



A Digger's Pilgrimage

LE QUESNOY REVISITED

THE experiences and impressions of a former Digger, Mr. A. P. Story, of Leigh, North Auckland, who was in the battle for Le Quesnoy, on revisiting the scene, will be read with interest by many New Zealand campaigners, even though they did not take part in that historic engagement. Mr. Story was a 2nd lieutenant at the time, and had command of the right flank platoon in the swing to envelop the town. He says:

"My wife, little Patrick, aged 7, and myself arrived at Le Quesnoy on November 13 last and put up at the Terminus Hotel, opposite the station. We walked up into the town, which had changed very little. We saw New Zealand Street and the public gardens, also named after the N.Z.E.F. We went to

look at the monument on the wall showing Lieutenant Averill climbing up the ladder at the capture of the town. The townspeople have built a marble bay opposite this monument, so that it can be easily seen from across the moat.

"We went through an old tunnel through the wall into the town, and climbed on to the ramparts by the Valenciennes gate. Here we actually found the marks in the grass where the Germans had a gun in 1918. The other side of the gate is now a military post, and we could look down on the men. We then went through the gate and down to the railway crossing, and I showed my wife the old factory chimney, which had been my objective in the fight.

"She and Patrick decided to go back to the hotel, and I said I would be back at noon. I thought I would take a photo of the railway crossing with the chimney in the background. After some minutes the sun came out and I

took my snap. I then went along the road to Villereau to see the house where two of my men took a German officer and six men prisoners.

"The farmer came out and I told him my mission. He was most interested. I wanted to go into his orchard and see exactly where I had my trenches, etc. Just then two French N.C.O.'s came along. They asked me if I had been taking any photos. I replied that I had. I was then told I must come and see the commandant. So off we went to the very place I had been looking into by the Valenciennes Gate. Here I was taken past sentries to a very bare and cold orderly room.

"Presently the adjutant arrived. He said, 'The civilians have signalled to us that you have been taking photos, and no one is allowed to take photos here, because we are within 10 kilometres of the Maginot Line.'

"I said I was sorry, but that I had been twice across the French and Belgian border at Le Bizet and driven along the Maginot Line and not a word had been said. He then asked for my 'passport,' which I said was at my hotel.

You Are A German

"He then said, 'You had a woman with you.' I told him she was my wife. He then asked me what I had photographed, and I told him the railway crossing and factory chimney. His face darkened, and he said, 'Now why did you want a photograph of a railway crossing and a factory chimney?' So I told him. He then said, 'You are a German!'

"I was getting pretty annoyed by this time, and I said 'I am a British subject, and what is more, a British officer, and if you come to my hotel I can get my papers and you can take the camera, but you will find no more on it than what I have stated.' This took him down a peg or so, so he said, 'Well, this is a matter for the police. I must ring them up.'

"Ultimately two policemen came and off we went to the hotel. On the way the police were very apologetic, and said the adjutant was a hard man. However, on getting near the hotel we met two more police, who said, 'The woman and the little boy are not there!' I could see things were getting in rather a muddle. But at the hotel, we, that is to say, the two police, my wife, Patrick, the proprietor, his wife and myself, all went into a back room. I produced my passports, my own and my wife's. These they examined very closely and read all the stamps, etc.

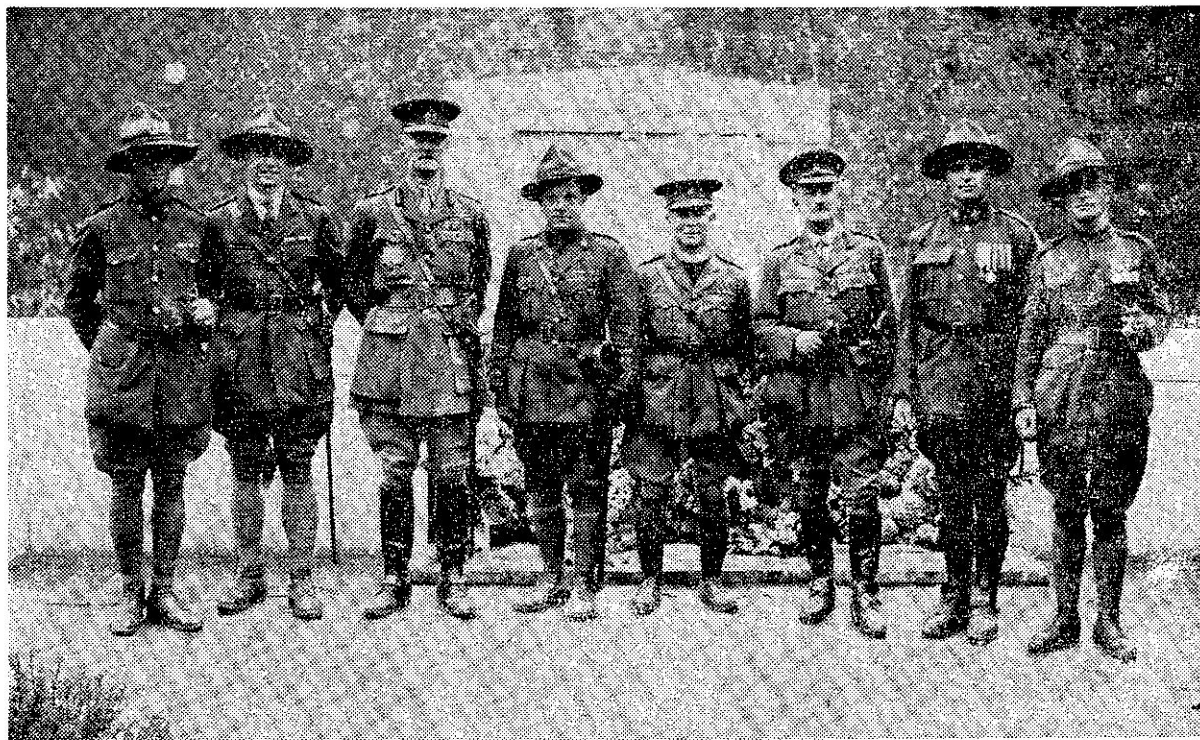
"Then the police said to the proprietor: 'This man says he came here yesterday and you have not entered him in the hotel register.' The proprietor said that was true, but he had forgotten to put us down. They told him he would be 'on the mat' anyhow! However, after much more talk they took the passports and the camera and said they would be back in the afternoon.

Didn't See The Chimney

"They returned with the film developed, badly. One said, 'But I do not see the chimney,' but I said, 'Look again.' It was there, but very faint! They had fogged the film, so the whole affair was over. A police officer, who lived at the hotel, came in and asked me what had happened, and we went to a large-scale map in the bar. He said, 'As a matter of fact it was quite all right for you to take that photo. That point is just 10 kilometres from the Maginot Line, and you had your back to it.'

"He said one could have a camera in the area, but it was against the regulations to use it. The French were in a very jumpy state—it was just after the September crisis—and they had had some trouble at Le Quesnoy with Germans coming back as commercial travellers. One of these was recognised as a former commander, and had to be rescued by the police and sent out of the town.

"A few new houses have been built outside the town. The moat was all dry and turned into allotment gardens. There are a few of our men buried in the cemetery, mostly Wellington men. Next day we left for Paris."



COMMEMORATING DIGGERS' BRAVERY.—Photo taken at unveiling of New Zealand memorial at Le Quesnoy in 1923. From left: Corporal Jenner, Lieutenant L. C. L. Averill (first to scale the walls), Sir A. Godley, Lieutenant Lang, Rev. M. Mullineux (Division chaplain), Colonel G. N. Johnstone (commander New Zealand Artillery Division), Corporal Thomas and Sergeant Moss crop.