

Robert A. Dahl: Fünf Briefe

Erschienen in: Robert A. Dahl, 2017, From Boston to Berlin: One Man's War in Letters. Bookbaby.¹

November 4, 1944

It's just five in the morning, which is, I suppose, as good a time as any for a letter. I've been up since 2:30, not really doing anything – just being around.

So far, combat has been fairly quiet at night. Artillery exchange (we exchange much more than they do) often blast the night's stillness. There is some patrolling, and this may stir up a little firefight, with perhaps some mortars thrown in.

Mostly we sit tight. On the line s, the men get in their foxholes and whoever moves – for *any* reason – may get shot. I know the problem you're wondering about. Many of us use a GI can during the night.

After a time, you learn to distinguish between the sound of our artillery and theirs. The outgoing stuff has a sharper, shallower sound, and you may hear a whoosh overhead on its way out. The incoming shells make a kind of abrupt, deep-based rumble as they land – and you may hear them whoosh overhead before they land. So far as anyone can tell for sure – you don't hear the one that gets you; this is the well-established myth and some survivors reinforce it. I should think it would apply only to a close or direct hit of a high velocity shell (faster than sound); but don't think I'll experiment.

Jerry² has a sizeable number of duds. The authorities say one out of three; it doesn't seem quite so high when you're catching it. But it *is* high and many men are alive because of duds; you hear new stories almost every day. The other night seven of Jerry's shells whooshed into our town; there was no explosion. They were all duds. He tries for us every night and always misses. (Don't tell him. He may think he's zeroed in and we don't want to disappoint him).

You have heard about the whine of artillery. Whine is really a poor description of the rushing sound it makes as it flies through the air. It's not quite a rustle, certainly not a roar; not a whistle, nor a whine. It whooshes. *Compris?*

1 Abgedruckt mit freundlicher Genehmigung von Christopher „Kit“ Dahl. Gekürzt und mit Kommentaren versehen von Stefan Andreas Meyer.

2 Jerry war einer der Spitznamen der Alliierten für die Deutschen (wie auch *Boche*).