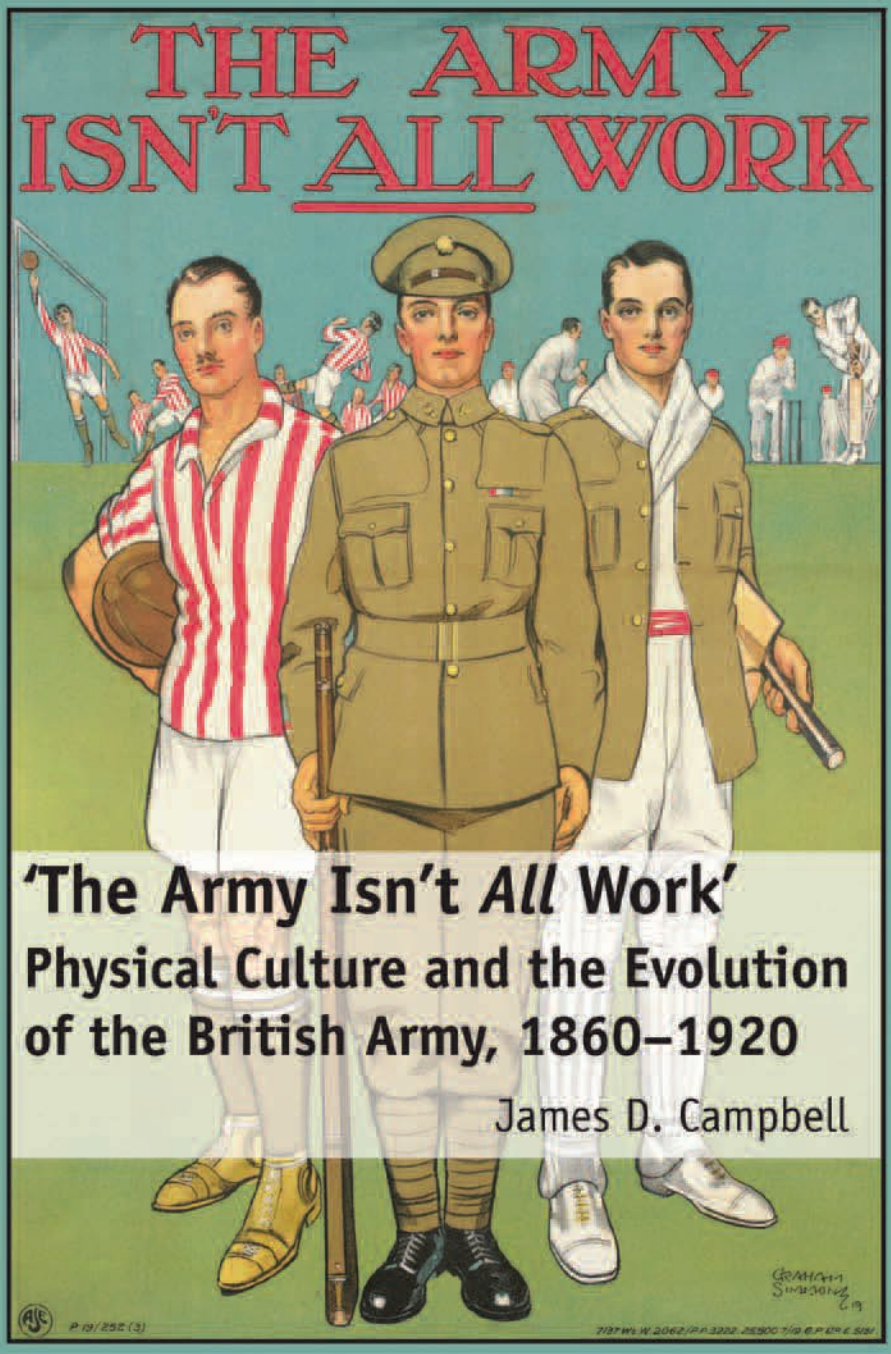

'The Army Isn't *All* Work'

Physical Culture and the Evolution of the British Army, 1860–1920

James D. Campbell

‘THE ARMY ISN’T *ALL* WORK’

To My Father –

Thomas Philip Campbell Jr.

1937–1996

And to the professionals who go to war not for an ideal,

but because it is their job.

‘The Army Isn’t *All* Work’

Physical Culture and the Evolution of the British Army, 1860–1920

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Acknowledgements

In 1996 I undertook a research project to discover whether there was a connection between the changes in the British Army between the Crimean War and the First World War, and the appearance in Britain during that same time of what we know now as Modern Sport. I began this project at the suggestion of my graduate advisor, Dr. William Baker of the University of Maine. He is an historian of Britain, but first and foremost he is an historian of sport and all the ways in which sport has been a part of peoples' lives and their societies since ancient times. I suspect that he had little interest in supervising the research of someone who thought he was really only interested in the Victorian British Army and the *Boys Own* tales of how it spread the benefits of British civilization around the globe. After many years of work, of wrong turns and exhilarating discoveries, and hopefully some maturing (but not a loss) of that original fascination with the Soldiers of the Queen, that research project is now this book.

It has taken far longer than I had ever intended for this manuscript to reach publication. Many thanks to the editors, readers, and staff of Ashgate Publishing who have made this possible. It was more difficult than I had thought it would be to undertake this effort while still serving as an active Army officer. Military duties, including the untimely intervention of the ongoing war, have a way of interrupting what has really been an intellectual hobby. I can say, however, that among other things my enforced sabbatical in Afghanistan allowed me to get a lot of reading done, and to see first hand the results of the spread of the British Army's physical culture. In the spring of 2006 while waiting to leave a small forward operating base in Helmand Province, in the first-ever Coalition Forces convoy to the then still-obscure town of Sangin, I spent some time watching our Afghan National Army partners play cricket in a dusty and windy patch of desert. It was a poignant event for me on several levels.

In an endeavor such as the completion of a book project like this, one realizes very quickly that without the assistance of many people, completing the project would be impossible. I have a long list of people to whom I owe much—I only hope that I can eventually repay some of them with more than a citation at the beginning of a manuscript. More than any other person, I owe a deep debt of gratitude to Dr. Baker. He started working with me when this project began as a Master's thesis—largely as the result of his suggestions. Little did either of us know that there would be such fertile ground in that field as to lead me to develop

the topic into what has become this book. Dr. Baker's ideas, encouragement, admonishment, and superb editing have made this document what it is.

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Photo Archive, the British Library, and the British National Archive (formerly Public Record Office) at Kew. I cannot forget the assistance of the Director and the Secretary of the Army Sport Control Board, Major General (ret) S.W. Saint-John Lytle, CB, and Lieutenant Colonel (ret) Barry Lillywhite. Lieutenant Colonel Lillywhite provided me with not only a ride around Aldershot but also a kind tour of the Board's facilities, and Major General Saint-John Lytle gave me access to the Board's historical files—something it was clear that few outsiders, if any, had ever had before. I owe a great debt to the staff of the Royal Army Physical Training Corps Regimental Association, and to the Commander and staff of the Army Physical and Adventurous Training Group, Aldershot. They also helped me in getting around Aldershot, and were gracious in their treatment of the curious U.S. Army officer who wanted to know all about their Corps.

Mr. Jim Pearson, a former Physical Training Corps NCO and Honorary Curator of the Royal Army Physical Training Corps Museum, proved to be perhaps the best source of material I could have hoped for. He gave unstintingly of his time, guided me around the school (despite his being aged over 80, I was sweating while trying to keep up with him), and allowed me unfettered access to all of his materials. His tour of the museum gave me an appreciation for the history and proud traditions of the Corps, and put into context the sometimes disjointed material I had accumulated. Most importantly for me, Mr. Pearson made me copies of original documents, and found for me the only extant original typescript copies of the Staff's War History, reports produced during the First World War, and the original correspondence associated with those documents. I cannot adequately express my thanks to Jim for his trust and kind assistance.

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COLONEL J.D. CAMPBELL
August 2011
Tampa, FL

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“Vitaï Lampada”

There’s a breathless hush in the Close to-night --
Ten to make and the match to win --
A bumping pitch and a blinding light,
An hour to play and the last man in.
And it’s not for the sake of a ribboned coat,
Or the selfish hope of a season’s fame,
But his Captain’s hand on his shoulder smote --
“Play up! play up! and play the game!”

The sand of the desert is sodden red --
Red with the wreck of a square that broke; --
The Gatling’s jammed and the Colonel dead,
And the regiment blind with dust and smoke.
The river of death has brimmed his banks,
And England’s far, and Honour a name,
But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks:
“Play up! play up! and play the game!”

This is the word that year by year,
While in her place the School is set
Every one of her sons must hear,
And none that hears it dare forget.
This they all with joyful mind
Bear through life like a torch in flame,
And falling fling to the host behind --
“Play up! play up! and play the game!”

Sir Henry Newbolt

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Introduction

July 1, 1916, dawned sunny and hot in Flanders, with a thick haze of smoke and dust from the Allied artillery barrage that had been blasting the German lines for seven straight days. The deafening roar of cannon fire heralded the beginning of the Somme offensive, the baptism by fire of Britain's New Armies. The million volunteers of this force had flocked to the colors to replace the original, professional British Expeditionary Force (BEF), the "Old Contemptibles" who had been all but wiped out in the bloody combat of 1914–1915. In the early morning hours of that day, Britain's mostly untested infantry battalions waited to advance, crammed shoulder to shoulder in the first-line trenches. Officers and NCOs gave last-minute instructions and motivational speeches to their soldiers, in all likelihood partly to gear up the men and partly to prepare themselves for the experience that lay ahead. In one of those battalions, the 8th Battalion, East Surrey Regiment, those preparations took a somewhat different form: Captain W.P. Neville, a company commander in the East Surreys, had set up a contest among his four platoons. He issued each platoon a football, purchased on his last London leave, and offered a prize to the first platoon to kick its football into the German front lines after going "over the top." A survivor of that day's fighting recalled zero hour:

> As the gun-fire died away I saw an infantryman climb onto the parapet into No-Man's Land, beckoning the others to follow. As he did so, he kicked off a football. A good kick. The ball rose and traveled towards the German lines. That seemed to be the signal to advance.

That kick-off was most probably made by either Captain Neville or one of his platoon commanders. Captain Neville was killed immediately after leaving his trench, but two of his company's footballs survived, and are preserved today in English museums. A monument was later erected at the Somme to commemorate this feat of military athleticism, and the celebrated military artist Richard Caton Woodville immortalized the event in his painting *The Surreys Play the Game*.[1]

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[1] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 27–28. This incident is also referred to in Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), p. 124.

Historians and writers who repeat accounts of this well-known episode use it as an example of the innocence of the pre-1916 British Army, the amateurish delight of citizen soldiers at the prospect of going off to glorious war. This incident also serves as a metaphor for the end of the Victorian Age, an age, like the soldiers at the Somme, about to be consumed in the inferno of the First World War. But this incident, and others like it,[2] also highlights for many the unrealistic, almost ridiculous approach to war of the contemporary British Army, and allows observers of the period one more opportunity to shake their heads at the unprofessional, aristocratic British officer corps—"The Donkeys"—who were more concerned with horses, drinking, and sport than with the modern application of military science.[3] Any officer, so the familiar line goes, so obsessed with games that he would consider as proper military leadership the ludicrous act of starting a major attack by kicking a football must be totally out of his element, and the widespread stories and reports of incidents similar to this one in the first years of the war only serve to confirm for many the backward state of British military thinking and leadership. A sports-mad, upper-class officer corps, unconcerned with modern training and doctrine, hopelessly bound up in the conservative traditions of the mid-nineteenth century, is how the British Army's leadership is most often portrayed in accounts not only of the First World War but of the years before as well, leading all the way back to the Charge of the Light Brigade.

Is this an accurate assessment of the "contemptible little army," as it was described by the German Emperor William II?[4] Had Britain's preoccupation with Kipling's "flannelled fools" and "the muddied oafs at the goals" and the cult of athleticism led to an army woefully unprepared for "modern" war? Clearly, the answer to these questions is no. The BEF that arrived in France in 1914 was,

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[2] Other, similar incidents are described by Fussell in *The Great War and Modern Memory*. I am indebted to Miss Sylvia Nash of Aldershot, England, editor and writer for the British Army sports newspaper *Scoreline*, for these accounts: On September 25, 1915, at the Battle of Loos, the London Irish Rifles passed a football between them on their way across No Man's Land, and on the first day of the Somme campaign the 16th Battalion, Northumberland Fusiliers left their trenches following a high-kicked rugby ball. Some of these stories may be apocryphal, but their prevalence and contemporary acknowledgment lend them an air of credibility.

[3] The most glaring example of this kind of portrayal is, of course, Alan Clark's *The Donkeys* (London: Random House UK [New Edition], 1992). Another popular version of this story is contained in Barbara Tuchman's *The Guns of August* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1962). Even in more balanced accounts such as in Lyn Macdonald's books *1914* (New York: Atheneum, 1988) and *1915, The Death of Innocence* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) there is a tendency toward presenting this view of the Army's senior leaders.

[4] Anthony Livesey, *Great Battles of World War I* (London: Marshall Editions Ltd., 1989), p. 14.

as a contemporary described it, the best army ever to leave Britain,[5] and the effect that army had in the opening months of the war was far beyond that which its small size would have suggested. Not only did the "Old Contemptibles" make their mark on the war, but their heirs in the New Armies and Territorials who replaced them throughout 1915 and 1916 managed to take on for the Allies the brunt of the fighting in France and outside Europe for the rest of the war, after revolution withdrew Russia from the fighting, and Verdun and the Nivelle Offensive made the French Army an unsure partner.

Rather than sport having a negative effect on the readiness of the British Army, the physical culture that evolved in the Army after 1860 made a significant contribution to military effectiveness. Moreover, the operation of the Army's sport and physical training schemes provide strong indicators of growing officer professionalism and concern with proper training throughout the period from the end of the Crimean War to 1920. From its origins as a means of keeping the soldiers from drink and the officers from duty, between 1860 and 1920 physical culture in the British Army developed into a systematic, institutionalized form of combat-oriented training that had its own published doctrine and regulations, and a proponent agency embodied in the Army Gymnastic Staff (later the Army Physical Training Staff). As early as 1865 the Queen's Regulations specified a required course of physical training to be taken by all new recruits and older soldiers, backed up by centrally trained instructors at the battalion level.[6] By the 1890s virtually all British military installations had a gymnasium or other physical training facility, and by the first decade of the twentieth century most had standard athletics fields and football and cricket pitches. All these developments were part of a deliberate program constructed by the Army hierarchy to improve the physical and spiritual wellbeing of the British soldier, enhance unit morale and *esprit de corps*, and develop individual initiative and leadership qualities. These functions were designed to contribute to a well-trained and efficient force with the fighting spirit to win Britain's wars, and parallel other efforts at modernization and professionalization that evolved simultaneously.

During the First World War the pre-war schemes of physical training and command-sponsored games acted as a powerful means of assimilating civilian–soldiers, and then ensured that they were physically and mentally prepared for the rigors of fighting, from Mesopotamia to Ypres. The sports programs of the pre-war Army continued to expand, contributing to the morale, welfare, and fighting spirit of Tommy Atkins and his imperial brethren, ensuring that they were able to stay the course and continue the fight until the Armistice in 1918.

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5 Tuchman, *The Guns of August*, p. 202.

6 Orders published in the *London Times*, Thursday, May 11, 1865.

These same programs had been used since the middle of the nineteenth century to improve the military effectiveness of Britain's imperial troops, and to inculcate them with the same ethos of athleticism that was a seminal part of the British Army's philosophy of training and leadership. The bonds thus forged by this common set of values helped unify and homogenize the otherwise potentially disparate partners of the Commonwealth Forces.

The story of the development of British Army sport and physical training between 1860 and 1920 is inextricably tied to the larger story of the late Victorian and Edwardian Army itself. That saga is essentially one of a continuing process of reform and modernization, sometimes a fight against entrenched and seemingly insurmountable obstacles, including those of public apathy or enmity, a conservative hierarchy and government penury.[7] These efforts at reform were overwhelmingly successful. Most historians of the Army in the sixty years prior to the Great War tend to focus on the political reformers who worked to change the Army from without, but between the Charge of the Light Brigade and the Battle of Mons the British Army also substantially transformed itself from within. In the face of not insignificant obstacles the Army changed itself from an anachronistic and frequently ineffective instrument into perhaps the best trained and most professional army in the world.[8]

The role of military physical culture in that process of remaking the Army is only a small piece of the whole, but a critical one. The recognition of the importance of physical fitness for combat readiness and soldier welfare came early on in the post-Crimean War period, and so the establishment of formal physical training programs was one of the earliest manifestations of this reform movement. The growing interest in scientific training methods that resulted in successive updates to doctrinal literature and regulations throughout the period was evidenced early on in the wholesale adoption of the physical training scheme. Moreover, the contemporary debate surrounding the type and extent of physical training is closely related to debates over everything from recruitment, length of service, and overseas postings, to education, race relations in the Empire, and national image.[9]

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[7] For an excellent synopsis of the problems and reforms within the late Victorian army, see Brian Bond, "The Late Victorian Army," *History Today* Vol. II No. 9 (Sept. 1961), pp. 616–624. A more comprehensive work outlining the reforms and general civil–military relations during the Victorian period is Edward M. Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815–1914* (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1980).

[8] Livesey, *Great Battles of World War I*, p. 14.

[9] See Edward M. Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), for a detailed discussion of these questions—the recruitment problem was perhaps the single most troublesome one for the Army during this period, and virtually all debate concerning reform touched on it. For the relationship between recruiting and physical training, see Lieutenant Colonel A.A. Woodhull, "Recruiting and Physical Training

Though considered by the Army leadership from the beginning as a component of physical training, Army sport has a distinctly different set of circumstances from those of formal physical training that surround its adoption and widespread popularity. The story of Army sport is but a chapter in the story of the explosion of sport and leisure pastimes in late nineteenth-century Britain. Many social currents acted on and contributed to the development of Army sport, including public-school athleticism, working-class leisure, traditional upper-class sporting pastimes, and the growth of amateur and professional sporting leagues and associations in Britain. Army teams were among the charter members of the Football Association and the Rugby Football Union, and the first Army Superintendent of Gymnasia was one of the founders of the English Amateur Athletic Association.[10] The role of sport and games in the late Victorian Army was a much more hotly debated topic in civilian and military circles, and sport was never as widely accepted as an element of the army's preparation for war as was formal physical training; the debate over the proper place of sport and games in military training continues today, in the British Army and elsewhere.[11]

This book will do two primary things. First, it will document the origins and development of institutional physical training in the late Victorian Army, and the ways in which the Army's gymnastic training evolved into what by 1918 was viewed as perhaps the most important building block of the process of making a civilian into a fighting man. Second, it will assess the nature and extent of British military sport, particularly regimental sports, during this period and into the First World War. Each of these areas is quite closely related. As the responsible agency for physical training, the Army Gymnastic Staff played a large role not only in fostering sport and games, but through its trained instructors it organized and coached unit teams, arranged tournaments and sports days, and assisted in the construction of pitches and grounds. Both sport and formal physical training have similar dynamics regarding officer education, officer-enlisted relations, regional variations, and doctrinal bases. And both of

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in the British Army," *The Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States* Vol. 16 (1895), pp. 37–47.

[10] Lieutenant Colonel E.A.L. Oldfield, *History of the Army Physical Training Corps* (Aldershot: Gale and Polden Ltd., 1955), p. 4. Here again I am indebted to Miss Sylvia Nash for providing me with the proofs of her unpublished work on the history of Army Rugby, in which she outlines the founding of the Rugby Union and discusses the role of teams from Army units, most particularly the Royal Engineers, in the early years of that body.

[11] Tony Mason and Eliza Riedi's excellent new book, *Sport and the Military: The British Armed Forces 1880–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), deals with the subject of sport alone. It does not include the other pillar of military physical culture, formal physical training, in its central analysis of the often controversial influence of sport in the British Army and Navy.

these areas had a symbiotic relationship to Army reform during this period. The genesis of scientific physical training lies at the root of the movement for reform itself, and the success and expansion of both physical training and sport in driving up the morale, health, and overall effectiveness of the Army acted as a catalyst for continued innovation and reform.

A complete examination of British Army physical culture, including both physical training and sport, provides more than just a window into important movements within the British military. Because of the important social and cultural position held by the British Army in the late Victorian and Edwardian period, through such an examination one can also gain a greater understanding for the ways in which British society influenced the military and vice versa. Sport, games, and physical training in the British Army between 1860 and 1920 were a crucial part of training and modernizing the military, and their nature and practice clearly suggest that a country's military, at any given period, is a fundamental reflection of that country's society.

PART I

Mens Sana in Corpore Sano: The Origins of the Army Gymnastic Staff and Regimental Sport, 1860–1880

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Chapter 1
Officer Sport: Aristocrats and Schoolboys

> I am sure that I am not exaggerating when I say that whether at cricket, boating, boxing, hunting, racing, shooting with rifle or gun, we invariably held our own. ... We suffered under one grievous misfortune ... we never in my time, excepting in the rebellion in Ceylon, were engaged in any campaign. We have fought with every kind of wild animals, but never with human beings.
>
> Johnson Wilkinson, East Yorkshire Regiment (15th Foot)[1]

> Being a good sportsman, a good cricketer, good at rackets or any other manly game, is no mean recommendation for staff employment. Such a man, without book lore, is preferable to the most deeply-read one of lethargic habits.
>
> Colonel Garnet Wolseley (later Field Marshal Viscount Wolseley, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army), 1869[2]

During the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, British Army officers were of primarily upper-class origins, with a majority coming from landed families. Those officers not coming from such a background quickly conformed to the social mold of their peers, or were ostracized and, more often than not, hounded into leaving the service. These facts have been well established in numerous detailed demographic studies of the Victorian and Edwardian officer corps.[3] With the officer corps firmly rooted in the social and cultural traditions of the rural upper class, it would naturally follow that the values and pastimes of that class would dominate the British officer corps, and they did. One of these class characteristics that dominated the life of the British officer was a passion

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[1] Byron Farwell, *Mr. Kipling's Army* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1981), p. 203.

[2] From Colonel Garnet Wolseley, *The Soldier's Pocket-Book for Field Service* (1869), quoted in Byron Farwell, *Eminent Victorian Soldiers* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1985), p. 206.

[3] Several excellent works cover the subject of officer demographics, pastimes, and social proclivities in great detail, most notably Gwyn Harries-Jenkins, *The Army in Victorian Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), and Edward M. Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992). Additionally, see Farwell, *Mr. Kipling's Army*.