

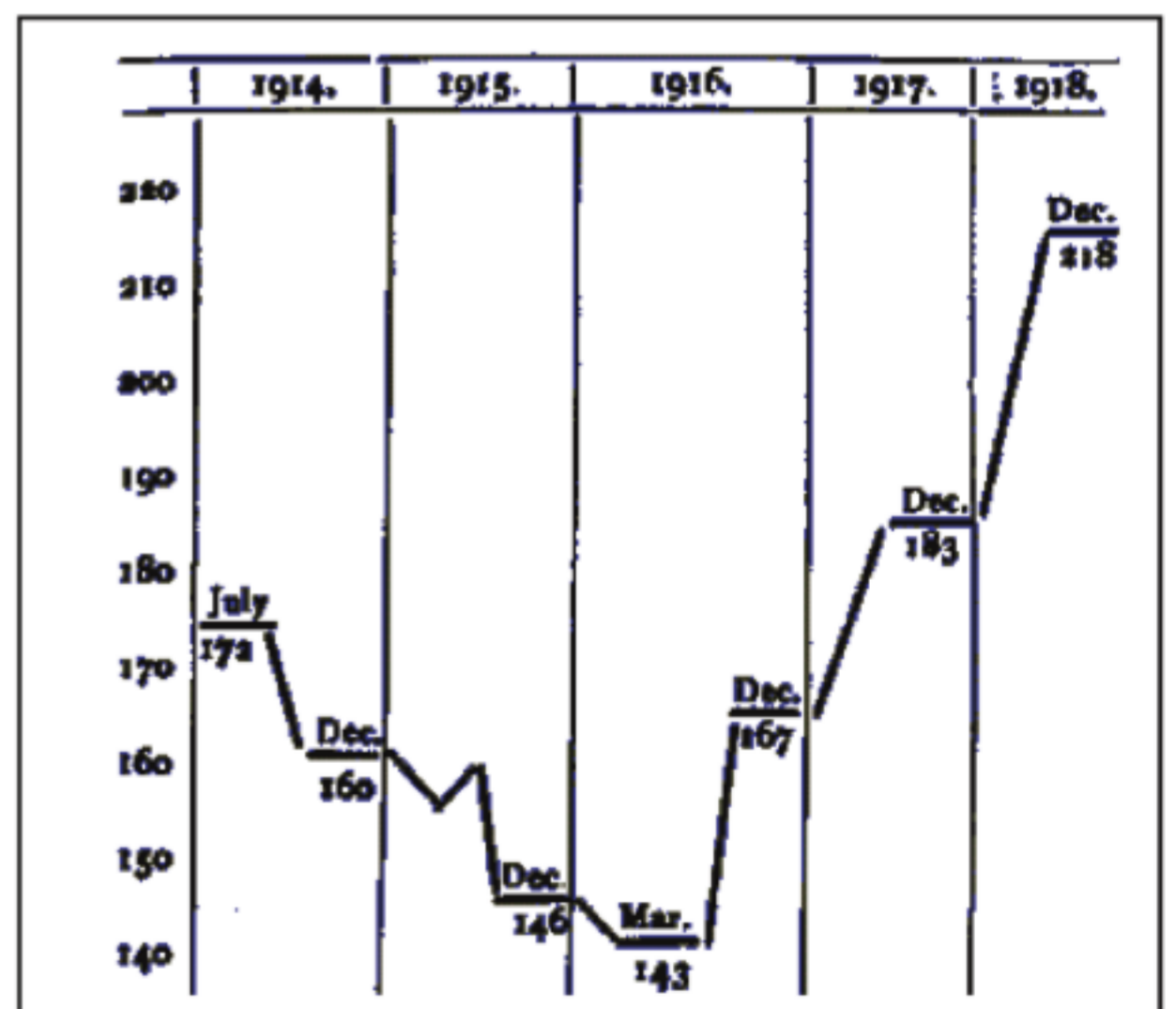
# College during the Great War

The First World War was a global war fought primarily in Europe from July 1914 to November 1918. The Government of the Isle of Man declared a State of War with Germany on August 7th 1914. One hundred and thirty-one OKWs died on active service in the War. Five hundred and forty-six Old Boys served in the War in all branches of H.M. Forces. King William's College was the only school in the British Isles to see active service during the war and in recognition the War Office presented the College with a trench mortar and a German field gun. These weapons were unfortunately scrapped in 1938 because the wooden spokes in the wheels were rotten. There is no doubt that the war had an effect upon the College. The Barrovian of June 1915 however tried its best to report that all was well; "In spite of the war, and the consequently increased fear of nearly all with regard to the sea-crossing, our numbers are very satisfactory indeed, and do not show any signs of diminution at present. Of course the war has claimed most of the bigger fellows, who have either enlisted, gone to Sandhurst, or taken up commissions temporarily: consequently the average age of the boys of the College has diminished somewhat, but that is rather satisfactory than otherwise." However a different picture emerged after the war as the Principal Rev. Owen explained, "The adjacent curve is the best answer we can give to the question, often put to us, 'How has the war affected the College?' for though in normal times numbers are not the only or the best test of prosperity, they provide a working index of the U-boat blockade as it has concerned us. Our experience is probably unique among Public Schools, and it may be of interest, now that the naval censorship is withdrawn, to record some things on which "Dora" [Defence of the Realm Act] previously bade us be silent."

As the war dragged on things began to improve. Owen explains why this was so: "It is remarkable that the "ruthless blockade" did not stop the upward curve of numbers. Von Tirpitz never said a more ominous thing for Germany than that the war would be won by the strongest nerves. "My boy," wrote one father, "will continue to cross the sea so long as there is one boat afloat flying the Union jack." "He will be very disappointed," wrote another, "if he does not see a submarine." "I have chosen the school I mean to send my boy to, and I am not going to be debarred by the Germans," said the father of a new boy, crossing on a day when all the ports in the Irish Sea were closed, and the Isle of Man boat, escorted by a destroyer, was the only boat allowed out. We draw from a virile stock, and the College cannot be too grateful, not only for their confidence, but that it was not misplaced.



The Officers Training Corps practising entrenchment on Hango Hill in November 1914



U111 entered the Irish Sea on two separate missions to sink Allied shipping.



An OTC cadet on manoeuvres. C.1915