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"Be Prepared!" (But Not Too Prepared): Scouting, Soldiering and Boys' Roles in World War I

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Article title: “Be prepared!” (but not too prepared): Scouting, soldiering and boys’ roles in World War I

Abstract: This article examines the shifting representation of the ideal of masculinity and boys’ role in securing the future of the British Empire in Robert Baden-Powell’s Boy Scout movement from its inauguration in 1908 to the early years of the First World War. In particular, it focuses on early Scout literature’s response to anxieties about physical deterioration, exacerbated by the 1904 *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration*. In Baden-Powell’s Scouting handbook, *Scouting for Boys* (1908), and in early editions of *The Scout* – the official magazine of the Scout movement – there was a strong emphasis on an idealised image of the male body which, implicitly, prepared Boy Scouts for their future role as soldiers. The reality of war, however, forced Scouting literature to acknowledge the restrictions placed upon boys in wartime and to redefine the parameters of boys’ heroic role in defense of the Empire accordingly.

Keywords: Baden-Powell, body image, Boy Scout movement, British manliness, physical deterioration, *Scouting for Boys*, *The Scout*, World War I

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“Be prepared!” (but not too prepared): Scouting, soldiering and boys’ roles in World War I

When war broke out in 1914, the minimum age of enlistment was eighteen, while the War Office did not permit those under the age of nineteen to serve overseas (Van Emden 2012: xix). Yet, unsurprisingly perhaps, given that Britain's army recruitment policy, unlike that of the other European Powers, relied upon volunteers until 1916, much of the literature aimed at future soldiers took a romantic rather than a realistic approach to war and the boy's role in it (Paris 2004: xii). War-based fiction frequently ignored the real-life restrictions imposed upon boys and instead engaged in fantasies of the heroic and triumphant contributions of fictional boy protagonists to the war. Such fiction attempted to instill in boy readers a patriotic fervor that would spur them on to join the army as soon as they reached the minimum age of enlistment. Michael Paris identifies the growth, by the early twentieth century, of "the pleasure culture of war", which "imbued Britain's youth with a romantic view of war and blind, unquestioning patriotism, and [. . .] convinced them that battle would be little more dangerous than a hard-fought game on the pitch" (xix). In particular, as the war advanced, and it became clear that it would not be resolved in a few months, recruitment propaganda – both official and unofficial, obvious and subtle – had to plan ahead, targeting "not just those approaching 18 but also younger boys who might be needed later" (Paris 2004: 8). The war stories produced by authors such as Escott Lynn and Rowland Walker not only supported the notion that war would be a great adventure, but also enticed young readers with numerous fictional examples of underage boys joining the army, performing great feats and, invariably, winning the Victoria Cross (Paris 2004: xx-xxi, 29). Since this fiction served largely as recruitment propaganda, it is hardly surprising that it indulged in exaggerated and unrealistic portrayals of the boy defender of Empire, ignoring the real-life limitations placed on boyhood by the State.

On its inauguration in 1908, Robert Baden-Powell's Boy Scout movement seemed similarly committed to preparing boys for their role as soldiers in the increasingly anticipated war. The Scout movement arose in response to a dramatic shift in the status of the British Empire and in the role of and attitudes towards its youngest British inhabitants in the early twentieth century. In the wake of Britain's struggle to victory in the Boer war in 1902, anxieties about the strength of the Empire and its defense mechanisms increased rapidly. The rise of other world powers such as Germany, America and Russia at this time put Britain in a vulnerable position. Germany, in particular, was seen as a threat to Britain on account of its geographical proximity and the progressively volatile relationship between Kaiser Wilhelm II and Edward VII. The first decade of the twentieth century saw a proliferation of "invasion scare" fiction, largely featuring Germanic conspiracies – most famously, perhaps, Erskine Childers' *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903).

Anxieties about the future security of the British Empire were exacerbated by the notion of physical deterioration, highlighted by the 1904 *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration*. This study had been commissioned in response to army recruitment figures which revealed that many potential soldiers were rejected on medical grounds. The report identified several social causes of deterioration, such as pollution, overcrowding, poor employment conditions and alcoholism. The report focused in particular on State and parental neglect of young people, attributing the high rate of infant mortality to parental ignorance of nursing and nutrition, while the State was condemned for allowing poor conditions in schools, including insufficient food supplies and inadequate provision of physical education. Perhaps most significantly, the report identified adolescence as the crucial period for determining the individual's proper development or degeneration. The "plasticity" of the individual to be molded

in one way or another, the report argued, “appears to terminate at eighteen, and the records of the years preceding that age are in the great majority of cases decisive for self-improvement or the reverse” (*Report on Physical Deterioration* 1904: 72-73). According to the report, therefore, the current young generation were at a crucial stage in their development, before the weaknesses polluting their adult counterparts had taken firm hold and, consequently, these weaknesses could be eradicated or, better still, avoided altogether. Social commentators and reformers began to identify the young generation as crucial to the future of the Empire and thus in need of special attention, not only to improve their welfare, but also to train them to become valuable assets to the nation. Lord Meath, founder of the Lads’ Drill Association, suggested that some form of military training would “inculcate on the rising generation the virtues of self-sacrifice, a greater respect for authority, and a deeper sense of personal duty and responsibility towards society and the State” (Meath 1903: 3). Many other commentators agreed and several proposals were made for the implementation of such a scheme.ⁱ

Yet it was the Boy Scout movement – ostensibly a non-military organization, although it did have army origins – which finally emerged to train British boys for their new role in the Empire. Baden-Powell’s movement was based upon his book *Aids to Scouting for N.C.O.s & Men* (1899), initially intended for adults, but which soon became popular with a younger audience. Baden-Powell later adapted this manual for a boy readership as *Scouting for Boys*, originally published in six fortnightly parts, beginning in January 1908. Rather than identifying Scouting as a distinct organization, Baden-Powell claimed that “we want amalgamation rather than rivalry, and scouting is only intended to be used as an additional attraction by those in charge of boys’ organisations of any kind” (Baden-Powell 1908: 302). However, it soon became clear, whether it was Baden-Powell’s original intention or not, that Scouting had become a

movement in its own right, cultivating a distinct ethos and image of British manliness for its members to internalize. Joseph Kestner hails *Scouting for Boys* as “one of the most significant texts in imprinting manliness on generations of young men in the early twentieth century” (Kestner 1997: 1). This manliness consisted of several components, which becomes clear when perusing the contents page of *Scouting for Boys*. Here, boys were instructed in areas such as “observation and tracking”, “campaigning and camp life”, “endurance and health”, “discipline” and “patriotism and loyalty” (Baden-Powell 1908: 3). To enter what Michael Rosenthal terms Scouting’s “cult of masculinity” (Rosenthal 1986: 129), members had to undergo intellectual, practical, physical and character training. Although all of these types of training were crucial in the formation of the Scout movement’s ideal of British manliness, there was a strong focus in pre-war Scout literature on the visual depiction of this ideal which, in turn, placed emphasis on the Scout’s physical training and his body image. In short, Scouting appeared to be preparing boys for their future role as soldiers ensuring that, when the time came, they would not, like many of the adult generation before them, be rejected for active duty.

Scouting for Boys responds to fears about physical deterioration by encouraging boys to become “*PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE for their own Strength, Health and Sanitary Surroundings*” [sic] (Baden-Powell 1908: 185). Chapter six of the handbook, entitled “Endurance for Scouts; Or, How to be Strong”, focuses on the need for boys to perfect each part of their body in order to become specimens of proper British manhood and it instructs them on how to achieve this. As well as giving boys advice on keeping various body parts such as the nose, eyes and teeth in good condition (Baden-Powell 1908: 189-191), this chapter advocates the use of measurement cards which tell a boy,

according to his age, what ought to be his height, weight, and various measurements (such as chest, waist, arm, leg, etc.) He is then measured, and learns in which points he

fails to come up to the standard. He can then be shown which exercises to practise for himself in order to develop those particular points. (Baden-Powell 1908: 192)

Scouting for Boys is full of exercises for improving the body to reach that standard of fitness deemed acceptable for the future defenders of the Empire. Ju-jitsu was encouraged as “a grand thing for keeping you fit” (25). Other methods were perhaps less sophisticated but no less strenuous. An exercise called “the struggle”, for example, in which boys locked hands and pushed each other “chest to chest” with the object of driving “the other back to the wall of the room”, was designed to “MAKE THE HEART STRONG” [*sic*] (Baden-Powell 1908:193-194).

The Scout magazine, too, encouraged a culture of physical exercise to improve the body, something which is clearly apparent in many of its advertisements. Advertisements for sports equipment were common, implicitly promoting activities such as cycling, cricket, tennis and rifle shooting. There were also advertisements for schemes to build up general strength, such as one for a book about Eugen Sandow, a Prussian bodybuilder who, as the living embodiment of the muscular ideal that proliferated from the late nineteenth century, became the inspiration for thousands of people to improve their bodies (Chapman 1994: 4). The book advertised in *The Scout* extended Sandow’s influence to a younger audience, “showing how Sandow won Health and fame [. . .] explaining how every reader of THE SCOUT may not only obtain [. . .] Stamina and Physique [. . .] but also gain that Physical perfection which is so universally admired and sought after” (“Sandow’s Free Book” 1910: 461). Sandow’s “Physical perfection” was something which was apparently within reach for the average Boy Scout.

It was not only the improvement of the ordinary body, however, that the Scout movement sought to promote. An advertisement in the first issue of *The Scout*, for a booklet called “*Health at Home*” [*sic*], promises to “eradicate troublesome complaints and physical defects” (“Strength by Mail” 1908: 17). This focus on the correction of physical defects, which is unsurprising in

light of physical deterioration fears at the time, was prominent in Scout literature in the pre-war period. Some of the corrections were fairly minor. *Scouting for Boys*, for example, identifies the importance of posture to the development of the boy's body, claiming that slouching "depresses all the other organs and prevents them doing their work properly" and suggesting that boys can combat the urge to slouch by engaging in "plenty of physical exercises and drill" (208). *The Scout* magazine addresses some more challenging defects. For example, an advert for the "Cleave-Extensor", with the tagline "are you short, or too fat?", offers a method for increasing height by "1 to 2 ½ inches" and decreasing "weight, abdomen and hips" to offer "health, strength, and symmetrical proportion" ("Are You Short, or Too Fat?" 1908: 17). On the letters pages, Scouts write in to ask for advice on how to correct defects such as knock-knees – the editor suggests "placing a flannel-covered block of wood between the knees when you go to bed" or sitting "astride a barrel for a period daily", before suggesting that the sufferer consults a doctor ("Knock Knees" 1908: 486). *The Scout* magazine also issued a health advice sheet where readers could ask for help to treat certain conditions by answering a series of medical questions such as: "What baths do you take. [. . .] Do you keep your window open at night. [. . .] Are you Constipated. Are you nervous or depressed." ("Our Health Free Advice Sheet" 1908: 19)

In light of this evidence, it appears that the Scout movement was not designed solely to recruit boys who were already well on the way to fulfilling the ideal of British manliness but, more importantly, those boys who fell short of the standard and would continue to do so without assistance. According to Joseph Bristow, the boys whom Baden-Powell was most intent upon catching were "from the much maligned East End and comparably degenerate working-class areas of the larger British cities" – boys who were, perhaps, most at risk of succumbing to physical deterioration (Bristow 1991: 175). The patchwork style of *Scouting for Boys* and *The*

Scout magazine – with their mixture of stories, articles, illustrations and anecdotes – replicated the format which had been successfully adopted by publishers such as George Newnes, Arthur Pearson and Alfred Harmsworth to attract a semi-literate working-class audience to their papers. In *Scouting for Boys*, Baden-Powell advises Scouts that “whether rich or poor, from castle or from slum, you are all Britons in the first place and you’ve got to keep England up against outside enemies” (281). The Scout movement advocated equality between its members, giving them all the opportunity to reach the ideal standard of British manliness. Even disabled Scouts, it seems, are not excluded. In response to the question “Can I be a scout if I am lame and have to go on crutches?”, an article in *The Scout* lists the feats that a disabled Scout can still accomplish, concluding that “some of the greatest scouts that ever lived were sickly boys to begin with” (“Crippled Scouts” 1910: 250). Thus, there is a sense of inclusivity in the Scout movement’s aspirational focus on an ideal body image – an impression that even the weakest of boys can overcome his physical defects.

At the same time, however, the Scout movement vilifies those who do not treat their body according to Baden-Powell’s system of discipline and care. For example, in E. le Breton Martin’s Scouting novel *The Boys of the Otter Patrol*, serialized in *The Scout* in 1908, the main threat to the Otter Patrol does not come from the gang of mutinous German sailors or the host of lower-class ruffians that the Scouts encounter on their travels, but from one of their own number. Despite his smart dress and evident wealth, fellow Scout Percy Judkins is representative of a type of which the Scout movement is particularly critical: the waster. The waster is the worst kind of enemy to Britain – an enemy from within, of any class, who becomes merely an onlooker rather than a participant in the fortification and defense of the Empire. Percy possesses all the hallmarks of the average waster. He is defined by his inactivity:

On paper he was a finished scout; that is to say, he knew all the secret signs, was thoroughly conversant with the theory of tracking, with the descriptions of the various games and contests, though, having no practical experience in such matters, his knowledge would have been of little use to him had he elected to join a patrol and act up to all he knew. And, as we all know, an ounce of practice is worth a ton of theory. It is deeds that count, not words. (Martin 1908b: 374)

Percy's identification as a waster is not only signified through his inaction, but also through his indulgence in health-damaging vices. For example, as he tries to bribe his reformed cousin to sabotage the Otter Patrol, he is featured "smoking the inevitable cigarette" (Martin 1908a: 300), and "drinking whisky and soda" (Martin 1908c: 445) – habits condemned by the Scout movement. In *Scouting for Boys*, Baden-Powell observes that "A man who is in the habit of drinking wine or spirits in strong doses every day is not in the slightest use for scouting, and very little use for anything else" (26). He also suggests that "A great deal of crime, and also of illness, and even madness is due to the [. . .] habit of drinking too much." (Baden-Powell 1908: 199) Baden-Powell is equally critical of smoking, which "weakens [boys'] eyesight", "makes them shaky and nervous", "spoils their noses for smelling" and "generally makes [the boy] look like a little ass" (Baden-Powell 1908: 26). Thus, although he is well-dressed, with a clean-looking appearance, Percy's vices mark him out as an unhealthy specimen, wasting his potential as he rejects the opportunity to join the ranks of his clean-living Scout rivals who have fully embraced the ideal of British manliness.

Through its intense focus on health, strength and physical appearance – and the dangers of neglecting these areas – early Scout literature appears to respond directly to contemporary anxieties about physical deterioration and, while the Boy Scout movement was not founded as a military movement, there is a sense that, in its inaugural years, it is preparing its boy members, both physically and mentally, to become future soldiers. This agenda is seemingly supported by the opening pages of *Scouting for Boys*, which links the Boy Scout movement to the role of the

Mafeking Boy Scouts in the second Boer War. In this opening Camp-Fire Yarn, Baden-Powell claims that “[e]very boy ought to learn how to shoot and to obey orders, else he is no more good when war breaks out than an old woman, and merely gets killed like a squealing rabbit, being unable to defend himself” (Baden-Powell 1908: 11). After repeated references to the key role that the Scouts played in the defense of Mafeking, and an emphasis on the importance of military training, Baden-Powell eventually acknowledges that the extent of the Mafeking boys’ contribution was limited to “carrying orders and messages and keeping look-out, and acting as orderlies” so that “men were released to go and strengthen the firing line” (Baden-Powell 1908: 12). The Yarn then distracts boy readers from the reality of the Mafeking Scouts’ errand-boy role by emphasizing the danger that they faced from flying bullets and ignoring the fact that the boys were not in a position to return fire. This account has already planted the association between soldiering and the Boy Scouts’ role in war in the mind of the Scout, potentially providing boy readers with a fantasy of fighting on the front line to eclipse the reality of the Mafeking Boy Scouts’ subsidiary role in the Boer War. A similarly misleading juxtaposition occurs later in the handbook in the outline of the Boy Scout’s “DUTIES AS CITIZEN-SOLDIER” [*sic*] (282). Baden-Powell urges boys that, in the likely event that England is attacked “just as Mafeking was, unexpectedly, and by a large number of enemies [. . .] every boy should be prepared to take his place and help in defence like those Mafeking boys did” (283). The “help in defence” to which Baden-Powell refers is, of course, support work undertaken by the Mafeking Scouts in order to release their more useful adult counterparts for combat. Yet the omission of details of this ancillary role here, and the subsequent emphasis on the value of boys who can “*shoot, and can drill and scout*” [*sic*] (283) in the case of an attack against Britain, again implies an active,

soldierly role for boys in wartime. This, of course, is a position that, in reality, boys would be unlikely to hold.

This masking of the Scouts' anticipated subsidiary role in war behind a layer of militaristic rhetoric led to a number of comic assaults upon Scouting ideology and propaganda. As Robert H. MacDonald observes, Boy Scouts "were not, of course real soldiers, and their link to the army was often put in humorous or ironical context" in sources which exposed the quasi-adult independence and impact of the Scout as an illusion (MacDonald, 1993:189). One such source is P. G. Wodehouse's invasion-fiction satire, *The Swoop! Or How Clarence Saved England: A Tale of Great Invasion* (1909), in which the "hero", Clarence Chugwater, the pride of the Boy Scouts, rescues Britain from a host of invaders with the help of his fellow Scouts. The Scouts prepare for invasion by "acting out a Scout play [. . .] doing Cone Exercises [. . .] practising deep breathing; and [. . .] dancing an Old English Morris Dance" (Wodehouse 1909: 19). Such passages stress the childishness of the Boy Scouts' activities and their irrelevance or lack of value to the protection of Britain from external threats. Moreover, the text also emphasizes the preposterous nature of the idea that Boy Scouts, and adolescent boys in general, have the autonomy, authority and capability to play a key part in the defense of the Empire. At the end of the text, Clarence informs the villainous Prince Otto of Saxe-Pfennig that:

Resistance is useless. [. . .] Your troops, worn out with fighting, mere shadows of themselves, have fallen an easy prey. An hour ago your camp was silently surrounded by Patrols of Boy Scouts, armed with catapults and hockey-sticks. One rush and the battle was over. Your entire army, like yourself, are prisoners. (Wodehouse 1909: 37)

As this ludicrous image reveals, the idea of the Boy Scout playing an active or lead role in the fight against Britain's enemies – a role reserved for adults in reality – is false propaganda, a farce and an impossible fantasy. The Boy Scout could play at being a soldier but could not in reality, officially at least, become one.

Another ironic example appeared in the form of a cartoon in *Punch* in 1909 entitled “Our Youngest Line of Defence”. It depicts a frail looking “Mrs Britannia” gratefully clutching the arm of a small Boy Scout brandishing a staff with the caption: “FEAR NOT, GRAN’MA; NO DANGER CAN BEFALL YOU NOW: REMEMBER, *I AM WITH YOU!*” [sic] (Partridge 1909: 147). Significantly, this cartoon later reappears on the front cover of *The Scout* just after the outbreak of war in 1914 (Partridge 1914). While the illustration served an ironic purpose in *Punch*, in *The Scout* it was re-appropriated to underline the crucial role of Scouts in the protection of the Empire during this period of crisis. Early war issues of *The Scout* focused upon the many key ways in which Scouts could help the war effort directly. The first edition after the announcement that Britain was at war contained detailed instructions of numerous war duties that Scouts could fulfil. These included guarding railway bridges and telegraph lines against attacks from foreign spies, collecting information about army provisions and watching the coastline for hostile warships and aeroplanes. Scouts could also act as signallers and dispatch riders and, in the event of an invasion of Britain, provide first aid for the injured and perform fire brigade duties (Baden-Powell 1914a: 1186). A week later, *The Scout* announced that “[t]he uniform of the Boy Scouts (‘B.-P.’ hat or Sea Scout cap and official *fleur de lys badge essential*) is recognised by His Majesty’s Government as the uniform of a public service, non-military body” (“Government Recognition” 1914: 1216). According to Baden-Powell, this meant that Scouts were now “regarded as servants of the State like soldiers, sailors, or policemen” (Baden-Powell 1914b: 1218).

The creation of the Scouts’ Defence Corps soon gave Scouts the opportunity to come closer to an official role in war. This movement proposed to train boys between the age of fifteen and seventeen in “[r]ifle shooting, judging distance, signalling, pioneering, intrenching, drilling

in accordance with the Army, ‘infantry training,’ scouting, first aid, camp cooking”, in readiness to fight in the event of an invasion of Britain (“Scout News” 1914: 192). By March 1915, Baden-Powell recorded over two thousand registered members of the Scouts’ Defence Corps, a figure which had apparently risen to over four thousand less than a month later. Baden-Powell acknowledges his unnamed critics’ objection that “it is all very well for boys to carry out men’s work behind the scenes, but they could not be any good for fighting” (Baden-Powell 1915a: 514). He answers this pronouncement with the claim that “[a] boy has just as good an eye as a man, he can hold a rifle just as straight, and can pull the trigger equally well” (Baden-Powell 1915a: 514). However, while Baden-Powell offers several real-life examples of boys’ successful involvement in former conflicts to support his assertion, he is unable to provide evidence of British boys’ capabilities, since they “have not yet had much chance of getting into action” (Baden-Powell 1915a: 514). As there was neither a German invasion of Britain nor a reduction in the minimum age of army enlistment below eighteen, the opportunity never arose for Scouts to prove themselves in military combat, except illicitly as underage soldiers. Instead, Baden-Powell had to be content with celebrating the success of those detachments of the Scouts’ Defence Corps who, after finishing their training and reaching recruitment age, had joined the army and, “as they were already efficient instead of being raw recruits on joining, they have nearly all been promoted” (Baden-Powell 1916: 894). While former Boy Scouts might have excelled in the army, the contribution of current Boy Scouts’ role to army recruitment did not extend beyond distributing recruitment notices to those old enough to join up (Baden-Powell 1914b: 1218).

However, although the War Office officially barred boys from joining the army, many enlisted and fought underage during the war. Richard Van Emden reveals that “[t]here are cases of boys as young as thirteen, or even twelve, serving in France” (Van Emden 2012: xvii) and,

while such instances were far from common, the number of fourteen to eighteen year olds who fought in the war was much higher. Among the boys who attempted to enlist, a division occurred between those obviously younger boys who were quickly dismissed by recruitment officers and those adolescents who were, physically at least, closer to adulthood. Van Emden stresses that “[t]he emphasis in sorting out who should or should not enlist was on physical condition rather than age” (41-42). He observes that doctors conducting the physical examinations for recruitment were “asked for a medical opinion as to the *apparent* age, in other words, whether the boy’s physical development was such that he would make an efficient soldier” (Van Emden 2012: 44). While the army turned a blind eye to underage recruitment of boys who were considered to be physically, mentally and emotionally mature enough to deal with the horrors of war, those who were not sufficiently robust became a hindrance, costing the army money to train them and giving little in return. Ernest Steele, an underage soldier serving in France,ⁱⁱ emphasizes as much in a letter to his younger brother, warning him that, at fifteen, he is too young to join up:

Well, do you think it would be your duty to join the army, and spend England’s money in training you now, and then when you got out here, you would crumple up immediately? It would be merely wasted on you. [. . .] I have seen several kiddies out here; they have a pretty rotten time and don’t survive it long, although they cost as much as anybody to train. (Van Emden 2012: 99-100)

In January 1916, the implementation of conscription significantly curtailed underage recruitment, as potential recruits had to produce their registration card, on which their date of birth was recorded (Van Emden 2012: 24-25, 198). From this period onwards, the army discharged many underage soldiers at the request of their parents.ⁱⁱⁱ While many boy soldiers distinguished themselves in warfare, it seems that by the middle years of war the army more clearly demarcated and enforced the separation of boys from men.

More suitable positions for boys during the war – and ones with which many boys had to be content – were those less glamorous, safer, subsidiary roles which helped the Empire at home and were, significantly, far removed from the battleground. Even the Boy Scouts – at the heart of domestic defense schemes and, according to Baden-Powell, performing crucial roles to protect Britain from foreign invaders – were somewhat restricted. In *B.P.'s Scouts*, Henry Collis, Fred Hurll and Rex Hazlewood suggest that some of the Scouts' war work "may have been of little real value: the spy menace was largely imaginary and small boys guarding railway lines and telegraph poles were surely but a symbolic defence" (Collis et al. 1961: 75). *The Scout* made much of Boy Scouts' guarding and lookout duties, chronicling rare success stories. One article, for example, credits a Patrol of Scouts guarding telegraph lines with the arrest of three spies (Baden-Powell 1914b: 1218). Another article reports that Scouts at a coast-watching station had "found a drifting mine" while, at another station, Scouts apparently "had sighted and reported a German submarine" (Baden-Powell 1915b: 714). Yet, even where a threat might exist, the Scout movement did not expect its members to play a direct role in combatting it. In an article on "Guarding the Bridges" in *The Scout*, Marcus Woodward reveals that when he asked two Scouts "what action they would take if a spy should come, they answered: 'We should give him a good fright, sir. We shall raise the alarm, depend on't.'" (Woodward 1914: 1193) Such a response implies Scouts' own recognition of their subsidiary role in war. They were not expected to tackle foreign enemies directly, but to bring them to the attention of their adult supervisors, who were better equipped to deal with such threats.

In most cases, therefore, Boy Scouts, like other boys, had to be content with playing what Martin Dedman identifies as "a useful, though ancillary – even peripheral – role during the Great

War” in work that “was similar to that of women, designed to release men for service in the forces” (Dedman 1993: 218). *The Scout* records a number of these less glamorous duties:

Wolverhampton Scouts are carrying out a novel idea, suggested by Sir Richard Paget, District Commissioner for Wolverhampton. Each Scout is undertaking to rear six chickens to help the food supply.

[. . .]

Other country Scouts have planted all the waste land in their neighbourhood with turnips. In many parts the Scouts are busy making splints and bandages and helping the Red Cross Society. (“All in the Day’s Work” 1914:1202)

On the whole, Scouts performed domestic roles, acting as general dogsbodies and errand runners, at the beck and call of anyone who wanted their services. The article above goes on to record that “A South London Troop has been invited into the country to help a farmer with his harvesting”, while “an efficient ‘Clerk’ Scout was at once dispatched” to a lady looking for “a boy to help her with some clerical work at her home” (“All in the Day’s Work” 1914: 1206). Anyone looking for assistance, it seems, could benefit from the Scouts’ generosity during wartime. *The Scout* suggested a host of other ways in which a Scout could make himself useful. He could visit the family homes of absent soldiers “once or twice a week to scrub floors, clean windows, fetch coal, turn the mangle, look after the garden, or take the children out while ‘mother’ rested” (“What Are *You* Doing To Help?” 1914: 1207). He could offer his services as a letter writer to the illiterate or sick parents of soldiers at the Front and could also “[c]ollect newspapers and periodicals for our sailors and for the wounded in hospitals” (“Editorial Chat: More Useful Work” 1914: 21). Young Scouts were encouraged to prepare “their club-rooms to be used as dressing or first-aid stations for people who may get wounded if war comes into this country” (Baden-Powell 1914b: 1218). Notably, these are feminine, domestic duties, no doubt holding little appeal for boys in comparison to the exciting and heroic masculine role of soldier.

As boys were increasingly confined to these supporting and, sometimes, hypothetical roles in the war, *The Scout* emphasized the importance of their subsidiary duties and encouraged Scouts to accept gracefully their position on the sidelines. Three months after the outbreak of war, *The Scout* warns boys that “you can’t all expect to be actors in the limelight, and while our men are fighting at the Front the boys can be mighty useful behind the scenes” (Baden-Powell 1914c: 114). The article goes on to reproduce part of Lord Roberts’s address to the Eton Boys’ Club:

The very youngest boy amongst you can make his influence felt, and although these fights and struggles must go on unseen and unrecorded, those who take part in them will find their reward in the knowledge that they too have done their share towards upholding the standard of British courage, endurance, and honour in the hour when Britain most had need of them. (114)

The “unseen and unrecorded” work of boys in war thus becomes part of the cult of heroism.

Another article in *The Scout* reassures boys that:

It may be as noble and heroic to perform a dull duty well as to lead a charge in battle. There are many heroes of this war left behind in this country; heroes who will never fire a shot, or go within a hundred miles of the Front. (“Guarding the Coast” 1914: 166)

In the context of war, and the boy’s place in it, the definition of heroism in Scouting literature necessarily changes. The heroic role does not just incorporate the brave soldier in the lead part, fighting on the front line, but extends to include the supporting cast: those further away from the action whose contributions to the war effort strike a blow against the enemy in an indirect, less obvious, understated manner.

From its inauguration in 1908, Scouting was careful to distinguish itself from military youth movements and yet, despite this, in its early years there was a clear link between the role of the Boy Scout and that of soldier, particularly through a focus in Scout literature on the development of the strong, healthy male body. While some of the earliest recruits to the Scout

movement may have been old enough to enlist when war broke out in 1914, many others were left behind, aiming for a role that was, for now, beyond their reach. Thus, wartime Scout literature had to tread the fine line between preparing boys for their future role in defense of the Empire while simultaneously preventing them from adopting this role prematurely. The message to Baden-Powell's wartime Boy Scouts, therefore, was to 'Be Prepared!' for war, but not too prepared. For these boys, defending the Empire was not the heroic adventure that they had been anticipating.

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ⁱ For examples, see: F. M. Roberts, "The Army—As it was and as it is"; Argyll, "National Defence: A Civilian's Impression"; F. Treffry, "National Defence: Part II"; Henry Birchenough, "Compulsory Education and Compulsory Military Training".

ⁱⁱ Steele joined the army underage at seventeen and, at eighteen, had not yet reached the minimum age at which he could officially serve abroad.

ⁱⁱⁱ Van Emden states that “[i]n the summer and autumn of 1916, thousands of boys were shipped back to Britain” (277).