

Footballers at war

[Jemaine Jenas]

Over 2000 footballers like me gave up the professional game in Britain to go and fight. But they weren't just on the front line as poster boys. Footballers were good soldiers, and they were there to win the war.

The Footballers Battalion was marked out by military leaders for their battlefield ability. So, why were they such good soldiers?

Footballers are physically fit and strong, and our job is to work as a team. We have to understand how to attack and defend as a unit and in formation. And if the manager changes a system in the middle of a game, we have to know exactly what to do. And the kind of leaders you'd follow on the football field are just the kind of leaders you'd follow on the battlefield.

There are so many stories about the amazing courage shown by footballers on the front line. Like Leigh Roose, the Welsh goalkeeper. His physical strength proved crucial when he carried on throwing bombs at the enemy during an attack in 1916.

This man, like me, used to play out there for Tottenham Hotspur.

[Ledley King]

Walter Tull was a remarkable man. First black outfield player to play in England, played for Tottenham before moving to Northampton and playing 111 games there, before going to the war. You can only imagine being a professional footballer and to have that taken away from you must have been very difficult but, as I say, it shows the character of him.

[Jemaine Jenas]

So what happened once he went to war?

[Ledley King]

In 1918, just a few months before the end of the war, Walter was shot and his body was never recovered.

[Jemaine Jenas]

When the guns finally fell silent and the game could be played again football had left its mark on World War One - but it had come at a cost. The Footballers Battalion lost over a thousand men, whole teams were devastated. Britain had not only lost so many of its talent young players but hundreds of thousands of the men who had cheered them on every week.