A MILITARY REVOLUTION?
Military Change and European Society 1550–1800

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Military Change and European Society
1550–1800

JEREMY BLACK

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To David and David,
Friends and Fellow-Writers

Editor's Preface

The main purpose of this new series of studies is to make available to teacher and student alike developments in a field of history that has become increasingly specialised with the sheer volume of new research and literature now produced. These studies are designed to present the 'state of the debate' on important themes and episodes in European history since the sixteenth century, presented in a clear and critical way by someone who is closely concerned himself with the debate in question.

The studies are not intended to be read as extended bibliographical essays, though each will contain a detailed guide to further reading which will lead students and the general reader quickly to key publications. Each book carries its own interpretation and conclusions, while locating the discussion firmly in the centre of the current issues as historians see them. It is intended that the series will introduce students to historical approaches which are in some cases very new and which, in the normal course of things, would take many years to filter down into the textbooks and school histories. I hope it will demonstrate some of the excitement historians, like scientists, feel as they work away in the vanguard of their subject.

The format of the series conforms closely with that of the companion volumes of studies in economic and social history which has already established a major reputation since its inception in 1968. Both series have an important contribution to make in publicising what it is that historians are doing and in making history more open and accessible. It is vital for history to communicate if it is to survive.

R. J. OVERY

A Note on References

References are cited throughout in square brackets according to the numbering in the Bibliography, with page references where necessary indicated by a colon after the bibliography number.

Acknowledgements

The illustrations of military weapons and soldiers are reproduced by permission of 'The Mansell Collection'.

Preface

The importance of the relationship between war and society is well established, but too often the nature of this relationship is obscure and the social dimension has been studied at the expense of military activity. This is particularly dangerous on the European scale when the problem of analysing many armies and lands over many decades can lead to a tendency to generalise on the basis of a few well-studied countries or campaigns. A misleading impression can be created of what is typical and what distinct, and unfounded causal relationships can be advanced.

This brief study seeks to re-examine the so-called Military Revolution of 1560–1660 in order to provide a different account of early modern European military developments. By stressing the relative importance of change after 1660, a different chronology is suggested and it is argued that military change arose from the absolutist state rather than causing it. An alternative basis of absolutism and thus of this change is found in the relative return of domestic stability, specifically acceptable crown-elite relationships, that followed the religious consolidation of several states, particularly France and Austria, in the first half of the seventeenth century. Increases in armed forces encouraged other rulers who wished to play a major role in what was an aggressive competitive international system to follow suit. Any model is of only limited value in face of the European diversity of the period, but it is hoped that the ideas of this work will encourage fresh thought about a number of tired stereotypes.

I am grateful to David Aldridge, Matthew Anderson, David Parrott, Andrew Pettegree, John Plowright, John Stoye and Philip Woodfine for commenting on earlier drafts of this book. The general editor, Richard Overy, has been extremely

helpful and I have also benefited from suggestions made by his two colleagues. I would like to thank Michael Prestwich for discussing medieval warfare with me and David Parrott for discussing the Thirty Years War and the French army of the seventeenth century. Gitte and Wendy have coped with my handwriting wonderfully.

JEREMY BLACK

Their expences are almost all employed in rendering themselves terrible to their neighbours; and fortified towns and citadels are the sovereign game they hunt after.

Applications of this hostile turn in some, soon make them necessary in all; and we now see the fate of Europe overspread with military grandeur . . . it becomes absolutely necessary for every state that would preserve its present existence, to support a considerable body of disciplined troops; and the more so, since the only imaginable resource and security of the weaker, by forming defensive alliances and confederacies, appears in this day to be of no effect. The most solemn engagements are impiously violated.

(Corbyn Morris, *A Letter from a By-Stander to a Member of Parliament: Wherein is Examined What Necessity there is for the Maintenance of a Large Regular Land-Force in this Island* (London, 1742) pp. 6–7. Discussing the rulers of Europe. He refers at the end to the recent attack on Maria Theresa by many of the guarantors of the Habsburg inheritance, especially Frederick the Great of Prussia and Louis XV of France.)

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