

Learning Resources for Teachers:

Learning Resource: **John Barnes**

"The whole slope in front of me and as far away to the left as far as one could see was crowded with cheering men moving forward as fast as they could. And still the enemy had not fired a shot'. It seemed they had gone home!

The leading men would have been about 100 yards from the German wire, and I was about the same distance from my starting point, when all Hell was let loose! As if from some predetermined signal the enemy machine guns opened up with a murderous fire, both from the front and enfilading fire from some buildings which had been out of sight behind some trees. Men began to stumble and fall, then to go down like standing corn before a scythe.

The cap from the head of the lad in front of me flew from his head and he fell - I stumbled over him - and even to this day I feel no shame when I say that I stayed where I was: my face buried in the grass, and never had the good earth smelled so sweet! I was 19 years old and no hero - just a scared teenager who had no wish to die and, after seeing all that devastation in front of my eyes, I was FRIGHTENED! The firing seemed to go on for hours. I afterwards learned that it was not even ten minutes. Bullets were cracking overhead and then it ceased as abruptly as it had commenced.

After a few more minutes I rose to my knees and should I live to be a hundred I shall never forget the sight that met my eyes. The whole slope was one mass of prone figures, some even lying on top of one another. The only thing I could liken it to would be one of the old fashioned fly-papers which used to hang in my mother's kitchen and which, after a hot summer day, were loaded with dead flies!

The Germans still held their fire and soon there was some movement. Men began to get their feet, others rose only to fall back again, whilst others limped and some even crawled. Many, like the lad I had stumbled over, would never move again. He had been shot through the head! There was plenty of movement on the slope now. Many men, even though wounded themselves, were helping their wounded comrades back.

Still the Germans held their fire. Some months later the German commander of this particular sector was reported to have said: "My machine gunners were so filled with pity, remorse and nausea at the Corpse Field of Loos that they refused to fire another shot'." This I do believe."

Clue 12 – Harry Fellows, an eye witness describes what his experience of the Battle of Loos (1915) was like