

Richelieu's Army

War, Government and Society in France, 1624–1642

The conduct of European war on an unprecedented scale is central to an understanding of the ministry of Richelieu (1624–42), and there has been no previous study of the French army during this period. This book provides a detailed account of the organization of the army, and examines the challenges posed by war to government and society in a period associated with the creation of the 'absolutist state'.

By making extensive use of archival material, the study cuts through myths concerning military and administrative evolution, and confronts typical assumptions about progressive centralization and more effective control of the war-effort by the crown and its agents. Although the European war imposed huge burdens upon the French people, Richelieu's ministry struggled to control the army through traditional administrative and financial mechanisms. Far from strengthening the absolutist authority of government, the waging of war eroded the ministry's control over army officers and troops and incited tensions between soldiers and civilians across French society which in turn contributed to the undermining of existing structures of authority and control.

The book also makes an original and sceptical contribution to the debate about a 'military revolution' in early modern Europe by examining the conduct of war in early seventeenth-century France. In addition, it seeks to contextualize the inadequacy of the war-effort during Richelieu's ministry by providing a view of the military context of French foreign policy after 1625 which challenges many of the orthodoxies about Richelieu's aims and objectives in involving France in the Thirty Years War.

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Richelieu's Army

War, Government and Society in France, 1624–1642

DAVID PARROTT





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To my parents
Fred and Dorothy Parrott



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Glossary

- armée: (1) The total military establishment maintained by Louis XIII.
 - (2) Individual army-corps serving in particular campaign theatres army of the Valtelline, army serving in Franche-Comté, army of Italy, etc.

COMPANY AND REGIMENTAL OFFICERS

I have used the term non-commissioned officer (NCO) to denote those company posts with disciplinary authority below the rank of captain, lieutenant and ensign, though the term is itself an anachronism; 'petty officer' might be more appropriate to a seventeenth-century context, but creates its own confusions for a modern readership.

aide-major: assistant of the regimental (*sergent-)major*; liaison between the *major* and the company officers.

anspessade: veteran ranking soldier, allocated the most important positions in a company deployment. The *anspessade* was immediately subordinate to a corporal, but without the formal disciplinary authority of an NCO.

appointé: veteran soldier in a company, though of lower status than an anspessade. archer: ordinary employee and assistant of the prévôt.

- cornette: (1) Lowest-ranking officer in a company of cavalerie légère.
 - (2) Frequently used to denote the cavalry company itself 'trois cornettes de cavalerie'.

enseign: lowest-ranking officer in an infantry company, by tradition charged with carrying the company banner. Equivalent in companies of *cavalerie légère* was the *cornette*.

état major: term for all officers and officials in a regiment outside the company hierarchy: mestre de camp, (sergent-)major, aides-majors, maréchal de logis, commissaire à la conduite, chaplain, surgeon, the prévôt and his lieutenant and archers.

guidon: lowest-ranking officer and standard-bearer in company of gendarmes.

lieutenant-général: supreme commander of an army-corps – the acting *lieutenant* of the king, commander of all his armies.



Glossary

maréchal: non-hereditary rank granted by the crown to a senior officer, in almost all cases one who had already served as commander of an army-corps. Provided court status equivalent to a duc sans pairie. It was not necessary to be a maréchal to command an army-corps, but a maréchal would enjoy precedence if two commanders were appointed to joint command of an army unless the other commander were a high-ranking prince du sang or prince souverain, for whom the status of maréchal was considered inappropriate.

maréchal de camp: officer of the high command immediately subordinate to the lieutenant-général of an army-corps. Overall responsibility for the quartering and encampment of the troops. In theory one or more maréchaux de camp was to remain with the army during the winter quarter to maintain discipline.

- maréchal des logis: (1) Officer in each infantry regiment, directly under the orders of the mestre de camp and the major. Overall responsibility for the lodging of troops, provision of supplies, management of the soldiers at the étapes.
 - (2) Low-ranking NCO in a company of *cavalerie légère*, *dragons* or *gendarmes*, charged with collection and distribution of forage, finding stabling, etc.

maréchal de bataille: officer within the general staff whose original function was to draw up the army for battle according to the plans established by the general.

mestre de camp: commander of a French infantry regiment; commanders of cavalry and foreign mercenary regiments held the title of colonels. (Mestre [maître] de camp derived from Spanish maestro de campo.)

sergent de bataille: subordinate to the maréchal de camp with duties similar to the maréchal de bataille, involving the embattling of the army and the general oversight of discipline in quarters. Some confusion of status between the two offices, and by the reign of Louis XIV the office of maréchal de bataille had replaced the sergent.

sergent-major (major): immediate subordinate of the mestre de camp in the regimental hierarchy, with authority over all the captains. Had control over the collection and distribution of all munitions to the regiment, and responsibility for drawing up the regiment in order of battle.

WEAPONRY, EQUIPMENT AND PROVISIONING

- canon: (1) General term for the artillery pieces present with a French army-corps or in a fortification.
 - (2) Heavy field or siege piece, weighing around 4,800 lb and firing a shot weighing 30-5 lb.

carabins: ultimately to be superseded by *dragons*, but under Richelieu the standard term for mounted infantry. Those armed with the heavier muskets were sometimes termed *mousquetaires à cheval*.

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Glossary

cavalerie légère: the great majority of the French cavalry units. Cavalry armed with a sabre and two pistols, lightly armoured with cuirasse, helmet and in some cases arm and leg protection.

corselet: chest and back armour issued to pikemen. Ministers complained frequently that the pikemen declined to wear this cumbersome protection.

culverine: second-heaviest artillery piece, weighing around 3,700 lb, and firing a shot of around 20 lb.

dragons [dragoons]: mounted infantry, armed with muskets or, more usually, lighter firearms, descendants of the sixteenth-century arquebuse. Soldiers would dismount to fight.

flintlock musket (fusil): though the matchlock was the standard issue musket for the French (and other European) infantry during the Thirty Years War, numerous examples survive of the more sophisticated flintlock, a musket fired by means of a spark struck from a flint when the trigger was pulled. While the pistols issued to the French cavalry were fired by flint- (wheel-) lock technology, it was considered too expensive and unreliable for adoption by ordinary musketeers. Flintlock muskets remained prestige objects manufactured in relatively small quantities until the later seventeenth century. A small number of mounted infantry – fusiliers – were equipped with flintlocks.

gendarme: heavy cavalryman, in most cases still fully armoured. In theory the most prestigious element in the armies, since the companies of gendarmes were invariably the personal units of the royal household, major grands or the provincial governors. In reality the gendarmerie had a reputation for indiscipline and disorder, and played a modest role in campaigning, especially once the cavalerie légère had been organized into squadrons or regiments.

matchlock musket: musket fired by means of a 'match' – a length of smouldering fuse applied to the powder in the firing chamber when the musket trigger was pulled. Hence 'match' – quantities of slow-burning fuse issued to infantry with firearms: an extremely large item in the budget of munitions purchase and distribution.

munitionnaire: large-scale supplier prepared to negotiate contracts with the crown for the provision of pain de munition to the armies. Frequently linked into networks of other financial speculators.

pain de munition: the basic daily ration of bread provided to the French infantry (not cavalry and artillery) by systems of central contracting. The soldiers contributed 1 sol per day to this provision, and the crown absorbed the additional costs of providing grain, baking bread and distributing the rations. The bread ration was supposed to weigh 24 ounces.

vivandier: local, small-scale, entrepreneur-merchant who would sell food and



Glossary

drink to the soldiers in camp or garrison to supplement the standard issue of pain de munition.

ARMY ORGANIZATION

denier: one twelth of a sol, one 240th of a livre.

deniers revenans bons: the financial sums outstanding from the gap between the calculations of the payment of the unit at 'full' strength, and the 'actual' size of the unit as established at the revue.

drapeau blanc: the privilege of carrying the king's standard, the drapeau blanc, in addition to regimental colours, was accorded to prestige infantry regiments. It was essentially identified with the vieux and petits vieux regiments, but a sequence of other regiments were accorded this privilege, together with entretenu status, during the 1630s.

écu: typically valued at 3 livres in 1630s/40s.

étape: prescribed halting-point for units marching down to the campaign theatres, supposedly provided with adequate provisions for the troops collected from the surrounding area or purchased via a local tax.

la colonelle: company in each of the régiments entretenus whose officers were nominated by the colonel général de l'infanterie française. The captain of this company was titled lieutenant colonel, and in theory enjoyed the highest status amongst the captains of the regiment, though this frequently ensured clashes with the captain commanding the company of the regimental mestre de camp.

licenciement: the disbandment of a regiment or company, either as a disciplinary penalty or because the numbers of troops in the unit had fallen beneath a minimal effective strength. *Licenciement* usually involved the dismissal of the unit officers and the incorporation of the soldiers and NCOs into other units.

livre tournois: basic unit of currency, though it did not correspond to an actual coin in the French monetary system.

millier: roughly 1,000 lb weight – used largely in connection with quantities of powder, lead, match.

- montre: (1) 'Monthly' payment made to both soldiers and officers in the army by the trésoriers de l'ordinaire et extraordinaire des guerres. The number of montres was reduced by the bureau des finances from ten per campaign to eight to six (1634–6), though in practice few troops received more than three or four montres per campaign.
 - (2) Synonymous with *revue* (English 'muster'). French administrative ordinances frequently refer to *montres et revues des gens de guerre*, with no implication that these were different processes.



Glossary

passe-volants: civilians or soldiers from other units, deployed by the unit commander on the day of the revue to deceive the commissaires and contrôleurs about the effective strength of his unit.

petits-vieux régiments: by 1635 this group consisted of seven elite regiments, maintained on a permanent basis and with the right to carry the drapeau blanc, but placed in a rank below the vieux: Neerestang, Sault, Rambures, Maugiron, Vaubecourt, Bellenaue, Saint-Luc.

pike: one third of the French infantry were armed with pikes, ten to twelve foot staff weapons, headed with an eighteen-inch metal tip. The pikemen were the largest and strongest of the soldiers, who received higher pay and consitituted the core of the infantry unit both in defence and attack.

prêt: basic subsistence payment made to the ordinary soldiers every ten days (in theory) on campaign to permit them to buy food, wine, etc.

réformation: reduction in the number of companies in a unit, usually to concentrate the soldiers and reduce the number of officers. During the winter quarter it was also possible for a full complement of companies to be maintained within a regiment, but at substantially reduced individual strength.

régiment or compagnie entretenu(e): undertaking by the crown and its ministers that a selected regiment or cavalry company would not be disbanded, but would be maintained on a permanent basis regardless of whether France was at war. The unit might undergo a reduction of its effective strength, but the potential to reestablish the unit was always maintained.

revue: assembly of the soldiers in a particular unit or entire army-corps to allow the *commissaires* and *contrôleurs des guerres* to carry out an exact count of the real strength of the force, after which payment would be made – usually into the hands of the unit commander who would then distribute (some of) it to his soldiers.

sol: one twentieth of a livre.

vieux régiments: could include the king's own régiments des gardes françaises and gardes suisses. Most usually denotes the four oldest 'provincial' regiments of Picardie, Piémont, Champagne and Navarre. To these four were added the Normandie regiment from c. 1617 (Père G. Daniel, Histoire de la milice française) and Richelieu's régiment de La Marine in 1635, though in June 1640 the Marine was accorded fifth rank amongst the vieux (SHAT A¹59, fo. 272).



Abbreviations

AAE MD Archives des Affaires Etrangères, Mémoires et Documents,

France

AAE CP Archives des Affaires Etrangères, Correspondance Politique Anselme, *Histoire* Père Anselme de Sainte-Marie, *Histoire généalogique et*

généalogique, chronologique de la maison royale de France, des pairs, grands offices de la couronne . . . (3rd edn), (9 vols.; Paris, 1726–33)

ASMa AG Archivio di Stato di Mantova, Archivio Gonzaga ASTo LM Archivio di Stato di Torino, Lettere Ministri

Aubery, Richelieu A. Aubery, Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du cardinal duc de

Richelieu (2 vols.; Paris, 1660)

Avenel D.L.M. Avenel (ed.), Lettres, instructions diplomatiques et

papiers d'état du cardinal de Richelieu (Collection de documents

inédits sur l'histoire de France) (8 vols.; Paris, 1853-76)

BL British Library

BN Bibliothèque Nationale

Code Michau A.L. Jourdan, J. Decrusy and F.A. Isambert (eds.), Recueil

général des anciennes lois françaises depuis l'an 420 jusqu'à la

Révolution de 1789 (28 vols.; Paris, 1821-33), XVI

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intérieure: correspondance et papiers d'état (6 vols. to date;

Paris, 1975-)

Hanotaux, Richelieu G. Hanotaux and duc de La Force, L'histoire du cardinal de

Richelieu (6 vols.; Paris, 1893–1947)

Michaud and J. Poujoulat (eds.), Mémoires pour servir a Poujoulat l'histoire de la France depuis le XIIIe siècle jusqu'à la fin du

XVIIIe – 3e série (10 vols.; Paris, 1838)

Ms.fr. Manuscrit français

Ms.fr. PO Manuscrit français, Pièces Originales

n.d. no date

Petitot and C. Petitot and L. de Monmerqué (eds.), *Collection des*Monmerqué

mémoires relatifs à l'histoire de France – 2e série (52 vols.;

Paris, 1824-9)

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List of abbreviations

Pinard, Chronologie M. Pinard, Chronologie historique militaire (7 vols.; Paris,

1760-4)

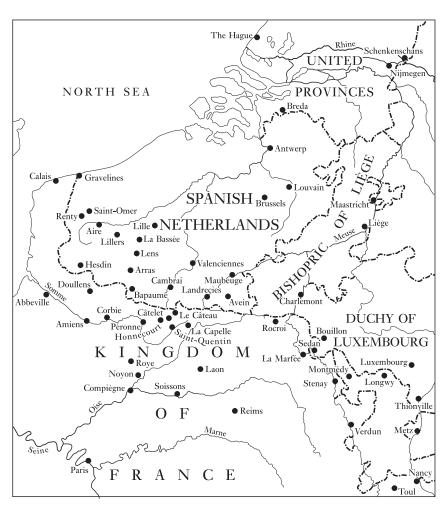
Richelieu, Mémoires Richelieu, Mémoires, in Petitot and Monmerqué, XXII-XXX

(numbered as I—IX in text)

SHAT Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre (Archives de la

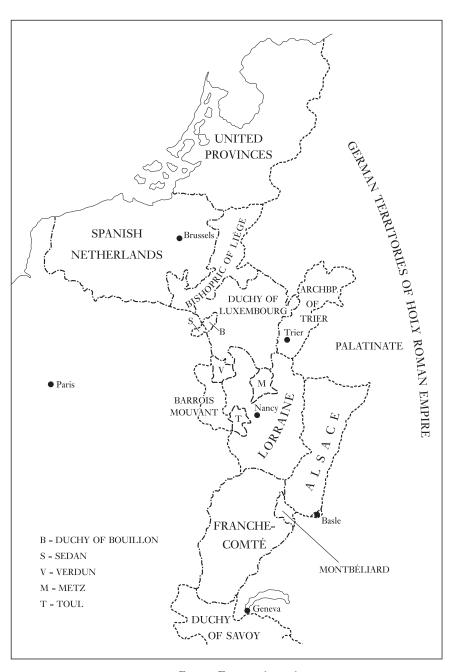
Guerre, Vincennes)





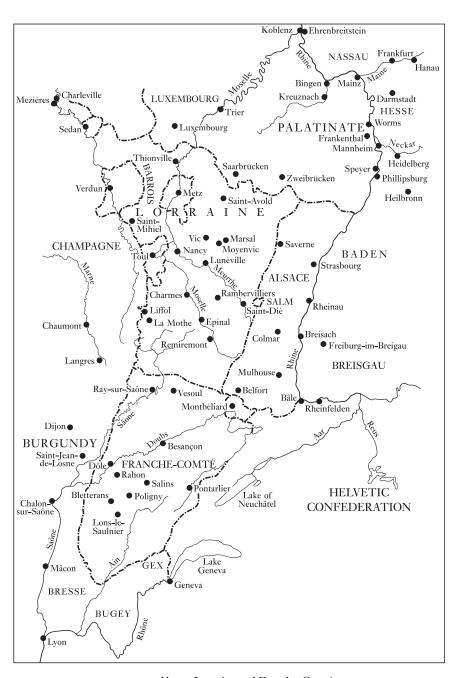
MAP I North-east France, 1635-1642





MAP 2 Eastern France, 1629-1642

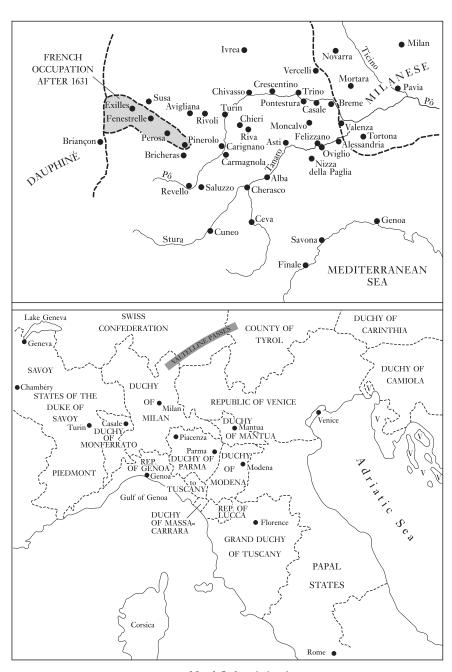




MAP 3 Alsace, Lorraine and Franche-Comté

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MAP 4 North Italy, 1626-1642

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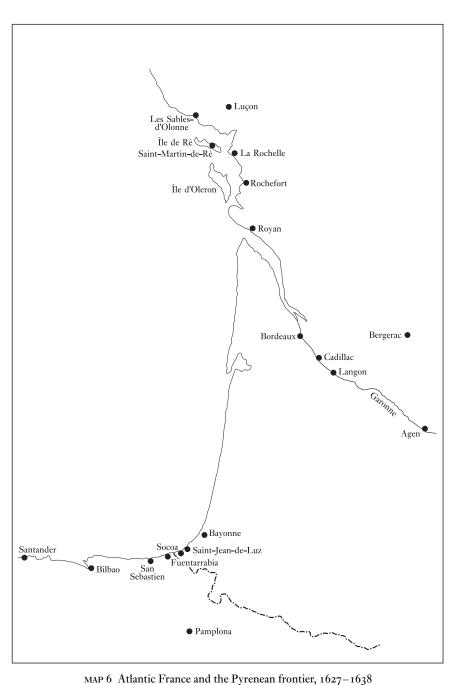




MAP 5 Languedoc, Roussillon and Catalonia, 1637-1642

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