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## NEW ZEALANDERS IN ACTION.

### NEWS FROM FRANCE.

FIRST WELLINGTON HAS A "WARM GO."

(Extract from "N.Z. Chronicle," Nov. 22, 1918.)

We were in snug "possies" on a ridge in reserve and miles away from the line, where all we had to worry about was how to dodge parade during the day and Fritz's aeroplane bombs by night. Alas, however, such happy times soon came to an end in this part of the world, and on Wednesday morning October 9, we moved forward. The day was bright and sunny, and we found it warm marching.

Rumours of all descriptions passed amongst us as we moved along. We were only going up a few kilos, to remain in reserve until the Division took over, and after that we were moving back again. As we pushed on we passed Divisional Headquarters, and there spotted another Divisional Commander conferring with ours, and that naturally strengthened our hopes of an early relief. We crossed the Canal about 12.30, and halted on the further side for lunch, on ground which only a week or so before had seen strenuous fighting. The whole battalion, four companies and Headquarters, enjoyed their midday meal together. While we were thus engaged the Divisional Mounted Police moved up beyond us. Naturally, they were greeted with "rousing cheers" from the fighting men.

"Must be a long way from the war yet, diggers. There go the Police up ahead of us," were the remarks passed by one digger when he recognised the blue pug-garees.

At 1.15 p.m. we took up the trail again, bearing half-right from our position on the canal bank. A village appeared in the hollow ahead of us, and we picked our way among the heavy traffic moving towards it. On the roadside we came across a battery or so of English heavy artillery. The guns were silent, and the gunners about were sitting smoking.

"Out of range, chum," was the reply we received when we asked them where the war was.

We entered the village and passed along the main street. Since the Hun had been pushed back his shell fire had reduced everything to ruin. Beautiful brick buildings lay shattered, the church in the centre had had its steeple top blown off, and the cemetery at its foot was nothing but a mass of shell-holes and ruined tombstones. German dead lay everywhere, telling the heavy toll the diggers had taken as they advanced. One German, in the attitude of firing a rifle, lay dead against the brick wall of a building. It was the last building on the farther side of the village, and he had evidently sought protection round its corner while he kept up a fire on those advancing up the street. A digger had apparently surprised him from the rear, and, when shot, his rifle had merely fallen from his grasp and his body had sagged against the wall, finding support there, and as we passed he looked for all the world as if he were alive instead of stiff and dead.

The Maori Pioneers were in the village filling in the shell-holes and generally clearing the way towards the line. Several of them had been prowling about the ruined French houses, and had salvaged some articles of apparel, which they seemed to take a huge delight in wearing. One chap had a hard hat on, another wore a woman's veil under the back of his steel hat, and a glaring red tie adorned another. War or no war, they seemed quite happy.

We pushed on up a short rise. In a sunken road we came across a German ammunition waggon, which had fallen foul of one of our shells. In among the remains of the six horses all the drives lay dead. The limber was shattered on one side, and sacks full of vegetables—potatoes especially—lay scattered everywhere.

We advanced about another mile and were then allotted our areas for digging in for the night. Most of us dug holes in the level ground about two or three feet deep, and long enough to lie down in, and with oilskins over the top to keep out the damp we turned in for the night. A little later a drizzly rain came on, and the air turned chilly on top of it. So we slept not so warmly as we should have liked.

Next morning we "stood to" until 10 a.m., awaiting orders, and rumours started to fly round again. "The Division are just in rear, and are taking over to-night. We're not going any further up." That was the first one which came from the vicinity of the cookers about breakfast

time, but by 10 o'clock the tune changed. "Fritz is going for his life, and there is no established line. The relieving Division won't take over until we hold a definite line. The first Brigade has to go forward and establish one."

About 12 noon we moved forward again, and it began to be whispered round among us that there was a stunt on—one objective that night, October 10, and another the following morning. We crossed the main railway from Cambrai to —, and found its rails with pieces about six inches long cut out of them every few yards. Crossing it we found ourselves in a wide stretch of beautiful country for miles ahead. Every here and there were huge crops of mangolds, and every other square foot of ground bore evidence of having been made full use of by the Hun for grain cropping last season. The countryside was dotted with small villages in the far-away back areas we had just left, where everything had been reduced to ruins by shell fire. To look at the country we were passing through and then imagine bloodshed and was a very hard thing to do. Everything looked so civilised and peaceful.

At 4.30 p.m. we halted to make ready for tea. The battalion transport had not arrived, having gone a round-about way by road, and we had some time to wait. When it did arrive, one particular company cook was missing, and full details as to the cause leaked out later when it arrived. They had taken a wrong turning which took them to another village some distance away, where they were met by an enthusiastic refugee population.

"Bon Soldiers! Vive l'Anglais!" they greeted, and out of sheer joy almost hugged our cooks and storemen. Our boys wondered what on earth had happened when they met with this reception, and there being only a few of them they felt rather embarrassed. However, they found the right road again, and came back with the tea for their anxiously waiting company.

One girl in this village is reported to have done fourteen months' hard labour for giving a handful of corn to a "Tommy" prisoner, and a little boy and his sister, both aged about nine, were given several lashes with a whip for taking a handful of wheat each from a heap the Germans were putting into bags. Everywhere there was evidence of the severe domination over the civilian population. They all appeared terror-stricken and frightened if they were spoken to. Some of them looked as if they did not yet realise they had been liberated.

After tea we pushed on again, and had hardly gone a hundred yards before we heard that the night's objective had been taken by the South Islanders, who had followed up another Fritz retirement. He had dug in again on the banks of the canal. Our objective was to be a rise on the further side.

Darkness was not long in coming, and we soon had the unpleasant experience of floundering about looking for our way in a pitch-black night. By this time we were getting fairly tired, and most of us felt rather glad that old Fritz had retired beyond our objective. None of us felt very hostile just then. We tramped and tramped ahead, but still seemed to be getting no nearer the war. In a sunken road we came across some of our South Island coppers—a reserve company.

"How far's the war, Dig?" was the first question we asked.

"About another two and a-half miles yet. Good luck!"

Securing a few more shovels from them to "dig in" with, we set our teeth and pushed on again. Between 10 and 11 p.m. we marched through the village of —, situated on the top of a rise and looking down on the — canal.

As we went through, the Hun was putting 8-inch stuff into it, making things anything but pleasant. We put on steam and moved as fast as we could. A few gas shells also were lobbing round and the air smelt strongly of gas, and once when we were passing where one had burst half an hour or so earlier our eyes began to weep, and handkerchiefs were brought into prominent display, but the air was not thick enough to make necessary the wearing of masks.

Next we came to a mine-crater in the centre of the main road, a huge hole, big enough to bury a fair-sized house in.

"Look out Dig! There's a whizz-bang

hole. Keep to the left." This remark was one of those passed back along the column. And we now often wonder what old Fritz would say if he heard the diggers calling his traffic-blocking mine-craters whizz-bang holes.

Passing out of the village we followed a down-hill road for several hundred yards, but, branching off this to the left, we picked a way in the darkness across the fields toward another village on the canal bank. We negotiated several wire fences by crawling under or through them, and crunched through patches of mangolds. We crossed a small gully and were near to the top of the further side—twice companies in all—when Fritz opened up on us with whizz-bangs. It seemed as if he had spotted us through the darkness and was just letting us know that we had at last bumped up against the front line. Salvo after salvo he fired over, altering his range every other one, until we had them "lobbing" all round us. Suddenly, in the midst of it all, three of us thought we spotted a light shining towards the enemy from the window of a lone house on our left.

"Put that — light out!" somebody shouted, and, strange to say it disappeared. Two diggers immediately crossed to the house and prowled round with their rifles at the "on guard," but they could find no one, and we came to the conclusion that what we had seen was a reflection from a flare in one of the windows.

The shelling had not ceased, however, and we eased off a little to the left to get out of the line of fire, but, strange to say, it seemed as if Fritz had anticipated our move, for he altered his range and commenced planting his shells exactly where we were about to go. We altered our course slightly again, veering still further to the left, and moved almost in a circle. We looked for all the world like a huge mob of sheep being attacked by worriers. Five minutes more and the shelling ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and we moved again in the direction of the canal village. We had gone about 100 yards when three of us in the rear of the last column spotted some figures moving back hurriedly on our left. With the suspicious light still in our minds we challenged them, but they paid no heed, and instead, seemed to push on all the faster. We three—a boy sergeant-major, and two others—moved out after them, carrying our arms in a handy position. When we came close enough the Sergeant-Major challenged again: "Halt! Who are you?" Again they failed to answer, so we ran until we came up with them. They turned out to be two South Islanders who had become separated from their company and had been too engrossed with their own troubles to take note of us. We assured them they were very lucky, and made back for our crowd. On our way we passed a company commander going out with a wound in the leg. He was the only casualty our Battalion had suffered from Fritz's mad strafe of a few moments before.

On the outskirts of the canal village we found the 2nd Brigade dug in. We relieved them, and they moved back.

As our fellows settled down, misty rain commenced falling, and the air grew cold. Patrols were sent forward to reconnoitre the village, which they shortly after reported "All Clear." They had been met by a crowd of French refugees, who gave them an enthusiastic welcome. One party had secured a Fritz prisoner in a cellar—locked him in—and handed him over to us. He was a young fellow, scarcely twenty, and seemed dazed when he found himself in British captivity.

Just before dawn two companies crossed the canal and established themselves on the further side. The rest of us then moved up into the village. For some time things were fairly quiet. An occasional J.E. shell would come whirling overhead, and several small gas shells kept landing behind us. "Emptying his dumps before pulling back," was the common verdict. One section of us settled down in a village cellar and had a few hours' sleep. Our objective was to be taken the following morning.

Punctually to the minute the barrage opened, and the diggers scrambled out of their possies and pushed forward. In a few moments chits began to come back: "Objective taken." For some time all was well. A report came back later, however, stating that Fritz's Jaeger Reserve Division—one of their picked regiments—had come back at our men after they had dug in, and had either taken some of them prisoner or had killed them and carried them out. At first we were inclined to disbelieve the report, but in the end it unfortunately proved true, and the rest of us had to fall back slightly and again dig in.

From the time his S.O.S. signal went up, Fritz put over a heavy strafe of five minutes. They began falling everywhere, from the front line straight back into reserve. Signal wires, maintaining the communications, were soon severed, and

the linesmen had stiff tasks ahead of them. It was not long before a shell hit the roof of the building we were in. At that time some of us were searching Hun prisoners, when the further wall of the next room crashed in, and pieces of shell and splinters of slate roof and bits of brick went flying everywhere. The Huns lost no time in clearing out to the building opposite—a brick stable—and we had a fair task to keep them still.

The strafe continued until well after midday, when it gradually wore off, and things became almost silent. Both his guns and ours were quiet, and but for the cracks of a few stray shots from snipers, no one would have known that there was a war on at all. After the stirring events of the morning it seemed uncanny, and every moment we expected a sudden break. It did come eventually, about four in the afternoon, when he counter-attacked the Division on our right.

A whisper then went round among us that we were going to be relieved that night, and our hopes began to go up by leaps and bounds. Billeting parties were sent out, so the rumour had good foundations. It was about five o'clock, when we were all "standing to" with packs up ready to move, that the order came for us to attack. There was yet another stunt ahead of us before relief. The ridge top had to be taken, so at 6 p.m. we again hopped over, covered by a barrage. This time, Jaegers or no Jaegers, the diggers were determined to carry out their job, and they streaked across No Man's Land like so many dogs let loose from the chain, and old Fritz bolted for his life. We dug in on our objective. When our attack opened he must have been in the act of withdrawing his guns in rear, for his S.O.S. flares failed to bring forth a reply, and our guns thundered unceasingly for a full half-hour.

In going forward in the darkness our fellows had somehow managed to miss a machine-gun "possie," and when the objective had been taken this gun opened out in all directions. Bullets whizzed everywhere until it was thought high time to send forth a "mopping-up" platoon. Meanwhile, the Fritz gunners had evidently taken note of their position and tried to make a break for it through our newly established front line, but unfortunately for them they found the diggers waiting for them; and out of the 18 or so of a gun crew, 16 were killed, one wounded, and one taken prisoner unhurt. After that silence reigned, and the next thing we knew was that a Company had arrived to relieve us. Not a shot was fired during the whole time the relief was taking place, so, weary and tired, but none the less happy, the diggers tramped back to billets for a well-earned rest.

If you were by chance to enter a certain village and peer through the windows of the houses, you would see us, before huge fires burning in big open fireplaces, sitting back in comfortable arm-chairs, some with feet on the mantelpieces, smoking pipes, and discussing Germany's latest Peace offer.

### ON TOWARDS LE QUESNOY.

Lying on a cove's back in hard work for an old digger who got something from Fritz on Monday the 4th, somewhere round about Le Quesnoy.

Leaving Solesmes about 5.30 on Sunday night we marched a distance of about fourteen kilos. A drizzling rain commenced falling, but soon eased off. Every few yards the long procession would halt—and growl! (It would make Bairnsfather's "Ole Bill coin new growls). The journey took about six hours. We had supper and some men at its end; and there in the open, 'midst cookers and much noise—and with yon Damitall not far away—we managed about five hours' sleep. Awake again, we had some "kai," to fortify the old dig for the fray, and the assembly began. "Our battery (1st L.T.M.B.) went in with six gun-teams, as the attack was on a very large scale and the full strength of the unit was being used."

That assembly in the dark! Lights were everywhere. Jerry—who was not far away, as his Very lights showed—was completely ignored. About 5 a.m. all were ready, and the guns ripped lighting flashes into the paling darkness. We have never had such a glorious barrage since Messines, Dig. The hammering of the guns was like the continuous noise of those big engines climbing up the — takas.

We had orders to get away, later with our company, and after a wait off we lunged. The daylight came pretty quickly, it developed into a light mist, of a smoky aspect; and the small woodlands were soon were passing through long fields of bages of the blue, pickling variety which Fritz had planted for suerkrant. At Solesmes, too, he had a paddock of green move cabbages!—Mr Massey might have said at a certain great moment in the