

OUR LAST BURROW

Dear Beryl,

MONTBREHAIN, 10/12/1

Now that old Fritz has ceased throwing iron at us, I have more opportunities of continuing my correspondence, hence this letter following the other so quickly.

I finished up at BRAY in my last, the guns were then on the North side. I did not tell you about our passage through the town. It simply reeked with gas and everybody was shedding tears. Fritz had thrown this gas over the night before. Everywhere there was wreckage, the Town and Railway being under bombardment so many times. The position we took up here was fairly good, as the men had decent dug-outs to sleep in. Our fire here was mainly harrassing and the 3rd Divisional Infantry went on and captured the village of SUZANNE. Great dumps of all sorts of war material were left behind by the enemy in his haste to get away from our men.

On August 24th the guns went forward, taking up a position N.W. of SUZANNE near UPPER WOOD. Very little firing was done from here, mainly observed shooting from the O.P.'s (Observation Post). The Battery Commanders reconnoitred a position still further ahead.

On the morning of August 28th, under a heavy Artillery Barrage, the Infantry captured CURLU, and the Batteries advanced to a position in rear of VAUX WOOD and again very little firing was done, the reason being that the enemy was continually moving back.

On August 29th the guns moved forward N.E. of CURLU. Practically nothing remained to show that a village had once stood there, as everything was battered to the ground. The Waggon-lines took up a position at VAUX, a small village snugly situated at the foot of a very steep hill which overlooked the SOMME VALLEY. Fritz had gone to a lot of trouble here, building comfortable huts and Bungalows on the side of the hill. It would have been quite an ideal spot for a rest, as everything around was so beautiful. The Batteries from their position managed some good observed shooting on hostile Infantry movements.

On August 30th, after another attack had been made in the morning, the guns moved forward near HOWITZER WOOD, the positions being about 1700 yards in rear of front line. Here the country was quite open. The Infantry was meeting with much stronger resistance now at CLERY COPSE, an isolated Wood. It was a thick nest of Machine gun posts. One had only to move over the rise just in front of the guns, to get a good view of the Infantry fighting. The O.P parties carried rifles and ammunition and enjoyed much sport, sniping at the German Machine-gunners. Continuous harrassing fire was extensively carried out by the Batteries on these "Hornet Nests" and one after another were knocked out by direct hits, this made the work much easier for our Infantry. Continuous firing was carried out all day and toward evening, the big ridge which the enemy was holding at the rear of CLERY COPSE, was cleared. During the day Fritz strafed Battery positions and roads without cessation, the 25th Battery having a particularly rough time of it, with the loss of men killed and wounded. The 107th Battery also was harrassed with shells of heavy calibre. The Infantry advanced about 2000 yards during the day.

Around this part of the country there was one thing that caught the eye very forcibly, that was, the absolute absence of any Fritz graves covering earlier periods in the war. In 1916 especially, very heavy fighting between French and Bosche occurred in this locality, as one could see by the many French graves bearing dates of that period. No Fritz graves were visible however, and this led one to think that the much read and talked about, "German Corpse Utilization Scheme", of rendering the dead bodies down for oils and fats, was not mythical but reality. Otherwise there would have been some signs to show the killed in action. It would be madness to think that the Hun escaped scatheless in these heavy encounters, so it leaves one imagining what he really did with the dead.

On August 31st our Infantry made another determined attack, carrying the line forward about another 1500 yards. Batches of prisoners kept dribbling back our way all day long. Many of them were set to work in the rear, digging graves to bury their dead who had fallen during the last few days. Observed shooting from the different O.P's was still being carried out with wonderful success. Communications between Batteries and O.P's were causing a great deal of damage anxiety, as the lines were being continually cut by enemy shell fire. Fritz telephone wire was in great demand; every available piece being "salved" and made use of in maintaining communications. Rifle sniping from the O.P's was still kept going. Rather a funny experience happened at the 26th Battery position. Major-General Jellibrand, G.O.C. 3rd Division, was around one morning inspecting the positions. The guns were firing at the time and suddenly the piece of No. 4 Gun left the carriage landing some distance away. No one was