

McCartney, Helen: *Citizen Soldiers. The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005. ISBN: 0521848008; 275 Seiten

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Each of the four armies that made up the British Expeditionary force that fought the First World War has its own literature, with the exception of the Territorial Force (TF). The pre-war Regular force (the 'Old Contemptibles') and the New ('Kitchener') Armies and in particular the 'Pals' battalions have received the most attention, while Ilana Bet-El has studied the conscripts who filled the ranks by 1918.<sup>1</sup> By contrast there has been far less written (only sections in books on wider topics, mainly by I.F.W. Beckett) about the Territorials who 'plugged the gap' caused by casualties to the Regulars in 1914.<sup>2</sup> The Territorial Force (forerunner of the modern Territorial Army) was formed in 1908 as a voluntary, part-time army specifically raised for home defence, but with the option of 'Imperial Service' overseas. It replaced the old Volunteer and Militia movements which had suffered much criticism after the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902).

With this study of the Liverpool Rifles and Liverpool Scottish, officially the 1/6th and 1/10th Battalions of the King's (Liverpool Regiment), Helen McCartney is attempting to, as it were, plug the gap in the literature, while also adding to the burgeoning revisionist literature of the war. Authors such as Gary Sheffield and John Bourne have produced a canon of work which rejects the simplified view of the common (British) soldier as a mindless automaton or as disillusioned and downtrodden that arose in the literature of the

1930s and 1960s.<sup>3</sup> In both of these objectives, McCartney is both aided and limited, as she notes, by the 'class corps' (i.e. Middle-class) nature of the units in question; this gives a skewed, middle-class view of the topic, but it also means that the men involved were much more likely to leave a written record of their service (p. 5).

The main two themes of the study, in terms of informing the Great War debate, are the importance of locality and regionality, and of social status for the men of the Liverpool Territorials<sup>4</sup>. It is natural that a territorially-raised unit should feel that their place of origin binds them, and McCartney shows that shared background (both socially and geographically) was the main factor in producing group loyalty in the Liverpool Scottish and Rifles (p. 54). 'County identity' she says, 'was to be used as the citizen soldier's equivalent of regimental loyalty' (pp. 80-81).

Regional identity was maintained in these units even when direct recruitment into the TF was stopped in December 1915, in direct contrast to the trend noted and investigated by Ian Beckett<sup>5</sup>. The general decline in local men Beckett noted (particularly in the Royal Buckinghamshire Hussars), is much less marked in McCartney's sample units. Where Beckett's study of casualties found that no men killed in the Buckinghamshire Hussars from 1917 were from the county, 87% and 70% of the Liverpool Scottish and Rifles respectively were from Lancashire. Where his findings led Beckett to note a decline in regional recruitment from 1916, McCartney sees a more varied picture<sup>6</sup>.

The reasons for this difference are rooted in the size of the reserve units of the Liv-

<sup>1</sup>For example: R Neillands, *The Old Contemptibles: the British Expeditionary Force, 1914*, London 2004; P. Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: the raising of the New Armies, 1914-16*, Manchester 1988, and the series of books on the 'Pals' published by Leo Cooper in the 1990s; I.R. Bet-El, *Conscripts*, Stroud, 1999.

<sup>2</sup>See I.F.W. Beckett, *The Territorial Force*, in: idem & K. Simpson (eds.), *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War*, Manchester 1985, pp. 126-163, and *The Amateur Military Tradition, 1558-1945*, Manchester 1991.

<sup>3</sup>See G. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: officer-man relations, morale and discipline in the British Army in the era of the First World War*, London, 2000.

<sup>4</sup>Or rather 'these' men of the Liverpool Territorials, as there were four other first-line TF battalions in the King's. Furthermore, in August 1914 the Territorial Associations were permitted to raise extra 'Second Line' battalions to back up or replenish each of their units – thus the 6th Battalion became the 1/6th when its second line (2/6th) was formed. See Beckett, *The Territorial Force*, p. 130.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, pp.137, 146-7.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.; McCartney, pp. 60-61 – in fact 69% of the Liverpool Scottish who were killed in 1918 were from Liverpool itself! The figures are taken from enlistment data in the 'Soldiers Died in the Great War' volumes.

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erpool Territorials and the shift from localised to regional recruiting from 1916. The geographically-based organisations for training new troops were such that, while Lancashire men were trained with Lancashire or Cheshire-born men and were largely fed into local units like the King's, those enlisted in Buckinghamshire were trained with men from across the South Midlands and later East Anglia and could end up in any of those regions' many regiments (pp. 62-66). Furthermore, Lancashiremen were lucky both in their access to top levels of Government and in the forward-thinking nature of their Divisional Commander. Local MP and recruiting chief Lord Derby was first under-Secretary and later Secretary of State for War, while Major-General Jeudwine of 55th (West Lancashire) Division shared his belief in regional recruiting. Both of these men applied pressure on the army to supply the 55th Division with Lancashire men (pp. 71, 147).

The social status of the units is a more tricky and unusual subject. The Liverpool Scottish and, especially, Liverpool Rifles were very socially exclusive units. The pre- and early-war Rifles had very strict social requirements for enlistment, on grounds of education, sporting ability and occupation. Likewise, around half of the Scottish were from social Classes I and II (the top levels, being upper and middle class, who comprised roughly 22% of Liverpool's population) and amongst its officers in the war were seven international rugby players (pp. 29, 33, 43). This social status caused many problems for the battalions, particularly in terms of discipline; while Territorial discipline was known to be much less strict and more consensual than elsewhere in the army<sup>7</sup> the high social status and education in the lower ranks until 1916 led to much greater scrutiny of the leadership than is usual in the army with consequent morale and discipline problems (pp. 52-53, 149-50). Following massive loss of life in the units (and the army as a whole) in 1916 and 1917 with bloody battles on the Somme, and at Ypres (Passchendaele) the social hierarchy of the Liverpool Territorials became more like that of the army as a whole, with middle class veterans being pro-

moted to command new, lower-class recruits (p. 139).

Beyond this, quite particular, study of two individual Territorial units, McCartney's work throws more light on the nature of the link between home and the men at the front. On this aspect of the war, a local study like this is very useful because, as McCartney notes, the writers who paint the army as 'disillusioned' and separated (psychologically) from home often rely only on national newspapers for contemporary public coverage of the conflict, and claim that people at the time did as well (pp 103-104). The large numbers of letters home and letters to (or printed by) the local press in Liverpool show that this view is untenable. McCartney shows that through the combination of letters, leave and the local press, 'the worlds of the soldier and the civilian remained closely linked' and that the views of both 'remained remarkably similar throughout the war' (pp. 117, 102).

Despite the limitations of a study of two 'class corps' battalions (which the author acknowledges), this work is very useful both specially when looking at the, sadly small, literature on the Territorial Force, and regarding the 'war experience' of the common (or middle class in this case) British soldier in the First World War. While the units reaped the benefits of useful contacts and a good regional support network, this did not spare them the horrors of battle. Their reaction to this, and the communication of it to relatives and friends, are important to understanding life in those bleak years. Although later chapters are a little dry, due to the lack of primary sources (after many of the original 1914-15 Territorials had been killed or promoted out of front-line service), McCartney's studies of social status, regional loyalty and unit discipline are very informative. This book sheds new light on both the Territorial and the wider experience of the men who fought on the Western Front.

HistLit 2006-1-088 / Stuart Hallifax über McCartney, Helen: *Citizen Soldiers. The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War*. Cambridge 2005. In: H-Soz-u-Kult 08.02.2006.

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<sup>7</sup> See Beckett, *The Territorial Force*, p. 144, and Sheffield, *Leadership*.