

Why did young men volunteer to join the army in 1914 and 1915?

In August 1914, 300,000 men had signed up to fight, and another 450,000 had joined-up by the end of September. Recruitment remained fairly steady through 1914 and early 1915, but it fell dramatically during the later years, especially after the Somme campaign, which resulted in 360,000 casualties. A prominent feature of the early months of volunteering was the formation of [Pals battalions](#). Many of these pals who had lived and worked together, joined up and trained together and were allocated to the same units. The policy of drawing recruits from amongst the local population ensured that, when the Pals battalions suffered casualties, whole towns, villages, neighbourhoods and communities back in Britain were to suffer disproportionate losses.



"Pals" departing from Preston railway station in August 1914

The **Pals battalions** of World War I were specially constituted battalions of the British Army comprising men who had enlisted together in local recruiting drives, with the promise that they would be able to serve alongside their friends, neighbours and colleagues, rather than being arbitrarily allocated to battalions.

At the outbreak of World War I in August 1914 [Lord Kitchener](#), the [Secretary of State for War](#), believed that overwhelming manpower was the key to winning the war and he set about looking for ways to encourage men of all classes to join.

[General Sir Henry Rawlinson](#) suggested that men would be more inclined to enlist in the Army if they knew that they were going to serve alongside their friends and colleagues. He appealed to London stockbrokers to raise a battalion of men from workers in the City of London to set an example. Sixteen hundred men enlisted in this 10th (Service) Battalion, [Royal Fusiliers](#), the so-called "Stockbrokers' Battalion", within a week in late August 1914.

A few days later, the [Earl of Derby](#) decided to raise a [battalion of men](#) from [Liverpool](#). Within two days, 1,500 Liverpudlians had joined the new battalion. Speaking to these men Lord Derby said:

"This should be a battalion of pals, a battalion in which friends from the same office will fight shoulder to shoulder for the honour of Britain and the credit of Liverpool."

Within the next few days, three more battalions were raised in Liverpool, forming the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th Battalions of the [King's Regiment \(Liverpool\)](#).

The photograph opposite shows the 'Liverpool Pals' being inspected in 1915



Encouraged by Lord Derby's success, Kitchener promoted the idea of organising similar recruitment campaigns throughout the entire country. By the end of September 1914, more than fifty towns had formed Pals battalions, whilst the larger towns and cities were able to form several battalions each; [Manchester](#), for example, raised four battalions in August, and four more in November.

2. Young men decided to enlist in the army for many different reasons. Some of them were certainly affected by posters they would have seen

There were many different posters published by the government during the war. Some were informative, others gave advice, and then there were recruitment posters and propaganda posters

Recruitment posters: these were designed to encourage young men and women to 'do their bit' for the war effort and enlist in the forces or other voluntary organisations

Propaganda posters: these were designed to stir up feelings of hatred and resentment towards the enemy

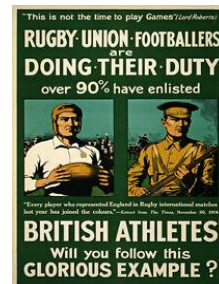
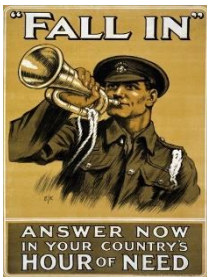
Have a go at designing your own WW1 **recruitment poster**. You can produce it entirely by hand, or use a software application like Microsoft Publisher or PowerPoint or Word

You need to decide who your target audience is going to be

You need to think carefully about the words you want to use

You need to think carefully about the images you select

You want your poster to be eye catching, attention grabbing, dramatic. You want people to remember it and the message you are putting across



Month	Volunteers	Conscripts & Attested	Total
August 1914	298,923	0	298,923
September 1914	462,901	0	462,901
October 1914	136,811	0	136,811
November 1914	169,862	0	169,862
December 1914	117,860	0	117,860
January 1915	156,290	0	156,290
February 1915	87,896	0	87,896
March 1915	113,907	0	113,907
April 1915	119,087	0	119,087
May 1915	135,263	0	135,263
June 1915	114,679	0	114,679
July 1915	95,413	0	95,413
August 1915	95,980	0	95,980
September 1915	71,617	0	71,617

Monthly recruitment figures for 1914-1915. As you can see, after the initial enthusiasm, numbers of volunteers started to decline

The **Birmingham Pals** were the three [infantry battalions](#) of the [Royal Warwickshire Regiment](#) of the [British Army](#) raised from men volunteering in the city of [Birmingham](#) in September 1914, shortly after the outbreak of the [Great War](#). They consisted of men volunteering for [Kitchener's New Armies](#) and the battalions became, respectively, the 14th, 15th and 16th (Service) battalions of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. A further battalion, 17th, was formed in June 1915 as a reserve battalion, and was reformed in September 1916.

They signed up to defend their country together, and went as a band of brothers to the terrible battlefields of France in the First World War.

Three 'Pals' battalions were raised in Birmingham, as young men flocked to sign up in 1914 during the fervour to serve king and country.

They had been promised they could serve alongside their friends and colleagues in the trenches.

Tragically, many were cut down during the disastrous battle of the Somme, when the Pals were first pitched into the frontline.

Birmingham provided thousands of men who joined the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, forming the 14th, 15th and 16th Battalions.

Now website findmypast.co.uk has released details including information from medal index cards, service records and other contemporary sources to provide what it claims is the most complete picture of the Pals battalions to date.

In many cases, large numbers of young men all working for the same company joined up and fought together. They would later be slaughtered in their thousands, most infamously on the Somme, but they would also go on to have a proud and brave record, taking part in some well fought engagements.

Paul Nixon, military historian at findmypast.co.uk, said: "Having such an extensive set of records available online is a huge benefit for anyone wanting to discover if their grandfather or great-grandfather volunteered alongside colleagues and neighbours during the First World War, especially after the terrible casualties that many of the Pals Battalions suffered."

