

Guillaume Batselier – 1ste Jagers te Voet and our journey to Alveringem, 11/11/08

My 81 year old mother, Gabrielle Douat, was born in Brussels in 1927. She came over to England at the end of World War 2, after marrying an English Tommy. As a small child, she told me stories about my Belgian family and her life in Brussels and Gerrardsbergen.

Mum told me of two holidays when she was a very small child in the early 1930s with her Grandmother and Grandfather, Victor and Louisa van de Catseye. Louisa's maiden name was Batselier, and my Mother told me of trips looking along the Belgian coast in military cemeteries at names of soldiers, trying to find the grave of Louisa's brother, Guillaume, who had been killed and his body never found. So, for over 20 years, my family searched for Guillaume, who was, I am proud to say, my great, great uncle. This was all I knew until this past year, but, through the wonders of the internet and the kindness of people, I have found out so much more.

Guillaume was born in Gerrardsbergen on 1st December 1890 and enlisted in 1910. He was a member of N1 Brigade of the 1st Jagers te Voet and was involved in the heavy fighting along the River Yser between 21st and 31st October 1914. The Jagers te Voet were fighting in the Pervijze sector in the vicinity of Berkelhof Farm, north of Pervijze. On October 24th 1914, the third company of the fourth regiment Jagers te Voet had only 67 survivors of the 200 men they started with and all officers perished. Guillaume's regiment suffered in the same way and records show that Guillaume was killed some time between 21st and 31st October, when, of course, to halt the advancing Germans, the waters were released.

Through this forum, I have discovered that my family, in 1922, tried to contact Guillaume's comrades and it was said that Guillaume died near the road between Lombardsijde and Diksmuide near Pervijze. His file was closed in 1924, his body not found, though it may be possible he lies in Ramskapelle where many, many unknown Belgian soldiers lie.

I am deeply honoured to be invited to attend the 90th anniversary commemoration of the end of World War 1 at Alveringem and to represent my family. I will be bringing a memorial plaque and a wreath to express thanks to all those who gave their lives fighting for freedom. In this way, I am hoping that this small act will also bring peace to the heart of my family and signify, to my great, great grandmother, Louisa, who searched for all those years, that Guillaume is finally home.

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