

1973

Victoria's Little Wars

B.M. Simpson III

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Simpson, B.M. III (1973) "Victoria's Little Wars," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 26 : No. 5 , Article 13.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol26/iss5/13>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

dictory. For example, the Gallup Poll found in 1969 that 79 percent of the population favored Universal Military Service, while during the same period 52 percent said that too much money was being spent on the military.

The chapters on Defense Department control of the military and DOD involvement in foreign policy concentrate again on the behavioral patterns of the groups involved and include two excellent chronological tables of major defense issues and their outcomes from 1945 to 1970. There also is a readable, concise history of military influence on major foreign policy decisions concerning Korea, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Vietnam.

The book is very quotable (by either side) and is thoroughly documented. The principal criticism of this excellent work is the disconnected format. The chapters indeed provide answers to the hard questions posed in the introduction, but one must work patiently to organize the main points into some meaningful pattern of thought. The book lacks an underlying theme, although the individual chapters approach each issue with essentially the same balanced structure—which is undoubtedly advantageous to the researcher. The concluding chapter does little more than to highlight what Mr. Clotfelter considers to have been his principal conclusions stated in earlier parts of the book. Notwithstanding these minor criticisms, *The Military in American Politics* is a serious, scholarly, and balanced analysis of the American military profession in the 1970's and is highly recommended for every professional military bookshelf.

LAWRENCE W. JACKLEY
Colonel, U.S. Army

Farwell, Byron. *Queen Victoria's Little Wars*. New York: Harper & Row, 1972. 394p.

Throughout Queen Victoria's long reign from 1837 to 1901, her soldiers were engaged every year somewhere in the world defending or extending her empire. Asia, Africa, America, and particularly India were the scenes of some remembered, many unreported, but mostly ignored, small imperial wars. In an easy and a readable style, Byron Farwell has chronicled some of the better known and some of the unknown little wars of this remarkable era.

If many of the military achievements are now forgotten, they are nonetheless impressive. For example, Maj. Gen. Sir George Pollock and his army in 1842 were the first to force the Khyber Pass. Even Tamberlaine had to bribe the Afridis, who controlled the pass, to let him through. Following rioting in Alexandria in 1882, the British mounted an expedition to bring order to Egypt (really to make her subservient to British wishes). At Tel-el kebir, General Wolsey conducted a night march, involving more than 17,000 men and 61 guns, through the desert with the aid of Royal Navy Navigators. This flanking movement was successful in routing the Egyptian and Sudanese forces. The expedition was completed within 2 months from the time the decision was made in London to conduct it.

The use of the British Armies in the 19th century was a reflection of an exceptionally vigorous, dynamic, and self-confident society. Aside from understandable reasons such as the protection of British citizens or the maintenance of British prestige, however perceived or defined, much of the motivation behind the extension of British authority was the firm belief that British rule, or at least influence, would bring the benefits and blessings of British civilization to the natives who, at times, were perversely ungrateful. Also, the extension of the Queen's empire was necessary in many cases to prevent the Tsar from extending his empire. Add to these reasons the general lack of interest in most instances of the British public and politicians and slowness of com-

86 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

munications, the resultant absence of meddling from Whitehall, and the resourcefulness and the initiative of the local commanders and the number and the frequency of these small wars become understandable.

After Waterloo the British Army engaged in only two wars that could be considered extensive by the standards of the time: The Crimean War and the Boer War. In both wars the performance of the commanders in the field and of the civilian managers at home left much to be desired. But most of the wars fought in the 19th century were small. Usually they involved no more than 10,000 men and frequently less. In these small encounters the army and its leaders showed their mettle and demonstrated an enviable degree of professional competence.

The key to the success of British arms lay in the quality of the leaders, most of whom joined one regiment or another in their late teens and remained there. As a rule Victorian officers had a fierce desire for glory and held the conviction that all English gentlemen were born courageous. With pluck, determination, raw courage, stamina, and self-confidence, the British officers trained and led European, Indian, and African troops in countless numbers of small but difficult engagements, wars, and expeditions to places with strange names, many of which are all but forgotten, save among antiquarians and regimental historians.

This attitude of the British officer was typified many years later by Sir Garnet Wolseley (then a field marshal and a viscount), who admitted that before battle he was sometimes nervous, because he feared that he would die "without having made the name for myself which I always hoped a kind and merciful God might permit me to win." Mr. Farwell notes that this must have been the only fear of the typical young 19th century British officer.

These wars were not all cowboys

and-Indians fights between the civilizing British and unruly tribesmen. The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 was a desperate, grim series of events, which could have spelled the end of British rule in India had it been better led. As it was, the mutiny was a ghastly affair with shocking atrocities committed on both sides. At Cawnpore, near Delhi, 350 British soldiers held off over 3,000 mutineers. The rebel leader gave to the garrison and to the women and children inside a written safe conduct by river boat to Allahabad. When the Europeans reached the riverbank and were embarked in boats, cannon loaded with grapeshot were fired pointblank at them. One hundred twenty-five women and children survived and were taken prisoner. The day before the relief expedition arrived, they were murdered. The relief force discovered their shoes in neat rows with the feet still in them. The mangled corpses had been tossed into a well.

It is difficult in this day, inured as we are to atrocities, to imagine the sensation of horror the Cawnpore massacre created in Europe. The fierce cry for revenge was answered by ruthless suppression of the mutiny, which was visited upon even suspected mutineers as a precaution, if for no other reason.

The Crimean War demonstrated that the British Army was not organized to fight even a moderate-sized war, to say nothing of a major war. However, the army organization was admirably suited to the small, imperial wars that were a constant factor of Queen Victoria's reign. The basic unit or organization was the regiment, which was a self-contained unit. Young officers would join a regiment before they were 20 and frequently remained with it for life. The same with the private soldiers, to whom the regiment was "mother, sister, and mistress." With their own uniforms, promotions, traditions, and close contact among usually very capable men, it is not surprising that the various regi-

PROFESSIONAL READING 87

ments developed an *esprit* which made them highly effective but relatively small fighting units.

If the Crimean War saw the last active service of the old Waterloo veterans, the tactics and techniques used by Wellington and his predecessors were long in dying. The Duke of Cambridge, a grandson of King George III and first cousin to Queen Victoria, resisted the Cardwell Army Reforms instituted in the 1860's. Interestingly enough, he was a major general at 26 and was Commander-in-Chief of the Army from 1856 until 1895.

Contemporary military officers will be struck by two distinct differences in modern military life from that of the 19th century. The first is the extraordinary active duty longevity of many of the officers. Receiving a commission while still in their teens, many officers would remain on active duty until they either died or resigned. Sir Bindon Blood must have set a record; he died in 1940, just short of his 98th birthday, having been on the army list for over 80 years. Field Marshals Roberts, Wood, and Wolseley all lived beyond 80. There were no retirements for physical disability, and many of the senior officers had an interesting assortment of physical infirmities which did not, as a rule, unduly hamper them in the discharge of their duties.

The other difference is the role of women. Marriage was ruinous to the prospects of a young officer. Most delayed until they had reached the grade of major, although some married as captains. Women were expected to understand the role of honor, which necessitated extensive separations punctuated by home leaves and convalescent leaves. Women who accompanied their husbands seldom failed to display exceptional courage and fortitude, as they did during the siege of Lucknow.

Perhaps the most interesting exception to the general role of Victorian women was Mrs. Frances Duberly, wife

of Capt. Henry Duberly, paymaster of the 8th Royal Irish Hussars. She not only accompanied her husband to the battlefield in the Crimea, but she remained there. She stayed on navy ships until she was finally put ashore. She even rode Lord Cardigan's horse and witnessed the charge of the Light Brigade. Although she was feted in the field, presumably without objection by Captain Duberly, she was unpopular at home and was snubbed by Queen Victoria when she wanted to dedicate a book describing her experiences to Her Majesty.

Mr. Farwell has written good military history and entertaining reading as well.

B.M. SIMPSON, III
Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy

Klare, Michael T. *War Without End: American Planning For the Next Vietnams*. New York: Knopf, 1972. 464p.

War Without End is a compendious military research book which considers in depth "the development of new strategies and techniques for counter-insurgency—while contributing to the broader assault on the assumptions of American foreign policy." Michael Klare, a 29-year-old member of the North American Congress on Latin America, includes also a brief guide to research on the U.S. Defense Establishment.

One often hears it said that the introduction is the most significant, or at least the most widely read, part of a book. If this is true, then Klare has done himself a disservice with his poorly organized opening chapter. Yet several basic points do come across in this introduction. For instance, Klare expresses distaste for American expansionism, which he views as "the way of life in this society." The author furthermore states that the only way to check American expansionism is to completely