

REVIEWS

Steve Murdoch and Alexia Grosjean

*Alexander Leslie and the Scottish Generals
of the Thirty Years' War; 1618-1648*

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IN THIS study, Steve Murdoch and Alexia Grosjean explore the impact of Scottish soldiers and generals – with Field Marshal Alexander Leslie, first Earl of Leven, as the outstanding example – on the continental wars of 1618–1648 as well as on the British civil wars from 1638 onwards. A predominant aspect of their analysis is the importance of Scotland's societal structures and militarized culture for the performance of Scottish soldiers. The clan system and prevalent norms, promoting individual martial prowess, formed the basis of a soldiering class which did not only produce tough, skilled and loyal soldiers, but competent officers as well. Scotland's relative abundance of population and the Stuart monarchs' interest in finding an outlet for potentially problematic manpower resulted in the creation of Scottish regiments in the service of Sweden, Denmark, France and the Dutch Republic. For the Stuarts, this was also a means of strengthening their political alliances abroad.

Murdoch's and Grosjean's research aims at assessing both individual and collective achievements, with an emphasis on generals rather than on lower military strata. An important result is that the continually repeated notion that Scots served only for pay is false, as there were clearly a lot of other motivational factors. Scottish soldiers were also highly valued for their loyalty, not least by leading Swedes such as the Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna. The authors emphasize, nevertheless, that military service on the Continent provided personal career opportunities – for those who survived long enough – which might not exist at home. Of eighteen Scottish generals in the service

of Sweden, Denmark and France during the Thirty Years' War, only two originated from the nobility. Of the sixteen commoners, three even rose to the rank of field marshal: John Hepburn in the service of France, Alexander Leslie and Robert Douglas in the service of Sweden.

While Sweden, Denmark, France and the Netherlands profited from the military skill and loyalty of Scottish soldiers, foreign service at the same time served as a form of military 'finishing school' for such men as Alexander Leslie. The authors discuss the achievements of Scottish generals on the continent, notably Leslie's important contribution to the Swedish victory at Wittstock (1636). They equally stress, however, the importance of Scottish veteran generals in the British civil wars and the fact that Scots fought not only for the Covenanters but also for the king. In 1643, for instance, the two main Royalist field armies in England were commanded by Scottish veterans of Swedish service, Patrick Ruthven and James King. Ruthven was, in fact, 'Lord General of the King's Forces' from October 1642 until November 1644 when he was replaced by Prince Rupert. Alexander Leslie's efforts as commander on the opposite side are discussed in detail. Murdoch and Grosjean strongly contend that his role in the battle of Marston Moor (1644) has hitherto been distorted and that the victory of the Army of Both Kingdoms was largely due to him. For a Swedish historian, it is most interesting to read about the introduction of the military tactics of Gustavus Adolphus to British battlefields through the leading civil war commanders Leslie and Ruthven. However, even more interesting is perhaps that the Covenanters, as Edward Furgol has shown ('The Civil Wars in Scotland' in J. Kenyon & J. Ohlmeyer (eds), *The Civil Wars: A Military History of England, Scotland and Ireland 1638-1660*, 1998), tried to mirror Swedish military administration in establishing military districts and authorizing the levying of troops through a system of quota numbers by shire and burgh.

No fewer than fifteen of the eighteen Scottish generals studied in this book served Sweden while two served Denmark and only one served France. In fact, by 1648 there was a considerable Scottish element among the higher levels of the Swedish military hierarchy. Almost half the indigenous Swedish and Finnish infantry regiments were commanded by Scots. This study exemplifies that some regiments commanded by Scots had other Scottish officers too, usually the colonel's kinsmen.

Murdoch and Grosjean raise the question why this influx was permitted by the Swedish government, in sharp contrast to the restrictive policy pursued vis-à-vis Scottish soldiers by the Dutch, and what the role of Swedes and Finns was in their own armies. Clearly, as they point out, Sweden during the first half of the 17th century generally accepted and elevated foreigners, not only

Scots, in the army, navy, nobility and the wider civic society. This is largely due to the fact that Sweden had an economic and social infrastructure that was inadequate to the political and military goals of its statesmen. As has been shown by, among others, the economic historian Eli F. Heckscher ('Svenskt och utländskt under Sveriges stormaktstid' in *Festskrift till Verner Söderberg den 4 oktober 1932*, 1932) part of the solution was the import of know-how from abroad. This was, perhaps surprisingly, true even in respect to the army and the navy. The 'natural' basis for the recruiting of military officers, as well as of the higher echelons of the civil administration, was the *adel*, equivalent to the nobility and gentry of the British Isles. Around 1600, however, this group comprised no more than c.450 adult men, a number which proved completely insufficient. This facilitated military promotion not only for foreigners but also for low-born Swedish soldiers. Uneducated peasants' sons were not generally, however, found competent for the ranks above lieutenant.

However, gradually the recruitment of the Swedish officer corps became an ever more internal affair, by the end of century practically excluding both peasants' sons and foreigners, if one is not to count the German noblemen of Sweden's Baltic possessions. Swedish-born descendants of Scots naturalized in Sweden during the first half of the century did of course serve as officers in the Swedish army, but none or few native Scotsmen. According to James Cavallie (*De höga officerarna : Studier i den svenska militära hierarkien under 1600-talets senare del*, 1981), eight out of 51 Swedish regimental commanders and fortress commandants were Scots in 1654, but by as early as 1672 there were none.

One might ask what language was used by Scottish officers commanding native Swedes or Finns. During the Thirty Years' War the *lingua franca* of the Swedish armies on the continent was certainly German – as exemplified by the correspondence between Leslie and Oxenstierna – but the linguistic difficulties must have been considerable.

From the perspective of a Swedish historian, Steve Murdoch's and Alexia Grosjean's penetrating study appears not only as an inspiring contribution to European military history, especially with regard to its analysis of the interaction between Scottish society and Scottish soldiers abroad. It also enhances our understanding of official and unofficial relations in a broad sense between Scotland and Sweden during the period. And it is, of course, vital to our knowledge of how the military capacity of Gustavus Adolphus' and Axel Oxenstierna's Sweden was successfully expanded.

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