

JOSEPH 'JOE' CLOUGH

Brave Ambulance Driver



Army service corps with a field ambulance
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Life as a Chauffeur

Joe Clough was born in Jamaica in 1885 and orphaned at an early age. As a child he was employed by Dr White, a Scottish doctor, to look after his ponies. At 18 years, Dr White offered Joe the opportunity to travel to Britain as his servant and companion. Young Joe accepted. He never saw Jamaica again. In Edwardian London Joe would drive Dr White around in his coach and horses, but the doctor was keen to acquire a motorcar, which were becoming popular. Consequently Joe learned to drive and became the doctor's chauffeur.

War Experience

In 1915 a patriotic Joe enlisted in the Army Service Corps. In a War Office minute dated January 1917, Sir Arthur Sloggett, the Director-General of army medical services, stated the following: "Neither woman nor coloured troops could be used in Field Ambulances or convoys to replace the medical personnel. Strength, coolness and courage, in addition to technical training, are required." However, Joe proved that Sloggett wrong by driving a field ambulance for four years in Ypres on the Western Front, the location of some of the war's bloodiest battles.

Prejudice

Joseph said he was proud that everywhere he went on the front line he was liked and respected: "No trouble, no trouble at all nowhere. Nobody mentioned my colour. I was like a king there. They even made me captain of the cricket team.'

However, Joe recalls an incident at a corporals' dance in Kempston Barracks just after the First World War when a captain

demanded drunkenly 'Who gave that damned nigger an invitation? Get him out of here.' Joe withdrew but later he received a regimental apology. He was also granted the freedom of Kempston Barracks for the rest of his life.

After the war

Demobbed in 1919, Joe settled in Bedford with his family. He worked as a bus driver until after the Second World War. On Remembrance Day each year between the wars, Joe would drive the 'poppy' bus, a bus that collected money for the Earl Haig Poppy Fund. He refused wages as a mark of respect for the soldiers he had served with. From 1949 he had his own taxi cab business until he retired in 1968. He died in 1976 at the age of 91.