



The British Soldier in America

Sylvia R. Frey

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In her investigation of the social history of the common British soldier in the era of the American Revolution, Sylvia Frey has extensively surveyed recruiting records, contemporary training manuals, statutes, and memoirs in an attempt to provide insight into the soldier's "life and mind." In the process she has discovered more about the common soldier than anyone thought possible: his social origins and occupational background, his size, age, and general physical condition, his personal economics and daily existence. Her findings dispel the traditional assumption that the army was made up largely of criminals and social misfits. Special attention is given to soldiering as an occupation. Focusing on two of the major campaigns of the war—the Northern Campaign which culminated at Saratoga and the Southern Campaign which ended at Yorktown—Frey describes the human face of war, with particular emphasis on the physical and psychic strains of campaigning in the eighteenth century. Perhaps the most important part of the work is the analysis of the moral and material factors which induced men to accept the high risks of soldiering. Frey rejects the traditional assumption that soldiers were motivated to fight exclusively by fear and force and argues instead that the primary motivation to battle was generated by regimental esprit, which in the eighteenth century substituted for patriotism. After analyzing the sources of esprit, she concludes that it was the sustaining force for morale in a long and discouraging war. This book is a contribution to our understanding of the eighteenth century and should appeal not only to military historians but also to social and economic historians and to those interested in the history of medicine.

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