

War was declared against Germany on August 4th 1914, many Post Office workers were Navy or Army reservists and were mobilised. Other men belonged to the Royal Engineers (Postal Section) others again were members of territorial regiments most of them in the 8th City of London (The Post Office Rifles). The Government called for volunteers, thousands answered the call. Post Office workers however had to obtain permission from the Department to enlist. At the outset permission was only given to join the Royal Engineers (Postal Section) a non-combatant body or unit, later permission was given to join the Post Office Rifles and on the 5th September 1914 I enlisted in that regiment.

From 11th Sept to 21st Sept 1915 we occupied trenches near Bully-Grenay leaving at night for the village of Philosophie. Here at Philosophie we were told that the big attack would take place at 3.00am on 25th Sept. The P.O.Rs would attack the slag heaps known as the Double Greasie, on the extreme right of the British Line. On 24th Sept we moved off to the assembly trench at 5.00pm, at 7.00pm the bombardment opened, the Germans replied, the noise is terrific and lumps of metal fly all over the place several men are hit. At 2.00am we are told the attack is postponed till later in the morning probably about 11.00am. At 10.00am we make our way along the assembly trench to the front line, ladders are placed along the trench to enable us to climb over the top quickly. At 10.30am the Royal Engineers put gas over, my platoon is to be the first over, a two gallon jar of rum is passed down the line from which we each have a swig. Ten minutes to eleven order comes 'fix bayonets', get ready to get over and lay in front of our barbed wire. We have about 200 yards to go, which is done in short rushes of approx. 50 yds at a time. A whistle is blown, over we go and immediately the enemy opens out with rifle and machine gun fire, bullets whiz and spurt up the ground several men go down like ninepins shouts and cries of agony, also fill the air. How I reached the German trench unscathed I will never know, thank goodness gerry had left, leaving his dead and wounded where they fell. We captured one slag heap and continued the fighting for the second slag heap, a number of the enemy came down this heap throwing hand grenades at us. We picked one or two off with rifle fire, the situation was becoming serious, a signaller who was with us flagged a message for help. Out came the bomber platoon led by the officer Lt. Kirkland, they reached the slag heap without a casualty and chased the enemy up the heap.

The day duly arrived and the regiment entrained for Mazengarbe and then proceeded on foot to the village of Saily-la-Bourse. Here we were billeted in newly built wood huts, which were very cosy with a fire stove in the centre of the hut. We were only four miles from the front line and within artillery range yet surprisingly very few shells fell in the vicinity of the camp. After spending four days here we moved off to occupy a trench known as the 'Hairpin Trench' in the Hohenzollern Redoubt, a stronghold captured from the enemy. It was a horrible trench, no dugouts, very narrow and up to ones thighs in water, there was not even a place to sit down, one just had to rest with ones back against the wall of the trench. To make it more uncomfortable we were only 30 yards from the Germans who were on a slight incline and could see right into certain parts of our trench. My platoon was the unlucky one to be posted in a section of the trench that was overlooked by the enemy consequently we have to spend most of the time bent over as the enemy snipers were very busy. I was talking to a chum of mine, when he happened to stretch himself and showed his head above the trench for the space of a second he caught it a bullet clean through his head. He fell onto me, my uniform was splattered with blood, four of our men were killed in that way and the water in the trench was red with blood. It was here that I was told that I was to go on 10 days leave to

England on Jan 9th 1916. On 27th December 1915 I was knocked over by the blast from a terrific explosion on regaining my feet I just could not stop my limbs from shaking, I had visions of losing my leave in Blighty. The shaking went on for several hours however my thoughts of going home on leave helped me I believe to overcome the shaking somewhat and although I was feeling quite ill I carried on.