

Fred Dover

Driver 11422, 11th Division Ammunition Column, Royal Field Artillery

Fred Dover's birth was registered during the three months ending June 1884, but he was not baptised until 27 July 1887 at St Mary's Church, Amersham. (He was baptised as Frederic.) His mother was Fanny Dover. Fred first appears in the 1891 Census aged seven and is described as a schoolboy, along with his brother Edward (8). The main elementary school in Amersham was St. Mary's, built in 1873. The family were living in Bury End, Amersham, and Fanny was a laundress. Her 25-year-old son, Thomas, was an engine driver, and there was a daughter, Elizabeth (12), also living at home. In the 1901 Census, Fanny was still working as a laundress and Edward (18) was a printer, compositor. Fred (17) was employed as a miller's assistant. Also living with Fanny was her mother, Ann Tarbox (Tarbucks), a widow aged 73.



Bury End Cottages, Amersham, 1910. (By permission of the Bucks County Museum, Aylesbury). The cottages were demolished in the 1920s. In Fred's will, dated 4 March 1917, his mother Fanny's address was given as 23 London Road, Amersham (which was in Bury End).

At some time before the next Census in 1911, Fred must have changed his job and been employed by a gas company. There was a gasworks in Amersham belonging to The Uxbridge, Wycombe & District Gas and Coke Company which was situated behind Broad Street, Amersham. Fred then moved to Scunthorpe, in the District of Glanford Brigg in Lincolnshire. The 1911 Census finds him, aged 26, living as a boarder in the household of John William Turner, gasworks engineer and manager, together with his wife, Ann Elizabeth Turner, and two daughters, Ann Eliza (26) and Lavinia (22). Fred was a gas worker and the address of the family was 'Gasworks, Scunthorpe.' The fact that he was living in Scunthorpe helps to explain why Fred enlisted in the army at Hull, which is across the Humber estuary, and could be reached easily by the New Holland to Hull ferry.

Fanny Dover, her children and the family connection to Albert John Dover

Fred Dover was Fanny's youngest child, born when she was 37 years old. In the 1901 Census Fanny described herself as a widow and head of the household. In fact Fanny never married, and a trawl through the parish registers of St Mary's, Amersham, reveals some interesting details about her children (eleven in all, and they all had Fanny Dover's surname). The first was Charles, born in 1863 (when Fanny was just 16). In the register she is noted as being a single woman. Thomas was born in 1867 and Minnie in 1869. Then in 1872 followed Albert Edward, who died aged 16 months in 1873. Ethel Hannah was born in 1874 and on 4 September 1875 there was a private baptism of Georgina. She died aged two years and was buried in 1878. Another Albert Edward was born in 1877 and he died aged five months. In 1878 Annie Elizabeth was born, followed by Ernest who was born in September 1880 and died in October. He was followed by Ernest Edward in 1883 and Fred Dover was the last, born in 1884. Fanny Dover was living alone in 1911 according to the Census; she died in 1923.

Fanny must have struggled to provide for her family. In 1871, Fanny (aged 24) was living in Bury End in a house with her grandmother, Hannah Dover, her mother, Ann Tarbucks (who was really Ann Dover and unmarried), and three of her children. The three women were employed as straw plaiters. Straw plaiting was a cottage industry supplying the Luton straw hat trade and Amersham was on the periphery of the area involved in it. In the 1861 Census the family lived in Washington Row; also living there was Hannah's daughter, Charlotte, unmarried, with her son, **John Dover** (12), a chair maker), the father later of **Albert J. Dover**. In 1861, five members of the household were engaged in straw plaiting, including Fanny and her 12-year-old son Thomas. Straw plaiting was poorly paid and the plaiters would work long hours to make a living.

Enlistment and army service

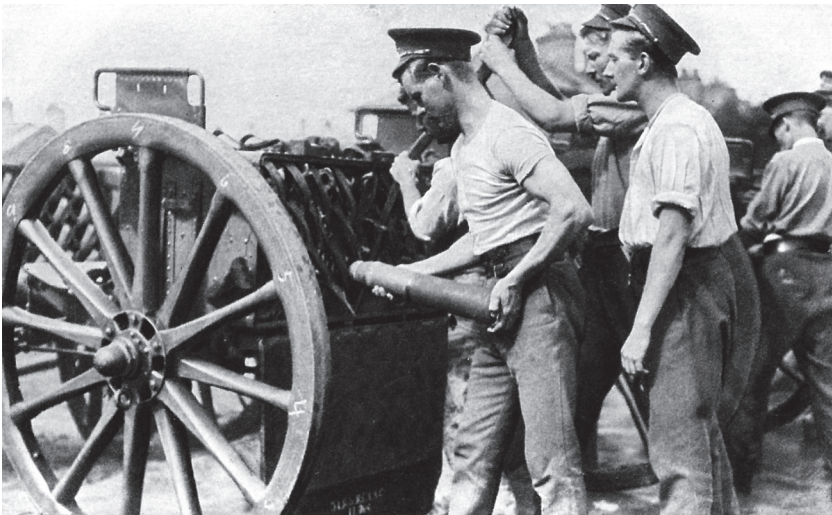
The date when Fred Dover enlisted is not known, but he joined the 11th Division (Northern) Ammunition Column of the Royal Field Artillery, which was formed from a brigade ammunition column in May 1916. Given the date when his will was written (4 March 1917), it is likely that he was conscripted into the army. Fred was aged 30 when war broke out. The 11th Division was ordered to France in the summer of 1916 to reinforce the Third Army on the Somme. The ammunition column disembarked at Le Havre on 4 July 1916. The division took part in the capture of Wunde-Werk and the **Battle of Thiepval** in 1917. It then moved to Flanders for the **Battle of Messines**, the **Battle of Langemark** and the **Battle of Polygon Wood**. Fred must have joined it in France in the spring of 1917.

The divisional ammunition columns each numbered 158 men, commanded by a captain, with three lieutenants and two second lieutenants. The job of the ammunition columns was to bring ammunition and other supplies to the battery positions from the divisional dumps, set up by the British Army Ordnance Corps. During WW1 few units had any motor transport, most transport being by General Service (GS) wagons or limbers drawn by horses or mules. Fred Dover was a driver of a team of horses or mules. According to the *Field Artillery Training Manual* (1914), each driver was responsible for two horses and harnesses. There were usually about 96 drivers in the columns. Carts also had to transport water and forage for the horses. Shoeing smiths, saddlers, wheelwrights and a farrier were also part of the team. The ammunition column had to supply 128 18-pound field guns and 44 4.5-inch howitzers with ammunition. Each field gun had to have a minimum of 1000 rounds in the field and each howitzer 800 rounds. The horse-drawn wagons and their drivers were deployed very close to the front line and often pits were dug behind the gun batteries to shield the horses from the noise and incoming shells. This rather grainy photograph shows the type of GS wagon and horses that Driver Fred Dover would have been responsible for.



The photograph is one of the Imperial War Museum collection used under creative common licence.

The GS wagon was a rugged vehicle and could withstand rough treatment in all weathers and all conditions on the roads. About 800,000 horses and mules served the British Empire troops on the Western Front. More than half of them died as a result of wounds or disease.



This photograph, from a postcard printed during WW1, shows soldiers of an ammunition column of the Royal Field Artillery loading their ammunition limbers with live shells in France.

The postcard was printed by Boots the Chemists in their Photogravure War Series.

Killed in Action – notes from the *War Diaries*.¹ The build-up to the **Battle of Messines**, Flanders, planned for July 1917:

Aveluy - 22 May 1917 “Orders were received that 22,000 rounds of ammunition had to be taken up by the morning of the 26th, dumps established and reliefs arranged so that the Column was working day and night. All the ammunition was delivered by midday on 25th May.”

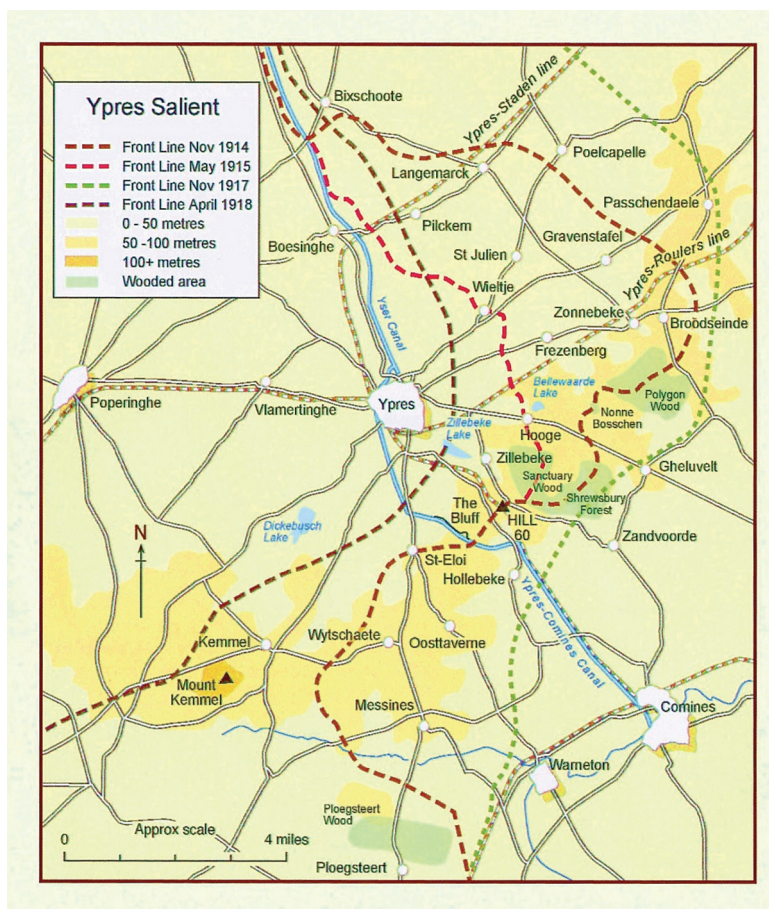
Bailleul - 5 June 1917 “Whilst on fatigue on the night of the 5th and 6th, a party consisting of a number of GS wagons came under fire of the enemy inflicting the following casualties. Killed: 2nd Lt. J C McFadyen, Drivers Dale, **Dover** and Miller wounded. **Dover**, Miller (subsequently died). Goole, Dukes. (sic) 16 mules were killed and three GS wagons destroyed. 2nd Lt. W.S Moses, who was attached to a trench mortar battery was killed the same night by a direct hit on the gun he was working.”

¹ *The War Diaries of the 11th Division Ammunition Column, Royal Field Artillery*, TNA ref. WO95/ 1802/5 Vol 12, July 1916 to June 1919

The ammunition column in which Fred Dover had served then moved up to Kemmel and Kemmel Wood for the **Battle of Messines**. The battle began, after initial British artillery bombardment, on 7 July with massive explosions of 19 mines detonated in tunnels underneath the German lines. These explosions devastated the German front-line defences, and were followed by a creeping barrage 700 yards deep, which allowed the advancing British troops to secure the ridge with support from tanks, cavalry and aircraft. British attacks from 8 to 14 June advanced the line beyond the German Sehenen line.

The **Battle of Messines** was the prelude to the much larger **Third Battle of Ypres Campaign**,² also known as the **Battle of Passchendaele**. Despite the loss of 24,562 men, the **Battle of Messines** was viewed as a triumph for the British and Empire troops under General Plumer. It was meticulously planned and well executed. The British took 7,350 prisoners and captured a large number of guns and trench mortars.

The Importance of the Messines Ridge



The **Messines Ridge** is the area above 100 metres shaded brown on the map. It extends north-east through the Gheluvelt Plateau and north to Passchendaele. Although the ridge was not very high it was important for the British to capture it as the occupying Germans had a commanding view over the area around Ypres and of the British positions.

The town of Bailleul lies to the S.W. of the map, and the Wulverghem-Lindenhoek Road Cemetery, where Fred Dover is buried, is situated along the road leading S.W. from Messines.

The map is taken from a brochure from the Zonnebeke museum.

Fred Dover is remembered with Honour in the Wulverghem-Lindenhoek Road Military Cemetery, Heuveland, Belgium, Grave ref I.C.5.

He is also remembered on the Memorial in the Baptist Church (subsequently the King's Church, Amersham, and now part of the King's Arms Hotel) and the Roll of Honour in St. Mary's Church.

He was awarded The British War Medal, 1914-18 and The Allied Victory Medal.

² Wikipedia.org, *Battle of Messines*