

## **Serving on the front line**

When the war began chaplains were instructed to stay away from the front line. But there are accounts – from as early as November 1914 – of chaplains breaking the rules and heading into no-man's land to bring back the dead for burial.

By late 1915, Tom Pym was one of those on the front line. In his letters, he describes being crouched in a dugout, shells and gunfire above his head, helping the doctor tend to the wounded soldiers.

By this time, senior officers in the Army were starting to recognise the important role chaplains played giving spiritual guidance on the battlefield and boosting the men's morale.

General Haig, the newly-appointed Commander in Chief of the British Forces on the Western Front remarked, "A good Chaplain is as valuable as a good General".

In early 1916 chaplains were told to go where they could be of most use to the troops. Many were sent to First Aid posts and Casualty Clearing Stations where they came face to face with the brutal reality of war.

Some went over and above the call of duty and risked their lives to help the soldiers.

Reverend Noel Mellish was the first of three chaplains to be awarded the Victoria Cross. In March 1916 he rescued 22 wounded men from the trenches under heavy fire.

Many more chaplains received medals for their bravery in World War One. Tom Pym was one of 67 chaplains to be awarded Distinguished Service Order for his work in the field.

Ever humble, Tom was not comfortable to be honoured in this way. He wrote in a letter home:

"About the DSO purchased with other men's blood... my views remain exactly the same; before ever I clutched anything I maintained these things don't go to the right people, and that in any case Ministers of Christ ought to be entirely excluded."