



KW Mitchinson *England's Last Hope, The Territorial Force, 1908-14*, Palgrave Macmillan 2008 ISBN 978-0-230-57454-0 £55 328 pages

The Territorial Force (TF) has received less attention from historians in recent years than the New Armies. *England's Last Hope* is an important and ground breaking book that will go some way towards redressing the balance. It should be as important in transforming our understanding of the TF as Peter Simkins' *Kitchener's Army* (1988) was for our understanding of the New Armies. Previous studies of the TF have covered the 1908-1914 period in barely a chapter,¹ so this full length treatment is critical in covering much new ground.

With *England's Last Hope* Dr. Bill Mitchinson adds to his important body of work on Britain's volunteer and reserve forces. This is the second volume in a projected trilogy of works on the subject. The first volume, *Defending Albion - Britain's Home Army 1908-1919*², was shortlisted for the 2005 Templar Medal and studied the schemes designed to confront an enemy invasion. The projected and as yet unnamed third volume will look at the performance of the TF divisions in the First World War and the problems the Territorial Force Associations had in their dealings with the War Office. In addition Dr. Mitchinson has written an acclaimed study of the London Rifle Brigade: *Gentlemen and Officers: The Impact and Experience of War on a Territorial Regiment* (1995).

The main unit of study in *England's Last Hope* is the Territorial Force Association (TFA), 94 of which were set up in late 1907 and early 1908 following the passage of the Territorial and Reserve Forces Act of 1907. Every county in England, Wales and Scotland had a TFA which was responsible for raising, administering, clothing, equipping and training those TF units within its borders. TFAs comprised a number of representatives typically drawn from retired senior officers, local politicians, local businessmen and the local landed gentry. The COs of the local TF units were also included.

Each TFA kept minutes of its meetings, as well as minutes of its various subcommittees such as recruiting and finance. From the counties listed in the sources and the index Dr Mitchinson appears to have studied the records of up to 50 TFAs, including two in Wales and six in Scotland. This is no mean achievement given that the records of the TFAs are not held centrally, but are scattered throughout the length and breadth of the country in numerous Country Record Offices. The TFA records have been little used until now, with their dispersal making a comprehensive study difficult. However, these records form the most important class of source material used in the research for this book. The sample of TFA records used covers a representative selection of counties both urban/industrial and rural/agricultural. It is also representative in that it covers TFAs of all sizes from the largest (the County of London TFA which was responsible for the entire 2nd London Division TF as well as about one-third of the 1st London Division TF) down to tiny TFAs such as Carmarthen.

¹ See for example *The Territorial Army 1906-1940*, Peter Dennis, pub Boydell and Brewer, 1987, ISBN 0861932080 (Royal Historical Society Studies in History v.51)

² *Defending Albion - Britain's Home Army 1908-1919*, KW Mitchinson, pub Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, ISBN 978140393825



Dr Mitchinson covers a comprehensive range of subjects, from the setting up of the TF Associations in 1908, to recruiting, clothing, equipping and training the men and then the mobilization of the TF in 1914. Valuable sections discuss the all important infrastructure of the TF including drill halls – the most visible manifestation of the TF in today’s townscapes³ – and the financial aspects. Mitchinson shows how each of these aspects to running the TF could end up being handled very differently by TFAs which had very different requirements. For example he devotes nearly six pages to the subject of boots. Some TFAs paid their men an allowance for boots. Others bought boots from a supplier and sold them on to their men, sometimes at a subsidised rate. Some TFAs made a trade-off between price and quality, and others laid down a stock of boots in case of mobilisation. Even with the humble boot, a ‘one size fits all’ policy was not appropriate. However, such locally developed policies could nevertheless be subjected to changing regulations and other problems ‘thrown at them by an often hostile and unsympathetic War Office’.

A topic that will perhaps prove of most interest to many readers is the support provided by many TFAs to the raising of the New Armies in late 1914 and 1915. The extent of this support has been largely unrecorded in previous studies, and includes support in clothing and equipping soldiers as the TFAs by 1914 had had a great deal of experience in placing contracts with civilian manufacturers. It reflects well on the patriotism and selflessness of the TFAs that they were prepared to support the War Office despite the lack of support for the TF from that direction before and during the Great War.

This book is the first time that many of these subjects have been described in detail, if ever, and many will repay deeper study. In addition, detailed local studies of the relationship between a TFA and its units are almost non-existent,⁴ and this book sets out a framework that such studies would do well to follow.

People researching a specific TF unit would also be well advised to read this book and track down the appropriate minutes of the local TFA as this will give invaluable context. This is particularly true for the many hitherto neglected units of the TF such as those of the Royal Engineers, RAMC, ASC and the Royal Artillery. Hopefully *England’s Last Hope* will encourage a move away from study of the middle class TF infantry battalions that has so far dominated unit-level research into the TF.

I have only two relatively minor quibbles with this book. First is the price which at an eye-watering £55 will deter the wider readership which it richly deserves. Only the most ardent TF enthusiast is likely to buy it, with most other readers opting to obtain it through inter-library loan.

The other slight cause for dissatisfaction is the photographs. There is a good selection of 32 photographs, many of which are previously unpublished. However, these have been printed onto the same type of paper as the text, and often at two to a page, which means that there has

³ See www.drillhalls.org for a county-by-county survey of surviving drill halls and a record of many of those that do not

⁴ A rare exception which focuses on the first part of the war is *Recruiting for the Territorial Force in Staffordshire, August 1914 - December 1915*, Andrew Thornton, in the Journal of the Centre for First World War Studies, Vol. 1, No. 2 (November 2004)



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been some loss of contrast and definition. A higher grade of paper suitable for photos would have been preferable, as would full page reproduction for certain pictures that are crammed with detail.

Quibbles aside, this is an extremely important book which should be read by anyone with an interest in the British Army in the lead up to the Great War. I for one am eagerly awaiting the final volume of the trilogy.

Charles Fair

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