

La Bassée

June, 1935. You've all returned to the place you've avoided for two decades. You are here to wander the countryside and walk the old front line and remember and perhaps put the horror to rest. Your walk starts in La Bassée, #12.

1. The Béthune road. You are marching toward the sound of the guns for the first time. Spirits are high. Only half of you will march back up this road to Béthune in five days.

2. Le Plantin. On the high street a fat man is selling ice cream from his rainbow-colored cart, surrounded by an unruly mob of children. He's laughing, *un à la fois, veuillez.*

3. The Loop. Your Company's position on the line is a wet hell stinking of unreachable corpses and alive with the rats that are feasting on them. Your officer drowns his terror in gin. Lucky John Nesbit is spreading a rumor about some suicidal assault on the Duck's Bill and you are breaking up signs to make a little fire. TRENCH A-31, into the fire.

4. St. Roch. The church was on high ground and changed hands many times and is now a grassy pile of rubble. A handful of German veterans are wandering the ruins.

5. Strong Farm. You can see where No Man's Land should be and there are women drying hay there. One looks like a woman you all knew, although of course that's impossible.

6. Violanes. A farmer comes over to shake your hands. The deep German artillery trenches are all filled in. Everything is green. You've lost your way in the fertile fields.

7. Frog Marsh. It was here you did some dirty business. It has haunted you and now you are all back before that gnarled tree and each wondering how you can be forgiven.

8. Windy Corner. It's some silly ball game well back from the front and for one perfect afternoon you are free and alive with potential and filled with love for one another.

9. Red Dragon Crater. A German patrol finds its way in and all is chaos in the pissing rain and it is kill or die and all you have are guns that won't fire and broken boards.

10. The Duck's Bill. God stamps his boot; engineers have blown a giant mine here and there's the whistle and you are over the top and *krak krak krak krak*

11. Canteleux. An engine backfires and you are all back in the mud of trench A-31 standing over Lucky John Nesbit, his head half missing, sniped all the way from St. Roch.

12. La Bassée. Stalls here sell war memorabilia; rusted oddments plowed up in farmer's fields, things your friends and enemies left behind in haste or in death.

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