

Richelieu's Army

War, Government and Society in
France, 1624–1642

DAVID PARROTT



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The French art of war during Richelieu's ministry

Accounts of French military practice during the seventeenth century have traditionally taken 19 May 1643 as their point of departure, the date of the battle of Rocroi and the defeat of the *tercios* of the Spanish army of Flanders by French forces under the command of the young Louis II de Bourbon, duc d'Enghien and future Grand Condé. Strongly influenced by the cult of the great commander, such studies have focused upon the middle and later seventeenth century, giving detailed attention to the campaigns waged by Turenne and Condé and the sophisticated siege warfare of maréchal Vauban.¹ The relationship of the period from the mid-1640s to the military experience of the earlier part of the century has been largely ignored; little interest is shown in how French armies were deployed for campaigns, battles or sieges during the period of Richelieu's ministry.

The neglect of the way in which French armies fought at the time of Louis XIII and Richelieu reflects another long-held assumption, that French military practice can be subsumed under a wider process of European military evolution; France was simply following those progressive states, the Dutch and the Swedes, whose army reforms were the decisive factor in shaping the military history of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The opinion that the tactics, deployment and discipline of European armies were radically reshaped by reforms introduced by the princes of Orange, Stadholders of the Dutch Republic – most notably Maurits of Nassau, but also his younger brother Frederik Hendrik and his nephew Willem Lodewijk – and then adopted and developed by Gustavus Adolphus, king of Sweden (1611–32), has a long ancestry. Indeed, the origins of

¹ A. Pascal, *Histoire de l'armée et de tous les régiments* (5 vols; Paris, 1847–50), II, 13–58; E. de La Barre Duparcq, *Histoire de l'art militaire depuis l'usage de la poudre* (Paris, 1864), pp. 95–212; R. Quarré de Verneuil, *L'armée en France depuis Charles VII jusqu'à la Révolution (1439–1789)* (Paris, 1880), pp. 147–75; L. Dussieux, *L'armée en France* (3 vols; Versailles, 1884), II, 17–223; L. Dussieux, *Les grands généraux de Louis XIV. Notices historiques* (Paris, 1888), pp. 1–111; J. Roy, *Turenne, sa vie et les institutions militaires de son temps* (Paris, 1884), pp. 15–78; M. Hardy de Périni, *Turenne et Condé, 1626–1675* (Paris, 1906); F. Reboul, 'Histoire militaire de la France', in G. Hanotaux (ed.), *Histoire de la nation française* (15 vols., Paris, 1920–35), VII, 349–418; H. Guerlac, 'Vauban: the impact of science on war', in E.M. Earle (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler* (Princeton, 1944), pp. 26–48; R. Foerster, 'Turenne et Montecuccoli. Une comparaison stratégique et tactique', in F. Gambiez and J. Laloy (eds.), *Turenne et l'art militaire. Actes du colloque international* (Paris, 1975), pp. 217–18; M. Blancpain, *Le mardi de Rocroi* (Paris, 1985).

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this argument for military change lie in the conscious dissemination of reform plans by Maurits of Nassau as early as the 1590s.

The key elements in the Orangist military reforms have frequently been identified by historians. Though infantry had dominated the battlefields of Europe since the victories of Swiss pikemen over Burgundian cavalry in the later fifteenth century, this supremacy had rested upon crude mass and impact: foot-soldiers bearing pikes, halberds or swords were pressed into huge blocks as many as sixty men deep and containing 3,000–4,000 soldiers in total, and advanced slowly and remorselessly across a battlefield against enemy formations of cavalry or infantry. When, as with the Swiss or the German *Landsknechte*, these infantry phalanxes possessed strong *esprit de corps* and a cohesion based on accumulated campaigning experience, they appeared invincible. What proved their fatal flaw was the development and increasingly widespread use of firearms. Artillery deployed on the battlefield, and a larger proportion of infantry armed with arquebuses, then from the mid-sixteenth century with the heavier and more effective musket, were gradually changing the face of battle. Attempts to modify infantry tactics to make allowance for the development of firearms were characteristic of sixteenth-century tactical thinking, but they were piecemeal bids to reconcile the traditional packed infantry formation with the new technology. Most notably, the Spanish *tercio*, an infantry formation of 3,000 soldiers, combined the traditional solid square of pikemen with an encircling belt of musketeers, able to return fire while sheltering beneath the protection of the massed pikes, and to disappear amongst them when the square began its lumbering advance across the battlefield. But according to the Orangist interpretation of tactical change, this type of redeployment was little more than tinkering with a traditional conception of battlefield tactics dominated by mass and the ‘push of pike’. What was required, and provided by Maurits of Nassau’s reforms, was a new conception of battlefield deployment which would take full account of warfare dominated by the killing-power of firearms. The result was a radical rethinking of the organization and deployment of infantry. In place of the massed square, the Orangist reforms substituted shallow formations initially ten rows deep but progressively reduced to eight, then six, rows. The proportion of musketeers rose in these formations to become two-thirds of the total, and instead of being spread in a girdle around four sides of a square so that the great majority were unable to use their firearms unless the formation were completely surrounded by enemy troops, they were placed in increasingly elaborate deployments amongst smaller groups of pikemen, deployments whose primary intention was to ensure that all of them should have the opportunity to fire their muskets. This decision to redeploy the infantry in shallower formations had two consequences. It greatly reduced the size of the basic tactical unit; if the Spanish *tercio* had contained 3,000 men, the reformed Dutch battalion was of 550 men. A Dutch or other ‘reformed’ general would now find himself in command of an army with a large number of small individual

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units, rather than five or six great blocks of infantry. This itself would encourage more flexible and complex battlefield deployment: a general with two or three dozen individual infantry units would more readily think in terms of drawing up his army in two or three successive lines, providing greater defence in depth and more capacity to adjust to changing battlefield circumstances. The second consequence of this shift to smaller units and more complicated deployment was the need to impose much more rigorous training upon the ordinary soldiers and a far higher level of initiative and flexibility upon NCOs and officers. While a recruit carrying a pike in the fortieth rank of an infantry square barely required any qualities beyond brute strength, musketeers and pikemen deployed in these new and more complex formations were to be subjected to rigorous and uniform drill, enabling units to perform more sophisticated manoeuvres and allowing individual soldiers to handle weapons more effectively – facilitating musket fire through the countermarch system, for example, which would allow successive rows of musketeers to discharge their weapons in sequence. When the loading and firing of a musket was taught, via printed manuals, as a sequence of carefully prescribed actions, a uniform rate of fire could be achieved which would further enhance the battlefield effectiveness of the unit. All of this was supervised and, outside the combat-zone, taught by a much larger group of unit officers and NCOs. These officers were themselves better trained and subordinated to commanders who were aware that maximizing the advantages of this military system required more sophisticated systems of control and communication. A disciplined, professional, cohesive officer-corps would reduce the dangers of misinterpretation or an ill-judged individual initiative which might jeopardize a complex battlefield strategy.²

If the essential elements of this change in the 'art of war' were attributed to the reforms of the princes of Orange, and first demonstrated by the Dutch army, no less a debt is attributed to Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden in the process of evolution. Though the Dutch reforms were the self-proclaimed starting point of

² G. Roloff, 'Moritz von Oranien und die Begründung des modernen Heeres', *Preussische Jahrbücher*, 111 (1903), 255–76; J.W. Wijn, *Het krijgswezen in den tijd van Prins Maurits* (Utrecht, 1934), pp. 433–48, 467–86, 533–41; W. Hahlweg, *Die Heeresreform der Oranier und die Antike* (Berlin, 1941), pp. 136–9, 191–6; H. Delbrück, trans. W. Renfroe, *History of the Art of War within the Framework of Political History* (4 vols.; Westport, Conn., and London, 1975–85), iv. 155–73; J.W. Wijn, *New Cambridge Modern History* (14 vols.; Cambridge, 1958–70) iv. 215–22; M.D. Feld, 'Middle class society and the rise of military professionalism: the Dutch army, 1589–1609', *Armed Forces and Society*, 1 (1975), 419–42; B.H. Nickle, *The Military Reforms of Prince Maurice of Orange* (Michigan, 1984), pp. 145–56; H. Ehlert, 'Ursprünge des modernen Militärwesens. Die nassau-oranischen Heeresreformen', *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 18 (1985), 27–56; G.E. Rothenberg, 'Maurits of Nassau, Gustavus Adolphus, Raimondo Montecuccoli and the "Military Revolution" of the seventeenth century', in P. Paret (ed.), *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, 1986), pp. 32–63; M. van der Hoeven (ed.), *Exercise of Arms. Warfare in the Netherlands (1568–1648)* (Brill, 1998), especially essays by J.A. de Moor and J.P. Puype; A. Wickart and J.P. Puype, *Van Maurits naar Munster: tactiek en triomf van het Staatse leger* (catalogue of exhibition at the Legermuseum (Delft, 1998), pp. 7–15.

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the development of tactics and organization, the next generation of commanders, those whose military experience was to be consolidated on the battlefields of the Thirty Years War, recognized the limitations of some of these initial reforms. Above all, the Dutch reforms were the product of a military environment characterized by relatively static warfare dominated by the set-piece siege. The reforms, by maximizing the firepower of infantry and strengthening the effectiveness of the defensive, could create armies that were better adapted through discipline, drill and essentially linear deployments to the conduct of sieges. What the reforms did not resolve was the problem of seizing the initiative when taking the offensive on the battlefield. Shallow, linear formations could throw up a hail of fire which might render an enemy attack unacceptably costly, but did not resolve the problem of how the Dutch army, in turn, could successfully assume the offensive with its lightweight formations, its heavy emphasis on firearms rather than pikes and the weakness of training in the inter-unit cohesion required for successful assault tactics.³ It was in developing the offensive capacity of his troops that the originality of Gustavus Adolphus was considered to lie. Although the Swedish infantry were deployed in small 'squadrons' of around 500 soldiers, these could be combined in larger 'brigades' of 1,500–2,000 troops, possessing the weight and cohesion to take the offensive. Linear formations and elaborate musket drill indicated that Gustavus was no less preoccupied with maximizing the firepower of his infantry; but pike drill and direct training in assault tactics facilitated hard-hitting offensives supported by a readiness for hand-to-hand combat. Numbers of light, three-pound, artillery pieces were distributed amongst the infantry to provide mobile firepower with far greater range and deadliness than muskets, able to give effective support to infantry assaults. The cavalry, which apparently played the most limited part in the tactical thinking of the princes of Orange, was rehabilitated under Gustavus, who emphasized the shock-value of the mounted charge. While cavalry tactics in the sixteenth century had been preoccupied with the *caracole*, an elaborate and arguably ineffectual manoeuvre to allow riders to fire pistols in sequence at close range into enemy formations, Gustavus stipulated the return to a cavalry whose basic weapon was the sabre, and whose tactic was the charge to contact, seeking to exploit the disarray and weakness that infantry firepower might have sown in enemy formations. The cavalry were to be coordinated with the offensive capacity of the other arms, and their training and tactics were to be developed accordingly.⁴

This location of this 'second stage' of developments in the art of war amongst

³ M. Roberts, 'Gustav Adolf and the art of war', in M. Roberts, *Essays in Swedish History* (London, 1967), pp. 60–64; M. Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus. A History of Sweden, 1611–1632* (2 vols; London, 1953–8), II, 182–9.

⁴ E. Carrion-Nisas, *Essai sur l'histoire générale de l'art militaire. De son origine, de ses progrès et de ses révolutions* (2 vols.; Paris, 1824), II, 54–9; T.A. Dodge, *Gustavus Adolphus* (Boston, 1895; reissued, London, 1996), pp. 28–62; Delbrück, *History of the Art of War*, IV, 173–83; Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, II, 247–62.

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the practical reforms of Gustavus Adolphus, reforms which are held to have shown their full potential at the great Swedish victory at Breitenfeld in September 1631, is an equally well-established element in traditional military studies of early modern Europe. What gave a new sharpness and wider relevance to such commonplace arguments about early seventeenth-century tactical development, and what makes them particularly familiar to a modern readership, was their incorporation into a much more extensive theory of 'military revolution', articulated so effectively by Professor Michael Roberts.⁵ Roberts started from these familiar assumptions about changes in tactics and military deployment, but his distinctive contribution was to argue that they could be shown to have radical political and social consequences for the states fielding the armies. As the introduction to the present book emphasizes, Roberts' assertion that changes in the nature of warfare represented 'a great divide separating medieval society from the modern world' has served to familiarize historians and students who might never have applied such concepts to early modern Europe with a series of arguments about the role of warfare in state formation.⁶

Successive chapters in the book will take issue with many of the assumptions underlying the theory of state development brought about through the demands of warfare. However, the concern of the present chapter is more specifically focused on the extent to which this framework of assumed changes in the nature of tactics, deployment and drill stands up to an investigation of France's 'way of warfare' during Richelieu's ministry. It is typically assumed that France stands in some form of apostolic succession to the reformist initiatives of the Orange princes and to Gustavus Adolphus: while the benefits of tactical and organizational reform only really bear fruit in the period following the battle of Rocroi and the age of the 'great commanders', the period of Richelieu's ministry is one of internal consolidation during which the lessons and prescriptions of the military reformers were being absorbed into the training, experience and assumptions of the French army.⁷ The intention of this chapter is to show, from the evidence of training, troop deployment and military practice, how unconvincing such assertions appear when examining the French army of the 1620s to early 1640s. Moreover, by raising doubts about the extent to which these prescriptions were adopted in the French case, it is possible to question the wider European context of military change. While aspects of this process have been subjected to critical

⁵ Roberts, 'Military revolution'; Roberts, 'Gustav Adolf and the art of war', pp. 56–81; Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, II. 169–271.

⁶ Roberts, 'Military revolution', p. 195.

⁷ Carrion-Nisas, *Essai*, II. 47–102; E. de La Barre Duparcq, *Eléments d'art et d'histoire militaire* (Paris, 1858), pp. 160–2; Dussieux, *L'armée en France*, II. 26–9; Avenel, *Richelieu*, III. 90–4; Hanotaux, *Histoire de la nation française*, VII. 339–43; J. Revol, *Turenne. Essai de psychologie militaire* (Paris, 1910), pp. 158–68; E. Carrias, *La pensée militaire française* (Paris, 1960), pp. 113–24. John Lynn identifies the fallacy behind this assumption in 'Tactical evolution in the French army, 1560–1660', *French Historical Studies*, 14 (1985), 178–80.

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scrutiny by other historians in the last two decades, the role of France in this reassessment has remained surprisingly restricted.⁸

THE FRENCH 'ART OF WARFARE' IN THEORY

In so far as any attempts have been made to examine French military activity in the period of Richelieu's ministry, historians have relied upon literary sources, and particularly tracts on the art of war.⁹ Such military tracts can provide useful insights into contemporary warfare, but it can be misleading to take their elaborate and frequently impractical theoretical prescriptions as an actual account of a cruder and much more diverse military reality.¹⁰

A rhetoric of military reform

An apparently good reason for taking such writings seriously as an indication of changes in tactical organization, deployment and drill in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is the extent to which early modern contemporaries

⁸ G. Parker, 'The "Military revolution, 1560–1660" – a myth?', *Journal of Modern History*, 48 (1976), 195–214, at pp. 89–90 (reprinted in G. Parker, *Spain and the Netherlands, 1559–1659* (London, 1979), pp. 85–103, and in C.J. Rogers (ed.), *The Military Revolution Debate. Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe* (Boulder, Colo., 1995), pp. 37–54), raises doubts about the chronological boundaries established by Roberts, and argues that the responsiveness of the Spanish army to developments in the potential of firearms and tactical flexibility has been underestimated. Other historians have echoed Parker's points about overly restrictive chronology and the focus on a narrow group of 'reformist' states: J.R. Hale, *War and Society in Renaissance Europe, 1450–1620* (London, 1985), explicitly places change after 1560 within the context of the developments of the preceding century (pp. 46–74), while a stimulating examination of the evidence for change before 1560 and its wider impact outside of Europe is provided by J.F. Guilmartin Jr, 'The military revolution: origins and first tests abroad', in Rogers (ed.), *The Military Revolution Debate*, pp. 299–333. Similar criticism is launched by D. Eltis, *The Military Revolution in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (London, 1995); F. Tallett, *War and Society in Early Modern Europe, 1495–1715* (London, 1992), pp. 21–68; J. Béranger (ed.), *La révolution militaire en Europe (XV–XVIIIe siècles)* (Paris, 1998), essays by Béranger and Chagniot. Other historians have emphasized the geographical limitations of the original thesis, the extent that it was far too focused on specifically Western European warfare: R. Frost, 'The Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth and the "military revolution"', in J.S. Pula and M.B. Biskupski (eds.), *Poland and Europe: Historical Dimensions. Selected Essays from the 50th Anniversary International Congress of the Polish Arts and Sciences in America* (Boulder, Colo., 1994), pp. 19–47, demonstrates that the Poles had a different set of military traditions, which reflected the geographical circumstances of vast, sparsely populated and open, territories. In encounters with the Swedish army on Polish territory such traditions, which placed a premium on light cavalry, proved more successful than the Swedish preoccupations with maximizing firepower and offensive tactics sustained by the infantry. This argument is elaborated in R. Frost, *The Northern Wars, 1558–1721* (London, 2000), esp. pp. 16–19, 304–27.

⁹ Carrion-Nisas, *Essai*, II, 41–102; E. de La Barre Duparcq, *Histoire sommaire d'infanterie* (Paris, 1853), pp. 29–30; Carrias, *Pensée militaire*, pp. 108–32; Lynn, 'Tactical evolution', 176–91.

¹⁰ The problems of relying on military tracts is made clear for the case of the better-studied sixteenth-century French army, where elaborate theoretical prescriptions can be shown to be largely irrelevant to the style of warfare actually practised: see J.B. Wood, *The King's Army. Warfare, Soldiers and Society during the Wars of Religion in France, 1562–1576* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 78–85.

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themselves appear to have acknowledged extensive debts to a previous literary tradition. From the outset of the period identified with the military changes of the Dutch, what impressed contemporary observers was the extent to which the princes of Orange claimed to be deriving their own reforms from the military prescriptions of classical antiquity. The reformers themselves stated explicitly that the basis of their tactical and organizational changes was a renewed study of the military prescriptions of classical authors – above all, Flavius Vegetius Renatus, Claudius Aelian and the Byzantine Emperor Leo VI¹¹ – which had provided the decisive impetus behind the development of linear formations, smaller units and a greater emphasis on drill, training and discipline. If later generations of historians have chosen to see the Dutch reforms as an apparently logical response to the growing importance of firearms on the battlefields of Europe, contemporary exponents of the changes were emphatic that they reflected the careful reading and adoption of the prescriptions of classical theorists. The amount of contemporary and subsequent discussion surrounding this classical revival certainly cannot be denied. What can be questioned, however, is whether this well-publicized structure of reforms supposedly based on classical antiquity was more than a rhetorical exercise, deploying language and concepts familiar and convincing to an audience easily susceptible to the authority of classical tradition, and above all, to the martial excellence of the Roman Republic.¹² The works of Vegetius and Aelian had been available in printed translations since the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries respectively, and classical military theorists had been studied throughout the middle ages.¹³ A century before Maurits of Nassau, Machiavelli's Florentine militia provides a notorious example of an attempt to use classical prescriptions as the basis of modern military discipline and organization. At the most general level this emphasis on ancient military prescriptions should be seen as part of a wider preoccupation with classical, and especially Roman, culture and political organization. The debate about the superiority of Roman institutions, law, art, civic organization and the practicality of their adoption in contemporary

¹¹ Hahlweg, *Heeresreform*, pp. 304–5.

¹² Two of the studies which have contributed most to affirming the link between classical prescriptions and early modern military practice both accept that this adoption was not unconditional: Hahlweg, *Heeresreform*, stresses that the employment of 'classical' models was selective and shaped to the perceived needs of modern warfare (pp. 194–5); Wijn, *Krijgswezen*, pp. 480–2, underscores the point that the direct influence of Roman military organization is at times difficult to demonstrate.

¹³ In the case of France, a printed translation of Vegetius, *L'art de [la] chevalerie selon Végèce* – trans. attributed to Jean de Meung 'et surtout à Christine de Pisan' is dated to 1488 (Paris), with a series of subsequent editions in 1494, 1495, 1505. Aelian, *De l'ordre et instruction des batailles* – trans. N. Volkyr de Sérrouville – appeared in a volume combined with Vegetius, *Du fait de guerre et fleur de chevalerie*, in 1536 (Paris). Although seventeenth-century strategists also acknowledged a debt to the writings of Leo VI, his *De bellico apparatu liber e graeco in latinum conversus* was not translated into French until 1758. For a degree of scepticism about the Maurician innovations, see C. Schulten, 'Une nouvelle approche de Maurice de Nassau (1567–1625)', in P. Chaunu (ed.), *Le soldat, la stratégie, la mort. Mélanges André Corvisier* (Paris, 1989), pp. 42–53.

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societies had a long pedigree, and was far more extensive than historians' concentration upon military reforms in isolation would suggest.¹⁴

In the case of the Dutch Republic, military reform had a specific aim: the repackaging of the Dutch army after decades in which it had been outclassed by the Spanish army of Flanders. The rhetoric surrounding the presentation of this 'new model army', stressing the Roman origins of its new drill and tactics, should be contrasted with the reality of a force overwhelmingly composed of foreign mercenary troops serving under contract. Military success in the decade of the 1590s, when the reputation of the reformed army was established, owed more to the absence or reduced scale of the Spanish army than to any demonstrable superiority of Dutch fighting methods.¹⁵ However, encouraging the notion that the Dutch army had undergone a decisive improvement in organization and fighting techniques was obviously in the interests of the Republic and its princely generals, as a means to convince both wavering citizens and undecided foreign powers that the United Provinces could sustain their independence into the future.¹⁶

As the Dutch in the early seventeenth century both enhanced their territorial security and consolidated their position as leaders of embattled Calvinism, so their well-publicized military reforms were imitated by lesser protestant states, especially those whose rulers were related to the Orange-Nassau. The creation of a military academy at Siegen, established in 1617 by Johann von Nassau-Dillemburg, nephew of Maurits and Frederik Hendrik, was explicitly dedicated to the propagation of these classically derived theories of drill and deployment, and sought to attract pupils from amongst the German protestant princes, their relatives and their nobilities.¹⁷ Disseminated across Europe during the 1610s

¹⁴ Gerhard Oestreich makes a good case for the incorporation of most of these developments into the neo-Stoicism which was central to late sixteenth-century philosophy and political assumptions: Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 39–117. Schulten, 'Une nouvelle approche', pp. 49–50.

¹⁵ G. Parker, *The Dutch Revolt* (London, 1977), pp. 228–32, who cited the papal legate in Brussels in July 1593: 'We can say that this progress of the Protestants stems more from their diligence and their energy than from military strength; but even more it stems from the absence of any obstacle'; J. Israel, *The Dutch Republic. Its Rise, Greatness and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 241–62.

¹⁶ Even Gualdo Priorato, whose military manual is in some respects an anti-Orangist tract, proposes that Maurits of Nassau 'vedendo le forze de gli Spagnuoli poderosissimi, e gli soldati di singular virtù, usò ogni studio per resistere loro . . . pose in osservanza gli ordini Greci, quali riuscendoli mirabilmente' ('seeing the strength of the Spanish armies and the outstanding military virtue of their soldiers, employed military science against them, making particular use of the ordinances of the Greeks, which proved greatly successful'). Galeazzo, count Gualdo Priorato, *Il Maneggio dell'armi moderno* (Bologna, 1643), p. 49.

¹⁷ Hahlweg, *Heeresreform*, pp. 140–8; J.R. Hale, 'The military education of the officer class in early modern Europe', in Hale, *Renaissance War Studies* (London, 1983), pp. 225–46, at pp. 229–30. The military academy at Siegen survived only until 1623, and during this time attracted a total of twenty students: Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500–1800* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 163 n. 44, quoting from L. Plathner, *Graf Johann von Nassau und die erste Kriegsschule* (Berlin, 1913).

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through a flood of publications by Johann Jacobi von Wallhausen, briefly director of the Siegen *Kriegsschule*, the idea of military reform deriving from classical antiquity became common currency amongst reform-minded rulers. Johann von Nassau's initiatives were first copied by his stepson, langraf Moritz von Hessen. As military tensions in the Empire intensified, advisers from Maurits' army were summoned to Brandenburg in 1610, then later to the Palatinate, Baden, Württemberg, Brunswick, Saxony and Holstein.¹⁸

The primary factor underlying this adoption of a reformist programme was confessional and dynastic solidarity. It was also underpinned by the princely elite's educational and cultural responsiveness to the lessons of ancient history and to classical institutions.¹⁹ But despite the enthusiastic embracing of the military rhetoric, the military prescriptions were not in practice effective. Encountering the realities of warfare after 1619, the protestant armies organized on these principles of small units, complex deployments and prescriptive drill suffered a virtually uninterrupted series of defeats stretching from the White Mountain to Wolgast, leading to the consequent annihilation of protestant military power in Germany by the later 1620s. It was one thing to deploy the Dutch army for war in the Netherlands, where success or failure owed most to a consistent flow of finance, and to skill and endurance in besieging and defending the innumerable fortifications spread across territory; it was quite another to employ Dutch-style tactics in circumstances where wars involved manoeuvring across relatively open country and where pitched battles were less easily avoided. The last great demonstration of the inadequacy of these tactical and organizational reforms in the face of military experience came at the battle of Breitenfeld in September 1631. The Saxon army, drawn up in a 'progressive' formation on the left flank of Gustavus Adolphus' Swedes, was shattered by the assault of Count Tilly's Imperial and Bavarian regiments within the first hour of the battle.²⁰

French military theorists were aware of the well-publicized military reforms of the princes of Orange; plenty of evidence can be found that these reforms influenced French military manuals in the first decades of the seventeenth century.²¹ However, examination of these writings reveals two obvious points, both of which suggest the rhetorical rather than the practical significance of such

¹⁸ Hahlweg, *Heeresreform*, pp. 154–64; Parker, *Military Revolution*, p. 21.

¹⁹ See for example the catalogue of the exhibition surrounding the reign of Moritz, Pfalzgraf von Hessen: H. Borggreffe, V. Lüpkes and H. Ottomeyer (eds.), *Moritz der Gelehrte. Ein Renaissancefürst in Europa* (Eurasburg, 1997).

²⁰ A detailed account of the battle which differs in certain respects from that of Roberts, *Gustavus Adolphus*, II, 250–61, is provided in T. Barker, *The Military Intellectual and Battle. Raimondo Montecuccoli and the Thirty Years War* (Albany, N.Y., 1975), pp. 174–81. The over-complex and fragile deployment of the Saxon army at Breitenfeld is clearly evident from plans and engravings.

²¹ The major works of Johann Jacobi von Wallhausen were translated into French during the 1610s, and were republished during the 1620s and 1630s, though interestingly almost all the editions were printed outside of France: *L'art militaire pour l'infanterie* (trans. J. de Bry, Oppenheim, 1615); *Art militaire à cheval* (trans. J. de Bry, Frankfurt, 1616); *De la milice romaine* – Wallhausen's own

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reform programmes. First, the French writers who make explicit reference to the Orangist reforms were in the great majority of cases themselves Calvinists, writing for a Huguenot audience; some of them were either related to the Orange-Nassau, or had served closely with the princes in the Dutch armies. Secondly, many of these texts show clear incompatibilities between the material explicitly derived from Orangist tactical and organizational prescriptions, and the more traditional – and supposedly obsolescent – ideas for organizing troops and fighting battles derived from traditional French texts on the art of war.

The Huguenot adoption of the Orangist military rhetoric and its alternatives

Given the level of dynastic and confessional solidarity within what might with justice be termed a ‘Calvinist International’, it comes as no surprise that a significant group of French texts on the art of war published in the early seventeenth century were written by Huguenots, and indeed in some cases by those specifically affiliated with the House of Orange-Nassau. Of the leading writers on military theory in the early seventeenth century, Jean de Billon, author of *Les principes de l’art militaire* (Paris, 1612) and the *Instructions militaires* (Lyon, 1617), began his career in the military service of the Orange-Nassau before moving back to France to join Henri IV, and was closely associated with Jacobi von Wallhausen, who translated Billon’s *Instructions militaires* into German in 1617.²² Louis de Montgommery, sieur de Courbouzon, author of *La milice Française réduite a l’ancien ordre et discipline militaire des legions* (Paris, 1610) states that ‘je ne puis oublier le brave Prince Maurice de Nassau . . . Estant pres de luy, en l’année 1600 . . . il me faisoit cet honneur de me discourir de plusieurs bons enseignemens pour la guerre.’²³ The sieur du Praissac’s *Discours militaires* and *Les questions militaires* (Paris, 1614) makes specific, detailed reference to the military campaigns of Maurits of Nassau, especially the sieges of the 1590s, and addresses one of the annexed letters in the *Discours* to the Calvinist duc de Bouillon.²⁴ The key work of the quintessential military Calvinist, Henri duc de Rohan – *Le parfaict capitaine, autrement l’abrégé des guerres de Gaule des Commentaires de César* (Paris, 1636) – is influenced by his military experience of the Dutch armies, where he had served a military apprenticeship with prince Maurits in 1606.²⁵ Lostelneau, *Le maréchal de*

translation of Vegetius, followed by his commentary – (Frankfurt, 1616); *Militia Gallica* (Hanau, 1617).

²² La Barre Duparcq, *Eléments d’art et d’histoire militaire*, p. 159; Hahlweg, *Heeresreform*, pp. 168, and 166 n. 115.

²³ Montgommery, *La milice française*, p. 127, taken from section pp. 103–32: ‘Les evolutions et les exercices qui se font en la Milice de Hollande.’

²⁴ Du Praissac, *Discours militaires* (Rouen 1625).

²⁵ A. Laugel, *Henri de Rohan. Son rôle politique et militaire sous Louis XIII (1579–1638)* (Paris, 1889), pp. 37–8.

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bataille, (Paris, 1647) makes clear his debt to the reforms of 'le feu prince d'Auranges, Maurits de Nassau'.²⁶ From the early 1660s, the *maréchal de camp*, the sieur d'Aurignac, wrote his *Livre de guerre* on the basis of his military experiences in the Swedish army of Gustavus Adolphus, and also drew upon the lessons of the Dutch army.²⁷ Like du Praissac he was a Huguenot, and part of the extended clientele of the Tour d'Auvergne.²⁸

There were also clear signs of confessional and family allegiance in the actual military service undertaken by French nobles in the early seventeenth century. Those military officers and memoirists who served with the Dutch – and later the Swedish – armies were, like the theorists who adopted the Nassau reforms in their writings, predominantly protestant. Gaspard de Coligny III, *maréchal de Châtillon* from 1622, was from a Huguenot family whose links with the Orange-Nassau had been exceptionally close; he had served under Maurits, commanded one of the three French regiments in the Dutch army, and became overall *colonel général* of the French troops in Dutch service in 1614. Frédéric-Maurice de La Tour, *duc de Bouillon*, travelled to Holland in 1621 to take service with the army of his uncles, Maurits and Frederik Hendrik. He served in the Netherlands until 1635 when he returned to take up the office of *maréchal de camp* with the French armies.²⁹ His brother Henri de La Tour, *vicomte de Turenne*, also began his military career serving with the army of Maurits.³⁰ Of the two other regiments in Dutch service in the 1610s one was commanded by Léonidas de Béthune, *seigneur de Congy* and kinsman of the *duc de Sully*, the other by Bertrand de Vignolles, *seigneur de Casaubon*.³¹ At a slightly lower social level, Bénédict-Louis de Pontis, relative of the protestant François de Bonne, *duc de Lesdiguières*, was a cadet in the *gardes* until his involvement in a duel led to his imprisonment. Escaping in 1602, he entered the service of prince Maurits, where he served until 1604.³²

It would be mistaken, however, to see service with the Dutch as the only source of military experience. There were catholic alternatives for those in France seeking military experience, and the Dutch army was not seen as the only 'school of war' in the early seventeenth century. François d'Aubusson, *seigneur de Beauregard*, went to serve with the Spanish army in 1598, taking part in the siege

²⁶ The full identity of a number of these French theorists has proved frustratingly elusive, and would perhaps merit a serious study in its own right.

²⁷ Aurignac's *Livre de guerre* (1663) was edited from manuscript by P. Azan, *Un tacticien du XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1904).

²⁸ Bérenger, *Turenne*, p. 519.

²⁹ J. de Langlade, *baron de Saumières, Mémoires de la vie de Frédéric-Maurice de La Tour d'Auvergne, duc de Bouillon* (Paris, 1692), pp. 9–33.

³⁰ Roy, *Turenne*, pp. 7–8; Bérenger, *Turenne*, pp. 33–5, 63–4; R. Mousnier, 'Conditions sociales et politiques de l'action de Turenne', in Gambiez and Laloy, *Turenne et l'art militaire*, p. 107.

³¹ Anselme, *Histoire généalogique*, ix. 145: Vignolles ultimately converted from protestantism, but was deeply entrenched amongst Henri IV's Huguenot supporters for most of his career.

³² B.-L. de Pontis (Pierre-Thomas du Fossé) *Mémoires* (Paris, 1986), pp. 10–11, 44.

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of Ostende.³³ Henri de Campion – adherent of Gaston d'Orléans during his exile in the Spanish Netherlands – served with the Spanish army of Flanders in 1634 during the Spanish siege of Maastricht, when the Dutch garrison was commanded by Frédéric-Maurice, duc de Bouillon.³⁴

If service with the Spanish army of Flanders involved the potential problem of fighting against fellow Frenchmen – albeit mostly protestants – in the Dutch armies, a more straightforward catholic alternative was found in service with the Imperial armies in Hungary, fighting against the Ottomans, their Transylvanian allies and Hungarian clients in the protracted war from 1593 to 1606. The scale of this alternative should not be underestimated; at the time when the French had three regiments of volunteers in Dutch service, they also had some 5,000 troops serving in Hungary with the Imperial forces under the overall leadership of Philippe-Emmanuel de Lorraine, duc de Mercoeur, until his death in 1602.³⁵ Relatives of Mercoeur involved in the Hungarian campaigns included Charles de Lorraine, fourth duc de Guise, Henri de Lorraine, marquis de Mouy and brother of Mercoeur, and Claude de Lorraine, duc de Chevreuse (who assumed overall command of the French forces after 1602).³⁶ The status of the extended Guise–Lorraine clan as both *princes étrangers* through their family links to the duchy of Lorraine and representatives of an ultra-catholic position in France may have conditioned their involvement in warfare on behalf of the Habsburgs, just as dynastic and confessional affiliations determined those who served with the Dutch. Others acquiring experience in this theatre included another *prince étranger*, Charles de Gonzague-Nevers, François de Bassompierre, who served as a volunteer with the Habsburg armies in Hungary and refused the colonelcy of a Bavarian regiment because he wished to acquire direct military experience, Henri de Schomberg, comte de Nanteuil, and Henri Duval, comte de Dampierre.³⁷ Just over a decade later, another member of the House of Guise who, exceptionally, was to become one of Richelieu's generals, Henri de Lorraine, comte d'Harcourt, began his career

³³ J. de Gangnieres, comte de Souvigny, *Vie, mémoires et histoire de messire Jean de Gangnieres . . .* (2 vols.; Paris, 1906), II, 44: Souvigny specifically emphasizes that Beauregard served with the Spanish forces 'parce qu'il était bon catholique'.

³⁴ H. de Campion, *Mémoires* (Paris, 1967), pp. 49–51; Saumières, *Duc de Bouillon*, pp. 30–1.

³⁵ Hanotaux, *Histoire de la nation française*, VII, 340; J.-P. Niederkorn, *Die Europäischen Mächte und der 'Lange Türkenkrieg' Kaiser Rudolfs II* (Archiv für österreichische Geschichte, 135) (Vienna, 1993), pp. 163–4.

³⁶ For the overall command of Chevreuse, who had assumed the title of prince de Joinville, see François de Bassompierre, *Mémoires*, in Petitot and Monmerqué, XIX, 299.

³⁷ E. Baudson, *Charles de Gonzague, Duc de Nevers, 1580–1637* (Paris, 1947), pp. 49–52; Bassompierre, *Mémoires*, XIX, 292–333. Bassompierre was also briefly present with Spinola's army at the siege of Ostende; for Schomberg, see F. Redlich, *The German Military Enterpriser and his Work Force, 14th to 18th Centuries* (Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte, Beihefte 47 and 48 (2 vols.; Wiesbaden, 1964), I, 155; O. Chaline, *La bataille de la Montagne Blanche* (Paris, 2000), p. 323, on Dampierre.

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in the service of the catholic armies which fought at the battle of the White Mountain in 1620.³⁸

Moreover, while confessional allegiances clearly dictated the character of military service for a large number of French nobles, there was a group who simply served in armies without any strong religious commitment to either camp. Claude de Létouf, baron de Sirot, began service in 1616 as an ordinary soldier acquiring experience in the regiment of *gardes*. He then travelled to the United Provinces to serve with the army of Maurits of Nassau. After the conclusion of the Twelve Years Truce, he passed across to the army of Carlo Emanuele I, duke of Savoy. Thereafter he raised a company of *chevaux légers*, with which he served the Emperor on the Hungarian frontier. Subsequently he served with both the Imperial generalissimo, Albrecht Wallenstein, and was then part of the Imperial army which sacked the city of Mantua in 1630. Apparently incongruously after this period of overtly catholic service, he joined the Swedish army of Gustavus Adolphus. Taken prisoner by Wallenstein, he ransomed himself and returned to France where he served on the north-east frontier after 1635, ultimately becoming a close *fidèle* of the young duc d'Enghien.³⁹ An only slightly less colourful military career was provided by Antoine III, comte de Gramont, who began his military career accompanying the king in the campaign against the Huguenots in 1621, where he served with distinction, but considered that he had not acquired enough experience. He travelled to the United Provinces in 1623, and served in the besieged Dutch garrison of Breda in 1625. Gramont would seem to offer an example of a catholic *grand* acquiring his military experience from the Dutch 'school of war'. However, following Breda, Gramont transferred to the Catholic League army of Johann Tserclaes, count Tilly, where he participated in Tilly's victory over the army of Christian IV of Denmark. Gramont's memoirs are effusive about the outstanding military capacities, skills and effectiveness of Tilly and Wallenstein as commanders. Only when the prospect of Habsburg war with France in north Italy loomed did Gramont decide to abandon Imperial service, and return to France.⁴⁰ Of lower social rank, but a considerably better-known example, René Descartes followed a similar path, beginning service in summer 1618 with the army of Maurits, but changing sides to fight in the Bavarian army after January 1619, where he probably remained until late 1621.⁴¹

Substantial numbers of French nobles who left France to acquire military experience did not take the 'protestant option' of fighting for the Dutch, and did

³⁸ Pinard, *Chronologie*, I. 455–64.

³⁹ C. de Létouf, baron de Sirot, *Mémoires* (2 vols.; Paris, 1683), I. 9–17; Henri d'Orléans, duc d'Aumale, *Histoire des princes de Condé pendant les XVI^e et XVII^e siècles* (7 vols.; Paris, 1863–96), IV. 12–13.

⁴⁰ Antoine III, maréchal de Gramont, *Mémoires*, in Petitot and Monmerqué, LVII. 146–52.

⁴¹ S. Gaukroger, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 65–6, 132. For a discussion of whether Descartes served under Tilly at the battle of the White Mountain, see Chaline, *Montagne Blanche*, pp. 120–1.

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not therefore consider that the Dutch way of warfare was the only valid military apprenticeship in the first years of the seventeenth century. Indeed, it might be suggested that there was a distinct type of 'catholic' military experience – both in the Hungarian Marches and in the catholic armies during the first decade of the Thirty Years War – which generated a different range of practical military experiences. Against the relatively static warfare of the Dutch–Spanish conflict, this provided experience of greater mobility, involving much more use of light cavalry, and placing much more dependence on the initiative of local commanders both in the conduct of raiding parties and small-scale skirmishes, and in responding to more substantial threats. While fortification was certainly a factor in this style of warfare – on the Hungarian frontiers, for example – it was of a much more rudimentary nature than the massive constructions of the Netherlands.

There was also a third area of experience, the common property of those, frequently the most senior commanders by the 1620s and 1630s, who had never left France, but had passed their early military careers in the Wars of Religion down to 1598. François de Bonne, duc de Lesdiguières and *connétable de France* from 1622, Jean-Louis de Nogaret de La Valette, duc d'Épernon, Jacques-Nompar de Caumont, maréchal de La Force, were all in their seventies and eighties during Richelieu's ministry, and had military experience which went back to the 1580s and even before.⁴² A slightly younger generation, for example, Charles de Valois, duc d'Angoulême, Honoré d'Albert, maréchal de Chaulnes, Charles de Blanchefort, maréchal de Créqui, and Louis, maréchal de Marillac, had been born in the 1570s and had served their military apprenticeships in the last decade of the Civil Wars.⁴³ This was a military experience shared by both protestants and catholics, and in its emphasis on cavalry, its deployment of relatively smaller numbers of infantry and concern with problems of territorial control and denial, it offered lessons that were both different from, and predated, the publicized 'reforms' in the Netherlands.⁴⁴ If this type of cumulative experience appears piecemeal and haphazard in comparison with the more systematic lessons proposed by the Dutch reformers, there is certainly evidence in a work like Charles de Gontaut, maréchal de Biron's *Maximes*, that such practical military experience could be used to criticize some of the impractical military theory of the Dutch.⁴⁵ Moreover if Henri de Rohan's *Parfait capitaine* can claim to be the most influential French

⁴² C. Dufayard, *Le connétable de Lesdiguières* (Paris, 1892), pp. 22–116; L. Mouton, *Un demi-roi: le duc d'Épernon* (Paris, 1922), pp. 44–9; Auguste de Caumont, duc de La Force, *Le maréchal de La Force, 1558–1652* (2 vols.: Paris, 1928), I. 44–120.

⁴³ J.A. Clarke, *Huguenot Warrior: The Life and Times of Henri de Rohan, 1579–1638* (The Hague, 1966), p. 11; *L'affaire du maréchal de Marillac, 1630–1632* (Paris, 1924); J. Humbert, *Le maréchal de Créqui. Gendre de Lesdiguières, 1573–1638* (Paris, 1962), pp. 23–42.

⁴⁴ A point well made by Lynn, 'Tactical evolution', 178–83.

⁴⁵ Henri de Gontaut, duc de Biron, *Maximes et avis du manieiment de la guerre . . .*, mistakenly attributed to André de Bordeille (elder brother of Brantôme), and published in Brantôme, ed. J. Buchon, *Oeuvres* (2 vols.; Paris, 1838), II. 509–24. Biron is particularly interesting on systems of military apprenticeship and the acquired skills of *vieux* soldiers.

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military treatise of the seventeenth century,⁴⁶ then its predecessor in the later sixteenth century was probably the *Discours politiques et militaires* (1587) of François de La Noue. La Noue's eclectic approach to tactics, deployment, training and weaponry, supported by a wealth of classical examples, tells against the claims of the Dutch reformers that their deliberate borrowings from the military theory of antiquity contributed something brand new to the contemporary debate.⁴⁷

The significance of tactical theory

It is striking that those French authors who wrote theoretical tracts on the art of war in this period should have been so preponderantly the product of a single area of military experience in which there was already an established rhetorical emphasis on classical models. Links of family and confessional allegiance, which were the determining factor in the adoption and publicizing of the Orange-Nassau military reforms in the Holy Roman Empire, were no less evident amongst the French authors. It is also pertinent to ask why those more numerous groups of French *noblesse* whose service had been in different military contexts were less attracted to the composition of military tracts. There is no reason to consider that the experience of war on the Hungarian frontier or in the Midi during the 1620s was a less valid basis on which to write about the art of war.

That many of the French elites acquired military experience from a variety of other sources may none the less have been an indirect factor contributing to the second problematic element in these written tracts, the often confused and contradictory military prescriptions that they contain. This, however, is not solely an issue with French tactical manuals. The work of Johann Jacobi von Wallhausen, the most celebrated exponent of the Dutch reforms, regularly combines descriptions of 'reformed' small units, deployed in linear formation, with an extraordinary variety of rectangular, circular and geometrically diverse formations of infantry, intended to accommodate between 100 and 6,000 soldiers.⁴⁸ Historians have arguably been anachronistic in interpreting early modern military manuals, assuming a degree of consistency and coherence that is incompatible with their rhetorical and even aesthetic character. It is notable that in discussing a series of increasingly elaborate and large-scale infantry formations, Jean de Billon remarked that all systems for the ordering of military units should have two

⁴⁶ Guerlac, 'Vauban', p. 32.

⁴⁷ The alternative candidate would be Blaise de Montluc's *Commentaires* (1571) – reprinted as late as 1661.

⁴⁸ Wallhausen, *L'art militaire pour l'infanterie*, pp. 85 *et seq.* Although Wallhausen was appointed as professor at Johann von Nassau's academy in Siegen in 1617, a year earlier he had dedicated his work *De la milice romaine* to Ambrosio Spinola, commander of the Spanish army of Flanders from 1604 to 1629. Even in the case of a writer taken to epitomize the new tactical reforms, the evidence is less than clear-cut and Wallhausen fits uneasily into a straightforward typology of 'radical protestant theorist'.

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qualities, first 'la beauté', and only subsequently 'la promptitude à se faire, ou desfaire, et l'utilité pour toutes actions de guerre'.⁴⁹

The French manuals do not offer a coherent guide to military organization on 'modern principles' that fits the model of progressive military evolution as depicted by subsequent historians. Although parts of these manuals can be read as accounts of Dutch-style reforms in tactics and deployment, most – like Wallhausen – also propose the formation of large infantry squares and other complex and impractical formations. Jean de Billon provides a series of instructions for the formation of an elaborate 'cross-shaped' formation of musketeers and pikemen, and for deploying up to 4,000 infantry into squares and other formations.⁵⁰ Louis de Montgomery gives details of a *bataillon* of 2,500 pikes.⁵¹ Du Praissac depicts regiments of 2,760 men in twenty companies and proposes square formations for up to 4,096 infantry, while Lostelneau stipulates that – 'si vous avez 2048 picquiers pour faire cette grande croix . . . il y faut aussi 2,192 mousquetaires', and goes on to describe a series of equally impractical formations for the formation of crosses of Lorraine, hexagons, octagons, etc.⁵² Nor was this process, which obviously appealed to the aesthetic sense of the writers, outmoded in ensuing decades. As late as 1675 the sieur de La Fontaine provided an 'ordre pour former toutes sortes de bataillons', a series of prescriptions for the deployment of between 1,000 and 2,600 infantry in various elaborate geometrical formations – octagons, crosses, etc. – whose tactical benefits from an Orangist or any other standpoint are dubious.⁵³

The Dutch military experience of many of these authors may have led them to give limited attention to the role and deployment of cavalry, so that prescriptions for its deployment were frequently vague and apparently contradictory. The debate about the relative merits of cavalry equipped with firearms and traditional edged weapons or lances remained unresolved. De La Noue had proposed in the 1580s that a squadron of pistol-firing *reiters* would always defeat a squadron of lancers if the former were prepared to stand their ground and hold fire, while half a century later Rohan argued that the lance had died out as a cavalry weapon because only one rank could be effective, thus forcing the cavalry to attack *en haie* (in an extended line), rendering them extremely vulnerable to an attack by other cavalry deployed in deeper formations.⁵⁴ Yet Wallhausen, whose *Art militaire à*

⁴⁹ J. de Billon, *Suite des principes de l'art militaire* (Rouen, 1641), p. 38.

⁵⁰ Billon, *Instructions militaires*, pp. 271–8, includes ever more elaborate ways of deploying eight *bataillons* of 500 men each – grouping together pikemen and musketeers in large blocks. Indeed for Billon the chief advantage of a unit of 4,000 infantry was the variety and complexity of possible formations that could be built from such a force: *Suite des principes*, p. 29.

⁵¹ Wallhausen, *La milice française*, pp. 80–91, 95–7.

⁵² Du Praissac, *Discours militaires*, pp. 3–6, 223–8, who explicitly takes examples of deployment from both Maurits of Nassau and Spinola; Lostelneau, *Le maréchal de bataille* (Paris, 1647), pp. 244 *et seq.*

⁵³ La Fontaine, *Les devoirs militaires des officiers de l'infanterie* (Paris, 1675), pp. 245–308.

⁵⁴ F. de La Noue, *Discours politiques et militaires* (Basel, 1587), pp. 307–14 (first military paradox); Henri, duc de Rohan, *Le parfait capitaine, autrement l'abrégé des guerres de Gaule des Commentaires de César* (Paris, 1636), p. 230.

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cheval was translated into French in 1616, stresses the preeminence of the lance as the most important cavalry weapon, though he regretfully admits that it was increasingly superseded by cheaper, less well-trained, cavalry armed with pistols. Because of this ambiguity, his manual includes both cavalry deployments *en haie* – suitable for lancers – and in deep columns, characteristic of cavalry practising the *caracole*, the sequential firing of pistols as they approached an enemy formation.⁵⁵ Jean de Billon appears to be approaching a compromise with the proposal that cavalry should be grouped in squadrons of 100 horse, five ranks deep, but does nothing to challenge the assumption that the cavalry would regard the pistol as their principal weapon. Aurignac, writing in the 1660s on the basis of his experience of the campaigns of Gustavus Adolphus, still proposed that a possible strategem for a commander with a superiority in cavalry would be to outflank the enemy on both wings and use the *caracole* to disrupt the exposed flanks of infantry formations.⁵⁶ Though the theorists were moving towards a consensus that the usual deployment of cavalry was in formations between six and three rows deep, all leave unresolved the problem that in an engagement with other cavalry, a force drawn up in deeper columns would have the mass and cohesion to force its way through an extended, shallow, formation. They are also unconvincing in their arguments that the cavalry should in some vague sense demonstrate their seriousness of intent by ‘charging to contact’ armed with swords or lances. For this ignores the obvious fact that an experienced formation of infantry, well buttressed with pikemen, is invulnerable to a cavalry charge. Cavalry horses cannot be trained to run into an apparently solid object, and a hedge of pikes presents a formidable obstacle to even the most suicidally reckless sabre-wielding cavalier. Hence the main preoccupation of most of these theorists is not with some simplistic transformation of pistolier tactics into reliance on the *arme blanche*, but with attempts to combine firepower and cavalry action in such a way that initial fire could sufficiently disrupt the cohesion of an infantry formation to allow a cavalry assault with sabres, preferably against a flank, to exploit the confusion. In some accounts a part of this firepower was to be provided by the cavalry itself; so, for example, La Fontaine (1675) describes how a deep formation of cavalry should pass close to the infantry unit, deploying the *caracole* to direct fire against one of the angles of the unit.⁵⁷ Another part might be provided by platoons or squadrons of musketeers, deployed in a number of possible ways alongside the cavalry squadrons, purportedly in order to provide sufficient firepower to facilitate a subsequent cavalry charge into a wavering enemy unit.⁵⁸ Lacking in all of this is

⁵⁵ Wallhausen, *Art militaire à cheval*, pp. 3–24, 52–3, 70–1.

⁵⁶ Azan, *Un tacticien*, pp. 88–9.

⁵⁷ La Fontaine, *Les devoirs militaires*, pp. 17–18.

⁵⁸ Du Praissac, *Questions militaires*, pp. 36–7; Lostelneau, *Maréchal de bataille*, pp. 420–9; Azan, *Un tacticien*, pp. 84–7; La Valière, *Pratique et maximes de la guerre* (Paris, 1675), p. 66 (text dates to no later than 1652, when the manuscript, taken from the library of cardinal Mazarin, was illicitly published by Laon d'Aigrémont in his own name). Other theorists examined the possibility of using

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any obvious sense of evolution, a clear consensus about cavalry tactics and weaponry from lessons learned on the battlefield which could serve as a model for military practice; indeed, it is arguable that the problem was intractable given the existing state of military technology.

A potential means of increasing the effectiveness of firepower against infantry formations that were drawn up in close order to resist cavalry would be the better deployment of battlefield artillery. Curiously again, the various French theorists offer little support for a reconsideration of the role of cannon. Most who have a section on artillery confine themselves to detailing the various calibres and weights of the cannon in service, and discuss issues of transport and the supply of adequate munitions.⁵⁹ In so far as the deployment of artillery on the battlefield is considered at all, it is in the most conventional manner: La Valière (c. 1652), for example, specifies that the artillery must be deployed before a battle in front of the first line of infantry ‘sçavoir le plus gros canon au milieu et les moindres pièces vis-à-vis de l’intervale des bataillons qui sont le plus sur les aisles’.⁶⁰

It might be tempting to assume that there was a logical evolution in military manuals through the first half of the seventeenth century, such that the early works of du Praissac and Louis de Montgommery, with their projects for the deployment of troops in large-scale, deep formations, give way to treatises in which the advantages of small units have been learnt. This does not appear to be the case. The influential Jean de Billon, whose prescriptions are taken, after the duc de Rohan, as the most significant theoretical writings of the period, is characteristic of the confusion and contradictions of such works, and was reprinted at least six times into the 1640s. Montgommery and du Praissac were also republished on numerous occasions into the 1630s.⁶¹ The evidence for a shift towards a more recognizably modern and coherent view of tactics and organization is hard to detect. La Fontaine was far from unusual in his continued emphasis on large, over-elaborate formations later in the century, while the works of Lostelneau and La Valière could sustain a model of progressive evolution only by ignoring much which contradicts such a thesis.

Historians who have tended to filter out much of what is contradictory and conventional in these military manuals have also glossed over the large element of the impractical. Most manuals continue to emphasize the importance of the pike

dragons or *carabins* to provide the supporting firepower for the *chevaux légers* to exploit: Azan, *Un tacticien*, p. 90.

⁵⁹ Du Praissac, *Discours militaires*, pp. 120–39; Rohan, *Parfait capitaine*, pp. 315–20.

⁶⁰ La Valière, *Pratique et maximes*, p. 66; d’Aurignac discusses the important role of Swedish artillery superiority at Breitenfeld and the crossing of the Lech, but does not extend this to any general prescriptions for the tactical deployment of artillery with the French armies: Azan, *Un tacticien*, pp. 93–5.

⁶¹ Lynn, ‘Tactical evolution’, 181, on Billon; editions of Montgommery, *La milice française*, appeared in 1603, 1610, 1615, 1636; du Praissac was republished in 1614, 1617, 1622, 1638, and translated into Dutch in 1623 (E.A. Bardin, *Dictionnaire de l’armée de terre, ou recherches historiques sur l’art et l’usages militaires des anciens et des modernes* (17 vols.; Paris, 1841–51)).

The French art of war during Richelieu's ministry

in infantry formations, and give little weight to the developing importance of infantry firearms – supposedly the *raison d'être* for increasingly linear formations. Indeed, Rohan lamented the relative decline in the proportion of pikemen, arguing that Swiss units with their large numbers of pikemen had a great advantage on the battlefield and that the shift to muskets reflected the contemporary preoccupation with siege warfare.⁶² The drill proposed for pikemen in exercise-manuals such as those of Jacob de Gheyn or Wallhausen involve numbers of elaborate manoeuvres of apparently limited relevance to training newly recruited armies or providing tactically relevant basic skills.⁶³ Such elaborate pike drills could be contrasted with the functional proposals made by a contemporary Italian theorist such as Gualdo Priorato, whose main concern was to ensure that the pikemen were able through simple drills to use their weapons in a number of defensive and offensive postures without obstructing each other.⁶⁴ Influenced by Roman practice a number of theorists saw fit to propose the reintroduction of legionary weapons. Both Montgomery and Rohan were enthusiastic proponents of the use of small shields (*rondeliers, targes*) to defend musketeers against pikes, and both attribute this proposal to Maurits of Nassau.⁶⁵

A further aspect of the manuals that sits uneasily with a reformist model is the typical concern to lay out the duties of each rank in the military hierarchy, a process at least as concerned to stipulate what a self-respecting officer should refuse to do as with providing a functional guide to service. There is a contrast between the supposed Orangist ideal of neostoic subordination to authority, and constant reiteration in the French texts that officers must never do anything which reflects badly upon their own social status and particular rank. Billon, for example, in his advice to captains stressed that 'celuy qui commande ne doit laisser rien passer à son desavantage, soit pour le rang de marcher, de loger ou de combattre, . . . ou d'avoir toutes payes et droicts qui luy appartient'.⁶⁶ The impact of this preoccupation may be seen in the over-formulaic prescriptions for the deployment of troops on the battlefield, where, for example, La Valière proposes that though the regiment of *gardes* and the *gendarmes* should always be placed in the second line (the *bataille*), the most honourable place to be accorded to the other senior regiments is the first line (the *avant-garde*), with a descending hierarchy of status allocating positions on the right wing first, then those on the

⁶² Rohan, *Parfait capitaine*, p. 233. J. de Billon, *Les principes de l'art militaire*, p. 46, proposed that an ideal company of 200 infantry should contain 120 pikes, one of 100 should contain 60 pikes.

⁶³ Jacob de Gheyn, *Waffenhandlung von den Rören, Musqueten und Spiessen* (The Hague, 1608); J.J. von Wallhausen, *Kunstliche Piquenhandlung* (Hanau, 1617).

⁶⁴ Gualdo Priorato, *Il Maneggio dell'armi moderno*, pp. 70 *et seq.*

⁶⁵ Montgomery, *La milice française*, pp. 127–8; Rohan *Parfait capitaine*, p. 220: Rohan's ideal infantry regiment consisted of 1,440 soldiers, composed of 600 pikemen, 600 musketeers and 240 sword-and-buckler men (p. 233).

⁶⁶ Billon, *Principes de l'art militaire*, p. 50; earlier he had stressed that the captain 'doit sçavoir disputer son rang quand on loge, quand on marche . . . et ne laisser rien passer au prejudice de sa charge' (p. 36).

The military context

left, with the centre as 'toujours la moindre place'.⁶⁷ If such prescriptions were more than a rhetorical convention, the difficulties faced by a commander in trying to exploit an element of surprise in deploying his army would be insuperable.

THE FRENCH 'ART OF WARFARE' IN PRACTICE

Leaving tracts and manuals on the theory of war, it is enlightening to observe how French troops were trained and deployed in practice – how they actually fought in warfare from the 1620s to the 1640s, especially in the period from the 1630s when the variety of military commitments faced by the French armies greatly increased. It is clear that the military activity of these armies owed little to theoretical prescription but was shaped by the practical imperatives involved in the recruitment and maintenance of troops and the effective use of existing resources. It is true that innovation and reformation are little in evidence. Yet the lack of conspicuous French military success during Richelieu's ministry seems very little to do with the adoption or rejection of the fashionable doctrines of military reform.

Training and drill in the French armies

One of the central assumptions about the modernization of warfare in the early modern period is that armies which had been characterized by extravagant levels of independence on the part of the noble officer or *gendarme*, alongside inflexible passivity on the part of the pikeman or halberdier, now gave way to forces in which individuals were subordinated to a rigid discipline which excluded independent initiative yet sought to achieve far higher levels of collective flexibility and skill. The means to achieve this was through standardized drill, strictly imposed by officers and NCOs on the base of instructions backed by printed texts. It was these latter, the products of Jacob de Gheyn and Wallhausen, which encouraged the widespread view that drill was essentially an invention of the Dutch, and spread across Europe through contact with the Dutch armies.⁶⁸

Both de Gheyn's and Wallhausen's drill manuals for the use of pike and firearms were translated into French, and de Gheyn was competently plagiarized by Lostelneau in the first part of his *Maréchal de bataille*,⁶⁹ but these seem to have had no practical impact on the military establishment.⁷⁰ A few references to the

⁶⁷ La Valière, *Maximes et pratiques*, p. 62.

⁶⁸ L. Susane, *Histoire de l'ancienne infanterie française* (8 vols.; 1849–53), 1. 215; J. Lynn, *Giant of the Grand Siècle* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 515–18; for an argument which links drill explicitly to a burgeoning 'middle-class' culture, see Feld, 'Middle class society', 419–23.

⁶⁹ De Gheyn's *Waffenhandlung* appeared in a French translation, although published in Amsterdam, in 1608: Lynn, 'Tactical evolution', 189; Wallhausen's *L'art militaire pour l'infanterie* was published at Oppenheim in 1615.

⁷⁰ Despite frequently reiterated claims that these drill manuals were used to train French recruits,