

When the First World War broke out in 1914 Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, realised that there needed to be a massive recruitment drive for volunteers to sign up and fight for their country. People thought that the war would be over by Christmas and it may well have been, because, without volunteers, Britain would not have had enough men to hold back the Germans! The image on the right became one of the most famous recruiting posters of all time and assisted in the creation of a whole new volunteer army, called 'The New Army', but more generally known as 'Kitchener's Army'.

The men recruited formed complete battalions that were put under British Army Regiments which already existed. The recruitment campaign was so successful that in some areas the queues outside the recruitment offices were up to a mile long! However, by 1916 the people who hadn't already signed up began to hear about the reality of war and the queues to sign up for the army shortened drastically. This led to conscription, to ensure enough men could replace those killed in campaigns such as Battle of the Somme.



Once recruited, the men were sent to their Regimental depot to receive their kit and then learn about army discipline and training. Then they went to the main training camps where they joined their battalions. This massive recruitment drive led to several problems. There was a severe lack of equipment and many men actually trained in their own clothes and others were given old red army uniforms left over from the First Boer War of the 1880s! Emergency blue uniforms were issued to many regiments and they quickly became known as 'Kitchener Blue'. At first there was no artillery to help train the recruits as it was all in France and Belgium ready for use. The volunteers had to make do with old rifles and machine guns. The government's attempt to solve this problem was to use old ceremonial cannons!

A further issue was that there were not enough experienced officers to train the new recruits, so all officers on reserve lists were called up and British Indian Army officers who were on leave in Britain were also called upon. Direct commissions were often given to men who had been to university, famous public schools, or if they had any prior military training in Officer Training Corps. Many men were promoted so quickly during the First World War that they had rank and responsibilities which were far higher than was realistic.

In all, Lord Kitchener managed to recruit almost 2.5 million men which was to be his lasting legacy. He did not survive the war himself and died when his ship hit a mine in 1916.