

MEDICAL STUDENTS IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR: THE EDINBURGH EXPERIENCE

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Generations of medical students have embarked on their chosen career with a variety of expectations and have faced, during the course of their training, a range of problems. None, however has had to undergo experiences and face problems such as those of the medical student between 1914 and 1918.

This article will discuss the dilemmas which confronted all medical students throughout Britain during this period, but will focus particularly on the students of Edinburgh University.

WAR

The declaration of war in August 1914 was followed by an almost hysterical war fervour. This provided a climate of opinion in which the medical student could not avoid difficult personal decisions: he shared in what was a very common ambition to 'do his bit' in the war, which was generally expected to be of short duration - 'Over by Christmas' was the common view. If a young man did not volunteer early he might feel that he ran the risk of missing what promised to be the greatest adventure of all time; there was a fear that he might be found wanting and his manhood called in question; he might even be shamed by those, many of them women, who would pin the 'white feather' on him. He was torn between patriotism which in 1914 was deeply felt, and deeply sincere, and his obligation to the profession on which he had embarked. He would not, in the early days of the war, feel that it was necessarily an 'either-or' situation. He could probably 'do his bit', and then come back, duty done and honour satisfied, to carry on where he had left off with only a little delay. Whatever decision he made it was a personal one. He had little guidance from the authorities, military, medical or university.

In the early enthusiastic days - as early as August 8, 1914 - the *British Medical Journal (BMJ)* reported in an editorial that 'offers of service from senior students are now coming in.... the Navy has already some actively afloat'.¹ A week later - 'The Navy, as Senior Service, has the pick of young men from the schools to act as temporary surgeons on probation. Immediate needs are now met'.² One of these Surgeon/Probationers expressed his satisfaction with his work aboard. 'On the whole I think I am on to a very good thing. Everybody tells me that getting on a hospital ship is about the best job you can get'.³

In December 1914 there was still no official policy regarding medical students. The President of the General Medical Council (GMC) pointed out that 'the need for efficient physicians and surgeons in the field and at home is not less urgent than the need for efficient soldiers and sailors'. 'I felt it my duty', he wrote, 'to press this consideration on senior students who, though they have nearly completed their curriculum, are ready to forego the prospect of early qualification and to enrol themselves straight away in the combatant forces'. 'I daily receive letters from senior students and their parents who desire guidance on their choice of apparently conflicting duties'.⁴ The Surgeon General, Sir Arthur Keogh, agreed. 'I think that the senior student is best fulfilling his duty to the country by getting his degree and then

joining the army. The need for young qualified men will become great, and I should regret that the supply should be diminished’.

By the end of 1914 the GMC was becoming increasingly concerned at the loss of medical students to the war effort. There were now 1,000 fewer students in the country as a whole than in the corresponding period of 1913. The President pointed out that unless students returned to their studies in the next few months, such a loss of young qualified practitioners, amounting to some 25% of the annual increase on the medical register, would be cause for serious consideration.⁵

In November 1914 the War Office had declared that medical students serving in combatant forces who wished to be released to continue their medical studies could only do so if they were serving in medical units of the Territorial Forces. For students who had joined the regular army (and these were in the majority), there were no special arrangements for their release. By February in 1915 there was some relaxation for students in their final year. This applied, however, only to those serving in the ranks, not to those holding a commission.⁶

By the summer of 1915 medical students who had not joined up were facing some unpleasantness. *The Scotsman* newspaper reported that the student was ‘daily twitted by the unthinking crowd, who regard him as a “slacker”. He sees the names of his school fellows in the casualty lists, and the desire to follow his comrades and “do his bit” is hard to restrain’.⁷ Lord Kitchener responded to this concern through his Private Secretary, stating that ‘all 4th and 5th year students should remain at their medical schools making every effort to qualify as soon as possible. The case of junior men is rather different as they would probably be of greater service to the country if they were to accept combatant commissions forthwith’.⁸ But another letter, also emanating from the War Office, ‘strongly advised medical students to stick to their studies’.⁹

The *BMJ* deplored the suggestion that the medical student was shirking his duty. ‘Anyone who deters medical students from making themselves competent and qualified in the profession of their choice is doing the country a disservice’.¹⁰

An attempt to clear up the confusion regarding the duties of medical students who were not in their final years was made in the House of Commons. The reply from the Under Secretary of State for War was ambiguous. ‘Any expression of official opinion which might seem to place upon them the obligation of taking up immediately military duty would hardly be in the interests either of the army or the community as a whole’.¹¹ The Dean of Kings College Hospital pressed for a more authoritative reply from the War Office. This is what he received:-

Lord Kitchener desires me to say in reply to your letter that it is advisable for medical students in their fourth and fifth years to continue their studies with a view to qualifying as soon as possible; the War Office would be unwilling to suggest that junior students should be discouraged from taking combatant commissions.

The Dean commented dryly ‘he views the matter less widely than I do’ and, referring to the continuing quandary of medical students, quoted a letter he had received from a medical student who took a pragmatic approach to the situation:-

in the army we deal with men by the million, so surely the few hundred men who are now engaged in studying in different parts of the country for the medical profession would be far more useful if they continued with their own work rather than waste two or three years of their training, for the doctor is quite as essential for the welfare of this country as the soldier or sailor, and, like the latter, the medical profession must have recruits¹².

The situation was becoming more and more illogical as the Dean added:-

The Government has admitted the mistake they made in the early days of the war in allowing munition workers to go to the front --- now they are taking measures to avoid a repetition of their mistake in the case of skilled agricultural labourers. Surely the same applies with the same, or even greater force, to those who are to fill the ranks of the medical profession, the numbers of which are already disquietingly low.¹³

In November 1915 it was reported that second and third year medical students were being actively canvassed at their homes, under Lord Derby's recruitment scheme, to join the army. The matter was taken up once more in Parliament, with the question being asked at what stage in the course did the War Office and Lord Derby agree that medical students should join the Army. The War Office reply was unhelpful, namely that students of first, second and third years must consider for themselves what answer they should make to the recruiting appeal and not regard themselves, so far as the War Office is concerned, as under the duty of continuing their medical studies.

Lord Derby himself (Director General of Recruiting) had no doubts. 'In my opinion it is the duty of medical students other than those in their fourth and fifth years of study to join HM's Forces'. The *BMJ* pointed out that this 'still left the younger student open to the blandishments of the recruiting sergeant'.¹⁴

The introduction of conscription in early 1916 for those aged 19 to 41 years brought the medical student more problems. Exemption from call-up was to be extended from all fourth and fifth year students to those in their third year, provided that they passed the forthcoming examination in the winter session. For all those thus exempted, enrolment in the Officers Training Corps (OTC) was compulsory.

It seems that over the following year the military authorities were finally beginning to realise the need for more students to qualify. In May of 1917 a statement in the House of Commons went so far as to say 'the employment of fourth and fifth year students in the army was not considered desirable'.¹⁵ Nevertheless many continued to serve in combatant units, having been refused release. For those who did secure their release, there were other grievances. A group calling themselves 'ex-combatants' complained that the War Office had refused them temporary demobilisation which meant that they were denied the privilege of wearing uniform (unlike the Navy) so that they were continually 'subjected to insults in public, being classed with conscientious objectors and those stricken with syphilis'. They also complained that once they obtained their commission in the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) following qualification, their previous combatant service was not counted for seniority.¹⁶

As the war entered its third year there was growing dissatisfaction about what was seen as the unfair advantages of medical students who did not join up. A father wrote that his son's fellow students were now qualified while his son was still at the front. He wrote bitterly of 'these shining patriots benefiting from the self-denial of their brother students'.¹⁷ The Central Medical War Committee now made certain recommendations aimed at increasing the number of students in training. All those who had completed their first and second professional exams should be released forthwith; those who had not should be seconded to medical school to enable them to do so, and if they were successful should be released. In addition, call-up of all bona fide medical students who had completed one year should cease. These recommendations were largely implemented in a new Army Council Instruction in

February 1918. However, the authorities retained the power to recall students whose progress in their studies had not been satisfactory.

Towards the end of the war some decisions were made regarding demobilisation of officers serving in the RAMC. This was to follow the principle of 'first in, first out' and go some way, it was hoped, to compensate those who, because of their combatant service, had 'fallen by the wayside in their race of life'.¹⁸

This account of the regulations and conditions (and the lack of them) governing the careers of medical students during the war years serves as a background to the events in Edinburgh University Medical School.

MEDICAL STUDENTS IN EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY

In the years before 1914, as now, Edinburgh was a very international university and attracted large numbers of medical students from the British Empire, Europe, China, Egypt and a number of other countries. Students entering the university in the sessions from academic years 1910-11 to 1916-17 were those most particularly affected by the war and this study has focused on these years.

The total number of students matriculating into the medical faculty between these years was 1605, an average of 230 each year, with a range from 193 to 264. Of these, 426 came from overseas: 345 from the British Empire and 81 from other countries. Before 1914, overseas students averaged 57 annually; after 1914 this fell to an average of 36, almost all of whom were from the Empire.

In the early years of the century most women received their medical training in the Edinburgh School of Medicine for Women. In 1916 this school closed and the students matriculated into the university where they continued their studies. The number of women students increased gradually from 8 in 1910-11 to 19 in 1913-14 and then more rapidly to 42, 64 and, with the closure of the Edinburgh School, to 94.

Up to the outbreak of war about 20% of the students were under 18 on matriculation. By 1916-17 students were entering university at a younger age; 31% were under the military age of 18.

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FACTS RELATING TO EDINBURGH STUDENTS IN THE WAR

According to the Record of War Service (which may not include all who enlisted) 504 medical students joined the Armed Forces; 238 as officers, either in the medical services after qualification, or in the combatant forces if they had obtained the necessary qualifications in the OTC, 86 served as Surgeon/Probationers(S/Ps) (or Surgeon Sub-Lieutenants) in the Royal Naval Voluntary Reserve (RNVR), and 170 enlisted into the ranks. In the case of ten students this information was not recorded.

Thirty enlisted twice - before and after qualification. These had obtained their release from the combatant forces in order to qualify, and then re-enlisted after graduation into one of the medical services. Only two of those qualifying during the war did not re-enlist, probably on health grounds; 425 were successful in qualifying during or after the war. There were 79 deaths. Nineteen were taken prisoner (13 of these subsequently qualified) 25 were invalided out, 19 of whom qualified. Fifty-four of the overseas students enlisted. These were mainly from South Africa, New Zealand, Australia and Canada and among these there were 5 deaths.

There was one death (from illness) in 1914. In 1915 there were 13 deaths, 23 in 1916, 21 in 1917 and 20 in 1918. In the Autumn of 1919 there was one death in Northern Russia, the last to be recorded in the University Roll of Honour.

Thirty-six of the deaths certainly occurred on the Western Front, 6 were killed in Gallipoli, 5 at sea, 4 in the Middle East and one each in Serbia, Salonika and one, as already noted, in North Russia. Seven died from disease, the remainder in action or died of wounds. Four were taken prisoner in 1916, 6 in 1917 and 8 in 1918 when there was much movement on the Western Front and one not recorded.

The war affected each generation of students in different ways, and these will now be considered separately.

Matriculation 1910-11. On the outbreak of war the majority of these students would have been in the 4th and 5th years of their medical studies and in sight of qualification. In spite of this 38 enlisted. Twenty-two became officers, having obtained the necessary experience in the OTC, 10 went into the ranks and 6 became Surgeon/Probationers in the RNVR - these would have been required to have passed their second professional examinations and would have appealed to those who wished to keep some links with their chosen profession. Seventy-two enlisted after qualification (usually in 1915 or 1916) as lieutenants in the RAMC or as surgeon/lieutenants in the Royal Navy and ten students enlisted twice.

This generation of students had more opportunity than those in later years to obtain higher rank in the medical services. For instance, Kenneth Fraser, who qualified in 1914, became a Lt/Colonel; Robert McKinlay, graduating in 1915, became Deputy Assistant Director of Medical Services (DADMS) in Salonika and James Riddell became DADMS for the 55th Division. Six were awarded the MC, one with bar, and one with two bars. There was one Military Medal, 3 OBEs and 2 foreign awards - the Croix de Guerre and Order of St George. Eleven were mentioned in despatches, 5 of whom also received other decorations.

There were 8 deaths. Lt G.M. Smith, a Machine Gun officer, was killed in 1915 in Gallipoli. 2/Lt Richard Vassie, invalided home after Gallipoli, died in 1918 from his injuries. No deaths occurred in 1916, but in 1917 there were 2: 2/Lt A.G. Carmichael and Lt A.M. Humphries were killed on the Western Front. Lt Humphries was killed by a shell while attending a wounded soldier, Surgeon S.N. Toulmin was killed in action at sea and Lt P.C. Macrae died after being invalided out from Salonika the previous year. Alexander Kennedy, who had completed his third year of medicine enlisted in the Royal Scots on the outbreak of war, rose to the rank of Captain, earned the MC, and was killed in the spring of 1918. Another long-serving officer, Lt O.D. Price, having served since 1915 in France, West Africa and again in France in the RAMC, succumbed to influenza contracted in France in December of 1918. Five were taken prisoner and 3 were invalided out.

Sixty-one completed their medical studies without interruption, and a further 22 after a period in the combatant forces. Only 9 failed to qualify.

Five overseas students enlisted, 3 from South Africa and 2 from New Zealand. All survived. (It will be seen later how overseas students were unfairly treated by the national service authorities in comparison with British-born students).

Matriculation 1911-12. More students enlisted than from the previous year, 59 in all. These included 29 officers, 13 in the ranks and 17 Surgeon/Probationers in the RNVR. Fifty went on to qualify without interruption of their medical studies while 34 qualified after a period in the armed services; seven enlisted twice. One of these, Lt G.H. Middleton, joined the Royal Field Artillery as a 2/Lt in August 1914. He returned to university in 1916, qualified in 1918 and was posted as a Lt in the RAMC

to Northern Russia and was killed in action in December 1919 in what seemed to many to have been a tragic and unnecessary war. Only 9 failed to qualify.

Eight deaths were recorded: (apart from Lt Middleton), 2/Lt R.G. Hindson died in London only one month after he joined up in 1914. In 1915 Pte D. Anderson and 2/Lt R.B. Buchanan were killed in Gallipoli and one, 2/Lt H.H.H. Richards, in Serbia. In 1916 2/Lt W.J. Dunlop was killed in action in September and 2/Lt F.B. Sanderson died of wounds in August. In 1918, Captain D.A. Sprott died in Baghdad from acute yellow atrophy of the liver. He had served in the Machine Gun Corps since October 1914.

Fifteen received the Military Cross (MC), 2 with bar. Twelve were mentioned in despatches, 9 of whom also had other decorations including one OBE and one DSO.

Sixteen overseas students enlisted, the greatest number being from South Africa. All survived.

Matriculation 1912-13. This intake of students and those of the subsequent year suffered particularly severely as a result of the war. Eighty three students enlisted; 36 as officers, 18 in the ranks and 22 as Surgeon Probationers. Details for 7 students were not recorded. Thirty-three students proceeded to qualify without interrupting their studies and of these 32 enlisted. Nine students qualified after a period of interruption and enlisted twice; 38 eventually qualified, some after the war. Only 12 of the survivors failed to do so.



FIGURE 1

Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh Residents showing four in uniform in 1916

By courtesy of Lothian Health Services Archive

There were 20 deaths, the highest number of all the groups studied. In 1915 there were 6 deaths; in Gallipoli, (Lt F. Chilton and Pte W.J. Manson), in Serbia (2/Lt H.H.H. Richards) and in France, (Lt T.N. Rout and Pte H.H. Macrosty). 2/Lt E.J. Campbell died in Cape Town. In 1916 there were 8 deaths. 6 were killed on the Western Front: Lts L.R.S. Gunson and J.E.B. Miller, 2/Lts J.D. Laidlaw and W.J. Dunlop and Pte J. Tulloch, and Pte J.F. Stewart who died from gas poisoning. Lt A.J. Edward was killed in Mesopotamia and Surgeon/Probationer R. Walker was killed in the Battle of Jutland. There were 5 deaths in 1917; 3 were on the Western Front. These were Lt J. Brink from South Africa, Lt T.J. White MC, and Pte A.D. MacLaren. Captain G.M. Clarke died in Palestine and Lt G.A. Hunter of the Machine Gun Company of the Imperial Camel Corps died in Port Said. In 1918 Captain H.M. Deans was killed in France. Three were taken prisoner and 2 were invalided out.

Nine received the MC, one with bar. Nine were mentioned in despatches, 6 of these also had other decorations. There were 2 DSCs. Out of the 17 overseas students who enlisted one was killed.

Matriculation 1913-14. This year showed the greatest number of enlistments, 97 in all: 46 officers, 28 other ranks and 20 Surgeon/Probationers; 3 were not recorded. Only 13 were able to qualify without interruption, but 49 qualified eventually, 24 did not.

The casualty rate was high with 19 deaths. There were 3 deaths in 1915: 2/Lt A.H.M. Henderson was killed at Gallipoli; Sapper E.O. Ruddock died of appendicitis in Alexandria after evacuation from Gallipoli, and Lt J.H. Cameron was killed in France. There were 8 deaths in 1916: four of these were in France: 2/Lt W.J. Dunn, H.M.H. Horrox (rank not specified), Lts J.W. McVicker and H.O. Marks. 2/Lt R.M. Buncle died of wounds in Edinburgh. Lt M. Macdonald was killed at Salonika and Surgeon/Probationer G.S. Freeman at sea. Lt E.A. Goodfellow who held the Vans Dunlop scholarship and received many prizes, died in Mesopotamia near Kut; he had enlisted on the outbreak of war. In 1917 there were 5 deaths and all were in France. They were 2/Lts R.P. Cole, C.L. Green, J.F. Harte and A.V. Stewart and Pte A.A. Thomson. There were 3 deaths in 1918. Captain R.F. Balmain MC was killed at Passchendaele, RAF Wing Adjutant H.P.D. Helm died in Carlisle (cause not stated) and Captain J.W.R. Ritchie was killed at a site unknown.

Nine received the MC, 1 with bar. 9 were mentioned in despatches, 2 of whom also received foreign awards - the Croix de Guerre and the Legion of Honour. Four were taken prisoner and 4 were invalided out.

All 3 of the overseas students who enlisted were killed.

Matriculation 1914-15. Many would have been too young to enlist immediately, but 90 of them did so at some stage of their careers: 38 as officers, 46 as other ranks and 6 as Surgeon Probationers. Only 3 students who had a record of war service managed to qualify without interruption of their medical studies. Forty-six did eventually qualify, but almost as many, 41, failed to do so (the reason for such a large number is not clear). Of the 12 deaths, 5 occurred in France in 1916. These were Pte C.J. Banks, L/Cpl D.T. Jack, Sgt D.G. Munro, 2/Lts W.B. Binning and J.A.H. Coats. Four were killed in 1917, 3 certainly in France and one probably so. These were 2/Lts J.F. McCredie and P.H.S. Bezuinhout MC, and Acting Captain D. Nicol. Two were killed in 1918, both in France: Lt E.H. Burgh MC and Lt F.A.K. Park. There was one early accidental death in 1915 when Cadet C.A. Ritchie fell off a horse.

Eight were awarded the MC, one with bar, one also received the DSO, two were mentioned in despatches and there was one Military Medal. Two were taken prisoner and 6 were invalided out.

Five overseas students enlisted and all survived.

Matriculation 1915-16. Students were still enlisting in large numbers. Some would be below military age on entry to medical school and some would have succeeded in passing their first and second professionals before the end of the war, and would accordingly come under the new regulations when the military authorities were relaxing their opposition to students continuing their studies. Nevertheless, 71 students did enlist; 33 as officers, 33 into the ranks and 5 became Surgeon/Probationers. Two succeeded in qualifying without interrupting their studies, possibly on health grounds or because they were more advanced in their studies than the average student. Only 13 of the enlisted students failed to qualify eventually, a sharp contrast to the preceding year.

There were 8 deaths. Of these only one (Pte M. Macdonald) occurred in 1916, probably in France. Three occurred in 1917; one certainly, but probably all, in France. These were Pte G.A.V. Gardiner and 2/Lts A.C. Garvie and A.K. Kincaid. Surgeon/Probationer D.J. Whitton was killed in action at sea on HMS *Cullist* in Dundalk Bay.

The students from this year had a shorter period of active service than previous years which may account for the smaller number of decorations, however 5 received the MC, one a Military Medal and one a Distinguished Conduct Medal. There were no prisoners, but 3 were invalided out.

Four overseas students enlisted. One, L/Cpl F. Borda, from Malta, was killed.

Matriculation 1916-17. Sixty-six students enlisted: 35 as officers, 22 other ranks, one was listed as Surgeon/Probationer and 8 were listed as Surgeon Sub/Lieutenants (an equivalent title). One became a Flight Sub/Lieutenant in the RAF. Their experience of medical school was short; most of those who enlisted did so in 1917. There were 4 deaths, all on the Western Front and all in 1918. They were 2/Lts A.T. Malcolmson, A.G. Allan and J.N. Macrae and Gunner P.G. Henty. Forty-nine qualified after the war. Thirteen failed to do so. Overall two were awarded the MC and one the Distinguished Flying Cross: 2 were taken prisoner and 2 were invalided out.

Overseas students were still enlisting. Four did so, but there were no deaths.

THE STUDENTS AND THE FACULTY

Throughout the war years the Dean of the Faculty was Professor Harvey Littlejohn, and it was on his shoulders that the greatest burden lay. It is clear from the voluminous letters emanating from the Faculty office that he gave close personal attention to a vast correspondence. The shortage of teaching staff increased his problems. On August 10th, 1914 he wrote 'All the qualified men have war fever and will not consider any other duties at present'. In addition to his duties as Dean he was also, as Major Littlejohn, officer commanding the medical section of the OTC in Scotland with responsibility for training designed to equip students for their future duties in the armed forces.

THE WAR AND THE UNIVERSITY

The outbreak of war was greeted enthusiastically in the *Student* magazine. 'To Arms! To Arms!' it called. 'Honour and justice and truth are to be vindicated'.

By contrast the Minutes of the Faculty of Medicine remained remarkably silent on the subject and it was not until November 1914 that consideration was given to relaxation of curriculum requirements. As university regulations included more than the minimum considered necessary by the General Medical Council, it was agreed some reduction would be in order. One term of anatomy could be omitted and attendance at certain classes e.g. ophthalmology and ENT could be reduced. Twelve months service in an army medical unit or a recognised war hospital would be acceptable for registration purposes in lieu of the normal medical and surgical practice in a recognised civilian hospital. A proposal was referred to the Senate that no male student, unless physically unfit or over 30 years of age, should be permitted to graduate unless he had gone through a course of physical and military training. It was not until a year later, however, that the class on the history of medicine was discontinued, and only in May 1916 that a limited class in 'War Neurology' was begun. It would seem that the adaptation of the course to war conditions was rather slow. From early 1915 the Faculty was responding positively to a number of requests from students for adjustments in the regulations governing examinations.

The Dean clearly had some difficulty in forming his views on students volunteering. In August 1914 he was writing to a concerned father: 'I deprecate the interruption of such a young student's curriculum.... I think it would be better for him not to volunteer at present'. But in January 1915 he was writing to a student who had enlisted as a private though he had already passed his second professional: 'I am glad you have enlisted'. And to another 'I think you have done the right thing'.

When a student who was serving as a Surgeon/Probationer in the RNVR wrote to him complaining that his work was 'monotonous and of little professional value', he advised him to 'stick with it' as, if he resigned, he would be required to enlist. (The Dean may have been mistaken about this). At the same time he was advising another student to return home, complete his studies, graduate and take a commission in the RAMC. This student was in his fifth year but the Dean seems to have shared in the general confusion when he told him that the War Office was recommending 'even more junior students' to return to their studies.

Towards the end of 1915 the movement towards conscription was building up; Lord Derby was bringing pressure on the universities. The Faculty responded cautiously: 'While the Faculty do not desire to influence the action of any of their students they are of the opinion that all possible steps should be taken to allow the students of 1st, 2nd and 3rd years to continue their studies until there is urgent need of their services to the State'. This motion was carried unanimously and referred to the Senate. The Senate, however, replied by calling on the Faculty to respond to their (i.e. the Senate's) motion that 'no concessions of any kind be asked for any student other than, if necessary, 3rd year students'.

The Faculty held further discussions when the Director General of the Army Medical Services said he was 'in entire agreement with Lord Derby's decision that it was the duty of medical students (other than those in the 4th and 5th year of study) to join HM Forces'. Finally they agreed a motion that all medical students 'eligible for military service except those in their 4th and 5th years should be recommended to join HM Forces' and that the university would 'as soon as possible, take such steps as are within its powers to obtain permission from the Crown Authorities for those

students (i.e. in first, second and third years) to continue their studies until there is urgent need of their services to the State'. The motion was referred to the Senate who were unenthusiastic and replied, as before, that concessions should not be sought.

It is not surprising that by March 1916 the students were expressing their dissatisfaction with the Faculty in no uncertain terms in the *Student*. 'Medical students have been poorly served by those who control his (*sic*) career and destiny. We looked to them for guidance and advice but received little of any value....' 'The advice (from the military authorities) was changing about once a month and it is no exaggeration to say that we have never definitely known where we stood....'

By now, with the war nineteen months old and no end in sight the medical students could show the wisdom of hindsight. 'One would have thought that efforts would have been made to conserve the profession.... But what has happened? A very large proportion of medical students in the excitement of the moment and in a commendable spirit of patriotism gave up their studies.... and took combatant commissions. Many more, when they got the chance, went over to France as dressers to do work which trained RAMC privates should have been equally well-trained to do and which trained nurses could do infinitely better'.

The writer went on to say that a saner outlook had now been reached and 'most senior men realised that their best gift to the common service was to stick to their studies and qualify as soon as possible'. He points out the difficulty the student faced: 'it hasn't been easy to lead the sequestered life of a student, and maintain the detachment for good work while the turmoil and anxiety raged all round. It was even harder when the powers that be and our own responsible guardians were eternally changing their ideas concerning our proper duties and obligations'. 'With conscription' he said, 'the medical student still did not know what was expected of him, nor could he find anyone who could tell him'.¹⁹

By November 1917 the Dean wrote of 'an agitation going on for a larger number of medical students to be released from the Forces'. Medical students were, in fact, beginning to return, but some anomalies were discovered, particularly for those from the Empire. For instance, the Dean wrote to L/Cpl Grace, a New Zealander serving in the 16th Royal Scots, informing him that the current Army Council Instruction (ACI) did not cover his situation because he was not from Britain. 'The whole question', he said, 'was under review'. 'I shall be only too pleased to do anything I can for you as I feel you have made a considerable sacrifice'. And to another who also was not eligible for release, 'I regret this more specially because of your going on service when you were not bound by the Military Service Act to enlist'. To yet another he wrote: 'I fully sympathise with you and with the great sacrifice you have already made in the service of your country. I think it is men such as you who ought to receive every consideration and concessions to enable them to the return for the purpose for which you came from South Africa to this country'. He showed a personal concern for another student: 'I am so sorry that you did not come and see me during the time you were at home suffering from shell shock, as I think I could have done something for you'. At present he was not eligible for release but 'You may rely on my doing all I can to help you when you do come back'.

One can sympathise with the students about not knowing what they were expected to do, but also with the Dean. 'I have a little difficulty', he wrote, 'in understanding the various ACIs'. Besides this problem he was also concerned that there should be fair play between students. He protested to the Ministry of National

Service that some students who had failed to pass their 1st professional examinations were being called up while others were not. 'This seems to me most inequitable'. He asked for clarification.

He wrote of another student who was working in a civilian hospital though he had not passed his 2nd professional and who had not presented himself for examination for two years. 'This student should have been called up long ago.... it seems unfair to those who have gone'. In February 1918 with the war seeming to drag on indefinitely, he was expressing his regrets to Sir William Norman, Medical Director General of the Royal Navy, that his list of volunteers wishing to be Surgeon/Probationers only included 20 names - 'much too small a number for a school of this size'. He went on to say that he would 'welcome compulsion for all male students to give a year's service to the country. Voluntarism is played out as far as a medical student is concerned and I would like to see some equality of sacrifice'.

Hostilities in France were heating up in 1918, and particularly so when the Germans made their rapid advance in May. The Dean was now giving slightly different advice to students in the combatant forces who requested it. For instance on May 25th he wrote to one such student serving in the Royal Engineers in France. 'I have no hesitation in saying that a man in your position can serve most usefully by remaining in the Army, specially during the present emergency'.

The Faculty held a Special Meeting on April 9th 'to consider a letter from the Convenor of the Scottish Medical Emergency Committee requesting the University to 'consider a drastic reduction in the clinical teaching staff during the present Summer term owing to the urgent need of medical men for the Public Services' It was the Dean's opinion that staff could be freed as most students could postpone Clinical Medicine and Clinical Surgery classes to a later date; the needs of students for clinical experience could be met by taking hospital appointments, by joining the Navy as Surgeon/Probationers or by acting as assistants in war hospitals. This was acceptable provided that the War Office and Admiralty would agree to take final year students immediately. However the response from the Ministry of National Service was prompt. They were not prepared to take any action upon the lines suggested.

It is not clear whether teaching staff were in fact released, but many senior students did act as resident house officers in civilian hospitals. Considering that almost all newly qualified doctors who would normally be filling these posts were called into the services, the students were filling a vital gap, and at the same time gaining valuable experience.

As the end of the war came within sight, the Faculty had to consider how they were to accommodate the students who would be returning to the university, together with the new intake of matriculating students, and what relaxation could be made to enable them to complete their studies.

It was decided to grant priority to returning service men - and to women. By excluding all under 18 they were able to admit 214 men and 18 women. There were a further 15 men on the reserve list 'to whom on account of their age and their war service, it would be very hard to refuse admission'. They were admitted. The Faculty took trouble to adjust courses, examinations, etc. to meet the needs of returning students. Many applications for special consideration in 1918 and 1919 were made, and many were granted, some with the proviso 'as a special war concession'. Even in 1920 requests were still being received. For instance Pte A.G. Mackay asked that the work he had done in attending to the sick when he was a prisoner of war in Friedrichsfeld Rheinland be allowed to count in lieu of three months clinical medicine. This was allowed.

STUDENT LIFE IN EDINBURGH DURING THE WAR

In the absence of first hand accounts (those few appearing in the *Student* are so flippant, unreliable and unconvincing that they have to be discarded), we have little to indicate what it was like to be a student in Edinburgh during the war years. One important facet of life was involvement in the OTC; in the early years this tended to be either in the infantry or artillery sections. Later the medical section became more prominent for the medical students. Weekly instruction covered aspects of military life which it would be necessary for a newly qualified doctor in the forces to know. Drill and field operations were learnt: marching, signalling and stretcher-bearing. In addition they would learn how to prepare an advanced dressing station and a tent for use as a Field Ambulance, erect tents and shelters for the wounded, prepare a field dispensary and issue drugs. They would have lectures on administration, sanitation, field hygiene, water purification, etc. The training had to be appropriate for students at an early stage of their medical course, so they were also taught minor surgery, bandaging, first aid, splinting fractures and the principles of treatment of burns, haemorrhage, and shock as they were understood at that time. With all this it may be presumed that the medical student of the war years had a firmer grasp of practical problems than had his predecessors – and probably also his successors. He had the stimulus of knowing that what he was learning he was very likely to be putting to practical use in the near future.

The OTC activities culminated in the annual Summer Camp. This could be very enjoyable if the weather were fine; less so if the weather were bad, but if this were the case it would, they recognised, be a more realistic preparation for life in the trenches. The final camp, in July 1918, was probably the largest and most successful of all. It included all the Scottish universities as well as Durham and Oxford and was under the command of their own Dean, Major Littlejohn. It greatly benefited by the inclusion of students who had returned from service in a variety of war situations overseas.

They got some fun out of it too and probably could look back with some nostalgia in later years to memories of their campfire song.

So fill up the dixies, and stoke up the fire,
Let the smell of the cooking rise higher and higher;
Bring gallons of water to boil for the tea
Of the Medical Unit, E.U.O.T.C.²⁰

Some of the particularly able students were employed as Demonstrators in Anatomy, and all students had plenty of opportunities for practical clinical experience before qualification.

Reference has already been made to the closing of the Edinburgh Medical School for Women in 1916 and their transfer into the university. Although there were already some women in the university it must have been quite an event when the ‘Lady Medicals’ entered the classroom. The event was recorded.²¹

One by one they come trooping in -
Tall girls, short girls, fat girls and thin!
Pale girls, stale girls, burly girls bluff,
Haughty girls, knutty girls - Gee! Some stuff.²¹

It must have been a highly embarrassing situation for the women as they faced the ‘stamping and tramping.... the cheering and jeering.... by the toughs at the back

and by most of the rest'. But at least it did not have the ugliness and potential danger that was faced by Sophia Jex Blake as she led her fellow students into Surgeon's Hall in 1870. The 'poet' goes on to admit 'the laugh was the other way round by the way when results of the class exams came out one day'.

In due course the university was celebrating the Armistice with services and a grand torchlight procession. An editorial in the *Student* magazine spoke for all students, 'But it is something to be alive'.²²

CONCLUSION

This account of medical students at Edinburgh University in World War One is incomplete. It is based on matriculation records, the University Roll of Honour, the Minutes of the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty Letter Books which record outgoing, but not incoming mail. The main deficiency is that the account lacks personal experiences. There must be many stories which would add fascinating detail to these brief outlines. One example is the incident in which Surgeon/Probationer Walker lost his life in the Battle of Jutland.

Walker had been a particularly distinguished student. He held the Vans Dunlop scholarship in anatomy, and sundry bursaries and medals, including the Cunningham Medal presented to the most brilliant student of the year in anatomy. He had been selected by his Australian University as a Rhodes Scholar on the basis of popularity, proficiency in sports, scholastic ability and capacity as leader. On HMS *Shark* he was said to be very popular, so much so that the officers asked him to stop with them instead of transferring to HMS *Tipperary* which would have meant promotion. He



FIGURE 2

Robert Walker taken from University of Edinburgh Role of Honour 1914-19

By courtesy of *Lothian Health Services Archive*

* The sources for this account are:- 1. Geoffrey Burnett. *The Battle of Jutland*. 1964 Batsford. P 103-4.

2. Stuart Legg. *Jutland. An Eyewitness Account of a Great Battle*. 1966. Rupert Hart-Davis. p77-8.

† The Scotland at War Trust based in the Department of Advanced Humanities, Edinburgh University would welcome any such information.

elected to stay on the *Shark*. In the Battle of Jutland 'he showed heroic fortitude when subjected to a murderous fire as they lay helpless and crippled'.²³

An unexpected encounter between the German and British fleets off the coast of Denmark on the afternoon of May 31st 1916 led to a fierce naval engagement. The fourth destroyer flotilla of the third Battle Cruiser Squadron under Admiral Hood included HMS *Shark* and HMS *Tipperary*. As battle was joined they were ordered forward to act as an anti-submarine screen to protect the larger vessels in the rear. This could be regarded as the equivalent of 'going over the top' for an infantry battalion. Under its captain, Commander Loftus Jones, HMS *Shark* led the attack. It 'hurled itself at the German force, opening fire with every gun that would bear'. As three battle cruisers appeared out of the mist HMS *Shark* came under a hail of shells. The forecastle guns and their crew were completely shot away, the wheel was shattered and a shell burst inside the engine room. HMS *Shark* was now totally disabled. When its fellow destroyer, HMS *Acasta*, offered help, the severely wounded captain refused. 'No, tell him to look after himself and not get sunk over us'. *Shark* was now settling by the bows and 'every minute shuddered with the impact of a fresh shot. The wounded were crawling into the lee of the casings and funnels in a pitiful attempt to find shelter'. The coxswain, half blinded by blood, superintended the launch of the boats while a midshipman maintained a steady fire with a crew now reduced to two men. When one of these collapsed through loss of blood, the Captain took his place. Almost immediately a shell took off his right leg above the knee. When he was told that the flag had been shot away he was greatly distressed. On his order another was hoisted. Now the bows had sunk and waves were lapping over the water-logged hull. As two German destroyers approached he gave his last order, 'Save yourselves'. He was helped into the water in a lifebelt and the remainder of the crew swam towards the rafts and pieces of wreckage. Two torpedoes struck the *Shark* and she went down with her colours still flying, just 1½ hours after firing the first shot. When the dying captain saw cruisers sweeping past in pursuit of the enemy, he asked if they were British. When he was told they were, he spoke his last words - 'That's good'.

A few of the surviving crew were picked up but Walker was not among them. Several weeks later the body of Loftus Jones was washed up on a beach in Denmark where he was buried. He was awarded the V.C.

It is not known precisely what happened to Walker, but knowing the high opinion of him held by so many people, and the exceptional courage and competence shown by all the crew of HMS *Shark* one may be confident that he acquitted himself well in the last desperate moments. HMS *Tipperary*, in the same flotilla, went down later that night, so even if Walker had accepted the offered transfer he would probably not have survived.*

Many such stories of the experiences of Edinburgh medical students may lie unrecorded but there is still time to reread family letters, examine old diaries and search memories for details that would clothe the bare bones recorded here[†], but time is running out. Perhaps even these bare bones may serve to indicate how one university medical school tried to cope with the very difficult circumstances in which it found itself, and how its students faced up to the extraordinary complications which interfered with their planned career. For both Faculty and students this study suggests that the lack of a stated policy from the various authorities and inadequate communication between them made life particularly difficult for those at the sharp end. It is satisfactory that many of the mistakes in the First World War were not repeated in the second.

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