1 Introduction

The First World War drew ordinary British men into an army that by 1918 numbered over 5 million soldiers.[1] Some had volunteered to serve; others had been less willing and were conscripted later in the war. Most had little contact with the military in pre-war days, and before 1914 few would have contemplated participating in war. These men were first and foremost civilians, and this book examines their experience from their initial decision to enlist, through trench warfare on the Western Front, to death, discharge or demobilization at the end of the war. It is concerned with the soldier's relationship both with the army and with home, and examines the extent to which these citizen soldiers maintained their civilian values, attitudes, skills and traditions and applied them to the task of soldiering in the period of the First World War.

The popular image of the British soldier in the First World War is that of a passive victim of the war in general and the military system in particular. On joining the army a soldier supposedly ceased to act as an individual and lost his ability to shape his world. It is an image that has been reinforced by two historiographical traditions and is largely derived from a narrow view of the British soldier presented by the self-selecting literary veterans who wrote the disillusionment literature of the late 1920s and 1930s.[2]

For some historians, the characteristics of the British 'Tommy' have become synonymous with the qualities of the regular pre-war private soldier. He is credited with being able to withstand great hardship, is

[1] HMSO, *Statistics of the military effort of the British Empire during the Great War* (London, 1922), p. 364.

[2] See D. Englander and J. Osborne, 'Jack, Tommy, and Henry Dubb: the armed forces and the working class', *Historical Journal*, 21, 3 (1978), 593–621, and D. Englander, 'Soldiering and identity: reflections on the Great War', *War in History*, 1, 3 (1994), 300–18. Authors of the disillusionment literature included Edmund Blunden, Robert Graves, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. See E. Blunden, *Undertones of war* (London, 1928); R. Graves, *Goodbye to all that* (4th edn, London, 1966); W. Owen, *Poems* (London, 1920); S. Sassoon, *Memoirs of an infantry officer* (London, 1930).

blessed with infinite courage and is believed to have been loyal, submissive and obedient to the end of the conflict.[3] According to this interpretation, ordinary civilians were transformed by army discipline and organization into soldiers who had assimilated the values and ideals of the regular army.[4]

Other historians view the British soldier against a backdrop of social and cultural change. The war is seen as a cataclysmic experience that defied explanation and coloured all that came afterwards. It helped to destroy traditional social and cultural norms and aided the development of new, modernist modes of thinking, marking a watershed in the development of European culture and society.[5]

To these historians, who see the war as destroying traditional beliefs and certainties, the British soldier stands out as a disillusioned figure, caught in the grip of an industrial war. Eric Leed's influential work *No Man's Land* exemplified this interpretation. He argued that pre-war ideals of heroism and self-sacrifice could not sustain the soldier in the face of machine-based slaughter, and he was forced to reject civilian society and retreat into his own unique trench culture based on passivity, fatalism, superstition and, in extreme cases, neurosis.[6] Creating a new defensive identity was seen as the only way for the soldier to survive the war experience.

In recent years the image of the powerless, victimized soldier of the Great War has been undergoing a transformation. It is undeniable that military participation left an imprint on those who experienced it, but there has been a lively debate over the depth of that imprint and its consequences both for the army and for wider society. Many historians have begun to identify more continuities than discontinuities between pre-war civilian society and the war years.[7] It has been argued that soldiers did not internalize regular army values, nor did they create new personalities and develop new values to cope with the experience of

[3] See W. Churchill, *The world crisis* (London, 1965 edn), 750; D. Winter, *Death's men: soldiers of the Great War* (London, 1978); A. J. P. Taylor, *An illustrated history of the First World War* (Harmondsworth, 1965).
[4] Winter, *Death's men*, 227–9.
[5] The greatest exponent of this view was P. Fussell, *The Great War and modern memory* (London, 1975). See also M. Eksteins, *Rites of spring: the Great War and the birth of the modern age* (NewYork, 1989); S. Hynes, *A war imagined: the First World War and English culture* (New York, 1991).
[6] E. Leed, *No Man's Land: combat and identity in World War One* (Cambridge, 1979).
[7] A comprehensive treatment of this theme can be found in J. Winter, *Sites of memory, sites of mourning: the Great War in European cultural history* (Cambridge, 1995). For a wider discussion of historiographical trends, see J. M. Winter, 'Catastrophe and culture: recent trends in the historiography of the First World War', *Journal of Modern History*, 54 (1992), 525–32.

trench warfare.[8] Soldiers and civilians turned to the traditional and familiar to survive four years of war. In examining the relationship between the soldier and the society from which he was drawn, this study makes a contribution to the debate.

The book centres around the experience of the 1/6th and 1/10th Battalions of the King's Liverpool Regiment, known by the soldiers as the Liverpool Rifles and the Liverpool Scottish.[9] It is a local study that re-examines some of the familiar historiographical 'truths' about the British experience of the Great War that have previously been analysed at the national level. As Britain was a decentralized nation in 1914 and the horizons of her citizens were profoundly local, it is also important to view war experience from a local perspective. Indeed, questions relating to the identity of the citizen soldier in wartime, his relationship with home and his impact on the command relationship can only be adequately examined at the microlevel.

By examining the history of the soldier and his unit it becomes possible to see what the trajectory of war service must have been like for those who fought. We can identify who the men were, where they came from, where they served and where they went after the war. Moreover, because of the longitudinal nature of the study, we are able to assess how far a unit and its soldiers changed as the war progressed. It is a holistic approach to history that examines not only the soldier himself, but his whole world, both in the trenches and back at home. By studying the soldier in his true context, we can begin to understand his motivations, his attitudes and his reactions to war.

[8] See especially, J. Bourne, 'The British working man in arms', in H. Cecil and P. Liddle (eds.), *Facing Armageddon: the First World War experienced* (London, 1996), 336–52, which considers the impact of working-class society on war; J. G. Fuller, *Troop morale and popular culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914–1918* (Oxford, 1990), which examines the transfer of civilian-based popular culture from home to the rear areas of France; G. D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the trenches: officer–man relations, morale and discipline in the British Army in the era of the First World War* (London, 2000), which highlights the fact that the ordinary soldiers were not 'mere passive victims of the war'; J. Bourke, *Dismembering the male: men's bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London, 1996), p. 21, which suggests that 'the gulf between civilians and servicemen was not as wide as some have portrayed' and stresses the importance of personal correspondence; and Englander, 'Soldiering and identity: reflections on the Great War', which constitutes a brief overview of the importance of continuity in the 'make-up and mentality' of British soldiers. For a French perspective see S. Audoin-Rouzeau, *Men at war: national sentiment and trench journalism in France during the First World War* (Oxford, 1992) and L. V. Smith, *Between mutiny and obedience: the case of the French Fifth Infantry Division during World War One* (Princeton, 1994).

[9] The title of the 1/6th Battalion is also sometimes shortened to 6th Battalion. Second- and third-line battalions of both units were raised later in September and November 1914, but they had different experiences and are only mentioned when their history impinges on the first-line units.

Of course, as no one infantry unit was exactly the same as the next and the experience of a soldier depended, in large measure, on the character and mores of the unit in which he served, the conclusions of a local study are necessarily limited. However, it is precisely because of these diverse experiences that individual unit studies are needed. They can both confirm and refute existing historical conceptions of the First World War and in doing so highlight future areas for investigation.[10]

The reasons that lie behind the type of units chosen for investigation are also important to the study. In August 1914 the British army encompassed three types of infantry battalion: regular, Territorial and Service.[11] On the outbreak of war the regular units comprised the small professional army, and the Territorial Force the reserve. When the mass expansion of the army became necessary, it was undertaken in an *ad hoc* manner. Extra recruits were accepted in the Territorial Force, forming second- and third-line battalions by the end of 1915, but the majority of men were recruited in separate Service battalions locally raised through regular army recruiting channels or by Members of Parliament, prominent local figures and city corporations.[12] The units selected for this study are both first-line Territorial battalions and have been chosen for a number of reasons. First, Territorial experience in wartime has been a relatively neglected topic, saved from anonymity only by the pioneering work of Ian Beckett.[13] The political wrangling that accompanied the birth of the Force has been comprehensively covered, together with its reconstitution as the Territorial Army after the war, but there remain few investigations of wartime Territorials.[14] This

[10] This point has been highlighted by both Ian Beckett and Peter Simkins, see I. Beckett, 'Revisiting the old front line', *Stand To: The Journal of the Western Front Association*, 43 (April 1995), 10, and P. Simkins, 'Everyman at war', in B. Bond (ed.), *The First World War and British military history* (Oxford, 1991), 305.

[11] There were also Special Reserve battalions that provided drafts for the Regular units in time of war.

[12] P. Simkins, 'The four armies 1914–1918', in D. Chandler and I. Beckett (eds.), *The Oxford history of the British Army* (Oxford, 1996), 243 and 246.

[13] I. Beckett, 'The Territorial Force', in I. F. W. Beckett and K. Simpson (eds.), *A nation in arms: a social study of the British army in the First World War* (Manchester, 1985), 128–64; I. F. W. Beckett, *The amateur military tradition 1558–1945* (Manchester, 1991). Many individual units published their histories in the aftermath of the war and J. Stirling wrote a book which contained a potted history of each Territorial division, but there was no attempt to write an official history. See J. Stirling, *The Territorial divisions, 1914–1918* (London, 1922).

[14] For an analysis of the birth of the Territorial Force see E. M. Spiers, *The Army and society 1815–1914* (London, 1980), 265–81; Beckett, 'The Territorial Force', 128–30; P. Simkins, *Kitchener's army: the raising of the New Armies, 1914–16* (Manchester, 1988), 10–19; P. Dennis, *The Territorial Army, 1906–1940* (Woodbridge, 1987), *passim*. The case studies that have been completed to date include: a case study of Buckinghamshire units by Beckett in 'The Territorial Force', 148–152; a doctoral thesis on the Leeds Rifles, P. M. Morris, 'Leeds and the amateur military tradition: the Leeds

is a serious omission in the historiography of the war, as the Territorial Force played a significant role in the conflict. During the course of the war 692 Territorial battalions had been in existence compared with 557 New Army and 267 regular or reserve battalions.[15]

Second, first-line Territorial battalions had been established prior to the war and were an expression of the civilian identities of their pre-war members. For example, in 1914 the membership and traditions of the Liverpool Rifles were staunchly middle class, drawn from the business and financial world of their city. The examination of units with established civilian-inspired characteristics and traditions makes it easier to trace continuities and changes in the importance and use of civilian values and skills in wartime.

However, the most important reason for choosing to study the middle-class battalions of the Liverpool Rifles and the Liverpool Scottish is the abundance of personal sources generated by their members. The treasure trove of letters, diaries and memoirs, produced by the whole range of ranks, is a consequence of the socially exclusive nature of the pre-war battalions. Those Territorials who first went to war were highly educated men, familiar with the art of letter writing, and keen to record their experiences in diaries and written accounts. Unsurprisingly, the availability of personal testimony decreases in tandem with the decline in the middle-class character of the Battalions, which occurred as the war progressed.

This has two major implications for the book. First, most beliefs and attitudes expressed in personal sources are those of the provincial middle classes, despite the fact that approximately 40 per cent of the Liverpool Rifles, for example, belonged to the skilled working class in 1918. Secondly, the bulk of the personal sources refer to the years 1914 to 1917.[16] Whilst a number of prolific diarists and letter writers of the 1914 era survived with the Battalions until 1918, only one remained with the Liverpool Scottish to the end of the war. Other, more indirect sources have had to be employed to reconstruct the life of the Battalions in the last years of the war.[17]

As the book relies so heavily on the personal testimony of the soldiers, an assessment of the value of these sources is appropriate. Some of the

Rifles and their antecedents, 1859–1918', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds (1983); and K. W. Mitchinson, *Gentlemen and officers: the impact and experience of war on a Territorial Regiment, 1914–1918* (London, 1995).

15 Beckett, 'The Territorial Force', 132.

16 For 1918 the Rifles had one memoir and one brief diary whilst the Scottish boasted one letter-writer, two memoirists and the Battalion history.

17 These included, Battalion diaries, trench magazines, newspaper reports, accounts of actions in Divisional papers and disciplinary statistics calculated from casualties books.

most useful sources are the letters, diaries, and accounts of individual experiences, written as the war unfolded. Whilst official censorship and self-censorship, together with the issue of self-justification, have to be considered, they present a remarkably candid view of the war, particularly from the ranks. The collections vary enormously in size, depending on the inclination of the writer, the length of time he spent at the front and, in the case of letters, the care of relatives in preserving communications.

Collections of letters from individuals such as Robert Scott Macfie that span the entire war are particularly useful. Macfie was a member of a prominent sugar refining family in Liverpool who had been a volunteer in the early years of the century. The Battalion turned a blind eye to his rejoining the Liverpool Scottish as a private at the age of 44, two days after the outbreak of war, and he quickly regained his former post as colour sergeant. Educated at Oundle, Cambridge and Edinburgh, with a passionate interest in gypsy studies,[18] he was something of an eccentric and certainly not a typical colour sergeant, but he was one of the many highly educated men of these Battalions who chose to remain in the ranks for the duration of the war. His acute observations of battalion life and his willingness to express both his feelings, and prevalent attitudes that were in opposition to his own, make his letters a supremely valuable source.

Diaries written at the front are another good source for gauging changing attitudes in relation to experience. The fact that many diaries, including those of Captain McKinnell, Lance Corporal Peppiette and Sergeant Campbell, were sent home after their death in action has meant that the opinions of men who did not survive the war can be included in this analysis.

A more problematic source is that of the memoirs and the piecemeal accounts written post-war. This writing was more self-conscious and prone to omissions, but as with the diaries and letters it is possible, at times, to identify personal prejudices and verify incidents from other sources. The value of the memoir also depends on the motivation of the author, when it was written and whether it was written from memory, or with the aid of diaries and letters. Only one memoir utilized in the thesis was written as late as 1970, but it was useful because the death of the author's contemporaries meant that he felt able to speak more freely about certain topics, including the incidence of self-inflicted wounds and the character of officers.[19]

[18] Macfie was secretary and editor of the *Journal of Gypsy Lore* from 1907 to 1914, and was intimately involved with the work of the society after the war. See G. L. Ackerley, 'Memoir of R. A. Scott Macfie', *Journal of Gypsy Lore*, 3rd series, 14 (1935), 20–50.

[19] H. S. Taylor, Reminiscences, LSM, Miscellaneous File T, and H. S. Taylor to Liverpool Scottish Museum, Date unknown, LSM, Miscellaneous File T.

Most memoirs, however, were written before 1940 and based on wartime diaries and letters.[20] They could be written as a personal or family record,[21] some found their way into the regimental gazettes of their old units,[22] and one was written as a basis for a wider regimental history that never came to fruition.[23] The majority of events were narrated chronologically, dated accurately, and punctuated with extracts from diaries or letters. Certainly those of Sergeant W. G. Bromley and Major S. E. Gordon read as diaries. Only one, a grossly exaggerated but highly entertaining memoir by Basil Rathbone, was published as part of his autobiography in the wake of his Sherlock Holmes success, but even this memoir has some value when corroborated by other sources. Rathbone's claim to have been pinned down in No Man's Land by both the Red Baron and Goering was undoubtedly a product of his theatrical imagination. Nevertheless, the account of his exploits on patrols and raids, for which he received the Military Cross and the admiration of many in the Battalion, was broadly accurate.[24]

Through their diaries, letters and memoirs the soldiers of the Liverpool Territorials have left a record of how ordinary men in uniform thought, felt, suffered and behaved between 1914 and 1919. To assess how far these soldiers retained and utilized their civilian outlook and attitudes through those four years of war, the book has been divided into three sections. The first examines the durability of unit characteristics and the traditions they inspired. It investigates how these traditions, derived from civilian culture, could be both supportive and detrimental to the morale of the soldier at war. The second part looks at how soldiers used rules and conventions of pre-war British society to protect themselves from the excesses of the regular army. It highlights how civilian skills and organization could be harnessed by soldiers to influence the command relationship and the discipline system within a unit and so exert some control over their lives in the army. The final part of the book examines the attitudes of the soldiers who served, to ascertain how far the ideals and aspirations of the men were influenced and changed by the war. It concludes with a short epilogue which highlights the main themes of the book whilst tracing the experience of some of the soldiers and their community as they reintegrated into civilian life and reflected on their achievements and sacrifice in war.

[20] For example, S. E. Gordon, 1917; N. F. Ellison, 1922 (first draft); W. G. Bromley, 1924; E. Herd, 1939; J. S. Handley, *c.*1950.
[21] S. E. Gordon, Memoir, Gordon Papers, IWM, 77/5/1.
[22] W. G. Bromley, Memoir, LSM, Acc. No. 544.
[23] N. F. Ellison, Diary and Memoir, Ellison Papers, IWM, DS/MISC/49.
[24] B. Rathbone, *In and out of character* (New York, 1962).

Those soldiers who returned home from the Western Front had experienced the alien environment of the trenches as well as long stretches of boredom, punctuated by the fear of battle and the obscenities of agonizing death. Yet most arrived back in their home communities with their civilian identities intact, ready to pick up their lives where they had left off. They were by no means unscathed by their ordeal, but, collectively, they had not become the obedient, passive victims of popular myth. They had remained civilians in uniform for the duration of the war. The ways in which they had been able to shape their own lives when faced by the challenges of army organization, separation from home and family and the fighting itself provide the subject of this book.

2 Pre-war Liverpool and the Territorial Force

The character of a Territorial unit before the Great War was rooted in the civilian life of its part-time soldiers. Its traditions were derived from the social status and values of its members and the locality from which it was recruited. Thus, to understand the characteristics and traditions of the Territorial battalions before and during the war, we must first examine the social and political life of the city from which they came.

On the eve of the Great War, Liverpool was a prosperous commercial centre. Since the late eighteenth century its port had grown in importance and by 1907 it handled one third of British exports and a quarter of the import trade. Liverpool's financial institutions had also gradually increased in stature, with its corn and cotton exchanges, underwriters and insurance companies playing a crucial role in the world economy in 1914.[1]

The port of Liverpool determined the nature of employment available to its inhabitants and thus influenced the social composition and character of the city. It was a city which generated wealth solely through the distribution of goods and celebrated the fact that it had little manufacturing industry of its own.[2] The self-styled second metropolis[3] saw itself as a genteel centre of commerce, unsullied by industrial factories, and asserted its superiority over manufacturing rival Manchester through the popular adage, 'Liverpool gentlemen, Manchester men'.[4]

By 1914 the city of Liverpool was the centre of a much larger conurbation, which had gradually expanded on either side of the River Mersey. It incorporated the shipbuilding and milling centre of Birkenhead, together with the residential suburbs of the Wirral Peninsula to the west, and extended up the commuter line to Southport in the north.

[1] R. Muir, *History of Liverpool* (2nd edn, London, 1970), 298.
[2] The main industries in Liverpool were corn milling, tobacco manufacture and sugar refining. Ward Lock and Co., *Liverpool, Birkenhead and New Brighton* (London, 1912), 12.
[3] See *Mitchell's newspaper press directory* (1847), 161, quoted in J. Belchem, '"An accent exceedingly rare": scouse and the inflexion of class', in J. Belchem and N. Kirk (eds.), *Languages of labour* (Aldershot, 1997), 122.
[4] Belchem, '"An accent exceedingly rare"', 102.

Beyond this urban unit, from which the city drew its immediate labour force, lay Liverpool's industrial hinterland. St Helens glass-works and the chemical industries in Widnes received their raw materials and exported their finished products through the port, but Liverpool's importance extended far beyond the hinterland. As the tentacles of its railways had spread across the north-west of England during the nineteenth century, the salt-mines of Cheshire and, most importantly, the manufacturing towns of industrial Lancashire had developed interdependent relationships with the port. Liverpool became vitally important to the region as the gateway to the world economy, assuming a shared leadership role, alongside Manchester, for the county of Lancashire, and neighbouring areas of Cheshire.[5]

The economic and social structure of Liverpool

The old, aristocratic land-owning families, including the Molyneux and the Stanleys, continued to exert an influence over Liverpool at the beginning of the century. The Stanleys, in particular, played an active part in the life of the city, acting as landlords, patrons, politicians and civic representatives, but they were no longer the dominant force. It was the merchants and ship-owners, on whose wealth and industry the city depended, who wielded the most influence over the economy and society of Liverpool in 1914.

The self-made merchant, broker and ship-owning families, established in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, helped to define the physical and psychological character of the city.[6] The distinctive commercial buildings, erected by the merchants and their companies, dominated the skyline. The corn, cotton and stock exchanges were at the heart of the city, whilst the imposing architecture of the Royal Liver Building and the Dock Board Offices framed the 'gateway to Liverpool' from the sea.[7]

The merchant class of Liverpool also epitomized the 'special toughness of the Liverpool fibre' that had developed the port and established commercial prosperity in the face of strong competition from London and Bristol.[8] They were staunch defenders of civic liberties,[9] philanthropists

[5] Liverpool became the natural capital for the West Lancashire region, hosting the headquarters of regional organizations. It was no surprise therefore, that the headquarters for the West Lancashire Territorial Association should be located in Liverpool.
[6] These families included the Lairds (shipbuilding), Macfies and Fairries (sugar), Holts (shipping), Fletchers (shipping), Harrisons (steam-ships), Booths (Booth-line shipping) and Pooles (shipping). See B. Orchard, *Liverpool's legion of honour* (Birkenhead, 1893), 22.
[7] Ward Lock and Co., *Guide to Liverpool, Birkenhead and New Brighton*, 9.
[8] The Liverpool Organisation, *Book of Liverpool civic week* (Liverpool, 1928), 8.
[9] *Ibid*., 9; Belchem, '"An accent exceedingly rare"', 103.