

Laddie Abroad—Billets, Gun Pits and Ammunition Carrying

By Bonnycastle Dale

In all this land of "Sunny France"—(you ought to see it when the skies weep! Muddy, muddy France)—one would never think the dreadful 'sub' was at work stopping supplies—motors run everywhere. Yes! right in the middle of the roads where the troops should march, nearly all the fields are brown from the plow, all old men and women and girls do this work. I am beginning to shed all superfluous things already, one is not supposed to have even a kit bag here, just about the things you stand up in and some extra socks.

I am already on the ammunition, and the corporal has just ordered me off with another load—later, no mishaps, back safely; glad to get back though, "Fritz" put some shells too close for my liking. I thought the first one had me. No! bad shot; over-reached the road 200 yards. I see where our "tin hats" come in useful now, there was a lot of steel and debris flying all along that road; most of the shells struck behind our quarters though; but just now, as I took the horses to water, they were too close to be agreeable, so I came back in a hurry. No mail yet. After a draft gets settled it takes quite a time to get them "right" on the mail.

We get no papers here and, if I believed all the yarns floating about, "the war is over," "it has only begun," "Sam Hughes is the best general," "Sir Sam Fish (his trench name) is the worst ever," etc., etc. Hurrah! I just got my long boots; every man has a pair over here, and he needs them. Can you imagine a field that was once a field but is one no longer; a million shells have fallen in it. The top soil has completely disappeared, the clay subsoil is churned into a creamy paste, crater edge meets crater edge all over the scene until, under the rains, the entire front is one unending chain of deep-set miniature lakes with high muddy shores, some big enough to float a canoe, others mere mud ponds.

I have gone relic-hunting on such a field; a fellow is lucky to get himself back without any souvenirs. I often think of the "missing," deep under these topsy-turvy eruptions. As is my custom I shall not tell you of any horrors; but I have seen things.

It rains every day this winter and clears almost every night. I saw a sight that surely did make my shoulder itch when I was going down "to water." In a corner by some wire entanglements were eleven quail; they seemed tame, so I sat down and watched them. One cannot help looking at them also as so much food in this land of "iron rations."

The mud-hens are in the pond where I water. Seems so strange, where people and customs are so different from ours, to find exactly similar game birds, with all the same habits and tricks, as in Canada.

Referring to the craters again, I paid a visit to one of the large mine craters, one blown out from the bottom, of course. Even when I got to the edge it seemed hard to believe it was blown up by a small amount of explosive; but when I got to the bottom it seemed impossible. It is the largest hole I have ever seen, and it was a stiff climb out I tell you!

I was just out to get the rum issue, it sure warms one up after a long day in the cold and wet. We have mud on our boots, our clothes, in our hair; and I find it hard to keep it out of my food and the few letters I can write. Tell those kind-hearted but misled women who are working to have the rum issue abolished, that one keg of rum will do more real good to a company of shivering men than all their daily efforts. Ask each one if they ever shivered and shrank with the cold—No! We do every day. I never drink liquor and I never will, as a beverage; but the rum issue is a blessing. I will now go to my bed in the mud—I have a wee dugout—and unless the ammunition boxes hold out, we will be cold again to-night.

Another chance to write. I do not know what day it is, we lose track completely—but thanks to the diary you sent me, I can soon get right. One of our Cobourg boys got a "blighty." It is a wonder to me why more of us do not

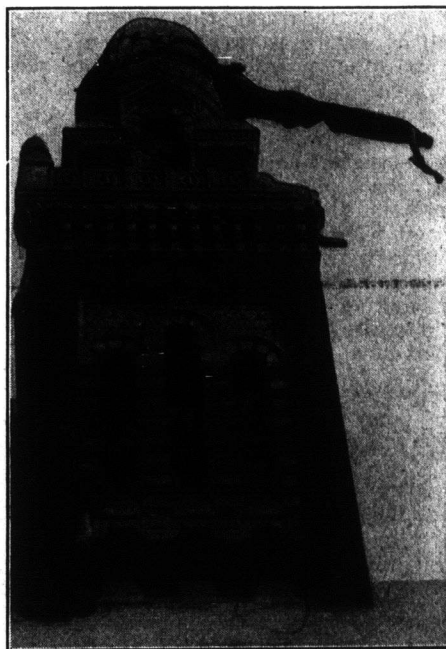
get in the way of "Fritz's," "Silent Hussies," "Whiz Bangs," "Pip Squeaks," and "Jack Johnstons," etc. They are always flying around us.

I did manage to get a bite of extra food at the Y.M.C.A. to-night; they are usually sold out to hungry men before dark. If you notice, this is written on Y.M.C.A. paper. Good people for the soldier to go to.

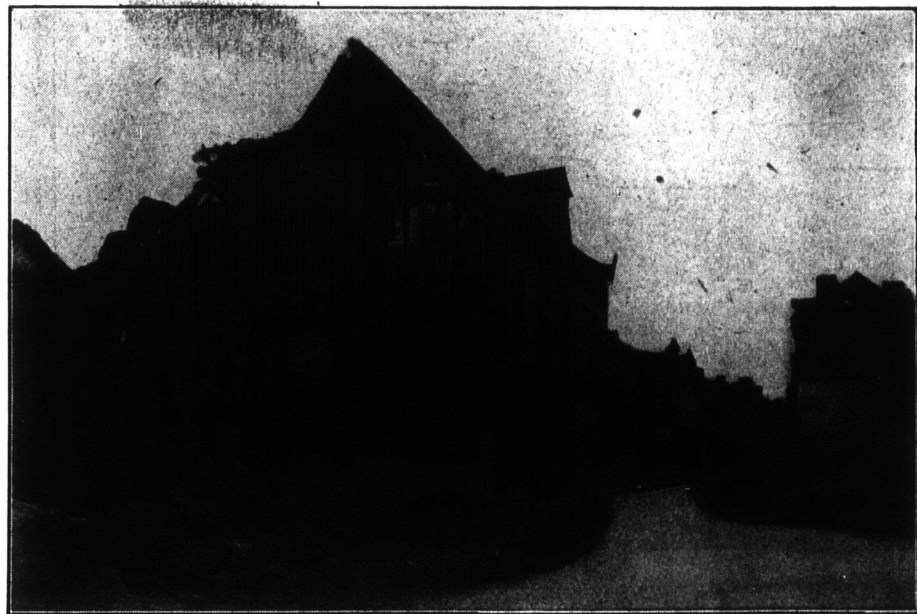
Hurrah! I just got my first mail in France. If you only knew how we do enjoy our home letters. No packages yet; they always take longer to find a fellow. Just mention to all and sundry that the Hun with all his "subs," has not stopped a single home letter or package in the nine months I have been over here. Some navy the old lion keeps afloat, eh! It did seem so safe on the Channel that dark, windy night; we knew the jackies were staring their eyes out all about us; that no destroyers could get near enough to attack, and the great nets have had many a bite from strange steel fishes—wait until I get home. If I even hinted what we have done to the Hun in the underwater game, the Censor would use up a whole pencil on me. I, at times, may have to use a "whiz bang" to get you news of me—said "whiz bang" being a "trench card," and not a high explosive.

One mud-hen is still in the pond; it ought to be fat by now. I saw the quail again, too; there are only nine now—somebody's fibbling.

tion, as we expect to move soon. I went over to see my cousin this evening (he came right up to the lines after he landed in France). He was packing up, evidently off for a "rest." All the men agree the "rests" do not agree with them; too little to do, and then all the necessary hardships loom larger. I got a dandy blanket he was leaving behind, which will come in handy. He has a fine German saw-edge bayonet, rather a horrible looking weapon. I have a German helmet, but they are rather com-



Albert (Somme). The Basilica after the bombardment.



Albert (Somme), Bapaume Street after several bombardments.

The rain has stopped for a while now, and the creamy mud has turned to dough. The roads are long gutters—horses, harness, shells and yours truly are one sticky mess long before we reach "the lines." Last night's trip was the most exciting yet; the Germans were shelling the road, using "tear" shells. We went through at a gallop and got no more than a bad dose of it; tears were running down my face all the time I was up; everybody else was in the same fix. We had a pretty rotten time. My horse got tangled in the wires and went into a shell hole chuck full of water. I got him out again O.K. at about midnight; then we waited a bit, deciding if we should go back through the fire or wait until it was over. Off we dashed; it was a great ride for a mile; we went through at the full gallop, each man on a single saddle horse—mud, shells, flares, answering guns, swerving leaping horses; not a man hit. One "silent Hussie" gave me a regular mud-bath; I did enjoy it immensely.

Say! there's no use "fretting over spilt milk," or mud in this case; but whisper, if that shell which coated me with clay had exploded, I would never have told you anything about it; luckily it was a "dead" one.

The odor of the "tear" shells seems to be in the air yet as I write this; it smells like thousands of lilac blooms, very pleasant and sweet smelling. I don't think it affects the lungs, and my eyes are as strong to-day as ever; another bit of Hun devilry wasted. I have taken up my last load of amuni-

mon souvenirs; looks like a saucepan.

Eight days later—Sorry so much time has slipped away since I wrote the last lines, but we have been on the move for a week. We are billeted now in a town on rather a quiet front. It is good to again see civilians around. When next I get paid I can have a decent meal, as every other house here is a "cafe." I met a fellow by my name "on the road," and he pulled out a couple of my letters and handed them to me—your "number 42," good game. Number all letters and packages, then we can tell if any do go astray.

We have had a great time trying to understand the French inhabitants in the many villages we have passed through, they jabber away and we say "No compree," or "Oui," just as we think fits the occasion. It is not hard to get the names of things and we usually get all we want—at exorbitant prices mostly. Our nightly billets were in quaint old French farmhouses, built in a square with a courtyard in the middle; and in the centre of that a huge manure pile, covered with all the farm animals, but the houses were always scrupulously clean. As regards sending money—send money orders; we cash them as civilians at the P.O.; the military authorities have nothing to do with the matter at all.

I send you with this a couple of French postals. I thought the ruins of Albert (they say "Albear" here) might interest you, as from here our long offensive on the Somme started. Madame Richard's tobacco shop is in a state of

excellent ventilation. The entire town is ruined. Look at the noted leaning figure on the Basilique d' Albert after twenty months' bombardment. The Huns are unable to send down this sacred figure, and the religious inhabitants are greatly encouraged thereby. We are slowly, but surely, driving the enemy back on to his own soil. Once we get pouring the daily hail of shells on to the "sacred soil of the Fatherland," there will be some squeal.

We are now out of the mud, and I am supposed to be doing some cleaning up. We'd be arrested at Shorncliffe, C.B. quick, if ever they saw us as we are now—literally coated—but alive and well so far.

Greenwood's War-Time Dinner

Greenwood is one of those intolerable men who always rise to an occasion, says a contributor to Punch. He is the kind of man who rushes to sit on the head of a horse when it is down. I can even picture him sitting on the bonnet of an overturned motor bus and shouting, "Now all together!" to the men who are readjusting it.

We were going down to business when Perkins introduced a new grievance against the censor.

"Whatever do they allow this rot about food prices in the paper for?" he began. "It unsettles women awfully. Now my wife is insisting on having her house-keeping allowance advanced twenty-five per cent. I tell you she'd never have known anything about the advances if they had n't been put before her in flaring type."

The general opinion of the compartment seemed to be that the censor had gravely neglected his duty.

"I agreed with my wife," said Blair, who is a shrewd Scotchman, "and told her that she must have an extra two pounds per month. At twenty-five per cent advance would have meant five pounds a month. Luckily providence fashioned women without an idea of arithmetic."

"My wife drew my attention to the paper," said Greenwood loftily. "I did not argue the point with her. Finance is not woman's strong point. I rang for the cook at once."

"I said to her," continued Greenwood, "Cook, get the store's price list for to-day and serve for dinner precisely the things that have not advanced. You understand? That will do." So you see the matter was settled.

"Er, what did your wife say?" asked Perkins.

"Say! What could she say? Here was the obvious solution. And I have noticed that women always lose their heads in an emergency. They never rise to the occasion."

The next morning I met Greenwood again.

"By the way," I asked, "did you have a good dinner yesterday?"

Greenwood looked me straight in the eyes. There is a saying that a liar cannot look you straight in the eyes. Discredit it. "The dinner was excellent," he replied. "I wish you had been there to try it. And every single thing at pre-war prices."

But that night I came across Mrs. Greenwood as she emerged from a Red Cross working party loaded with mufflers and mittens.

"Glad to hear these hard times don't affect your household," I began diplomatically.

Mrs. Greenwood smiled. "What has Oswald been telling you?"

"Nothing except that he had an excellent dinner yesterday."

"I wasn't there," said Mrs. Greenwood. "I went to my mother's. You see, cook conscientiously followed Oswald's instructions. He had sardines, Worcester sauce, macaroni, and tinned pork and beans. I can't make out quite which of the two was the first to give notice afterward. Only, unless Oswald shouted, 'Take a month's notice!' when he heard the cook's step in the hall, I am inclined to think that cook got there first."

Now in the train I recommend tinned pork and beans with Worcester sauce as a cheap and nourishing food in war time.

Greenwood says nothing, but glares at me. For once in his life he cannot rise to the occasion.