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NEW ZEALANDERS IN ACTION.

(Extract from "Chronicles of the
N.Z.E.F.," Nov. 8, 1919).WITH THE DIGGERS TO "DIGGER-
VILLE."

It seems a long time since we passed by Bapaume, yet I must go back there to pick up the threads of my narrative which told of the doings of the artillery up to the fall of that town. It is over a month since, and the intervening weeks have not been without their interest. Steadily the Hun has been pushed back, and in his enforced retreat we have followed persistently on his heels. One day he would shell continuously, and both forward and back areas would be harassed. The next day he would be as contrastingly silent. And that was the surest indication of a withdrawal on his part. In the end it became symptomatic.

From Bapaume the guns went into action behind Fremicourt, were moved again in front of that village on September 3rd, and the next day, Fritz having retreated during the night, we trekked up to the left of Bertincourt, and went into action near Velu Wood. Our stay here was for three days, and on the afternoon of the 7th the guns went forward another two or three miles, while the infantry had occupied a line to the east of Havencourt Wood, somewhat approximating that from which Fritz launched his offensive in March last. We were now close up to the famous Hindenburg line, and, as we expected, we halted for a fortnight while the next attack was being prepared.

On — the infantry pulled out of the line for a spell, but it was our lot again, as it has been repeatedly before, to remain in action while the rest of the diggers were resting. However, in the long run we were to get a short spell. About — the bridge came out for a breather of some days, and returned to the line on the nights of the — and the —. Once again we were on the eve of a big stunt. This time we were up against old Hindenburg's impregnable line. The attacks began in the dawning of September 27th, and, as the day wore on, it became apparent we were on the right flank of the attack. This was the Canadians' dash for Cambrai, and gradually we watched the balloons north of us swinging in towards that point, indicating how well they had done. The next day, although we had had no definite news as to how things were going, the balloons travelled even farther eastward. — came our turn to move. By this time our infantry had come back to the line, and we were glad to see them. On the night of the 28th the guns went forward up over the heights which dominate —, and another blow was delivered. This brought us into that great system of wire entanglements and deep dug-outs upon which Fritz had placed such reliance. But it had crumpled up here as it had done all along the line, and the infantry were well through it.

On the 30th the diggers made another big advance, which took them right up to the Canal. The guns followed up, though it was hard going, as the roads were in bad condition—having been reduced to a series of shell holes. From Beauchamp, we passed through Villers-Plouich, lying at the bottom of the gully, and up the hillside to the top of that high commanding ridge, on the eastern crest of which lie the ruins of La Vacquerie. For two nights the guns were in action, and then, on —, we side-stepped to the north to get in behind our own boys, as hitherto we had been covering Imperial troops. The guns took up positions on the western face of the last ridge before St. Quentin canal. We were in that big salient which the canal makes to the east from Marcoing to Crevecoeur at its apex, into which the infantry had penetrated in their rapid advance. By degrees, then, we had worked through the Hindenburg line. We were just over the last system of wire entanglements, which from the heights we were on we could see stretching away for miles on either hand. From this spot, too, we had a grand view of the surrounding country. Below in the gully were the batteries, camouflaged in their pits; away further in the distance was Bournon Wood, and round further again was Cambrai whence rose great columns of dense smoke from the fires the enemy had started. The three church steeples stood nobly erect, and, looking down on that study of war, on so fine a city being thus wantonly destroyed, I was deeply moved.

To-day we learn that Fritz has begun to fall back again, and to-morrow we are to cross the Canal. Ahead lies some grand open country, something so vastly different to the last few miles of broken, wire-strewn territory which the Hindenburg line has left like a scar across the face of the land. To-morrow, then, we

continue the game, and it seems as though we were entering a land of promise.

Later.

On the afternoon of October 7th, the brigade moved to the eastern side of the Canal, crossing by a pontoon bridge, constructed by the Engineers. Skirting round through Vauchelles, the guns went into action in the neighbourhood of Cheneux Wood, a few hundred yards in front of which was Fritz's line. That night was a wild one, if ever there was—pitch black, so that one could scarcely see one's hand before one's eyes. The weather, too, was changeable, and a good deal of rain had fallen. Yet, through it all, the preparations for a big stunt went on, and the next morning it opened. The guns blazed away merrily, for two or three hours, and the infantry hopped it and drove Fritz for over three miles. The day came out beautifully fine, and that afternoon we moved up into the sunken road leading to —. The batteries went into action immediately in front. Here we occupied a series of dug-outs which only that morning had been a German headquarters, and which had produced to the Canterbury some three hundred odd prisoners. The next morning, October 9th another barrage was begun for the continuation of the stunt, but it turned out to be a wasted effort. The infantry went over and encountered little or no opposition, Fritz had quietly gone in the night, and so the guns without great necessity barked away for over three hours. We packed up once again and moved on, reaching — by the afternoon, where we remained the night. Now we were among towns practically intact, a rare change from the devastated villages we had passed through. Once again, during the night, Fritz retreated, and again we moved on, and trekked through — into —, which had been systematically mined. The main thoroughfare had several gaping craters, with wrecked on either side, but otherwise the town had suffered little. The houses had been well looted by the Huns, and shops and all had been left in a terrible condition. The forward sections of guns went through the town, and opened fire during the morning hours upon machine-gun positions which were temporarily holding up the advance. That night we went into reserve, and now we are billeted in — itself. Since then the whole division has arrived in the town; we are all out on a very welcome spell, and I don't suppose there has been such a gathering of Pig Islanders in one spot for a long, long time. — might well be called "Diggerville." We are living more comfortably than at any other period of our stay in France. Most of us are enjoying the luxuries of decent homes, tables and chairs, soft beds, and pianos. Truly it is the best war we've struck so far.

—D.V.G.S.

DISPATCHES FROM THE DIVISION.

(From the Official Correspondent).

October 21.—Since the Division started on the great drive from the region of Hebuterne it has advanced in five and a half weeks 40 miles, fighting its way over 327 miles of this distance, capturing over 6,000 prisoners, 49 guns, and nearly a thousand machine-guns. Of the prisoners, 180 were officers, and 800 were wounded.

October 23.—The New Zealanders have made another splendid advance in the battle which was recommenced this morning by the British Armies. Canterbury and Otago troops assembled across the Selle River just south of Solesmes. Waiting for a short initial advance by an English division which had been holding the line, they went forward at 8.40, following a destructive barrage which made hundreds of the enemy take to flight. The troops were in fine form and pressed quickly after the retreating enemy. Prisoners soon came back, a mixed lot and very dejected. They had been told that Germany had agreed to our demands, and they wondered why we were still fighting. Shortly after noon, pressing on, our men crossed a small stream and, still meeting with slight opposition, reached their first objective, forward and to the right of the village of Vertain. Ahead lay an obstacle in the shape of a stream of considerable size, named St. George's. The bridges were blown up, but the troops, making light of difficulties, reached the other side with but few casualties, and, after an hour's pause, proceeded to exploit their success toward another stream, the River Ecallon, with steep banks and a considerable flow of water. Ahead lies Beaudignies, and beyond that Quesnoy, with its old wall of fortifications.

In all we have advanced to-day 6,000 yards, and battalions which took the first objective are still strong enough to go on again to-morrow. It has been a fine day's work. Other divisions engaged in the battle have also done well, and there has been a big haul of prisoners. The weather

which recently has been dull and wet, cleared last evening; this morning the battlefield was veiled in mist, but later the sun shone out, and all were in high feather with the success.

Continuous streams of traffic, unhindered by enemy shelling or aeroplanes, poured along the roads, and regimental bands stationed at intervals, played stirring tunes, as the troops marched to victory. The New Zealand Artillery did excellently; they were in a position south-east of Solesmes, and, having fired from there till 6 a.m., they limbered up and dashed forward to shoot for the advance on the next objective. For this shoot, batteries had already 350 rounds of ammunition dumped.

In Solesmes there was ample evidence of the devilish destructiveness of the Hun. Houses had been looted, and much of what could not be carried away smashed. A large number of civilians left behind gathered in groups to-day and, somewhat dazed with the sudden change, watched for hours our troops and traffic streaming past. Some of them recognised, among returning prisoners, officers and men who had but a little while before treated them brutally. Some civilians with difficulty were restrained from violence upon one man who only a few days back had kicked a little child in the street because it did not get out of his way. But the saddest incident of all was that of a germdame returning to his own town. He had had no news for four years of his wife, who lived there. To-day he learned that before the German departure her two children had been locked in a room while she was gagged and outraged by a German soldier, and, as the result of her ill-treatment, she was already dead. When I expressed doubts to some of the civilians who told this story, they took me to the doctor who attended the woman, and he confirmed the statement in its entirety; he did his best to save her, but failed. Fines were imposed upon civilians for trivial and even imaginary offences; treatment of British prisoners was, as usual, brutal, and they were made to work at trench-digging and wiring under shell-fire.

October 24.—Last night many New Zealanders slept in the town through which, a few months ago, the Emperor and the Crown Prince motored en route to Le Cateau. As the All-Highest passed, all the civilians, on pain of severe punishment, had to remain indoors. Now these civilians are returning from noisome cellars—in which they had been cooped up for ten to fifteen days—to their old living rooms, strewn with the litter of their remaining household goods. A few shells came over; otherwise we were unmolested. To-day, in the bright sunshine, the tricolour flies from many houses, and pale-faced civilians gather in little groups and curiously watch the army streaming forward. Maori Pioneers are helping to clean up the town, and are already great friends with the inhabitants.

Along the Corps front, yesterday's fighting was curiously varied. In some sectors machine-guns stoutly resisted the advance, while in others they did not fight with much determination. Many ran before the initial creeping barrage, and the resistance weakened as we advanced. We learnt that the enemy had heard the sound of our approaching tanks, and this news going quickly to the rear brought heavy enemy shelling on part of the front before the attack commenced. Our men fortunately escaped. Enemy air scouts were aggressive, single-seaters patrolling the line offensively and two-seaters reconnoitring under strong patrols of single-seaters. Generally speaking, there was more enemy artillery fire than has been experienced for sometime on the line of the New Zealanders' attack.

Further details of yesterday's fighting add to our admiration of the South Islanders' splendid feat, who advanced so far and, eventually, under cover of darkness, stormed Ecallon bridgeheads. In addition to the artillery, the Canterbury and Auckland machine-gun companies greatly helped the infantry in their advance. In from of Vertigneul village—which we captured early in the day—machine-gunners drove their limbers right up into action, and in one moment had their guns off the limbers and were firing a barrage in front of the advancing infantry. Their performance was particularly brilliant. Later, they made a further advance to protect our right flank, which was in the air—our infantry at one time holding two thousand yards beyond their boundary. A famous division on our left kept well abreast of the New Zealanders, the Gordons especially distinguishing themselves. Canterbury and Otago men moving forward to the high ground ahead still had opposition from German machine-gunners on the right; but one company was swung around to keep the enemy down, while another—reached the outskirts of Beaudignies, on the banks of the Ecallon River.

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