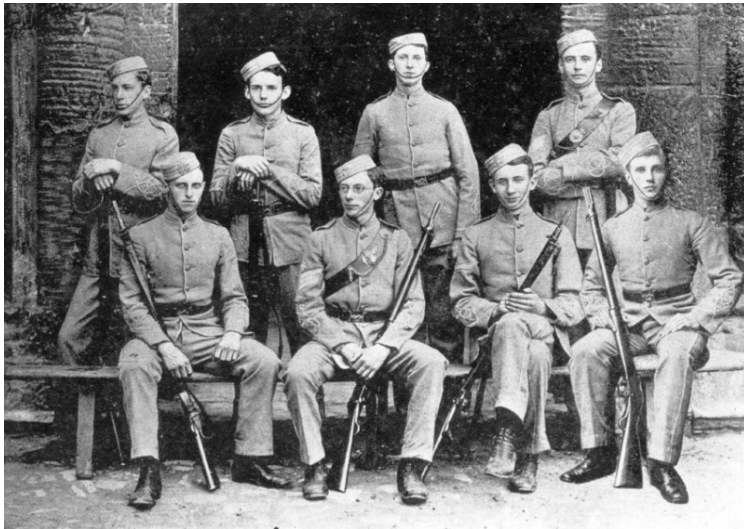


## The Formation of the Officer Training Corps

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Officer Training Corps (OTCs) were created by Haldane in the reforms of 1908 following the problem of finding sufficient officers for the Army in the Boer War of 1899 - 1902. They were divided into senior and junior divisions. The senior were



Eton Rifle Volunteers Ó Royal Green Jackets Museum Trust

set up in the universities and the junior in the public schools. They replaced public school and university cadet forces such as the Eton Rifle Volunteers and their purpose from the start was officer training for the Special Reserve and Regular services.

Six years into the scheme, at the beginning of the First World War, after Mons and First Ypres, when the New Army was being built up by Kitchener, boys from public

schools who had served in their school OTC were usually granted commissions without further ado, for the most part in a unit of their choice. The commanding officer (CO) would have had a report from the school and it was assumed that the candidate would have had some training as a leader. Once commissioned, he would have received unit training, which would have included cadres for newly-commissioned officers.

As the Great War progressed and the demands for manpower grew, University OTCs were turned into officer factories. Oxford University OTC was expanded in 1915 into two Officer Cadet Battalions (all cadets were billeted in the colleges) and you did not have to be an undergraduate to pass through. You had to be at least eighteen and a half and have served in the ranks or at a school OTC. It was not only at Oxford and Cambridge Universities that officers were trained - 4,218 men were commissioned from London University OTC.

Sadly, the life of thousands of these young subalterns in the front line was measured in days and it became clear to the General Staff that after the early casualties there was a need for many more experienced and better trained officers. It is interesting to read from contemporary sources, such as *Goodbye to All That* by Robert Graves, that the class origins of the British officer changed in the latter half of the war after the introduction of conscription in 1916. Promotion from the ranks and from occupations in society from which military men were not usually drawn became acceptable. Certain units such as the Artists' Rifles and the Inns of Court Regiment were treated as specialist officer-training cadres - 10,256 men of the Artists' Rifles were granted commissions in the Great War; more than 11,000 from the Inns of Court.

The officers of the all-volunteer Territorial Force (TF) created by Haldane in 1908 for home defence were usually drawn from the local bourgeoisie - solicitors, accountants, businessmen and bankers - and were also simply chosen by their COs. Many would have been to public school and thus done some form of military training.

The expansion of the TF by cloning their battalions into 1/1 then 2/1 then 3/1 Battalions of the regiment as the war went on and the deployment of the Territorials in France and Belgium brought more volunteers from the professions into the Army. The 2/1 Bucks was officered for example by railway managers, barristers and solicitors, printers and mercers. Territorial units provided officers for the New Army. Volunteers who had served in the ranks in the Territorial Force were treated in much the same way as potential officers in the New Armies, though they might be commissioned into a different regiment.

The scale of the sacrifice of the schoolboys and undergraduates who volunteered as officers in the Great War and were trained by their OTCs to lead their troops unhesitatingly over the top can be seen today from the memorials in the school and college chapels throughout the United Kingdom.