



## CREATING AN ARMY

When Britain declared war against Germany on August 4, 1914, it was the only major European power not to have conscription, or compulsory military service. At the first British engagement on the western front, the Battle of Mons on August 23, 1914, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) consisted of four infantry divisions and one cavalry division, a total of some 100,000 men. This number stood in stark contrast to the German fighting force, which had been mustered by the same time, consisting of 25 corps (around 700,000 men).

To counteract the large numbers of men conscripted by the German government, English officials had to enact an aggressive propaganda campaign. The vast output of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee's posters, leaflets, and newsletters, appealing to patriotism, honor, and manliness, among other virtues, resulted in a volunteer force between 2 and 3 million. On September 19, 1915, the *New York Times* reported that British "recruiting [was] proceeding at a race which outstrip[ped] the provision of equipment."

Conscription began in January 1916, when the British government introduced the first of a series of Military Service Acts specifying that men between the ages of 18 and 41 were liable to be called up for service unless married, widowed with children, or in certain professions. With each new act, the exceptions grew more limited until the fifth act, in April 1918, drafted men between 17 and 51, disregarding, at the government's discretion, all previous exemptions. Recruitment, both voluntary and conscripted, resulted in a British fighting force of 5,215,162.

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