

INCIDENT FROM WORLD WAR ONE

MESSINES - WYSCHAETEBYM.A. Fergusson (Go to Profile:Click Here) I am quite sure that fear played no part in my decision. The battery was up to strength in men and guns, and two horses over strength. I had quite recovered from the nervous strain of Bullecourt. During the attack on the Messines Ridge we had only two casualties, and they were from a premature burst from a battery to our rear. We occasionally had uncomfortable periods under gas attack and the O Pip in trenches on the forward slope of Hill 63 was never subjected to accurate bombardment, whilst I was there. For this attack I was once again F.O.O. for the brigade. Zero hour was at 3.10 a.m. My two signallers and I laid a line to the N.Z. front line trench at about 1 a.m. I had re-connoitered this route and the route forward through no mans land and up to the ridge the day before. I was very tired and went to sleep on the trench floor to be awakened by the minor earthquakes of the mine explosions. I was not quick enough to see the explosions, but one crater was 100 yards wide and 20 deep. As soon as the infantry advanced we followed, laying the phone line as we moved. I don't remember seeing any dead before we got to Messines, and then very few, but many wounded were walking and being carried to the rear. When I reached the northern outskirts of the rubble heap which was the village, I was astonished at the view. We had been so used to looking up at this commanding ridge running right across the battle field, we imagined that when we got to the ridge we would have similar command over enemy territory. We were wrong. There was a gentle slope, cleared by shell fire and running forward to the final objective. As we looked deeper into enemy territory we saw trees, hedges, houses and villages, and although the command from my location was not very good, it was better than anything further forward. I decided to look for an O Pip in the fringe of Messines and soon found a German concrete blockhouse. Here I established the O.P. and contacted Brigade HQR's. A large Howitzer, (apparently a single gun) had been shelling in my area for the last 15 minutes. I suppose the other field guns were withdrawing to another position. I think the 3rd Division in its first action, on the right hinge of the attack was shelled heavily, both during the approach march and the attack. There were heavy casualties, mostly from gas. There was nothing to put the wind up me however. I started down the slope when I met Colonel Elliott the CRE 4th div and he was deciding to put a road forward. Whilst speaking to him a piece of shell hit me just below the ribs on the right side, and went through my map case, and Sam Browne belt, knocking me over like a kick from a horse. When I looked at the wound there was hardly a drop of blood. The hole was about the size of a half penny. I feel sure that had there been a doctor or medical orderly there, they would have tied me up, commented it was not serious, and let me go on with the job. My only excuse for my following behaviour was that we were always worried about stomach wounds. I returned to the dug out, told the Signallers I was wounded, and was going to the Field dressing station. I asked them to report the fact to Brigade. When I got down the slope into the old no-mans-land I sat down for another look at the wound, and found I could feel a piece of shell less than half an inch in, so I dug it out with my finger. I have always been ashamed I didn't get it tied up with a field dressing and return to my task. Plenty of Infantry more seriously wounded carried on for at least a day. I knew nothing about "shock" in those days, but the Doctor I saw did, and lost no time in sending me by ambulance and hospital train to a hospital on the channel coast.M.A. Fergusson.