

## Bert and Philip Meet

On a sunny summer's day on the cliffs above Boulogne 1916, a young English officer, fresh from training, looked longingly across the Channel to the White Cliffs of Dover in the distance. He thought of the battle ahead - he was one of hundreds of thousands of men being herded towards the trenches in Flanders for what history would call the Somme Offensive, among the bloodiest confrontations this world has ever seen.

But Second Lieutenant Philip Brocklesby had a more pressing concern. He was desperate to see his older brother, who he knew was also in France. "I sat on a grass hummock and waited," he recalled many years later. "Then some 40 men came marching up the hill and I saw Bert in the centre ranks. I shall never forget how his face lit up when he saw me."

There was, however, a sad and sinister slant to this emotional family reunion, because Bert was not a fellow soldier, a brother-in-arms, but a prisoner under escort - and about to be sentenced to die. Bert - teacher, choirmaster, gentleman and scholar - was a conscientious objector whose deep religious faith barred him from fighting and killing.

"God has not put me on this earth to go destroying His children," he said on the day war between Britain and Germany was declared in 1914. He would not put on a uniform, pick up a rifle or take orders. And now, two years later, he was prepared to sacrifice his life for that belief. Philip had decided differently. Like millions of other young men, he dutifully took up arms against his country's enemies.

But there was no family rift. Philip, on his way to the front, had risked a charge of going absent without leave (AWOL) to track down Bert for what could be their last meeting.

They talked for half an hour and it was "a joy" to both of them.

Two months later, Philip marched his men towards the German machine guns just one of the 60,000 British soldiers killed or wounded on the first day of the Somme Offensive. But still Philip, despite having been tested in battle and seen two thirds of his comrades fall around him, had no hard feelings for his pacifist brother. Instead, he wrote in admiration: "I wish I had your faith, Bert." He told their mother: "I'm right proud of him."

[Account adapted from:](#)

‘Brothers At War’ (Tony Rendell, Mailonline)

‘We Will Not Fight’ (Will Ellsworth-Jones, Aurum Press)

Also read:

Bert Brocklesby's story on the Bible Society website: <http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/about-bible-society/our-work/world-war-1/stories/conscientious-objectors/vengeance-is-mine/>