Sport and the Military

On battleships, behind the trenches of the Western Front and in the midst of the Desert War, British servicemen and -women have played sport in the least promising circumstances. When 400 soldiers were asked in Burma in 1946 what they liked about the army, 108 put sport in first place – well ahead of comradeship and leave – and this book explores the fascinating history of organised sport in the life of officers and other ranks in all three British services from 1880 to 1960. Drawing on a wide range of sources, the book examines how organised sport developed in the Victorian army and navy, became the focus of criticism for Edwardian army reformers and was officially adopted during the Great War to boost morale and esprit de corps. It shows how the services adapted to the influx of professional sportsmen, especially footballers, during the Second World War and the National Service years, and how sport helped to bridge the gap between civilians and the military.

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‘Athletes’ – the sportsmen of the 1st Battalion King’s Own Royal Regiment pose in the local photographer’s studio, Aldershot 1901.
SPORT AND
THE MILITARY

The British Armed Forces 1880–1960

Tony Mason and Eliza Riedi
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