***Childhood and War in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, by Jennine Hurl-Eamon (Oxford, Oxford U.P., 2025, pp. 258. £99).**

Although more than a third of England's eighteenth-century population was under the age of fifteen, the wartime experiences of youngsters during this notably belligerent era have received only sporadic historical attention. Jennine Hurl-Eamon's welcome volume aims to address this oversight by bringing military history into dialogue with the history of childhood.

The book's scope is both broader and narrower than its title suggests. Rather than covering the eighteenth century proper, Hurl-Eamon focuses on the period from the Seven Years' War to the Battle of Waterloo (1756-1815). She is primarily concerned with the British Army, on the grounds that more has been written about youthful seafarers. Yet, much like the Georgian soldiers she studies, Hurl-Eamon ventures well beyond British shores, tracing children's interactions with the military across diverse European and colonial contexts. Her research encompasses both boys and girls, including youngsters caught up in the fighting as well as children whose knowledge of war was strictly second-hand. The author exploits a wide array of sources, making extensive use of soldiers' memoirs and effectively analysing contemporary prints. The book is further enriched by the productive sampling of local archives and courts-martial records.

*Childhood and War* highlights the presence and significance of youngsters in regimental life. Echoing themes from her earlier work on military wives, Hurl-Eamon argues that officers regarded juvenile camp followers as an encumbrance. At the same time, she suggests that soldiers' children benefited from educational initiatives sponsored by the army, including the creation of the Royal Military Asylum and the development of regimental schools. Indeed,

Hurl-Eamon argues that military life could be ‘surprisingly conducive’ (p. 96) to independent study and self-improvement, not least because soldiers had ample spare time. Civilian children in Britain, meanwhile, needed little prompting to partake in a contemporary ‘pleasure culture of war’ (p. 67): they expressed fascination with martial pageantry and indulged in games of military make-believe. The wartime suffering of young people could evoke public sympathy, while acts of kindness towards vulnerable children underscored soldiers’ humanity.

Youths were not only victims of armed conflict but active participants in war. Children supported military operations by acting as servants, guides, and intermediaries with local populations. Although minimum age requirements for officers were introduced in the 1790s amid concern over immature commanders, the manpower demands of the French Wars prompted new efforts to recruit minors, including the creation of dedicated boy regiments. While acknowledging officers’ interest in preparing juvenile recruits for promotion to the non-commissioned ranks, Hurl-Eamon suggests that the army generally failed to treat its youngest members with sufficient care and consideration. In a thoughtful final chapter, she contends that the flipside of regimental paternalism was the army’s systematic infantilisation of enlisted adults. The author argues that commanders viewed their subordinates as childish dependents and identifies soldiers who defied the stereotype of enlisted men as feckless fathers.

Though well-organised and well-written, *Childhood and War* contains some noticeable errors. The 94th Regiment, for example, is routinely misidentified as the ‘9th Scots Brigade’ while the 7th and 43rd Foot are mistaken for dragoons (p. 69). No separate Irish Parliament existed in 1839 (p. 49). Several other claims, including the assertion that boy regiments were issued

with fewer rations (p. 187), would have benefited from more thorough documentation. The military autobiographer John Shipp is repeatedly described as nine years of age on enlistment, despite evidence from parish registers that he was several years older.

The argument that boy soldiers were 'undervalued' by the army and broader society (p. 190) is sometimes overstated. To be sure, Georgian drummer boys never attained the status of republican martyrs as with their counterparts in revolutionary France and the Civil War-era United States. Yet they were by no means invisible in contemporary artworks, newspapers, and songs, appearing variously as diminutive but dutiful performers, battle-shy scamps, and laudable exemplars of British pluck. Nor were boy soldiers invariably considered poor substitutes for adults (p.173). In fact, youths were widely regarded as more likely to master the musical instruments required for army operations and regimental display.

The book maintains that juvenile soldiers were denied equal pay until their eighteenth birthday, citing an 1805 directive that set their wages at five-sixths of a private's salary. However, it omits subsequent general orders – including those issued on 28 February 1806 and 25 February 1813 – which granted full wages to enlisted minors who had turned fifteen or had demonstrated sufficient strength and skill to serve as privates or drummers. More might also have been made of the striking fact that the army had previously paid its youngest members at rates that were equivalent to or (in the case of drummers) higher than those of adult privates. Hurl-Eamon rightly notes that growing lads often received much smaller enlistment bounties than mature recruits, and that service before eighteen was not counted towards a soldier's pension by the time of the Napoleonic Wars. Indeed, had the army done otherwise, its most precocious recruits would have qualified for lifetime long-service pensions by their mid-twenties. Yet not all readers may agree with the implication that all

instances of differential compensation should be considered unjust. Many modern governments continue to set lower minimum wages for workers under eighteen, and the Georgian military's treatment of juvenile recruits might well be seen as notably even-handed in an age when children were widely exploited as a source of cut-price labour.

Although *Childhood and War* argues that the contributions of boy soldiers have hitherto been underestimated, it makes little effort to establish their numbers or age distribution, beyond quoting Art Cockerill's conjectural figure for 1811. The book notes that certain regiments were authorised to recruit up to 100 boys during the Napoleonic conflict but overlooks later orders which revised the official maximum to fifty per infantry battalion. While readers are informed that military records are 'largely silent on youth' (p. 184), opportunities for further quantification exist. Regimental inspection reports, for example, list the ages of officers and give aggregate figures for the other ranks, noting the number younger than eighteen. Description books, which often furnish soldiers' reported ages at enlistment, also survive in far greater numbers than the book suggests, with many digitised by The National Archives (WO25 series). Although not without methodological challenges, further study of these sources would complement the valuable qualitative evidence presented by Hurl-Eamon.

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