

ALL THE KING'S MEN
(British, 2000, 112 Minutes)

“If I should die, think only this of me....” (Rupert Brooke)

Lord Kitchener's concept of “pals battalions,” in which local men enlisted to fight (and more often die) in World War I, is terribly illustrated in **All the King's Men**. The Sandringham Company of the 5th Norfolk Regiment was composed of grooms, servants, gardeners and other workers from King George V's royal estate at Sandringham in Norfolk under the command of the overaged estate manager. All but one of its 250 men disappeared without a trace at Sulva Bay in an attack on August 12, 1915 during the Gallipoli campaign. Raised in bucolic innocence in the English countryside, these amateur soldiers, some as young as 14, soon learned the horrors of the ill-prepared and incompetent campaign against the Turks into which they were sent. Led to believe that the Turks were little better than primitive savages, the Sandringham Company quickly discovered the fighting abilities of the German-supported Turkish forces.

The film provides a poignant example of the enthusiasm of the troops going off to war in the early days of the First World War. Yet when entire units disappear without a trace, incompetence rather than bravery usually lies at the heart of the problem. Queen Mother Alexandra (played by Maggie Smith) owned Sandringham and was the driving force behind the extensive investigation to determine the fate of her beloved “lads.” Estate agent Frank Beck (Sir David Jason) commands the company and is a trusted father figure, respected by both the King and the troops.

War poet Rupert Brooke's naïve remarks were read to the troops in **All the Kings Men**. Given the realities of the First World War, a more appropriate choice would have been the writings of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen mentioned in **Regeneration** during the OLLI Spring 2013 film course (see OLLI DocStore)