

Gunner Depew

By
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"I Got Wan From Each of Thim Fellas."

fellas." We counted fourteen prisoners in the bunch. Pat sure thought he was rolling in wealth.

After we were rested up we were issued rifles, shrapnel helmets and belts, and then started down the communication trench. These trenches are entrances to the fighting trenches and run at varying angles and varying distances apart. They are seldom wide enough to hold more than one man, so you have to march single file in them. They wind in and out, according to the lay of the land, some parts of them being more dangerous than others. When you come to a dangerous spot you have to crawl sometimes.

There are so many cross trenches and blind alleys that you have to have a guide for a long time, because without one you are apt to walk through an embrasure in a fire trench and right out into the open, between the German front line and your own. Which is hardly worth while!

If any part of the line is under fire, the guide at the head of the line is on the lookout for shells, and when he hears one coming he gives the signal and you drop to the ground and wait until it bursts. You never get all the time you want, but at that you have plenty of time to think about things while you are lying there with your face in the mud, waiting to hear the sound of the explosion. When you hear it, you know you have got at least one more to dodge. If you do not hear it—well, most likely you are worrying more about tuning your thousand-string harp than anything else.

In the communication trench you have to keep your distance from the man ahead of you. This is done so that you will have plenty of room to fall down in, and because if a shell should find the trench, there would be fewer casualties in an open formation than in a closed. The German artillery is keen on communication trenches, and whenever they spot one they stay with it a long time. Most of them are camouflaged along the top and sides, so that enemy aviators cannot see anything but the earth or bushes, when they throw an eye down on our lines.

We took over our section of the front line trenches from a French line regiment that had been on the job for 24 days. That was the longest time I have heard of any troops remaining on the firing line.

Conditions at the front and ways of fighting are changing all the time, as each side invents new methods of butchering, so when I try to describe the Dixmude trenches, you must realize that it is probably just history by now. If they are still using trenches there they probably look entirely different.

But when I was at Dixmude they were something like this:

Behind the series of front-line trenches are the reserve trenches; in this case five to seven miles away, and still farther back are the billets. These may be houses or barns or ruined churches—any place that can possibly be used for quartering troops when off duty.

Troops were usually in the front-line trenches six to eight days, and fourteen to sixteen days in the reserve trenches. Then back to the billets for six or eight days.

We were not allowed to change our clothing in the front-line trenches—not even to remove socks, unless for inspection. Nor would they let you as much as unbutton your shirt, unless there was an inspection of identification disks. We wore a disk at the wrist and another around the neck. You know the gag about the disks, of course: If your arm is blown off they can tell who you are by the neck disk; if your head is blown off, they do not care who you are.

In the reserve trenches you can make yourself more comfortable, but you cannot go to such extreme lengths of luxury as changing your clothes entirely. That is for billets, where you spend most of your time bathing, changing clothes, sleeping and eating. Believe me, a billet is great stuff; it is like a sort of temporary heaven.

Of course you know what the word "cooties" means. Let us hope you will never know what the cooties themselves mean. When you get in or near the trenches, you take a course in the natural history of bugs, lice, rats and every kind of pest that has ever been invented.

It is funny to see some of the new comers when they first discover a cootie on them. Some of them cry. If they really knew what it was going to be like they would do worse than that.

Then they start hunting all over each other, just like monkeys. They team up for this purpose, and many times it is in this way that a couple of men get to be trench partners and come to be pals for life—which may not be a long time at that.

In the front-line trenches it is more comfortable to fall asleep on the parapet fire-step than in the dugouts, because the cooties are thicker down below, and they simply will not give you a minute's rest. They certainly are active little pests. We used to make back scratchers out of certain weapons that had flexible handles, but never had time to use them when we needed them most.

We were given bottles of a liquid which smelled like lysol and were supposed to soak our clothes in it. It was thought that the cooties would object to the smell and quit work. Well, a cootie that could stand our clothes without the dope on them would not be bothered by a little thing like this stuff. Also, our clothes got so sour and horrible smelling that they hurt our noses worse than the cooties. They certainly were game little devils, and came right back at us.

So most of the pollus threw the dope at Fritz and fought the cooties hand to hand.

There was plenty of food in the trenches most of the time, though once in a while, during a heavy bombardment, the fatigue—usually a corporal's guard—would get killed in the communication trenches and we would not have time to get out to the fatigue and rescue the grub they were bringing. Sometimes you could not find either the fatigue or the grub when you got to the point where they had been hid.

But, as I say, we were well fed most of the time, and got second and third helpings until we had to open our belts. But as the Limeys say: "Gaw blimey, the chuck was rough." They served a thick soup of meat and vegetables in bowls the size of wash basins, black coffee with or without sugar—mostly without—and plenty of bread.

Also, we had preserves in tins, just like the Limeys. If you send any parcels over, do not put any apple and plum jam in them or the man who gets it will let Fritz shoot him. Ask any Limey soldier and he will tell you the same. I never thought there was so much jam in the world. No man's Land looked like a city dump. Most of us took it, after a while, just to get the bread. Early in the war they used the tins to make bombs of, but that was before Mills came along with his hand grenade. Later on they flattened out the tins and lined the dugouts with them.

Each man carried an emergency ration in his bag. This consisted of bully beef, biscuits, etc. This ration was never used except in a real emergency, because no one could tell when it might mean the difference between life and death to him. When daylight catches a man in a shell-hole or at a listening post out in No Man's Land he does not dare to crawl back to his trench before nightfall, and then is the time that his emergency ration comes in handy. Also, the stores failed to reach us sometimes, as I have said, and we had to use the emergency rations.

Sometimes we received raw meat and fried it in our dugouts. We built regular clay ovens in the dugouts, with iron tops for broiling. This, of course, was in the front-line trenches only.

We worked two hours on the fire-step and knocked off for four hours, in which time we cooked and ate and slept. This routine was kept up night and day, seven days a week. Sometimes the program was changed; for instance, when there was to be an attack or when Fritz tried to come over and visit, but otherwise nothing disturbed our routine unless it was a gas attack.

The ambition of most privates is to become a sniper, as the official sharpshooters are called. After a private has been in the trenches for six months or a year and has shown his marksmanship, he becomes the great man he has dreamed about. We had two snipers to each company and because they took more chances with their lives than the ordinary privates they were allowed more privileges. When it was at all possible our snipers were allowed dry quarters, the best of food, and they did not have to follow the usual routine, but came and went as they pleased.

Our snipers, as a rule, went over the parapet about dusk, just before Fritz got his star shells going. They would crawl out to shell craters or tree stumps or holes that they had spotted during the day—in other words, places where they could see the enemy parapets but could not be seen themselves. Once in position, they would make themselves comfortable, smear their tin hats with dirt, get a good rest for their rifles and snipe every German they saw. They wore extra bandoleers of cartridges, since there was no telling how many rounds they might fire during the night. Sometimes they had direct and visible targets and other times they potted Huns by guesswork. Usually

they crawled back just before daylight, but sometimes they were out 24 hours at a stretch. They took great pride in the number of Germans they knocked over, and if our men did not get eight or ten they thought they had not done a good night's work. Of course it was not wholesale killing, like machine gunning, but it was very useful, because our snipers were always laying for the German snipers, and when they got Sniper Fritz they saved just so many of our lives.

The Limeys have a great little expression that means a lot: "Carry on." They say it is a cockney expression.

When a captain falls in action, his words are not a message to the girl he left behind him or any dope about his gray-haired mother, but "Carry on, Lieutenant Whosis." If the lieutenant gets his it is "Carry on, Sergeant Jacks," and so on as far as it goes. So the words used to mean, "Take over the command and do the job right." But now they mean not only that but "Keep up your courage, and go to it." One man will say it to another sometimes when he thinks the first man is getting downhearted, but more often, if he is a Limey, he will start kidding him.

Our men, of course, did not say "Carry on," and in fact they did not have any expression in French that meant exactly the same thing. But they used to cheer each other along, all right, and they passed along the command when it was necessary, too. I wonder what expression the American troops will use. (You notice I do not call them Sammies!)

I took my turn at listening post with the rest of them, of course. A listening post is any good position out in No Man's Land, and is always held by two men. Their job is to keep a live ear on Fritz and in case they hear anything that sounds very much like an attack one man runs back to his lines and the other stays to hold back the Boches as long as he can. You can figure for yourself which is the most healthful job.

As many times as I went on listening-post duty I never did get to feeling homelike there exactly. You have to lie very still, of course, as Fritz is listening, too, and a move may mean a bullet in the ribs. So, lying on the ground with hardly a change of position, the whole lower part of my body would go to sleep before I had been at the post very long. I used to brag a lot about how fast I could run, so I had my turn as the runner, which suited me all right. But every time I got to a listening post and started to think about what I would do if Fritz should come over and wondered how good a runner he was, I took a long breath and said, "Feet, do your duty." And I was strong on duty.

After I had done my stint in the front-line and reserve trenches I went back with my company to billets, but had only been there for a day or two before I was detached and detailed to the artillery position to the right of us, where both the British and French had mounted naval guns. There were guns of all calibers there, both naval and field pieces, and I got a good look at the famous "75's," which are the best guns in the world, in my estimation, and the one thing that saved Verdun.



They Potted Huns by Guess Work.

The "75's" fired 30 shots a minute, where the best German guns could do was six. The American three-inch field piece lets go six times a minute, too. The French government owns the secret of the mechanism that made this rapid fire possible. When the first "75's" began to roar, the Germans knew the French had found a new weapon, so they were very anxious to get one of the guns and learn the secret.

Shortly afterward they captured eight guns by a mass attack in which, the allies claim, there were 4,000 German troops killed. The Boches studied the guns and tried to turn out pieces like them at the Krupp factory. But somehow they could not get it. Their imitation "75's" would only fire five shots very rapidly and then "cough"—puff, puff, puff, with nothing coming out. The destructive power of the "75's" is enormous. These guns have saved the lives of thousands of pollus and Tommies and it is largely due to them that the French are now able to beat Fritz at his own game and give back shell for shell—and then some.

CHAPTER V.

With the "75's."

My pal Brown, of whom I spoke before, had been put in the infantry when he enlisted in the Legion, because he had served in the United States infantry. He soon became a sergeant, which had been his rating in the American service. I never saw him in the trenches, because our outfits were nowhere near each other, but whenever we were in billets at the same time, we were together as much as possible.

Brown was a funny card and I never saw anyone else much like him. A big, tall, red-headed, dopey-looking fellow, never saying much and slow in everything he did or said—you would never think he amounted to much or was worth his salt. The boys used to call him "Ginger" Brown, both on account of his red hair and his slow movements. But he would pull a sur-

prise on you every once in a while, like this one that he fooled me with. One morning about dawn we started out for a walk through what used to be Dixmude—piles of stone and brick and mortar. There were no civvies to be seen; only mules and horses bringing up casks of water, bags of beans, chloride of lime, barbed wire, ammunition, etc. It was a good thing they were not superstitious. At that, the shadows along the walls made me feel shaky sometimes.

Finally Brown said: "Come on down; let's see the '75's.'" At this time I had not seen a "75," except on a train going to the front, so I took him up right away, but was surprised that he should know where they were.

After going half way around Dixmude Brown said, "Here we are," and started right into what was left of a



We Started Right Into What Was Left of a Big House.

big house. I kept wondering how he would know so much about it, but followed him. Inside the house was a passageway under the ruins. It was about seven feet wide and fifty feet long, I should judge.

At the other end was the great old "75," poking its nose out of a hole in the wall. The gun captain and the crew were sitting around, waiting the word for action, and they seemed to know Brown well. I was surprised at that, but still more so when he told me I could examine the gun if I wanted to, just as if he owned it.

So I sat in the seat and trained the cross wires on an object, opened and closed the breech and examined the recoil. Then Brown said: "Well, Chink, you'll see some real gunnery now," and they passed the word and took stations. My eyes bulged out when I saw Brown take his station with them! "Silence!" is about the first command a gun crew gets when it is going into action, but I forgot all about it, and shouted out and asked Brown how he got to be a gunner. But he only grinned and looked dopey, as usual. Then I came to and expected to get a call down from the officer, but he only grinned and so did the crew. It seems they had it all framed to spring on me, and they expected I would be surprised.

So we put cotton in our ears and the captain called the observation tower a short distance away and they gave him the range. Then the captain "called 4128 meters" to Brown. They placed the nose of a shell in a fuse adjuster and turned the handle until it reached scale 4128. This set the fuse to explode at the range given. Then they slammed the shell into the breech, locked it shut and Brown sent his best to Fritz.

The barrel slipped back, threw out the shell case at our feet and returned over a cushion of grease. Then we received the results by telephone from the observation tower. After he had fired twelve shots the captain said to Brown, "You should never waste yourself in infantry, son." And old dopey Brown just stood there and grinned.

That was Brown every time. He knew about more things than you could think of. He had read about gunnery and fooled around at Dixmude until they let him play with the "75's," and finally here he was, giving his kindest to old Fritz with the rest of them.

I never saw a battery better concealed than this one. Up on the ground you couldn't see the muzzle twenty yards away—and that was all there was to see at any distance. There was a ruined garden just outside the gun quarters, and while the gunners were there picking apples there would be a hiss and an explosion, and over would go some of the trees, or maybe a man or two, but never a shell struck nearer the guns than that. The pollus used to thank Fritz for helping them pick the apples, because the explosions would bring them down in great style. Shells from our heavy artillery passed just over the garden, too, making an awful racket. But they were not in it with the "75's."

They gave me a little practice with a "75" under the direction of expert French gunners before I went to my 14-inch naval gun, and believe me, it was a fine little piece. Just picture to yourself a little beauty that can send a 38-pound shell every two seconds for five miles and more, if you want it to, and land on Fritz' vest bullet every time. There is nothing I like better than a gun, anyway, and I have never since been entirely satisfied with anything less than a "75."

As you probably know, the opposing artillery in this war is so widely separated that the gunners never see their targets unless these happen to be

buildings, and even then it is rare. So, since an artillery officer never sees the enemy artillery or infantry, he must depend on others to give him the range and direction.

For this purpose there are balloons and airplanes attached to each artillery unit. The airplanes are equipped with wireless, but also signal by smoke and direction of flight, while the balloons use telephones. The observers have maps and powerful glasses and cameras. Their maps are marked off in zones to correspond with the maps used by the artillery officers.

The observations are signaled to a receiving station on the ground and are then telephoned to the batteries. All our troops were equipped with telephone signal corps detachments and this was a very important arm of the service. The enemy position is shelled before an attack, either en barrage or otherwise, and communication between the waves of attack and the artillery is absolutely necessary. Bombardments are directed toward certain parts of the enemy position almost as accurately as you would use a searchlight. The field telephones are very light and are portable to the last degree. They can be rigged up or knocked down in a very short time. The wire is wound on drums or reels and you would be surprised to see how quickly our corps established communication from a newly won trench to headquarters, for instance. They were asking for our casualties before we had finished having them, almost.

Artillery fire was directed by men whose duty it was to dope out the range from the information sent them by the observers in the air. Two men were stationed at the switchboard, one man to receive the message and the other to operate the board. As soon as the range was plotted out it was telephoned to the gunners and they did the rest.

The naval guns at Dixmude were mounted on flat cars and these were drawn back and forth on the track by little Belgian engines.

After I had been at my gun for several days I was ordered back to my regiment, which was again in the front-line trenches. My course was past both the British and French lines but quite a distance behind the front lines.

Everywhere there were ambulances and wagons going backward and forward. I met one French ambulance that was a long wagon full of pollus from a field hospital near the firing line and was driven by a man whose left arm was bandaged to the shoulder. Two pollus who sat in the rear on guard had each been wounded in the leg and one had a big strip of his scalp torn off. There was not a sound man in the bunch. You can imagine what their cargo was like, if the convoy was as used up as these chaps. But all who could were singing and talking and full of pep. That is the French for you; they used no more men than they could possibly spare to take care of the wounded, but they were all cheerful about it—always.

Just after I passed this ambulance the Germans began shelling a section of the road too near me to be comfortable, so I beat it to a shell crater about twenty yards off the road, to the rear. A shrapnel shell exploded pretty near me just as I jumped into this hole—I did not look around to see how close it was—and I remember now how the old minstrel joke I had heard on board ship came to my mind at the time—something about a fellow feeling so small he climbed into a hole and pulled it after him—and I wished I might do the same. I flattened myself as close against the wall of the crater as I could and then I noticed that somebody had made a dugout in the other wall of the crater and I started for it.

The shells were exploding so fast by that time that you could not listen for each explosion separately, and just as I jumped into the dugout a regular



A Regular Hail of Shrapnel Fell.

hall of shrapnel fell on the spot I had just passed. It was pretty dark in the dugout and the first move I made I bumped into somebody else and he let out a yell that you could have heard a mile. It was a Tommy who had been wounded in the hand and between curses he told me I had sat right on his wound when I moved. I asked him why he did not yell sooner, but he only swore more. He surely was a great cusser.

The bombardment slackened up a bit about this time, and I thought I would have a look around. I did not get out of the crater entirely, but moved around out of the dugout until I could see the road I had been on.

The first thing I saw was a broken-down wagon that had just been hit—in fact, it was toppling over when my eye caught it. The driver jumped from his seat and while he was in the air his head was torn completely from his shoulders by another shell—I do not know what kind. This was enough for me, so back to the dugout.

How the Germans did it I do not know, but they had found out about that road and opened fire at exactly the moment when the road was covered with wagons and men. Yet there had not been a balloon or airplane in the sky for some time.

After a while the bombardment moved away to the east, from which direction I had come, and I knew our batteries were getting it. The Tommy and I came out of the dugout. As I started climbing up the muddy sides I saw there was a man standing at the edge of it, and I could tell by his puttees that he was a Limey. I was having a hard job of it, so without looking up I hailed him.

"That was sure some shelling, wasn't it?" I said. "There's a lad down here with a wounded fin; better give him a hand."

"What shelling do you mean," says the legs, without moving. "There's been none in this sector for some time, I think."

The Tommy was right at my heel by this time, and he let out a string of language. I was surprised, too, and still scrambling around in the mud.

Then the Tommy let a "Gawd 'elp us!" and I looked up and saw that the legs belonged to a Limey officer, a major, I think. And here we had been cussing the eyes off of him!

But he sized it up rightly and gave us a hand, and only laughed when we tried to explain. I got rattled and told him that all I saw was his legs and that they did not look like an officer's legs, which might have made it worse, only he was good-natured about it. Then he said that he had been asleep in a battalion headquarters dug-out, about a hundred yards away, and only waked up when part of the roof caved in on him. Yet he did not know he had been shelled!

I went on down the road a stretch, but soon found it was easier walking beside it, because the Huns had shelled it neatly right up and down the middle. Also, there were so many wrecked horses and wagons to climb over on the road—besides dead men.

After I had passed the area of the bombardment and got back on the road I sat down to rest and smoke. A couple of shells had burst so near the crater that they had thrown the dirt right into the dugout, and I was a little dizzy from the shock. While I was sitting there a squad of Tommies came up with about twice their number of German prisoners. The Tommies had been making Fritz do the goose step and they started them at it again when they saw me sitting there. It sure is good for a laugh any time, this goose step. I guess they call it that after the fellow who invented it.

One thing I had noticed about Fritz was the way his coat flared out at the bottom, so I took this chance to find out about it, while they halted for a rest just a little farther down the road. I found that they carried their emergency kits in their coats. These kits contained canned meat, tobacco, needles, thread and plaster—all this in addition to their regular pack. Then I drilled down the road some more, but had to stop pretty soon to let a column of French infantry swing on to the road from a field. They were on their way to the trenches as re-enforcements. After every two companies there would be a wagon. Pretty soon I saw the uniform of the Legion. Then a company of my regiment came up and I wheeled in with them. We were in the rear of the column that had passed. Our boys were going up for their regular stunt in the front lines, while the others had just arrived at that part of the front.

Then for the first time my feet began hurting me. Our boots were made of rough cowhide and fitted very well, but it was a day's labor to carry them on your feet. I began lagging behind. I would lag twenty of thirty yards behind and then try to catch up. But the thousands of men ahead of me kept up the steady pace and very few limped, though they had been on the march since 3 a. m. It was then about 11 a. m. Those who did limp were carried in the wagons. But I had seen very few men besides the drivers miring in the wagons, and I wanted to be as tough as the next guy, so I kept on. But, believe me, I was sure glad when we halted for a rest along the road.

That is, the re-enforcements did! Our company of the Legion had not come from so far, and when the front of the column had drawn out of the way along the road we kept on filing, as the saying is. I did not care about being tough then, and I was ready for the wagon.

Only now there were no wagons! They belonged with the other troops. So I had to ease along as best I could for what seemed like hours—to my feet—until we turned off onto another road and halted for a rest. I found out later that our officers had gone astray and were lost at this time, though, of course, they did not tell us so.

We arrived at our section of the trench about three o'clock that afternoon and I rejoined my company. I was all tired out after this trek and found myself longing for the Cassard and the rolling wave, where no Marathons and five-mile hikes were necessary. But this was not in store for me—yet.

(Continued next week)

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