

Journal #3



**French soldiers marching to the front in August 1914.
Many would be dead by Christmas.**

Do you think the idea of going to war excites young people today in the same way it did many in the early 1900s? Why or why not?

Letter

George Coppard of Great Britain was sixteen when he joined the Royal West Surrey Regiment on 27 August 1914.

Although I seldom saw a newspaper, I knew about the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand at Sarajevo. News placards screamed out at every street corner, and military bands blared out their martial music in the main streets of Croydon. This was too much for me to resist, and as if drawn by a magnet, I knew I had to enlist straight away. I presented myself to the recruiting sergeant at Mitcham Road Barracks, Croydon. There was a steady stream of men, mostly working types, queuing to enlist. The sergeant asked me my age, and when told, replied, "Clear off son. Come back tomorrow and see if you're nineteen, eh?" So I turned up again the next day and gave my age as nineteen. I attested in a batch of a dozen others and, holding up my right hand, swore to fight for King and Country. The sergeant winked as he gave me the King's shilling, plus one shilling and ninepence ration money for that day.

1. What did the recruiting sergeant tell George Coppard when he gave his true age?
2. What did George do the next day? Was it actually his birthday? Explain.
3. Should boys under the age of eighteen be allowed to serve in the military? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

King's shilling: To "take the King's shilling" was to enlist in the army or navy, a phrase dating back to the early 19th century; specifically in the context of kissing the image of the sovereign in general, a shilling (a British coin) being a convenient object carrying the likeness. Later, the recruit would actually receive the coin.

Before your number was dry: Expression used by more experienced soldiers to *rookies* as a form of put-down: "I was killing Germans before your number was dry" - i.e. before the ink on the junior soldier's enlistment papers was dry. Alternative usage: *Before you was breeched, before you nipped, and I was cutting barbed wire while you was cutting your milk teeth.*