

# Buckinghamshire in World War One: The Home Front

Much attention has been focused on the soldiers who went to war, but little has been written about those who were left behind, and even less about life in Buckinghamshire. World War I reached into the lives of every person in this country in a way which previous wars had not. From school children to old women, from farmers to factory workers every person was impacted in some way and expected to use their skills as part of the war effort. The aim of these pages is to show the impact the war had on people in Buckinghamshire and to give a flavour of what life was like for those left behind.

The text pages have limited illustrations; more can be found on a companion CD entitled "The Home Front in WWI" and which can be purchased from the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies for £10. There is also a select bibliography on the final page.

Both text pages and CD represent a small amount of the information that can be found about WWI at the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies. Teachers are welcome to visit the archives and local studies areas of the Centre, and we can organise school visits although we do not have the space to accommodate large numbers of pupils. Should you require more information about resources held at the Centre or advice about how to use this pack, please contact the archives on 01296 382587 or email [archives@buckscc.gov.uk](mailto:archives@buckscc.gov.uk).



Royal Artillery leave for France after being billeted at Ivinghoe, 1916. (CBS ref phIvinghoe56)

## Part 2: Volunteer Defence Forces

# Volunteer Defence Forces

## Attack from the air: Zeppelin and Gotha G-V bomber

Never before in the history of warfare had attack from the air been possible. By 1914 the German military had developed huge balloons called Zeppelins which were able to carry bombs across English Channel. The first Zeppelin attacks began in 1914 and the attack on Scarborough in December 1914 was widely reported and greeted with universal horror. In reality the Zeppelins, filled with highly inflammable gas were very vulnerable as well as slow. Zeppelins were limited in the damage they could do and raids were confined to the south and eastern coastal areas. Nonetheless people were horrified by the notion of indiscriminate air attacks and they struck fear into the hearts of the British public. In August 1914 the Bucks Herald published unconfirmed rumours of spies at large in Aylesbury Vale and of a Zeppelin base at Great Missenden. These were quickly refuted, but illustrated the panic and paranoia prevalent at the time. Preparations in Buckinghamshire were made in anticipation of attacks from Zeppelins: voluntary soldiers and fire brigades practised manoeuvres and High Wycombe Fire Brigade purchased extra hoses.

Zeppelin attacks continued until 1917 when Germany abandoned them in favour of the Gotha G-V Bomber. Less well known, these inflicted greater damage and led to higher casualties. Again limited to London and the south coast, they were responsible for a wave of refugees fleeing into Buckinghamshire which was brought to the attention of the County Council in October 1917.

The attack on Scarborough resulted in 137 fatalities and 592 casualties. It prompted renewed calls to join up as reflected in this recruitment poster (CBS ref D/X 1882) and article from the Lee Magazine, December 2014 (CBS ref AR81/2001)

The bombardment of the Yorkshire coast is much to be regretted because of the loss of so many defenceless people. On the other hand the German shells have had the result of sending up the number of recruits, in our coast towns, to an extraordinary extent. Perhaps a Zeppelin raid would have an equally salutary effect on our inland districts. There are still about 35 eligible unmarried men in the parish, and more, in proportion, at Ballinger; against this there is a married man, with six children, at Hunts Green, who has joined the colours. But away with grumbling, the Parish of Lee has done fairly well, and we have one thing to congratulate ourselves upon, namely, that our "best" have gone, and so we are assured of many proud moments when these men get their opportunity of showing their worth.

The soldiers billeted in the village are welcome guests and a smart company.

Can anyone supply me with two copies (or if this is not possible, one) of the January, 1914, Magazine. I want them for binding and cannot put my hand on a copy.

The Squire has been none too well during the last months of 1914, the Vicar, too, has been out of sorts; good health and happiness to them in the coming year and to all of you.

IVOR STEWART-LIBERTY.





## The Volunteer Defence Corps

Men too old for active service or involved in exempted occupations were keen to be involved in Home Defence even if they were unable to fight abroad. Thus in November 1914 a Volunteer Defence Corps was set up in Buckinghamshire as in other counties across the country. The Lord Lieutenant of the county, Lord Lincolnshire, was in charge and three battalions were raised for the north, south and middle part of the county (a fourth, centred on High Wycombe, was also raised). The corps was not allowed to wear the khaki uniform of the regular army and were issued instead with caps and the County Badge. They were nonetheless armed with rifles, bayonets and ammunition, largely purchased by the wealthier members of the corps. By the time the Volunteer Act was passed in 1916, the Buckinghamshire corps had 2500 members. The Volunteer Corps had funds donated to it for the purchase of rifles and bayonets. Recruits could then buy their own rifles at a cost of £2 10s (in today's money (2014) this is about £110).

Their duties dovetailed to a certain extent with those of the Special Constables. In addition to military training, they were involved in guard duties for strategic positions like railways and reservoirs. They were also called upon to guard enemy Prisoners of War undertaking civilian work on farms and roadways.

Lord Desborough (Taplow Court) and Lord Lincolnshire (Wycombe) were instrumental in the establishment of the Volunteer Defence corps nationally as well as in Buckinghamshire. Lord Lincolnshire became Lord Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire in March 1915 following the death of Lord Rothschild (Waddesdon). Historically the Lord Lieutenant was responsible for raising military forces in his county. (Front cover of Volunteer Training Corps Gazette, 1915; in T/A/7/24)



JULY 1917.

Day	Hour	Nature of Work	Place	Remarks
SUNDAY 1st	2-15 - 4-15	Physical Drill Squad Drill Musketry	1 hour 1 1	OFFICERS COMMANDING DETACHMENTS MUST SEE THAT BOMB CASETTES AND FABRICATING STITCHES ARE ALWAYS AVAILABLE WHEN REQUIRED BY PROGRAMME.
THURSDAY 5th	8-30 - 9-30	Squad Drill Musketry	1 hour 1	
SUNDAY 8th	2-15 - 4-15	Bayonet Fighting Musketry Extended Order	1 hour 1 1	
THURSDAY 12th	8-30 - 9-30	Musketry Squad Drill	1 hour 1	
SUNDAY 15th	2-15 - 4-15	Bombing Squad Drill Musketry	1 hour 1 1	
THURSDAY 19th	8-30 - 9-30	Extended Order Musketry	1 hour 1	
SUNDAY 22nd	2-15 - 4-15	Bayonet Fighting Extended Order Musketry Bombing	1 hour 1 1 1	
THURSDAY 26th	8-30 - 9-30	Musketry Lecture: The Attack	1 hour 1	
SUNDAY 29th	2-15 - 4-15	Physical Drill Squad Drill Musketry	1 hour 1 1	

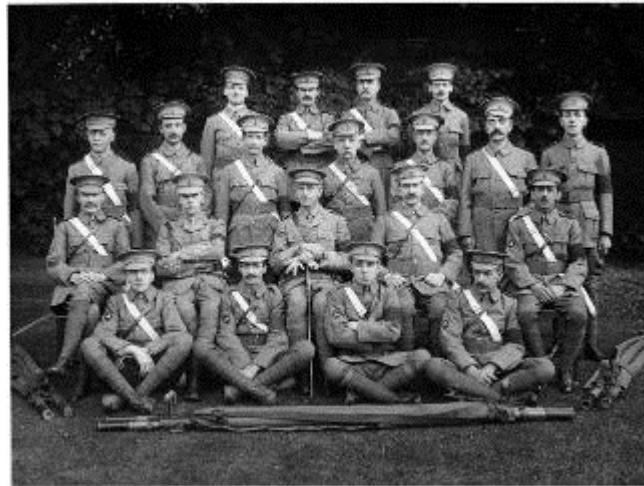
Members of the Volunteer Defence Corps were expected to be committed to a rigorous amount of training in their spare time, as shown here in the programme of training for July 1917. (CBS ref T/A/7/20)

## Special Constables

Specials were volunteers who acted as an auxiliary to the regular police force. They were sworn in by the local magistrate and their duties were very similar to those of the Volunteer Defence corps; indeed some joined both forces. Like the Volunteer Defence force they were not issued with a proper uniform but had an armband and a badge to distinguish them. In the early days of the war there was no shortage of volunteers – 4120 signed up in the first month.

## Other Volunteer forces

Other voluntary forces included the fire brigade, the Rifle Volunteer corps, the Voluntary Aid Detachments (nurses) and even scouts and guides; all were called upon to play their part in home defence.



The Volunteer Defence Corps had an Ambulance section which wore a distinctive "A" badge. Pictured here is a section from the Buckinghamshire regiment, May 1916. (HWL ref RHW : 08698)

## Voluntary Aid Detachment: Nurses and Hospitals

One of the concerns raised at the end of the Boer War was that in the event of another war the medical and nursing services would prove insufficient. Thus in 1907 Voluntary Aid Detachments were set up to fill gaps in the Territorial medical services. Men and women could join as volunteers and local detachments met regularly to learn bandaging, simple dressings and the basics of invalid cooking and hygiene. Members could work towards gaining certificates in Home Nursing and First Aid. On the eve of the war there were 26 Voluntary Aid detachments in Buckinghamshire. When war broke out in September 1914 these units were mobilised and temporary hospitals were set up in church halls, public buildings and private houses across the land. In addition to the provision made by the Royal Bucks Hospital in Aylesbury, several VAD hospitals were set up across the county on a temporary basis. A VAD hospital at Rivets factory on the Oxford Road in Aylesbury was known as "Little Rivets" and had 24 beds with 578 patients; Wycombe High School in High Wycombe, Aylesbury Grammar School and Queens Park school in Aylesbury were all set up as VAD hospitals. At first they were mainly treating soldiers from the camps who had been called up and were waiting to be posted abroad. Soon they were receiving increasing numbers of wounded soldiers from the Front. Some hospitals were under the direction of the Territorial Army –from 1917 these were at Newport Pagnell, High Wycombe, Slough and Winslow- but there were also others which were military or privately run hospitals. Local people gave generously to the VAD hospitals in terms of food, bedding, clothing and anything else that could be used. With trained nurses at a premium much of the day to day work of scrubbing, cleaning, washing patients, and food preparation was done by these local VADs.



VAD nurses at Wycombe hospital  
(CBS ref PHX183/4)





The High School at High Wycombe was one of the places used as a hospital during WWI. Here the science lab is shown being used as a pantry. (CBS ref PHX 183/3)

### **The Duchess of Connaught Canadian Red Cross Hospital at Cliveden.**

At the outbreak of war the Astor family offered their covered tennis court for the basis of a hospital ward and this was taken up by the Canadian government. Further building work on the polo ground and the use of Taplow Lodge to house medical staff resulted in the creation of a military hospital with 600 beds. Lady Astor was personally involved in the work of the hospital and recruited local ladies for voluntary work there. A staggering twenty four thousand servicemen were treated there during the First World War.



In August 1917 George V and Queen Mary visited the Canadian Red Cross Hospital . These photographs show the patients in their ward and also enjoying the summer weather.

(CBS ref D/X748/7)

