



How did 12 million letters reach WW1 soldiers each week?

Video transcript – The importance of letters

The humble letter: one of the most powerful weapons of World War One. It played a vital role in lifting the spirits of the British Tommy during a war that threatened to drag endlessly.

For that reason, the British government went to great lengths to have letters delivered to its soldiers on the front line.

Sending and receiving letters wasn't just important to the men at the front; it was important to their families back at home. Public support could make or break the war effort. The British Army knew the Post Office could help them to maintain it.

The wartime post was a slick operation that saw 12.5 million letters sent to the front line each week. But with it came one of the biggest acts of censorship ever attempted.

During my time as a postman I'd find it unimaginable that anyone would open and read the letters for my walk. But during the First World War, so concerned was the British Army about the messages that may be conveyed, that every single letter crossing the channel was opened and read. This was a mammoth task.

So how exactly did the British run such an effective postal operation in a warzone, and what sorts of packages did the posties find themselves delivering to and from the front line?