



Queen Victoria's Little Wars

Byron Farwell

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From 1837 to 1901, in Asia, China, Canada, Africa, and elsewhere, military expedition were constantly being undertaken to protect resident Britons or British interests, to extend a frontier, to repel an attack, avenge an insult, or suppress a mutiny or rebellion. Continuous warfare became an accepted way of life in the Victorian era, and in the process the size of the British Empire quadrupled.

But engrossing as these small wars are—and they bristle with bizarre, tragic, and often humorous incident—it is the officers and men who fought them that dominate this book. With their courage, foolhardiness, and eccentricities, they are an unforgettable lot.

Queen Victoria's Little Wars Details

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From Reader Review Queen Victoria's Little Wars for online ebook

Jill Hutchinson says

Note: This is a re-read for me and I stand by my original review. Great book!

Farwell strikes again!!!!.....another terrific book by one of the great historians of the British experience. This one covers the reign of Queen Victoria and the "little wars" that were constantly in progress over that 60+ years. Some were outright wars...the Crimean and the Boer.....and some were just skirmishes that lasted from a week to several months and have been forgotten (or are unknown) to the modern world.

As the Empire on which the sun never set, expanded across the globe, there were uprisings from the indigenous populations who chaffed under British rule. Britain's military pride, which was a driving force of the Empire, led them into one fight after another and the generals were not satisfied unless they were on the field of battle. Every once in a while, they got slapped in the face; i.e., the failure to rescue "Chinese" Gordon from the Mahdi in the Sudan; the Boer farmers using guerilla tactics in South Africa; and the pride and bravery of the Zulus.

The author provides interesting biographical sketches of the leading military leaders and those subalterns that showed unbelievable bravery or in some cases, foolhardiness. This is a wonderful word picture of a time when half of the globe was covered by the Union Jack and men charged into battle without fear. Highly recommended.

Dennis Boccippio says

Incredibly (exhaustively) (insanely) well researched, but alas pretty dry. An interesting account of the more obscure skirmishes and colorful characters associated with the expansion and preservation of the British empire in the 1800s.

William DuFour says

An outstanding book about the "Savage wars of Peace" with Victorian personalities that would astound today's eccentrics as being able and unable to command.

Jacqueline says

An interesting overview of the wars that made the "Pax Britannica" possible. Even the author admits that his research was incomplete, as record-keeping for the time was a bit less rigorous; that means that for the scores of "little wars that we know of, there are actually dozens more.

Paul says

Queen Victoria's Little Wars

The author, Byron Farwell noted, that in the last quarter of the nineteenth century little wars came ever more frequently. There were plenty of military campaigns, plenty of revolts to quash and full scale wars, from the time of Queen Victoria's ascension to the throne until her death, and until this book nobody had ever counted them.

When the author researched this book, he noted that was not a single year in Victoria's long reign that the British Army in its various guises was not fighting for her and the empire. The one thing of note that Farwell makes is that except for the final Boer War all the military action was small when compared to the wars of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Victoria's armies were, and still are, organised on a regimental basis, and in one of the appendices he explains the system for those unfamiliar with the regimental system of the British Army. What Farwell does note though the British Army may have been officered by the British, but they were not afraid to use mercenaries in the ranks.

To name all the wars that took place would end up looking like a very long list, but they are all covered in this book, so we see the theatres may change, but the idea of spreading British dominance did not. We are taken across the battles in Asia, India, Africa, the Middle East to dealing with any trouble that were on the edges of the empire in the far east, such as was Burma, some of which did not even garner any interest back home.

Something that does come through rather clearly is that the continual little wars that Britain had undertaken had by the end of Victoria's reign, become an accepted way of life for the army. In the Sixty-four years Victoria was on the throne, the British Army fought, or undertook more than one hundred 'little' wars, starting with the Insurrection in Canara, India in 1837 to the Ashanti War in 1900-1901. With the wars, many can name such as the Crimea and Zulu wars to those people may have heard of such as the Opium Wars or the Boxer Rebellion to far more that you may not know.

Queen Victoria's Little Wars was originally published in 1973, and has like those little wars become a forgotten book, and it is good to see this recent publication, bringing an excellent historical account back in to print, well done Pen and Sword.

Dimitri says

Farwell leaves me wanting for more. He promises not to focus on the famous Victorian campaigns, but he does. The Crimea, the Indian Mutiny, the retreat from Kabul, the Sudan and the Boer shuffle into a crowded limelight. Give me more Xhosa to go with the Zulus. He promises not to focus on battles, but his battle descriptions raise the blood. Give me more bodies scarred all over by decades of mutilating bravery. One promised focus he sticks to is the "gentlemen", the officers, as a social class, and the pride of the pre-1950s

British Regiments (which gets a great Appendix I) as the main motivation to scale a wall in the world's forgotten corners with a standard in one hand and bullets smashing the other.

Devon Start says

similar is style to eminent victorian soldiers. each war is given a small section highlighting the action, the general motivation of the british government and any personages of note involved in the war. essential reading for anyone interested in the victorian era of warfare(roughly 1830s to 1918)

Fred Dameron says

quick read with a lot of good detail about "The Little Wars" of Victoria's reign. The wars of Empire were fascinating and fired young men's imaginations well into the 20th and 21st Centuries. Farwell does an excellent job of describing the actions and personalities that made up The British Army during the 19th Century. But, his last few chapters seem to have been written as if on a dead line or that he had just grown board with the project and wanted to be done with it. Over all though an excellent read.

Joe says

A great little read about the victories and defeats of the Victorian British Army.

Jim Pfluecke says

Interesting book. This is not a history of the wars of the Victorian period but rather a collection of snapshots from the majority of the "small wars" fought in that period. It is as much about the British officers who fought the wars as it is the actual battles and campaigns.

So, if you are looking for geo-politics, the Great Game, or detailed campaign or battle narratives, this is the wrong place to go. What this book does offer is insight into the character, ambitions, and lives of the military leaders of the period. It also tells the stories of particularly amazing, depressing or heroic battles, units and leaders.

This book is a different approach to history than I am used to and it was a nice departure. To me, it served as an introduction to some campaigns I was unfamiliar with, specifically in India, and will help guide my further reading of this period.

Jamie says

I really tried to finish this book, but it's not going to happen. It's not that it's a bad book, just that it didn't hold my attention. Each chapter you're introduced to a different war and a different list of names and it was hard

to connect them chronologically or philosophically.

Matthew says

This book was read as a reinforcement of Thomas Pakenham's *The Scramble for Africa: White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent* from 1876 to 1912. The scope of the *Queen Victoria's Little Wars* is larger than *The Scramble for Africa*, as it covers wars that occurred in North America and Asia as well as those on Africa, though at the same time the scope is smaller as it only concerned with Great Britain and military history. The style of *Queen Victoria's Little Wars* is different too, as, while very factual, it is not as densely packed with information and possesses many amusing vignettes. Nonetheless, *Queen Victoria's Little Wars* does serve as a good reinforcement to *The Scramble for Africa* as it reviews the wars described in *The Scramble for Africa*. The book is certainly worth the read.

Alex says

Good brief synopses of the many wars of Colonial Wars fought under the reign of Queen Victoria. Some were very interesting. Some are not.

Graham says

I thought I would hate this book, but ended loving it!: When I first began reading this book, I was disappointed, thinking that it was little more than an account of the various military campaigns undertaken during the reign of Queen Victoria, with no attempt to connect these wars with events within Britain itself.

However, very shortly indeed, I realized that this book was nothing short of a tour de force! The author uses wit and a thorough understanding of his subject to draw the reader in, both informing and entertaining!

Jrobertus says

According to the author, British troops were engaged in various wars, punitive expeditions and related activities every single year of Victoria's 64 year reign. These involve several in Afghanistan, many in India, Burma, China, Egypt, Sudan, the Crimea, and finally in South Africa. Farwell does a wonderful job describing the culture of the empire, the desire, even the yearning of young men of the middle and upper middle class to prove themselves in combat. He describes the local nature and culture of "the regiment" and the public's view which is mostly detached when not jingoistic. It was a fascinating time. Farwell gives brief histories of the officers involved and that gives a feel for the culture as well. What surprised me is the author is American but he must have done a TON of background research. His writing is crisp and fast paced so it made for a most enjoyable read.
