

2.3 Pals Battalions

OBJECTIVES

- Explain what a **Pals Battalion** is.
- Suggest why men joined up to fight in these battalions.
- Judge whether Pals Battalions were a good or bad idea.

SOURCE A: Men from a Hull Pals Battalion marching near Doullens, 28 June 1916.



STOP THE CLOCK

28 August 1914 – Lord Derby established the first Pals Battalion in Liverpool.

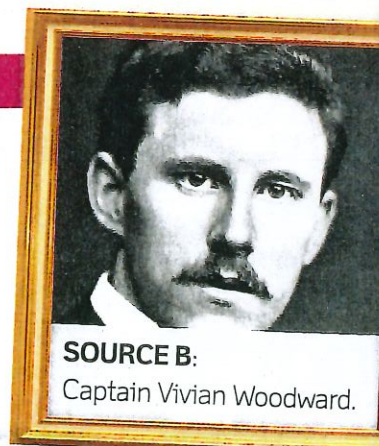
THE SUCCESS OF PALS BATTALIONS

One of the reasons why recruitment to the British armies was so successful initially was because of the 'Pals' (or 'Chums') Battalions. The idea of these battalions was to persuade men to join up with their friends and work colleagues, so that they could serve together. Perhaps they were all hoping that the war would be friendly and full of companionship, as well as a mental and physical challenge. This idea proved to be incredibly popular. Alongside men joining up to serve and protect their country, the government had now got the added bonus of men joining up to have fun!

Some of the battalions that were formed included Tyneside Irish, Footballers' Battalion, Stockbrokers' Battalion, Judeans, Glasgow Tramways' Battalion, Post Office Rifles, Accrington Pals, Leeds Pals, Bantams (for men below the minimum height) and Liverpool Dockers Battalion.

PEOPLE OF WWI

A member of the Footballers' Battalion was Captain Vivian Woodward. As well as being a Captain in the British Army he had been one of a number of professional footballers who served in the war. Woodward served on the Somme, having also captained England, Spurs and Chelsea before the war.



SOURCE B:
Captain Vivian Woodward.



SOURCE C: Liverpool Dockers Battalion march through Liverpool while watched by the public.

WHAT WERE THE PROS AND CONS OF PALS BATTALIONS?

SOURCE E

A real **incentive** to join the army.

A massive social loss for the areas that the soldiers came from.

Large numbers of men were called up quickly.

Recruits were positive and in good spirits.

Whole villages and groups of young men were wiped out, sometimes in one day.

Workplaces suffered.

Areas never recovered from the trauma.

Towns and villages helped out with the recruitment drive.

THE DISADVANTAGES

However powerful the Pals Battalion scheme may have been, a terrible disadvantage of it was that its men, as well as training together, also fought and often died together. If they came from the same community, it meant that whole villages and towns could lose a large proportion of their young men. For example, the Battle of the Somme in 1916 saw the death of 750 of the 900 Leeds Pals, and 584 of the 720 Accrington Pals. The **trauma** of small communities losing hundreds of sons, husbands and fathers was a terrible feature of the war. The sheer scale of the casualties within the Leeds and Accrington Pals means that the tale of the Pals Battalions will always be told as one of great sorrow – but this is not the entire story (see **Source E**).

In Accrington, recruitment began on 14 September, with 104 men accepted for service in the first three hours. Brothers, cousins, friends and workmates enlisted together and within ten days the Accrington Pals had reached full strength of some 1000 men.

SOURCE D: Written by historian and journalist Bruce Robinson, www.bbc.co.uk.

FINAL FOCUS

Although there were great losses in the Accrington and Leeds Pals, such losses were not common. Why do you think such tragedies are mentioned again and again?

TASKS

- When was the first Pals Battalion set up and who was it set up by?
 - Name two Pals Battalions.
- Read **Source D**.
 - Which battalion is mentioned in the source?
 - How many men would have to join a Pals Battalion for it to be at full strength?
 - Is **Source D** useful for informing us about Pals Battalions? Is it a reliable source of information?
- What happened to the Accrington and Leeds Pals at the Battle of the Somme?
- Look at the statements about the Pals Battalions in **Source E**. Put the statements into two columns

under the headings 'Pros' and 'Cons'. Then write two paragraphs summarizing the points and adding your own if possible.

- Make a judgement: were Pals Battalions a good or a bad idea? Why?
- Research one of the other Pals Battalions mentioned on these pages. Can you present your teacher with the information that you have found out by next lesson?

GCSE-STYLE QUESTION

What was the significance of Pals Battalions?

KEY WORDS

incentive
Pals Battalion
trauma