

*Laurence Spring*

*The First British Army, 1624-1628: the Army of the  
Duke of Buckingham*

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LAURENCE SPRING'S *The First British Army* is an attempt at sketching out the conception, life and subsequent death of an early modern army. The book is essentially split into two halves. The first nine chapters give a sense of an army beyond the battlefield: levying, outfitting, provisioning, as well as life in the army and the dangers inherent in a life of soldiery. The final five chapters detail the military service of several different armies on campaign: those of Count Mansfeldt (1624), Sir Charles Morgan (1626-9), and the Duke of Buckingham's armies (1624-8). This is an excellent approach, and Spring does well to position his work within both 'new' and 'old' styles of military history.

The main strength of the book is its impressive archival source base, drawn from municipal and regional archives across the United Kingdom, ranging from the Isle of Wight to Edinburgh in addition to those from The National Archives and the British Library. These sources provide the backbone to the statistics of casualties, rates of pay, expenses for the army, and, one of the best sections of the book, the appendices, in which Spring meticulously lists the officers of each regiment described in the book. These appendices will certainly become an important reference source for anyone studying British officers in the 1620s.

Unfortunately, this book is otherwise problematic, often lacking historical nuance. For example, according to Spring, 'both Scotland and England hated the idea of Great Britain' (page viii). Furthermore, despite wishing to 'contradict the established facts' (ii), the old orthodoxy that 'King James tried to keep Britain out of the Dutch Revolt ... and later the Thirty Years War' (ix) is repeated, even though this contention has been utterly dismantled by recent scholarship. Language is often informal, bordering on inappropriate. Two deserters are labelled as being 'stupid enough to

return home' (37), and there were apparently only 'three types' of women attached to an army: 'soldiers' wives, whores ... and prostitutes' (46). This is presumably drawn from John A. Lynn II's *Women, Armies, and Warfare in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2008). However, Lynn makes a distinction between 'whores' and 'prostitutes' but Spring does not make this distinction clear, and the word 'whore' without any context feels grating and dated. There were certainly also other women attached to early modern armies who are overlooked here. Daughters often accompanied their parents to the field, widows remained attached to armies, and others performed duties like brewing, washing, or practising medicine. Large sections of the book include little or no introduction. There is no satisfactory explanation for the causes of the Spanish War and, while the introduction to the expeditions to France are helpful, it is frustrating that this does not appear until page 175.

However, the fundamental problem with the book is that it accomplishes very little of what it sets out to do. Many examples drawn on in its early chapters have very little to do with Buckingham's army, or the other armies that are described. While drawing comparisons from other periods can certainly be a helpful supplement, many of the examples used seem to be filling in for a lack of those pertaining to the professed subject of the work. For instance, the book relies heavily on Robert Monro's Expedition with the Mackays, which has little or nothing to do with Buckingham's army. Almost all the examples on recruiting in Ireland fall outside the ambit of the book, and the section dealing with the motivations of soldiers seems to do with British soldiery in the Thirty Years' War generally and not to the expeditions specifically (20-2, 24). Similarly, two of the armies described, those of Count Mansfeldt and Sir Charles Morgan, were not part of Buckingham's army at all. While there was some overlap in the officer corps, the Mansfeldt army was levied independently of Buckingham, while Morgan's was formed from regiments already in the Dutch Republic.

Ultimately, the main problem with the book is that the title is misleading and erroneous. Buckingham's army was not the 'first' British army. In 1610, James VI and I gave an explicitly British commission to Sir Edward Cecil as general over several Scottish and English regiments for the expedition to Juliers-Cleves, and this was repeated in 1614 when James intervened again in Juliers-Cleves. The levies of 1624-1628 could not even be considered the third British army since, in 1620, Sir Andrew Gray raised a regiment for service in Bohemia of 1500 Scots and 1000 Englishmen, and this force was acknowledged by contemporary travel writer John Taylor as 'the Brittain regiment.' While *The Fourth British Army* is not nearly as catchy a title, it is, in fact, actually the truth.

The earlier armies of 1610, 1614, and 1620 are all described in depth in Steve Murdoch's article 'James VI and the formation of a Scottish-British Military Identity,' but this, unsurprisingly, does not appear to be cited. This leads to the next major problem of the book. The strength of Spring's archival source base is severely undermined by a dearth of references to secondary literature. Notably lacking is any sort of awareness of up-to-date Scottish and Irish historiography, which prevents the work from accomplishing one of its purposes: to '[discuss] the origin of officers' (i). It is never mentioned that the Earl of Morton was, in fact, the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland and that many of the officers in his regiment—like Sir George Hay or Sir Archibald Acheson—were from the upper echelons of Scottish society and the Scottish government. Furthermore, Sir Robert Anstruther, as one might glean from his name, was from the East Neuk of Fife. However, by incorrectly referring to Anstruther as an 'English ambassador' to Denmark-Norway, rather than more correctly a 'Stuart' or 'British' ambassador, the book betrays a complete lack of understanding of early modern British identity and the nuances of early Stuart diplomacy.

These problems persist in the latter chapters of the book when Britain and Britons are consistently referred to as 'England' or 'English.' For example, the beleaguered Huguenots in France 'appealed to England for help,' and one of the main causes of the French war was France's refusal to allow Mansfeldt's army to land, which, Spring asserts, 'cost the lives of 12000 Englishmen'. Mansfeldt's army did, in fact, include 4000 Scots, and, furthermore, not all 12000 men died. Throughout the rest of the chapter, and indeed into the following chapter, the soldiers at the Isle of Rhé are referred to as 'English,' having arrived there on an 'English' fleet, in complete disregard of the three Irish regiments and the Scottish regiment, whose colonel—the Earl of Morton—was the Vice-Admiral of the fleet after the assassination of Buckingham. When purporting to write about 'Britain' in the early modern era, an author must make the effort to address the Scottish, English, and Irish dimensions equally. Even still, it is evident that the work of many of the foremost English military and naval historians, like David Trim, Adam Marks, Mark Fissell and even N A M Rodger, have not been consulted here.

Finally, the book is plagued by a number of editorial problems. The lack of a list of abbreviations makes it very difficult to track many references in the footnotes, and large sections of the book have few or no citations, making the reader wonder about the origins of the arguments and information presented. Quotes are missing, paragraphs are randomly spliced, and typographical errors abound. Names are not always standardised: Alexander MacNaughton, who led a company of Highland bowmen in the Earl of

Morton's regiment, is referred to as Captain Magnaities (241), Machnaiton (57) and Macnaught (73). While this is due to obvious inconsistencies in the sources, this is never addressed, leaving the reader to wonder who is who. Again, this is symptomatic of not taking the time to properly identify these officers. It would not be unacceptable to keep every name as it had been found but this would need to be spelled out in a list of conventions, which the book lacks. The indexing is also inaccurate, the entries for Sir Charles Morgan being a case in point.

While Laurence Spring's book provides a good starting point when searching for archival documents, officers, and statistics, readers should approach most of its content and arguments with caution. Its title is misleading, it lacks a central thesis, and much of its content lacks relevancy to the topic at hand. If anything, the book serves as a warning for why a broad reading and acknowledgement of the secondary literature in the field is so essential to writing history.

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