

Boy soldiers in the first world war

[Government](#), [Army](#)



A. Plan of Investigation The purpose of this investigation is to evaluate how allowing underage soldiers to fight affected Kitchener's Army during the First World War. To examine this, the investigation will focus on the increase of soldiers in Britain's army, and out of those, how many were under the required recruitment age of 18. Also, the increase in casualties that occurred due to inexperienced, underage soldiers will be assessed. Lastly, the social issues that arose due to young boys being allowed on the Western Front will be examined.

The investigation will be conducted using a variety of sources, the main source being Boy Soldiers of the Great War by Richard Van Emden, which will be evaluated for its origins, purposes, values and limitations.

B. Summary of Evidence Increased Enlistment Rates in Kitchener's Army ? During August of 1914, Britain's Army had approximately 750, 000 men ? Lord Kitchener (Field-Marshal) needed at least another 500, 000 soldiers to fight in the war. In August 1914, Lord Kitchener started an intense recruitment campaign that used many propaganda posters saying things like " Your Country Needs You" and " A Call To Arms" which encouraged many men and youths to enlist. ? By September 1914, over 500, 000 men had enlisted to Britain's Army ? It is approximated that a quarter of those soldiers were under the required recruitment age of eighteen. ? These boys enlisted for many reasons: to fulfill their own patriotism, to join friends who were also enlisting, or to even get away from their own parents. By the end of the war, more than a quarter of a million boy soldiers fought for Britain in World War One.

Increased Casualties Due to Inexperienced Underage Soldiers ? Many soldiers would become emotionally and physically unstable when facing the horrors of war,

and experience “ shell shock”. ? Especially in underage boys who were not used to witnessing death, soldiers would panic and act hysterically ? Many soldiers who suffered from shell shock would run from the trenches, and be executed for desertion or cowardice. ? Over 300

British soldiers were court-martialed and executed by fellow British soldiers ? Young (and old) soldiers resorted to suicide in the trenches, due to shell shock, however the exact number of suicides is not known because it is too hard to track ? Training for all soldiers was a short period of time before heading off to the front lines, and for soldiers under age eighteen, no amount of training could prepare them mentally or physically for trench warfare ? Because of their lack of training, young soldiers were usually not the best soldiers and would be killed easily

Increase of Social Concern ? Many boy soldiers joined the army without telling their parents, so mothers and fathers were very worried, and wanted their sons to be sent back home ? Sir Arthur Markham (Liberal MP for Mansfield) was known for fighting throughout the duration of World War One, to get the underage soldiers sent back home to their families ? Not only were the parents of the young boys concerned, but people in general were hearing gruesome stories of war, and were upset that boys as young as fourteen were involved D. Analysis

During World War One, over 8 million brave soldiers fought for Britain, all of them at various ages and stages of their lives. During Lord Kitchener’s recruitment campaign in 1914 , thousands of soldiers enlisted for a variety of reasons. Out of these soldiers, more than 250, 000 of them were under the age of eighteen . Boy soldiers that had been allowed to enlist affected

<https://assignbuster.com/boy-soldiers-in-the-first-world-war/>

Kitchener's Army because of increased recruitment rates, a rise in casualties due to inexperienced, underage soldiers, and a growing social concern about these young boys.

By August 1914, Britain's Army was in desperate need of more men to fight against the Germans. Throughout the same month, the field-marshal at that time, Lord Kitchener, launched a forceful campaign to recruit soldiers by using propaganda posters with phrases like "Your Country Needs You" and "A Call To Arms". This campaign was extremely successful and by September of 1914 the recruitment rates of the army increased significantly. Not only had hundreds of thousands of men enlisted, but boys had been allowed to join as well.

These young boys chose to lie about their age and enlist for a variety of reasons: their own sense of patriotism, wanting to follow friends/family into war, pressure from their own cities and towns, and even wanting to get away from austere parents. At this point of World War One, expanding Britain's Army was the primary goal, not necessarily recruiting the 'right' type of soldier. Although these underage men were beneficial to Lord Kitchener's Army by augmenting the number of combatants, these boys were still extremely young, and had not fathomed the horrors of war.

After soldiers had officially joined, all men and boys were subject to an exceedingly short period of time dedicated to training, after which they would immediately be sent to the front lines. For soldiers that were as young as 14 years old, no amount of training could prepare them physically or mentally for trench warfare. As a result of this, there was an increase in casualties within Kitchener's Army because boy soldiers were usually not the

best fighters, and would be killed easily. Also, many youths were not used to witnessing death and would experience “ shell shock” in the trenches .

One young boy described his experiences in the trenches , saying, “ It was hell, absolute hell. ” By not taking the time to verify a soldier’s age, and not allowing for a more extensive training period, Lord Kitchener unknowingly sent these young soldiers to their deaths, deaths that could have been prevented. “ We were doing things we knew nothing about. ” stated on sixteen-year-old. This “ hell” earlier described would cause soldiers to panic, act hysterically, run from the trenches, or even commit suicide.

These unfortunate injuries and deaths demonstrated how Lord Kitchener seemed to favour quantity over quality, which, in a military sense, is a poor idea. These unnecessary casualties affected Kitchener’s Army, not only in a numerical way, but it also produced a great social concern, which, in turn, affected the British Army. Seeing as the required recruitment age was eighteen, a majority of the boy soldiers joined Kitchener’s Army without telling their parents, causing much worry amongst the families of these young boys. The British people’s view on the government and the British Army changed and thought that by allowing underage boys into the army, “[Families] have been tricked, deceived, and lied to, in the most scandalous and un-English fashion. ” This worry then turned into anger, and families started fighting to get their sons off of the Western Front and back home. This presented a serious issue to the British Army because, according to the enlistment laws, allowing underage soldier’s into the army was against the law, and they had not only numerous upset families writing them letters

regarding their sons, but several politicians had started a campaign to bring the young boys home.

One of the most well known political leaders of this campaign was liberal MP Sir Arthur Markham who continually questioned Lord Kitchener and the Under Secretary of War what they were going to do about these underage boys in the trenches, and insisted that “ no system of enlistment can be satisfactory which allows boys like that to be taken. ” By allowing these immature boys to enter into World War One, Kitchener’s Army lost support from his own country, as the general public would not tolerate sending innocent boys into such a harsh environment.