

# DELIVERED TO THE FRONT

## Up and running

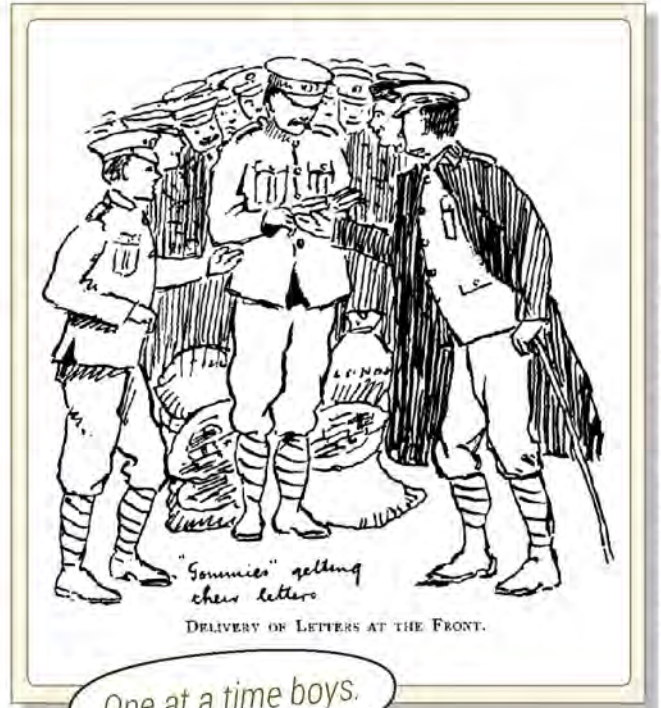
In August 1914, at the start of the First World War, the General Post Office worked in complete secrecy. It was instructed to prevent any letter from reaching troops and vice versa.

By December, an efficient mail system was up and running and soldiers could expect to receive mail from home in two days of being sent.

### ► Soldiers receiving letters at the Front

*'I got three letters posted in Ireland on the 26th (of December) and in England on the 28th this afternoon, so letters are reaching us as quickly as if there were no war. It's really rather wonderful'.*

**Gerald Burgoyne, Officer,  
British Expeditionary Force, 1914**



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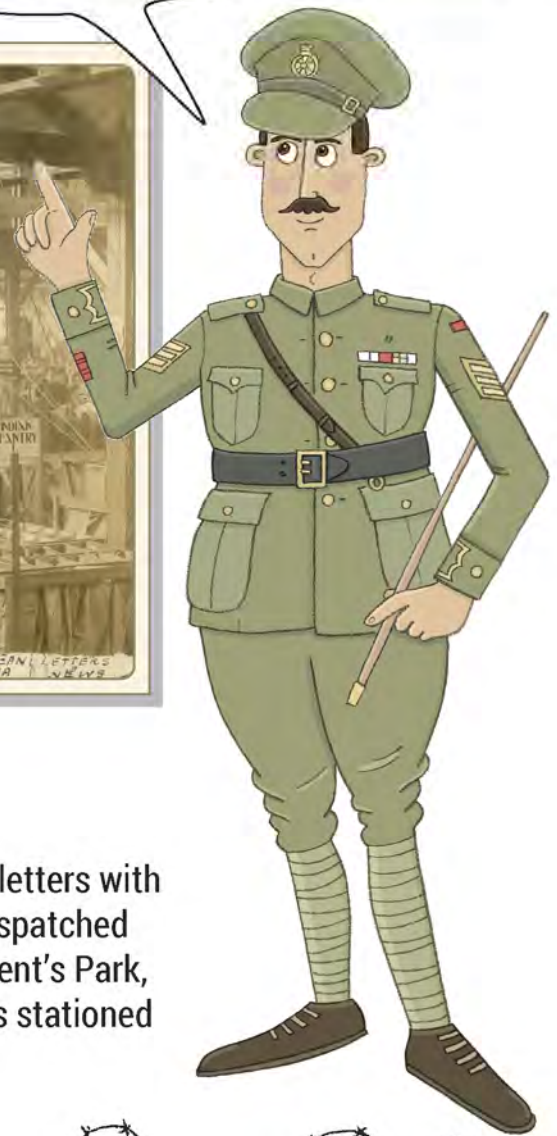
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### ▲ The Home Depot employed 2,500 staff, mostly female

## The Home Depot

People writing to soldiers on the Front only had to address letters with names and the correct fighting unit. Mail was sorted and dispatched by the Home Depot, a huge wooden building erected in Regent's Park, London. At the height of the war, letters for over 8,000 units stationed in France and Belgium were sorted there.



## The boat train

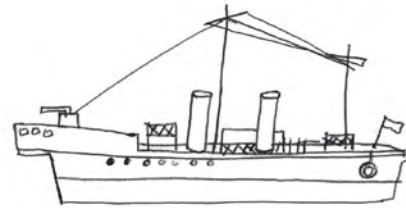
Mail destined for the Front left the Home Depot for London railway stations in lorries, destined for the 'boat train' to Folkstone or Southampton. At the docks, mailbags were loaded on to 'mail packet ships' bound for Boulogne, Calais or Le Havre where the main Base Post Office was located.



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### ► The boat train

*'The appearance of a long black craft ... makes one realise that the mail is under the protecting arm of the Navy in the form of a torpedo boat acting as an escort'*  
Major General C.A. Wheeler describes a journey aboard a packet ship, 1915



## Delivering to the Front

Transporting mail had to be done at night with minimal lighting. For reasons of security, the men loading trains were not informed of troops' whereabouts until last moment. Within a few hours the mail was sorted and delivered to the Front together with food and arms. From there, the mail was taken by horse, truck, lorry or cart to the trenches. Other services were offered too for example, cashing postal and money orders, foreign exchange, war loans, Savings Certificates and even dog licences!



▲ **Field Post Office**  
Soldiers posted and collected mail from Field Post Offices. This could be in a tent or sometimes was no more than a table

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► **Sorting the mail at the roadside**

*'The mails are stacked and sorted by the roadside; the long line of carts comes up... to receive its quota of the mails from home; and each orderly then clatters off with his letters and parcels, which he carries with his comrades right up to the firing line'.*

**Frederick Williamson,**  
Director of the Army Postal Service, July 1915

**Power POINT**



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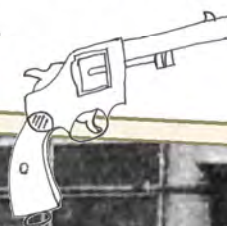
**Dangerous deliveries**

Despatch riders on motorbikes and armed with pistols delivered secret and important messages to the trenches. The men had to be quick map-readers - if roads passed through bombed out areas, alternative routes had to be quickly chosen. They also had to possess a wide knowledge of the army organisation since delivering dispatches to an army convoy on the move was not easy.

*'He returns from his journeys at any time of the day or night, covered with dust or mud and his trusty revolver hanging out of his pouch ready to hand'*

**A.A. Jayne, St Martin's Le Grand, 1915**

▼ **Despatch Riders**



**SOME DESPATCH RIDERS.**

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