

## Cadet John Sidney Smith



John Sidney Smith, known as Jack to his friends and family, was born and bred in Stroud, Gloucestershire. He volunteered to fight in the First World War little over a month after Britain declared war on Germany. He epitomised those admirably patriotic, pioneering individuals who answered the very first call to fight for King and Country - well over a year before military conscription was introduced in January 1916. One of 'Kitchener's Boys', when Jack signed up of his own free will, Britain was in an optimistic mood, swept up in street parades and bolstered by a generation of brave, restless

young men readily taking up arms. Many genuinely believed this was a war that would be 'won by Christmas'. Few could have envisaged the terrible grinding attrition or the horrors of trench warfare to come.

For whatever reasons Jack Smith enlisted, his 'signing on' in September 1914 marked the dawn of almost four and a half years of dedicated military service. Whatever his early preconceptions may have been, his enlistment began a journey which included fighting in the trenches of the Western Front and home defence in Southern England. It started a distinguished army career which saw him rise from the rank of Private to Second Lieutenant, following officer training in Cambridge. Serving with two battalions of the Gloucestershire Regiment for the majority of the war, Jack received a gun shot wound through both thighs in September 1916 and as a result he ended his period of service as an officer in the Labour Corps.

Having fought in some of the predominant military theatres of the war, notably on the Somme, Jack had been heavily shelled, subjected to muddy trenches and embroiled in military actions; including a successful, but costly, attack on German positions during the Battle of Guillemont in 1916. Like so many of the thousands of men he fought alongside, this humble ironmonger's son went from an idyllic corner of South West England to the very heart of the Great War and was seriously injured. Yet he remained undefeated, serving until demobilisation in 1919; by which point around one in three men who had signed up to his original battalion had been killed. Jack Smith had endured a remarkable wartime story; from Stroud to soldier.