

RECRUITMENT

As soon as War was declared many of the men of Kelso & District prepared themselves to “do their bit for King & Country”.

The 4th King’s Own Scottish Borderers (K.O.S.B.) Territorials departed on Friday 7th August 1914 for the purpose of home defence. Following an enthusiastic send off in Kelso they marched all the way to Galashiels, their initial destination. Twenty members of the National Reserve departed by train the next day to join them at Galashiels. The local members of the Lothian and Border Horse had already left the town on Wednesday. A considerable number of motor men left in the first two days to be in readiness for Government service.

A recruitment office was opened in the town and throughout the following few months there was a steady stream of volunteers enlisting. Enlisting was not confined to the Army Regiments, although this was by far the largest area. A number of men for example joined the Royal Navy, the Motor Transport, Engineer, Veterinary or Medical Services and later the Flying Corps

The Kelso Chronicle and other local newspapers published weekly lists of Recruits. The lists identify the fact that enlisting in the Army was not confined to the K.O.S.B. but encompassed many other regiments in Scotland & England. This included Seaforth Highlanders, Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders, Royal Scots and Northumberland Fusiliers, the latter mainly being due to our proximity to the Scotland/England Border. Young and not so young men tended to enlist in groups e.g. a group of friends, fellow workers or entire families. Thus **they earned** the reputation of this being “The Pals Army”. There were many anecdotal stories published along with the recruitment lists.

Businesses in the town and the Farming Community, were seriously affected by this as in many cases their entire workforce had enlisted. It was left to the women, older and younger members of the Community to assume duties they were not always equipped for.

Recruitment rallies were held regularly in the town and surrounding villages led by Sir Waldie Griffiths from Hendersyde, Commandant of the Territorials. In October 1914 the Territorials began a route march throughout the Border District. Starting in Kelso their route took them, over two days, to Coldstream, Duns, Earlston and back to Galashiels. The visit to Kelso was followed by a great recruiting rally in the Town Hall. A similar march took place in January 1915 when the 4th K.O.S.B’s reserves marched from Kirkbank station to Morebattle, Yetholm and onward to Kelso.

The growing number of casualties meant that nationally the level of volunteering did not match the government’s requirements, **despite a huge campaign by Lord Kitchener with the famous slogan “Your country needs you”**. **This led eventually** to the Military Services Act being passed in January 1916. The passing of this Act meant that all eligible men between the age of 18 and 41 were called upon to serve their country. The effect of this deeply affected Kelso and the surrounding district with already depleted workplaces and farms losing yet more men to the armed services. This is reflected in the local press reports of the Tribunals.

CONSCRIPTION

The 'Derby Scheme' failed to obtain sufficient recruits to fill the ranks resulting in the introduction of the Military Service Bill in January 1916 which provided for the conscription of single men aged 18-41.

Every single man and childless widower between the ages of 18 and 41 was offered three choices

1. Enlist at once
2. Attest at once under Derby's Scheme
3. Or on 2nd March 1916 be automatically deemed to have enlisted

In May 1916 the bill was extended to married **men**.

By April 1918 the upper age was raised to 50 (or to 56 if the need arose)

Ireland, which was still part of the UK at that time was excluded from the scheme. (Later proposals to introduce conscription in Ireland led to widespread support for Sinn Fein and independence).

Men called up for military service or their employers could appeal to a civilian Military Service Tribunal in their town or district.

TRIBUNALS

Men who might be exempted by their local tribunals:-

1. Men more useful to the Nation in their present employment
2. Men in whose case Military Service would cause serious hardship owing to exceptional financial or business obligations or domestic problems
3. Men who are ill or infirm
4. Men who conscientiously object to combatant Service. If the Tribunal thinks fit, men may on this ground, be exempted from combatant (not non-combatant) service or be exempt on condition that they engaged in work of National Importance.

The Tribunals were made up of local prominent figures. Members were generally poorly briefed and prejudiced by their own views. *Editorial Comments and reports of Tribunals in the Kelso Chronicle in 1916 would appear to bear this out.*

Appeals on the grounds of work of national importance, business or domestic hardship, and medical unfitness – Many of those appealing were given some kind of exemption usually temporary or conditional. Some men were given exemption on the condition that they joined the Voluntary Training Corps. A few appeals were successful, usually after 3 or 4 attempts.

Conscientious Objectors – Although it has been the focus of the tribunal's image since the war only 2 per cent of those appealing were Conscientious Objectors. If an appeal was successful they were granted non-combatant duties. If refused exemption, the CO was considered to have enlisted into military service – he became a soldier **absent** without leave and therefore subject to arrest. At first, he would be sent to a military prison, but, by mid-1916, an Army Order ruled that a CO could be court-martialed and sent to a civil prison. On release, he could be immediately arrested as a deserter, court-martialed and returned to prison. Some COs were sent to France, where they could be shot for refusing to obey orders. Conscientious objectors were not released until six months after the war ended. This was to give returning soldiers a head start in finding civilian jobs. COs were also stripped of the vote until 1922.