

'Every British hen should be on active service!'

In August 1914 *Poultry World* magazine launched an unusual national campaign to help improve soldiers' nutrition. The 'National Egg Collection for the Wounded' scheme asked British civilians to collect eggs to send to soldiers recovering from their injuries in hospital. 'Every British hen should be on active service,' the magazine proclaimed.

During the First World War Britons suffered food shortages, with U-boat attacks preventing imports, and many goods, including eggs became scarce or expensive. However, people gladly sacrificed their eggs to help soldiers recovering in hospital. Farmers, as well as people who kept chickens at home sent their eggs, or a donation to help buy eggs, to a local depot. The eggs were then distributed to war hospitals in Britain and overseas. The scheme allowed thousands of people to contribute to the War Effort in a small, simple way. Huge numbers of people took part and by Christmas 1914 over 70,000 eggs had been distributed, and in January 1918 it was estimated that over 7 million eggs had been sent to UK hospitals and 25 million overseas. Some people wrote their name and address in pencil on the egg they donated, and soldiers wrote to their donors to thank them. Special boxes and labels were supplied (there were over 2000 depots run by local groups and churches) and



free transport was provided by the railways. A central collection point was established in London in a warehouse initially provided free of charge by Harrods. It was estimated that an egg was placed in front of a wounded serviceman, even in France, within three days of being laid.