

The Taylor Termination Programme

By January 1915, the British War Ministry had grown alarmed at the heavy casualties the Royal Army was suffering on the Western Front. It was not so much the numbers of men killed and wounded that concerned war leaders, as the great cost of training and equipping new recruits, then transporting them across the Channel and to the Front, only to have nearly all of them killed within hours of their arrival. This was wasteful and inefficient.

Consequently the Ministry retained celebrated American efficiency expert Frederick Winslow Taylor, author of *The Principles of Scientific Management*, as a consultant to advise the Royal Army Training Command. Because the United States was still officially neutral, the real purpose of Taylor's trip to England was designated Top Secret, and remains so to this day.

Taylor compiled detailed figures on the costs of recruiting and training a man, of furnishing him uniform, boots, rifle, bayonet, food, medical care, pay, and other military essentials. He also calculated the exact cost per man of ship passage to France, plus train or road travel to the Front.

After crunching these numbers with his slide rule, Taylor determined that, rather than investing a substantial amount of time and money in turning a raw recruit into a trained soldier, then shipping him overseas at additional expense, only to have the Germans blow him to bits, it would be far more efficient and cost effective simply to shoot each new recruit immediately upon swearing him in. Taylor also calculated that the amount of money saved for each 10,000 recruits shot on enlistment would reduce the interest cost on War Bonds 0.0279%, over and above the direct cost savings.

Impressed by these figures, the War Ministry immediately instituted the Taylor Termination Programme. On March 21, 1915, 7,264 fresh recruits, including the entire first year class at Sandhurst Military Academy, were stood up in groups of 25 in the Arena at Rushmoor, Aldershot, and shot by firing squad. Late in the afternoon, Frederick Winslow Taylor, who had been timing the firing with his stopwatch, was struck by a round ricocheting off an unauthorized fountain pen in a recruit's shirt pocket, and killed instantly.

Undeterred by this tragedy, the Taylor Termination Programme continued without pause for the next 17 days. It then had to be suspended due to a shortage of ammunition. In all, 110,639 recruits were shot at Aldershot, leading to a direct cost saving (net of expenses) of 486,812 pounds sterling, 3 shillings, 4 pence, and a reduction in the War Bond rate of 0.309%.



The tragic death of Frederick Winslow Taylor, March 21, 1915