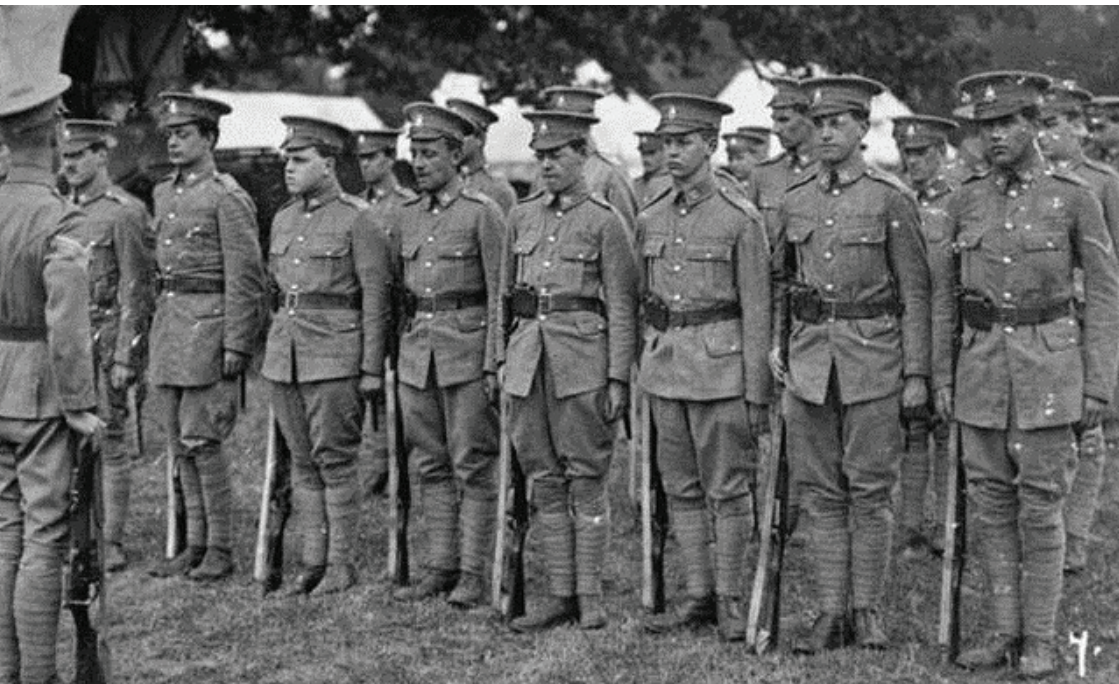


**COUNCIL OF MILITARY EDUCATION COMMITTEES
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM**



UNIVERSITY OFFICERS' TRAINING CORPS AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

By Edward M. Spiers

COMEC OCCASIONAL PAPER. No 4.

Front cover image: Cambridge OTC line up at Mytchett Camp, Hampshire, August 1914. Both the university and school contingents of the OTC spent that month wondering what might happen to them - and the world they knew. *Courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.*



Oxford University Rifle Volunteers, 1890s. *Courtesy of Oxford UOTC.*



Aberdeen OTC Rifle Team. *Courtesy of Aberdeen UOTC.*

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Series Editor

Dr Patrick Mileham

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**FOREWORD BY
PROFESSOR DICK CLEMENTS
CHAIRMAN COMEC**

It gives me great pleasure to introduce and commend this, the fourth in the COMEC Occasional Papers series. Professor Spiers is a well known author in the field of Strategic Studies and Military History; we are fortunate indeed to have this short history of the Officers' Training Corps in World War I from so knowledgeable a source. The debate for universal conscription after the Boer War was defeated, thus the OTCs were formed as a result of R B Haldane's Territorial and Reserve Forces Act of 1907. Most of the contingents were stood up between 1908 and 1910, so the Corps was arguably still finding its feet when WWI broke out in 1914. It is a great credit to the spirit and patriotism of the undergraduates of the day that the OTCs played such a significant role in the training of young officers for the British Army. Prof Spiers tells an inspiring story in this concise and excellent history.

Dick Clements
→

The Author
Edward M. Spiers



Professor Edward M. Spiers has been the Professor of Strategic Studies at Leeds University since 1993. A former Defence Lecturer attached to the School of History at Leeds University, he later served as Chairman of the School of History (1994-7), Dean of Research for the Faculty of Arts (1999-2002), Pro-Dean of Research for the Faculty of Arts (2006-11), Acting PVC for Research (2011), Pro-Dean for Research Evaluation (2011-

14) and now Acting Dean for Postgraduate Research Studies. He has written sixteen books and numerous articles and chapters on military history and contemporary strategic studies. He co-edited *A Military History of Scotland* (2012) that won the Saltire Society prize (2012) and the Templer Medal (2012). He has served on the Military, Air Force and Naval Education Committee of Leeds University since his first appointment as Defence Lecturer. He became vice-chairman of the Committee in 1994 and served for three terms on the Executive Council of Military Education Committees (1996-2008).

UNIVERSITY OFFICERS' TRAINING CORPS AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

By
Edward M. Spiers

The predilection of students for military service predates both the rush to the colours in 1914, and the formation of University Officers' Training Corps (OTCs) in 1908. Students from Oxford University joined the volunteers who were raised during the Civil War in 1642,¹ and Aberdonian students rallied to the Hanoverian cause in December 1745. Aberdeen University also provided volunteers (both officers and men) for home defence against any invasion from France during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars,² and, in 1803, Cambridge University raised a volunteer corps for a similar purpose. Cambridge permitted drilling for one hour a day, and enrolled some 180 volunteers by Christmas 1803 in a wave of enthusiasm that lasted little over a year or so.³ Later in the century students would again seek an outlet for their military proclivities in the Volunteer movement, which was revived in 1859 against the perceived threat of another French invasion. Those units subsequently became the core of an expanded number of OTC units established in the wake of the army reforms of Richard Burdon Haldane, the Liberal secretary of state for war (1905-12). As these units evolved in the late Edwardian era, the cadets met their ultimate test with the onset of the Great War (1914-18).

Volunteering history

Volunteering erupted in spectacular fashion following the French invasion scare of 1859, and Alfred Tennyson's famous invocation, 'Form, Form, Riflemen, Form!'⁴ In 1859, four companies of rifle volunteers were raised within the University of Oxford, becoming the 1st Oxfordshire (Oxford University) Rifle Volunteer Corps (OURVC), with fifth and sixth companies added in March 1860.⁵ In Edinburgh a University unit, known as No. 4 Company, was formed as part of the City of Edinburgh Rifle Volunteer Corps, and, by August 1860, the company had 90 volunteers. It took part in the famous Royal Review of Volunteers in Holyrood Park (7 August 1860), when 21,514 volunteers marched past Queen Victoria and 200,000 spectators. Six years later the Corps was granted a major honour, becoming The Queen's City of Edinburgh Rifle Volunteer Brigade (QCERVB).⁶ Professors, graduates and students at Glasgow University also formed a unit, namely No 9 Company, 2nd Battalion, Lanarkshire Rifle Volunteers.⁷ The Inns of Court raised another Volunteer unit in 1860, as did Cambridge University on 5 March 1860, when the Vice Chancellor administered the

oath of allegiance to the 3rd Cambridgeshire (Cambridge University) Rifle Volunteer Corps on the lawn of King's College. The Prince of Wales, who was appointed as the honorary colonel of the corps on 8 March 1861, provided £50 to meet the expense of a new rifle range, and shooting became a prominent social activity of the cadets, and a source of inter-university competition with Oxford from 1868 onwards.⁸

The University of St Andrews, having blocked the formation of a student volunteer unit in 1860, relented in 1882, and permitted the formation of a battery of artillery, which would have the use of a 40-pounder gun.⁹ In Aberdeen, where students had enrolled in local Volunteer units, the University established No. 8 Battery as a sub-unit of the 1st Aberdeen Artillery Volunteers in December 1885 but, within ten years, it was absorbed into the 1st Heavy Battery. In November 1897, Aberdonian students enrolled in a detachment of the 1st Volunteer Battalion, Gordon Highlanders, which became the University Company ("U" Company), 1st Volunteer Battalion, Gordon Highlanders.¹⁰ In 1898, Manchester University formed the "N" Company of the 2nd Volunteer Battalion, Manchester Regiment, and, in 1900, Birmingham University supplied "U" Company of the 1st Volunteer Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment. Other units formed in 1900 included "E" Company of the 5th Volunteer Battalion, South Wales Borderers, by Aberystwyth University College, and "G" Company of the West Yorkshire Royal Engineers by an enthusiastic group of staff at Sheffield University.¹¹

Under the army reforms of H. O. Childers in 1881 Volunteer units were linked with local militia and regular army units, but only latterly did this require further changes of names. The OURVC first became part of one of the volunteer battalions of the Oxfordshire Light Infantry, and then, in 1887, became known as the 1st (Oxford University) Volunteer Battalion or the Oxford University Volunteers. In 1888, the Cambridge corps became the 4th (Cambridge University) Volunteer Battalion, the Suffolk Regiment. Similarly, in 1888, the QCERVB became the Queen's Rifle Volunteer Brigade, The Royal Scots. When the next major military crisis erupted during the South African War (1899-1902), students like other Volunteers offered themselves for overseas service. Lieutenant (Volunteer Captain) W. O. Duncan, the commanding officer of 'U' Company, assumed command of the 1st Volunteer Service Company, Gordon Highlanders, and another six Aberdonian medical students joined him in South Africa.¹² Of over one hundred applicants, twenty-eight were selected from the Cambridge University Volunteers. They served for a year in the Suffolk Volunteer Service Company and earned a battle honour, unique among Officers' Training Corps, namely "South Africa 1900-1".¹³

Although British and imperial forces compelled the surrender of the Boers at Vereeniging (31 May 1902), the war had cost the taxpayer £201 million and required the services of 448,435 officers and men, of whom 5,774 were killed in action, 16,168 died of wounds or disease, and 75,430 left South Africa as sick or wounded.¹⁴ Army reform emerged as a major concern both during the war and after it, with wartime issues resonating among university units. Cambridge University and the Inns of Court both adopted mounted infantry, which had flourished in South Africa, and, in 1906, the University of Oxford followed suit. This form of service proved popular among the cadets, especially in annual competitions involving mounted scouts at Bisley, in the Naval and Military Tournament, and in annual gymkhanas, involving races, tent pegging, saddling and bridling, and riding and jumping competitions. Many of the training innovations that became commonplace among the OTCs after 1908 took root during the South African War, including night operations (popular as they did not clash with lectures or sport), signalling, trench-digging (again on a competitive basis at the gymkhanas) as well as the traditional field days and annual camps.

Lectures and theoretical training focused upon the new training manuals for the Maxim machine gun from 1901, infantry drill from 1905 (certificate A), and signalling from 1907. The tactical employment of companies was covered in certificate B, and tactics, topography, engineering and administration in certificate C.¹⁵ The University of St Andrews even approved a course of forty lectures on military subjects, to be given over three terms. Included in the Arts syllabus from March 1907, this course ran until 1914.¹⁶ A similar proposal provoked a heated debate within the Senate and Council of Manchester University before the university appointed H. Spenser Wilkinson, the founder of the Manchester Tactical Society and a former journalist with the *Manchester Guardian*, as a special lecturer in military history. He began a series of evening lectures on military subjects from 29 September 1908 before being appointed as the first Chichele Professor of Military History at the University of Oxford in 1909.¹⁷ Finally, the number of corps continued to expand; in 1906, Reading University College formed a college troop for the Berkshire Yeomanry, and, in 1908, Durham University formed “K” Company of the 3rd Battalion, Northumberland Fusiliers.¹⁸

Formation of the Officers’ Training Corps

Innovations in drill, training, and the expanded role of mounted infantry were minor benefits from the South African War. Royal commissions and select committees reviewed all aspects of the regular and auxiliary forces, particularly the difficulty of

expanding the regular army in wartime and the problems derived from the lack of a general staff and an army council. Successive secretaries of state for war, William St John Brodrick and Hugh O. Arnold-Forster, both tried and failed to implement major reforms, encountering skepticism about their expensive proposals as well as opposition from vested interests in the auxiliary forces.¹⁹ Richard Burdon Haldane assumed the mantle of army reform when the Liberals entered office in December 1905. A philosopher by training and a lawyer by profession, Haldane had never previously held ministerial office nor had any previous military experience. As a Liberal Imperialist, who had supported the war in South Africa, he had enemies within the parliamentary party and the cabinet, and knew that he would have to be politically adroit to secure any achievements in office.

Haldane chose his military advisers, like Colonel Gerald Ellison and Major-General Douglas Haig, wisely, and developed ideas on army reform in a cautious and incremental manner. Contrary to the myths propagated in his memoirs,²⁰ Haldane did not reform the army with a clear-sighted vision of its future role in a European war, but sought to produce a politically acceptable budget, which included cuts in the armed forces, before reshaping the regulars into an expeditionary force. He also cut the cost of the auxiliary forces, which were then at £4.4 million annually,²² by recasting the Militia as a Special Reserve, and by reorganizing and re-equipping the Volunteers and Yeomanry as a new Territorial Force. The latter was intended as the principal means by which the six divisions of the expeditionary force could be expanded in war, but, on encountering political opposition to this concept, Haldane settled for home defence as the primary role of a Territorial Force and secured passage of his Territorial and Reserve Forces Bill.²³

Finding junior officers for these forces was a major challenge as both the regulars and the auxiliary forces had deficiencies of 4,000 subalterns. Accordingly, Haldane constituted a committee under the chairmanship of Sir Edward Ward, then permanent under secretary of state for war, to review the provision of officers. The committee included Professors T. Hudson Beare (Edinburgh University) and G. C. Bourne (Cambridge University), the Reverend A. A. David (Clifton College), Colonel H. J. Edwards (Cambridge University, commanding CUVRC), Lord Lovat, Major-General J. S. Ewart, Brigadier-General H. H. Wilson and G. P. Wight (War Office). Assembled on 23 October 1906, the committee held 21 meetings and questioned 24 witnesses before issuing its interim (and sole) report in January 1907. It proposed that

- (a) For the purpose of establishing a proper system of progressive military instruction for prospective officers in all branches of the Service, existing School

and University Corps should be reorganized into an "Officers Training Corps."

(b) A specially selected staff should be added to the department of the War Office charged with military education, in order to supervise the organization, instruction, and examination for certificates, of all branches of the Officers Training Corps.²⁴

The corps was to be divided into a Junior Division for public schools and a Senior Division for universities. Whereas the school corps could only prepare cadets to take examinations for Certificate A, university cadets could take either A or B. Both examinations were to be divided into written and theoretical parts, with B involving compulsory papers in elementary tactics, military law and administration, practical and written papers in special-to-arms training, and an optional paper in military history and strategy. Cadets could only take Certificate B if they had proved themselves 'efficient' over a period of two years, (including attendance at 15 parades a year, musketry training, and attendance at annual camp).²⁵ Training for the Certificate B papers took place in the evening, with the recommendation that universities should provide "Schools of Military Instruction" in close connection with their respective OTC contingents. It was thought that training at these centres could be offered to suitable candidates other than undergraduates, and that possession of a Certificate B would be the equivalent of 6 months' residence at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst.²⁶

The corps lost their Volunteer affiliations, coming under the control of the War Office. The latter appointed officers and non-commissioned officers to deliver a standardized scheme of training and curriculum, subject to annual inspection and regular review. Henceforth everything was standardized: musketry, drills, attendance at camp, and an annual grant paid over each year by the War Office to every contingent in respect of the number of cadets passing Certificate B (£5 for each cadet), the number of 'efficient' cadets (£2 for each 'efficient' cadet), and per diem payments (30p) for every cadet attending camp up to a maximum of 15 days. Furthermore, any Certificate B man, who was willing to spend one year with the auxiliary forces, would receive a £20 gratuity and an outfit allowance of £40. The universities were also required to set up, if they did not already exist, military education committees and to accept officers of their corps as ex officio members of the committees in question.²⁷ Army Order 160 of 1908 confirmed details of the new scheme, and in 'Issues with Army Orders 1908' (10 November 1908) 'the transfers of units from the old Volunteer corps to the new OTCs were approved for Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Durham, Birmingham and Manchester Universities, Aberystwyth College, as well as for Clifton and Winchester Colleges'.²⁸

Haldane, as an academically distinguished politician, possessed all the credentials to promote the cause of the OTCs within universities. He duly toured the campuses, extolling the potential of the new scheme. At Oxford, he claimed that the army 'wanted officers, and officers with brains', and that service in the reserves would provide a 'second string' to the bow of a young professional man. He emphasized, too, that the OTC would add a new dimension to university life by providing an outlet for the patriotism and idealism of the student.²⁹ At Birmingham and then Glasgow he beat the imperial drum: four hundred million people depended upon Britain across the empire, and the responsibility could not be evaded: Birmingham should sustain its 'share of the burden',³⁰ and Glasgow should 'make the organization of the defence of the Empire a reality'.³¹ Speaking at Edinburgh University, where he appeared as Rector, he waxed lyrically on how the OTC could help to weld the army and society together. Whereas the British army had suffered from its detachment from the rest of society, 'all great armies', he claimed, 'all real armies had been created by the people'.³²

Initially Haldane enjoyed his visits to universities, and, on 7 December 1908, informed his mother that 'We had a splendid officers training corps meeting yesterday at London University. The movement promises very well...'³³ Yet he was also touring the country, trying to persuade the old Volunteers to join the Territorial Force, and to defend the Territorials from the criticisms of the National Service League. So Haldane delegated some of his speaking engagements to Lord Lucas, the parliamentary under-secretary of state for war, who would speak at the launch of the University of Leeds OTC on 22 January 1909.³⁴ As the engagements multiplied, Haldane still delivered his share of speeches, but his enthusiasm had begun to wane. On 30 April 1909, Haldane informed his mother that 'I am off to Reading to open an Officers Training Corps. It is a bore to have to do these things, but they have to be done...'³⁵

Nevertheless, he sustained his round of ministerial duties, commending the Inns of Court OTC as 'one of the very pivots upon which the Army organization acted'.³⁶ At the first dinner of the University of London's OTC, he explained that wastage in the next war 'might be terrible, the task of mobilization might be supreme, but the problem might be solved if only the best of the nation was ready to take up the burden. And in such a corps as that of London University he believed they had the necessary material'.³⁷ Despite this rhetoric, Haldane realized that it would take time to build up a cadre of special reserve officers: as he informed the House of Commons on 4 August 1909, 'We are relying very largely upon the Officers' Training

Corps, whose work is now beginning to mature' but it would take 'the next year or two' to assess the results.³⁸

Few could emulate Cambridge University when it announced at the end of September 1908 that the new OTC would comprise a battalion of infantry, a squadron of cavalry, a battery of artillery (soon to be given two 18-pounder guns), and medical and engineering units (soon to acquire a steam traction engine).³⁹ Of the other Volunteer units, only Aberdeen refused to join Haldane's scheme, since 'U' Company of the 4th Battalion, Gordon Highlanders continued to thrive as the most popular unit for its students over the next four years. It required Principal George Adam Smith, a former Volunteer rifleman, to chair the first meeting of the University's Military Education Committee on 17 May 1912 and advocate the formation of a University OTC. Facing continued opposition from the Gordon Highlanders, Aberdeen had to form a medical unit of the Senior Division of the OTC.⁴⁰

Most universities had responded more promptly. Glasgow University established its OTC in 1908 with three infantry companies and an engineering company; St. Andrews formed a corps on 17 November 1908; and two University OTCs emerged in Ireland: Queen's University of Belfast OTC in October 1908 (and able to hold a camp in the following year with 8 officers and 123 cadets), and Dublin University in 1910, comprising three infantry companies, an engineering company, a medical unit (field ambulance section), and an Army Service Corps unit (transport and supply section).⁴¹ In England, the University of London OTC enrolled 783 cadets in its first year and, by the eve of the Great War, comprised over 950 students,⁴² and several provincial English OTCs followed suit. Manchester had four officers and 175 cadets when converted in 1908; Nottingham and Leeds were formed in 1909, Bristol in 1910 and Sheffield, 1911.⁴³ The Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, Royal Veterinary College of Ireland, Royal (Dick) Vet College, Edinburgh, and Bangor University College also formed corps.

The proliferation of OTCs reflected not only an upsurge of interest from staff and students but also the support from the War Office, including a free supply of blank ammunition for practice and camp.⁴⁴ Several of the newer corps struggled to raise the resources that would sustain their activities, partly because their university colleges had only just been established and their 'fortunes ... were by no means large or assured'.⁴⁵ Some corps charged students entrance fees (5 shillings in the case of Queen's Belfast and later, Dublin, which had charged fees for tailoring (10 shillings)

and for insignia, cap badges, swagger sticks, jacket buttons, and crested cigarette cases at six pence each, for which Mr. Lawlor's shop in Nassau Street, Dublin, sold specially crested "Officers' Training Corps" cigarettes and tobacco.⁴⁶ Many engaged in fund-raising or relied on personal gifts to raise contingent funds,⁴⁷ such as pipes and drums⁴⁸ and more specific purchases in Nottingham, namely an orderly room table, chairs, a military library, and writing material.⁴⁹ Other acquisitions included more conveniently located rifle ranges, and improved OTC buildings.⁵⁰ Sometimes students provided their own equipment, notably motorcycles, which were brought to annual camps so that drivers could act as despatch riders, and portable wireless sets designed and built in workshops or laboratories.⁵¹

The year's work for each OTC was extensive. Field days were less prominent than previously but parades more instructional than simply exercises in drill (although the latter were taken seriously in preparation for the annual inspections). Special-to-arm training became more varied, including signalling sections among engineering units; musketry courses were compulsory for all cadets save those in artillery or medical units; night operations became commonplace; and the 15-day annual camp rounded off the year, with artillery units going to Bulford or Larkhill and the engineers often to Christchurch.⁵² Competition and rewards sustained many facets of the programme, with Nottingham's College Council offering swords to each cadet that earned a certificate B.⁵³ Many OTCs gave prizes for shooting and performances at the annual camp, while Oxford and Cambridge sustained their annual rivalry in the Chancellor's Plate, Humphry Cup, revolver, and snap shooting competitions.⁵⁴ The annual inspections attracted senior regular officers, who observed parades, a march past, drills by companies or special-to-arm sections, scrutinized the contingent's books, and toured armouries and rifle ranges: these events then generated detailed reports from the War Office, with criticisms sometimes mollified by comments at OTC dinners.⁵⁵

Attendance at annual camp was now a prerequisite for efficiency qualifications. Oxford and Cambridge retained their own camps but smaller contingents trained together. In 1909, Manchester, Durham, Birmingham and Reading camped together at Windermere, and, as units continued to grow, larger camps were held. At Ilkley, in 1913, contingents from London, Durham, Wales and Scotland composed one formation while three companies from Manchester, and one company each from Leeds, Sheffield, and Nottingham formed the other. Following company training in the first week, the second week involved combined operations, a series of mock battles, and a march past before Major-General Sir Charles Douglas, the Inspector

General of the Home Forces. An even larger camp, involving 1,200 cadets from eight universities and colleges was due to be held at Windmill Hill, Salisbury Plain, on 25 July 1914 but was never completed due to the outbreak of war.⁵⁶

Commanding officers and their staffs proved crucial in the inculcation of professional soldiering. OTC histories extolled the contributions of energetic commanding officers, such as Captain Samuel R. Trotman (Nottingham),⁵⁷ Captain (later Brevet-Major) Stewart H. Capper (Manchester), who held a chair in Architecture at the university,⁵⁸ and Major William R. N. Annesley, DSO (St Andrews), a be-medalled veteran of the Egyptian and Sudanese campaigns, who both commanded the OTC and delivered (with Captain Harris) a 40-lecture syllabus on military studies.⁵⁹ Just as important were many of the adjutants, some of whom like Major Walter L. Loring served the OTCs of Birmingham and Bristol simultaneously, and Captain F. H. Nugent, who served Nottingham, Manchester, and Sheffield simultaneously before undertaking similar duties at Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield.⁶⁰ Captain James L. Sleeman, the first adjutant of the Queen's University Belfast OTC, even received an Honorary Degree of Master of Arts.⁶¹

Cadet impressions of the pre-war OTCs probably reveal more about the cadets themselves than the corps. John (later Lord) Reith, a former member of the Glasgow University Company of the 1st LRV, recalled 'two most happy years' in the Glasgow University OTC, being one of the first three to be made sergeant.⁶² Herbert Read, the pacifist, poet and later anarchist, who joined the pre-war OTC at the University of Leeds, reckoned that 'very few' cadets 'had any serious motive' in the corps. He enjoyed being part of 'an open-air club, with possibilities of friendship and youthful enterprise, and an annual camp which was in effect a free holiday'.⁶³ Arthur Tedder, who revelled in the OTC at Whitgift School, devoted most of his physical energies at Cambridge to 'the river and the OTC'. He became a scout corporal and college commander in the Cambridge OTC, learning 'the elements of military discipline, [and] the understanding of that unique phenomenon, military comradeship'.⁶⁴

Haig-Brown, the historian of the pre-war corps, claimed that the OTCs had 'few opportunities for social functions' other than annual dinners. He asserted that the Senior and Junior Divisions were 'separated by impenetrable darkness', that apart from 'camp and Bisley, and brief moments at Field Days and other functions', the University OTCs rarely interacted, and that despite producing handbooks, reports, and in one case elaborately illustrated magazines, never communicated between themselves.⁶⁵ The OTCs were not quite as isolated as these comments imply. Haig-

Brown underplayed the social cachet that large dinners might have had for students in the newer universities, and overlooked examples of interaction such as Leeds OTC conducting night operations against the OTC of Leeds Grammar School, Durham University OTC enjoying sporting and social contacts with the Yorkshire Regiment (later the Green Howards) when utilising depot facilities at Richmond, and the field days of Cambridge OTC that attracted cadets from numerous school OTCs.⁶⁶ Some of the inspections evolved into major social events for the universities. Hence when Sir John French, the Inspector-General of the Forces, inspected Oxford University OTC in June 1909, he attracted the attendance of Haldane, Lord Valentia (the Oxford MP), the Vice-Chancellor, 'several heads of colleges, a large number of members of the University, and several ladies', followed by a dinner at Magdalen College in the evening.⁶⁷ In Cambridge the annual gymkhanas, rechristened as the O.T.C. Military Tournament on 14 June 1909, and later as the 'Inter-University Assault-at-Arms' (1912), involved competitions with Oxford University OTC, and, on one occasion, with the Honourable Artillery Company. They became the major social and sporting event of the OTC's calendar, and both Oxford and Cambridge received invitations to take part in the Royal Tournaments of 1913 and 1914.⁶⁸ Finally, the OTCs gained both social and professional recognition through the representatives of the Senior and Junior Divisions, who attended the funeral of King Edward VII and the coronation of King George V. The new king, then the colonel-in-chief of the Officers' Training Corps, reviewed the corps in Windsor Great Park on 3 July 1911 (and inspected Dublin University's OTC when he visited Ireland from 8 to 12 July 1912).⁶⁹

However gratifying these developments, the ability of the OTC movement to produce the requisite number of officers remained at issue. When pressed on this in the House of Lords Haldane, now an ennobled secretary of state for war, had to admit that although 18,000 cadets had left the entire Officers' Training Corps, only 283 had become officers in the Special Reserve by 29 February 1912. Admittedly the reform was still maturing, and only 500 former cadets had left their corps with A and B certificates, but Lord Haldane was now reduced to conceding that 'mobilisation is always rather a ragged business and would be so with us'. He had to hope, too, that 'it is not too much to expect that, in the event of a supreme national emergency, feelings of patriotism would, as has always been the case in the past, induce a certain number of gentlemen to come forward and take commissions'.⁷⁰ Although the number who took up commissions reportedly grew to 694 by February 1914,⁷¹ the failure of the OTCs to make up the officer shortfall was used to explain the refusal to allow Cardiff University to raise another corps. Having first offered to raise an engineering contingent in June 1910, the University College of

Cardiff found its offer rejected on the grounds that the War Office only wanted infantry units. Three years later, in 1913, when Cardiff offered to raise an infantry contingent, the general staff requested assurances that officers would emerge from the unit. Answers such as 'the Registrar hopes' failed to impress, stated Haldane, as the general staff desperately wanted officers from the OTCs but Cardiff found its case blighted by performances elsewhere in Wales: 'Our experience in other Welsh Colleges has not been very good in regard to the furnishing of officers ... Aberystwith [*sic*] has furnished only two officers for the Territorial Force and seven for the Special Reserve, and Bangor two officers for the Territorial Force and two for the Special Reserve.'⁷²

Outbreak of War 1914

As the prospect of war loomed over the first weekend of August 1914, and the War Office invited applications for commissions in the Special Reserve and Territorial Force, it brought the large OTC annual camp on Salisbury Plain to a premature end. Many of the 1,200 cadets from the eight universities and colleges were at least able to start registering their names and qualifications with their respective commanding officers.⁷³ As the contingents returned to their own universities, and the declaration of war followed on 4 August, regular officers and sergeant-instructors had orders to return to their regiments. Those who remained with the OTCs heard the call of the new secretary of state for war, Earl Kitchener of Khartoum, on 7 August for the first 100,000 men, part of the first 500,000 in the new Kitchener's Armies to expand the expeditionary force sent to France. Unimpressed by the expansion potential of Haldane's part-time Territorial Force, Kitchener issued his appeal directly to men between the ages of 18 and 30 to enlist for a period of three years, or for the duration of the war. Between 4 August and 12 September, the War Office accepted 478,893 recruits, with 301,971 attested during the 13 days from 30 August onwards and the last five-figure number, 12,527, attested on 11 September.⁷⁴

Kitchener's concept evolved over time; by mid-August he was thinking of raising four New Armies, making a total of thirty divisions in the field, including the BEF, and subsequently the requirement grew to fifty and eventually a notional seventy divisions. His attitude towards the Territorial Force also mellowed, allowing these units to continue recruiting and to volunteer for active service (as 70 would do so by 25 August). By the end of the year 23 Territorial units were serving on the Western Front and another four in India and Egypt. Kitchener's chronic problem was finding officers for all these units whether deployed or in training. Having inherited only 28,060 officers (9,563 of whom were attached to the Territorial Force), he had

to find another 30,000 for his New Army, excluding the requirements of other branches of the army or replacements for casualties. Among several expedients was his appeal, published on 10 August, for 2,000 young men to come forward and take temporary commissions in the regular army. The appeal was directed towards men between the ages of 17 and 30, who were, or had been cadets in the 'University Training Corps' or other members of a university. While these applicants were encouraged to apply to their respective commanding officers, the appeal was extended to 'other young men of good general education'.⁷⁵

As the Mancunian OTC history observed, 'public schoolboys and university students in 1914' knew 'what was expected of them in terms of honour, loyalty, chivalry, patriotism and leadership': they 'came forward in numbers that soon exceeded the number of commissions available'.⁷⁶ Oxford's OTC had to set up an ad hoc committee to speed up the application process, and, by the end of September 1914, it had processed about 2,000 applications for commissions.⁷⁷ In Cambridge the Board of Military Studies, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, established a special war committee, which conducted viva voce sessions in the morning, afternoon, and evening until 6 September 1914, when the office was moved from high table in Corpus hall to the University Offices. The sessions were reduced to two per day, and by 1915, only morning sessions were necessary. Over the period from 4 August 1914 to 15 February 1916 the committee received some 3,432 applications, of which 1,790 were for temporary commissions in the regular army. Of these, it processed 1,249 by 31 December 1914 and 1,630 by 31 December 1915.⁷⁸

Overall, the response fully vindicated Haldane's optimism: Haig-Brown's data for the Senior and Junior Divisions of the universities and public schools is often quoted, namely 20,577 junior officers commissioned from the OTCs from August 1914 to March 1915, and another 12,290 men trained in the OTCs, who served in the ranks during the same period. As this data did not include exact returns from Oxford, Cambridge and the Royal (Dick) Veterinary College, Edinburgh and another six public schools, the estimated number commissioned in this period is sometimes given as about 27,000, exclusive of the 6,322 who had been gazetted as officers from all OTCs in various branches of the army between 1908 and the outbreak of war.⁷⁹ Haig-Brown, nonetheless, includes 'rounded' returns for the two ancient English universities in his appendix, and so by using this data, the military contribution of the Universities' OTCs can be assessed as 2,298 officers gazetted as officers, including regular officers, before the outbreak of war; 9,402 commissioned from August 1914 to February 1915; and another 3,278 serving in the ranks during this period.⁸⁰

University OTC contingents recorded their wartime services in different ways. While Manchester claimed that 550 of its cadets received commissions by March 1915, Belfast claimed almost 1,200 commissions by the end of the war. Nottingham University College recorded that all its officers and 119 out of 120 cadets volunteered immediately for active service in 1914 (and later provided a full accounting of cadets trained during the war).⁸¹ Some like Leeds later found that their wartime records and memorial rolls of honour were incomplete,⁸² and University OTCs operated different policies on membership both before and during the war. So when Nottingham's Military Science Committee ruled on 8 December 1914 that only registered College students could be admitted as members of the OTC, it was adopting practice at variance from that of many other universities.⁸³

The differing practices meant that the routes to a commission were quite diverse. William (Bill) Slim, the future field marshal, had joined Birmingham University's OTC in 1912, even although he had no direct connection with the university. On 22 August 1914 he was commissioned from the OTC as a temporary second lieutenant in the 9th Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment.⁸⁴ Vivian de Sola Pinto, who would later gain renown as a poet, literary critic, and authority on D. H. Lawrence, appearing for the defence in the trial of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1960), found it frustrating to wait for a commission from Oxford University OTC. He left Oxford prematurely in March 1915 to seek a commission through the Inns of Court OTC and a lenient medical examiner.⁸⁵ Basil Liddell Hart was an undergraduate at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, when war broke out and promptly joined the special commissions class of the Cambridge University OTC. He qualified as a musketry instructor, despite characteristically complaining about the course, and gained his commission in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry in December 1914.⁸⁶ Some like Alastair Crerar, a Glaswegian legal clerk, joined the local University OTC to circumvent the opposition of his employers to his voluntary enlistment,⁸⁷ whereas others glided from their University OTCs into active service. Two notable sportsmen from Oxford received commissions quickly; the rower, Tom Gillespie, who was gazetted into the 2nd Battalion, King's Own Scottish Borderers, and Ronald Poulton, who received a rugby cap for England before his Blue, and captained the pre-war England rugby XV, gained a lieutenancy in the 4th Battalion, Royal Berkshire Regiment: they were both killed within weeks of reaching the Western Front.⁸⁸ Sadly short service was by no means unusual: Horace Watkins joined the South Wales Borderers from Oxford University OTC on 22 August 1914; he was killed in action at Poelkapelle, Belgium, on 21 October 1914.⁸⁹

Of the motives that inspired undergraduates to seek commissions or enlist in the ranks, an Oxford soldier poet reckoned that they included a sense of England's honour over Belgian neutrality, sympathy for France, a readiness to suffer for others, patriotism, the zeitgeist of the times, a spirit of adventure, curiosity, a vague feeling that 'it was the thing to do', and a fear of the world's censure and state compulsion to come.⁹⁰ Friends and family influenced John Reith, who chose to enter the Territorials rather than the Special Reserve on the advice of his cousin, whilst Herbert Read saw the war as requiring a decision, 'a crystallization of vague projects: an immediate acceptance of the challenge of life. I did not hesitate.'⁹¹ Many did not wait for the offer of a commission, enlisting in such numbers within the 6th Cameron Highlanders that they provoked the comment from a brigadier that 'One company (6th Camerons, 45th Brigade) was entirely composed of men from the Glasgow University and High Schools, a shocking waste of good officer material.'⁹² Some of these former cadets gained promotions from the ranks, as did another 1,000 from the four battalions of the University and Public Schools battalions, Royal Fusiliers, by January 1915 (rising to over 7,000 commissions overall and prompting the disbandment of three of the four battalions in France).⁹³

Army Expansion

As the rapid expansion of the army continued in 1915, it exhausted the capacity of the OTC contingents to supply all the junior officers needed, and temporary commissions were granted to school-leavers, undergraduates without any military experience, and men with responsible positions in civil life. Nevertheless, Haig-Brown is surely correct in his claim that 'the work of the O.T.C. before the war and after its declaration made the forming of the New Armies an absolute possibility and not a chaotic dream'.⁹⁴ These officers, he admits, were not the finished article; they were inexperienced in 'the handling of men other than their own companions', and they profited hugely from the months of training that ensued⁹⁵ while the BEF, the reserves, and the Territorials bore the brunt of the casualties in the first six months of the war. Moreover, as regular officers and sergeant-instructors were withdrawn from the wartime OTCs, the supply of trained cadets began to dwindle. In February 1916 this process was accentuated by the order of the War Office, which required training in the ranks, save in some special corps, as the main means of gaining a temporary commission: as one historian of the New Armies observed, 'the *raison d'être* of most of the senior OTC units' temporarily disappeared.⁹⁶ The OTCs, nonetheless, had produced a stream of cadets, who had left their mark on the units both serving at the front and training for war. During the eighteen months when the voluntary system was tested thoroughly, Peter Simkins emphasizes that the

OTCs had ensured that there would be 'no sudden and radical change in the social composition of the officer corps in the first year of the war'.⁹⁷ At a time when the British army was undergoing rapid demographic change, the values and standards of the officer-gentleman tradition remained firmly in place.

Conversely the University OTCs encountered all manner of challenges during their wartime existence. As cadets either gained their commissions or enlisted for active service, the remaining numbers plummeted: at Cambridge University barely 100 cadets, a tenth of the total of the previous term, remained at the beginning of the Michaelmas term, 1914. Although new members enrolled during the year, almost as many left, and by the start of the Lent term of 1916 only 60 cadets remained. Apart from a small field ambulance unit, infantry training prevailed but any sense of wartime immediacy was offset by the loss of specialist instruction.⁹⁸ The erosion of support from the War Office was keenly felt: St Andrews catalogued the suspension of payments for A and B certificate examinations for the duration of the war, only partially offset by the award of capitation grants; the withdrawal of 107 rifles from the unit, leaving it with sixteen rifles for the entire contingent; the termination of the spring route march and the annual camp; and the ending of all competition for trophies, as personnel in the various sections changed so rapidly. Numbers on parade oscillated, with a brief rise in 1915, but those not training for commissions attended less regularly. Eventually on 28 May 1915 the Principal had to address a special parade to extract personal promises from each cadet to attend training regularly. New depths were reached when a professor of philosophy joined the unit as a cadet out of patriotic motives but proved so utterly unable to keep in step, or turn left or right when ordered, let alone handle a rifle, that he was asked to resign!⁹⁹

Where an OTC was blessed with an active, committed, and resourceful commanding officer, such as Captain Trotman at Nottingham, it could make a reasonable transition from pre-war to wartime roles. Trotman persuaded the Senate and Council to establish a degree subject in Military Science at Nottingham, and as the two intended lecturers found themselves assigned to the New Army in November 1914, Trotman delivered the course as well the training programme for the residual OTC. While his wife undertook much of the clerical work for the unit, Trotman probably subsidized the training to the extent of at least £1,000. He found a house for the OTC for which the College Council voted £25 a year towards its running costs, and his infectious enthusiasm persuaded two other professors to assist with the musketry and the NCO instruction. Once conscription was introduced in February

1916, the OTCs had the responsibility of training cadets before the age of 18 and-a-half years, whereupon they were recommended for an additional six-months' training at one of the separate Officer Cadet Units (or Officer Cadet Battalions) that were then established. When the age limits were reduced to 18, Nottingham's OTC like the others feared that their numbers would dwindle but, in the year ending 30 September 1917, 275 of its cadets entered the Officer Cadet Units and almost every one was commissioned. By the end of the war, Nottingham OTC could claim that it had trained some 1,600 cadets.¹⁰⁰

Conclusions

Adaptation, commitment, and survival were watchwords for the University OTCs during the First World War. They all had to adapt in one way or another to the loss of support from a War Office that was preoccupied with other matters. They endured under the shadow of an unprecedented war and kept producing as many partially trained cadets as they could manage. Where numbers fell, the scale of local infantry training diminished in scope, sometimes to section or platoon levels, but smaller OTCs kept going at their authorized strength, at least for a year or so, with parades, lectures, weekend camps and night operations.¹⁰¹ While the requirements of the army in wartime commissions – over the entirety of the war, 247,061 combatant officers, chaplains, and Royal Army Medical Corps officers¹⁰² – completely outstripped the numbers that the University OTCs could supply, the latter took pride in the sacrifices made, and the degree of commitment displayed by their former cadets, the gallantry awards earned, and their sustained contribution to the war effort. If waves of sadness swept in as the casualty totals included many of their former staff and students, morale could be boosted by royal inspections, as of Leeds University OTC by King George V on 27 September 1915,¹⁰³ and ultimately the units all survived to emerge from 'the war to end all wars' often with extraordinary records of wartime service to start training the officers of the future.

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Leeds OTC off duty at Camp. The permanent staff instructor on the right is Sgt Fear (William to his friends), a resonant name for a breed of men employed to lick undergraduates into military shape. *Courtesy of the Liddle Collection, University of Leeds.*



Edinburgh Engineer Detachment test their bridging skills at Chattenden, Kent. *Courtesy of Edinburgh UOTC.*



Inspection of Oxford OTC Cavalry Detachment. *Courtesy of Oxford UOTC.*



Post-war Edinburgh University 'Battery' with 18 pounders, still horse-drawn, at Redesdale Camp, Northumberland, 1934. *Courtesy of the University of Edinburgh PR Department.*