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**Fortunat Mueller-Maerki**

Moderator

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Location: Sussex New Jersey USA  
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BOOKREVIEW by Fortunat Mueller-Maerki

## The Ultimate Collection of Data and Images on British Military Watches

***British Military Timepieces, A Documentation in Pictures – Uhren der britischen Streitkräfte, eine Bilddokumentation, by Konrad Knirim.*** [Volume II of: *Military Timepieces – Band II von: Militäruhren*] First Edition, 2009 by Pomp Publishers, Bottrop (Germany), [www.pomp.de](http://www.pomp.de); hardcover, dustjacket, 800 pages, 30 x 22 cm; ISBN 978-3-89355-260-3; heavily illustrated in color (around 5000 photographs of over 1200 different timepieces, plus reproductions of hundreds of related ephemera items). Fully bilingual text and image captions (German/English). Includes Index. Available now at the websites <http://www.amazon.de> or <http://www.abebooks.co.uk> for Euro 178 (approx. US\$ 215) plus postage, or borrow from the Library and Research Center at the National Watch and Clock Museum, Columbia Pa.

The dedicated aficionado of military watches is in all likelihood already familiar with Konrad Knirim's earlier book on 'Military Timepieces – 150 Years of Watches and Clocks of German Forces', first published in German only in 1998, and available since 2002 in an expanded bilingual German/English edition. That book rapidly became the 'bible', the 'must have reference tool' for horological collectors in that specialized segment. Now Knirim has set out to create a similar book on the timepieces (both watches and clocks) used and issued by the British armed forces, including the army, the navy and the airforce.

By personality, Knirim is more the passionate collector than the detached observer or analytical scholar, and that is reflected in his publications. Wisely he subtitles his books "A Documentation in Pictures", and that is exactly what they are, and as such they are unsurpassed in the depth and breadth in which they cover their subject matter. The author has systematically collected military timepieces for over 25 years since his first purchase at auction of a lot of British aviation watches. His once formidable collection of British military watches was sold long ago, so when he decided to complement his earlier book on German military watches with a volume on Britain he had to rely on a series of horological friends – in Great Britain and elsewhere – to 're-build' his database. Given his prominence among military watch specialists he had no problem gaining access to most of the relevant museums and private collections. For several years he systematically photographed every British military timepiece he could identify, documenting dial, case and movement. From among the resulting 20'000 pictures he selected about 5000 photographs, showing over 1200 different timekeepers (complemented with reproductions of hundreds of related ephemera items, such as service manuals, in-situ photos of the pieces in use, etc) and assembled them into the bulk of the book under review. These several hundred full page images have been expertly composed by the author on his computer using imaging software and thousands of photographs.

The images are interspersed with various texts (mostly published previously elsewhere, by a large number of different authors, some only as extracts or synopses, but also including some short texts by Knirim himself) ranging from one to 20 pages in length. For the most part these contributors are recognized experts in their area. Nevertheless, this approach toward creating the text portion of the book has its limitations. The narrative is episodic rather than continuous, and there

Fortunat Mueller-Maerki, Sussex NJ



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is no way to assure that all aspects of the subject of the book are covered, and there is some duplication of information provided. Altogether there are about 80 such text-blocks spread throughout the book.

Knirim chose to define his subject broadly, somewhat arbitrarily including sections on the John Harison sea clocks, a selection of observatory precision regulators, and an overview of the history of the British marine chronometer. In the opinion of this reviewer the resulting 'Part I' of the book is its weakest part; not only is each of these three subjects a huge sector of horological history in its own right, but there exist in depth scholarly monographs covering all these areas in a more scholarly and complete manner. Likewise, in the final part of the book the timepieces of the Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, South African and Indian armed forces are covered, which, given the nature of the British empire, is of course appropriate and most interesting, but then some sections on military timekeepers in the USA, France and Japan were also included. This reviewer feels that these latter parts were added primarily because the author hated to discard 'material that was available', rather than because they belong in the book.

The book is broadly organized by type of timekeeper, starting with clocks and chronometers, and progressing to pocket and deck watches, followed by wrist watches. Within these broad categories, the structure is chronological or by branch of armed service. The nature of the book as a documentation rather than a narrative sometimes makes it not easy to find a specific subject, but a keyword index (primarily names of makers and model numbers) is a great help, although more index entries by watch type would be helpful.

The scope of coverage of the subject is truly extraordinary. There is no type of military timekeeper that is left out: divers watches, radio room clocks, zig-zag clocks, sector clocks, aircraft panel clocks, pilot watches, deck watches, instrument timers, chronographs, chronometers, artillery watches, surveying watches, sidereal watches, trench watches, parachuters' watches, bomb timers, and many others – all make their appearance. The quality and thoroughness of the pictures is very good; in most instances a specific timepiece is shown both in a dial view and a movement view, and - wherever relevant - clear pictures of both the inside and outside of the back covers (with their all important marks and engravings) are shown as well.

This is not the kind of book that anybody will read cover to cover, but rather a reference book to consult for specific information, or also a 'browsing book' to leaf through for picking up tidbits of fascinating morsels of information on horological or military history. The text throughout is bilingual in German in the right hand column, in English in the left hand column. All picture captions have been translated by the author as well. The author's mother tongue is not English, so there are a few isolated translation errors, but most of them are easy to identify, such as when the term 'mantel clock' is used to describe a wall hanging clock. Readers who have even a minuscule of knowledge in German should read both picture captions as different features may be highlighted in the German and English texts: So e.g. on page 366, showing a pair of civil time/sidereal time deck watches described as having a "sliding cover"; only the German text reveals that the 'slide' alternatively obstructs the view on one of the two watches.

No publication of this magnitude is perfect; some of the minor issues noted by this reviewer include the lack of a good overall bibliography on the subject of British military horology, and clear citations on where and when some of the text contributions were first published. Also on the wishlist is a more detailed, more structured table of contents that more clearly distinguishes chapter headings and third party text contributions.

But these minor criticisms pale in comparison to the admiration for the dedication shown by the author in collecting this information and getting it into a printable format. All the image processing, typesetting, proofreading and layout work was done by the author himself, delivering a set of print ready Acrobat files on a disc to the printer/publisher. That has allowed for a reasonable sales price for a massive publication of this sort that surely accounts only for production and distribution cost – the thousands of hours Knirim must have spent collecting and organizing the material clearly were a labor of love, without compensation. The horological community owes the author –and his many contributors- deep gratitude for creating a comprehensive and in depth documentation covering British Military Horology, a subject area which hereto was covered by only a few smaller, very partial publications.

*Fortunat Mueller-Maerki, Sussex, New Jersey, USA – March 20, 2009*