

# Somme Observations

By Mary Gearhart-Gray

An insistent pinging sound travels along my mastoid bone to my inner ear. I come awake—sort of. Automatically I touch tongue to my upper-right, back molar, signaling a “yes” response.

I observe. I am a temporal observer.

I observe the ground is hard and I am lying with my head slanting downhill. A stone is poking me in my back. It hurts, but not as much as the wound in my lower-right quadrant that is leaking blood into the dirt.

*Did you know the spring after World War I was over France had one of its most prolific growing seasons ever?*

My head is spinning. I’m lying still, and my head is spinning. There is a roaring sound in my ears. The sky is very blue—amazingly blue. I’m thirsty.

The rock hurts. No, I hurt. The rock just is.

I can’t move.

The sky is so blue....

Water...?

A voice inside my head says, “Can you talk?”

I touch my tongue to my upper-left, back molar, signaling “No.”

“Are people around you so you can’t talk?”

Through the roaring in my ears, I can hear people in the distance. Some are crying, some are moaning. Over to my left and far downhill I can hear a man calling, “Maman! Maman!”

I signal, “No.”

“Are you able to talk?”

I signal, “No.”

Water? I am so thirsty. And the rock. Please, move the rock.

Flies buzz. Through the roar, I can hear crows fluttering and squawking.

“Maman! Maman!”

The sky is so blue—azure—azul—blu....

“We stopped getting your observations. Your equipment appears to be offline. Do you need assistance?”

I'm thirsty. The rock hurts my back. I can't move, and the rock hurts my back. Yes, I need assistance.

Uphill I see broken stumps of trees outlined against the blue, blue sky. I don't recognize them. I try to think.

Big, leafy, old trees shade my observation post. I chose the spot because of them and the elevation. On the hill I would be out of the direct flow of battle, but I could observe and report everything. Uphill and hidden among the tree shadows, within the cover of the dense foliage, I would be cool, safe, and virtually invisible.

I remember lying there on my belly among the old, fallen leaves. I remember monitoring my equipment and watching the battle through my long lenses. Now I'm lying in the hot dust looking at artillery-shredded trees.

I don't remember how I got here. I don't understand. I hurt. My head spins. My ears roar. I begin to shiver.

I touch my right, back molar with my dry tongue.

"Assistance. Yes. Yes. I need assistance."

Flies buzz.

The air smells of cordite, dirt, feces, blood, and smoke.

And the sky is so blue until the air between me and it begins to shimmer in the excited-energy dance characteristic of a temporal pulse.

My body begins humming and buzzing in time with the pulse.

The rock that does not hurt is left resting in the dirt just downhill from a drying pool of my blood.

*Come spring, the wild, red poppies will bloom beautifully in these fields.*

The End