



Stephen M. Miller *Volunteers on the Veld, Britain's Citizen-Soldiers and the South African War 1899-1902*. University of Oklahoma Press, 248pp, illus, maps, index. Price: \$29.95. ISBN:978-0-8061-3864-0

Stephen Miller's account of the British volunteers who served in the Boer War leaves the reader with a mixture of emotions. It is in many respects an excellent book but is frustratingly incomplete and sometimes resembles a series of essays on particular aspects of this fascinating and much neglected chapter in British military history. Miller, who is Associate Professor of History at the University of Maine, is no stranger to the late Victorian British Army and its unhappy experiences against the Boers, also having written *Lord Methuen and the British Army: Failure and Redemption in South Africa*.¹

In *Volunteers on the Veld, Britain's Citizen Soldiers and the South African War 1899-1902* Miller spends some considerable time examining the development of a muscular Christian patriotism in late 19th century Britain which provided the seedbed for the growth of the auxiliary forces and their desire to become involved in the South African War after the disasters of Black Week in December 1899. He has a sure grasp of this curious and fairly short-lived period in British history although I would dispute his assertion that the peacetime Yeomanry "mostly consisted of tenant-farmers and agricultural labourers". While the former certainly provided the backbone of the Yeomanry regiments, the latter were not often found in its ranks, excluded by both the rural social hierarchy and lack of horsemanship skills. Farm labourers were more likely to join the Militia.

Miller only spends about 50 pages of this book on the experiences of the Imperial Yeomanry, the City Imperial Volunteers, the Volunteer Service Companies attached to regular infantry battalions and the Militia in South Africa. This includes a useful and thoughtful analysis of the changing attitudes of the volunteers as the realities of the Boer War began to sink in. Dreams of imperial glory vanished to be replaced by an exhausting and demoralising guerilla war in which farms were burned down, women and children sent off to concentration camps and prisoners sometimes shot. The volunteers' reactions to this and their feelings towards the Boers make for fascinating reading. Miller has mined the many first-hand accounts by the volunteers dating from the early years of the 20th century and used this material well.

Yet there is very little about the second contingent of Imperial Yeomanry which was radically different to the first in terms of both motivation and social composition. The middle class patriots and adventurers of the first contingent were replaced by working men attracted by good rates of pay and the possibility of a new life in South Africa. Given that the second contingent was far more numerous than the first it is a surprising omission. Yet despite this there is much to recommend about this book, including tremendously detailed notes and bibliography, and it captures the feel of the age very well. It deserves a place on the bookshelves of anyone interested in either the Boer War or the history of the auxiliary forces.

Will Bennett

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1 Stephen M Miller, *Lord Methuen and the British Army: Failure and Redemption in South Africa*, Routledge 1999 288 pages