



## **Was the tunnellers' secret war the most barbaric of World War One?**

### **Video transcript – A deadly game of cat and mouse in the dark**

The prime duty of the tunnellers was not offensive but defensive, to protect the infantry in the trenches from being undermined. To do so they had to intercept the Germans and turn their galleries into graves by blowing them in underground.

So what you had was listeners at the end of tunnel like this. And the first thing that was used was civilian listening kit. You stick your ear to it; this is for finding water leaks. That's the only tool they had at the beginning of the war. If they didn't have that they used a biscuit tin: fill it with water and on the water's surface the vibrations of the German tunnellers nearby would make that water ripple.

Now in November 1915, Norton-Griffiths arrived at La Boisselle with one of these, the geophone. And with it you could pick up German tunnelling 100ft away and you could track them in. In chalk you could pick them up 260ft away, an extraordinary distance. And what that allowed you to do was to track their progress towards you. And if they didn't hear you first you could choose the moment that you murdered them.

In clay, once the decision to blow the enemy had been taken, a hole was silently drilled towards the source of the sound. The weapon was a steel tube packed with explosive, a terrestrial torpedo known as a camouflet. The gallery behind it was then tamped, tightly back-filled with sandbags to maximise the explosive force.

What this conflict has which no other part of the war has is the ultimate form of barbarism. You wait before you blow until you know that the maximum number of the enemy are at the end of that gallery. You blow them in. It doesn't matter whether they live or die. It doesn't matter to you.

But then if you were very clever you've got another charge ready. And the one thing you do know is that miners will make the maximum effort to save their comrades. So you wait for the rescue team to come down, wait till they're digging and then blow them as well.

In this deadly game the challenge was to hear and kill the enemy before he heard and killed you. A race to the death.