



**How did Britain let 250,000 underage soldiers fight in WW1?**

**Boys and young men answer the call**

**Narrated by Greg James, Radio 1 presenter**

**Video transcript**

When the call for new recruits to join the war effort came in 1914, men responded in their thousands, but why did so many young boys want to sign up as well?

This was a generation unfamiliar with the effects of war. There weren't the graphic images of it that we're used to today.

Boys were brought up on stories of war heroes and great battles. .

Children read adventure books and magazines and joined the Scouts or Boys' Brigade.

For many of them war seemed like one big adventure.

So when Kitchener launched his recruitment campaign in 1914, many young boys answered the call. Some even giving false names so their parents wouldn't find out.

From the likes of nine-year-old Alfie Knight, commitment to the national cause is touching. He sent this directly to Lord Kitchener.

'I can ride jolly quick on my bicycle and would go as a dispatch rider.' He wrote, 'I am a good shot with a revolver and would kill a good few of the Germans.'

But for those closer to 18, there was added pressure all around - they would even be stopped in the street and asked by recruiting sergeants why they weren't in the army. The spectre of cowardice was enough to drive many young boys to join up. Being given a dreaded white feather was a potent pressure.

For some, the army was a refuge from ordinary life. The vast majority of children left school at 14 and often went straight into work.

Don Price was 16 when he joined up and sums up what many of these underage boys thought when they enlisted:

'We just believed we'd have a damn good time for about six months.' He said after the war.

'Work was so tedious and people wanted a bit of fun and this was the way to get it. This would be a holiday.'

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