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“From the cradle up we have been fed on battles and heroic deeds”:

The Militarization of Adolescent Boys in England, 1897-1916

by

Cameron Blake Godfrey

Under the Direction of Joe Perry, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2024

ABSTRACT

Approximately 400,000 underage soldiers served in the British Armed Forces during the First World War. This thesis examines the cultural and social factors that potentially influenced and compelled young boys to lie about their ages and head to the front where the war would quickly shatter their illusions of adventure and glory. Youth organizations, schooling, organized sports, toys, and ideas of Empire all worked in tandem to provide an overly romanticized representation of war and at the same time implemented ways to reverse perceived societal and racial decline. Using the *Boy's Own Paper* as a case study, this thesis explores the way narratives in contemporary media, as well as mass organizations and popular culture, promoted militarism and patriotism to English youths.

INDEX WORDS: World War One, England, Militarization, Underage soldiers, Pleasure Cultures of War, *Boy's Own Paper*.

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Cameron Blake Godfrey

Committee Chair: Joseph Perry

Committee: Gregory Moore

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Services

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2024

DEDICATION

Glory be to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now,
and ever shall be,
world without end.
Amen

First and foremost, I dedicate this work to the glory of God for His unending love and grace.

To my ever supportive and loving family, especially my dearest Mother, Stephanie, and my
beloved Nana, Patricia.

To Maggie, there is literally no one else with whom I'd rather have endured this experience.

To all who fought, suffered, and died in the First World War.

May we remember them. Always.

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I would also be remiss not to acknowledge the profound influence of Dalton State College, where it all began. Dalton State's indelible history faculty molded me into the academic I am today. I am forever grateful to Dr. Sarah Mergel who changed my academic trajectory, for it was in her American history survey course where I first set my sights on becoming a historian. Many thanks to Dr. Tammy Byron who has been so supportive throughout my academic journey. Also, thank you for keeping the Archie Bunker reference in your lecture, even if I was the only one who both understood and appreciated it. Finally, I am forever indebted to Dr. Thomas Veve, professor emeritus, who cultivated in me a deep admiration and respect for history. Upon his retirement, Dr. Veve passed on the metaphorical keys to the discipline, and I hope this project serves as a testament to my commitment to the field.

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1 INTRODUCTION

*From the cradle up we have been fed
on battles and heroic deeds, nurtured
on bloody episodes in our country's
history; war was always glorious,
something manly, never sordid,
uncivilized, foolish or base.*

-Thomas Hope¹

1.1 Statement of the Thesis

In January 1916, Private Abraham “Aby” Bevistein fell under German attack while in the trenches of the Western Front. In December of the previous year, Bevistein survived a German mine explosion, but the survival was only physical; mental and emotional wounds began to take their toll. After this second brush with the horrors of war, “shellshock” sent Bevistein wandering the British line and abandoning his post. In a letter to his mother, he wrote, “Dear mother, I’m in the trenches and I was ill so I went out, and they took me to the prison and I’m in a bit of trouble now.” That “bit of trouble” translated into a charge of desertion and would cost him his life, for during the First World War, the British military executed “deserters” via firing squad. Aby Bevistein was only 17 years old.²

The British Army executed Aby Bevistein before he was of legal age to enlist. Analyzing the cultural factors that potentially compelled individuals like Aby Bevistein to lie about their ages head to the front is the foundation of this master’s thesis, and it is essential because Bevistein was not an anomaly. In his book *Boy Soldiers of the Great War*, Richard Van Emden concludes that over 400,000 underage British boys like Bevistein enlisted in the armed forces.³ I

¹ Thomas Hope, quoted in Richard Van Emden, *Boy Soldiers of the Great War* (Yorkshire: Pen & Sword, 2021), 33.

² BBC, “The Teenage Soldiers of World War One,” 11 November 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-29934965>. *Aby Bevistein enlisted as Abraham Harris, but for sake of clarity, I’ll use his given name.

³ Richard van Emden, *Boy Soldiers of the Great War* (Yorkshire: Pen & Sword, 2021), 497. *Note: A 2014 BBC article stated that during WWI, approximately 250,000 underage men enlisted and served in the British armed forces. The 2005 edition of Van Emden’s book agreed with this number, but further research confirmed the number to be much larger than originally believed. Emden updated the number in the 2021 edition of his book.

argue that due to social anxieties at the turn of the twentieth century, Britain attempted to shore up perceived national and societal decline. As a result, the efforts ingrained a form of militarization within adolescents.

Understanding why such an astounding number of young men felt compelled to enlist, whether they were successful in their attempt, is critical to expanding further our understanding of both the impact and legacy of the First World War, for juvenile combatants' mere presence likely altered the course of the war. Based on his quantitative study, Emden claims that if Britain had "withdrawn, *en masse*, all those who were underage serving on the Western Front in 1915, then the British Expeditionary Force would in all likelihood have been defeated."⁴ Such an assertion, even if exaggerated, underscores that juvenile combatants played a pivotal role in Britain's war efforts, encouraging researchers to delve further into how and why these young men felt the need to serve and likely die for their country before ever reaching adulthood.

1.2 Historiography & Context

Research on juvenile combatants is relatively new in the historiography of the First World War, and academics, such as Manon Pignot, have argued that "the Great War's young combatants deserve more attention in contemporary historiography."⁵ This does not suggest that underage enlistees were completely unknown until recent decades. Instead, the history of boy soldiers has been "widely acknowledged but consistently under researched."⁶ One must ask why this has been the case. One major issue historians face is determining who was underage at the time of enlistment. This thesis will take a different approach. Instead of focusing on the soldiers themselves during the war years, it will attempt to reconstruct the cultural milieu in which boys

⁴ Emden, *Boy Soldiers of the Great War*, 9.

⁵ Manon Pignot, "'We Don't Enlist Children. Go Home and Do Your Homework': Juvenile Combatants in the First World War, from Transgression to Filiation." *Cultural and Social History* 17, no. 5 (2020): 638.

⁶ Emden, *Boy Soldiers of the Great War*, 22.

found themselves in the decades prior to the First World War. This reconstruction is based on two theoretical frameworks, the “war culture” and the “pleasure cultures of war.”

Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker theorize the concept of “war culture” in their book, *14-18: Understanding the Great War*; the authors describe it as “a collection of representations of the conflict that crystallized into a system of thought which gave the war its deep significance.”⁷ The authors write that:

Representations of the war intended for children – books and periodicals, images, and toys used in schools and churches – everything societies taught their youngest members during the Great War puts us in contact with what people thought was most important, and what each society believed it should communicate about the conflict. The stories for children, the representations offered them, whether suggested or imposed, are like the inner core of the various war cultures.⁸

While Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker situate this concept within the war period (1914-1918), I intend to understand what actions in the decades before the war helped foster “a system of thought” that would evolve into the national “war culture” that included children.

The Napoleonic Wars, which ended in 1815, were the last great conflagration that Europeans had experienced. Monuments like Nelson’s column and Trafalgar Square served as physical and visual reminders of Britain’s prowess on the global stage. The distance of time distorted the meaning and experience of war and imbued it with a romantic tinge. The result came in the form of what Michael Paris terms the “pleasure cultures of war,” which the author extended from Graham Dawson’s study of soldier heroes. Paris defines it when “war and the

⁷ Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau & Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 102.

⁸ Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau & Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 110.

heroic but violent deeds of the warrior became a widespread and popular theme in mass entertainment.”⁹

1.3 Methodology

For a workable timeframe, this thesis will cover the period between 1897 to 1916. I have chosen these dates because they bracket the issues explored below. In 1897, the United Kingdom and its empire celebrated Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee, which was an embodiment of an “emerging imperial consciousness.” The fear of social decline, in the form of decadence, also spread during the same time, and it reached a fever pitch in the aftermath of the South African War. The British initiated two important moves in 1916 that would work towards solving the underage enlistment issue. First, the British army established conscription for the first time, thus allowing the military to monitor more effectively those who were going to the front. Conscription proved to be an emotionally charged topic, with individuals both for and against its implementation. On the war’s eve, Great Britain was the only European power not enforcing the practice. For one, conscription ran anathema to the ruling Liberals’ sensibilities and philosophy.¹⁰ The British government finally imposed conscription in January 1916 as the war prolonged and popular support waned. Until then, propaganda and moral coercion filled the gap, both of which were vital in building the “pleasure cultures of war.” Second, the British government and military acknowledged juvenile combatants as an issue, and, as a result, implemented birth certificate verification upon enlistment or attestation. Before, recruiting officers took recruits solely at their word.

⁹ Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 8.

¹⁰ Peter Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public-School Ethos* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 1987), 34.

A minor methodological question deals with semantics. In the literature it is common to see academics use the term “boy soldiers” to identify underage youths who enlisted to serve in the armed forces. To Pignot, however, this identifier is misleading due to “the current social and geo-political meaning” that undermines the voluntary nature and agency these youths exhibited. Therefore, like Pignot, I shall utilize the term “juvenile combatants” to refer to those individuals who attempted to or did enlist in the British armed forces during the First World War because it “expresses both the legal status of a minor and the assertions of youthful agency.” During the conflict boy soldiers were not solely victims, but rather active and willing participants.¹¹

It is also essential to define and differentiate between “militarism” and “militarization” and the justification for using one over the other. While similar, both terms carry their distinct definitions and connotations. Militarism is the older of the two, while militarization entered academic parlance only in the 1970s and 1980s. As John Gillis writes, the former carries with it a “meaning that is distinctly political and overly ideological” and “is always applied to the ‘other’ as a way of ‘displacing responsibility and blame.’”¹² As stated earlier in this introduction, the goal is not to cast blame, and I do not wish to debate whether Britain was or was not a militaristic society. That discussion lies outside the scope of this thesis. Gerard DeGroot defines true militarism as “the domination of government and society by military elites, a tendency to overvalue military power, and the dissemination of military values into wider society.” British society did not meet the parameters because, according to DeGroot, it only successfully met the third—the dissemination of military values.¹³ Therefore, I use “militarization” throughout this

¹¹ Manon Pignot, “‘We Don’t Enlist Children. Go Home and Do Your Homework’: Juvenile Combatants in the First World War, from Transgression to Filiation,” *Cultural and Social History* 17, no. 5 (2020): 627.

¹² John R. Gillis, *The Militarization of the Western World* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 1-2.

¹³ Gerard J. DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1996), 39-40.

thesis aligning with Gillis' assertion that militarization is an ongoing "process" rather than a byproduct of an overtly militaristic society.

1.4 Chapter Overview

I have broken this thesis down into three distinct chapters. Chapter two examines how Britain's dismal performance during the South African War (1899-1902) prompted officials to understand why it was not an assured victory. The chapter traces what led individuals to define the issue as "decadence," which, in contemporaries' eyes, contributed to national, physical, and imperial decline. In response, individuals like Robert Brabazon, Earl of Meath, and Sir Robert Baden-Powell designed and heavily promoted movements they felt would bring Britain's youth back from the precipice. Chapter three explores what Graham Dawson terms the "pleasure cultures of war." I chose three areas where young, upper-middle-class boys most likely experienced this "pleasure culture." The public schools, along with their playing fields and cadet corps, toy soldiers, and juvenile literature: each romanticized warfare and painted an unrealistic view of what one could expect in an actual battle. They also formed a critical part of the childhood experience in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras. Chapter four builds on the juvenile literature through a case study of the *Boy's Own Paper (BOP)*, one of Britain's and the British empire's most popular boy's weeklies during its eighty-eight year run. First, I situate the *BOP* within its historical context and provide a brief history of the periodical. Second, I look at the *BOP*'s material beginning from the South African War and contrast it to the changes that occurred once war broke out in 1914.

It is not the intent of this thesis to cast a litany of blame against any one person or institution (whether political, religious, or military) for intentionally militarizing young boys. When all was said and done, the boys had agency; no one forced them to go to war. Rather, the

goal is to understand the cultural factors at play that inspired and challenged adolescents to utilize that agency to enlist in the armed forces while being younger than the allowed age. The First World War was a complex and varied event that sent shockwaves worldwide, and juvenile combatants are a small, but no less important, component in understanding that complexity. In short, this thesis argues that as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, a fear of national and societal decline caused the British to combat the perceived domestic threats. The results created myriad “pleasures cultures of war” that, when the First World War broke, easily coalesced into a “war culture” with which male youth immersed themselves. While many contributed to the war effort via the relative safety of the home front, others went a step further and answered the call to martial service.

The twenty years before the First World War “saw a systematic and widespread attempt to organize and indoctrinate future citizens and future soldiers” in Great Britain.¹⁴ These attempts proved successful because Britain waged over a year of war during the First World War, fueled solely on a volunteer army of approximately 2.5 million. When it came to this indoctrination, England stood in stark contrast with its European counterparts, for it did not have the traditional modes of militarization, such as conscription (only implemented in 1916), garrison towns, and “duelling manias” that were prevalent on the continent.¹⁵ England exhibited what Anne Summers calls “popular militarism,” which was unique to the British Isles. This distinctive form of militarization did not occur overnight; instead, according to Summers, England “must have developed, over a long period, an extensive and pervasive range of military and militaristic

¹⁴ Robert H. MacDonald, “Reproducing the Middle-Class Boy: From Purity to Patriotism in the Boys’ Magazines, 1892-1914,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 24, no. 3 (July 1989): 526.

¹⁵ J.A. Mangan, “Duty unto Death,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27, nos. 1-2 (January-February 2010): 128.

modes of thinking.”¹⁶ There is a note of irony here: Britain’s “popular militarism” developed when many denied that Britain was a militaristic nation, even as jingoism proliferated.

¹⁶ Anne Summers, “Militarism in Britain Before the Great War,” *History Workshop Journal* 2 (Autumn 1976): 105.

2 SAVING THE NATIONAL BOYHOOD

If you scouts want peace for your country you must each be prepared at any time to stick up for it. Don't be cowards and content yourselves by merely paying soldiers to do your fighting and dying for you. Do something yourselves, learn marksmanship and drilling, so that as men you can take your place with the other men of your race in defending your women and children and homes, if it should ever be necessary.

- *Scouting for Boys* (1910)¹⁷

2.1 Introduction

Social anxieties that began in England during the last quarter of the nineteenth century compelled those in authority to shore up perceived national decline that came in various forms. This chapter will outline how, concerned by rapid social and moral decline, the government and civic-minded, patriotic leaders sought to reinforce the ideas that underpinned the imagined imperial consciousness and bolstered the ideals taught through ideological movements, including the Empire Day and Duty and Discipline Movements led by Lord Meath as well as other cultural outlets, including Sir Robert Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts. The growing power of continental rivals (especially Germany), anxieties over racial decline, the fear of an impending (though unfounded) invasion of the British Isles, and the physical deterioration of the nation engendered consternation amongst many. The threat came in the overarching form of "decadence," which became a catchall for the ills that plagued British society at the turn of the century. Viewed as the soldiers and defenders of tomorrow, male youth served as direct recipients of national revitalization efforts that would keep Britain and its empire on a solid footing. Therefore, one

¹⁷ Robert Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship*, 3rd ed. (London: C. Arthur Pearson, Ltd., 1910), 270.

sees a concerted effort to strengthen youth physically and morally and establish them on a path to defend their “Britishness” and, by extension, the empire when the time came.

2.2 Decadence, Decline, and the Road to Renewal

The United Kingdom and other European nations participated in what historians have termed New Imperialism in the final decades of the nineteenth century. This “empire for empire’s sake” movement within the broader European colonial expansion embodied “aggressive competition for overseas territorial acquisitions,” as it was built on the “basis of doctrines of racial superiority.”¹⁸ Collecting further colonial outposts and resources was paramount to maintaining or increasing global influence. New Imperialism contributed to the South African War during the notorious “scramble for Africa.” The conflict, however, proved to be a turning point for the British during intense competition among the leading world powers. This section begins by examining the South African War, its embarrassing results (for the British, at least), and their impact on popular attitudes at home in Britain. It also explores the roots of feelings of anxiety among some Britons about issues of societal decline through decadence. Such feelings became an impetus for militarization and masculinization efforts.

From 1899-1902, the United Kingdom warred with two Boer republics, the South African Republic (the Transvaal) and the Orange Free State, over control of the Witwatersrand gold-mining complex in the South African Republic. In theory, the victory should have been swift and decisive for the British since the total strength of the British army reached close to 500,000 men compared to only 88,000 Boers.¹⁹ The South African War, which Christopher Parker terms

¹⁸ *New World Encyclopedia*, “British Empire,” accessed 3 June 2023, https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/British_Empire#Britain_and_the_New_Imperialism.

¹⁹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, “South African War,” updated 8 May 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/South-African-War>.

“Britain’s Great War experience in miniature,” was a pyrrhic victory for the British.²⁰

Realization quickly dawned that another war on a much grander scale would surely result in a resounding defeat for the empire on which the sun never set. With the world watching, the United Kingdom needed answers.

Before the war’s conclusion, the British government tasked itself with understanding what exactly went wrong in its attempt to wield power effectively and without question over such a minor, isolated incident. The government initiated a review process in the name of “national efficiency,” which it modeled on rising German hegemony. While there was no clear definition of “national efficiency,” it nevertheless became a political catchphrase for the reforms needed within the government, empire, armed forces, and industry, and it encompassed a complex set of beliefs, assumptions, and demands. However, this desire for change was not limited to the political arena. In 1902, *The Spectator* claimed there was “a universal outcry for efficiency in all the departments of society, in all aspects of life.”²¹

One of the first tasks of the “efficiency” movement was to investigate why many recruits were so physically unfit, as demonstrated by Britain’s lackluster performance during the South African War. From December 10-16, 1899, three British generals suffered defeat at the hands of the Boer Army. This subsequently became known as “Black Week,” and historian W. J. Reader connects the dismal results as a catalyst for the “explosion of enthusiasm” in volunteering that occurred in its wake; the enthusiasm heralded the turnout in 1914.²² In Manchester alone, over

²⁰ Christopher Parker, “Wayward Sons: The New British Masculinity in World War I,” *Oracle: The History Journal of Boston College* 2, no. 1 (2021): 30.

²¹ Geoffrey R. Searle, “The Politics of National Efficiency and of War, 1900-1918,” in *A Companion to Early Twentieth-Century Britain* ed. Chris Wrigley (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 56. Geoffrey R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Thought, 1899-1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 54. *Spectator* quoted from Searle’s “The Politics of National Efficiency and of War, 1900-1918.”

²² W. J. Reader, *At Duty’s Call: A Study in Obsolete Patriotism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 11.

11,000 men attempted to enlist in the army, but only around 3,000 passed the physical examination. Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice publicized this disquieting figure.²³

In April 1903, Sir William Taylor, who was Surgeon-General and Director-General of the Army Medical Service, compiled a memorandum in response to the “alarming proportion of the young men of this country, more especially among the urban population, who are unfit for military service on account of defective physique.”²⁴ This finding led the British government to appoint the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration. The remit of the committee, chaired by Sir Almeric Fitzroy, was to examine the supposed “deterioration of certain classes of the population as shown by the large percentage of rejections for physical causes of recruits for the Army.”²⁵ After an extensive inquiry, the committee concluded insufficient evidence existed to prove “that progressive deterioration is to be found among the people generally.”²⁶ Nevertheless, the need for the inquiry was enough to confirm that Britain was not on the right path to maintain its global influence. The causes were not solely external but also internal; psychological as well as physiological.

Queen Victoria’s death in 1901 further exacerbated the fear of national decline, and the fact that it occurred amid the South African War further underscored this anxiety. The Edwardian novelist Elinor Glyn reflected on her feelings about the queen’s death and connected it to the South African War. Glyn observed that:

It was impossible not to sense, in that stately [funeral] procession, the passing of an epoch, and a great one; a period in which England had been supreme, and had attained to the height of her material wealth and power. There were many who wondered, doubted perhaps, whether that greatness could continue; who had read

²³ Anne Summers, “Militarism in Britain Before the Great War,” *History Workshop Journal* 2 (Autumn 1976): 111.

²⁴ “Report of the Inter-departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration,” (London: Darling & Son, Ltd., 1904), 95.

²⁵ “Report of the Inter-departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration,” 1904, V.

²⁶ “Report of the Inter-departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration,” 1904, 92.

in the failures of the early part of the Boer War a sign of decadence, and, influenced perhaps unduly by Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* and by my own French upbringing, I felt that I was witnessing the funeral procession of England's greatness and glory.²⁷

The funeral served as a metaphor for something greater than a mere individual death. It signified the end of a world where England and its empire reigned supreme. Interestingly, in her book published in 1937, Glyn still parroted the exact causation after nearly forty years. Glyn and her contemporaries blamed "decadence" for Britain's poor performance, and it became a catchall for everything within British society that plagued *fin-de-siècle* England; in short, the enemy lay within.

The causes of British decline exposed during the South African War were not solely secular; for some, the spiritual played a vital part in understanding the conflict. Indeed, some historians call attention to the vital role of religious concerns within the debate on what contemporaries called "decadence." The "Great Church Crisis," which occurred throughout the South African War, developed in response to some attempts to reinstate ritualism within the Church of England's liturgy. Anti-Ritualist Protestants believed the Roman Catholic adulation of ritualism embodied a glaring form of idolatry. Religion was integral to how the British understood the world around them; as historian Bethany Kilcrease asserts, "Protestantism itself was a prerequisite of British greatness."²⁸ Therefore, Britain's waning power, exposed by the South African War, was, for many, a direct sign of God's removing His divine grace and influence from the British Isles. For some, "idolatry" was the cause, which ran parallel to societal decay.

²⁷ Elinor Glyn, *Romantic Adventure: Being the Autobiography of Elinor Glyn* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1937), 97-8.

²⁸ Bethany Kilcrease, "Protestant Paranoia and Catholic Conspiracies: Protestant Perspectives on the Second Anglo-Boer War," *Fides et Historia* 44, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2012): 31.

Decadence and societal degeneration were not new phenomena for imperial powers, and the fear of decadence along with its potential implications had a historical basis. Opponents of societal decline, as the passage from Glyn has already shown, alluded to the once vast Roman Empire and what contributed to its eventual downfall. *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire* first analogized the similarities between the British Empire and its Roman counterpart. The pamphlet, published in 1905, found popularity among Tory circles, especially since it encapsulated conservative fears through what the anonymous author believed to be the eight direct causes of British decline. Influenced by the pamphlet, Sir Robert Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts, drew direct comparisons between the Roman and British Empires. In *Scouting for Boys*, Baden-Powell wrote, “the same causes which brought about the fall of the great Roman Empire are working today in Great Britain.”²⁹ Citizens were not the only ones to make the connection. Prominent government officials also understood the ramifications if society remained on its current trajectory. Arthur Balfour, Prime Minister from 1902-1905, delivered a speech at Newnham College, Cambridge, where he mused over the subject of decadence, which, Balfour clarified, was not “literary or artistic” in nature but rather “political and national.” His described form attacked “great communities and historic civilizations” and was a “precursor and cause of final dissolution.”³⁰ The Roman Empire served as his example. The myriad sufferings in the Roman Empire consisted of a shrinking population, a sense of impending doom (i.e., anxiety), and a growing bureaucracy, which he termed a “crude experiment in socialism.”³¹ However, these did not send Rome on the path of destruction. It was, instead, a loss of national

²⁹ Robert Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship*, 3rd ed. (London: C. Arthur Pearson, Ltd., 1910), 290.

³⁰ Arthur Balfour, *Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), 6-7. *Balfour distinguished from the literary Decadence Movement that arose in France in the late nineteenth century and spread across Europe and America.

³¹ Arthur Balfour, *Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), 21-31.

energy and “some process of social degeneration” that “may conveniently be distinguished by the name of ‘decadence.’”³² He did not go so far as to claim that Great Britain had reached this point, but failure to correct it would send it on the same pathway.

Decadence produced two primary forms of deterioration within British society: the physical deterioration of the “race” and the “deterioration of imperialistic enthusiasms in the people” themselves.³³ For some, decadence opposed manliness, and effeminacy in men resulted directly from social decay. For the historian George L. Mosse, decadence was “a word often used by those who worshiped at the altar of manliness to express a curse and a fear.”³⁴ Similarly, the French novelist J. K. Huysmans described it as “the progressive effeminacy of men.”³⁵ The perceived blight of homosexuality ran parallel to the decadence movement, and prominent individuals such as Oscar Wilde represented its deleterious effects on men. The Edwardians prioritized rooting out decadence and its negative influence, and they found a cure for it in movements that targeted Britain’s youth by emphasizing moral aptitude, imperial understanding, and physical superiority.

2.3 Duty, Discipline, and the Empire

In the wake of Fitzroy’s report, concerned individuals initiated their own programs to combat societal decline. There was an overarching belief that Britons, especially the youngest, required an education to increase imperial understanding. In response, Reginald Brabazon, 12th Earl of Meath, created the Empire Day and subsequent Duty and Discipline Movements, both of

³² Arthur Balfour, *Decadence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908), 34.

³³ Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (London: Pimlico, 1991), 29.

³⁴ George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 62.

³⁵ Huysmans quoted in George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 63.

which are significant in understanding the role of militarism and imperialism in the pre- and post-South African War years and the early history of British youth movements.³⁶

The Empire Day movement began in the 1890s after Lord Meath visited schools and discovered their lack of imperial education and awareness. Even before decadence became a perceived threat, it troubled Lord Meath that children grew up ignorant of their imperial heritage and responsibilities, which would not bode well for the empire's future. The Empire Movement would cross all social divisions as "a non-party, non-sectarian, non-aggressive, non-racial effort to awaken the peoples who constitute the British Empire to the serious duties which lie at their door."³⁷ Meath's use of "non-racial effort" is interesting; he likely envisioned a movement that fostered an imperial brotherhood, thus suppressing any possible colonial or native uprisings vying for independence. Even the date for celebrations needed to have national significance. In a *London Times* article in 1897 Meath proposed May 24, Queen Victoria's birthday, as the official day for celebration. Because she physically embodied the nation and the empire there was no better individual around whom to build a movement to strengthen the bonds of both. "Responsibility, duty, sympathy, and self-sacrifice" were watchwords of the Empire Day movement and reflected the attitude that all Britons should have towards their imperial family.³⁸

Initially, Empire Day became more popular across the empire than in the United Kingdom. Ontario, Canada, would be the first to celebrate Empire Day in 1897, which fell during Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee and marked one year since Lord Meath had begun actively campaigning for public commemoration. The United Kingdom would not celebrate

³⁶ John Springhall, "Lord Meath, Youth, and Empire," *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 4 (1970): 97.

³⁷ "Lord Meath and Empire Day," *London Times*, April 30, 1912.

³⁸ "Lord Meath and Empire Day," *London Times*, April 30, 1912.

Empire Day until May 24, 1904.³⁹ Five years later, in 1909, the *London Times* declared that Empire Day was now “an established festival throughout the British world.” The same article also addressed the surprising lack of royal and governmental support. It stated that Prime Minister Herbert Asquith would not instruct government buildings to hoist the Union Jack and that King Edward VII’s advisers “refuse to honour [Empire Day] and seem to fear its influence.”⁴⁰ It is unclear from where this fear stemmed and to what influence the government could be alluding. Nevertheless, the lack of official recognition did not deter local communities from undertaking their own celebrations and establishing traditions that lasted until after the Second World War and the empire’s slow decline. The celebration of Empire Day allowed many Britons to situate themselves in the broader imperial imagination. This imagination came to life most prominently in the classroom.

Schoolchildren were the focal point of Empire Day celebrations. The day divided itself into two halves, the first half to educating children about imperial topics through history and geography and the second to festivals, parades, games, and speeches from prominent local officials. Attendees recited Kipling, and then sang the national anthem.⁴¹ While it may seem that children were the only ones inculcated with imperial ideology throughout the celebrations, parents and other guests actively participated as the festivities moved from the confines of the schoolhouse into larger public spaces. As historian Jim English argues, the populace’s rapid and widespread adoption of the event demonstrates that it had far more social influence than

³⁹ Ben Johnson, “Empire Day,” Historic UK, accessed July 1, 2023, <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/Empire-Day/#:~:text=Ben%20Johnson&text=The%20first%20'Empire%20Day'%20took,were%20celebrating%20it%20before%20then.> *The United Kingdom and the Commonwealth no longer celebrate Empire Day in its original form. Today, after the dissolution of the British Empire and the creation of the Commonwealth of Nations, it is now known as Commonwealth Day, which is celebrated on the second Monday in March each year.

⁴⁰ “Empire Day,” *London Times*, May 24, 1909.

⁴¹ John Springhall, “Lord Meath, Youth, and Empire,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 4 (1970): 108.

previously believed.⁴² However, scholarship has debated whether the Empire Day movement significantly influenced working-class children. Grounding his argument in a case study that analyzes the data from two surveys distributed in 1948, Jonathan Rose argues that Empire Day ideology did not significantly impact working-class Britons. He acknowledges that propaganda like Empire Day likely found fertile ground amongst the middle class but did not find relevance amongst the working class because, as he questions, “how much of the Empire did [the working class] own?”⁴³ Nevertheless, the fact that Empire Day began as a grassroots movement testifies to its popularity among the public.

However, despite Empire Day’s enduring popularity at home and abroad the British government did not officially sanction it as a national holiday until 1916, when the United Kingdom was firmly entrenched in the war. The timing is no coincidence; historian Barry Blades argues that at the time Britain was “using every available device to promote patriotism at home and solidarity with the Imperial Dominions.”⁴⁴ After years of campaigning, Lord Meath’s vision became a reality, and once the war was over, he would work to take some credit for the war enthusiasm of 1914.

When asked in a 1921 *London Times* interview what effect he believed the Empire Day movement had had on British subjects, Lord Meath confidently affirmed that “a large proportion of those young men from all parts of the Empire who rushed to the Colours during the bloody years from 1914 must have learnt at school the watchwords of the [Empire Day] movement.” Meath then asked rhetorically, “Would they have answered their country’s call so readily if they

⁴² Jim English, “Empire Day in Britain, 1904-1958,” *The Historical Journal* 49, no. 1 (March 2006): 254.

⁴³ Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 364.

⁴⁴ Barry Blades, *Roll of Honour: Schooling and the Great War, 1914-1919* (South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword, 2015), 17.

had not acquired in their early years a knowledge of the obligations of a free citizenship? We may claim that the movement was not without effect on the successful prosecution of the world war in defence of liberty and justice.”⁴⁵ In Meath’s eyes, there was possibly no more significant influence on British youth to fight for king and country than an abiding affection and respect for the empire.

Lord Meath’s Empire Day movement segued directly into his Duty and Discipline movement. To foster respect and deference for the empire, Meath believed that the British would need to develop a set of ideals that deepened one’s understanding of the imperial order. The Duty and Discipline movement dealt with principles rather than methods, and, as a result, it was a purely philosophical endeavor that worked to “combat softness, slackness, indifference and indiscipline and to stimulate discipline and a sense of duty and alertness throughout the national life, . . . and to give reasonable support to all legitimate authority.”⁴⁶

The Duty and Discipline movement was not an official organization that required membership fees. Instead, adherents pledged to follow the movement’s tenets. According to the *London Times* in December 1912, nearly 1,800 supporters “signed a form of adhesion to the principles.” In November of the following year members numbered over 2,900.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, research has not yielded whether supporters signed a universal template or if it varied based on geographical location. One can see the Duty and Discipline’s mission of correcting societal ills, especially as they related to the raising of children, within the pages of Lord Meath’s collection of essays that addressed both the causes and cures of decline.

⁴⁵ “Empire Day,” *London Times*, May 24, 1921.

⁴⁶ John Springhall, “Lord Meath, Youth, and Empire,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 4 (1970): 104.

⁴⁷ “The Duty and Discipline Movement,” *London Times*, December 14, 1912, & “The Duty and Discipline Movement,” *London Times*, November 24, 1913.

Essays on Duty and Discipline: A Series of Papers on the Training of Children in Relation to Social and National Welfare, a collection that articulated the central tenets of the Duty and Discipline Movement, was published in 1910, and by 1913 it was on its sixth edition, which attests to the publication's popularity. Prominent political and religious figures, both male and female, from across the United Kingdom, the empire, and even the United States contributed to the collection "with a view to counteract the lack of adequate moral training and discipline" in children.⁴⁸ Contributors offered solutions on how best to reverse decline, "the effects of which are so apparent in these days amongst many British children, in rich as well as in poor homes."⁴⁹ The litany of supporters included well-known names such as U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Even King George V included a brief statement at the beginning of the book.

A sampling of the essays reveals a glaring concern with perceived internal threats to British global hegemony. Rather than solely blaming children, some writers reprimanded parents for their negative influences on children. One such writer was Wilson Carlile, founder of the Church Army, which was an evangelical and missionary organization of the Church of England that concerned itself with social welfare and rehabilitation.⁵⁰ Carlile minced no words when he wrote of the "decay of parental responsibility," which he believed was "one of the most disquieting symptoms of the present day."⁵¹ Parents must alter their ways, ingrain Christian morals, and refrain from over-indulging their children. Over-indulgence was a by-product of the feared "decadence" that plagued society, and one must stamp it out to save Britain. Another

⁴⁸ *Essays on Duty and Discipline: A Series of Papers on the Training of Children in relation to Social and National Welfare* (London: Cassell and Company, 1913), vii.

⁴⁹ *Essays on Duty and Discipline*, vii.

⁵⁰ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Church Army," updated 31 May 2013. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Church-Army>.

⁵¹ Wilson Carlile, "The Decay of Parental Responsibility," in *Essays on Duty and Discipline: A Series of Papers on the Training of Children in relation to Social and National Welfare* (London: Cassell and Company, 1913), 131.

writer deplored selfish parents who at that moment functioned as “a fruitful source of demoralization” for children who desired to better themselves.⁵²

In his essay, the illustrious Victorian general Lord Roberts appealed directly to the youngest Britons. “Every able-bodied boy,” he encouraged, “should certainly prepare himself to be a useful citizen-soldier and to be able to help his country in her time of need.”⁵³ Lord Roberts had a vested interest in promoting such preparation. He aligned himself with the National Service League, which campaigned (unsuccessfully) for national conscription and accepted the role of president of the organization in 1905.

Not all proponents of the Duty and Discipline Movement viewed it in such martial terms. Dyce Duckworth, a prominent physician who had once served King Edward VII, would brush off the idea that the Duty and Discipline Movement’s sole purpose was militaristic and would instead reiterate its importance in developing moral character. He wrote that

it has been flippantly assumed in some quarters that its main object was to encourage military drills for boys, and thus to fit them ultimately for the Voluntary Combatant Services. This is, indeed, an important, but a subsidiary, part of the project, and in the light of to-day is a necessity which surely needs no check or repression. The main object is rather to raise character and personal conduct in the young of all classes, which no one can suggest is a needless requirement at this moment.⁵⁴

Duckworth would also justify using military drills that, according to critics, were “apt to be ‘deadening and ruinous to character’ for the individuals submitted to it.” Duckworth said, “this may be the case in Germany, but we do not find it so in this country.”⁵⁵ While not everyone may have agreed with Duckworth’s assessment, the juxtaposition of German and British ideas of

⁵² T. H. Manners-Howe, “Save the Boys,” in *Essays on Duty and Discipline*, 102.

⁵³ Field Marshal Earl Roberts, “An Appeal to British Boys and Girls: What Does it Mean to be a Member of the British Empire?,” in *Essays on Duty and Discipline*, 460.

⁵⁴ Dyce Duckworth, “The Duty and Discipline Movement,” *The Fortnightly Review*, January-June 1917, 332-33.

⁵⁵ Dyce Duckworth, “The Duty and Discipline Movement,” *The Fortnightly Review*, January-June 1917, 333.

militarism is crucial to our understanding of how Britain differentiated itself from its European counterparts. Theirs was not an inherently militaristic society. One should note that Duckworth was writing in 1917 when the war was still going strong, and he may have felt it necessary to reiterate the divide between Britain and Germany as the public's support for the war waned.

Lord Meath and his various movements endeavored to socialize a large swath of the population. Participation in Empire Day situated children and adults alike into broader imperial understanding. The Duty and Discipline Movement provided a template for how parents should raise their children, especially the boy, who continued to decline socially, morally, and physically. The Boy Scouts, a more widespread and familiar institution, followed similar goals.

2.4 The Boy Scouts, or An Army in Short Trousers?

Many deemed the vacuum created between the end of formal schooling at age fourteen and attaining adulthood as a crucial period. Authority figures desired a way to prevent youths from falling into delinquency and vice, neither of which contributed to revitalization efforts within British society. The remedy came in the form of organized youth movements, which would, in theory, fill time with wholesome pursuits that fostered fraternity, patriotism, and respect for authority. In this section I explore the creation of the Boy Scouts, the popular youth movement, and how it stemmed from a desire to combat perceived societal decadence. Sir Robert Baden-Powell, the group's founder, envisaged a movement that would foster imperial cohesion; I suggest that while the Boy Scouts was not intrinsically a militarizing organization, it nevertheless served as a means of social control.

John Springhall points out the correlation between the emergence of military-structured youth movements and the rise of New Imperialism. Duty, honour, and patriotism, which, according to Springhall, were the “emotional moulds within which British imperial attitudes set”

also became synonymous with boys' youth movements, especially when those same "emotional moulds" appeared within the mottos.⁵⁶ The Boys' Brigade called its members to be "Sure and Steadfast." The Church Lads' Brigade, which had a more prominently martial outlook, encouraged its members to "Fight the Good Fight." The Boy Scouts simply proclaimed, "Be Prepared." Springhall identifies a youth movement as an organization that is willing to "admit unlimited numbers of children, adolescents, and young adults, with the aim of propagating some sort of code of living . . . and provide them with a specific identity or status in the form of the uniform."⁵⁷ The time in British history when organized youth movements appeared is also significant. The creation of the Boy Scouts would give rise to a movement whose popularity spanned the British Empire and the United States.

On Brownsea Island near Dorset stands a stone commemorating "the experimental camp of 20 boys" between July and August 1907. The island is considered the birthplace of the scouting movement because the experiment's success became the foundation for Sir Robert Baden-Powell's Boy Scouts, which began the following year. Baden-Powell had served during the South African War and became renowned for his exploits during the Siege of Mafeking. Like other groups examined in this section, the Boy Scouts (and, later, the Girl Guides) would work to reverse societal decadence and the decline of masculine virility. Baden-Powell abhorred the perceived decadence and believed his new-found movement to be a remedy.⁵⁸ Historian Simon Heffer declares that the Boy Scouts were the most significant consequence for young people that

⁵⁶ John Springhall, "The Boy Scouts, Class and Militarism in Relation to British Youth Movements, 1908-1930," *International Review of Social History* 16, no. 2 (August 1971): 127.

⁵⁷ John Springhall, *Youth, Empire, and Society: British Youth Movements, 1883-1940* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 13.

⁵⁸ W. J. Reader, *At Duty's Call: A Study in Obsolete Patriotism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 77.

arose out of the South African War.⁵⁹ The Boy Scouts emerged directly from the Boys' Brigade, a movement founded in Scotland in 1883. Aiming for the "advancement of Christ's kingdom among Boys and the promotion of habits of Obedience, Reverence, Discipline, Self-respect and all that tends towards a true Christian manliness,"⁶⁰ the mission of the Boys' Brigade preceded that of the Boy Scouts. Christian values formed a significant component of both organizations.

Baden-Powell enshrined his ideas in *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship*, which clearly enjoyed popular success. Pearson's republished *Scouting for Boys* four times the year it was released in 1908, and its second edition, released in 1909, sold over 60,000 copies. Accounting for copies sold across Britain, the empire and the wider world, Biographer Tim Jeal speculates that it was likely one of the top-selling books of the twentieth century, second only to the Bible.⁶¹ *Scouting for Boys* was originally published in six separate installments, and the cover of the first one would set the tone for what young boys could expect. The image shows a young scout, campaign hat and staff close by, lying behind a rock and stealthily observing a ship out at sea while a small group of individuals disembark from a dinghy that has landed on the shore. The proto-militaristic illustration promoted spying on and, very likely, confronting any invaders. The cover conveyed a clear message to its young readers: a scout should be active, engaged, and alert.

The Boy Scout uniform also communicated a vital message, and it was more than an aesthetic one; the khaki-colored wool or flannel tunics, campaign hats, and neckerchiefs cloaked myriad differences. Baden-Powell reiterated the uniform's importance as not "merely an

⁵⁹ Simon Heffer, *The Age of Decadence: A History of Britain, 1880-1914* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2021), 487.

⁶⁰ "Who We Are," *Boy's Brigade*, accessed 5 July 2023, <https://boys-brigade.org.uk/who-we-are/>. John Springhall explains the mission statement has remained virtually the same since its inception in 1883. "Obedience" was added in 1893. John Springhall, *Youth, Empire, and Society*, 33 (n22).

⁶¹ Tim Jeal, *Baden-Powell* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 396. Teal does not specify whether *Scouting for Boys* was the top-selling in either English or generally.

attraction” because “under it all differences of social standing were hidden and forgotten.”⁶² It symbolized a fraternal bond, bolstered a sense of belonging and camaraderie, and removed nearly all class-related distinctions. As Paul Fussell states, uniforms “do tend to ennoble their wearers.”⁶³ Like the armed forces, the Boy Scouts uniform integrated an individual into the larger, cohesive group dedicated to a common goal. Seeing oneself as part of something greater reinforced duty to the collective group and the nation.

A year after the formation of the Boy Scouts, Baden-Powell lectured in Newcastle about the importance of the Territorial Force. Created in 1908, the Territorial Force combined the Volunteer Force and yeomanry into a consolidated unit, thus attempting to circumvent the need for conscription. Expressing his firm belief in protecting British shores from invasion, Baden-Powell proclaimed that after bouts with France and Russia, Germany now “was the natural enemy of [England] . . . because Germany wanted to develop her trade and commerce, and must, therefore, get rid of England, which blocked the way.”⁶⁴ The incendiary lecture did not go unnoticed by members of Parliament. Sir William Byles questioned Secretary of State for War Richard Haldane as to whether he was aware of Baden-Powell’s recent address that was of “an alarmist character and couched in language likely to be offensive to a friendly Power [Germany].”⁶⁵ The real possibility of invasion gripped Baden-Powell’s imagination. In *Scouting for Boys*, he likened Britain and its empire to a cuttlefish with “the British Isles being the body and our distant Colonies the arms spread all over the world.” To kill a cuttlefish one must not attack one of the arms (i.e., a colony), he wrote, but rather suddenly stab at the heart (i.e.,

⁶² Baden-Powell quoted in Paul Fussell, *Uniforms: Why We are What We Wear* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2002), 162.

⁶³ Paul Fussell, *Uniforms: Why We are What We Wear* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2002), 5.

⁶⁴ “What is Required of the Territorial Army,” *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*, May 4, 1908.

⁶⁵ UK Parliamentary Debates, 188 Parl. Deb. (4th ser.) (1908) cols. 1122-23.

Britain). Baden-Powell's anxiety manifested itself prominently when he declared that Britain had many powerful European enemies who coveted its trade and lands in the colonies. The cuttlefish's protector came in the form of scouts and other boys who desired to defend the heart of the empire by learning to shoot, drill, and scout. Those who learned these skills would be "useful for defence of our King and country when needed."⁶⁶ Baden-Powell tacitly encouraged militarization of youth by stoking the fears of invasion.

The Crystal Palace Rally, held in 1909, showcased the Boy Scouts' rising popularity. Over 11,000 boys attended the event, publicly demonstrating the movement's growth and progress since its initiation two years prior. Attendees participated in a variety of scoutcraft competitions. The fledgling organization also caught the king's eye. Though not physically present, King Edward VII sent a telegram containing a message that Baden-Powell read publicly to the assembled crowd. The king, who took the "greatest interest" in the group, assured them that if he "should call upon them later in life, the sense of patriotic responsibility and the habits of discipline which they are now acquiring as boys will enable them to do their duty as men should any danger threaten the Empire."⁶⁷ The message culminated with thunderous cheering and applause. The call would come less than a decade after the pronouncement, though the king likely had little belief that many underage soldiers, many of them likely still scouts, would heed it.

As the Boy Scouts spread, the group served another purpose, too. Through its popularity as a global movement, the Boy Scouts fostered a universal imperial identity amongst its members. In this regard, it functioned similarly to Lord Meath's Empire Day Movement. While on a tour of Australia Baden-Powell spoke of unity and how "we want to make the boy scouts a

⁶⁶ Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys*, 273-74.

⁶⁷ William Hillcourt, *Baden-Powell: The Two Lives of a Hero* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1964), 294.

link in the chain that binds the Empire together.”⁶⁸ Strengthening the relationship between the metropole and its colonies and dominions would ensure that England could rely on the support of its imperial subjects when war eventually came. For Baden-Powell, this was especially important where the youngest imperialists were concerned. Historian John Mitcham argues that Baden-Powell’s systematic approach demonstrates that he “clearly envisioned Scouting as a part of a pan-British movement preparing the white boys of the empire for the possibilities of imperial military service.”⁶⁹ Focusing on an inherent “Britishness” would cultivate a fraternal bond between all members, thus allowing them to see themselves as valued members of the larger imperial family. However, it is essential to situate the issue within the context of England’s anxieties at the turn of the century. By strategically using the collective idea of an inherent “Britishness,” Baden-Powell hoped to prevent deviations that might fracture the imperial ideal. Baden-Powell along with many others feared that hot-button issues such as Irish Home Rule and budding colonial nationalism might destabilize and weaken the British Empire; therefore, building a cohesive bond between all British subjects was paramount.

That imperial bond did not, however, cross the color divide, and the envisioned chain was an intentionally monochrome one that bound subjects together. He pointedly declared in *Scouting for Boys* that if Britain ever needed defending, then young boys should prepare now so eventually “as men you can take your place with the other men of your race in defending your women and children.”⁷⁰ In the dominions and colonies, such as India and Africa, individuals did not sanction scout troops for indigenous peoples or others of color. Training colonized subjects

⁶⁸ “Chief Scout,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 20, 1912.

⁶⁹ John C. Mitcham, *Race and Imperial Defence in the British World, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 189.

⁷⁰ Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys*, 270.

in drilling could promote anticolonial sentiments that might lead to native uprisings.⁷¹ The fear of potentially militarizing colonized peoples illustrates that some Britons' concerns about possible militarization were not unfounded when it came to their own children. One must note, however, that this was not Baden-Powell's outlook. He commended non-white troops, but never explicitly condemned the Indian and African officials for excluding subjects of color.

As the youth movements' prevalence and popularity spread, the government moved to formalize the relationship between the movements and the military. Richard Burdon Haldane, Liberal Secretary of War from 1905 to 1912, envisioned a "nation in arms" and endeavored to bring it to fruition through various changes within the military.⁷² The Territorial and Reserve Forces Act of 1907, which formed part of the Haldane Reforms (1906-1912), came on the heels of the South African debacle. The *New York Times* dubbed the act "to be the most ambitious and far-reaching military measure brought forward in Great Britain in half a century."⁷³ The act merged the Volunteer Force and the Yeomanry into the Territorial Force and created the Special Reserve out of the Militia. However, one component failed to pass. Haldane proposed the implementation of compulsory military training for all elementary-aged children. Labour Party members, including the party's founding member Ramsey MacDonald, and radical MPs from Haldane's own Liberal Party, opposed this portion of the bill.⁷⁴ In 1908, Army Order 160, another part of the Haldane Reforms, established Officer Training Corps in public schools and universities, initiatives that I will discuss in greater depth in the following chapter.

⁷¹ Mitcham, *Race and Imperial Defence*, 181.

⁷² John Campbell, *Haldane: The Forgotten Statesman Who Shaped Modern Britain* (London: C. Hurst and Co., 2020), 270.

⁷³ "Great Reforms in British Army," *New York Times*, February 26, 1907.

⁷⁴ Rosie Kennedy, *The Children's War: Britain, 1914-1918* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 92.

Haldane also attempted to incorporate the Boy Scouts, the Boys' Brigade, and other youth organizations into a national cadet force that would fall under the jurisdiction of the War Office. Through this process, Haldane intended to create one homogeneous group of all youth movements who would report to their respective local Territorials and become "a second line of national defence."⁷⁵ Both the Boys' Brigade and the Boy Scouts refrained from formally joining with the Territorial Army. Both organizations feared losing their autonomy to implement their declared religious missions that were foundational to their original intent. While the Boy Scouts did not officially partner with the Army Cadet Force, Baden-Powell did not restrict scoutmasters from aligning their own troops with local military authorities and this decentralized approach to the Scouting movement allowed Baden-Powell to circumvent any potential pushback.⁷⁶ His hands-off approach was rather ingenious; any martial undertones developed at the grassroots level, as opposed to an expected top-down approach.

One must also not assume a universal acceptance of youth organizations, especially if individuals perceived any traces of militarism. Opponents, including both pacifists and some religious figures, took issue with the overt paramilitary components that encouraged a "military spirit" in boys.⁷⁷ Criticism came most prominently from trade union leaders, some working-class parents, and Labour Party leaders, all leery of any attempt to militarize citizens.⁷⁸ Baden-Powell navigated carefully to avoid ostracizing the very groups he desired to influence. As with the Haldane Reforms, Baden-Powell forthrightly avoided aligning his organization with causes that appeared overtly militaristic. Nevertheless, the composition of the scouting movement's initial

⁷⁵ John Springhall, *Youth, Empire, and Society: British Youth Movements, 1883-1940* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 29.

⁷⁶ Mitcham, *Race and Imperial Defence*, 185.

⁷⁷ John Springhall, "The Boy Scouts, Class and Militarism in Relation to British Youth Movements, 1908-1930," *International Review of Social History* 16, no. 2 (August 1971): 129.

⁷⁸ Rosie Kennedy, *The Children's War: Britain, 1914-1918* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 93.

Executive Committee would not reassure detractors. Over half of the committee consisted of individuals serving in or retired from the military. Two members also served in the National Service League, which was a highly militant organization that petitioned for conscription in Britain.⁷⁹

The popularity of the Boy Scouts spread rapidly across Great Britain, the empire, and even America. As the movement widened its reach, its ideals filtered down into other areas of life. Michael Paris surmises that while many young boys may have joined up solely for the recreational purposes of the movement there were other motives at work, and he further contends that the Boy Scouts “reflected Edwardian anxiety about physical decline, loss of racial energy and the mounting challenge from European rivals.”⁸⁰ Robert Brabazon, Lord Meath, wrote of these anxieties and how the Boy Scouts rectified them. Lord Meath worked closely with Baden-Powell and served as Scout Commissioner for Ireland from 1911-1928, and he praised the Boy Scout movement “where a great national, educational lesson lies” as a continuation of his Duty and Discipline movement. Like Baden-Powell, Meath also differentiated the Scouts from direct military influence. He described it as a way in which the “British lad may, without soldiering, and without being exposed to any of the moral dangers of a soldier’s life, obtain all the undoubted moral and physical benefits to be derived from discipline.” He believed that “a thorough national arousing, a determination on the part of the mass of British men and women...and of British boys and girls to put aside self and to seek the best interests of the community, can alone save us from the moral decay which has preceded the fall of all previous

⁷⁹ John Springhall, “The Boy Scouts, Class and Militarism in Relation to British Youth Movements, 1908-1930,” *International Review of Social History* 16, no. 2 (August 1971): 137.

⁸⁰ Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 108-09.

Empires.”⁸¹ For Meath, the Boy Scouts epitomized the goals of his Empire Day and Duty and Discipline movements. Being a scout situated an individual in his place in the larger imperial imagination and taught him duty, honor, and respect for authority.

Historians disagree whether Baden-Powell intended for the Boy Scouts to serve as a vehicle to promote future military involvement. Baden-Powell made clear to his scoutmasters that the organization had no “intention of making the lads into soldiers or of teaching them bloodthirstiness.” Rather it was under the guise of “‘patriotism’ they are taught that a citizen must be prepared to take his fair share among his fellows in the defence of the homeland against aggression in return for the safety and freedom enjoyed by him as an inhabitant.”⁸² Historian W. J. Reader contends that whether Baden-Powell intended his movement to instill direct military values is mute. By the start of the war in 1914 boys acquired through scouting a patriotic and imperial outlook that made volunteering “seem the most natural thing in the world to do.”⁸³ Indeed, the Toynbee Hall Scouts proved the claim. After Britain’s declaration of war, the Scoutmaster led his troop to the local recruiting station and everyone enlisted *en bloc*.⁸⁴ Baden-Powell spoke on behalf of those involved in the Scouts when he said we “desire not so much to cure present social evils as to prevent their recurrence in the rising generation”; leadership attempted “to lessen the great waste of human life now going on in our city slums where so many thousand [sic] of our fellow humans are living in misery through being unemployable.” Baden-Powell believed the working class did not inflict this misery on itself, but it was present “simply

⁸¹ Earl of Meath [Robert Brabazon], “What the Boy Scout Movement May Do for Britain,” *The Windsor Magazine*, December 1909, 56-57.

⁸² Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys*, 308.

⁸³ W. J. Reader, *At Duty’s Call: A Study in Obsolete Patriotism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 78.

⁸⁴ Peter Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 1987), 147.

because they have never been given the chance.”⁸⁵ The Boy Scouts provided a means to correct ills pervading every social class in Great Britain.

This global movement arose directly from Baden-Powell’s concern with what he perceived as the death knell for Britain. As the hero of Mafeking, Baden-Powell witnessed first-hand the issues Britain faced after the South African War. His scouting movement would remedy the ills that plagued the late Victorian and Edwardian periods and prevent the British Empire from following in the steps of its Roman counterpart. One can assume that Baden-Powell did not intend for underage soldiers to flock to the recruiting line. Nevertheless, the movement created a straightforward trajectory from scout to soldier.

2.5 Conclusion

Even though Great Britain dominated the world stage as the largest empire in human history, at the beginning of the twentieth century its future seemed less sure as a wave of anxiety swept across the United Kingdom. The anxieties originated from a variety of factors, which included the potential impending decline of British hegemonic strength, the lack of imperial understanding and commitment, youth delinquency, the middle class’s falling birthrate, and the large number of unfit recruits who served during the South African War.⁸⁶ Britain’s underwhelming performance in the South African War further exposed the fault lines within English society. These concerns were not mutually exclusive; together they created a cocktail of issues that would force Britain to assess its future within the global network of European hegemony. As British politicians and civic leaders sought to understand and stem the flow of decline, they found a likely culprit: societal decadence.

⁸⁵ Sir Robert Baden-Powell, “Socialists and Boy Scouts,” *Headquarters Gazette*, June 1912.

⁸⁶ Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and the Boy’s Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855-1940* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 128.

Since mandatory military training and conscription never gained a strong foothold in Britain in the pre-World War I era, the establishment of youth movements became the vehicle through which these ideas could develop within the minds and bodies of British youths. A focus on strengthening manliness and a sense of duty would be paramount in these initiatives. The desire for social control underpinned the various movements covered in this chapter, and militarization grew from it, whether intentionally or not. At the turn of the last century, no matter where boys gazed, they understood they were integral to a more extensive national and imperial system. A system, which in due time, would call for assistance, and the boys would be there—short trousers and all.

3 THE PLEASURE CULTURES OF WAR

*The sand of the desert is sodden red, --
Red with the wreck of a square that broke; --
The Gatling's jammed and the Colonel dead,
And the regiment blind with dust and smoke.
The river of death has brimmed his banks,
And England's far, and Honour a name,
But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks:
'Play up! play up! and play the game!'*

-Sir John Henry Newbolt, *Vitai Lampada* (1892)

3.1 Introduction

Historian Rosie Kennedy states that the presence of war in a variety of children's spaces as the First World War progressed is "evidence of the 'mobilization' of the imagination."⁸⁷ I postulate that this "mobilization" began long before the outbreak of war, and it only intensified once war commenced. This chapter outlines the myriad ways in which youths interacted with forms of militarization in their day-to-day lives, and this indoctrination did not appear through conventional channels. Rather, it materialized through what Michael Paris terms the "pleasure-culture of war." In the classrooms, on the sports field, behind the nursery door, and between the pages of adventure stories with their allure of far-flung adventure, young boys found ways to act out and imagine themselves as a part of a larger imperial mission.

3.2 "Play Up! And Play the Game!"

"It is here that the battle of Waterloo was won!" the first Duke of Wellington allegedly declared while visiting Eton College circa 1825, conveying an assumption that linked martial victory to England's public schools. The relationship between public schools and the military becomes more complex when one considers that neither the army nor the state directly administered control over any public schools.⁸⁸ The lack of military influence extended to the

⁸⁷ Rosie Kennedy, "Children," in *The British Home Front and the First World War*, edited by Hew Strachan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 572.

⁸⁸ C. B. Otley, "Militarism and Militarization in the Public Schools, 1900-1972," *The British Journal of Sociology* 29, no. 3 (Sept. 1978): 335.

headmasters, too. Statistical data compiled from 1900, 1936, and 1972 found that no headmaster held any military rank during those years.⁸⁹ Therefore, other forces established within these socially elite institutions influenced impressionable young minds in the art of patriotic and martial duty. This section outlines how public schools, through their classrooms, cadet corps, and sports contributed to militarization and fostered the cult of athleticism within their pupils.

While only a small percentage of youths, mainly from the aristocracy and upper-middle class, attended a public school, the schools' influence reverberated across English society. Historian W. J. Reader styles English public schools as the "central temples of the faith": both imperial sentiment and English patriotism formed the ideological basis of this nationalistic dogma.⁹⁰ However, this was not always the case. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, public schools were "self-governing boy republics" where pupils inhabited a "tribal, turbulent, brutal and often drunken" world with little to no authoritative intervention, and any attempt to regulate or impose discipline led to adolescent rebellion.⁹¹ Public schools eventually experienced a "rebirth" in the mid-nineteenth century with the work of the Clarendon Commission (1861) and the resulting passage of the 1868 Public Schools Act. Many developments prompted a need for regeneration within the public schools, including new national prosperity; the emergence of the industrial aristocracy (which began to supplant the older, landed aristocracy); the rising influence of a professional middle class; the "growing preoccupation with 'Britain overseas' against a backcloth of industrial, commercial and imperial expansion"; and moral regeneration.⁹² Public schools educated the sons of England's wealthiest

⁸⁹ Otley, "Militarism and Militarization in the Public Schools, 1900-1972," 324.

⁹⁰ W. J. Reader, *At Duty's Call: A Study in Obsolete Patriotism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988) 84.

⁹¹ Jeffrey Richards, *Happiest Days: The Public Schools in English Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 9.

⁹² J. A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology* (London: Routledge, 2000), 14.

and most illustrious families who served the empire in a myriad of ways, whether as Members of Parliament or in colonial outposts across the globe; therefore, it became imperative that these educational institutions lived up to their names, and public school leadership tightened control and enforced discipline on their pupils.

The rise in decadence and the South African debacle, discussed in Chapter Two, forced some to question whether the public school boy who was the “greatest asset of England’s future” had lost his “head and heart and hand” and with those the “old qualities of fair-play and pluck, of application and resolution—in short, of character.”⁹³ In a 1905 article, “Has the Public Schoolboy Deteriorated?” *The Strand Magazine* addressed the issue head-on. The schoolboy-led anarchy of the previous century and perceived societal decline in the current one was likely on the minds of *The Strand Magazine*’s editor and the publication’s readers to warrant such an article. The underlying anxiety about possible racial decline exposed itself when the editor claimed that if the public-school boy had indeed deteriorated, then the future race would not be “so sterling, strenuous, and straight-forward as the race which has won and ruled an Empire.”⁹⁴ The concern related directly to the future management and defense of the British Empire, whose primary protectors matriculated directly from the public schools. The editor posed the titular question to the headmasters from ten of the leading public schools: Eton, Harrow, Shrewsbury, St. Paul’s School, Christ’s Hospital, Rugby, Haileybury, Westminster School, Tonbridge School, and Mill Hill School. The headmasters overwhelmingly agreed there was no perceivable decline in public schoolboys over the past 50 years, and Dr. Joseph Wood, Headmaster of Harrow, even believed the boys of the current day were better off than their counterparts of fifty years ago. He

⁹³ “Has the Public School Boy Deteriorated? The Opinions of Head Masters,” *The Strand Magazine*, February 1905, 189.

⁹⁴ “Has the Public School Boy Deteriorated?,” 189.

declared the boys are “not less manly, . . . Their code of honour is higher, . . . They are very keen in all they do, and their patriotism, if a little unreasoning, is very real and very charming.”⁹⁵

Another, Rev. H. A. James of Rugby, remarked that headmasters rarely feared the vices of bullying and drinking, for both died at the “development of athletics and by the humanizing influences which Arnold did so much to foster.”⁹⁶ While the headmasters were likely “extravagantly optimistic” about their young pupils, the public schools’ past and the uncertain future of national and racial decline justified *The Strand*’s inquiry, for if decadence had seeped into the public schools, then it must be rooted out to prevent further deterioration.

Both Wood and James alluded to a distinct ethos that developed from the article’s publication and English public schools in the 1880s. One scholar compares this ethos to a “complex piece of music, a symphony in which the various elements overlap, combine and reinforce one another.”⁹⁷ Those elements consisted of sportsmanship, honor, manliness, and devotion to duty, and the resulting symphonic ethos contributed to a wholly male-dominated and authoritarian world “with strict hierarchies of power and a culture of homoerotic yearnings and shame which would be transported, unchanged in essentials, to the womanless world of military ranks and regimental traditions of the Western Front.”⁹⁸ The ethos permeated all aspects of the English public school, including the classroom, the playing fields, and the Cadet Corps/Officer Training Corps.

The classroom became an ideal place to instruct youth in imperial history and their responsibilities as future protectors of the empire. It was in the schoolroom, stated *Cassell*’s

⁹⁵ “Has the Public School Boy Deteriorated?,” 190.

⁹⁶ “Has the Public School Boy Deteriorated?,” 192.

⁹⁷ Peter Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public-School Ethos* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 1987), 69.

⁹⁸ Brian Bond, quoted in Anthony Seldon & David Walsh, *Public Schools and the Great War: The Generation Lost* (South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword, Ltd., 2013), 22-23.

Illustrated History of England, that “children of the Empire gained their first perception of Imperialism.” The author referred to the imperial maps that adorned schoolroom walls with the far-reaching lands of the British Empire colored red.⁹⁹ In some schools, great military commanders gazed down from their portraits and served as visual reminders of past achievements. Headmasters also intercalated famous military dates into the school calendar such as Empire Day, and textbooks outlined the corresponding roles and responsibilities.¹⁰⁰ Using “language which a child can understand,” *The Citizen Reader* described the purpose of British institutions and their respective mechanizations and informed “children what ought to be the principles which should actuate them as patriotic citizens.”¹⁰¹ Between 1886 and 1910, *The Citizen Reader* sold over 500,000 copies, making it one of the most popular school texts of the era.¹⁰² The poet Rudyard Kipling and historian Charles Fletcher also contributed to the curriculum. They co-wrote *A School History of England*. The authors proclaimed that “all civilized nations, except ourselves and the Americans, have also set themselves to arm and drill all their citizens, so as to fit themselves for war on a gigantic scale at any moment.” They charged their young readers that the “only safe thing for all of us who love our country is to learn soldiering at once, and to be prepared to fight at any moment.”¹⁰³ Public school students mimicked a form of soldiering through sports and games that blossomed on school grounds.

Team sports originally appeared at the students’ behest but lacked any formal, unifying structure. Left to their own devices, the boys endured rough and often brutal matches. As a

⁹⁹ *Cassell’s Illustrated History of England* (London: Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, 1906), 195-96 quoted in John Springhall, “Lord Meath, Youth, and Empire,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 4 (1970): 102-03.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Van Emden, *Boy Soldiers of the Great War: Their Own Stories for the First Time* (London: Pen & Sword, 2021), 26.

¹⁰¹ H. O. Arnold-Forster, *The Citizen Reader* (London: Cassell and Co, Ltd., 1904), iii.

¹⁰² John C. Mitcham, *Race and Imperial Defence in the British World, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 163.

¹⁰³ Charles Fletcher & Rudyard Kipling, *A School History of England* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1911), 245.

result, bullying and physical cruelty ran rampant.¹⁰⁴ The resulting chaos prompted some schools to try and forbid the activities.¹⁰⁵ At other times the students roamed the countryside and surrounding villages all the while making mischief and wreaking havoc. Headmasters eventually appropriated sports and gaming from the mid-nineteenth century onwards as a means of controlling unwieldy pupils, developing character, and reigning in the indiscipline of the previous century. Thus, sports and games expanded in importance and popularity with established rules and expectations for all participants.

Sports also evolved out of the Muscular Christianity movement that gained momentum in the mid-nineteenth century. Charles Kingsley, a devout proponent of Muscular Christianity, expounded on the connection between playing sports and acquiring valuable life lessons. He believed that “games conduce not merely to physical but to moral health; in the playing field boys acquire virtues which no books can give them.” Beyond only “daring and endurance, these virtues included temper, self-restraint, fairness, honour, envious approbation of another’s success, and all that ‘give and take’ of life which stand a man in such good stead when he goes forth into the world.”¹⁰⁶ The playing field thus became an extension of the classroom, where academics proved second in importance to athletics. Another advocate of athletics seconded this viewpoint and believed that many a young man left school “disgracefully ignorant” in language, writing, history, and literature. However, if he [the student] devoted much of his time and thoughts to athletic sports, he “brings away with him something beyond all price, a manly straightforward character, a scorn of lying and meanness, habits of obedience and command, and fearless courage.” With these in hand, the young man “goes out into the world, and bears a man’s

¹⁰⁴ John R. Mallea, “The Victorian Sporting Legacy,” *McGill Journal of Education* 10, no. 002 (1975): 184.

¹⁰⁵ Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 74.

¹⁰⁶ Charles Kingsley, *Health and Education* (London: W. Isbister & Co., 1874), 42.

part in subduing the earth, ruling its wild folk, and building up the Empire.”¹⁰⁷ Thus, the accumulation of character learned on the playing field outweighed academic knowledge, which benefitted the broader imperial mission. Great Britain maneuvered both to expand upon and defend its colonial holdings, and therefore, it required healthy, young, and, in theory, moral men to accomplish this goal.

The reformation of the public schools, the formalization of sports, and the advent of Muscular Christianity coalesced into the cult of athleticism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With its focus on physical and mental acuity, the cult of athleticism prepared young people, particularly boys, for the act of war by guaranteeing that males were “physically fit to shoulder a rifle and endure the vicissitudes of combat,” providing “familiarity with basic military skills and practices” (e.g., drilling), and strengthening the required mental conditioning for the armed forces.¹⁰⁸ Proponents viewed the sports field as a “manifestly masculine environment” that served as a “haven from the dangers of the ‘soft’ urban environments” resulting from urbanization and industrialization.¹⁰⁹ The playing of sports forged healthy bodies and moral minds while developing character and ingraining discipline within participants.

Sports went beyond the physical and fulfilled an ideological purpose as well. Participants built and protected a sense of “Britishness” through sportsmanship and camaraderie, which helped develop national and imperial allegiance.¹¹⁰ Britons regarded cricket and rugby as a

¹⁰⁷ T. L. Papillon, quoted in Bernard Darwin, *The English Public School* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1931), 21.

¹⁰⁸ Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000), 77. Nic Stone, “‘The Greater and Grimmer Game’: Sport as an Arbiter of Military Fitness in the British Empire—The Case of ‘One-Eyed’ Frank McGee,” in *Sport, Militarism and the Great War: Martial Manliness and Armageddon*, ed. Thierry Terret and J. A. Mangan (New York: Routledge, 2012), 285.

¹⁰⁹ Stone, “‘The Greater and Grimmer Game,’” 285.

¹¹⁰ Stone, “‘The Greater and Grimmer Game,’” 285.

component of a distinctly British and imagined national identity.¹¹¹ This worked in tandem with movements such as Empire Day and the Boy Scouts to foster an imperial bond between participants. The resulting *esprit de corps* mixed into a potent amalgam where young boys considered themselves part of a larger unit that extended beyond the geographical bounds of the British Isles instead of mere individuals.

The cult of athleticism blurred the lines between play and war; participation in the former contributed to preparation for the latter. Athleticism cultivated physical fitness and endurance—two qualities highly valued for military service. Along with a focus on athletics, public school boys also engaged with martial organizations that resided on the school’s campuses. The primary vehicles for this were the cadet corps and its successor, the Officer Training Corps. Both bridged the divide between the playing field and the battlefield.¹¹²

In the wake of the Crimean War (1853-1856), Secretary for War Jonathan Peel circulated a letter in 1859 to public schools that requested they establish their own Cadet Corps. The groups would function similarly to the Volunteer Corps that was organized the same year. The Cadet Corps had a few limitations, however. First, they lacked any coordinated training and organization at the local level and “largely reflected the peronality [sic] and energy of their commanding officers.”¹¹³ Second, the lack of structure created a pipeline of ill-prepared Reserve and Auxiliary officers. As previously discussed, the South African War prompted many individuals to find ways to correct societal decline exhibited by the dismal physical state of the recruits who volunteered and the paucity of adequately trained officers who served during the

¹¹¹ Peter Donaldson, “‘We are having a very enjoyable game’: Britain, Sport, and the South African War, 1899-1902,” *War in History* 25, no 1 (2018): 7.

¹¹² Geoffrey R. Searle, *A New England? Peace and War, 1886-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 36.

¹¹³ Ernest M. Teagarden, “Lord Haldane and the Origins of the Officer Training Corps,” *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 45, no. 182 (Summer 1967): 91.

conflict. As a result, schools shifted to a distinctly militaristic outlook in the Edwardian era, and the Officer Training Corps contributed to this process.

In 1907 Secretary of State for War Richard Burdon Haldane spoke of an “officer problem” in a speech to the House of Commons. The “problem” stemmed from South African War complications already discussed above. He apprised the MPs that “you are not in danger of increasing the spirit of militarism” within public schools and universities because that very spirit “already runs fairly high” in both.¹¹⁴ Secretary Haldane desired that public schools and universities “put their militarism to some good purpose” to alleviate the officer problem.¹¹⁵ Haldane depended heavily on educators’ willingness



Figure 3.1 Boy at Eton (War History Online)

to achieve his goal. The result was Army Order 160 of the 1908 Haldane Reforms, formally establishing the Officer Training Corps (OTC) in universities and public schools. The former contained “Senior Divisions” and the latter “Junior Divisions.” OTC Junior Division members underwent rigorous training to earn the “A” Certificate in OTC proficiency. The two years of service required to achieve the “A” Certificate consisted of “written and practical examination in infantry training, combined training, squad and company drill, tactics and care of arms and equipment.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ UK Parliamentary Debates, 169 Parl. Deb. (4th ser.) (1907) col. 1321.

¹¹⁵ UK Parliamentary Debates, 169 Parl. Deb. (4th ser.) (1907) col. 1321.

¹¹⁶ Teagarden, “Lord Haldane and the Origins of the Officer Training Corps,” 93.

Three years later, Under-Secretary of State for War Colonel John Seely informed the House of Commons that 155 schools had contingents in the “Junior Division” and the total number of cadets equaled approximately 18,134. Two prominent public schools, Eton College and Marlborough College, had the highest number of cadets at 491 and 466, respectively.¹¹⁷ Anthony Seldon asserts that by 1914, service in the public school OTCs had become virtually compulsory.¹¹⁸ The advent of the OTC cemented the relationship between public schools and the British Army, especially since the OTCs were under the direct control of the War Office.¹¹⁹ Those involved in the OTC would feed naturally into the Territorial Force whose creation in 1908 would, in theory, solve the officer shortage without resorting to conscription, which did not have widespread support in Britain. Secretary Haldane, learning from the struggles of the South African War, worked to prevent those issues from happening again, thus (hopefully) returning Britain to a solid footing on the global stage.

Sport and war tapped into the same rhetoric; the former served as a metaphor for the latter. One saw this most prominently in Henry Newbolt’s poem, *Vitai Lampada*. The poet encapsulated the ideas of duty, honor, and courage, and his refrain, “Play up! Play up! And play the game!” painted a lively picture and transformed the horrors of war into a vigorous competition. Many sporting terms mirrored those of army life, most of which are still in use today. One only needs to consider terminology such as “captain,” “defense,” and “offense.” The ease in which young boys immersed in the parlance of sports could very well have translated into martial conflict, for sport and warfare each involved competitive facets. For example, terms like

¹¹⁷ UK Parliamentary Debates, 24 Parl. Deb. H.C. (5th ser.) (1911) col. 408.

¹¹⁸ Anthony Seldon & David Walsh, *Public Schools and the Great War: The Generation Lost* (South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword, Ltd., 2013), 22.

¹¹⁹ Ian Worthington, “Socialization, Militarization, and Officer Recruiting: The Development of the Officers Training Corps,” *Military Affairs* 43, no. 2 (April 1979): 90; Anthony Seldon & David Walsh, *Public Schools and the Great War: The Generation Lost* (South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword, Ltd., 2013), 25.

“match,” opponent,” and “victory” delineated each game as an “us versus them” situation. Sport also encouraged players to “lay their bodies on the line” and to put the team over self, which bore direct similarity to the soldier’s aim while in the thick of battle.¹²⁰

Public schools transitioned from “nurseries of all vice and immorality” to elite “temples” that proselytized youths in the values of duty, honor, and courage between the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹²¹ The decade leading to the First World War witnessed a new focus on physical health. It connected directly to British subjects’ physiological concerns from the South African War. Classroom learning situated young boys within their place in the larger imperial mission. At the same time, others viewed the playing fields and the Officer Training Corps as preparation for war.¹²² Imperial understanding, team sports, and the cadet corps forged young bodies and minds for their future responsibilities to Great Britain and its empire.

The cult of athleticism in Edwardian public schools intertwined closely with militarization. In the preface of Alec Waugh’s *The Loom of Youth*, first published in 1917, Thomas Seccombe asseverated that the public school system “has fairly helped . . . to get us out of the mess of August 1914. Yes, but it contributed heavily to get us into it!”¹²³ Therefore, public schools promoted physical fitness, discipline, character development, and the values necessary for imperial service—even the language of the playing fields translated easily into the vernacular of the battlefields. In theory, boys would move from winning games to winning battles. This connection reflected the focus on producing individuals who could serve both in the military and in administrative roles across the many colonial outposts of the British Empire.

¹²⁰ Seldon & Walsh, *Public Schools and the Great War*, 21.

¹²¹ Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews and Shamela* (London: Everyman, 1998), 213.

¹²² John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 6.

¹²³ Thomas Seccombe, quoted in Alec Waugh, *The Loom of Youth* (New York: George H. Doran, 1920), x-xi.

3.3 Playing Soldier

The toy remains a quintessential object of childhood. Through playing with toys children interpret the world in which they live, and while they may seem innocuous at first, toys serve as “socializing mechanisms” and “educational devices” that are “scaled down versions of the realities of the larger adult-dominated world.”¹²⁴ Toys function as one of the few juvenile objects that cut across all class barriers and find their way into the hands of children across Great Britain, and the toy soldier serves an example of this class-crossing ephemera. While it would be incorrect to assume that these playthings were created to promote militarization, toy soldiers contribute to this study because they embody messages of masculinity, militarism, and national identity. They play a critical role in shaping attitudes and perceptions to the armed forces.¹²⁵ This section explores how toy soldiers and war games influenced the minds of young boys through instilling a sense of imperial understanding and inherent “Britishness” through romanticized portrayals of soldiering.

Though initially found in aristocratic circles, toy soldiers have existed since at least the sixteenth century. Initially, Germany dominated the market in producing metal toy soldiers, and it was not until 1893 when the prominent toy manufacturer William Britain (hereafter referred to as W. Britain, to differentiate from the geographical location) pioneered a new approach to the mass domestic production of toy soldiers. W. Britain’s hollow metal soldiers offered a cheaper alternative to the ones manufactured on the continent. This democratization of toys exposed more children, especially boys, to the “continuum of militaristic influences” that pervaded

¹²⁴ Donald W. Ball, “Toward a Sociology of Toys: Inanimate Objects, Socialization, and the Demography of the Doll World,” *The Sociology Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (Autumn 1967): 447.

¹²⁵ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), 235.

England.¹²⁶ That “continuum” came in response to various factors, including the South African War, the arms race with Germany, and the spread of war gaming through groups such as the Boy Scouts. The implementation of cadet corps in the public schools would also provide a reason for their growing popularity amongst children.¹²⁷ Kenneth Brown notes the relevancy of toy soldier production accelerating during the same time as the establishment of public-school cadet corps after the South African War.¹²⁸ Each influence ties directly back to the topics covered in chapter two, thus confirming an underlying connection between militarization and multiple aspects of childhood.

Toy soldiers influenced children’s minds and were more significant than public schools and youth organizations, and the overall numbers appear to back this claim. By 1914 toy manufacturers produced between ten and eleven million toy soldiers annually while only a small percentage of British boys attended public schools and the Boy’s Brigade and Boy Scouts boasted 61,660 and 106,937 members respectively in 1910.¹²⁹ Toys cost less than tuition or membership fees, thus allowing them to become a more democratized form of childhood militarization. Cheap materials and advanced modes of production contributed to the rise in toy soldier dissemination. Children did not, however, solely monopolize the toy soldier craze. Many adults also collected the small toys for various reasons and engaged in their own imaginative form of play. Prominent individuals even credited toy soldiers for their eventual career paths, including Sir Winston Churchill, who recalled how he amassed a collection of nearly fifteen hundred, all of which were one size and British. Churchill then stated that “toy soldiers turned

¹²⁶ Kenneth D. Brown, “Modelling for War? Toy Soldiers in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain,” *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 2 (Winter 1990): 243.

¹²⁷ Jane Pettigrew, *An Edwardian Childhood* (Boston: Bullfinch, 1991), 117-19. Brown, “Modelling for War?”: 243.

¹²⁸ Brown, “Modelling for War?”: 243.

¹²⁹ Brown, “Modelling for War?”: 244.

the current of my life” after his father inspected the boy’s toy soldier formation, primed for an imaginary attack, with a “keen eye and captivating smile.”¹³⁰

Toy soldiers created and reinforced a highly romanticized view of war, or, as one historian labels it, “Rupert Brooke syndrome.”¹³¹ Brooke’s famous poem, “The Soldier” (first published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in March 1915), has since become synonymous with the nobility of war and glorifies a noble death in a foreign land. The figurines achieved this through war gaming. War gaming allowed young people, and likely adults, to reenact historic battles or create their own through imaginative play.

Children who did not have the imaginative capacity to design their own war games could find a companion in detailed rule books. Around 1910 Hanks Brothers Toy Company produced *The Great War Game*. The set came with thirty hollow-cast toy soldiers and a rulebook titled *War Games for Boy Scouts*. The book declares that “a healthy patriotic spirit now prevails amongst our boys” because of the “popularity of the Church Lads’ Brigade and of the Boy Scouts.”¹³² Anti-German sentiment appears in the book, too, but interestingly in the form of toy soldiers’ quality. A. J. Holladay, author of *War Games*, took pride in the now British-made toy soldiers since previously the German-made ones were “crude and incorrect.” With domestic production now on England’s shores, Holladay felt it “can now be truly said that the British Toy Soldiers have defeated the foreign invaders and driven them out of the country.”¹³³ Upon closer inspection, one discovers the underlying anxieties felt in England. Holladay labeled the German toys as “foreign invaders,” which alluded directly to the real-life concern of a potential invasion. It was not enough for children simply to have access to model soldiers; indeed, it would seem

¹³⁰ Winston S. Churchill, *My Early Life* (London: Thornton Butterworth, Ltd., 1930), 33-34.

¹³¹ Brown, “Modelling for War?”: 247.

¹³² A. J. Holladay, *War Games for Boy Scouts: Played with Model Soldiers* (London: Gale & Polden), 2.

¹³³ A. J. Holladay, *War Games for Boy Scouts: Played with Model Soldiers* (London: Gale & Polden), 1-2.

anathema that children played with toys, and soldiers no less, produced by a rising continental threat. Therefore, the toy soldiers became a metaphorical battlefield upon which England's supremacy outshone Germany's; this battle for domination was a "war through other stuff."¹³⁴ It was important for British children to play with British-made toys that accurately portrayed the glories of Britain's martial past. However, war gaming not only allowed participants to reenact battles, but it also provided an opportunity to reverse any former defeats through a revisionist lens.

A year before the outbreak of war, the novelist H. G. Wells authored *Small Wars*, which illustrated how children could play at war. Wells, a devoted pacifist, intended for the small book to serve a purpose beyond simply "playing a game." On the last page, Wells conveyed the actual cost of war. He wrote that "you only have to play at Little Wars three or four times to realise just what a blundering thing Great War must be." He further stated that Great War is "not only the most expensive game in the universe, but it is a game out of all proportion. Not only are the masses of men and material and suffering and inconvenience too monstrously big for reason, but—the available heads we have for it, are too small."¹³⁵ Wells aimed to make a point about the frivolity of war, but he had an interesting method of illustrating it.

Toy soldiers allowed for boys to segue into one of the popular youth movements, whether that was the Boys' Brigade or the Boy Scouts. Brown posits that it may have been an easy and natural progression from boys playing with toy soldiers to young adults participating in youth

¹³⁴ Euan Loarridge, "War Through the Eyes of the Toy Soldier: A Material Study of the Legacy and Impact of Conflict, 1880-1945," *Critical Military Studies* 7, no. 4 (2021): 368.

¹³⁵ H. G. Wells, *Little Wars* (London: Frank Palmer, 1913), 100.

movements, and then adults matriculating into the Volunteers.¹³⁶ Uniforms were the common element among each of these stages of boyhood into manhood.

The toy soldiers' uniforms furthered the imperial imagination and hearkened back to a tradition that was no longer present. After soldiers transitioned to wearing the drab brown of khaki, their toy counterparts did not usually follow suit, and instead most donned the bright scarlets and colorful accoutrements of past wars. For example, W. Britain did not update the Cameron Highlanders' outfits from their distinctive kilts to the new service dress worn during the South African campaign. In another instance, he reversed the uniforms on a set initially released in 1899. In 1903, shortly after the South African War's conclusion, the toy company reissued the same set but with a scarlet uniform instead of the khaki.¹³⁷ W. Britain presented an anachronistic and sterilized version of the modern soldier. Embodied in toy form, he was not a being of action, but rather one of stately and glorious inertia. Uniforms create a sense of unity and visually embodied the homogeneity felt among their wearers. One historian implies that in dressing toy soldiers in outdated uniforms toy makers and illustrators celebrated the strength of the British military tradition to compensate for the South African War's depressing outcome.¹³⁸

It is difficult to discern if toy soldiers create war or are a product of it. While it is outside her scope in the history of toys, Antonia Fraser presents this question in the context of the chicken or the egg metaphor. She postulates whether it is "as long as men go to war and armies exist" or if children who play with toy soldiers "will grow up prepared to be soldiers"¹³⁹ This type of philosophical musing lies outside the bounds of this thesis, but it does pose the question

¹³⁶ Kenneth D. Brown, "Modelling for War? Toy Soldiers in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain," *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 2 (Winter 1990): 244.

¹³⁷ Christopher Leach, "Uniforms and Commercial Culture: Constructing a Vision of Warfare in Pre-Great War Britain," *Cultural History* 10, no. 1 (April 2021): 53.

¹³⁸ Christopher Leach, "Uniforms and Commercial Culture: Constructing a Vision of Warfare in Pre-Great War Britain," *Cultural History* 10, no. 1 (April 2021): 49.

¹³⁹ Antonia Fraser, *A History of Toys* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1966), 231.

of whether it is simply innate human nature to crave violence and destruction or if playing with certain toys and/or games cultivates the desire for conflict. Playing with toy soldiers implies the presence of an enemy, whether real or imagined. Some believe this innate desire to conquer contributed to the “buildup of aggression” that eventually found release at the outbreak of war in 1914.¹⁴⁰ Others, such as Graham Dawson, believe one must give credit to the boy’s own agency.

Toys are inherently harmless. However, it is through the imagery and messages they present where the real troubles lie—with their bright and colorful uniforms toy soldiers belied a profession of order and visual stasis. Toys formed part of the “cultural ephemera of imperialism,” including postcards, board games, cigarette cards, jigsaws, and commercial packaging. The pervasive militarism was an ever-present theme in childhood throughout the late Victorian and Edwardian periods.¹⁴¹ Less clear is whether toy soldiers shaped attitudes around warfare and the armed forces or if some children took them only at face value.

3.4 Juvenile Literature

As the nineteenth century progressed, a demand for adolescent reading material became apparent. Several things contributed to this demand: more disposable income, rising literacy rates in England and Wales, and increased adolescent leisure time, the latter two of which came as a byproduct of the reformed education system. In 1870 the first of several Elementary Education Acts enshrined compulsory education for all children aged five to fourteen in England and Wales, and the burgeoning literacy rate called for an increase in reading materials directed at this up-and-coming demographic.¹⁴² Marjory Lang even contends that longer life expectancy also

¹⁴⁰ Kenneth D. Brown, “Modelling for War? Toy Soldiers in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain,” *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 2 (Winter 1990): 245.

¹⁴¹ John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 17

¹⁴² Walter Dalglish, “A plain reading of the elementary education act,” 1870, British Library, 4.

contributed to the need for adolescent literature; she writes that “since increasing numbers of their children survived [past infancy], middle-class parents were hard-pressed to keep their numerous offspring quietly entertained . . . and were obliged to purchase books and magazines for their sons and daughters.”¹⁴³ In response to the demographic shifts, publishing houses began printing and disseminating various reading materials, but they did not publish their ephemera in a vacuum. Rather, popular literature “was a medium as much as mirror,” and publications reflected the demand.¹⁴⁴ This section explores how juvenile literature, mainly marketed to boys and young adults, conveyed ideas of adventure, heroism, and warfare in an imperial context and thus inadvertently militarized youth.

Juvenile literature painted a romanticized view of war that “became a remote adventure in which heroism was enhanced by both distance and exotic locales.”¹⁴⁵ Adventure stories were popular genres that fueled a longing for exploits in the far reaches of the Empire; the allure of adventures depicted within the pages of a book were enough to coax underage boys to enlist in the armed forces prematurely. Vic Cole recalled how in August 1914 he “wanted to be in the army with a gun in my hand, like the boys I had so often read about in books and magazines.” A month later, Cole enlisted with his sixteen-year-old friend, George Pulley.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, with war unknowingly on the horizon, Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island* enthralled Thomas Kehoe with the far-off exploits of Jim Hawkins and Long John Silvers. He believed those days of adventure were long gone and he was a century and a half too late to partake in any like them.

¹⁴³ Marjory Lang, “Children’s Champions: Mid-Victorian Children’s Periodicals and the Critics,” *Victorian Periodicals Review* 13, no. 1/2 (Spring-Summer 1980): 18.

¹⁴⁴ J. A. Mangan, “Duty unto Death: English Masculinity and Militarism in the Age of the New Imperialism,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27, no. 1-2 (2010): 136.

¹⁴⁵ John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 6.

¹⁴⁶ Vic Stone, quoted in Richard van Emden’s *Boy Soldiers of the Great War*, 62. Stone would survive the war, but Pulley would not; he died aged eighteen on the first day of the Battle of the Somme (Emden, 454).

Kehoe felt the war's beginning "brought more adventure than Jim Hawkins ever dreamed of" and he "meant to get into that war, even though [he] was too young" because it was "too good to miss, and there might not be another in a lifetime."¹⁴⁷ At a height of four feet ten inches and weighing ninety-six pounds, fifteen-year-old Kehoe tacked on three years to his age "for good measure" and enlisted as a bugler for a rifleman's corp. His tenure as the "mascot" did not last long (mainly due to his inability to play the instrument); the commander soon gave Kehoe a rifle, and he went on to have his fill of adventure. While not martial in nature, novels like *Treasure Island* and its young protagonist fed the imagination and cultivated a desire for adventures that happened beyond Britain's shores.

As reading material became more readily available, individuals encouraged the reading of wholesome materials according to age and gender. Victorian novelist and religious reformer Charlotte Yonge believed that "boys especially should not have childish tales with weak morality or 'washy' piety; but should have heroism and nobleness kept before their eyes." For Yonge, "true manhood needs, above all earthly qualities, to be impressed on them, and books of example . . . with heroes, whose sentiments they admire, may always raise their tone."¹⁴⁸ British history abounded with figures who possessed the necessary qualities that Yonge believed important for impressionable young minds. Many authors hearkened back to battles both lost and won and repackaged past heroes for a young readership. These manly, heroic figures from the mid to late nineteenth century "fused into a potent configuration with representations of British imperial identity."¹⁴⁹ In the eyes of contemporaries, these men embodied the best of the British Empire

¹⁴⁷ Thomas Kehoe, *The Fighting Mascot: The True Story of a Boy Soldier* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1918), 3.

¹⁴⁸ Charlotte Yonge, *What Books to Lend and What to Give* (London: Spottiswoode & Co., 1887), 6.

¹⁴⁹ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1.

and illustrated how one should interact with the broader world. Charles George Gordon (of Khartoum), Major-General Henry Havelock, and Field Marshal Herbert Kitchener took center stage in various stories. These men exuded the correct amount of patriotism and nationalism, qualities that figured prominently in most juvenile literature. Devotion to God, the Sovereign, and Country became an ideal that one should strive to emulate. Men like Gordon exemplified how one lived (and potentially died) for Britain and the empire. Edwardian author Jeanie Lang believed Charles George Gordon of Khartoum was a hero “who sought all his life to find what was holy, who fought all his life against evil, and who died serving his God, his country, and his Queen.”¹⁵⁰ In her book, *The Story of General Gordon*, Lang narrated the general’s life and exploits from early childhood until his perceived martyrdom during the Mahdist siege of Khartoum. In the intervening years Gordon represented the British imperial machine in a variety of exotic locales. He fought in the Crimean War, led soldiers in the Taiping Rebellion (where he received the moniker “Chinese Gordon”), served as General Governor of the Sudan, and unsuccessfully defended Khartoum. However, even in his untimely death, Gordon illustrated how one should die. He penned a final letter to his sister a month before his death, and in it he stated, “I am quite happy, thank God, and, like Lawrence, I have ‘*tried* [sic, emphasis in original] to do my duty.”¹⁵¹ To drive home her point and connect with her intended audience, Lang dedicated her book to “all the boys who are going to serve their king on land or sea.”¹⁵² Gordon encapsulated the ideal hero for those future soldiers and sailors—serve nobly and die dutifully.

Writers used narratives to instill a deep sense of national pride in their readers, encouraging them to view the armed forces as a vehicle through which one could both defend

¹⁵⁰ Jeanie Lang, *The Story of General Gordon* (London: T. C. & E.C. Jack, 1906), 4.

¹⁵¹ Lang, *The Story of General Gordon*, 32. He is referring to Sir Henry Lawrence, who died at the Siege of Lucknow.

¹⁵² Lang, *The Story of General Gordon*, 3.

and extend the British way of life across the globe. Part of this became known as the “civilizing mission” where Britain tasked itself with disseminating civilization, Christianity, and democracy across the globe. While historians debate this mission’s overall intent and effectiveness, which is beyond the scope of the current project, it is important to situate this in the cultural milieu of the period. It is overly simplistic to assume that every Briton internalized a robust patriotism from merely reading about it. Nevertheless, writers impressed upon their readers an imperialistic and martial viewpoint that channeled the national cause. No writer better embodied this than George Alfred (G. A.) Henty, whose books “helped to foster the imperial spirit” and introduced children to the heroic exploits occurring abroad.¹⁵³

A devoted Tory, G. A. Henty unabashedly believed in and promulgated the British imperial cause. His vividly constructed stories starred boys in the role of the lead characters who experienced adventure set in exotic locales, and his work followed a distinct pattern of formulaic writing. A family tragedy befalls the protagonist, usually aged fifteen or sixteen, launching him into the wider world as an orphan. In due course, the hero finds himself entangled in a foreign war of empire where he meets famous heroes and makes a name for himself through his selfless and heroic deeds.¹⁵⁴ Readers immersed themselves into the narrative through the intersection of fictional derring-dos with actual historical events. Henty’s protagonists do not evolve in character; if they do, it is only subtle. Instead, they appear prefabricated with the necessary qualities to which all individuals should aspire.¹⁵⁵ Courage was one such quality that Henty believed instrumental in defending the empire. His concern shone through when he proclaimed,

¹⁵³ G. A. Henty quoted in Jeffrey Richards, “With Henty to Africa,” in *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, ed. Jeffrey Richards (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 74.

¹⁵⁴ Jeffrey Richards, “With Henty to Africa,” in *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, ed. Jeffrey Richards (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 75. Richards mentions that Henty did not blindly support the empire, and he was no stranger to offer criticism when he felt it necessary.

¹⁵⁵ Richards, “With Henty to Africa,” 75.

“the courage of our forefathers has created the greatest Empire in the world around a small and in itself insignificant island; if this Empire is ever lost, it will be by the cowardice of their descendants.”¹⁵⁶ These qualities cultivated into a warrior ethos, which mirrored the public-school version as we saw earlier; both promoted the ideas of manhood, honor, duty, and courage. Unsurprisingly, Henty’s heroes often matriculated out of the English public schools. He also romanticized warfare, and, in the process, appealed to young men and boys. One historian argues this was intentional on Henty’s part “in order to inculcate a sense of duty in his readers and the commitment to defend the empire.”¹⁵⁷

Warfare played a central role in Henty’s stories. Henty, among others, offered sterilized versions of past conflicts, which occurred factually but were presented falsely. Much of his material came from first-hand accounts since he initially served as a war correspondent beginning in the Crimean War. He swept the death and destruction to the back and brought the intrigue and adventure to the fore.

Henty’s writing was critical in shaping boyhood in Britain and across the globe. He frequently contributed to the *Boy’s Own Paper* (a publication I use as a case study in Chapter Four) and served as a vice president for the Boys’ Brigade. After his death, in 1902, The *Boy’s Own Paper* eulogized Henty as a figure who “managed to get his manliness into everything he wrote.” The “boys of England,” would, through his death, “lose one of the best friends they ever had.”¹⁵⁸ Through his adventure tales, promotion of imperialism and nationalism, and realistic

¹⁵⁶ G. A. Henty, *St. George for England: A Tale of Cressy and Poitiers* (London: Blackie & Son, 1900), 5.

¹⁵⁷ Michael Paris, *Over the Top: The Great War and Juvenile Literature in Britain* (Westport: Praeger, 2004), xv.

¹⁵⁸ George A. Hutchinson, “Death of Another ‘B.O.P.’ Writer, Mr. G. A. Henty,” *Boy’s Own Annual* 25, 17 January 1902, 256.

war descriptions, G. A. Henty significantly contributed to the militarization of youth in the decades prior to the war's outbreak.

By 1912, “war-to-come” and invasion fiction appeared in books and stories aimed at young readers. Characteristics included German invasion of the British Isles, spies, disguised Germans living in Britain, “an all-powerful German leader; an indecisive, risk-averse, bureaucratic British government with inadequate intelligence about the enemy; a complacent, uninformed British population; and a dynamic young hero.”¹⁵⁹ This genre fueled fears about an imminent war with Germany and illustrated how young boys could and should serve the nation; it was not a matter of “if” war came but rather “when.”

The juvenile periodical, or story paper, which provided young people with cheap entertainment, proved a successful form of cultural dissemination. The notorious “penny dreadful” was a fast-growing genre that “told stories of adventure, initially of pirates and highwaymen, later concentrating on crime and detection” in the Victorian era.¹⁶⁰ Publishers marketed penny dreadfuls to the working class. However, their focus on vagabonds and crime caused consternation amongst many parents, teachers, and religious leaders. It was only a matter of time before concerned groups designed an alternate genre that countered the influence of the penny dreadfuls.

Samuel Beeton's *Boy's Own Magazine (BOM)* was the first successful story paper for boys. The *BOM* appeared from 1855-1890 and set the standard for magazines explicitly aimed at boys. Others soon followed, including *Boys of England* (1866-1899), *Boy's Own Paper* (1879-1967), *Chums* (1892-1934), and *The Boy's Friend* (1895-1927), among others. While providing

¹⁵⁹ Kimberley Reynolds, “Words about War for Boys: Representations of Soldiers and Conflict in Writing for Children before World War I,” *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 269.

¹⁶⁰ Judith Flanders, “Penny Dreadfuls,” The British Library, 15 May 2014, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/penny-dreadfuls>.

wholesome entertainment, these boys' magazines also "represented the distinctive late Victorian alliance of Church, State, and military."¹⁶¹ The literature was a conduit that influenced how "men would learn to live . . . as men."¹⁶² However, not everyone viewed the juvenile publications positively, regardless of their supposed moral intent. George Orwell, writing in 1940, presented a scathing rebuke of boys' periodicals. He directed most of his ire at *The Gem* and *The Magnet*, which ran from 1907-39 and 1908-40, respectively. Orwell believed that reading materials (e.g., books, serial stories, etc.) and films for widespread consumption relied upon an "imaginative background" of outdated ideals and illusory beliefs presented to young readers, namely the views that "there is nothing wrong with *laissez-faire* capitalism, that foreigners are un-important [sic] comics and that the British Empire . . . will last forever." If that was the case, Orwell argued, boys' story papers were of most profound importance, especially when one considers that perhaps a large majority of English boys read these materials.¹⁶³ As Europe geared for a second global conflict, Orwell asserted that magazines such as *The Gem* and *The Magnet* idealized a pre-1914 British ethos that, to some, never existed in the first place. The *Boy's Own Paper* was a periodical that influenced nearly a century of children at home on the British Isles and across the empire.

3.5 Conclusion

Militarization, or some variant thereof, permeated nearly every facet of childhood decades before the First World War. These "pleasure cultures of war" romanticized warfare and illustrated the process as a game in which one defeats an opponent honorably. The cult of athleticism in public schools contributed to a false ideal that gamified the war experience. Of

¹⁶¹ John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 203.

¹⁶² Joseph Bristow, *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man's World* (London: HarperCollins, 1991), 48.

¹⁶³ George Orwell, "Boys' Weeklies," in *A Collection of Essays* (New York: Mariner Books, 1970), 305-306.

course, World War I shattered all previously held notions about the glories of war. It was not simply a “game,” and the conflict’s realities would unmask the hells of modern warfare. Toys allowed children to imitate the world around them and participate in a controlled environment. Toy soldiers and the accompanying war games made war shiny, idealized, and far removed from its real-life counterpart, thus providing a dangerous viewpoint. Literature served as a vehicle for Authors like G. A. Henty to disseminate warlike ideals to a young readership. The glorification of military heroes, the idealization of patriotism and nationalism, and the promise of adventure became central characteristics of juvenile literature, especially the material directed at adolescent boys. Far more dangerous than overt military themes and stories, heroic imaginings and noble interpretations of war, and, more specifically, the glories of youth, influenced young minds. The *Boy’s Own Paper* exemplified this process.

4 THE BOY'S OWN PAPER

I wish you to grow up men—real, brave, and good men. Not men of the world, . . . for by-and-by your country will need you, and don't you forget it. Be manly enough, even as a boy, to eschew evil and vice; take the side of everything that is noble.

- Dr. Gordon Stables, *BOP* Contributor (1906)¹⁶⁴

4.1 Introduction

The *Boy's Own Paper* (*BOP*) was the most famous and longest-running juvenile periodical in Britain from 1879-1967, and even after it ceased publication the *BOP* remained a part of Britain's cultural heritage.¹⁶⁵ Using the *BOP* as a case study, I concur with Kelly Boyd that "boys' story papers provide a fertile source of instruction about male behaviour" and "offer a lens through which we can examine the cultural forces which helped to shape and structure boys' lives."¹⁶⁶ This chapter focuses on the *BOP* for two reasons. First, Patrick Dunae describes it as "the most important and influential children's periodical ever to have appeared in Britain," so it would therefore be of the utmost importance to incorporate the *BOP* into any study of youth in the years preceding the First World War.¹⁶⁷ The second reason deals with accessibility. Fortunately, the *BOP*'s entire collection of annual volumes, each containing the monthly issues for a given year, is available entirely in a digitized format. Many of the *BOP*'s contemporaries were not so fortunate to survive in such a complete form. Both the enduring popularity and

¹⁶⁴ Gordon Stables, "Doings of the Month: The Boy Himself, Poultry Run, Pigeon Loft, Aviary, Rabbitry, and Gardens" *Boy's Own Annual* 28, 28 May 1906, 479.

¹⁶⁵ Peter Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public-School Ethos* (London: Constable & Co., 1987), 130.

¹⁶⁶ Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855-1940* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 7 & 10.

¹⁶⁷ Patrick Dunae, "The *Boy's Own Paper*: Origins and Editorial Policies," *The Private Library* 9 (Winter 1976). Quoted in J. A. Mangan, "Duty unto Death: English Masculinity and Militarism in the Age of the New Imperialism," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 27, no. 1-2 (2010): 136.

availability of the *BOP* permit the researcher to assess the mindset of a bygone age, and this is especially true when placed within the context of First World War studies.

The textual analysis of the *BOP* that follows will shed light on how periodicals indirectly advanced Michael Paris's idea of the "pleasure cultures of war." As we will see, the *BOP* was unique in that it did not expound too heavily on the glories of war in its initial publications. However, this changed at the outbreak of the First World War. The current chapter explores the changes that occurred within the *BOP* from the South African War (1899-1902) and 1916, when many juvenile periodicals moved away from promoting the conflict in a positive light within their pages due to waning popular support for the war. During this period the representations of adventure, duty, empire, and ideals of manliness embedded within the *BOP* contributed to and built on the pervasive pleasure cultures of war that arose in the years leading up to and during the First World War. During that time, these representations would inform British youth's "inner core" of Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker's concept of "war culture."

4.2 *Boy's Own Paper: A History*

The first issue of the *Boy's Own Paper* hit newsstands on Saturday, January 18, 1879. It was a simple 16-page publication that was published both weekly and monthly. It consisted of a three-column layout interspersed with serial stories, poems, diagrams, and artistic engravings, many of which complemented the stories.¹⁶⁸ The title page of the first annual declared the publication to be "pure and entertaining reading," but it also allowed the young reader to engage actively with the magazine.¹⁶⁹ The most common form of engagement was the prize competition. As the first issue made clear, the *BOP*'s competitions offered readers a "variety of prizes for

¹⁶⁸ Jack Cox, *Take a Cold Tub, Sir!: The Story of the Boy's Own Paper* (Surrey: Lutterworth, 1982), 22.

¹⁶⁹ "Title Page," *Boy's Own Annual* 1, 1879, 7.

essays, solutions to puzzles, anagrams, etc.” to promote “pleasant rivalry” between readers.¹⁷⁰

From the start, the *BOP* also provided its readers with real-life models of how boys should interact with the world in which they lived. “Youthful Honours Bravely Won” (an article in the first issue) gave an account of the “various acts of gallantry by boys who, without thought of self, have bravely risked their own lives in their noble anxiety to save the lives of the others.”¹⁷¹

The author, Lambton Young, details a story in which Samuel Green, a “generous youth” of fifteen who was “determined to sacrifice his own life,” saved a classmate from drowning in the sea. Due to the stormy conditions, everyone else present had determined that the drowning boy was irrevocably lost, but Green put aside his own safety and comfort to save his companion.¹⁷²

Throughout its long run, the *BOP* would continue instilling the ideas of selfless courage and manliness to its juvenile readers.

The birth of the *Boy's Own Paper* stemmed from a desire to combat the success and popularity of the “penny dreadfuls.” In an 1878 committee meeting of the Religious Tract Society (RTS), “a conversation arose on the subject of providing healthy boy literature to counteract the vastly increasing circulation of illustrated and other papers and tales of a bad tendency.” The RTS already had a record of publishing a variety of tracts, sermons, books, commentaries, and periodicals, so it would be an easy transition to wage a moral war and “vanquish” the penny dreadfuls.¹⁷³ The *BOP* would achieve this aim “by portraying goodness, honesty and decency as ordinary qualities.”¹⁷⁴ A poem commemorating the publication’s twenty-first birthday acknowledged this intent: “We’d rivals to vanquish: the grim ‘penny dreadful.’”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ “Our Prize Competition,” *Boy's Own Annual* 1, January 18, 1879, 16.

¹⁷¹ Lambton Young, “Youthful Honours Bravely Won,” *Boy's Own Annual* 1, January 18, 1879, 14.

¹⁷² Lambton Young, “Youthful Honours Bravely Won,” *Boy's Own Annual* 1, January 18, 1879, 14.

¹⁷³ Jack Cox, *Take a Cold Tub, Sir!: The Story of the Boy's Own Paper* (Surrey: Lutterworth, 1982), 18.

¹⁷⁴ Jane Pettigrew, *An Edwardian Childhood* (Boston: Bullfinch Press, 1991), 84.

¹⁷⁵ “Our Coming-of-Age,” *Boy's Own Annual* 21, September 30, 1899, 838.

The language used here implies a militaristic bent and could hint at what would come during the publication's tenure.

Even though it was a Religious Tract Society publication, the *BOP* itself was not overtly religious; instead, the religious and moral nature of the publication lurked deftly under the surface. Seeking to gain a foothold in the market, George Hutchinson, who was the *BOP*'s first editor (1879-1912), believed the best way forward was to have "articles on common subjects, written with a decidedly Christian tone" instead of "articles on religious subjects."¹⁷⁶ The former would placate any doubts that decorous middle-class parents, educators, and religious leaders might have had concerning the material's respectability. While the *BOP* was not a fully jingoistic magazine, at least at the onset, it still reflected the ideals of manliness and self-sacrifice that were prominent in all boy's serial papers. One historian even labels the *BOP* as the "unofficial organ" of the Muscular Christianity movement.¹⁷⁷ To uphold these ideals, the *BOP* "exhibited a complex struggle to balance Christian beliefs, social expectations, and national responsibility."¹⁷⁸

With the *Boy's Own Paper*, the RTS sought to create a unique reading experience that focused on a form of morality, and it also drew on a variety of different genres popular at the time. For example, the *BOP* incorporated material on science, which paralleled the growing interest in technological breakthroughs. Historian Richard Noakes posits that it was the *BOP*'s extensive inclusion of "scientific" (a collect-all term Noakes uses to combine science, technology, and medicine) material "constituted an important part of the *BOP*'s strategy of producing an entertaining and wholesome serial that would please middle-class boys and their

¹⁷⁶ Richard Noakes, "The *Boy's Own Paper* and Late-Victorian Juvenile Magazines," in *Science in the Nineteenth-Century Periodical: Reading the Magazine of Nature*, by Geoffrey Cantor, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 155.

¹⁷⁷ Patrick Dunae, quoted in Penner's "Masculinity, Morality, and National Identity," 10.

¹⁷⁸ Elizabeth Penner, "Masculinity, Morality, and National Identity in the *Boy's Own Paper*, 1879-1913" (PhD diss. De Montfort University. 2016), 2.

high-minded parents and teachers.”¹⁷⁹ The *BOP*’s content catered to a large audience, which increased the publication’s popularity and appeal.

The publication sought to amass readers through marketing strategies, some of which were based on military language and imagery. For example, a February 1908 illustration shows a young boy in military garb standing at attention before a sign that reads: “The B.O.P. has a whole army of readers . . . recruits wanted to swell the ranks.”¹⁸⁰ The *BOP*’s robust material and its marketing made an impression on young readers, and over the course of its eighty-eight year press run, the *Boy’s Own Paper* enjoyed a vast readership, reaching an international audience within its first decades of publication. From her research based on the names of prize competition winners and contributors from the 1880s and 1890s, historian Elizabeth Penner determined that the paper reached readers in Canada, New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, India, Barbados, Egypt, and various European countries.¹⁸¹ While young boys had a plethora of serials from which to choose, the *BOP* was early on a top choice for young readers. In 1884, Edward Salmon, a prominent specialist in children’s literature, surveyed a sample of 600 schoolboys to gauge juvenile reading habits. From this group Salmon found that approximately 400 respondents noted the *BOP* as their favorite serial.¹⁸² Readership even included members of the British Royal Family. While serving as editor of the magazine in its final years, Jack Cox recalled how at a Press Club reception in 1962, Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother informed him she was a lifelong fan and, as a child in the early 1910s, would read her brother’s copy before

¹⁷⁹ Richard Noakes, “The *Boy’s Own Paper* and Late-Victorian Juvenile Magazines,” 154.

¹⁸⁰ “The B.O.P. has a whole army of readers . . .,” *Boy’s Own Annual*, February 22, 1908, 325.

¹⁸¹ Elizabeth Penner, “Masculinity, Morality, and National Identity in the *Boy’s Own Paper*, 1879-1913” (PhD diss. De Montfort University. 2016), 48-9.

¹⁸² John Springhall, *Coming of Age: Adolescence in Britain 1860-1960* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1986), 130. For comparison, *Tit-Bits* came in second with only 27 votes.

allowing him the chance.¹⁸³ The Queen Mother's enjoyment illustrates that the *BOP* appealed to young girls, too, even though the RTS published the equivalent *Girl's Own Paper*, which went into publication nearly a year after the *BOP* in 1880.

Robert MacDonald argues that juvenile periodicals leaned into the "emerging imperial consciousness" in the decades before the First World War, and the *Boy's Own Paper* was no exception.¹⁸⁴ The publication's lifespan coincided with the era of New Imperialism, which became dominant in the second half of the nineteenth century, and, along with the majority of juvenile literature, the *BOP* was "without exception dedicated to the imperial idea."¹⁸⁵ The imperial display at Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 was a visual manifestation of that idea. According to Walter L. Arnstein, this historic event was "first and foremost a celebration of the late-Victorian British Empire at its zenith." It was not the illustrious crowned heads of Europe who processed in celebration for the Grandmother of Europe's 60-year reign. Instead, it was an "unending procession of troops—white, yellow, brown, and black—from Australia and the Far East, from India and Africa, from Canada and the West Indies."¹⁸⁶ The strength and might of the far-reaching British Empire converged at its heart for the first time. Boy's magazines would absorb this display of power and in turn reflect the ideals presented. While penny dreadfuls, according to John MacKenzie, "internalized crime and conflict in terms of domestic society," boy's journals "externalized them" and presented a "world that became a vast

¹⁸³ Jack Cox, *Take a Cold Tub, Sir!: The Story of the Boy's Own Paper* (Surrey: Lutterworth, 1982), 120-123. *The Queen Mother was not the only Royal to enjoy the *BOP*; Cox also states that Volume IV (1881-82) was dedicated to Prince Edward and Prince George of Wales, the future Duke of Clarence and King George V, respectively (pg. 49).

¹⁸⁴ Robert H. MacDonald, "Reproducing the Middle-Class Boy: From Purity to Patriotism in the Boys' Magazines, 1892-1914," *Journal of Contemporary History* 24, no. 3 (July 1989): 520.

¹⁸⁵ John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 203 & Patrick Dunae, "Boys' Literature and the Idea of Empire, 1870-1914," *Victorian Studies* 24, no. 1 (Autumn 1980): 106.

¹⁸⁶ Walter L. Arnstein, "Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee," *The American Scholar* 66, no. 4 (Autumn 1997): 595.

adventure playground where Anglo-Saxon superiority could be repeatedly demonstrated.”¹⁸⁷

Kelly Boyd asserts that “manliness and imperialism were integrally bound up with one another in boy’s story papers”; for the *Boy’s Own Paper* this was a subtle relationship, but it would become more pronounced as the country marched towards the First World War.¹⁸⁸

The *BOP* was still in print after the Second World War, and its audience apparently grew in the years after 1945. Unfortunately, the massive number of readers did not always equate to sales from individuals purchasing their own copies. Readership figures were a product of both “share-a-copy” schemes that stemmed from the days of rationing, and school magazine clubs, which made single copies available to multiple readers. Research from the time concluded that an average of forty-one readers shared a single copy of the *BOP*. Already underpriced at a shilling, this model was not sustainable for publication. Cox described the situation as a catch-22; he wrote that “our relationship with our readers served at one and the same time as our handicap and our security.”¹⁸⁹ The market was there, but not enough individuals were purchasing their own copies to allow the publication to remain viable as it approached its centennial.

On January 11, 1967, *The London Times* reported that after 88 years in print, the *Boy’s Own Paper* would publish its last issue the following month. According to the article, the disappearance of the *BOP* encompassed a “nostalgic social landmark and perhaps a depressing and ominous comment on the standards of 1967.”¹⁹⁰ The rise of teenagers as a distinct group with their own buying power would alter consumerism in the post-war era. However, nearly fifty years after the *BOP* went out of print, its legacy remains in Britain’s cultural and social

¹⁸⁷ John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 204.

¹⁸⁸ Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys’ Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855-1940* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 125.

¹⁸⁹ Jack Cox, *Take a Cold Tub, Sir!: The Story of the Boy’s Own Paper* (Surrey: Lutterworth, 1982), 120.

¹⁹⁰ “B.O.P. ends its 88 years of adventure,” *London Times*, January 11, 1967.

consciousness for the older generations who enjoyed the publication. The adjective “Boy’s Own” has transformed into a colloquialism that embodies a bygone age and serves as a callback to one of the most memorable juvenile periodicals. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “Boy’s Own” as something “resembling or evocative of a children's adventure story; characterized by daring and heroism; exciting.”¹⁹¹ According to Elizabeth Penner, an issue that arises from this is “distillation, as nostalgia produces an oversimplified idea of the *Boy’s Own Paper*.”¹⁹²

Only in the past decade or so have academics made a concerted effort to assess the influence of the *BOP*. One must err on the side of caution when reading early books about the *BOP*. They lack critical analysis and, whether intentionally or not, drape the publication in a cloak of nostalgia and superiority. The authors themselves are self-aware of the lack of analytical criticism. Warner proclaimed, “Nobody who has read it has tried to attack it. Perhaps there have been resourceful sociologists who have picked up copies with a view to denouncing it as an imperialistic, class-conscious, insidious publication, but having made the fatal mistake of starting to read it perhaps they became so immersed . . . they forgot their original purpose.”¹⁹³

4.3 “England expects every boy to do his duty,” 1899-1914

From its inception, the *Boy’s Own Paper* was not a magazine brimming with overt nationalistic and military ideology. It was in fact quite the opposite, for anything dealing with the military took only a tiny section of space in the early publications. During the South African War (1899-1902) the *BOP*’s pages remained silent in supporting the war effort. Christian pacifism from the RTS’s members and supporters directly influenced this decision, namely on the part of

¹⁹¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, “Boy’s Own (adj.),” accessed July 2, 2023, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/271175?redirectedFrom=Boy%27s+Own#eid>.

¹⁹² Elizabeth Penner, “‘The Squire of Boyhood’: G. A. Hutchison and the *Boy’s Own Paper*,” *Victorian Periodical Review* 47, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 642.

¹⁹³ Philip Warner, *The Best of British Pluck: The Boy’s Own Paper* (London: MacDonald and Jane’s, 1976), 1.

the Baptists who served at the RTS vehemently opposed the South African War and subsequently influenced the publication's material.¹⁹⁴ During the same time, Cox writes that three RTS supporters complained about the "inflammatory and war-like character of the *BOP*." This was not a new phenomenon. Criticism arose from the very first issue of the *BOP* with its inaugural serial story, "From Powder Monkey to Admiral." Critics believed the story was "too militaristic and 'encourag[ed] warlike spirit.'"¹⁹⁵

In lieu of overt militarism, the *BOP* would focus heavily on ideas of duty, manliness, and self-sacrifice during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. In the February 23, 1901 issue a self-proclaimed "old ex-soldier" spoke to *BOP* readers about "duty," which consisted of being kind to one's mother, treating others as one would like to be treated, keeping a pure mind and heart, and continuing one's studies.¹⁹⁶ One therefore had a duty to one's family, fellow citizens, and oneself, and, in doing so, cultivated the fortitude to rise above moral and physical decay.

The author subsequently acknowledged that "Many of you boys will doubtless join the army, some as officers, others as privates." He encouraged those who enlisted as privates to "be clean" rather than sink "into the dreadful gulf of Impurity," which was the devil's most potent weapon. If they fell into this vice, the boys would likely suffer the consequences. The author detailed what he had witnessed while at a garrison in Secunderabad, India. Soldiers there who participated in "Impurity and Intemperance had so weakened their systems that they could not shake off the fell enemy," which the author informed the readers was a cholera breakout. He also encouraged boys to avoid gambling and drinking, both of which caused the shame of cashiering if taken too far.

¹⁹⁴ John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 204.

¹⁹⁵ Jack Cox, *Take a Cold Tub, Sir!: The Story of the Boy's Own Paper* (Surrey: Lutterworth, 1982), 89.

¹⁹⁶ "Duty: A Straight Talk with 'B.O.P' Boys," *Boy's Own Annual*, February 16, 1901, 330.

In closing, he then reminded the boys they “possess a glorious inheritance,” and it was up to them to “maintain and strengthen in the future the grand empire of your fathers, which has been built up at an enormous expense of blood and treasure.”¹⁹⁷ Therefore, boys should strive towards the idea of duty, for it had a greater purpose; one day the empire would expect them to rise to the challenge and help defend it.

Another example of the ideological material is found within the March 30, 1901, issue where there is an indirect mention of that “unhappy war,” though the subject matter dealt less with the war itself than the ideals boys should cultivate from the experience. An anonymous author expounded upon the concept of “manliness” and its meaning. As the author’s son sailed off to South Africa, the author encouraged him with the maxim to “live clean, be straight, do your duty, and act the man.” The author railed against those he labeled sneaks, the selfish, and cowards; the latter of which, according to him, were “often the victim of mental and physical weakness,” and the former two “deserve no place in the ranks of true manhood.” Instead, the author encouraged all boys to be plucky and manly. Pluck, that broad and ambiguous Victorian term, encapsulated the manliness movement. For the author, all should be plucky in “facing what is wrong, unjust, and impure” and manly in “giving a lifting hand to the fellow who is down.”¹⁹⁸

Some readers, however, took a dim view on what they perceived to be the *BOP*’s focus on militaristic themes. One reader raised concerns about the *BOP*’s support of the Boys’ Brigade. In a November 27, 1909 “Correspondence” reply, the respondent attempted to assuage any fear of the group’s “training for militarism.” The answer also quoted an “officer” of the Brigade who stated, “I can safely affirm that it does not make boys think of war and possible enemies. The drill is purely ceremonial, and is used only as a means of securing the interest of the boys,

¹⁹⁷ “Duty: A Straight Talk with ‘B.O.P’ Boys,” *Boy’s Own Annual*, February 16, 1901, 330.

¹⁹⁸ “Manliness,” *Boy’s Own Annual* 23, March 30, 1901, 411-12.

banding them together in the work of the Brigade, and promoting among them such habits as the Brigade is designed to form.”¹⁹⁹ The necessity to include the point about drill is particularly interesting, for it implies that it was an activity that boys enjoyed and sought out. However, the readers’ unease over support for the Boy’s Brigade signifies that many people strongly believed the *BOP* should maintain a wholly un-militaristic outlook in its material.

What was to come in 1914 would upend the pacifist ideals and moral high ground that the *BOP* previously portrayed within its pages. In the past, the *BOP* took a neutral stance on England’s involvement in foreign wars, illustrated by a poem tucked away in the November 28, 1896 issue. The poem, simply titled “War,” reads:

I saw two mighty nations with hands upraised in
 strife,
 Each caring for its petty pride more than for human
 life:
 I saw a mighty statesman step forth proclaiming War,
 And I saw Death, smiling grimly, fling open wide
 his door.
 I saw two brilliant armies exulting in their might,
 Each thinking of to-morrow and of to-morrow’s fight;
 I heard the crash of battle, I heard the cries and
 groans;
 The shouting of the living, and I heard the dying
 moans;
 I saw two shattered armies with broken strength
 draw back,
 And I saw the dead and dying that each left in its
 track.
 I saw Death now exulting as he welcomed in each
 guest—
 The pick and flower of Europe, the chosen of the
 best—
 I saw two mighty nations weeping with bended head—
 Weeping for soldiers lying on the field of battle dead.
 And I heard Death laughing shrilly, as he opened
 wide his door,
 And shout in cruel triumph— “These are the fruits of

¹⁹⁹ “Correspondence” – “The Boy’s Brigade (Anxious),” *Boy’s Own Annual* 32, November 1909, 143.

war.”²⁰⁰

The poem ominously portends the horrors to come in less than twenty years from its publication, and it is possible that it served as a guiding principle during the South African War. As Britain geared for war decades later in August 1914, however, the poem and its timely message would remain conveniently forgotten.

4.4 “Building a Consciousness of Patriotism,” 1914-1916

A shift occurred within the *Boy's Own Paper* a few months after the start of the war. The once subtle support of Britain's military endeavors and the noble ideals of duty, manliness, and self-sacrifice would intersect and coalesce into a call to arms for military and patriotic fervor. The juvenile periodicals became only one avenue through which intense propaganda campaigns sought to influence youth. The first mention of the war appears in the November 1914 issue. Using “The Editor's Page,” A. L. Haydon, editor from 1912-1924, compelled readers to follow “intelligently the course of events” and make themselves “familiar with the causes that have given rise to the war.”²⁰¹ It is difficult to surmise why it took three months for the *BOP* to address the conflict for the first time, but there could be two likely reasons. First, the editors planned successive issues well in advance, thus preventing a quick change in material. Second, there was the widespread belief (at least among some individuals) that the war would be over by Christmas, and there would not be any reason to wade into the dialogue surrounding the foray, thus allowing the *BOP* editorial team to err on the side of caution. Philip Warner believes the latter to be the most likely reason. He postulates that “like many people the Editor of the B.O.P. probably hoped the war would soon be over and there would be time enough to discuss it

²⁰⁰ E. C. Fulton, “War,” *Boy's Own Annual* 19, November 28, 1896, 143.

²⁰¹ A. L. Haydon, “About the War” – “The Editor's Page,” *Boy's Own Annual* 37, November 1914, 41.

afterwards.”²⁰² However, it is possible that both reasons worked in tandem. No matter when the *BOP* began discussing the war, it did so with a clear goal in mind, for, as Fabiana Loparco argues, the periodical “utilized war propaganda to exalt the power of the British military machine and strengthen the physique and spirit of the country’s youth” and, in the process, created an “internal frontline.”²⁰³ The driving force behind this exaltation would be the editor himself.

Haydon was no stranger to fanning the flames of imperial avidity. Before his *BOP* editorship, Haydon wrote for the explicitly patriotic journal *Boys of Empire (BoE)*. According to one historian, the *BoE* was only in print from 1900-1903 and was “arguably the most jingoistic of all the juvenile periodicals.”²⁰⁴ Therefore, it should come as no surprise that with the reigns loosened with the outbreak of the war, Haydon quickly penned a serial for the *BOP* titled “For England and the Right!” This serial appeared in the *BOP* from February to October 1915 and perpetuated the belief in a just war against German aggression and barbarism.

Roddy Markham is the fifteen-year-old English protagonist of the story. He is in Belgium when the German Army marches through on its way to France. Young Roddy sees the destruction the army leaves in its wake and views the Germans as heartless beasts with no regard for life or property. A handful of characters fall victim to the Germans as the story progresses. An early suspicion and confirmation of the story is Roddy’s realization that Herr Dorbacher was his schoolmaster from England; Dorbacher was a German spy all along.

A minor statement that Herr Dorbacher makes stands out. In regaling Roddy Markham about what the Germans planned to do, Dorbacher mentions how the German Army would

²⁰² Philip Warner, *The Best of British Pluck: The Boy’s Own Paper*, (London: MacDonald and Jane’s, 1976), 169.

²⁰³ Fabiana Loparco, “The First World War on the *Boy’s Own Paper* Magazine (1914-1915),” *Rivista Di Storia Dell’Educazione* 2, (2015): 74-75.

²⁰⁴ Patrick A. Dunne, “Boys’ Literature and the Idea of Empire, 1870-1914,” *Victorian Studies* 24 no. 1 (Autumn 1980): 112.

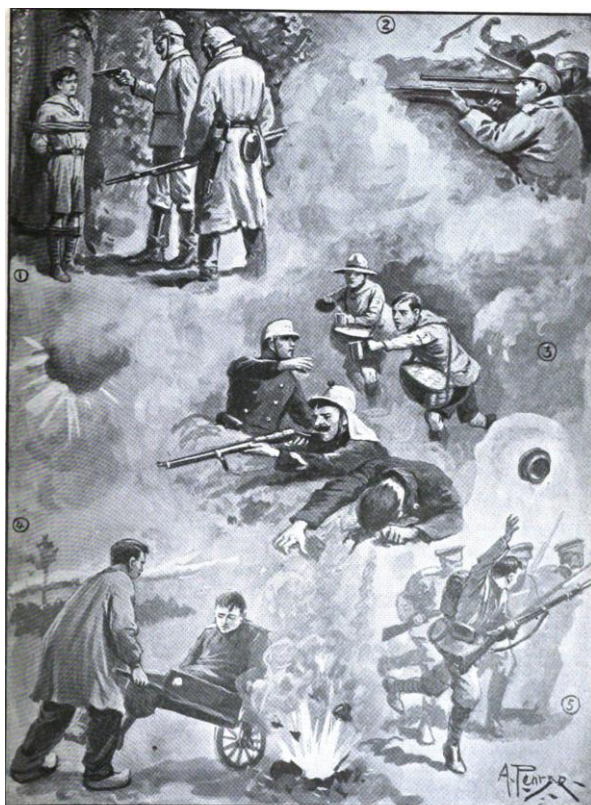
“gonquer” [sic] France after defeating “those red-breeched Frenchmen and [Britain’s] handful of beardless boy-soldiers.”²⁰⁵ Dorbacher also clarifies that Germany’s end goal is the conquest and humiliation of the English.

Roddy embodies the core tenets of manliness; he is courageous, deductive, and selfless. He also confirms the prevalent anxieties in the years leading up to the First World War, such as the Invasion Scare of 1906, which detailed unfounded German attempts to invade the British Isles. Out of these anxieties, xenophobia pullulated once again as the war got underway. Through his serial, Haydon would unabashedly demonize “the host of Germans whom England admitted to her shores” and explain how the “army of waiters, barbers, pastry-cooks, and other humble employees” secretly carried out espionage prior to the war.²⁰⁶ It is important to note that prior to the First World War, the *BOP* did not embrace anti-German sentiment, and a review of the volumes published from 1906-1914 confirms this. The story’s inclusion elucidates the shift that occurred within the *BOP*’s offerings for its young readers.

As Roddy in “For England and the Right!” illustrates, the *BOP* focused on stories and anecdotes of “boy heroes.” Articles such as “Boy Heroes of the War” regaled readers with the courageous and selfless feats boys across the Channel exhibited. A keen eye will notice that none of the young people mentioned are British nationals or soldiers of the Empire. Instead, they represent three of the Allied Powers: France, Serbia, and Belgium, the honor of the latter of which Britain sought to defend in joining the fray. Accompanying the article is a collage of illustrations that drives home the point of the message. The two most potent images reside in the

²⁰⁵ A. L. Haydon, “For England and the Right!”, *Boy’s Own Annual* 37, May 1915, 488.

²⁰⁶ A. L. Haydon, “For England and the Right!”, *Boy’s Own Annual* 37, February 1915, 258.



BOY HEROES OF THE WAR.
(See notes on next page.)
(Drawn for the "Boy's Own Paper" by ALFRED PEARSE.)

Figure 4.1 *Boy Heroes of the War*
(BOP Jan., 1915)

top-left and bottom-right corners. In the first image a young French boy is tied to a tree and two imposing German soldiers with their brandished weapons stand menacingly over him (Figure 4.1). The story tells how this young man fell into German hands after scouting for a French regiment. After his capture the boy refused to disclose the location of the regiment. The German soldiers “threatened him with instant death if he persisted in silence;” however, the boy was a rock that would not budge, and he “paid the penalty with his life, his secret unrevealed.”²⁰⁷

Image five in the bottom right-hand corner of the same figure refers to a story of a Belgian officer of seventeen who “headed a charge of twenty men against a force of Uhlans [cavalrymen] fifty strong.” Any reader familiar with the glories of the British past would no doubt equate the scene with the infamous “Charge of the Light Brigade.” Unlike the youth who died with his regiment’s secret, the Belgian would survive, though he was “badly hit,” but this would not prevent him from ignoring his wounds and carrying two of his comrades to safety. The young man immediately received a promotion “to the rank sergeant the following day in the presence of his regiment” for his actions.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ “Boy Heroes of the War,” *Boy's Own Annual* 37, January 1915, 228.

²⁰⁸ “Boy Heroes of the War,” *Boy's Own Annual* 37, January 1915, 228.

The stories' veracity is irrelevant. What matters is how readers both read and understood the message, which was that other boys are doing courageous deeds on behalf of their respective countries. This assertion is not to suggest that *BOP* leadership explicitly encouraged underage youths to join the ranks, but it does make it clear that young men, no matter their age, should not have remained idle while others were giving their lives to support the cause. The stories and images discussed above would have been unimaginable during the South African War fifteen years earlier.

Late into 1916 the *BOP* still painted youthful sacrifice and death as admirable. Sixteen-year-old John "Jack" Travers Cornwell, an "example of unflinching heroism and devotion," served aboard *H. M. S. Chester* during the Battle of Jutland. Four German cruisers shelled the *Chester* during the battle, and the ship received seventeen direct hits. Cornwell's position received four. The attack caused the death of Cornwell's entire team and wounded Cornwell with "flying metal shards from German shells" that "ripped through [Cornwell's] legs and stomach."²⁰⁹ The *BOP* article drew from the official account, according to which Boy First Class Cornwell was "mortally wounded early in the action . . . [but] remained standing alone at the most exposed post, quietly awaiting orders, until the end of action, with the gun's crew dead and wounded all round him."²¹⁰ The accompanying illustration (Figure 4.2) captures the moment and drives home the point of unrelenting devotion to the cause. Both the story and the image bestow a form of militaristic hagiography; In the image Cornwell stands resolutely (and visually unharmed) amidst the destruction and his fallen crew members as the battle continues to rage behind him.

²⁰⁹ "Boy (1st Class) John 'Jack' Travers Cornwell VC," Imperial War Museum, accessed 19 January 2023, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/boy-1st-class-john-jack-travers-cornwell-vc>. Note: The IWM states that current research suggests the portrait of John Cornwell (Figure 3.2) is one of his brothers.

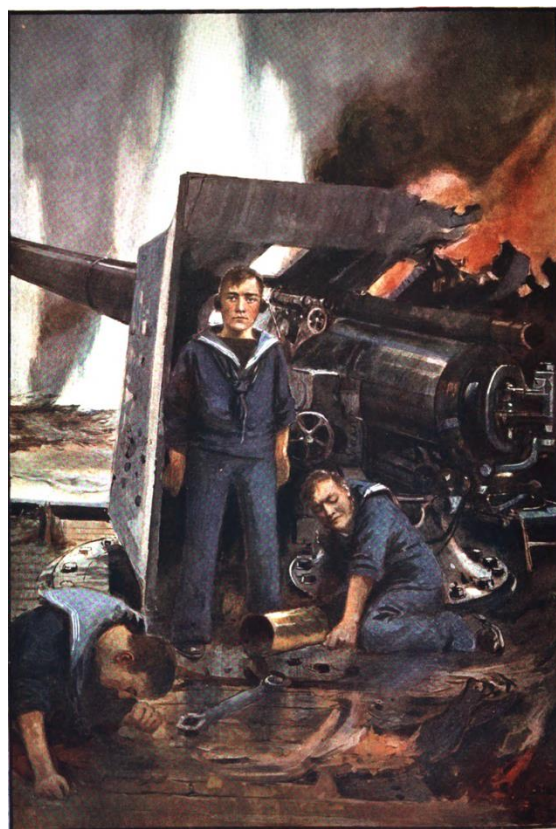
²¹⁰ A.L. Haydon, "The Boy Hero of the 'Chester,'" *Boy's Own Annual* 39, November 1916, 82.

King George V posthumously conferred on Cornwell the Victoria Cross, Britain's highest honor for a member of the armed forces. According to the National Army Museum, it requires "an act of extreme bravery in the presence of the enemy, and has achieved almost mythical status, with recipients often revered as heroes."²¹¹ Cornwell embodied the new Edwardian idea of masculinity, which Boyd argues was "not exhibited by the foolhardy deed or reckless courage, but in working together as a unit, playing together as a team."²¹² Cornwell also represented the *puer aeternus*, or "eternal boy."

While the *BOP* epitomized the *puer aeternus* before the First World War, this imagery takes on added meaning when put in the context of the conflict.

On the one hand, the *puer aeternus* represents the unblemished innocence of youth, while on the other, it embodies those qualities to which all men should aspire, which include courage, sacrifice, and national responsibility.

The war fiction would not last, though. As the war became one of attrition rather than one of swift victory, the corresponding war fiction all but vanished after 1916.²¹³ As the true horrors



THE BOY HERO OF H.M.S. "CHESTER."
JOHN TRAVERS CORNWELL, V.C., at his Post of Duty, during the Battle of Jutland, June 2, 1916.
Specially painted by CHARLES DIXON, R.I., and J. H. VALEN
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Digitized by Google

Figure 4.2 John "Jack" Travers
(*BOP* Nov., 1916)

²¹¹ "The Victoria Cross," Medals, National Army Museum, accessed 21 January 2023, [https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/victoria-cross#:~:text=The%20Victoria%20Cross%20\(VC\)%20is,recipients%20often%20revered%20as%20heroes.](https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/victoria-cross#:~:text=The%20Victoria%20Cross%20(VC)%20is,recipients%20often%20revered%20as%20heroes.)

²¹² Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855-1940* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 74.

²¹³ Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys' Story Paper in Britain*, 98.

of trench warfare became public knowledge, it seemed unwise to continue portraying the war as something adventurous. A detailed history of one of the paper's features—the “War Notes & Pictures” section (“WN&P”)—exemplifies this change. Beginning in April 1915, the *Boy's Own Paper* included a section on “War Notes & Pictures” (“WN&P”) that explained various aspects of the war. The section resulted from a demand for information about the conflict. Haydon wrote in January 1915 that he received letters daily from readers requesting information about the war. He stated that moving forward the *BOP* would include “special articles on the most striking and important features of the War.” Haydon reiterated that “boys want to know about these things,” and he commissioned writers to prepare “authoritative articles” on various subjects.²¹⁴ The main topics of interest included weaponry and vehicles used in the conflict. The information included in the sections brought the trenches to the hearth.

The first “War Notes & Pictures” explained items such as a silent gun the Germans used and a military folding bicycle, which could be “folded or unfolded in approximately ten seconds.”²¹⁵ The following issue (May 1915) took the popular topic of cycling a step further. The article described a corps of 300 “machine-gun motor-cyclists.” Each motorcycle consisted of “side-cars fitted with Scott-maxim machine-guns.” Each required two men to operate effectively; an accompanying illustration quenched the imagination.²¹⁶ Some information detailed weapons and tactics that Allied opponents used. For example, the Germans employed the *Flammenwerfer* (flame-thrower). The *BOP* informed readers that Germans wielded that “dastardly device” against the French *poilu* first and demolished towns and villages through which the German Army marched.²¹⁷ The recreational nature of German snipers also found a place with the

²¹⁴ A.L. Haydon, “Special War Notes – The Editor’s Page,” *Boy's Own Annual* 37, January 1915, 168.

²¹⁵ “War Notes & Pictures,” *Boy's Own Annual*, April 1915, 354.

²¹⁶ “War Notes & Pictures,” *Boy's Own Annual*, May 1915, 410.

²¹⁷ “War Notes & Pictures – Flame-Projectors,” *Boy's Own Annual* 38, January 1916, 150.

“WN&P.” Both portrayed the Germans as barbaric and without honor; they were simply killing machines with no remorse for fighting inhumanely. As with the war fiction, though, the “War Notes & Pictures” would not last.

After the “War Notes & Pictures” first appeared in April 1915, it was a familiar feature for the next seventeen months. In Volume 39 (November 1916-October 1917), only six of its monthly issues had a “WN&P” section. The following volume (November 1917-October 1918) contained no “WN&P” section in any of the monthly issues. Most historians agree that 1916 was a turning point in the war, and the *BOP* reflected this change. What is significant to note is the change in material within the last half-dozen published “WN&P” sections. Initially, as discussed above, the articles focused heavily on myriad styles of weaponry, vehicles, and technological wonders. In early 1917, though, the subject matter transformed from materialistic to ideological content. One article, “Precepts Before Battle,” which appeared in the April 1917 “WN&P”, commended the Russian Army for instructing every soldier in a dozen precepts. A few of these “special maxims” that would be “of interest to every British boy” went as follows: “die, but save your brothers”; “always advance, even over the corpse of your comrades”; “in battle there is no relief. Once engaged in fighting, you must remain to the end; you will be supported, but never relieved”; and “there is no situation from which it is not possible to emerge with honour.”²¹⁸ Another article reinforced fraternal bonds, especially between the British and the French. In “Khaki and Blue” the author described the relationship as a “big band of brothers” who are “bound to one another by heroic ties of blood and bravery.”²¹⁹

This imagery is noteworthy; it illustrated that Britons were fighting to defend themselves and the French nation, which suffered more directly from German aggression. This new-found

²¹⁸ “War Notes & Pictures – Precepts Before Battle,” *Boy’s Own Annual* 38, April 1917, 300.

²¹⁹ “War Notes & Pictures – Khaki and Blue,” *Boy’s Own Annual* 38, May 1917, 360.

camaraderie, represented in a proposed “khaki and light blue” flag that would serve “as an emblem of the unity between the two nations,” belied Britannia and Marianne’s tumultuous past. In a sense, the close of 1916 brought an end to feeding the imagination with the war’s physical aspects. Instead, the *BOP* could reinforce the sacrificial language of honor and national duty through its “WN&P” sections. It also homed in on contextualizing the conflict as part of a larger European struggle for survival, and, in the process, sought to justify the war in a time of waning popularity.

Part of chapter two discussed the Boy Scouts’ role in militarizing British youth before the First World War. In September 1915, nearly a year after the war began, the *Boy’s Own Paper* published an article highlighting the work of the Boy Scouts and other youth organizations. In the introduction of “British Boy’s Work in War-Time,” author J. F. Collett pushed back against those who previously viewed the Boy Scouts as a vehicle for militaristic values. He thanked youth organizations who “in times of peace, may have provoked adverse criticism or even ridicule on the part of the unthinking—they have proved also that they were prepared to render instant and valuable assistance in several essential departments of national defence.” Collett reiterated that military training was not an original foundation of the scout system and that Robert Baden-Powell [the Boy Scouts’ founder] was against it “as a principle.” Initially, Baden-Powell aimed at “developing in every way character, manliness, and usefulness, but not on the lines of infantry drills.”²²⁰ However, the outbreak of the war altered this perception.

A table in the article shows that since its inception the Boys’ Brigade had trained 650,000 boys, 150,000 of whom would serve in the “Forces of the Crown.” If this number is accurate,

²²⁰ J. F. Collett, “British Boys’ Work in War-Time: What Boy Scouts, Cadets, and other Youthful Members of well-known Organizations are doing for their King and Country on Land and Sea,” *Boy’s Own Annual* 37, September 1915, 711.

that means that over 23% of Boys' Brigade members trained since its founding would eventually join the British Armed Forces.

After the outbreak of the First World War, the *Boy's Own Paper* experienced a shift in its content. When it neglected to cover extensively the South African War, the publication subsequently lost a great deal of circulation.²²¹ One must question how in the span of a little over a decade the *BOP* went from being "unusually" silent on the South African War to supporting without hesitation the First World War. One could assume that when the First World War broke out the Religious Tract Society had learned from past reluctance and placed morality on the sidelines for the sake of profit and maintaining a robust circulation. In a July 1903 General Committee meeting, the RTS acknowledged that neglecting to provide any references to the South African War "resulted in a marked decline in the paper's sales."²²² That mistake would not happen again. Moreover, another likely reason was the prevalent belief that the First World War was just and necessary. In his book, *The Great and Holy War*, Philip Jenkins argues that religious ideology permeated the justification for the war. Contrary to the prevailing belief in widespread secularization, Jenkins states that it was at the very early stages of the war that "the full panoply of holy war rhetoric came to dominate media and propaganda in all the combatant states."²²³ With its Christian underpinnings, the *BOP* parroted the popular refrains of German barbarism and lauded boy heroes. The *BOP* editorial team aimed to build "a consciousness of

²²¹ Alison Enever, "Boys Should be Boys and Girls Should be Wives: The Construction of a Gendered Identity in the *Boy's Own Paper* and *Girl's Own Paper*," *Emergence: Humanities Graduate School Research Journal* 4 (Autumn 2012): 34.

²²² Patrick Dunae, "Boys' Literature and the Idea of Empire, 1870-1914," *Victorian Studies* 24, no. 1 (Autumn 1980): 115. *Dunae uses the committee as a source and does not detail the total loss of readership. Unfortunately, I was not able to access the actual source to confirm any amounts, which is currently housed in the School of Oriental and African Studies Archives at the University of London.

²²³ Philip Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014), 8-9.

patriotism” within their readers. However, as popularity for the war waned, the material reverted to a less-militaristic bent and halted the glorification of warfare.

4.5 Conclusion

The *Boy's Own Paper* embodied one aspect of the “pleasure cultures of war” that permeated childhood in the years leading up to the First World War and beyond. From its inception, the publication offered a vast array of material that appealed to young readers. As a moral arbiter, the *BOP* promoted ideals such as duty and manliness, although outright martial content comprised only a minute amount of the paper's content before 1914. Even so, the *BOP* celebrated underage combatants' noble exploits, which put those desired ideals of duty and manliness into action for a greater good.

While the *Boy's Own Paper* stood as a popular and widely read periodical, it would be unwise to assume that all boys of Britain and its Empire internalized the message to the extent of running off and enlisting into the armed forces. Whether intentional or not, periodicals like the *BOP* contributed to the “‘mobilization’ of [boys'] imaginations,” and they also, according to Enever, “demonstrate the ways in which private identities can be, and are, contested and constructed in public forums.”²²⁴ Stiff competition and a desire to remain relevant within the publishing industry were not the sole reasons for the RTS to alter its approach at the onset of the First World War. The *BOP* was at home supporting a religious conflict, but the prolongation of the war forced the *BOP* to lessen its war-related content. As with any profit-driven enterprise, the *BOP* navigated between what readers wanted to see and what the editors thought best to relay to their readers. Nonetheless, the paper's constant recourse to examples of boyish duty and

²²⁴ Rosie Kennedy, “Children,” in *The British Home Front and the First World War*, ed. Hew Strachan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 572-73 & Alison Enever, “Boys Should be Boys and Girls Should be Wives: The Construction of a Gendered Identity in the *Boy's Own Paper* and *Girl's Own Paper*,” *Emergence: Humanities Graduate School Research Journal* 4 (Autumn 2012): 34.

manliness before 1914, and more forthright expressions of pro-military narratives after the war started, underscores the prevalence of such themes in popular reading material intended for Britain's youths.

5 CONCLUSION

Does my right hon. Friend seriously tell the House [of Commons] that the Government and the War Office do not know that boys under the prescribed age have been enlisted from the time of the outbreak of the War onwards? Does not the War Office know that? Does it know anything?

-Sir Arthur Markham, MP (1916)²²⁵

There is no definitive answer as to what influenced the formation of Britain's volunteer army in 1914 because there is no possible way to "search the minds of the 2.5 million men" who enlisted with such "collective exaltation."²²⁶ This is especially true for those juvenile combatants who felt the need to lie about their ages and head to the front, for the reasons varied as much as the enlisted individuals. The surge of excitement and the possibility of a grand adventure far away from rural life, a deep-rooted sense of duty and patriotism, a break from humdrum routine, and the fear of being perceived as a coward all seem plausible motivations. Individuals like George Coppard, who enlisted at age sixteen, did not fully understand the forces that drew him to enlist; he knew about Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination, and he recalled how "news placards screamed out at every street corner, and military bands blared out their martial music" in his hometown. The cacophony was too much for Coppard to resist, and "as if drawn by a magnet," he knew he had to enlist.²²⁷ Therefore, this thesis does not seek to explain every impetus for enlistment. Instead, it seeks to reconstruct, at least in part, the cultural and social world tinged with militarization in which young boys lived in the decades before the First World War.

²²⁵ UK Parliamentary Debates, 74 Parl. Deb. (5th ser.) (1915) col. 1176.

²²⁶ W. J. Reader, *At Duty's Call: A Study in Obsolete Patriotism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 2.

²²⁷ George Coppard, *With a Machine Gun to Cambrai: The Tale of a Young Tommy in Kitchener's Army 1914-1918* (London: H.M.S.O., 1969), 1.

In 1916, two changes affected the way in which the British government and army dealt with underage enlistment, conscription and age verification that would prevent adolescents from reaching the front again, thus affirming that “[t]he First World War was a turning point in the way society viewed adolescent military engagement.”²²⁸ The war continued to rage with no apparent signs of allaying, and the fuel of patriotic fervor exhausted itself; volunteers did not so willingly enlist as they had sixteen months previously. In January 1916 the British government passed the Military Service Act, which instituted a military draft for the first time in the UK. The act went into effect on March 2, 1916. It conscripted all single men between the ages of eighteen and forty-one. The act would also serve a dual but indirect purpose; it would now deal with the issue of underage enlistment, which, up to that point, was an issue the British government neglected to address.

The British War Office had vehemently denied time and again that underage enlistees were an issue. Mr. Harold Tennant, who served as a Labour MP and as the Under Secretary of State for War under Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, declared before the House of Commons in October 1915 that “in this country no boys under the prescribed age, as laid down by Regulations, have been enlisted with the knowledge of the War Office, and I regret the imputation of deliberate connivance, which is wholly unfounded. Boys under that age are not wanted, either with or without the consent of their parents.” Tennant’s statement was in direct response to Markham’s supposed “imputation” that questioned if the Cabinet was “aware that many boys under the prescribed age laid down by the Regulations have been enlisted by the War Office, who have deliberately connived at this breach of their own Regulations; whether the

²²⁸ Manon Pignot, “‘We Don’t Enlist Children. Go Home and Do Your Homework’: Juvenile Combatants in the First World War, from Transgression to Filiation.” *Cultural and Social History* 17, no. 5 (2020): 632.

Cabinet have sanctioned the action of the War Office.”²²⁹ Soon, though, the government conceded there was indeed a problem. In June of the following year, Tennant acknowledged the presence of underage soldiers and outlined the government’s plan. The *London Times* reported that underage soldiers “serving with the Expeditionary Force will, if under 18 years of age, be sent home.” Those over eighteen but under nineteen would “be posted to a training or other unit behind the firing line.” Tennant also stated military authorities would no longer take potential enlistees’ word about their age; the military would now depend solely on birth certificates.²³⁰

While it has been on the sidelines of the historiography, the idea of the juvenile combatant still resides in the cultural memory of the present. One only needs to stroll through the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, England, and gaze upon the Shot at Dawn Memorial. The site honors and acknowledges the 307 “cowards” and “deserters” executed via firing squad during the war. At the center of this memorial is a statue that represents Private Herbert Burden, aged 17, who fell victim to the firing squad. Pvt. Burden is both blindfolded and handcuffed while an aiming disk hangs around his neck. Behind him the 306 simple wooden stakes stand at attention, and each lists a British or Commonwealth soldier’s name, age, regiment, rank, and date of death.²³¹ In addition to serving as memorials “almost all commemorative monuments also express a sense of indebtedness.”²³² In the case of the Shot at Dawn Memorial, I would push that argument to include both an acknowledgment and a request for forgiveness. One of the wooden stakes includes the name of A. Bevistein, mentioned in the introduction of this

²²⁹ UK Parliamentary Debates, 74 Parl. Deb. (5th ser.) (1915) col. 1176.

²³⁰ “Recruits Under Military Age,” *London Times*, June 27, 1916.

²³¹ Martin Purdy, “The Shot at Dawn Memorial,” The Western Front Association, accessed 18 February 2023, <https://www.westernfrontassociation.com/world-war-i-articles/the-shot-at-dawn-memorial/>.

²³² Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 95.

thesis. Bevestein, along with the other 306 executed soldiers, received a pardon from the British government. Nevertheless, the damage was done.

As stated in the introduction, my purpose is not to cast judgment on one group or another, but rather to explore the pervading ideals that fostered a sense of duty to one's country. The decline of popular support and the implementation of conscription showcase the breakdown of the cultures of militarization. The realities of war tore off the veil of romance. It would be unwise to assume that only one force contributed to the militarization of British youth. As this thesis illustrates, in Britain an undercurrent of indirect militarization was interwoven into various avenues that formed "the pleasure cultures of war." Britain entered the twentieth century in possible decline. The South African War brought societal regeneration to the forefront as perceived decadence worked to undermine Britain's hegemonic standing. The Duty and Discipline Movement, Empire Day, and the Boy Scouts all strove to tighten social control and cultivate a deeper imperial understanding. Children received the bulk of this training. Those same children, particularly boys, also interacted with those same ideals in classrooms, on the playing fields, and through the medium of toys and literature. Publications like the *Boy's Own Paper* infantilized the actual realities of courage, manliness, and duty.

Even so, to say any of these, individually or collectively, encouraged youths to enlist provides a blanket cause (or causes) that generalizes the youth experience and undermines other potential factors at play. John Mitcham asserts that it is "problematic" to declare that only a few cultural influences "motivated an entire generation of young men to volunteer," fight, and, more likely than not, give their lives for king and country.²³³ Focusing solely on the patriotic is limiting in its scope, for it does not consider those with motivations outside the bounds of

²³³ John C. Mitcham, *Race and Imperial Defence in the British World, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 189.

religion and politics. For example, in his memoir, George Parker, who enlisted at age fifteen, wrote, “I do not think I can say that it was all patriotism, but my mates had gone and I had the feeling that I was regarded as a kid, too young to do what others were doing.”²³⁴ Parker also stated he felt ashamed that he was too young to join up. Other reasons could include searching for a great adventure or even hoping to find something greater that one could not find amongst the idyllic hedgerows of the countryside or the smoggy streets of industrialized London. Underneath these diverse motivations lay a nigh inescapable culture of indoctrination into values of manliness, duty, imperial legitimacy, and heroism.

The catalysts for enlistment are nuanced, and it is far likely that it was a compilation of various factors that depended heavily on each underage combatant and his respective reason(s) for enlisting. Others fully understood what potentially lay ahead, especially Thomas Hope. He gladly embraced the opportunity and willingly left his life behind:

Ahead is the unknown – danger, hardship, wounds, perhaps death, but these possibilities leave me unmoved. I can only think of heroics, of battles won, of returning heroes, glorious deeds already enacted perhaps on this very ground, the newspaper war I have read so much about. What if I had missed this, if I had been born too late? But why worry? I am here, proud and glad to be here, and that is all that really matters. This is my great adventure.²³⁵

Were juvenile combatants victims or willing participants, or were they, like their own fluctuating place in human development between childhood and adulthood, an oscillating mixture of the two? Whatever their reasons for enlisting, the fact remains—these young men believed in something enough to face the unknown.

²³⁴ George Parker, *The Tale of a Boy Soldier: A Great War Memoir* (Brighton: QueenSparks, 2008), 21.

²³⁵ Thomas Hope, quoted in Richard Van Emden, *Boy Soldiers of the Great War* (Yorkshire: Pen & Sword, 2021), 104.

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