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'The Army Isn't All Work': Physical Culture and the Evolution of the British Army, 1860-1920

James D. Campbell

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Between the Crimean War and the end of the First World War the British Army underwent a dramatic change from being an anachronistic and frequently ineffective organization to being perhaps the most professional and highly trained army in the world. Historians have tended to view that transformation through the successive political reform efforts of those years, but have largely overlooked the ways in which the Army transformed itself from within. This change was effected through the modernization of training, operational and leadership doctrines. The adoption of formal physical training and organized games played a central part in this process. With its origins in elite public schools and upper-class country homes, the Army's philosophy of Athleticism was a part of the ethos of 'muscular Christianity' widely held in contemporary British institutions. Under the potent influence of this philosophy, military sport went from a means of keeping soldiers from drink and the officers from duty, to an institutionalized form of combat training. This book documents the origins and development of formal physical training in the late Victorian Army and the ways in which the Army's gymnastic training evolved into a vital building block of the process of turning a civilian into a fighting man. It also assesses the nature and extent of British military sport, particularly regimental sports, during this period of evolution for the Army. Through an investigation of the Army's physical culture during this dynamic period, one can gain an understanding of not only how the Army's change from within occurred, but also of some of the important links between the Army and its parent society.

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