

Rifleman Pat Paterson, "I was one of the lucky ones" in "Tales from the Trenches", recollections of members of the Post Office Rifles, held at the Royal Mail ceremony

I haven't the faintest idea where the Clearing Station was that I spent a restless night with a chap dying beside me, but I do know that eventually I was back at No 2 Canadian General Hospital for the third time at Le Treporte and labelled for Blighty. On arrival at Dover I was sent on to Tankerton, Kent, in a V.A.O. Hospital and in due course transferred to Summerdown Convalescent Depot, Eastbourne. I was still there in June when HMS Hampshire was sunk and was selected as one of the funeral party to attend the burial of Colonel Fitzgerald, Lord Kitchener's Personal Private Secretary, who was buried at Eastbourne, after his body was found. In 1963, when on holiday at Eastbourne, I made a special visit to the cemetery, where, with the aid of the office staff, I was able to see this officer's memorial stone after so many years.

"Summerdown" was no bed of roses, mostly staffed, it appeared, by NCOs who didn't want to lose their jobs, "get 'em fit to fight again" I expect was the order. I was fed up with the place so when the inspecting officer made his tour one morning and asked me "How are you?" I replied that I felt quite alright. He appeared to doubt my word, lifted my eyelids and peered beneath them, then, "Are you quite sure you feel alright?", "Yes, Sir, quite". Consequence, discharged from hospital, Grade A1.

The 3rd Battalion was at Fovant, an isolated spot on Salisbury Plain when I joined them after sick leave. Major Croysdale, hearing of my arrival, sent for me to go to his quarters. He expressed pleasure at seeing me again and was amazed when I told him I was in A1 category. "You cannot possibly be A1", he declared, "after your experience at Festubert and now the Trench Fever. I would like to have you back with me, but that is impossible, only low grade men are allowed to perform such a duty; but we must see what can be done. You cannot take the risk of being sent back again for the third time". Later in the day the Orderly Sergeant told me to report to Major Croysdale as his servant, and the Major was waiting in his quarters to see me. Entering the apartment he said "Well, Paterson, I have got you back, I don't know how it has been done. It appears you have been taken completely off the nominal roll, except for pay, and now we must get you out of that A1 grade". I had been performing this duty for some little while and was doing a bit of tidying up when the Major came in the room and asked if I could ride a cycle. On replying yes, he ordered me to borrow one of the HQ runners bikes and take a letter to a village called Hurdcott.

I had returned from the errand when he again entered the room and asked how I felt after the ride. "Oh, alright", I assured him, "but didn't the hills affect you?". "Oh yes, I felt a bit short of wind on the hills", I confessed. "Ah I thought so", said the guvnor. "I am going to send you to Doctor Stocks for examination this afternoon". Armed with a note I attended the MOs room and was put through a test after he had read the Major's report of my service in France. The message I took back to Major Croysdale was to the effect that I was recommended for a Travelling Medical Board.

The day eventually arrived when the Board came to Fovant. Colonel Davie was either on leave or indisposed; Major Croysdale under the circumstances, was acting CO. When my turn came to be called in he was seated beside Surgeon General Sir... to whom he remarked loud enough to reach my ears "This is the man I spoke to you about Sir". Two officers ran the rule over me comparing and remarking on the defects they discovered. At the end of the examination I was directed to the table where the General was seated. Having examined his Juniors report he turned to Major Croysdale and said "This man is not fit enough to walk around the camp picking up paper. I do not consider it worth while keeping him in the service". To this, the guvnor replied "Well Sir, if you will permit him to remain as my servant I promise he will not be overworked". "Very well, Major, I will agree to that, but it must be your responsibility if anything happens to him".

Lucky? Of course I was lucky. Dropped from A1 category into a low one B3 or C3, I forget which it was, but I never went overseas again.