

Chapter I

The beginning of my search.

Early in the first World War I received a telegram:

From H.M. War Office, 31st March, 1915.

Deeply regret to inform you Captain F.W. Townend R.E. died 3.5 a.m. 29th March. Lord Kitchener expresses his regrets. Secretary, War Office.

A few days later, I gazed, horror stricken, at a long paragraph in the Morning Post. It was headed "An Officer's Heroism", and read as follows:-

"A motor-ambulance driver, at the front, sends his mother a thrilling account of the fortitude and cheerfulness of an officer under the most distressing conditions. The writer says:- 'After dinner I commenced a letter, but was interrupted by a shell bursting in the vicinity and a man yelling for bandages. Of course I rushed to see if I could be of any use, and found that the shell had burst at the side of the road about forty yards away, right in the midst of a party of Indian engineers who were inspecting the telegraph wires. T.. and I grabbed stretchers from our car and, with some others, rushed for the Indians. I was late in starting and all the Indians were being attended to when I arrived on the scene. However I saw someone in the shell-hole where the men had been hit, and so had escaped notice. In it was a man, the white officer of the Indians, who appeared to have his legs half buried in the debris of the hole. He told us to attend to the others first; he was all right. And then, as we moved him, we saw that he was standing on the stumps of his legs. Both had been shot off at the knees. (I'm telling you this story because of the extraordinary courage the man showed -- such courage as I've never seen before and hardly imagined. It's worthwhile hearing the horror of it to realize we are officered by such men.)

'He was perfectly conscious and calm, and spoke as though he were a medical officer and someone else the victim. He looked at his legs as we moved him on to the stretcher and asked me quietly (he was not in the least