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978-0-521-89765-5 - Women, Armies, and Warfare in Early Modern Europe

John A. Lynn II

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Introduction: Identifying Issues and Questions

In the early seventeenth century, a military commentary by Jacob von Wallhausen cautioned: “When you recruit a regiment of German soldiers today, you do not only acquire 3,000 soldiers; along with these you will certainly find 4,000 women and children.”¹ Two hundred years later, British regulations stipulated: “The number of women allowed by Government to embark on service are six for every hundred men, inclusive of all Non-Commissioned Officers’ wives, [an ample number which] should never be exceeded on any pretext whatsoever, because the doing so is humanity of the falsest kind.”² These quotations begin our story, because the continuities and contrasts between them set the twin directions of this inquiry.

Each quotation confirms the presence of camp women with early modern armies in the field. Such women endured the rigors of the march and the hard life of the camp; and, even if they did not fight in the line of battle, they were exposed to risks of injury, illness, and death, plus a danger almost exclusively reserved for them, rape. Ultimately, camp women belonged to the army and were integral to its military functions. It is the first goal of this book to explore their lives on campaign in as much detail and with as much humanity as possible.

Yet these two excerpts also reveal an important change in campaign life for these women. During the sixteenth century and the first half of the

¹ Jacob von Wallenstein, *Kriegskunst zu Fuss* (Graz: 1971), p. 7. Originally published in 1615.

² British regulations for the Corps of Riflemen, 1801, in Noel T. St. John Williams, *Judy O’Grady and the Colonel’s Lady: The Army Wife and Camp Follower Since 1660* (London: 1988), p. 19. These reflect the 29 October 1800 order issued by the duke of York, pp. 17–18.

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seventeenth century, mercenary bands arrived with great crowds of women in their trains, but from the second half of the seventeenth century and through the eighteenth century, the number of women that accompanied troops radically declined. The plebian women who are the subjects of this study were always present with early modern armies, because they performed tasks essential to the health and well-being of the common soldiers who were their partners. However, if a British unit could march with only six women per one hundred men, why did earlier forces include so many more? The second goal of this book is to come to grips with this question.

THE HISTORY OF WOMEN ON CAMPAIGN

The history of noncombatant camp women who accompanied early modern armies across Europe remains woefully under explored. This is not meant to imply that contemporaries and historians have failed to comment on women with armies, but they have almost always reserved the discussion to those rare but fascinating women who bore arms in battle or siege. The more mundane women who scrubbed clothing and tended fires have not seemed worth much commentary.

Surprisingly, interest in the subject of women associated with European armies came centuries before the rise of women's history as an academic field. Popular culture regaled seventeenth- and eighteenth-century audiences with books, pamphlets, articles, and songs about women who dressed as men, adopted male identities, and bore arms. Their stories appealed to audiences as amusing, unusual, and, sometimes, titillating adventures. These cultural products will be discussed at length in Chapter IV: Warrior Women: Cultural Phenomena, Intrepid Soldiers, and Stalwart Defenders.

Tales of women warriors continued to attract a wide readership during the nineteenth century. Authors presented such stories as engaging curiosities, patriotic models, and examples of extraordinary womanhood. They appeared throughout the 1800s, but are more prevalent from the mid-century and later. British examples include T. J. Llewelyn Prichard's *The Heroines of Welsh History* (1854) and Ellen Clayton's *Female Warriors* (1879).³ British accounts were not always full of

³ T. J. Llewelyn Prichard, *The Heroines of Welsh History: Comprising Memoirs and Biographical Notices of the Celebrated Women of Wales* (London: 1854); Thomas Carter, *Curiosities of War and Military Studies: Anecdotal, Descriptive and Statistical* (London: 1860); Ellen C. Clayton, *Female Warriors: Memorials of Female Valour and Heroism, from the Mythological Ages to the Present Era*, 2 vols. (London:

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praise; Julie Wheelwright demonstrates that Victorian works sometimes criticized military women for violating the boundaries of their gender.⁴ The French read of their military women in such works as Alfred Tranchant and Jules Ladimir's *Les femmes militaires de la France* (1866) and J. Pichon's *Les femmes soldats* (1898).⁵

Several modern works also concentrate on female soldiers and sailors, cashing in on the interests of the reading public, attempting to make scholarly sense of the phenomenon or even mining the past for political messages. Those meant for a popular market vary in quality, with one of the best being David Cordingly's *Heroines & Harlots* (2002).⁶ Other works carry more practical subtexts, advocating fuller participation of women in the military, particularly in the combat branches—the female warrior as woman empowered. Linda Grant De Pauw's *Battle Cries and Lullabies* straddles the line between history and modern agenda.⁷

Much of the serious scholarship written by academics during the past two decades continues the tradition of history-by-vignette, sketching the lives of those exceptional women who dressed as men to stand in the

1879); and Menie Muriel Dowie, *Women Adventurers: The Adventure Series*, vol. 15 (London: 1893).

⁴ Julie Wheelwright, "Amazons and Military Maids: An Examination of Female Military Heroines in British Literature and the Changing Construction of Gender," *Women's Studies International Forum* 10, no. 5 (1987): 489–502.

⁵ French works include Alfred Tranchant and Jules Ladimir, *Les femmes militaires de la France* (Paris: 1866); Nicolas Edouard Delabarre-Duparcq, *Histoire militaire des femmes* (Brest: 1873); Edouard de Beaumont, *L'Épée et les femmes* (Paris: 1881); and J. Pichon, *Les femmes soldats* (Limoges: 1898).

⁶ Earlier twentieth-century works include Reginald Hargreaves, *Women-at-Arms: Their Famous Exploits Throughout the Ages* (London: 1930); and C. Romain, *Les guerrières* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1931). More recent examples of such works include John Laffin, *Women in Battle* (London: 1967); J. David Truby, *Women at War: A Deadly Species* (Boulder, Colorado: 1976); Suzanne J. Stark, *Female Tars: Women Aboard Ship in the Age of Sail* (London: 1996); David E. Jones, *Woman Warriors: A History* (Washington, DC: 1997); and David Cordingly, *Heroines & Harlots: Women at Sea in the Great Age of Sail* (London: 2002). A book dealing with women at war, although not in uniform, is Alison Plowden, *Women All on Fire: The Women of the English Civil War* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: 1998). A recent scholarly compendium on individual military women is Reina Pennington, ed., *Amazons to Fighter Pilots: A Biographical Dictionary of Military Women*, 2 vols. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003).

⁷ Linda Grant De Pauw, *Battle Cries and Lullabies: Women in War from Prehistory to the Present* (Norman, OK: 1998). She discusses women and war on several levels, stressing the examples of particular individuals, although she also deals with camp women a bit. Her mix of scholarly skill and enthusiastic credulity can be frustrating, and the book must be used with care. Also see works of more explicit modern advocacy, as Erin Solaro, *Women in the Line of Fire* (Emeryville, CA: 2006).

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ranks. The most thought-provoking modern scholarly survey of cross-dressing women soldiers is Julie Wheelwright's *Amazons and Military Maidens* (1989).⁸ Alfred Young provides an exhaustive treatment of one early modern woman soldier; however, his subject is not European, but a heroine of the American Revolutionary War, Deborah Sampson.⁹ Some of the most sophisticated modern studies in this vein explore women soldiers as female transvestites, individuals who overthrew the signs and confines of gender.¹⁰ Other historians are asking interesting questions about the loyalties and motivations of women who stood in the line of battle, either openly as women or masquerading as men, during the Wars of the French Revolution. They follow new approaches, but their focus remains women warriors, not camp women.¹¹ A number of intriguing works have examined the cultural representation of women at war, for example, Dianne Dugaw's *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry* (1996).¹² A few additional works address those civilian women who

⁸ Wheelwright, *Amazons and Military Maids* (London: 1989).

⁹ Alfred Young, *Masquerade: The Life and Times of Deborah Sampson, Continental Soldier* (New York: 2005).

¹⁰ See Rudolf M. Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe*, trans. Judy Marcure and Lotte Van de Pol (Basingstoke, Hampshire: 1989); Sylvie Steinberg, *La confusion des sexes: Le travestissement de la Renaissance à la Révolution* (Paris: 2001); and Joseph Harris, *Hidden Agendas: Cross Dressing in 17th-Century France* (Tubingen: 2005).

¹¹ See Rudolf M. Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol, "Republican Heroines: Cross-Dressing Women in the French Revolutionary Armies," trans. Judy Marcure, *History of European Ideas* 10, no. 3 (1989): pp. 353–63; Dominique Godineau, "De la guerrière à la citoyenne. Porter les armes pendant la Révolution française et la Révolution française," *Clio* 20 (2004): p. 43–69; Jean-Clément Martin, "Travestissements, impostures la communauté historienne: À propos des femmes soldats de la Révolution et de l'Empire," *Politix: Revue des sciences sociales du politique*, 74 (impostures), 19, no. 74 (2006): pp. 31–48; and Barbara Ann Day-Hickman, "The Heroic Imaginary: Women Soldiers in the Republican and Imperial Wars," paper presented at the 2006 meeting of the Society for French Historical Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

¹² Wheelwright, "Amazons and Military Maids"; Keith Moxey, *Peasants, Warriors, and Wives: Popular Imagery in the Reformation* (Chicago: 1989, 2004); Dianne Dugaw, *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry* (Chicago: 1996); Ulinka Rublack, "Wench and Maiden: Women, War and the Pictorial Function of the Feminine in German Cities in the Early Modern Period," trans. Pamela Selwyn, *History Workshop Journal*, 44 (January 1997), pp. 1–21; Simon Barker, "Allarme to England!: Gender and Militarism in Early Modern England," in *Gender, Power, and Privilege in Early Modern Europe*, Jessica Munns and Penny Richards, eds. (Harlow: 2003), pp. 140–58; Scarlet Bowen, "'The Real Soul of a Man in her Breast': Popular Oppression and British Nationalism in Memoirs of Female Soldiers, 1740–1750," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2004): pp. 20–45.

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took part in the defense of their towns when they were threatened by besieging armies. Here the work of Brian Sandberg stands out.¹³

Two unique volumes deal with women with the troops. Beate Engelen, *Soldatenfrauen in Preußen*, concentrates on soldier wives in Prussian garrisons during the eighteenth century.¹⁴ Engelen provides important insights in this study, particularly about marriage, but her focus and questions are quite different from those that concern me here. She explores the relationships between the numerous soldiers' wives and the municipal civil communities where they were garrisoned during peacetime to tell us more about society. My study, however, surveys the contributions of those women on campaign with the troops in the early modern combat zone to learn more about the conduct of war. Holly A. Mayer's *Belonging to the Army* discusses male and female camp followers in the train of the Continental Army, giving us a good sense of the military community during the American Revolution. However, she does not concentrate on women in particular, does not have a European focus, and treats only a few years, 1775–83.¹⁵ Not only is my study centered on women and on European armies, but much of its value derives from broadly considering military evolution over three centuries.

¹³ Brian Sandberg, "‘Generous Amazons Came to the Breach’: Besieged Women, Agency and Subjectivity during the French Wars of Religion," *Gender & History*, vol. 16, no. 3 (November 2004): pp. 654–88. Rublack, "Wench and Maiden," also deals with townswomen who contributed to the defense of their homes. For a popular account of female defenders in the English Civil War, see Plowden, *Women All on Fire*.

¹⁴ Beate Engelen, *Soldatenfrauen in Preußen. Eine Strukturanalyse der Garnisonsgesellschaft im späten 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Münster: 2004).

¹⁵ Holly A. Mayer, *Belonging to the Army: Camp Followers and Community during the American Revolution* (Columbia, SC: 1996). See as well the brief and sketchy work, Walter Hart Blumenthal, *Women Camp Followers of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: 1952).

Just as military history enjoys a large popular readership, it also benefits from the contributions of earnest and enthusiastic students of the past from outside universities and other institutions of higher learning. The historical reenactment community supplies some of these. Consider the work of Don N. Hagist published in *The Brigade Dispatch*, a reenactors' newsletter, particularly his four part, "The Women of the British Army, A General Overview. Part 1 – Who & How Many," *The Brigade Dispatch*, vol. XXIV, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 2–10; "Part 2 – Sober, Industrious Women," vol. XXIV, no. 4 (Autumn 1993): 9–17; "Part 3 – Living Conditions," vol. XXV, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 11–16; "Part 4 – Lives of Women and Children," vol. XXV, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 8–14. This is republished conveniently on the web at <http://www.revwar75.com/library/hagist/britwomen.htm#110>. See also the work of John U. Rees, 'The Multitude of Women': An Examination of the Numbers of Female Camp Followers with the Continental Army," *The Brigade Dispatch*, three parts: vol. XXIII, no. 4 (Autumn 1992): 5–17; vol. XXIV, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 6–16; vol. XXIV, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 2–6.

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Thus, no book takes on directly the lives and roles of European camp women, from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Instead, the subject is dealt with exclusively in a scattering of articles and chapters, among which only two require attention here, and both of these pieces have been around for some time.¹⁶ In 1981, Barton Hacker published the most important article on women with early modern forces, “Women and Military Institutions in Early Modern Europe: A Reconnaissance.” In his classic piece, Hacker establishes that many women performed work integral to the well-being of military forces in the field, including the gender-defined tasks of laundering, sewing, and nursing. He also notes other ways in which such women aided their male companions, thus presenting women as something other than “camp followers,” a term often used as a synonym for prostitutes. Yet Hacker does not really address the decline in the number of camp women after 1650. He makes passing reference to military reforms in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but does not go into much depth.

Unlike Hacker, Peter H. Wilson’s 1996 article, “German Women and War, 1500–1800,” offers an explanation for the decreasing presence of women, but it does not stand up well. Wilson questions that women were essential to the functioning of armies on campaign, particularly after

¹⁶ The useful and enjoyable, St. John Williams, *Judy O’Grady and the Colonel’s Lady*, includes interesting materials about army wives on campaign, but deals only briefly with plebian camp women, 1660–1815. See as well, Dianne Graves, *In the Midst of Alarms: Women in the War of 1812* (Montreal: 2007). The regrettably small number of scholarly articles and chapters includes: Barton Hacker, “Women and Military Institutions in Early Modern Europe: A Reconnaissance,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 6, no. 4 (1981): pp. 643–71; Peter H. Wilson, “German Women and War, 1500–1800,” *War in History*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1996): pp. 127–60; Brian Crim, “Silent Partners: Women and Warfare in Early Modern Europe,” and Scott Hendrix, “In the Army: Women, Camp Followers and Gender Roles in the British Army in the French and Indian Wars, 1755–1765,” in *A Soldier and A Woman: Sexual Integration in the Military*, ed. Gerard J. DeGroot and Corinna Peniston-Bird (New York: Longman, 2000), pp. 18–48; Barton Hacker and Margaret Vining, “From Camp Follower to Lady in Uniform: Women, Social Class and Military Institutions before 1920,” *Contemporary European History* 10 (2001): pp. 353–73; Barton Hacker and Margaret Vining, “The World of Camp and Train: The Changing Role of Women in Early Modern Armies,” *Sovereign Arms: Armies and Fleets in the World between Lepanto and the French Revolution, 1571–1789* (Rome: 2002); and Mary Elizabeth Ailes, “Camp Followers, Sutlers, and Soldiers’ Wives: Women in Early Modern Armies (c. 1450–c. 1650),” *A Companion to Women’s Military History*, Barton C. Hacker and Margaret Vining, eds. (Leiden: 2010). To these should be added Wilhelm Haberling, “Army Prostitution and Its Control: An Historical Study,” in Victor Robinson, ed., *Morals in Wartime* (New York: 1943), pp. 3–90; this chapter includes a fruitful discussion of 1500–1800 with excellent sources.

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1650. He then argues that military authorities expelled women from military camps because Reformation and Counter-Reformation concepts of morality lowered the status of women and confined them in more restricted roles. His argument may convince historians who privilege cultural explanations, but as this volume will demonstrate, Wilson fails to appreciate women's critical contribution to the troops and the camp economy.

Only by transforming the discussion can we give camp women their due. This requires positioning the lives and labors of camp women in the contexts of military, community, and women's history. In particular, bringing together military and women's history invites interpretive tensions. To be blunt, the two fields tend to be wary of one another. Military historians are likely to regard the history of women and gender as an agenda-driven field fortified by a nearly impenetrable barrier of arcane theory, a sort of intellectual barbed-wire entanglement. Historians of women often disdain military history as a hide-bound traditional field, unable to see beyond war and the state, dominated by men, dismissive of women, and usually blind to modern theoretical approaches. This does not make for a happy marriage.

And yet I propose a union. Let me reassure military historians that this is the work of one of their own who fully intends to give the study of warfare and military institutions its proper significance. Women described here are not transformed into anything other than what they were; their portraits are meant to come as close as possible to historical accuracy. The arguments will be direct and language as jargon-free as possible. Also, this volume is guided by the assumption that understanding women's presence and roles with early modern armies entails, above all, knowledge of the history of armed conflict. At the same time, *Women, Armies, and Warfare* hopes to demonstrate that any attempt to describe early modern warfare without reference to the women who accompanied its armies is doomed to be at best incomplete and, most probably, distorted.

To those who come at this work from gender history, let me promise to do my best by your specialty and beg a bit of indulgence if I do not bring out what you would regard as the full variety and richness of the gender issues raised in these pages. I am admittedly new to your town, but I will try to be respectful and leave no rubbish in my wake. I believe the same historical facts that are required for an understanding of women's contributions to early modern warfare should also give these female noncombatants considerable significance for the history of

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women and gender. Complexities of femininity and masculinity within the very masculine environment of the military camp may add new insights to the discussion of early modern gender boundaries. Women who engaged in petty commerce within the camps experimented with an economic leeway similar to but greater than that accorded their sisters in civil society. The presence of women with armies and the daily life issues fundamental to them emerge as matters of significance to the traditional “big” historical subjects: war, military institutions, and state formation.

I propose that the women who accompanied early modern armies were always important to the well-being of the troops, and before 1650 they were actually vital to the maintenance of military forces on campaign. During the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when legions of women accompanied soldiers into the field, logistical realities determined strategy and operations, such as movements of armies on campaign and pillage of civilian communities in their paths. Women were significant factors and actors in this plunder-driven campaign economy. On the demand side, they and their children were extra mouths to feed, while on the supply side, women were active in pillaging and, more subtly, apparently played a key part in managing the take from plunder.

In the second half of the seventeenth century the framework of warfare changed; definitive military and governmental reforms fundamental to state formation increased state support of armies and allowed a decline in the numbers of women traveling with the troops. Women were no longer necessary to fill the gap between what armies required and what states could provide. Only when armies could make do with fewer women, did their numbers decrease.

Admittedly, this study remains preliminary because detailed monographs that allow for a more definitive evaluation are still lacking. Hacker called his article a “reconnaissance,” and to borrow his metaphor, we are still reconnoitering. A large part of my purpose here is to scout directions for further advance.

EVIDENCE AND THE LACK OF EVIDENCE

Despite the ubiquity of plebian women with troops on campaign, official records are disappointingly sparse on this subject. Those who employed soldiers usually did not accept responsibility to feed and maintain the women who accompanied them; therefore, these women remained “off the books” and had to take care of themselves in one way or another. Maurizio Arfaiole concludes in his study of the sixteenth-century

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Florentine Black Bands that although these mercenaries were known to bring many women, “Their presence is more easily inferred than proven.”¹⁷ To establish their numbers and examine their roles with the troops, we must cobble together diverse sources that vary in their subject, form, and reliability.

Several forms of popular culture speak of women with military forces. I employ songs, literature, plays, and other public performances, but bear in mind that such works of popular culture expressed their authors’ points of view and the tastes of their intended audiences. Often these works were formulaic, because authors felt comfortable with a set pattern, and the public liked to hear the story told a certain way. Thus, songs about women soldiers portrayed them as driven by a desire to stay with or seek lovers and husbands, although, in fact, most such women adopted male identities to escape misery from crushing economic poverty or intolerable personal situations. Contemporary books also had their own conventions. A literary conceit among seventeenth- and eighteenth-century works disguised entirely fictional accounts as legitimate memoirs or collections of correspondence, in a mode similar to Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. At the same time, however, openly fictional accounts by certain authors can serve as valuable sources: The German author of picaresque novels, Johann Jacob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen, was carried off as a boy by raiding troops and became a soldier during the Thirty Years War, and the Irish playwright George Farquhar was an officer recruiting for his regiment when he wrote his comedy, *The Recruiting Officer*.

Popular prints, drawings, and paintings also provide windows into military life, including that of women with the troops.¹⁸ For some periods and regions, graphic sources are particularly numerous; for example, a rich harvest of woodcuts depicts sixteenth-century German mercenaries, known as Landsknechts, and Swiss mercenaries, known as Reisläufers.¹⁹ While visual media can be compelling, it is important to recognize that contemporary engravings and paintings are not

¹⁷ Maurizio Arfaioi in his *The Black Bands of Giovanni* (Pisa: 2005), p. 68.

¹⁸ In preparation for this study I collected some six hundred contemporary images. Here I am exploring a wealth of graphic material earlier exploited by Barton Hacker. David M. Hopkin provides a sophisticated discussion of popular prints in his *Soldier and Peasant in French Popular Culture 1766–1870* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: 2003).

¹⁹ On these German and Swiss military woodcuts, see J. R. Hale, “The Soldier in Germanic Graphic Art of the Renaissance,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 17, no. 1 (Summer, 1986).

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snapshots; they are creations of talented and imaginative artists. Of course, it is important to recognize that some of these artists were unfamiliar with military life, while others knew it well. Urs Graf (circa 1485–1529) carried arms as a *Reisläufer*, and the English artist, Marcellus Laroon (1679–1772), spent many years in military service; thus, the works of these men have an eye-witness character. Jacques Callot (circa 1592–1635) seems to have been acquainted with his subjects, and the prolific artists of the Watteau family lived in the French garrison towns of Valenciennes and Lille during the eighteenth century.

Sometimes common motifs tell us something, as in the German fashion of showing *Landsknechts* paired with their women, indicating that these soldiers typically formed such partnerships, whether sanctioned by the church or not. It is also important to realize that artists plagiarized one other, so later engravers duplicated works by the talented and original Jacques Callot, simply updating the clothing and detail but retaining the theme and layout.²⁰ Owing to the lack of formal records, graphic sources are important mainstays of this study, but they are used with care and some skepticism. Often the most reliable aspects of such artistic sources are the details that set the scene behind and around the main characters.

Contemporary treatises and memoirs provide some accounts of women's activity, although these are usually terse. As historian Simon Barker observes: "Non-fictional military narratives rarely dwell on the involvement of women in the extensive camp infrastructure that, for centuries, determined the success or failure of armies as they engaged . . . at a little distance away on the field of battle itself."²¹ Contemporaries usually described women who followed the camps as moral dangers and logistical embarrassments. Such women populate the works of moral crusaders who disparaged casual sexual liaisons and advocated Christian marriage.

²⁰ For example, Callot's depiction of recruitment and pay in his large format "Les misères et malheurs de la guerre" was updated into early eighteenth century garb and reproduced as the payment of troops in at least two different prints. See Jean Delmas, ed., *Histoire militaire de la France*, vol. 2, De 1715 à 1871 (Paris: 1992), pl. 2, between 12 and 13 and Jean-René Bory, *La Suisse à la rencontre de l'Europe : l'épopée du service étranger : du Concile de Bâle (1444) à la Paix de Westphalie (1648)* (Lausanne: D. Perret, ca. 1978), p. 183, pl. 317. Callot's works are also reflected in the series by Romeyn de Hooghe on the brutal conduct of French troops in the Dutch Netherlands, 1672–74. See the series reproduced in Georg Hirth, *Picture Book of the Graphic Arts, 1500–1800 (Kulturgeschichtliches Bilderbuch aus drei Jahrhunderten)* (New York: 1972), vol. 5, pls. 2680–90.

²¹ Barker, "Allarme to England!", p. 141.