notice, but it only proved what the man was made of, and proved also that the Australian cantake a knock with the best, as he can give one. Eric lost his leg and was sent back to Australia, but his genuine interest in the Yandoo and the Boys was always maintained. That untoward and unlucky happenin' was a bad augury for our entrance into the Ypres sector, but the A.I.F. generally fared disastrously in that perilous sector, though at the same time, they acquitted themselves nobly and added very great lustre to the young nation from the southern ocean.

On the evening of the 11th. September, the guns were taken into action at a position a few hundred yards from the Menin Road, and not far from "Hell Fire Corner" in front of Zillebeke Lake. To reach the position, the main road through Ypres had to be followed, and the exit from the City was by way of Menin Gate. Although a town of a pre-war population of about 17,000, there were only a few buildings left standing, and even at this stage of the war, the historic old ruins were being daily reduced by enemy shells.

The first few days in the new positions, the batteries were busily engaged in getting in big stocks of ammunition, and on the 13th. September, a heavy bombardment of gas shells was turned upon the batteries.

Barrages were put over by the batteries on 15th, 18th. and 19th. September in preparation of the big advance on the 20th.

The Menin Road was now a death trap. Numbers of Fritz's guns appeared to be trained upon the road, and the thoroughfare was at all times strewn with dead horses and mules and damaged wagons and ambulances.

The objectives were all reached, a large catch of prisoners resulted.

On the night of 21st. September, the guns were moved forward along the Menin Road near the famous Chateau Wood, and during this period the drivers were also working laboriously. By day, ammunition was drawn, and at night, by means of pack horses, the ammunition was conveyed to the guns. Besides, the wagon lines were at all times subject to shelling by day and bombing by night, and to meet the difficulties of the situation, "snacks" had been "dug in" to a depth of a few feet which meant safety from all but "direct hits."