*‘The Army Isn’t All Work’: Physical Culture and the Evolution of the British Army, 1860-1920*, by James D. Campbell (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012; pp. 224. £70.00)

*The Army Isn’t All Work* is visually beautiful. From the full-colour reproduction of a recruiting poster that forms the cover image to the numerous black-and-white photographs of men engaged in sporting activity that liberally illustrate it, this book is lovely to look at. And these images form only a small part of the rich seam of primary source material that James D. Campbell mines in his examination of the role and development of physical culture in the British Army between 1860 and 1920. Focussing on the formalisation of physical culture within the army from formation of the Army Gymnastic Staff through to the creation of the Army Sport Control Board, ‘the final achievement of the goal so many of the supporters of Army sport had long being working for’ (191), Campbell utilizes official reports, personal accounts, regimental journals and government memoranda and publications to produce an intriguing history of an often misrepresented aspect of British social, cultural and military history.

Given the richness of the material and depth of research that has clearly been undertaken, it is unfortunate that the analytic structure of the book’s argument is not as robust as the material it supports. While Campbell succeeds in demonstrating how the evolution of physical culture ‘made a significant contribution to military effectiveness’ (3), he struggles to show how this fact contributes to a greater understanding of ‘the ways in which British society influenced the military and vice versa’ (6). This is principally due to the weakness of the sports and social historiographic context that Campbell provides. While the first two chapters set out the socio-cultural place of sport in the Army in the middle of the nineteenth century, with a particular emphasis on the different ways in which sport was constructed as shaping the characters of officers and other ranks, the lack of comparative contextual discussion of sport in civilian society in this period makes any evaluation of the particular social significance of these roles difficult.

There is also little discussion of the change in the social importance of sport in British civil society over the time period examined by the rest of the book. Thus debates over the role that Army physical training might play in national preparedness at the end of the nineteenth century and the importance of football to recruitment practices in 1914 are both presented solely from the perspective of the military establishment rather than set within a broader social context. The result is that nuances such as the complex relationship between particular sports and different occupations and social groups in a changing economic and social landscape, the debates about amateurism that transcended the armed forces, and the negative cultural image of the football fan as a shirker are missed.

Nor is the failure to pursue a discussion of broader social context throughout the entire period under discussion the only weakness of this book. The narrative of development created by the use of a chronological structure, focussing on four distinct periods in the institutional development of the physical training staff, is often less clear-cut than is implied. This is particularly true of the sections concentrating on the periods 1880-1908 and 1908-1914. Both sections deal with developments that boosted the preparedness, both in terms of physical fitness and morale, of the British Army in 1914, yet the key distinguishing feature separating the two periods, the Haldane reforms, is dealt with only superficially and with little discussion of the wider implications for military organisations. This failure to explore the broader context of the reforms of the Army as a whole, and their meaning for the place of physical training within the reformed force, leads to the two sections becoming repetitious in their claims for the significance of the developments they discuss.

This repetitiveness is also symptomatic of the slightly uneven tone that occurs throughout. It is evident in the tendency to drop into anecdotal mode, with great detail given about minor points such as the reception of speech about polo by Winston Churchill (6) or the description of a reconnaissance patrol in 1914 (138). While such over-descriptions clearly demonstrate Campbell’s remarkable grasp and knowledge of his source material, they tend to distract from the argument he is making. Where this anecdotal mode is most useful, however, is when Campbell utilizes it to make comparisons with current physical training practices in the US Army, a subject about which he is as much an expert as he is about the same subject in the British Army of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While the less formal tone adopted in these comparisons can occasionally be jarring, the comparisons raised tend to be extremely informative. Above all, they work well in support of a key element of Campbell’s thesis, that developments in physical training and the use of sport in maintaining combat readiness and morale were successfully transmitted to other military forces throughout both the Empire and the wider world. This is undoubtedly Campbell’s most important argument about the significance of sport and physical training in the British Army in this period, one that continues to have relevance to this day.

Ultimately, *The Army Isn’t All Work* is an episodic, sometimes uneven work. While it does not provide as full an exploration of the significance of developments in the professionalism of the British army as it might do, it is well researched and clearly a labour of love. It sheds useful light on a small but important facet of the development of the Army as a professional body in a key period, light that can only assist scholars seeking to explore the subject further

.

Jessica Meyer

*University of Leeds*