

BEITRÄGE

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British and american perspectives on early modern warfare

Anglophone writing on warfare is currently undergoing a transformation, driven by a number of contradictory forces. In the US, as John Lynn has noted, 'political correctness' is stifling much traditional military history in the universities. Yet, conflict remains a central concern of academic study and social and political scientists are paying increasing attention to the past in their attempts to trace long-term human developments.¹ Given the scope and volume of new work, this paper will eschew a comprehensive survey in favour of concentrating on the last decade, identifying key trends and important individual publications. The focus will be primarily on Anglophone writing on war as a historical phenomenon and as a factor in early modern British history.

The revolution in social and economic history which swept British universities in the 1950s did not leave military history untouched. The new methodologies and concerns were incorporated to create what has become known as the 'new military history', or 'war and society' approach which seeks not merely to understand armed forces as social institutions, but to locate war in its wider historical context. This approach thrived in the 1970s and 1980s, epitomised by the 'War and Society' series originally published by Fontana and recently reissued by Sutton.² It is maintained today by the journal, *War in History*, published by Arnold, as well as further individual volumes.³ While appreciating their insights, critics have charged the

¹ Contrasting perspectives are offered by J. A. Lynn, The embattled future of academic military history, in: *Journal of Military History* 61 (1997), 777-789; J. Black, War and the world, 1450-2000, in: *ibid* 63 (1999), 669-682.

² J. R. Hale, *War and society in Renaissance Europe 1450-1620*, London 1985; M. S. Anderson, *War and society in Europe of the old regime 1618-1789*, London 1988; G. Best, *War and society in revolutionary Europe 1770-1870*, London 1982. All reprinted Stroud, 1998.

³ F. Tallett, *War and society in early modern Europe 1495-1715*, London 1992.

practitioners of this approach with seeking 'to bring academic respectability to a branch of their discipline which has long been the poor relation of its political, religious, social and economic brothers'.⁴ The result has been the dual neglect of operational history, which has been left to traditional 'amateur' popular historians, and of the political aspects of war, which has been surrendered to the historical sociologists and political scientists.

It is clear, however, that these divisions have been short-lived. The publication of John Brewer's *Sinews of power* in 1989 helped stimulate a healthy cross-disciplinary fertilisation of ideas, opening up new perspectives on European as well as British history. Brewer's central thesis was that, compared to its continental European rivals, the English monarchy was a highly organised and successful 'fiscal-military state', mobilising the means for war and accumulating the ability to project its power on a global scale. This argument attacked many long-held assumptions about the 'amateur' nature of early modern English administration, as well as the belief that continental absolutist monarchies possessed greater coercive and military power. Brewer argued that the Glorious Revolution of 1688 encouraged a relatively harmonious working relationship between crown and parliament since both had a vested interest in preserving the Protestant Succession and the revolutionary political settlement. By working through parliament, the crown was able to tap Britain's growing economy more effectively than its continental rivals, because parliamentary consent legitimised resource mobilisation, while public accountability encouraged greater efficiency in collection and management. The ensuing debate has produced some exciting work on the relationship between representative government and fiscal-military power,⁵ as well as a healthy interest in comparing

⁴ J. Childs, *The Nine Years War and the British army 1688-97. The operations in the Low Countries*, Manchester 1991, p. 3.

⁵ J. Brewer, *The sinews of power. War, money and the English state 1688-1783*, New York 1988; M. J. Braddick, *The nerves of state. Taxation and the financing of the English state, 1558-1714*, Manchester 1996; *Fiscal crises, liberty and representative government*, ed. by P. T. Hoffman/K. Norberg, Stanford 1994; M. C. t'Hoff, *The making of a bourgeois state. War, politics and finance during the Dutch revolt*, Manchester 1993; D. W. Jones, *War and economy in the age of William III and Marlborough*, Oxford 1988. There are obvious connections with the recent debate on absolutism generated by N. Henshall, *The myth of absolutism*, London 1992. For a discussion see P. H. Wilson, *Absolutism in central Europe*, London 2000.

English 'state formation' with that elsewhere.⁶ While endorsing Brewer's overall thesis, James Scott Wheeler has recently challenged his timescale, arguing that the true foundations of the English fiscal-military state were laid during the mid-seventeenth century civil wars and the era of the Protectorate.⁷

The emphasis on state formation in comparative perspective has facilitated a fruitful fusion with the work of British and American political scientists who have sought to place war in a long-term historical perspective. Much of this work centres on tracing different paths to the modern European state and sees war as one of a number of key variables affecting this process.⁸ Often insightful, some of these studies suffer from reliance on rather simplistic models of military institutions and a failure to appreciate the full implications of the Brewer debate. The latter challenge the convention of relating political and military organisation which characterises not only Anglo-American political thought, but other historiographical traditions.⁹ Brewer's findings on Britain, together with the recent debates on absolutism, have tended to relativise the distinctions between different types of European state. It no longer seems tenable to automatically associate representative government with militias, citizen armies or navies. Political rhetoric may have associated standing armies with absolutism, but this did not prevent the maintenance of strong land as well as naval forces after the 1640s, nor did it inhibit close relations between those groups

⁶ An imperial state at war: Britain from 1689 to 1815, ed. by L. Stone, London 1994; Rethinking leviathan. The eighteenth-century state in Britain and Germany, ed. by J. Brewer/E. Hellmuth, Oxford 1999; J. Black, Britain as a military power 1688-1815, London 1999. Some of this material is summarised in H. V. Bowen, War and British society 1688-1815, Cambridge 1998.

⁷ J. S. Wheeler, The making of a world power. War and the military revolution in seventeenth-century England, Stroud 1999. See also similar critique in R. G. Asch, Kriegsfinanzierung, Staatsbildung und ständische Ordnung in Westeuropa im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert, in: Historische Zeitschrift 268 (1999), 635-671.

⁸ Influential contributions include B. M. Downing, The military revolution and political change. Origins of democracy and autocracy in early modern Europe, Princeton 1992; C. Tilly, Coercion, capital, and European states, AD 990- 1992, Oxford 1992; M. Mann, The sources of social power, 2 vols., Cambridge 1986-93; J. E. Thomson, Mercenaries, pirates and sovereigns. State-building and extra-territorial violence in early modern Europe, Princeton 1994; T. Ertman, Birth of the leviathan. Building states and regimes in medieval and early modern Europe, Cambridge 1997.

⁹ An obvious example is Otto Hintze whose ideas have influenced Thomas Ertman.

who dominated parliament and those who officered the army and navy.

The recent discussions of war and state formation continue to draw on the earlier debate on the 'military revolution' sparked by Michael Robert's famous essay of 1956. This might have become a sterile discussion over the significance of particular weapons and tactics if it were not for the fact that it touches on the key question of the relationship of military change to wider historical development. Whereas Geoffrey Parker's modified version of the original thesis continues to stress the significance of technological innovation, others like Jeremy Black and John Lynn have pointed to political factors as the chief reason for the growing scale of early modern warfare.¹⁰ While some recent contributions have extended the geographical application of the concept to include the British Isles, Bert Hall has reinvestigated the technical roots of the tactical changes in one of the most significant contributions to the discussion so far.¹¹

The place of war in international relations has continued to receive attention, most notably in the works of Jeremy Black. His approach is distinguished by a willingness to abandon traditional Eurocentric perspectives and take a truly global view. Given the still insular view of many British academics, this is particularly striking and has produced a considerable number of recent works stressing the interaction of military developments across the early modern world.¹² He roundly rejects determinist explanations of conflict, arguing instead for the significance of contingency and the need to

¹⁰ The key contributions have been collected in *The military revolution debate. Readings on the military transformation of early modern Europe*, ed. by C. J. Rogers, Boulder 1995. See also J. Black, *A military revolution? Military change and European society 1550-1800*, Basingstoke 1991.

¹¹ D. Eltis, *The military revolution in sixteenth-century Europe*, London 1998; R. Loeber/G. Parker, *The military revolution in seventeenth-century Ireland*, in: *Ireland from independence to occupation 1641-1660*, ed. by J. H. Ohlmeyer, Cambridge 1995, pp. 66-88; B. S. Hall, *Weapons and warfare in Renaissance Europe*, Baltimore 1997.

¹² For example, his: *Why wars happen*, London 1998, his edited volume: *War in the early modern world 1450-1815*, London 1998, and his forthcoming: *European international relations 1648-1815*, Basingstoke 2002. For British involvement in conflicts beyond Europe see the two studies by B. Lenman, *England's colonial wars 1550-1688. Conflicts, empire and national identity*, Harlow 2000; and *Britain's colonial wars 1688-1783*, Harlow 2000.

appreciate the cultural and social environment in which decisions were taken.

Black's grand strategic perspective is complemented by a range of work on what might be described as 'operational history'. There is no British equivalent of the current German debate on the definition of this aspect of military history. John Keegan's famous essay into the psychological side of battle has produced few imitators and much Anglophone writing remains wedded to fairly traditional 'campaign history', focussing on 'decisive battles' and 'great commanders'.¹³ This has begun to change recently, thanks to a fruitful marriage of the 'new military history' with the attempt to relate the course of past conflicts in their wider context. This is most apparent in the series 'Warfare and History', published by Routledge, which is notable for the breadth of its coverage.¹⁴ The other major US and British-based commercial publishers run similar series; testament to the continued popular demand for military history from the reading public. While focussed more conventionally on individual conflicts, these series have nonetheless also included some important and innovative work.¹⁵

¹³ J. Keegan, *The face of battle*, London 1976; R. Weigley, *The age of battles. The quest for decisive victory from Breitenfeld to Waterloo*, Bloomington 1991. For a survey relating to Britain see J. Black, *Britain as a military power 1688-1815*, in: *Journal of Military History* 64 (2000), 159-178.

¹⁴ The series was originally published by UCL Press till its merger with Routledge following the take-over of both houses by the American firm Taylor and Francis. Important contributions on early modern warfare in the series include: R. Murphey, *Ottoman warfare 1500-1700*, London 1998; H. W. Ward, *The War of Independence and the transformation of American society*, London 1999; A. Starkey, *European and native American warfare in North America 1675-1795*, London 1998; R. Harding, *Seapower and naval warfare 1650-1830*, London 1999; J. Glete, *Warfare at sea 1500-1650*, London 1999; J. K. Thornton, *Warfare in Atlantic Africa 1500-1800*, London 1999; J. Black, *European warfare 1660-1815*, London 1994.

¹⁵ Titles in the Longman series 'Modern Wars in Perspective' include D. E. Showalter, *The wars of Frederick the Great*, London 1996; C. J. Esdaile, *The wars of Napoleon*, London 1995; R. I. Frost, *The Northern Wars 1558-1721*, London 2000; J. R. Jones, *The Anglo-Dutch Wars of the seventeenth century*, London 1996; M. S. Anderson, *The War of the Austrian Succession 1740-1748*, London 1995. Recent studies of the last two conflicts include R. Hainsworth/C. Churches, *The Anglo-dutch naval wars 1652-1674*, Stroud 1998 and R. Browning, *The war of the Austrian Succession*, New York 1993. The Arnold series 'Modern Wars' includes T. C. W. Blanning, *The French Revolutionary Wars 1787-1802*, London 1996 and D. Gates, *The Napoleonic Wars 1803-1815*, London 1997. Other recent writing on

In contrast to the breadth of these studies, coverage of war in early modern Britain is still uneven. Naturally, the civil wars of the seventeenth-century have attracted the most attention. Writing in this field continues to expand as it incorporates the more recent interest in the history of everyday life and the experience of war.¹⁶ The debate on state formation has also been helpful here, shifting attention from the former preoccupation with the wars' origins in elite politics to examining their consequences for the development of local and national political power.¹⁷ There has also been a growing awareness of the different 'national' interpretations of what used to be called simply the 'English Civil War'. This is unquestionably a reflection of the contemporary debate about the devolution of power in Scotland and Wales, as well as the future of North Ireland and the United Kingdom's position in the European Union. While much contemporary public opinion rejects closer involvement with Europe, British historians at least are now more ready to borrow continental concepts to help understand their own history. One of these is the idea of the 'Confessional State' which entered the debates on Irish history in 1995 as a politically neutral replacement for earlier sectarian terminology.¹⁸ This offers the possibility for a new look at the relationship between confession, military recruitment and war-making in an era that is often described as an age of religious war.¹⁹

these conflicts include R. Muir, *Tactics and the experience of battle in the age of Napoleon*, New Haven 1998; G. Nafziger, *Imperial bayonets. Tactics of the Napoleonic battery, battalion and brigade as found in contemporary regulations*, London 1996; P. Griffith, *The art of war of revolutionary France 1789-1802*, London 1998; C. D. Hall, *British strategy in the Napoleonic War 1803-15*, Manchester 1992, reprint 1999.

¹⁶ J. Morrill, *Revolt in the provinces. The people of England and the tragedies of war 1634-1648*, 2nd ed., Harlow 1998; M. Bennett, *The Civil Wars experienced. Britain and Ireland 1638-1661*, London 1999; C. Carlton, *going to the wars. The experience of the British Civil Wars 1638-1651*, London 1993. See also R. Hatton, *The royalist war effort 1642-1646*, 2nd ed., London 1999; P. R. Newman, *Atlas of the English Civil War*, London 1998. For the period prior to the civil wars see M. C. Fissel, *English warfare 1511-1642*, London 2001: forthcoming.

¹⁷ *War and government in Britain 1598-1650*, ed. by M. Fissel, Manchester 1991; J. P. Sommerville, *Royalists and patriots. Politics and ideology in England 1603-1640*, 2nd ed., Harlow 1999.

¹⁸ My thanks to my colleague Dr Neal Garnham for this point.

¹⁹ For example, I. Ryder, *An English army for Ireland*, London 1987; J. S. Wheeler, *Four armies in Ireland*, in: *Ireland*, ed. by Ohlmeyer, pp. 43-65.

Later conflict is comparatively less-well covered. Studies of the Jacobite challenge have become more wide-ranging and relate operations in Scotland, England and Ireland to wider European conflicts.²⁰ This is also an area that still generates good traditional military history which can have much to say about the nature of low-level combat and the experience of war.²¹ The Jacobite's mobilisation of the Scottish Highlanders resulted in a clash between two very different ways of fighting. The American scholar James Hill has developed this into a thesis of a distinctive Gaelic way of war which contrasted sharply with the increasingly regimented methods of their opponents.²² Hill's arguments are instructive since they question many of the standard assumptions of Anglo-American military history. Much military history is written from the perspective of a paradigm army; the idea that military developments can be divided into epochs dominated by particular combinations of weapons and tactics. Certain armies are thought to have typified these trends at particular times. Thus, the early sixteenth century is dominated by the professional mercenary, who is later disciplined and maintained in the standing armies of the great monarchies. This has led to an emphasis on the military history of western and central Europe: Spain in the sixteenth century, Sweden and the Netherlands in the early seventeenth century, France thereafter, followed by Prussia in the eighteenth century.²³ British military history can be fitted easily into this scheme since these were the main opponents and allies of English monarchs and since the crown's land forces also followed a similar development, at least from the mid-seventeenth century. In the clash between the British redcoat and the Scottish Highlander, it has thus seemed obvious that the former should eventually triumph thanks to his training and disciplined use of modern

²⁰ Kings in conflict. The revolutionary war in Ireland and its aftermath 1689-1750, ed. by W. A. Maguire, Belfast 1990; J. Black, Culloden and the '45, Stroud 1990; F. McLynn, The Jacobite army in England 1745. The final campaign, Edinburgh 1998.

²¹ S. Reid, 1745. A military history of the last Jacobite rising, London 1996; G. B. Bailey, Falkirk or paradise! The battle of Falkirk Muir 17 January 1746, Edinburgh 1996.

²² J. M. Hill, Celtic warfare 1595-1763, Edinburgh 1986, and his: Gaelic warfare 1453-1815, in: European warfare 1453-1815, ed. by J. Black, Basingstoke 1999, pp. 201-223.

²³ For example, J. A. Lynn, The evolution of army style in the modern west 800-2000, in: International History Review 18 (1996), 505-545.

weaponry. As Hill convincingly demonstrates, the forces of the English monarch were regularly trounced by Scottish and Irish armies who apparently had failed to keep pace with 'modern' military developments. However, there are times when Hill's emphasis on the Gaelic charge as a battle-winning tactic is a little coloured by his sympathy for the Gaels' rejection of stifling English rule. What his arguments do suggest is that the social and physical geography of Europe fostered different styles of war and military organisation. Forms indigenous to one area could not be transplanted to another with any certainty of success. This suggests that we should question any automatic association of 'modern' weaponry and organisation with military success. As Robert Frost has convincingly demonstrated, the supposedly archaic military forms of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were also very successful against the disciplined mercenary armies of Sweden and other opponents.²⁴

Britain's defeat in the American War of Independence seems at first sight to corroborate this point. However, as recent work shows, British regular forces were by no means always unsuccessful in North America, particularly where they adapted to local conditions. In addition to some fine overviews of the 1775-83 war, the earlier struggle for empire 1754-66 has just received elegant treatment from Fred Anderson who combines detailed campaign history with thoughtful analysis of the wider social and political context.²⁵ These studies stress the extent of Britain's military effort, as well as the impact on domestic politics and society, permitting insight into the interplay between military mobilisation and local and national politics. Like the more general work on state formation, the detailed findings of Stephen Conway and others suggest that we need to re-appraise standard associations of English constitutional monarchy with voluntary service and a comparatively low level of military mobilisation. Militia service and impressment were both forms of coercion that were used despite parliamentary control of the armed

²⁴ Frost, *Northern Wars* (as n. 15).

²⁵ J. Black, *War for America. The fight for independence 1775-1783*, Stroud 1991; S. Conway, *The American War of Independence*, London 1996; F. Anderson, *Crucible of war. The Seven Years War and the fate of the empire in British North America 1754-1766*, London 2000. For a survey of the extensive literature in this field, see D. Syrett, *The British armed forces in the American Revolutionary War: publications 1875-1998*, in: *Journal of Military History* 63 (1999), 147-164.

forces. Moreover, both were not confined to the emergency of the 1770s, but were a feature throughout much the eighteenth century.²⁶

Research into early modern British military institutions is rather patchy and much of the best work by British and American historians in this field has been on the armed forces of other countries.²⁷ Richard Harding has provided a succinct summary of current thinking on the Royal Navy as a fighting force, political weapon and social institution.²⁸ He rightly notes the influence of N. A. M. Rodger's important study of the eighteenth-century navy, as well as other recent work.²⁹ The land forces have been less well served, apart from the mid to late seventeenth century which has received model studies from the 'new military history' approach.³⁰ This work has yet to extend to the eighteenth century, despite the wealth of material in local archives, as well as national holdings like the Public Record Office. Good studies exist for individual topics,

²⁶ S. Conway, *The politics of British military and naval mobilization, 1775-83*, in: *English Historical Review* 112 (1997), 1179-1201; *Britain and the impact of the American War, 1775-1783*, in: *War in History* 2 (1995), 127-50; *The recruitment of criminals into the British army, 1775-81*, in: *Bulletin of the Institute for Historical Research* 58 (1985), 46-58; N. Rogers, *Vagrancy, impressment and the regulation of labour in eighteenth-century Britain*, in: *Slavery and Abolition* 15 (1994), 102-113.

²⁷ Examples include J. R. Bruijn, *The Dutch navy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*, Columbia 1990; C. Storrs, *War, diplomacy and the rise of Savoy, 1690-1720*, Cambridge 1999; J. B. Wood, *The king's army. Warfare, soldiers and society during the Wars of Religion in France, 1562-1576*, Cambridge 1996; J. A. Lynn, *Giant of the grand siècle. The French army, 1610-1715*, Cambridge 1997; H. G. Brown, *War, revolution and the bureaucratic state. Politics and army administration in France 1791-1799*, Oxford 1995; W. S. Cormack, *Revolution and political conflict in the French navy 1789-1794*, Cambridge 1995. For further examples see P. H. Wilson, *War in early modern German history*, in: *German History* 19 (2001), forthcoming.

²⁸ R. Harding, *The evolution of a sailing navy 1509-1815*, London 1996. See also N. A. M. Rodger, *Recent books on the Royal Navy of the eighteenth century*, *Journal of Military History* 63 (1998), 683-703.

²⁹ N. A. M. Rodger, *The wooden world. An anatomy of the Georgian navy*, London 1986; K. R. Andrews, *Ships, money and politics. Seafaring and naval enterprise in the reign of Charles I*, Cambridge 1991; B. Capp, *Cromwell's navy. The fleet and the English Revolutions 1648-1660*, Oxford 1989; S. R. Hornstein, *The Restoration navy and English foreign trade 1674-1688*, Aldershot 1991.

³⁰ I. Gentles, *The New Model Army in England, Ireland and Scotland, 1645-1653*, Oxford 1992; J. Childs, *The army of Charles II*, London 1976; *The army, James II and the Glorious Revolution*, New York 1980; *The British army of William III, 1689-1702*, Manchester 1987.

such as training and officership and the regimental economy.³¹ There are also a number of useful unpublished dissertations on aspects of recruitment, administration and the social composition of personnel, as well as some interest in desertion.³²

However, there are promising signs that this period will be opened up by fresh work. The recent boom in socio-legal history has encouraged renewed interest in the role of the army as a factor of public order, as well as in soldiers and militia service as a source of popular disorder. In particular, this work indicates the value of civil legal records as a source for the social history of military institutions.³³ Nonetheless, basic details still await clarification. There is still no reliable set of statistics on the size of the land forces due to the practice of dividing the army into separate establishments and garrisons, as well as hiring foreign auxiliaries in wartime.³⁴ How this large number of armed men were accommodated in peacetime is also poorly understood as there has been no systematic study of the billeting system, or the rotation of

³¹ J. A. Houlding, 'Fit for service'. The training of the British army 1715-1795, Oxford 1981, reprint 1999; A. J. Guy, *Oeconomy and discipline. Officership and administration in the British army 1714-1763*, Manchester 1985.

³² Examples include I. F. Burton, 'The Secretary at War and the administration of the British army during the War of the Spanish Succession' (University of London PhD thesis, 1960); S. D. M. Carpenter, 'Patterns of recruitment of the Highland regiments of the British army, 1756-1815' (University of St. Andrews Mlit thesis, 1978); J. Hayes, 'The social and professional background of the officers of the British army 1714-1763' (University of London MA thesis, 1956); J. L. Pimlott, 'The administration of the British army 1783-1793' (University of Leicester PhD thesis, 1975); G. A. Stepler, 'The common soldier in the reign of George III, 1760-1792' (University of Oxford PhD thesis, 1985); J. R. Western, 'The recruitment of the land forces of Great Britain 1739-99' (University of Edinburgh PhD thesis, 1953); D. A. Kent, "Gone for a soldier": family breakdown and the demography of desertion in a London parish 1750-1791, in: *Local Population Studies* 45 (1990), 27-42; H. C. McCorry, "Besides he was really drunk at the time...". Desertion and discipline, North Britain, 1751-1753, in: *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 69 (1991), 221-232; 70 (1992), 114-117 + 189-197; 71 (1993), 42-50; 72 (1994), 142-159.

³³ For an introduction, see T. Hayter, *The army and the crowd in mid-Georgian England*, Totowa 1978; J. M. Beattie, *Crime and the courts in England 1660-1800*, Oxford 1986; J. A. Sharpe, *Crime in early modern England 1550-1750*, 2nd ed., Harlow 1998.

³⁴ See the statistics in L. D. Schwarz, *London in an age of industrialisation*, Cambridge 1992. While suspect, these numbers are suggestive of the scale of the British military presence in both peace and war.

regiments around the country. These and other important topics await detailed investigation which will permit more useful comparisons to be drawn between Britain and the rest of Europe.

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