



How do you fix a face that's been blown off by shrapnel?

Video transcript – The man who fixed faces

Surgeon Harold Gillies was 36 when war broke out. Posted to France in 1914, he knew little of plastic surgery.

As a junior Red Cross officer, he was horrified by ghostly images of disfigured men limping back from the front.

He was also shocked to discover that French surgeons were way ahead of the British.

He immediately saw the opportunity to make himself the greatest plastic surgeon in the world. By 1915, Gillies had his own plastics unit and two years later his own purpose-built hospital - the Queens in Sidcup. It had 1,000 beds and was the first of its kind in the world.

The young Gillies was more magpie than innovator. Obsessively poring through textbooks and research papers, he taught himself everything there was to know about reconstructive surgery.

Remarkably he got his patients by sending address labels marked "Sidcup Hospital" to the battlefields of the Western Front.