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The Crisis in British Army Recruiting in the 1930s

Chris Hull

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Article abstract

During the 1930s, the British army suffered a shortage of recruits despite the depression. This study explores the response of the War Office to the crisis, which undermined the army's ability to undertake its peacetime and wartime roles. The study is important in helping to elucidate the army's place in society, as the War Office had to examine itself and its public image to understand the reasons for the shortage. The War Office concluded that its image as a bad employer, an inefficient military force and as the object of pacifist propaganda played a crucial role in deterring recruits. Despite intense, and partially successful, efforts to improve its public relations structure and measures to combat the bad image, the main reasons for the improvement in recruiting from the fall of 1937 were the lowering of the physical standards required of recruits and the improving conditions in the service. The army remained a source of public pride, but one that was separated from society and whose recruits tended to be attracted by economic incentives.

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CHRIS HULL

Résumé

During the 1930s, the British army suffered a shortage of recruits despite the depression. This study explores the response of the War Office to the crisis, which undermined the army's ability to undertake its peacetime and wartime roles. The study is important in helping to elucidate the army's place in society, as the War Office had to examine itself and its public image to understand the reasons for the shortage. The War Office concluded that its image as a bad employer, an inefficient military force and as the object of pacifist propaganda played a crucial role in deterring recruits. Despite intense, and partially successful, efforts to improve its public relations structure and measures to combat the bad image, the main reasons for the improvement in recruiting from the fall of 1937 were the lowering of the physical standards required of recruits and the improving conditions in the service. The army remained a source of public pride, but one that was separated from society and whose recruits tended to be attracted by economic incentives.

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Au cours des années 1930, le recrutement dans l'armée britannique a souffert d'une crise, en dépit de la dépression économique. Cette étude constitue une exploration de la réponse du War Office à une situation qui compromettait les capacités que détenait l'armée d'accomplir son rôle en temps de paix, comme en temps de guerre. Elle aide à clarifier la place de l'armée dans la société car, pour tenter d'éclairer les raisons de la pénurie, le War Office a dû s'interroger sur son image publique et sur son propre rôle. Il a conclu que tous ensemble, sa réputation de mauvais employeur, de force militaire inefficace, de même que les attaques de la propagande pacifiste, jouaient un rôle crucial dans le découragement des recrues. Des efforts intenses et soutenus pour combattre cette image et améliorer la structure des relations publiques ont rencontré un certain succès. Cependant, le facteur principal d'augmentation des effectifs, à partir de l'automne 1937, est à trouver ailleurs, du côté de la diminution des exigences physiques d'entrée dans l'armée et de l'élévation des conditions de vie des soldats. Ainsi, l'armée a pu ainsi demeurer une source de fierté publique, mais l'institution allait dorénavant s'accroître à l'écart de la société, en amenant en son sein des individus attirés surtout par des incitations économiques.

This paper forms part of my dissertation, "Aspects of British Civil-Military Relations between the Two World Wars," research for which has been supported by the University of Toronto. The paper has benefited from the comments of Professor W. Wark and Valerie Korinek on earlier drafts.

In a 1936 recruiting newsreel, Secretary of State for War A. Duff Cooper told his audience that "The Army gives you a good time and promises to give you a hopeful future, and, in addition, you have the satisfaction of knowing that you have done your duty and served your country."¹ The stress on duty and service — an attempt to combat pacifism — were Cooper's special contribution to the appeals he and his successor, Leslie Hore-Belisha, made to overcome the severe recruiting crisis the army faced from 1935 to 1938. Hore-Belisha, more of a populist than the self-consciously patrician Cooper, portrayed the army as a good employer and as a modern force in his speeches.

This dearth of recruits poses an interesting problem for two reasons. First, the crisis is intriguing in itself and, like the whole subject of recruiting, has been relatively neglected by historians.² Why was there, for instance, a lack of recruits in a time of high unemployment, particularly following the good recruiting in the 1920s in the immediate aftermath of the war? Second and more importantly, the army's efforts to comprehend the causes of the crisis forced it, and to a lesser extent the Cabinet, to analyze the military's place in society and to understand how the public perceived it and its role. Thus, as a case study in civil-military relations, the examination of the recruiting crisis gives insight into what the army thought of itself and its place in society.

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1. The same message was broadcast by four of the five major newsreels, two of which are still extant. London. Visnews, Lib. No. 5050, "More Tommies wanted: War Minister appeals for recruits. Attractions of Army life outlined by Duff Cooper," *British Paramount News*, Reel No. 532, 2 April 1936; London. Movietone Film Archives, "Army: Policy of Increase is Beginning new era for Tommy Atkins," *Movietonews*, Vol. 7, Reel No. 356a, 2 April 1936. The issue sheets for all five newsreels are available at the British University Film and Video Council.
 2. The literature on British army recruiting in the twentieth century is limited to a few articles concerned mainly with the transition from a conscript army to an all-volunteer force, some scattered references in a few major works on the interwar army, and a single unpublished dissertation. Two accounts of defence decision-making between the wars explore the question of manpower supply and organization more than the recruiting effort itself. Peter Dennis argues that poor service conditions and the lack of obvious advances after the Great War were the source of the recruiting problem, while Gerrald Spillan connects manpower policy to strategic policy, arguing that the decision to re-create the army in the 1920s as an infantry-based, imperial gendarmerie combined with social pressure against enlistment and a lack of economic incentives to leave the army with a dearth of recruits in the 1930s. See Peter Dennis, *Decision by Default: Peacetime Conscription and British Defence, 1919-39* (London, 1972) and Gerrald F. Spillan, "Manpower Problems in the British Army 1918-1939: The Balancing of Resources and Commitments" (Ph.D., Oxford, 1985)]. See also T. H. McGuffie, "Recruiting the British Army in Modern Times," *Memoirs of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester* 96 (1954-55); Lt.-Col. C. D. Waters, "Recruiting to the Regular Forces," *JRUSI*, CII (1957): 54-60; P. J. Dietz and J. F. Stone, "The British All-Volunteer Army," *Armed Forces and Society* 1/2 (February 1975): 168-72; Thomas A. Fabyanic, "Manpower Trends in the British All-Volunteer Forces," *Armed Forces and Society* 2/4 (August 1976): 562-7; Keith Jeffery, "The Post-war Army," in Ian Beckett and Keith Simpson (eds.) *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester, 1985).

The War Office's first response to the crisis produced a lengthy list of proposals presented by the Army Council to the war minister in the fall of 1936, but the government's answer was delayed until the Minister, the Treasury, and the Cabinet had all been convinced of the necessity and fiscal responsibility of each proposal in turn. Only after the least expensive, least involved, and least politically dangerous measures had been tried and had failed did the Cabinet approve more far-reaching and costly reforms to improve recruiting.

Initially, the War Office had identified both the unemployed and pacifist propaganda as the main targets of its efforts, but when the Ministry of Labour would not co-operate and Cooper's anti-pacifist propaganda failed to hit home, the War Office implemented minor improvements in service conditions. As a result, by the fall of 1936 all that Cooper had gained from Cabinet was a Ministry of Labour-controlled training scheme for ex-soldiers. Hore-Belisha, who succeeded him in May 1937, brought new life to the effort and introduced simple new reforms, but by the fall of 1937 the failure of even his measures left the Cabinet with little choice; it had to adopt major changes to improve recruiting, and did so again in the spring of 1938 when it accepted the need for a pay increase. The effort paid off as the War Office propaganda campaign, substantive reforms in service conditions, and the modernization of the army — together with an increasingly threatening international environment — eventually succeeded in persuading more men to enlist. On the decline since 1932, recruiting figures bottomed out in 1936 (when only two-thirds as many men had enlisted as in 1931) and began to improve thereafter, slowly in 1937 and then more rapidly in 1938.

Still, the recruiting crisis had been real enough, calling into question the army's ability to perform both its peacetime and wartime roles. While it was only 4,700 men below establishment in the fall of 1935, the army had been forced to recall reservists to reinforce the woefully understrength infantry battalions sent to police Palestine in 1936. Moreover, the short-fall anticipated for 1940 came close to 20,000 men, a substantial 10 per cent of regular army strength, and was projected to grow even larger.³ If these predictions were accurate, it would be hard-pressed to form an effective expeditionary force.⁴

Yet the recruiting crisis of the 1930s was not unprecedented. The British Army traditionally had a recruiting problem, with manpower requirements almost always exceeding enlistments. Traditional dislike of the army because of constitutional fears, of working-class hatred for a force of oppression, and of middle-class contempt for the supposed buffoonery of the class-based officer corps made recruiting difficult even in the decades before the First World War despite the increasing glorification of the army, its officers and, even more so, its "Tommies" in literature, the mass media, and high art

3. Public Records Office (PRO), WO 32/2984, Minute 1a, Adjutant General, "The Regular Army Recruiting Situation," Appendices I and III, 4 October 1935.

4. PRO, CAB 27/615, CP 322 (36), Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, "Recruiting for the Army," 16 October 1936; PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 76a.

from the 1880s onwards.⁵ Remarkably, recruiting remained good in the early 1920s — so good, in fact, that the pay of soldiers and junior officers was reduced considerably in 1925 — but after these cuts the intake of new recruits began to fall off, gently at first but consistently enough that by 1929 Field Marshal Sir George Milne, chief of the imperial general staff (CIGS), had become concerned. Despite proposing a number of radical, expensive, long-term solutions, the War Office simply reduced its physical standards and launched special recruiting drives like that of January 1931 featuring local county regiments.⁶ However, such efforts soon became irrelevant. A depression-induced recruiting boom and tight financial circumstances soon reduced the incentive for reform and led to the imposition of limits on the number of enlistments in August 1931.⁷ The army had weathered the first dip in inter-war recruiting in the traditional manner of lowering physical standards, launching a limited recruiting drive, and waiting for “conscription by hunger” to do its work. It had not been compelled to look outside itself. The later crisis was not so easy to solve.

The first recognition in the War Office of a serious drop in recruiting in 1934 led to a series of minor reforms well within its purview. The accumulated and projected shortages meant that manpower concerns began to affect the army's ability to carry out its peacetime tasks, while war mobilization became a problem with the abandonment of the 10-year rule.⁸ The Adjutant-General's (AG's) department initially restructured the recruiting organization and improved its publicity measures, forming AG 10 and charging it with the specific responsibility of generating recruiting propaganda.⁹ While intensifying the traditional poster campaigns and recruiting marches, AG 10 and the War Office at large tried to improve relations with the media and to show off a modern and friendly army. Regiments were encouraged to hold open houses or “At Homes,”¹⁰ while

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5. See J. W. M. Hichberger, *Images of the Army: The Military in British Art, 1815-1914* (Manchester, 1988); John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion* (Manchester, 1984), 5-7; John M. Mackenzie, “Introduction,” *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, 1986), 1-16; John M. Mackenzie (ed.), *Popular Culture and Militarism, 1850-1950* (Manchester, 1992); Alan Ramsay Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home: The Recruitment and Terms and Conditions of the British Regular, 1859-1899* (London, 1977), chs. 4, 5 and 6.
 6. PRO, WO 279/65, “Report on the Staff Conference held at the Staff College, Camberley, 14th to 17th January, 1929, Subject 5: The Recruiting Situation,” 42-4; PRO, WO 32/2827, Minute 1, CIGS to DSD, 10 September 1930; “Editorial,” *Army Quarterly* 22/1 (April 1931): 12; “Parliamentary Notes,” *Army Quarterly* 22/1 (April 1931): 223; A. P. Hatton, “Recruiting Problem of the Future,” *Army Quarterly* 22/1 (April 1931): 157; Major R. L. Sherbrooke, “Recruiting for the Regular Army,” *Army Quarterly* 22/2 (July 1931): 324.
 7. “Parliamentary Notes,” *Army Quarterly* 23/2 (January 1932): 448; “Service Notes,” *Army, Navy and Air Force Gazette* 3767 (31 March 1932): 255.
 8. Spillan, 153.
 9. PRO, WO 237/25, No. 1306, “Committee on Press and Publicity arrangements in the War Office,” January 1935; PRO, WO 33/1369, “Report of the Committee on Press and Publicity Arrangements in the War Office,” January 1935.
 10. “On Recruiting,” *The Hampshire Regimental Journal* (April 1934): 99-100; “Hampshire

newspaper proprietors and reporters were invited to the 1935 Royal Review at Aldershot where, by playing up the participation of fifty tanks and 254 tractors, the War Office emphasised that the army was in a state of transition. (The reporters received a free lunch.¹¹) While the press noticed the mix of traditional and modern elements in its text, the photos highlighted the mechanized element in the Review.¹² The newsreels received similar treatment after the civilian staff, ungraciously and under pressure from the CIGS and Finance Member, gave up any payment for the filming of the Review. The army needed the publicity more than the newsreels needed the story.¹³

By late 1935, however, stronger measures requiring help from outside the War Office were needed. Acting on the belief that the unemployed simply did not know the advantages of life in the army, General Sir Harry Knox, the conservative AG from 1935 until late 1937, pressured the Ministry of Labour to take the initiative by allowing recruiters to make their pitch at its training centres, for example, and by asking Ministry personnel to play up the possibility of enlisting in the army to the unemployed.¹⁴ Arguing that few men of military age remained unemployed for long, the Ministry of Labour would not go along.¹⁵ And, in fact, the limited evidence on the employment background of recruits in the 1930s indicates that a decreasing percentage came to the army from the unemployed.¹⁶ Why this was so is unclear, but may in part be explained by the general increase in employment levels as the decade wore on and by the fact that the long-term unemployed were unlikely to be in any shape to be accepted. In addition, there is evidence that only a rapid increase in the unemployment rate leads to improved recruitment — and that the long-term unemployed were unlikely to enlist.¹⁷ Nonetheless, a preoccupation with the “feckless” unemployed continued to influence the War Office’s recruiting efforts, reflecting a class bias on the part of the officers directing army policy.

Depot “At Home,”” *The Hampshire Regimental Journal* (August 1934): 247-8.

11. Quotation from Minute 38a. PRO, WO 32/3014, Minutes 23a, 25, 38a and 46a.
12. Series of press clippings, King’s College, London, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (LHCMA), Gawthorne-Hardy 23; LHCMA, Gawthorne-Hardy 24a, “A Review of the Troops of Aldershot Command by HM The King,” 13 July 1935.
13. PRO, WO 32/3020, “His Majesty’s Jubilee Review at Aldershot: Arrangements for Press Photographers.”
14. PRO, WO 32/2985, “Recruiting in Distressed Areas.”
15. PRO, WO 237/26, No. 1329, “Interdepartmental Committee on Co-operation with the Ministry of Labour to assist recruiting,” July 1936; PRO, CAB 27/615, CP 327(36), Minister of Labour, “Recruiting for the Army and the Ministry of Labour.”
16. While in February 1929 71 per cent of London recruits were unemployed at the time of enlistment, in 1938 almost 75 per cent of recruits joined from recent employment. “Parliamentary Notes,” *Army Quarterly* 18/1 (April 1929): 190; PRO, WO 79/72, “Letters from CIGS to the Field Marshals on the State of the Army,” October 1936; Great Britain. Parliament, House of Commons, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5:338 (1938), col. 2892.
17. Peter J. Dietz and J. F. Stone, “The British All-Volunteer Army,” *Armed Forces and Society* 1/2 (February 1975): 169-71.

Following staff discussions over the summer and early autumn, Knox presented a long memorandum to the Army Council in October 1935. He noted that projected shortages of infantrymen would critically affect the ability of the army to train and mobilize effectively for war by 1940, with drafting for overseas garrisons being impossible. The projected shortages were the key to the crisis. Knox's October 1935 memorandum assumed an annual recruiting rate over the next five years of 26,500, the average of the past two years plus a thousand.¹⁸ A year later, the next set of projections assumed an annual intake of 22,500 recruits, because enlistments in 1936 had fallen to under 22,000.¹⁹ Over five years, the difference made for a sobering deficit of 20,000. More than anything else, the War Office's gloomy projections fed the atmosphere of crisis in the mid-1930s and provided a justification — a real one — for the AG's memorandum.

The memorandum argued that "To ensure good recruiting the army must be popular both with its own members and with the public. The best recruiter is the contented soldier; the worst is a discontented one. The soldier is quick to compare the conditions under which he serves with those which he believes obtainable in civil life. Today the comparison often favours civil life." Knox recognized that it was the Army Council's responsibility to recruit soldiers, but to do so it had to be given the means, monetary and moral, by the government. He divided the deterrents to better recruiting into three categories: those within the control of the Army Council; those requiring increased funding; and those beyond the military's control. In the first category, irritating discipline and training were already being addressed by the Army Council. The second category, on which Army Council would concentrate over the next three years, included such complaints as the lack of post-service prospects, the unpopularity of lengthy overseas service (with its crowded troopships) followed by immediate discharge upon return home, the shortage of infantry battalions to adequately garrison the empire, poor barracks, the practice of stoppages and allowances, and the lack of money for recruiting. In the third category, Knox included the influence of pacifism, public apathy due to the ill-informed opinion that the army was obsolete, the dole, the poor physical state of youth, and the lack of public support for the army from responsible individuals in public life.

To overcome these deterrents, the memorandum proposed acting on the items under the War Office's control, seeking funds to make substantive improvements in the conditions of service and to advertise the changes, and asking prominent individuals to speak in favour of the army. Knox thought gaining public support crucial as, the memorandum concluded, "It is evident that any action which we take to improve recruiting will be largely abortive unless we can alter the whole attitude of the nation

18. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 1a, Knox, "The Regular Army Recruiting Situation," 4 October 1935.

19. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 71a, "Regular Army: Statement Showing the Past, Present and Approximate Future Position," 11 September 1936.

towards the Army.”²⁰ The other members of the Army Council agreed with the memorandum, adding only minor items to the list.

The wide-ranging list of deterrents was held together by the impression that the army suffered from a poor image due in part to bad service conditions inside the army and in part to a public opinion unduly influenced by pacifists and military critics. The statement that the best recruiter was a contented soldier was a widely and honestly held belief in army circles. This belief motivated the AG’s and the QMG’s proposals for improving the conditions of service. Obsolete barracks, poor food, petty discipline, and pay worse than the dole did not please serving soldiers and did not attract recruits.²¹

The proposed measures, as expanded upon in discussions with the Treasury over the next three years, dealt with most of the immediate problems in service conditions identified in internal War Office discussions and in articles in the military and civilian press. (Even pay was mentioned, although for the moment the possibility of an increase had to be downplayed.) Indeed, while they did not neglect the very important role of spectacle and of personal contact with a serving friend or relative, it seems clear that officers thought economic incentives were crucial in a recruit’s decision to enlist.²² “It would appear,” the Commandant of the London Recruiting Area observed, “that the problem is to render the Army attractive enough to be able to compete not only with the ‘Dole’ but also with civil employ (unskilled perhaps in the main) and to offer, at the outset, a tangible attraction.”²³ Undoubtedly, many men were attracted to the army by the prospect of better pay or a job, but not all officers agreed that soldiers should be looked upon as labourers.²⁴ Some viewed soldiering as a special service to the nation, which required men motivated by higher instincts than the King’s gold.²⁵ The propaganda

20. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 1a, Knox, “The Regular Army Recruiting Situation,” 4 October 1935.

21. The men of the Canal Brigade compiled a report later and substantiated most of the concerns. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 61a, Minute 10b; LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers, 1/575/44a, “Report of a Number of soldiers called to assist the Brigade Commander in arriving at conclusions regarding recruiting for the Army,” nd.

22. Recruiting officers were equally well aware of the importance of personal contact in recruiting and the War Office consistently offered a bonus to each recruit a serving soldier brought in. PRO, WO 293/14, “Recruiting on Furlough,” *Army Council Instruction (ACI)* 638 (December 1923); PRO, WO 293/22, “Headquarters Recruiting,” *ACI* 95 (April 1936); “Recruiting” *Journal of the Royal Army Service Corps* 60/1 (January 1936): 5; “Editorial Notes,” *Journal of the Royal Army Service Corps* 61/1 (January 1937): 5; “Why did you join the Army?” *The Hampshire Regimental Journal* (February 1934): 43; Lt.-Col. J. C. M. Baynes, *The Soldier in Modern Society* (London, 1972), 70.

23. PRO, WO 32/4248, Minute 1c, Colonel S. Lowe to Inspector of Recruiting, 4 June 1937.

24. London. Imperial War Museum, 91/21/1, A. C. Boreham, “The Saga of a Suffolk Soldier,” 4, 9; LHCMA, Stockwell Papers, 1/3, H. C. Stockwell, “A Welsh Fusilier,” 25-6; Private XYZ (Frank Griffin), “I Joined the Army,” *Fact: A Monograph a Month* 2 (May 1937): 9.

25. See, for example: LHCMA, Kirke Papers, 11/3, “Address to Wellington College OTC,” [1935]; LHCMA, Liddell-Hart Papers, 1/132/24, Burnett-Stuart to Liddell Hart, 7 November 1936; LHCMA, Liddell-Hart Papers, 1/262/11, Major Ellenberger to LH, 18 April 1939.

speeches of army officers and Cooper stressed the honour and value of service. Nonetheless, the principal reasoning behind the list of proposed reforms was that with the establishment of the "dole" the army had to make itself more attractive, because it had to compete in the labour market for men rather than just await the arrival of conscripts of necessity.

Along with the need for substantive reforms in army conditions of service, the discussion surrounding Knox's memorandum also highlighted the importance of developing a propaganda campaign to change the service's public image: in part by advertising recent reforms, and in part by countering both the pacifist spirit and those critics who maintained that the army remained a hide-bound organization only too ready to repeat the horrors of the Somme. Knox believed that while the army could accomplish the former, the civilian leadership must take responsibility for the latter although the CIGS, Montgomery-Massingberd, argued that the army shared responsibility in that regard. This was fortunate because, as things turned out, the army was to get little public support in its recruiting efforts over the next few years.

While the memorandum was being drafted, Cooper and the Army Council pursued other means to improve the army's image. Already, the War Office had begun to cooperate in the production of a commercial film, *OHMS*, with Gaumont-British, and was working on a number of items for the newsreels. These publicity measures cost the War Office relatively little and apparently did not require Cabinet sanction, even though they did get the War Office message out to a wide audience.

Although *OHMS* was not released until early 1937, the film provides a good example of the messages the War Office was using in its early propaganda to improve its image as an employer, to show off its new equipment, and to combat pacifism. Intended as a piece of background propaganda and under the artistic control of Gaumont-British, *OHMS* has a bizarre plot. A small-time American mobster joins the British Army in a case of stolen identity, rebels against the system, and even tries to desert. He eventually learns the value of comradeship, tradition, and the army way of doing things before dying a hero's death on active service in China.

Disgusted British patriots attacked the portrayal of an American lead in an official film, but there might have been some method to the apparent madness.²⁶ British cinemas in the 1930s relied primarily on Hollywood imports and this was the era of the gangster film. As many officers thought that the youth of Britain lacked the spirit of adventure and rejected the discipline inherent in an army career,²⁷ the War Office may have thought

26. W. Eason, "Screen Parliament - American Even Runs the Army," *Film Pictorial* 11/266 (27 March 1937): 30.

27. See for example: LHCMA, Burnett-Stuart Papers, 4/7, Unsigned Memorandum probably by Burnett-Stuart on the Recruiting Problem of the Army, January 1937.

that a boy might think that the army offered something after all if a free-wheeling American gangster learned to appreciate discipline, comradeship, and even drill.

Alongside the main plot line, the film both informed and enticed the viewer, with every mood and attraction the War Office could think of packed into it. The montage of recruit training turns it into a fast-paced, exciting series of exercises, while even the American walks taller during a long royal review. The Colonel, in a speech to the battalion before it leaves for overseas, stressed the role of tradition, team work and the joys of seeing the world. The film's climax takes place in China, where the excitement, and dangers, of battle fly across the screen as mechanized machine gun carriers assist a river crossing. In the final sequence, the audience is reminded of the price of honour when a friend of the reformed gangster collects his posthumous medal, but also of the rewards. The friend wears his own medal, his new sergeant's stripes, and holds his new wife in front of Buckingham Palace.

While the film's recruiting message and its efforts to show the new mechanized equipment are evident, at first glance the film has little to do with combating pacifism. Take a second look. The battles occur as part of an effort to rescue an inland British mission from pirates at the request of the Chinese. The troops literally restore peace and order, although in a quasi-imperial setting. Any discussion of a continental role for the army was left to other, less widely broadcast mediums. Equally important, the film provided an extensive and relatively realistic look at life inside the army, building on the work of the "At Homes" on a massive scale. There are a few non-sequiturs surrounding the love interest in the story, but on the whole the film accurately portrays the troubles and blessings of army life. In the battle scenes, almost as many British soldiers play dead as Chinese. The film aimed to overcome pacifist leanings fed by ignorance and fear of the army. It showed that the army provided an exciting occupation, that it upheld the peace, and that it had modern weapons. *OHMS* also re-affirmed the values of service to the crown, loyalty to superiors, and honour that the army thought it represented. The values of service and loyalty overcame the limited class tensions shown in the film. Masculine honour was served and rewarded by protecting women. The object of breaking down the barriers between the public and the army was to make "the people from whom the Army is drawn . . . fully aware of what service in the Army means . . ."²⁸ The theme of service was a common one during Cooper's time in the War Office, and was intended to undermine pacifism.

Pacifism was one of the main deterrents to recruiting for Cooper and, in the early stages of the crisis, the Army Council. Officers feared that the flood of war memoirs after 1928, pacifist films like *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Journey's End*, and the propaganda of the large organized pacifist groups had undermined the willingness of young men to defend the country. The Peace Ballot of 1935 and the famous "King and

28. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 25a, "Recruiting for the Army: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War," 13 March 1936.

Country” debate at Oxford demonstrated to many its influence, an influence that they recognized as particularly anti-army due to the casualties of the First World War. To many, the spirit of these occurrences also seemed to demonstrate a deep crisis of morality in society and led the editor of *The Gunner*, Cooper, and others to insist that the country needed a spiritual rearmament alongside the material one, a campaign to convince young men “that it is a fine thing to be a soldier” and of “the duty that young men owe to their country.”²⁹ As a result, although it certainly publicised reforms, initially the main target of the War Office’s publicity bureau was pacifism, which it fought by trying to overcome ignorance of the army and its role, by using spectacles like Tattoos to reaffirm its values, and by arguing that the army was a force for peace in the world.

A more insidious opponent to recruiting lay in the work of military critics, in the debates over the role of the army, and in the stories of veterans who painted the army as an obsolete force ready to repeat the horrors of the First World War. Indeed, the fact that the RAF and the navy did not suffer recruiting problems suggests that patriotism was not lacking and that the problem was the army itself — not pacifism.³⁰ The sections of society which the army recruited from were unlikely to be affected by ideological pacifism, but the experiences of fathers, uncles, and brothers in the war remained a part of life in Britain. Those in uniform were well aware of the problem. As one Territorial Army officer observed to Liddell Hart: “What can you expect? The boys now growing up are the sons of the infantry in the last war.”³¹

Recruiting for the combat arms, and particularly the infantry, suffered from the army’s image as an incompetent force in which foot soldiers were little more than lambs to be led to the slaughter,³² and to offset these criticisms the War Office made a conscious effort to play up its new equipment in recruiting posters, newsreels, and the press. It also issued a new uniform. Yet recruiting for the infantry remained difficult to the end, suggesting that despite the much advertised new weapons, the new uniform, and the quota of motor transport, memories of the Somme and Passchendaele determined that it would remain an unpopular arm.³³

29. “Editorial Notes,” *The Gunner* 19/7 (October 1937): 178; PRO, CAB 27/615 CP 322 (36), “Recruiting for the Army,” Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, 16 October 1936: 2-3, 5. Dennis thinks Duff Cooper shows an almost paranoid fear of pacifists and concludes that he could not understand the pacifist revulsion against war. Peter Dennis, *The Territorial Army, 1906-1940* (London, 1987), 198; Dennis, *Decision by Default*, 78.

30. PRO, WO 32/2984 Minute 61a, Burnett-Stuart to PUS, 22 February 1936; “Notes of the Week,” *The United Services Review* 4014 (24 December 1936): 3; LHCMA Liddell Hart Papers, 1/166/16, LH to Chetwode, 30 April 1937; PRO, WO 163/47 17th Informal Meeting of Army Council, 25 February 1938, Item 11 and Precip No. 19; PRO, WO 32/4644 Minute 16a, A Policy for the Army: Report of the Army League Committee,” Draft 3: 27-8.

31. LHCMA Liddell Hart Papers 1/232/11, LH to FM Sir Cyril Deverell, 25 November 1936.

32. LHCMA Liddell Hart Papers 1/115/52, Brigadier John Brown, TA, to LH, nd [1937]; Brigadier A. H. G. Ricketts, “Recruiting for the Infantry,” *JRUSI* XCI (1946): 527-8.

33. Moorhouse discusses how the memory of the war kept men from joining a much venerated local infantry regiment in Bury, Lancashire. Geoffrey Moorhouse, *Hells Foundations: A Town*,

Cooper did not see these memories of the Great War as his opponent. Nor did he agree with his permanent under-secretary that the current recruiting problem represented only a temporary decline in the popularity of the army.³⁴ Rather, when he put his memorandum on the recruiting crisis before Cabinet in March 1936,³⁵ emphasizing the dangers it posed to the army's ability to fight a war and even to garrison the empire, he repeated his demands for more money to ameliorate service conditions, for increased co-operation from the Ministry of Labour in the matter of retraining and securing enlistments, and for his colleagues to join him in fighting the influence of pacifism at a time when the public desired and needed such leadership.³⁶

Unfortunately for the army and for Cooper, the Cabinet was not convinced of the gravity of the situation. It paid lip service to the idea of crisis, and made some promises about supporting recruiting efforts publicly, but the only concrete result of the deliberations was the establishment of an interdepartmental committee to discuss Ministry of Labour co-operation with the three services. However, for reasons having to do with its desire to maintain the trust of the working class and the political necessity of avoiding any impression of conscription by the back door, the Labour secretary refused to do more than post a more colourful recruiting poster for each service and to mount a box with recruiting brochures underneath them in the Labour Exchanges.³⁷ The army's first major effort to gain Cabinet backing for its recruiting efforts had signally failed.

Left once again to its own resources, the War Office improved its publicity effort, adding additional staff (including a journalist) to the recruiting publicity bureau, undertaking an additional film project, and almost tripling its expenditure over 1935. The new bureau initiated a large-scale poster campaign blanketing four industrial regions that did not traditionally serve as recruiting areas, circulated a pictorial brochure to two million homes, and cooperated in the production of over 100 newsreel stories. While the sum spent, £16,700, represented a large expenditure for the army, it was small change for a major commercial firm like Cadbury's.³⁸ At the same time, reforms in disciplinary practice, emanating from the AG, allowed men with the rank of sergeant and above to

its *Myths and Gallipoli* (London, 1990), 194-203.

34. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 7, PUS to AG, 22 November 1935.

35. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 25a, "Recruiting for the Army: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War," 13 March 1936.

36. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 11, Duff Cooper, 21 November 1935.

37. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 50a, "Minutes of the First Meeting of the Interdepartmental Committee to Consider Co-operation by the Ministry of Labour in order to assist recruiting," 20 May 1936; PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 63b, "Report of the Interdepartmental Committee to Consider Co-operation by the Ministry of Labour in order to assist recruiting," 28 July 1936; PRO, WO 237/26, No. 1329, "Interdepartmental Committee on Co-operation with the Ministry of Labour to assist recruiting," July 1936; PRO, WO 32/4642, "Recruiting Policy, 1935-37."

38. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 54a, Bernard, DRO, "Recruiting Publicity: Notes for Memorandum to Sir Thomas Inskip," 10 July 193; Army Estimates for the Financial Year 1936 to 1938.

sleep out, extended lights out, and ordered the scrapping of petty regulations.³⁹ The Army Council also made it easier for experienced soldiers to receive Military Proficiency Pay, an extra penny a day, and increased certain allowances.⁴⁰ In addition, in order to reduce rejection rates that reached as high as 60 per cent of applicants, the War Office lowered physical standards, going so far as to grade recruits physically for the different arms and to establish a depot to build-up under-strength applicants.⁴¹

But these reforms, too, made little difference, and recruiting continued to decline to the point where, by the fall of 1936, it seemed that the regular army would be 31,000 men short in four years time.⁴² The War Office consequently turned to the Commands for help, and the Commander of the Canal Brigade, for one, had a group of soldiers draw up a report detailing what they saw as the causes of poor recruiting. The soldiers drew attention, in particular, to bad pay, foreign service, and the high rate of unemployment among ex-servicemen.⁴³ Almost all the reports reflected similar concerns, with those by senior officers stressing the impact of the dole and adding pacifism to the list.⁴⁴ The discussion covered almost every possibility and strengthened the consensus among the military that a pay increase was the measure most likely to improve recruiting, but that was something Cooper could not consider, believing it to be impolitic.⁴⁵ Accordingly, the army had to look to other measures.

The memorandums produced by Knox and his staff in September 1936 demonstrated the changes in War Office thinking since the fall of 1935. Senior officers now recognized explicitly that no one enlisted because he could not live outside the army and that the army therefore had to offer him a future.⁴⁶ To do so, Knox wanted to rectify conditions that broke the promises in recruiting propaganda and to bring conditions in the service closer to those in civil life. Knox proposed, in order of priority, issuing a blue dress uniform for walking out, providing free vocational training to all soldiers, paying

39. PRO, WO 32/4521, Minute 8a, AG to GOCinCs and GOCs, 8 October 1936.

40. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 72, AG to PUS, 23 September 1936.

41. PRO, WO 32/4643, Minute 10a, "Committee on Physical Standards: Interim Report," 22 June 1936; PRO, WO 32/4643, Minute 22a, "Committee on Physical Standards: Final Report," 15 September 1936; PRO, WO 163/47, 18th Informal Meeting of the Army Council [Informal Meeting], Item 2(f), 23 March 1938.

42. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 71a, "Regular Army: Statement Showing the Past, Present and Approximate Future Position," 1 September 1936; PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 71b, AGS (Mob.), "The Effect of Recruiting Deficits on the Regular Army Reserve," 23 September 1936.

43. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 61a, Minute 10b; LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers, 1/575/44a, "Report of a Number of soldiers called to assist the Brigade Commander in arriving at conclusions regarding recruiting for the Army," nd.

44. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 54, AG to SofS, 10 July 1936. See also the reports in Minute 61a and the comments following upon them in PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 61a.

45. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 55, PUS, 13 July 1936.

46. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 73b, AG to CIGS, 15 September 1936; PRO, CAB 27/615, CP 322 (36), Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, "Recruiting for the Army," 16 October 1936.

a foreign service allowance, allowing the extension of service for up to six months to find employment, and subsidizing a furlough home during foreign service.⁴⁷ The provision of a blue dress uniform appealed to the heads of the War Office as a means to raise morale; the uniform would make the men more attractive to women.⁴⁸ Long a major theme in the military press, the provision of free vocational training and the reservation of more government jobs for ex-soldiers became the central aim of the memorandum to the Cabinet. The War Office wanted to overcome one of the enduring and demeaning images of the army in art and popular folklore: the ex-soldier beggar, the product of a dead-end career in the army. The payment of a foreign service allowance and a subsidized furlough home were supposed to make foreign service more attractive. Knox's memorandum provided the basis for one to Cabinet.

Cooper presented his second memorandum to the Cabinet in October 1936. While written in the main by the permanent under-secretary, the memorandum reflected the continuing concerns of the minister about the influence of pacifism and the lack of co-operation from the Ministry of Labour. It attacked Canon Sheppard, the Peace Pledge Union and Mr. Lansbury by name, and called for a government led, anti-pacifist propaganda campaign designed to stress the duty young men owed the country. It also demanded access through the Ministry of Labour to the supposedly untapped pool of potential recruits among the unemployed. Otherwise, the memorandum reflected the proposals of the AG, except in rejecting a pay increase. In addition to the major demands, the memorandum included a whole range of minor measures, like the provision of supper and the construction of new barracks, which aimed to raise the standard of living inside the army closer to that in civil life.⁴⁹ While the plea for a dress uniform appears to have reflected masculine nostalgia more than a real demand,⁵⁰ and the demand for more Ministry of Labour support was a dead issue, the rest of proposals before the Cabinet addressed legitimate grievances in the army and some problems outside it. Before the question was discussed in Cabinet, however, Cooper upped the stakes publicly when he warned that if recruiting did not improve, conscription would be necessary, a statement he would later have to back away from.⁵¹

47. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 72, AG to PUS, 23 September 1936; PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 73b, AG to CIGS, 15 September 1936.

48. PRO, CAB 27/615, CP 322 (36), Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, "Recruiting for the Army," 16 October 1936. See also MG Fainlyson's and Brigadier Priestman's notes in PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 61a; R.R.M., "From a Recruiting Officer's Desk," *Army Quarterly* 33/1 (October 1936): 167; LHCMA, Burnett-Stuart Papers, 4/7, "The Recruiting Problem of the Army," January 1937.

49. PRO, CAB 27/615, CP 322 (36), Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War, "Recruiting for the Army," 16 October 1936; PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 76a.

50. The soldiers and officers of the Canal Brigade saw no need for the dress uniform. LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers, 1/575/44a, "Report of a Number of soldiers called to assist the Brigade Commander in arriving at conclusions regarding recruiting for the Army," nd., Annex A and Annex B, nd.,

51. "In Parliament," *The United Services Review* 4011 (3 December 1936): 19.

The Cabinet response to the memorandum distressed Cooper. It briefly discussed his memorandum on 2 December 1936, along with those from the Secretary of State for India and the Labour minister dealing with aspects of the War Office proposals. With the Treasury, India Office and Labour Ministry all opposed, the Cabinet rejected any immediate action and turned the question over to a Cabinet Committee. While unproductive in the short term, the appointment of a Cabinet Committee showed recognition that the crisis posed a real problem, especially in the aftermath of the manpower shortages during the Abyssinian crisis.

The Cabinet Committee on Recruiting for the Army reported in January 1937. Labelling the problem "formidable," it asked for drastic action to avoid conscription. The Report called for action to improve measures to attract recruits, to ease service conditions, and to better the post-service prospects of soldiers. It proposed a new War Office publicity bureau, in addition to the recruiting publicity section, which would publicize the army and address misconceptions about service conditions, showing, for instance, that pay consisted of cash and "in-kind" wages. Any recruiting role for the Ministry of Labour was rejected firmly. The Committee also turned down any measure to increase the attractiveness of foreign service — and the blue uniform — because of their cost but it accepted most of the other proposals to improve conditions.⁵² To enhance the post-service prospects of soldiers, the Committee agreed to a scheme to extend vocational training under the control of the Ministry of Labour and to the provision of more government jobs for ex-regular soldiers, who suffered a higher unemployment rate than average. The latter matter was directed to a sub-committee. Ironically, in discussing the possibility of reserving more Post Office employment for ex-soldiers, the Cabinet Committee decided against it, not wanting to be accused of "encouraging 'blind alley' employment . . ." for boy messengers.⁵³

The full Cabinet approved the Committee report with a few provisos.⁵⁴ It would not, for example, reserve more government jobs for ex-soldiers — or credit their time in the service toward a government pension — because of potential political and industrial cost.⁵⁵ Moreover, not every aspect of the Committee's recommendations sat well with the War Office. Fearful that soldiers would not join a vocational scheme that treated them as unemployed men, the War Office had preferred to manage one of its own rather than involve the Ministry of Labour, but for Cabinet the Labour-run plan became a central element in the effort to improve recruiting. Indeed, by sanctioning improvements in

52. The approved measures included the abolition of the practice of retaining soldiers abroad for an extra year, allowing each man three months colour service in Britain before the end of his tour to re-establish contact with the civil community, the provision of supper, and an end to most stoppages, deductions from pay to cover a variety of expenses.

53. PRO, CAB 27/615, CP 11 (37), "Report of the Committee on Recruiting for the Army," 14 January 1937.

54. PRO, CAB 23/87, 2 (37) 4, Cabinet Minutes, 20 January 1937.

55. PRO, CAB 27/616, CP 87(37), RA (sub)(36) 14, "Cabinet Committee on Recruiting for the Army: Sub-Committee on Government and Local Authority Employment for Ex-Regulars: Final Report," 5 March 1937.

conditions of service and the free vocational training scheme, the Cabinet hoped that it had solved the problem.⁵⁶

Cabinet's wish, however, was not its command. Recruiting figures did not improve much until the fall of 1937, and even then the number of applicants continued to fall. The formation in January 1937 of C6, a new, enlarged publicity bureau under the permanent under-secretary did not prove to be a great success when John McCulloch, its journalist head, became bogged down in a dispute with the adjutant general over who controlled AG 10. As a result, McCulloch not only did not have the time or energy to implement many of his interesting ideas, but the general message about army reform was also not getting out to potential recruits.⁵⁷ Reports showed that recruits were often entirely ignorant of the reforms.⁵⁸ Clearly more time would be needed for the message to permeate society. Moreover, although there were some bright spots in the 1937 recruiting year (the rejection rate fell and there was a small increase in enlistments because of the lowering of physical standards and the reconditioning scheme⁵⁹), and the War Office shifted its propaganda effort somewhat to show off the army's latest equipment in books and newsreels and by having mechanized columns tour the country⁶⁰, the expansion of the army to meet its imperial and anti-aircraft roles more than ate up the small increase in enlistments and the accumulated manpower deficit continued to grow.⁶¹

While the efficiency theme may have owed something to the greater availability of modern equipment, it was also probably linked to the increasingly bitter debate over the role of the army in war — a debate which grew sharper when Neville Chamberlain (who, as chancellor of the exchequer, had fought many battles with Cooper over army funding and vehemently opposed the continental commitment which was the basis of the latter's thinking) became prime minister. Indeed, in a surprising move Chamberlain shifted Cooper to the Admiralty in late May 1937⁶² and named Leslie Hore-Belisha Secretary of State for War, a promotion widely welcomed because of his flair for publicity.⁶³ A National

56. PRO, CAB 23/87, 11 (37) 7, Cabinet Minutes, 10 March 1937.

57. PRO, WO 32/4587, Minutes 1 to 9.

58. PRO, WO 32/4248, Minute 1, AG to SofS, 30 June 1937; PRO, WO 32/4248, Minute 1c, Colonel S. Lowe to Inspector of Recruiting, 4 June 1937.

59. The June 1937 figures showed an increase of 191 over June 1936, of whom 52 were reconditioned. [PRO, WO 163/47, 2nd Informal Meeting, Item 2 (ix), 13 July 1937.] Of the increase of 667 recruits in October 1937 over the year previously, 334 resulted from the changed medical standards. [PRO, WO 163/47, 11th Informal Meeting, Item 9d, 22 November 1937.] A similar small increase of 184 due to changed medical standards occurred in the two months of April and May 1937 over the previous year. [PRO, WO 32/4248, Minute 1, AG to SofS, 30 June 1937.]

60. *Photographs of Some Military Vehicles and Weapons in Service* (London, 1936).

61. PRO, WO 163/47, 10th Informal Meeting, Item 3, 15 November 1937; Spillan, 190-1.

62. Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget* (London, 1953), 199-200, 206; J.P. Harris, "Two War Ministers: A Reassessment of Duff Cooper and Hore-Belisha," *War & Society* 6 (May 1988): 68-9.

63. "Editorial," *Army Quarterly* 34/2 (July 1937): 194; R. J. Minney, *The Private Papers of Hore-Belisha* (London, 1960), 14, 18.

Liberal and Chamberlain's protégé, Hore-Belisha was sent to the War Office to shake it up in general and, in particular, to impose spending cuts and "limited liability."⁶⁴

Hore-Belisha began well enough, bringing a greater sense of urgency and drive to the War Office recruiting effort (and to improving conditions of service) than Cooper as well as a greater willingness to impose his ideas on the War Office bureaucracy and the Treasury alike. He also began quickly. Within days of taking office, Hore-Belisha suggested that a re-definition of the army's role in war would improve recruiting. This is the one recruiting suggestion that can be traced directly to his civilian adviser, B. H. Liddell Hart, and was one suggestion that went nowhere.⁶⁵ Almost as quickly, Hore-Belisha implemented the simple, inexpensive and successful measures of granting an unlimited number of extensions of service and allowing reservists to re-join the army.⁶⁶ Both measures were opposed by the military as they weakened the reserves. Many of his proposals only pushed to fruition measures which had been circulating for some time, but he provided the drive to implement them. During his tenure in office the established programme of new barracks construction was extended, vocational training was provided to all who wanted it, and a pay increase enacted. He also brought lasting benefits to soldiers by further easing petty restrictions and obsolete discipline. In an enlightened measure, he extended the disciplinary reforms of Cooper's Army Council, giving the privilege of sleeping out of barracks to all trained soldiers over the age of 21.⁶⁷ Only absolutely necessary restrictions were to be maintained. In March 1938, Hore-Belisha continued in this vein, announcing the removal of all superfluous movements in drill and all unnecessary gadgets requiring polishing in the soldier's kit.⁶⁸

The greater sense of urgency that Hore-Belisha imparted to the War Office bureaucracy also paid off in discussions with the Treasury and the Cabinet, as progressively more expensive and far-reaching proposals gained approval. In the fall, for example, Hore-Belisha raised the maximum age for enlistment to 28 and allowed

64. Harris, "Two War Ministers," 69, 75-6.

65. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 94, AG to SofS, 4 June 1937; PRO, WO 32/4614, Minutes 1 and 5d. Liddell Hart, who is not known for his modesty, claims credit for a number of minor recruiting measures; however, his own notes of his meetings with Hore-Belisha suggest that the latter was the source of most of the ideas he implemented. See: LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers, 11/HB Misc/18-21, "Army Reforms urged by L.H. . . .," LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers, 11/HB Misc/13, "Short outline of my association with the Right Hon. L. Hore-Belisha, during his first year of office as Secretary of State for War," 27 June 1940.

66. PRO, WO 163/47, 1st Informal Meeting, Item 2, 5 July 1937; PRO, WO 163/47, 4th Informal Meeting, Item 6 (ii), 27 July 1937; PRO, T 162/478/E.35330, "Alterations in conditions of serving for Pension and in length of Colour Service in the Army," 30 July 1937; PRO, WO 32/4656, Minute 31, MG Barker, "New Terms of Service (Other Ranks)," 28 September 1937; Dennis, *Decision by Default*, 102; Spillan, 186; Minney, 43.

67. PRO, WO 32/4521, Minute 37a, C6 to Press Association, Evening and Daily Press, BBC, 2 September 1937; Minney, 45-6.

68. Minney, 95; "Editorial Notes," *The Gunner* 20/1 (April 1938): 1.

married men to join, both at the expense of apparent military efficiency.⁶⁹ The whole series of minor reforms created a sense of urgency and momentum in the War Office. Further changes in the physical standards, more enlistment of boys and the commissioning of soldiers were only some Hore-Belisha's ideas. He never let up. He was always making new proposals to improve recruiting and demanding to know the latest figures.

The speed with which these proposals were implemented reflected Hore-Belisha's energy and his clever manipulation of both the Treasury and Cabinet. The former had to approve at least some of the measures contained in the lengthy lists of reforms he had submitted to it, while he simply avoided taking matters to the Cabinet until November.

The impression of movement was undoubtedly aided by Hore-Belisha's propaganda efforts and his populist persona, which stressed the improvements in service conditions and the changed attitude of the War Office towards the soldier. Compared with the very structured and controlled work of Cooper, Hore-Belisha's more personal and flamboyant style enlivened newsreel coverage of the recruiting campaign. His frequent newsreel appearances generally had a spontaneous nature. Through newsreels of his attendance at army cooking competitions or touring a new troopship, Hore-Belisha told the public that his concern about conditions in the service was leading to improvements. His talks with soldiers, also filmed, gave them a chance to air their grievances directly to the minister. While Cooper and his Army Council deserve credit for many of the improvements in service conditions and for innovations in propaganda with their newsreel coverage and feature film, Hore-Belisha turned up the whole effort a notch.

Hore-Belisha's frequent appearances in the newsreels resulted partly from his own efforts and partly as a result of the efforts of the re-organized publicity bureau. Within two months of becoming minister, Hore-Belisha, unhappy with the propaganda efforts of the War Office, amalgamated the two warring publicity sections under a new, high profile Director of Public Relations (DPR) and increased its budget to £30,000 in 1937 and to a shocking £60,000 in 1938. The arrival of the DPR, first Brigadier A. G. C. Dawnay and then Major Ian Hay Beith, widened the scope of War Office publicity.⁷⁰ Dawnay was a regular officer who had been an army instructor at the Imperial Defence College and a former Controller of Programmes at the BBC. Beith was wartime officer and an author of some note. His works on military subjects included *The First Hundred Thousand*, a best-seller about the Kitchener armies published in 1915. As DPR, both men held the local rank of Major-General at Hore-Belisha's insistence, so that they could carry some weight in the War Office bureaucracy and the army. The honorary rank may also have been intended by Hore-Belisha to deflect the pressure from military members of

69. Spillan, 184-5; Minney, 43.

70. PRO, WO 32/4587, Minute 18, SofS, 22 August 1937.

the Army Council for the appointment of a serving officer to head the publicity section.⁷¹

The new publicity section did more than set up the newsreel cameras for Hore-Belisha. It brightened up army posters, starting two new campaigns in 1938 and 1939 which focused primarily on the modernity of the army. A series of 1938 posters entitled "Join the Modern Army" featured pictures of mechanized 25 pdrs., 3.7" anti-aircraft guns, and tanks. The 1939 "Mightier Yet!" posters exude a sense of raw mechanical power.⁷² The DPR promoted the image of modernity through a series of books. For example, Beith's foreword to Major J. T. Gorman's *The Army To-Day*, which extolled the modern, mechanized army, looked to a future when military operations "will be carried out at high speed and, it is hoped, with short, sharp, and decisive results."⁷³ What a contrast to the memory of the Great War. The public relations bureau also helped many infantry regiments publish sixty to eighty page recruiting booklets in 1938. While each one differed a bit, all promoted the recent reforms in service conditions, used pictures and text to show off the army's new weapons, and praised the regiment's glorious history. The booklets even sought to remove the fear of the recruitment process, using pictures and text to demonstrate how it worked.⁷⁴ With the increased funding and better direction, army publicity took on a comprehensive nature for the first time, as it tried to overcome the images of the army as a bad employer and as an obsolete force; pacifism was no longer a central opponent.

Hore-Belisha wanted to back up his successful propaganda endeavours with more substantive reforms. By November 1937, the failure of the Ministry of Labour-run scheme of vocational training was obvious. Soldiers just would not attend the Ministry of Labour schools where they were treated and paid as unemployed individuals.⁷⁵ Hore-Belisha, with another year of poor recruiting and an obvious failure to buttress his arguments, succeeded where Cooper had failed. To save the political capital which it had invested in the highly publicized programme, the Cabinet approved a War Office-controlled scheme of general vocational training whereby soldiers would go to the centres as soldiers. As quickly growing attendance proved, the new scheme met both the financial and psychological objections of soldiers to the Ministry of Labour controlled

71. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 61a, Minute 15, CIGS to AG, 30 June 1936.

72. For the "Join the Modern Army" poster, see the Royal Armoured Corps Museum, Bovington, the film "Sword of Honour," National Film Archive, London and "Benson's Design New Posters for War Office," *Advertiser's Weekly* 99/1,309 (23 June 1938): 458. For the "Mightier Yet!" poster, see the National Army Museum, London and Royal Armoured Corps Museum, Bovington.

73. Foreword by Ian Hay to Major J. T. Gorman, *The Army To-Day* (London, 1939).

74. The Museum of the Scottish Royal United Service Institute, Edinburgh, holds a number of such brochures for Scottish regiments, while the author has one kindly given to him by the Devonshire Regiment Museum.

75. PRO, WO 32/4360, Minute 52a, "Memorandum for the Cabinet: Vocational Training-Soldiers," October 1937; Minney, 45.

scheme.⁷⁶ The War Office was proud of the vocational training scheme and advertised its benefits. Trainees took part with great success in public competitions at Olympia. The high placement rates of graduates meant that propagandists like Major Gorman could say that the army was no longer a dead-end career.⁷⁷

After his November success, Hore-Belisha did not rest on his laurels. Recruiting was not improving quickly enough. The War Minister pursued two costly measures: a change in the terms of service and a pay increase. He ended up trading long-service for the pay increase. To make it attractive, Hore-Belisha persistently sought to make the army a career, as the navy was for many of his constituents in Davenport. Making the army a career of twenty-one years for up to half the strength of the army ironically involved shortening the colour service to five years for most soldiers. Requiring a larger number of recruits each year, more movement of men around the Empire, and a higher pension bill, the proposal was extremely expensive and not popular in the War Office, where officers and officials doubted its ability to attract sufficient recruits.⁷⁸ Nonetheless, although the cost and the large initial recruit requirement were important considerations, the Treasury was attracted by the possibilities of Hore-Belisha's proposal, thinking that it would improve recruiting in the long term.⁷⁹

The second measure, the pay increase, came about because of the failure of earlier reforms to affect recruiting significantly. Knox persistently pressed for an increase from 14s a week to at least 21s in the summer and fall of 1937. It was the only way, he argued, to enlist the necessary 50,000 men a year.⁸⁰ The good recruitment rates in the technical corps and the Royal Tank Corps, with their greater number of specialists, showed, in part, that better pay attracted men.⁸¹ Knox's pitch for a pay increase in July 1937 noted that more soldiers than sailors or airmen drew the basic rate of pay, which was common to the three services.⁸² A second reference point was the dole. Almost everybody compared the 17s 6d a single man received on the dole unfavourably with the 14s a private earned for serving his country. Only the civilian bureaucrats in the War Office attacked the comparison and rejected the idea that a soldier's pay should leave him better off than an

76. PRO, CAB 23/89, 38 (37) 12, Cabinet Minutes, 20 October 1937; Spillan, 192.

77. "Notes of the Week," *The United Services Review* 4022 (18 February 1937): 4; Gorman, 162.

78. PRO, T 162/478/E.35330, WO to Mr. Speed, Treasury, 12 August 1937; PRO, WO 32/4656, Minute 31, MG Barker, "New Terms of Service (Other Ranks)," 28 September 1937; PRO, WO 163/47, 10th Informal Meeting, Item 3, 15 November 1937; PRO, WO 32/4614, Minute 3, PUS to SofS, 14 May 1936; PRO, WO 163/47, 9th Informal Meeting, Item 5, 4 November 1937; PRO, WO 163/47, Precis No. 6, "Proposals relating to changes in terms of service," 9 November 1937.

79. PRO, T 162/478/E.35330, Undated and unsigned Treasury internal memo.

80. PRO, WO 32/4248, Minutes 1, 4, 5 and 14a.

81. LHCMA, Liddell Hart Papers, 1/376/40, Hobart to LH, 5 December 1936; PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 61, Colonel P. de Fonblanque to GOC, 2nd Division, 25 February 1936.

82. Eighty-four percent of the army, 81 per cent of the navy and only 26 per cent of the RAF drew the basic rate of pay. PRO, WO 163/47, 1st Informal Meeting, Item 2, 5 July 1937.

unemployed individual.⁸³ They continually added the “in kind” wages a soldier received, his clothing, housing and food, to his cash pay. However, the failure of other measures to make a significant difference meant even the permanent under-secretary, Sir Herbert Creedy, a dogged opponent of a pay increase until late 1937, came to support one after he learned “The lesson of the recent recruiting amenities and their negligible effect on recruiting...”⁸⁴ The fact that by the spring of 1938 recruiting was recovering did not matter. The idea of a pay increase had gathered sufficient momentum to go forward.

Hore-Belisha also came to support a pay increase in the fall of 1937, but only a graduated one which rewarded proficiency and length of service. The marriage allowance was also to be increased.⁸⁵ The plan was Hore-Belisha’s and drew on the navy model, which allowed men to increase their pay fairly rapidly once in the service.⁸⁶ The military wanted an increase in the basic pay rate which would have more appeal to potential recruits. Such a measure, however, was too expensive. By drawing on the navy model, Hore-Belisha ensured that the plan would be politically expedient, not requiring a prohibitive increase in either the basic rate or the pay of the other services. Cabinet doubts about the effectiveness of Hore-Belisha’s proposals for a change in the length of service helped secure the pay increase.⁸⁷ Even Neville Chamberlain had to approve it, because of the recruiting situation and the atmosphere abroad. After the increase, Army pay began to compare favourably with civilian wages for the first time since the 1920s.⁸⁸ But the pay increase took place despite, rather than because of, the other reforms. It was a measure of last resort to deal with the crisis, which was having an increasing impact on war plans.

The year ending September 1938 showed a dramatic 54 per cent increase in recruiting. The mixture of propaganda, substantive reform, and international events had clearly influenced recruiting levels; yet it is nevertheless impossible to assess with any degree of accuracy how effective the War Office’s propaganda and reforms turned out to be.⁸⁹ Regular army recruiting began to recover marginally with the changed physical standards in 1936, and a bit more through the first part of 1937. The real increase in recruiting began in the fall of 1937, a few months after the Army Council’s reforms were instituted by Cooper. Hore-Belisha’s initial reforms had just been implemented and his

83. PRO, WO 32/2984, Minute 61a, Minutes 11a, 13 and 14a.

84. PRO, WO 163/47, Precis No. 6, “Proposals relating to changes in terms of service,” Part 3d, 9 November 1937.

85. PRO, WO 32/4248, Minute 20b, “Memorandum on Proposals for Increasing the Pay of Soldiers Enlisted or Re-Enlisted after 1925”; *War Office: Statement Relating to Improvements in the Pay, Allowances, &c., of the Regular Army*, March 1938, Cmd 5696; Minney, 40.

86. PRO, WO 163/47, Precis No. 6, “Proposals relating to changes in terms of service,” Part 3d, 9 November 1937.

87. PRO, CAB 23/92, 5 (38) 13, Cabinet Minutes, 16 February 1938.

88. Spillan, 195-6.

89. Martin Ceadal can find no way to adequately assess the impact of pacifist propaganda either. Martin Ceadal, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford, 1980), .

personal flair had only helped the long-standing propaganda campaign since the summer. Hore-Belisha's pay increase came in May 1938, meaning that it only added to the impetus of the improved recruiting. Moreover, there were no events in Europe to suggest why the boom should occur in the fall of 1937. The war in Spain had already been under way for a year, the crisis in Abyssinia had died down, and Hitler was not making any aggressive moves. In the Far East, Japan had attacked China in July, but that was far away. The War Office thought the increasing recruiting figures demonstrated success and its efforts deserved some credit. Applications to enlist did rise from the fall of 1937. The fact that opinion polls showed no change in the attitudes towards war until well after Munich does not mean, as Spillan argues, that the War Office's propaganda effort failed.⁹⁰ The army tried to avoid associating itself with war too much and those who enlisted in the army were unlikely to be influenced by the propaganda of pacifists. A major, if unspectacular, reason for the improvement in recruiting came about because the army rejected fewer men. While approximately 62 per cent of applicants were rejected in 1935, only 37 per cent of the increasing number of applicants were so treated in 1938.⁹¹ In the end, a mix of substantive reforms, propaganda effort and changed physical standards, combined with a darkening international horizon, did produce more men for the regular army.

To improve recruiting, the army tried to assess its place in society to understand why men did not enlist. The assessment led the army to think that a combination of a lack of economic incentives, pacifist propaganda, and its image as militarily inefficient deterred recruits. Officers like General Knox also thought that the army could not combat these deterrents on its own; the army needed government help. Despite feeling somewhat besieged because of it, officers likely over-estimated the influence of pacifism while under-estimating an anti-army mentality arising out of the casualties of the First World War. The Peace Ballot, interpreted as pacifist, showed that almost 60 per cent of the population backed the use of military sanctions to support the League of Nations.⁹² Service to the nation in the air force, the navy or the Air Raid Protection service remained popular; it was the army, and particularly the infantry, which remained relatively unpopular. War Office propaganda and popular Hollywood films alike tapped popular support for the themes of honour, valour, and the willingness to defend one's country. On the other hand, the army accurately assessed the need for reforms to make itself more attractive in the market place and the need for government support. Without either, the army would have remained a relatively isolated appendage on society, starved of the men it needed to fulfill its missions.

90. Spillan, 201-2.

91. Great Britain. Parliament, House of Commons, *Parliamentary Debates*, 5:346 (1939), col. 1669-70.

92. Rachel Barker, *Conscience, Government and War: Conscientious objection in Great Britain, 1939-1945* (London, 1982), 7; Peter Brock, *Twentieth-Century Pacifism* (New York, 1970), 133-4; Dennis, *Decision by Default*, 47-8.

Nevertheless, a recruiting problem remained in 1939. With the army growing to meet the threat of war, the accumulated deficit continued to rise as recruit requirements outpaced supply, and that fed calls for conscription. Eventually, conscription was introduced in April 1939, primarily, however, for political reasons connected to air defence and relations with France.⁹³

93. Dennis, *Decision by Default*, 2, 225.