

YMCA

AND OTHER VOLUNTEER ORGANISATIONS

In addition to support provided by the army in the form of the Army Chaplains Department and the Expeditionary Force Canteens, several other – principally religious – organisations provided valuable facilities for the troops.

THE YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION (YMCA)

Within ten days of the declaration of war, the YMCA had established no fewer than 250 centres in the United Kingdom, providing tea, sandwiches or other refreshments, perhaps some reading materials. Many of these were next to railway stations or other places where troops would be passing. In November 1914, the first YMCA contingent went to France and organised similar centres at Le Havre. Later, they had centres at Rouen, Boulogne, Dieppe, Etaples and Calais (the principal army bases), Abbeville, Dunkirk, Abancourt (railway junction), Paris and Marseilles. Eventually there were numerous centres in each of these places, and another three hundred along the lines of communication. Vast quantities of refreshments were served out to troops on the move: for example, one centre at Etaples served more than 200,000 cups of cocoa each month.



YMCA Messines

On 30 June 1915, YMCA received permission to establish a centre within the area of army operations at Aire, then the location of HQ of First Army. By the end of the year, there were hundreds of small centres close to the front. As the pictures show, some of these were very near the firing line, providing a welcome refuge.

SCOTTISH CHURCHES HUTS IN FRANCE

“The Scottish Churches’ Huts in the First World War were familiar to Scottish soldiers serving both at home and abroad. There they could relax, obtain refreshments, newspapers, books and writing materials. Since 1904 the Church of Scotland Young Men’s Guild had been providing tents for rest and recreation at Territorial Army Summer Camps and in 1914 the Guild had tents at Tain, Gales, Monzie and Stobs; thus at the outbreak of war it had a nucleus of equipment, supplies and voluntary staff.”



YMCA Hut

“The aim was to serve Scottish troops at home and abroad. Hut and Canteen centres were set up at all the main camps in Scotland... A Rest Room was established at St Enoch’s Railway Station, Glasgow, for troops passing through the city, while in Edinburgh, volunteers visited the sick and the wounded in Craighleith Hospital, writing letters and keeping the men in touch with home.”