Fighting for a Living

Published by Amsterdam University Press

Amsterdam University Press, 2013.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/66285.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/66285

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2319433
Particularly after the second half of the seventeenth century, when armed forces grew exponentially, armies typically ranked as the largest single employers within states. Thus, soldiers constituted the most numerous unified labour force within Europe. A consideration of troops within the framework of labour history is accordingly both appropriate and also long overdue, especially since in certain circumstances soldiers acted very much like modern workers. For example, it would not be out of line to regard military mutinies as among the largest and most effective strikes in European history before the emergence of labour militancy associated with the Industrial Revolution. However, generalizations about soldier-labour in Europe during the early modern period – taken here to encompass those decades falling roughly between 1500 and 1790 – have to be advanced cautiously and hedged around with caveats. This is for three principal reasons. First, there was considerable variety of practice both within and between polities with regard to the employment of soldiers, which makes generalization hazardous. Secondly, the period was characterized by considerable changes of practice. To be sure, the notion that these changes constituted a "military revolution", at least in the format originally proposed by Michael Roberts in the 1950s and subsequently amended by Geoffrey Parker, has been challenged and rejected by many specialists. But the debate over the "military revolution" has emphasized the extent of the changes that were taking place, though these occurred over a much longer timeframe than Roberts and Parker envisaged, and lay as much in the areas of state development, the economy, and the management of armies, for instance, as in the realms of weaponry, drill, and tactics. This chapter will seek to do justice to these changes in the space available without misrepresenting the reality of complex and uneven developments. Thirdly, precisely because the exploration of soldier-labour is so important and almost unprecedented, the effort must be undertaken with care so as to avoid distorting categories and conclusions by imprudently constructing generalizations about military

1 I wish to thank Joël Félix and Beatrice Heuser for their comments on an early draft of this paper. I am especially grateful to John Lynn for his advice and permission to use some of the ideas and material from his "Comments on Mercenary Military Service in Early Modern Europe", paper presented at the IISH Conference in March 2010.
labour from the study of the civilian workforce or by too freely imposing concepts generated by modern labour studies onto an earlier era. As military institutions and practices are incorporated within a broader labour history, it is important to respect the integrity of the military past. These points need to be borne in mind not least of all with regard to the many and varied forms of recruitment that were to be found in the early modern period.

Methods of recruitment, c. 1500-1650

To fill the ranks of their armies, early modern governments made use of a variety of methods of recruitment, which stood on a spectrum between the involuntary and the voluntary. In different ways, all drafted recruits forcibly by making use of the generally accepted – if vague and ill-defined – notion that adult male subjects had some responsibility to bear arms in defence of their homeland. Sweden, with its tiny population (1.25 million in 1620), its need to raise forces to defend its newly won independence from Denmark in the sixteenth century, and its desire to pursue its bellicose ambitions in the following century, came closest to constructing a system of universal conscription. As a result of initiatives launched by Gustavus Vasa (1523-1560) and developed by Gustavus Adolphus (1611-1632), lists of able-bodied males aged over eighteen years were drawn up annually and used by conscript commissioners to select the required number of men. Nobles, clerics, and some peasants, as well as apprentices in the royal gardens and church organists, were exempt from the draft. Yet the system was remarkably wide-ranging. Almost 50,000 men were conscripted between 1626 and 1630, and under Charles XII (1697-1718) levies were taken more than once per year. Significantly, the conscripts could be required to serve outside their homeland. 2 Other states, including Habsburg Spain and Brandenburg-Prussia, considered the use of conscription, but none adopted it in a fully fledged form until it was introduced by France in the unprecedented circumstances of the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars.

Sweden went furthest in employing conscription, but many other polities – including towns as well as national governments – made use of the obligation to bear arms to forcibly recruit men into militias. True, the local nobility in Bavaria and Brandenburg hesitated at the thought of arming their

2 Glete, War and the State in Early Modern Europe, pp. 179, 189-191, 194-195, 201-206; Tallett, War and Society in Early-Modern Europe, pp. 82-83.
tenants, but elsewhere nobles and rulers had no such compunctions. 3 In England, for example, the militia system received a new lease of life under Henry VIII. All those with £10 in land and the equivalent in goods were obliged to keep weapons and armour and be ready to serve the king. The enquiry of 1552 revealed the existence of 128,250 available men, though their military knowledge and ability to equip themselves was patchy. 4 Venice similarly rostered 20,000 militia to defend the terraferma in 1528 and a number of German states and towns reorganized their militias for local defence in the crisis years of the Reformation and the Thirty Years War. 5 In practice, militias proved to be of dubious military value. Poorly equipped and lacking training, they were unable to confront professional forces, and their reluctance to serve away from their immediate locality further restricted their usefulness. However, as we shall see, after c. 1650 they would be reconfigured by inventive rulers who employed militias to bulk out their regular forces.

Governments also forcibly drafted men whom they regarded as harmful to society or otherwise useless. This was not a novel expedient: up to 12 per cent of men serving in English forces between 1339 and 1361 may have been criminals. 6 On average, the English crown recruited 6,500 men annually for overseas service between 1585 and 1602, many of them ne’er-do-wells. 7 The Tudor administration in Ireland was especially keen to encourage social and economic stability by freeing the body politic of undesirables. It periodically emptied the prisons of Ulster, leaving the province “in more complete peace and obedience than has ever been seen since the Conquest”, according to one seventeenth-century English administrator. 8 Similarly, the republic of Genoa enlisted Corsican bandits, although it did promise a pardon at the end of their service. 9 However, the impressment of dissolute persons should not be exaggerated and probably looms larger in the historiography than is warranted. 10 Rogues, vagabonds, and criminals made bad soldiers, and commanders were reluctant to have too many in their forces. Sir Francis de

3 Schnitter, Volk und Landesdefension, pp. 123-130.
7 Hammer, Elizabeth’s Wars, pp. 245-247.
8 Quoted in O’Reilly, “The Irish Mercenary Tradition in the 1600s”, p. 390.
10 See the exaggerated comment in Motley, A History of the United Netherlands, IV, p. 69, for example.
Vere was accordingly “careful to send them back again” to England from his command in the Netherlands when he discovered their origins. However, governments in the eighteenth century would make increased use of their power to draft such men in their efforts to find recruits for their burgeoning armies.

Standing somewhere between voluntary and involuntary forms of recruitment was what might best be termed the quasi-feudal system. The socio-cultural identity of the nobility remained bound up with military endeavour, and the medieval notion that nobles had a feudal obligation to fight for their ruler retained some vigour. Accordingly, rulers in the sixteenth century still resorted to the customary way to raise troops by calling upon their nobles to turn out accompanied by their retinues. Thus the ban and arrière ban were deployed in France with a degree of success, though some individuals chose to make a financial contribution rather than serve in person. Here, the great nobility retained an important role in the provision of the cavalry. In England, the great nobility were less important than in previous decades, and the crown relied more upon the lesser gentry, though members of the court nobility still had an important if neglected role. Nobles assembled their retinues in various ways: they recruited volunteers; they established contracts with subordinate officers to find men; and they called out their dependants, affinities, and tenants who had little choice but to follow their lord. For instance, the Earl of Leicester, who was authorized by Elizabeth I to raise 500 infantry in 1585, responded by insisting that his tenants, whose leases obliged them to serve “in tyme of warre”, should follow him into the field. Nobles continued to obey their ruler’s summons to arms in this way throughout the sixteenth century, not least because they used their role as recruiting agents to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the crown but also over their own dependants. The numbers that could be raised in this way were not insignificant. The Earl of Pembroke reportedly brought 2,000 men from his Welsh estates during the Western rebellion of 1549 though, as this example suggests, the use of

12 Lot, Recherches sur les effectifs des armées françaises, pp. 258-261.
13 Potter, Renaissance France at War, pp. 177-179.
these semi-feudal retinues was generally restricted to local service within the homeland. But, as time went on, a declining proportion of the noble class proved willing to honour their “feudal” obligations, and the system fell into disuse. Nobles nevertheless continued to associate their social status, and the privileges it brought, with martial virtues and military service. As we shall see, in the eighteenth century rulers played upon this to make use of them as recruiting agents.

It was generally agreed that volunteers made better soldiers than pressed men. As one captain observed, “it is most sure [...] that persuading without pressing will carry most and make the best soldiers”. This was one reason why states preferred to use voluntary methods of recruitment. Three main systems for voluntary recruiting can be identified, though they shared some important characteristics. The first involved the use of commissioned officers. Typically a captain would be issued by a ruler with letters patent that left him free to appoint his junior and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and that designated the area in which he could recruit. He, together with a small party that included veterans whenever possible attracted volunteers by broadcasting the need for men and by making soldiering appear as attractive as possible through various means of public display – beating a drum, unfurling the colours, recounting tales of heroic military action – as well as through the purchase of copious amounts of alcohol and the payment of a bounty. Recruiting by commission was used both to raise new companies and to maintain existing ones at something approaching full strength, and was employed throughout western Europe. As one veteran commentator noted, “The levying of soldiers [...] by the sound of the drumme [...] is generally used over the most partes of Christendome.” It reached a peak of efficiency in sixteenth-century Spain where the monarchy raised an average of 9,000 men annually with up to 20,000 being recruited in some years, though the strains of war eventually took their toll and Philip II’s successors reverted to more traditional means, handing over responsibility for recruitment to local towns and nobles as administración gave way to asiento.

The second method of voluntary recruitment involved negotiating an agreement, the Bestallung, with a military contractor for the delivery of a specified number of troops at an agreed time and place. The contract also set out the

18 Quoted in Trim, “Fighting Jacob’s Wars”, p. 229.
20 Thompson, War and Government in Habsburg Spain, pp. 103-145.
terms of service, including levels of pay, duration, and the forms of warfare in which the troops could be involved. Particularly in demand were German Landsknechte, all-arms units noted for their reliability in battle, together with specialist forces including Swiss pikemen, German Reiter or pistoleers, and Albanian and Savoyard light cavalry. Contract troops developed a reputation for being assertive in defence of their rights, refusing to fight if they were not paid, for instance, and they were not cheap. However, they comprised a high proportion of veterans, came ready trained and equipped, and acquitted themselves so well on the battlefield that few states dared do without them.

One disadvantage of contract troops was that money not only had to be found “up front” to employ them, but a continuing revenue stream was also essential to retain their services. This was always going to be difficult for cash-strapped governments. The situation was just about workable during the sixteenth century when wars had lasted for no more than two or three campaign seasons, but conflicts began to increase in duration, especially after the temporary lull provided by the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis (1559), putting increased strain on state finances. This opened up the potential for a novel form of contracting which, following Fritz Redlich, I will designate “general contracting”. The general contractor differed from the traditional mercenary contractor of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries in that he did not merely raise a troop in return for initial costs. Instead, he met these initial and some ongoing costs – recruitment, wages, equipment, and supplies – well into the campaign, eventually recouping his outlay and making a profit by the receipt of tax revenues, lump sum payments, Kontribution levied on friendly and enemy territory, and booty. The unit was “owned” by the contractor who had raised it and thus proprietorship as well as entrepreneurship became significant features of warfare in the late sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries.

The system of general contracting reached a peak during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). Fought largely within the German theatre, but involving almost all the European states, the conflict demanded unprecedented numbers of troops. Rulers lacked the necessary native manpower, the administrative structures, and the liquid cash to recruit and supply the soldiers themselves and turned to the services of general contractors, who undertook the provision of whole regiments and even armies. The foremost employer was the Holy Roman Emperor who had large potential assets in the form of land and tax revenues, but lacked the administrative machinery

21 Redlich, The German Military Enterpriser and His Workforce, remains the classic study.
22 Parrott, "From Military Enterprise to Standing Armies", esp. pp. 79-83.
in his Austrian lands to mobilize these. The leading enterpriser was Albrecht von Wallenstein. His army lists recorded total paper strengths in 1625 of 61,900, rising to 150,900 five years later. To recruit and supply forces on such a huge scale perforce involved the contractor in establishing networks with subcontracting colonels and captains who “beat the drum” and produced the volunteers. Not only that, but the contractor made agreements with financiers and bankers, merchants, munitionnaires, arms manufacturers, and others to supply the army with food, munitions, equipment, and pay. Accordingly, regiments or armies such as those raised by Ernst von Mansfeld, Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar, Albrecht von Wallenstein, Johan Banér, or Lennart Torstensson represented the accumulation of venture capital on a huge scale, and the commander presided over a group of stakeholders who all expected a return on their investment, whether that investment be financial or purely military, with implications for the relationship between soldier and employer, as we shall see.

Methods of recruitment, c. 1650-1790

From the second half of the seventeenth century, methods of recruitment changed in a number of significant ways. In the first major development, states made greater use of involuntary recruitment. They continued to draft criminals and ne’er-do-wells, but in larger numbers than before. The war minister of France, the Comte de St Germain, noted in 1775 that, “As things are, the army must inevitably consist of the scum of the people, and of all those for whom society has no use.” More importantly, states developed the obligation to perform military service to draft men into militias. These could be used for special purposes, such as policing Huguenot areas, serving as a reserve in time of war, or providing a mechanism for drafting men directly into the regular forces. Of the great powers, it was France under Louis XIV that led the way. Every parish was obliged to provide a recruit who could be taken into the regular army. In this way more than 250,000 men were

23 He employed twice as many contractors as Sweden: Redlich, The German Military Enterpriser and His Workforce, I, p. 206.
25 Kollmann, Documenta Bohemica Bellum Tricennale Illustrantia, IV, pp. 414-446. There were around 210,000 soldiers employed in Germany in 1648: Parker, The Thirty Years War, p. 191.
raised between 1701 and 1713, representing 46 per cent of the native recruits who fought during the War of the Spanish Succession, while some 120,000 militia were drafted to replace garrisoned veterans in the 1740s. Although heartily detested, militia service was supportable because the wealthy and well-connected were able to buy themselves out. Many German states made even greater use of the militia. In Bavaria, Mecklenburg, and Württemberg under the regency of Friedrich Karl (1677-1693), militia formations were raised and then drafted into the regular army as the need arose. Elsewhere, as in Saxony, Mainz, and Würzburg, the intermediate militia stage was omitted and men on the militia lists were taken straight into the army. In Prussia in 1733, Hesse-Cassel in 1762, and Austria between 1771 and 1780, a canton system of recruitment was adopted (Kantonverfassung), with each regiment being allocated a district from which it drew regular annual levies, the compulsory element of service being supplied by the obligation that had existed to enrol in the militia.

The second major development concerned the system of military contracting. This did not end altogether after 1650, but it changed markedly. The general contractors who had figured so prominently in the Thirty Years War disappeared from the scene, and military contracting in its classical sense was substantially modified. Military contracting had always represented a standing affront to princes’ sovereignty. This was what Stephen Gardiner had been getting at in 1545 when he wrote of the need “to eskape the thrawldom to such noughty mennes service”. Moreover, some contractors in the Thirty Years War had displayed signs of a dangerous autonomy. Cardinal Richelieu commented about Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar, “An excellent commander but so much for himself that no-one could be sure of him”. Accordingly, the use of general contractors was phased out and the role of the private entrepreneur was diminished. For a while, the market for contract troops was left to the younger sons of German princes who had no personal patrimony or hope of royal succession.

---

27 Corvisier, L’Armée française de la fin du XVIIe siècle au ministère de Choiseul, I, tables pp. 157, 248; Lynn, Giant of the Grand Siècle, pp. 369-393. See also Girard, Le service militaire en France à la fin du règne de Louis XIV.
28 Summarized in Wilson, War, State and Society in Württemberg, pp. 79-81. See also Ingrao, The Hessian Mercenary State; and Duffy, The Army of Frederick the Great, pp. 54-57.
31 Barker, “Military Entrepreneurship and Absolutism.”
century and throughout the eighteenth, a substantial number of rulers began to rent out their armies to foreign employers. The states concerned in this “soldier-trade” were principally German but included others such as Savoy-Piedmont and Sweden under the regency of Karl XI. In return for the hire of its forces, Sweden took “subsidies” from France using the money to retain a credible army in Pomerania.32 The eighteenth-century market for the hire of soldiers was dominated by states from within the Holy Roman Empire, including Hesse-Cassel, Hanover, Württemberg, Bavaria, Saxony, the Palatinate, and Würzburg.33 Significantly, many of the troops who were hired out had been forcibly drafted into the army with implications for scholars seeking to construct a taxonomy of army types, as we shall see.

As well as relying on impressed men, militias, and hired forces, states also developed their systems for finding volunteers. Even in Prussia, which relied heavily upon impressment, more than half the army continued to be volunteers.34 How were these found? As noted above, the quasi-feudal system of recruitment was already in terminal decline in the sixteenth century. Nobles nevertheless continued to associate their social status with martial virtues and military service, and rulers made use of this to engage their social and political elites in the recruitment and maintenance of their forces.35 Many nobles were prepared to put themselves and their private fortunes at the disposal of monarchs in the expectation of gaining prestige and because, quite simply, this was what was expected of them. One way of encouraging nobles to do so was by formally implementing a system of venality under which officers purchased their commissions, as happened most notably in France.36 Although venality theoretically gave officers ownership of their office and not of their men, in practice they were still expected to recruit their unit. They did so by public appeal to volunteers, by using their influence over dependants, and by deploying their private retinues in those instances where they still maintained them. Equally,
nobles were expected to use their own resources to equip, pay, and feed their men when state funding ran out, as it invariably did. Venality gave officers an incentive to invest their personal resources in the recruitment and maintenance of their units, since they would be more likely to get a return on their investment over the longer term. Profits could be made, for example, by selling rights of leave, from the supply of food and equipment to the men, and from the sale of subordinate officerships and NCO positions. Even where venality was not introduced, nobles could still be lured into accepting a commission and acting as a recruiting agent by the expectation of making a profit through the Kompaniewirtschaft, the system whereby captains made money from administering the finances of a company of soldiers. Austrian colonels expected to earn 10,000 gulden annually. Prussia resisted the trend, though here the lack of alternative employment forced nobles into the army. Proprietorship and entrepreneurship thus continued to be important within armies throughout the early modern period, and integral to the process of raising and maintaining forces.

Looking at the period 1500-1790 overall, three points stand out. First, governments used a variety of systems to recruit their forces. These systems reflected the nature of the early modern state, and in particular the relative fiscal and administrative weakness of central authority. This obliged governments to rely upon the use of contractors, including general contractors for a time, as well as upon their social and political elites to recruit and maintain armies. Even when the use of general contractors was phased out after c. 1650, states still found it easier to hire troops rather than raise them ab initio, and the dependence of rulers upon the co-operation of their nobilities, who served as intermediate agents of government, remained very considerable.

Secondly, despite the increased use of impressment, volunteers constituted the majority of recruits before the French revolutionary wars when, confronted with an apparently overwhelming coalition of European states, the nascent republic introduced the levée en masse in 1793 and further refined its procedures for conscription through the Jourdan-Delbrel law of 1799. The readiness of men to volunteer for military service can be chiefly explained by the overcrowded state of the labour market. For most volunteers, the army was an employer of last resort, and they signed on only because there was nothing better to be had. To be sure, a few may have joined to throw off the humdrum workaday world of civilian employment. “To bee bound an apprentice, that life I deemed little better than a dog’s

37 Asch, “War and State-Building”, p. 326; McKay, Prince Eugene of Savoy, p. 11.
life and base”, wrote Sydnam Poyntz in explanation of his decision to join up.38 Others welcomed the chance to see the world, or the opportunity to enjoy the unrestrained licentious behaviour that characterized what Erasmus termed “the wicked life of the soldier”,39 while for yet others the army offered the chance of glory. Francis I, the Holy Roman Emperor (1745-1765), noted that “what the natives of Ireland even dislike for principle, they generally will perform through a desire for glory”.40 Yet most recruits agreed to serve for the prosaic reason that they simply had no other way to make a living. Hardship and need were the best recruiting sergeants and drove men into armies. Even Poyntz confessed his true reason for enlisting: “My necessitie forced mee, my Money being growne short, to take the manes of a private soldier.”41 The impoverished recruit created by the playwright Caldéron de la Barca summed up the situation for the overwhelming majority of volunteers: “Only great need drives me to the war, I’d never go had I money in store.”42 Recruitment patterns were accordingly closely linked to economic cycles. Volunteers were easiest to find in the autumn months as agricultural labourers were laid off, or in the wake of a slump. Edward Coss has demonstrated that enlistment in the British army soared at times of economic downturn.43 Of course, one might question whether potential recruits faced with a choice between starvation and signing-on were in any meaningful sense “volunteers”. But the fact that they were theoretically free agents, and there was no legal compulsion on them to join, means that we should locate them on the “free” end of the axis of our graph.

Thirdly, the ready supply of volunteers meant that governments throughout our period could use impressment and militia service as a last resort to top up their forces, drawing upon those elements judged to be of little use to society and who had no political clout. There was greater resort to involuntary recruitment in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This was brought about by an expansion in the number of men under arms. Historically, around 1 per cent of the population has represented the ceiling for sustainable recruitment, but this figure began to be routinely exceeded with Louis XIV’s France leading the way. Peacetime levels of about 10,000 and 60,000-80,000 for major wars before 1650 soared to totals of 130,000

38 Goodrick, The Relation of Sydnam Poyntz, p. 45.
39 Quoted in Hale, War and Society in Renaissance Europe, p. 127.
41 Goodrick, The Relation of Sydnam Poyntz, p. 45.
42 Quoted in Stradling, Europe and the Decline of Spain, p. 124.
43 Coss, All for the King’s Shilling.
and 360,000 respectively by the 1690s, representing over 2 per cent of the French population. Prussia during the Seven Years War (1756-1763) had 250,000 men under arms, around 5 per cent of the population of 5 million, and kept an army of 150,000 in peacetime. Britain similarly came close to the 2 per cent mark during the Seven Years War and War of American Independence. These wartime highs proved unsustainable in the long term, but they nonetheless represented an increase on earlier decades, and by the eighteenth century most European states had wartime military establishments that were four or five times bigger than those of their predecessors 200 years previously. One consequence of the increased number of men under arms was the need to make greater use of involuntary methods of recruitment. These methods were deployed especially by those states, such as Prussia, that maintained disproportionately large armies in relation to their population, and whose limited tax base and under-commercialized economies made it difficult to mobilize liquid resources.

The rewards of soldiering

Whatever the process that led to their recruitment, all soldiers expected to be compensated for what they did. This included receipt of pay, and in certain respects being paid made them similar to civilian wage-labourers. Pay rates for the “average” soldier – if such a thing existed – were on the low side but broadly consistent with those in the civilian labour market. The 1514 Statute of Artificers in England set the wages of skilled craftsmen at 6d per day, with other labourers at 4d. By comparison an ordinary infantryman received some 6d in mid-century. When inflation is taken into account this was hardly generous but not out of line with what one might expect. Moreover, soldiers with specialist skills who were in short supply received additional rewards, so that manifold gradations of pay existed in early modern armies. Thus the company assembled by Count Brissac for royal service in 1567 included three commissioned officers, two NCOs, a quar-

termaster, musicians, three kinds of pikemen, halberdiers, and three sorts of arquebusiers, all of whom received different levels of pay with the result that in this small unit there were fourteen distinct pay grades. Specialist troops received higher rewards than their locally recruited counterparts, partly in recognition of their superior fighting skills. Landsknecht pay in sixteenth-century French royal armies was about 20 per cent higher than that of the native infantry, and the German units also received additional bonus payments. Swiss pikemen in French employ received an extra month's wages in the event of battle, and survivors insisted upon receiving the pay of casualties.

To be sure, higher pay rates did not simply reflect the state of the labour market and the specialist skills on offer. Thus, the heavy cavalry throughout our period tended to be especially well rewarded. During the Wars of Religion, their officers were paid twice as much as analogous ranks in the infantry; and even the lowest-paid mounted archer, at 17 livres per month, had a salary higher than most rank-and-file infantry. This certainly reflected their perceived usefulness on the battlefield, but higher wages were also meant to cover the initial investment in horses and equipment that was required of the mounted soldier. The cost of outfitting a mounted archer was in the region of 400 livres; and a minimum of 600-700 livres was required for an homme d'armes who needed three horses and a significantly greater amount of armour. This was ten or fifteen times the cost of equipping a heavily armoured pikeman. Higher wages were also paid to cover the cost of feeding and replacing the horses while on campaign (given their high mortality levels, the latter represented a significant expense). Finally, and most importantly, higher pay rates in the cavalry were due in large measure to the superior social status of the members of this branch of the army.

It was probably in the artillery regiments – units that proved least attractive to the nobility and where there were the clearest functional divisions – that the laws of the labour market can be seen to have operated

49 Potter, Renaissance France at War, pp. 129-130, 137. Being hired by the regiment made contract troops more expensive, since the employer had to fund an extra layer of regimental officers: Wood, The King's Army, p. 137.
50 Wood, The King's Army, pp. 135-136; Robinson, “Horse Supply and the Development of the New Model Army”, p. 122 and passim. It cost around £12 to mount and equip a cavalryman in England in the 1640s, compared to an infantryman's pay of 8d per day. See British Library, Thomason Tracts, E300(5) Ordinance...for the Raising of Five Hundred Horse; Asquith, The New Model Army, p. 19. Note the comments of Maurice de Saxe, Mes rêveries (1732), in Phillips, Roots of Strategy, pp. 119-120, 137.
in their purest form. A French memoir from 1568 estimated that 2,620 people would be needed to service the artillery train of the royal army, including clerks, gunners, pioneers, pontoon specialists, tenters, drivers, and others. The highest paid was the grand master, at 500 livres per month; the lowest were the humble labourers or pioneers. As James Wood has indicated, the wages paid to the personnel of the artillery train, and the functions they performed, correlated very closely to an industrial enterprise. Thus there was a clear labour hierarchy, with those exercising managerial/supervisory roles receiving the most pay, followed by the skilled elements (roughly 22 per cent of the total force), then the unskilled workers who comprised some 75 per cent of the workforce. All the skilled workers, beginning with the gunners at 10 livres per month, received higher wage rates than the average pikeman or arquebusiers at 8-9 livres per month, and their pay compared favourably with that of the mounted archers who, when expenses were taken into account, may have cleared only 8.7 livres in monthly salary.51

Like their counterparts in civilian society, soldiers were not averse to using their “industrial muscle” to wring higher rewards out of their employers. This was especially the case with groups such as the Swiss pikemen and the Landsknechte, both of whom had a strong sense of communal solidarity reinforced by well-developed, autonomous internal structures that made them, in some respects, akin to guilds or trade unions. The Landsknechte, for instance, formed self-governing units in which the common soldiers, comprising the gemeente or community, elected their own officers (the voerder, gemeene weyfel, and fourier), administered justice, and agreed their terms and conditions of employment.52 They used their corporate solidarity to drive up pay rates and to impose what now might be termed restrictive practices. Thus the Swiss in 1522 informed their immediate employer, the duc de Montmorency, that they would not assault fortified towns because this was simply “not their trade”.53 Just as the autonomy and restrictive practices of the guilds offended the lumières of later Enlightenment decades, so these same characteristics of the Landsknechte offended their employers even though their military skills made them indispensable. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the remedy in both instances appeared similar: to reduce the autonomy and self-governance of guilds and Landsknechte. In the case of the former this meant exposing them to the

51 Wood, The King’s Army, pp. 161-168.
52 Baumann, Landsknechte; Burschel, Soldner in Nordwestdeutschland des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts.
53 Du Bellay and du Bellay, Mémoires, IV, p. 189.
rigour of the free market, and in the case of the latter it involved an attack on their internal structures of governance.

There are undoubtedly parallels to be drawn between soldiers and wage-labourers in civilian society. Yet we should not take these too far. One difference was the irregularity of soldiers' pay. To be sure, wage-labourers in civilian society were commonly laid off: as the need for farm labour was reduced in the winter months or as cyclical slumps hit manufacturing industries. Soldiers too were frequently dismissed at the end of the campaign season as the winter months approached. What was distinctive about the soldier's situation was the extent to which he frequently received little or no pay even while he was employed. This resulted in the accumulation of arrears which could be substantial. By February 1568 a third of the heavy cavalry companies in the French royal army had received no pay since the first quarter of the previous year; and the wages of the rest of the army were more than six months in arrears. During the campaign around Landrecies in 1542, the English commander Wallop, then in imperial service, reported of his men that they were “veray poore and few or none of them have any greate store of money, victualz be dere, clothes wax thyn, and cold weather encreaseath”. Similarly, the veteran Sir James Turner, who fought in Ireland for a Scots contingent during the Wars of the Three Kingdoms (as the English Civil Wars are now more adequately referred to) recorded that the army “fingered no pay the whole time I stayd in Ireland, except for three months”.54

One response of soldiers to low or no pay was to mutiny, and in some respects this withdrawal of labour may be regarded as the equivalent of the strike in the civilian labour market. Mutinies were most common and sophisticated in the Spanish Army of Flanders, though they were by no means restricted to these forces. Forty-five major munities were staged (and there was a good deal of ritualized drama in their conduct) between 1572 and 1607, with some lasting more than a year. Mutineers elected leaders or “management committees”, negotiated with the government, and sustained themselves by levying local taxes.55 However, a second response of soldiers to low or no pay was unique and simply not available to civilian workers. Without the wages that were supposed to buy essential supplies, the soldiers

---


resorted to pillaging the local population, taking whatever they needed by force. Thus, Thomas Stockdale complained of the atrocities committed by soldiers based in Yorkshire during the 1640s, admitting that if only the troops had been paid “the sufferance and wrong would be unto many less sensible.” This easy, almost casual resort to violence, often involving extreme levels of brutality, can be explained in a number of ways. Robert Muchembled notes the constant and systematic pattern of conflict between troops and members of the rural community. Such poor relations in part reflected the long-standing urban/rural hostility that was a pronounced feature of early modern society; and troops recruited largely from the towns had little regard for inhabitants of the countryside whom they regarded as backward, stupid, and easy prey.

However, we should probably look beyond town/country relations to the huge cultural gulf that separated soldiers from all civilians. As Wood notes, “The soldiery were an instrument of barely controlled violence and destructiveness and their vocation and values were based upon completely different assumptions about rules of law, property rights, and the application of force and coercion that in any other context would be clearly criminal behaviour.” Levels of violence were especially high whenever there was a heightened sense of the “Other” between soldiers and civilians brought about, for example, by pronounced ethnic, religious, or cultural differences. Foreign troops in particular saw themselves as set apart from the native civilian population. The notorious “Day of the Landsknechte” at Caen in 1513 when soldiers ransacked the town after having not been paid for months, the sack of Rome by Charles V’s unpaid German troops in 1527, and the “Spanish Fury” at Antwerp in 1576 were merely the best known of a long catalogue of outrages by non-native troops. Similarly, the appalling treatment of Irish civilians in the 1640s by English soldiers was grounded in the widely held belief that Irish Catholics were “backward” with respect to religion and culture. Barnaby Rich described them as “more uncivil, more uncleanly, more barbarous and more brutish in their customs and demeanours than any other people in the known world.” Moreover, it

56 Johnson, The Fairfax Correspondence, I, p. 203.
57 Muchembled, La violence au village, esp. pp. 107-118.
58 Hale, War and Society in Renaissance Europe, pp. 190-191.
59 Wood, The King’s Army, p. 236.
60 Hale, “On the Concept of the ‘Other’ and the ‘Enemy’”.
61 De Bourdeille de Brantôme, Oeuvres complètes, VI, pp. 220-227; Tracy, Emperor Charles V, Impresario of War, pp. 32-36; Parker, The Dutch Revolt, p. 178.
made little difference when soldiers were meant to be allies of the civilian population. This can be exemplified by the behaviour of poorly paid Scots forces in England during the first Civil War, who committed numerous atrocities in their search for supplies, even though they were meant to be billeted upon a friendly population.63

The irregularity of their pay and their ready resort to violence when unpaid were not the only things that distinguished soldiers from civilian wage-labourers. Being paid a wage was not necessarily the main or even sole reason for fighting. All soldiers anticipated an economic reward, but this might equally come from ransom or from booty as from pay, certainly before c. 1650. “Do you think we are in the King’s service for the four ducats a month we earn?”, Henry VIII’s Spanish captains serving at Boulogne rhetorically asked their general. “Not so my lord: on the contrary, we serve with the hope of taking prisoners and getting their ransom.”64 Others expected to make a profit by picking over the dead and wounded on the battlefield and from the sack of a town after it had been taken by assault. The laws of war permitted the soldiers three days of unrestricted plunder of a town that had been stormed after it had unreasonably refused to surrender. This was justified partly on the grounds that it would otherwise have been impossible to bring the soldiers to the point where they were prepared to undertake the hazardous operation of storming a breach. Outside these instances, monetary reward might come through routine pillaging of peasants and others. Thus a sixteenth-century woodcut by Erhard Schön shows a Landsknecht and his female companion with poems accompanying the two characters. The Landsknecht, a former cobbler, explains that he will abandon shoemaking for soldiering to gain what he can, since being a cobbler rewards him little, though “in many wars I have won/Great wealth and manifold honors/Who then knows whom fortune favors?” She replies that, “Perhaps so much may be my winning [from pillage]/Much more than ever I could whilst spinning.”65 We should not be surprised by soldiers’ expectation of reward by means of ransom and pillage, for the spoils of war figured prominently as a form of legitimate compensation in the late Middle Ages, and a long tradition of legal plunder preceded early modern

63 British Library, Thomason Tracts, E365(9), A Remonstrance Concerning the Misdemeanours of some of the Scots Souldiers in the County of Yorke, 1646. On patterns of soldier/civilian violence, see Tallett, “Soldats et actes de violence à l’encontre des civils dans les îles britanniques”.

64 Hume, Chronicle of King Henry VIII...Written in Spanish by an unknown hand.

65 Lynn, Women, Armies, and Warfare in Early Modern Europe, pp. 16-17.
military practice. The taking of spoils was a defining characteristic of just, or public, war.66

Cash-strapped governments, unable to pay the soldiers in full or sometimes at all, had little choice but to accept the routine nature of pillage. The Mercure françois put it bluntly: “One finds enough soldiers when one gives them the freedom to live off the land, and allowing them to pillage supports them without pay.”67 Indeed, sometimes the situation could be turned to one’s advantage. The system of regulated plunder that came to a peak in the Thirty Years War sought, not altogether successfully, to allow armies to live off the population by taking regular Kontributionen. Although heavy, Kontributionen were meant to preserve the productive capacity of the territory while tapping it for the army’s benefit.68 At other times, giving soldiers free rein to pillage was a deliberate act of strategy, designed to hamper the movements of the enemy forces and bring about their disintegration. Integral to pillaging before c. 1650 was the presence with the army of non-combatants, including women, who foraged, plundered, managed the “take”, and exchanged goods for money or food with the sutlers and “fences”. The significance of all this from our point of view is that soldiers were not so much being paid to fight but rather being given “a de facto licence to pillage in order to support themselves, often with the aid of their comrades and female partners”, and in these circumstances the soldier should be regarded less as a wage-earner and more as “a kind of sub-contractor, empowered to support himself by a form of petty entrepreneurship in a family economy based upon pillage.”69

The relationship of general contractors and noble officers to their “employers” was equally ambiguous. As I have already noted, for the employer the attraction of using a general contractor was that in return for only a modest “up-front” payment, the contractor and his network of subcontracting colonels and captains, financiers, and munitionnaires, were prepared to subsidize initial recruitment costs, and then cover the expense of paying, equipping, and supplying the troops until well into the campaign. The contractor and his network of associates were thus not so much employees of the state as its creditors. True, the use of general contractors was phased out after the end of the Thirty Years War. But, as we have seen, governments turned increasingly to their nobilities, who were expected to use

---

66 Keen, The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages.
68 See Tallett, War and Society in Early-Modern Europe, pp. 55-56, for a summary.
their personal resources to help with the recruitment, pay, and supply of their unit. As Redlich has observed, regiments ceased to be the large-scale business enterprises of Wallenstein’s day, but they nevertheless represented an investment from which the colonel/captain might hope to recover his capital and, with any luck, generate a profit. Whether nobles did always make a profit is open to doubt: as Hervé Drévillon has shown in the case of France, they acquired honour as a result of military service, but little monetary gain. Nevertheless, the fact remains that they were prepared to subsidize the crown, and in this respect they too were as much creditors as employees of the state.

There are, then, real difficulties in seeing the soldier, certainly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as a wage-labourer who fought merely for pay. However, the situation did become clearer by the eighteenth century. As any number of examples testify, the failure to pay and supply troops and the tacit approval of ransom and pillage as substitutes for regular wages resulted in mutiny, indiscipline, disorder, or desertion. Any one of these could cause the collapse of the army as a fighting force and bring a campaign to a juddering halt. As the experienced contractor Count Rhingrave, presciently warned, “The soldier cannot live on air […] where there is hunger and necessity, there will arise disorder.” A seventeenth-century observer similarly noted that “The greatest weakening of an army is disorder. The greatest cause of disorder is want of pay.” The duc d’Estampes warned that if he could not provide for his men they would either desert or join the enemy “because such men follow the éscu”. Accordingly, from the mid-seventeenth century, governments began, albeit falteringly, to put in place a series of linked initiatives aimed at producing military forces that were more tightly controlled by the prince and better supported by the state. The objective behind these initiatives was to improve military efficiency and to turn armies into more effective instruments of state power. As Michel le Tellier succinctly noted, “To secure the livelihood of the soldier is to secure victory for the king.”

---

70 Redlich, The German Military Enterpriser and His Workforce, II, pp. 55-62.
71 Drévillon, L’impôt du sang. His archival sources probably lead him to understate the costs incurred.
72 Lublinskaya, Documents pour server à l’histoire des guerres civiles en France, p. 246.
73 British Library, Thomason Tracts, E16(36) Observations Concerning Princes and States upon Peace and Warre, 1642.
75 Quoted in André, Michel le Tellier et l’organisation de l’armée monarchique, p. 64.
First, governments sought to pay their soldiers regularly even if not always in full. The Dutch in many respects led the way, and were generally regarded as the best – in the sense of most reliable – payers in the late seventeenth century. Not only did the States have access to liquid funds, drawn from taxes levied upon the Republic’s thriving commercial trade, but they made use of the innovation of *solliciteurs-militair*, businessmen who, in return for an agreed monthly sum, were prepared to advance money to a captain and his company, thus ensuring the men their pay. A formalization of the system gave the *solliciteurs-militair* a monopoly on paying the troops in return for an agreed interest rate of 6.95 per cent on all the funds they advanced.\(^76\) The Dutch system of payment to some extent prefigured what would happen elsewhere. During the War of the Austrian Succession (1741-1749), for example, pay advances to the troops in the two French armies operating in Germany, the *armée de Bavière* and the *armée de Westphalie*, were handled increasingly by a body of specialist financiers such as Mauvillain.\(^77\) If soldiers were paid more routinely, governments nonetheless took action to ensure that there was no scope for bargaining over levels of pay and conditions of service. Thus the *Landsknecht* regiments were reorganized into companies; their elected officers were abolished; pay was tied to musters; and troops lost the right to represent themselves. In a similar way, employers sought means to restrict the autonomy of the Swiss pikemen.\(^78\)

Secondly, paying the soldiers allowed the enforcement of harsher discipline. As Everhard van Reyd stated bluntly, “One could not hang those [soldiers] one did not pay”, a judgement confirmed by General George Monck who concluded that “if [the men] are punctually paid [...] then your general can with justice punish them severely”\(^79\). By the mid-seventeenth century, most of the rules and conventions governing the conduct of warfare were already in place.\(^80\) As far as the ordinary soldier was concerned, these were embodied in the articles of war issued by commanders at the

---

77 Félix, “Victualling Louis XV’s Armies”, p. 10.
80 Parker, “Early Modern Europe”, p. 41.
start of each campaign. The articles would not be altered in substance, though they were greatly expanded in detail, but from the second half of the seventeenth century they began to be enforced with a new rigour.81 In particular, those sections that forbade looting, theft, and mistreatment of civilians were implemented in an attempt to cut out or at least restrain unlicensed pillaging. Marshal Claude Villars’s use of “the very greatest severity” against breaches of discipline with respect to pillaging was typical.82 All eighteenth-century armies thus had their equivalent of the French prévôts de maréchaux charged with keeping order in the camp and on the march, and military courts were held on a more routine basis than they had been earlier.

Apart from restricting pillage, the enforcement of more rigorous discipline had the extra benefit from the commander’s point of view that raw recruits could be made to march, drill, and practise battlefield manoeuvres. Additionally, troops could now be obliged to perform duties such as digging trenches and latrines, carrying their own baggage, and preparing earthwork fortifications. These were duties that their predecessors had frequently jibbed at and devolved onto the numerous women and other camp followers, or onto civilians haplessly pressed into service.83 As Wood has noted, these privileges were analogous to those of master-craftsmen, and their existence had meant that troops in the first half of our period had “operated more like skilled and somewhat independent contract workers, and the whole army as a cross between a warrior society and a specialized labor force”.84 Although it is important not to exaggerate the contrasts with an earlier epoch and to acknowledge national differences of practice, by the eighteenth century soldiers were increasingly cowed and obedient products of harsh discipline, epitomised at the extreme by the robotic Prussian forces, very different from the swaggering freebooters of two centuries earlier.85

As well as restricting opportunities for pillage, governments also denied soldiers the possibility of profit by taking over responsibility for ransoming prisoners. Henry VIII’s Spanish captains had no counterpart in the

81 Navarreau, Le logement et les ustensiles des gens de guerres; Tallett, War and Society in Early-Modern Europe, pp. 123-126.
83 McNeill, The Pursuit of Power, pp. 117-143. See plate 6 and accompanying inscription of Callot’s “Les Misères...de la Guerre” (1633), depicting villagers being led away probably to act as labourers: Daniel, Callot’s Etchings, item 271.
84 Wood, The King’s Army, p. 304.
85 Kunisch, Fürst-Gesellschaft-Krieg, pp. 178-182; and the comments of Frederick the Great on “Prussian Troops” in Military Instructions.
eighteenth century as governments asserted that prisoners became the property of the state which would handle negotiations for their release and take the proceeds of any ransom. Soldiers thus lost out financially on two fronts. More positively, however, governments did begin to take greater care of the welfare of their soldiers, arranging to supply them directly with food, equipment, tobacco, clothing, and housing, things that the soldier had previously been expected to purchase out of his pay. Again, the motivation was not altruistic but pragmatic: governments recognized that poorly supplied troops did not win wars. The Spanish Army of Flanders had led the way in this regard in the sixteenth century, but by the 1700s it was becoming commonplace for governments to put in place arrangements with large-scale civilian contractors for the supply of goods to the army.86 One unlooked-for consequence of the direct supply of clothing to the troops was that there was greater standardization of dress, leading to the development of uniforms with all that this implied in terms of making men more amenable to drill and discipline.87

To be sure, we should not exaggerate either the extent of these changes or the abruptness of the breach with the past. Change was gradual rather than revolutionary. The mechanisms of state administration were creaky and frequently broke down, leaving the soldier unpaid, unfed, and poorly clothed. Despite the harsh enforcement of discipline, desertion and disorder remained common features of armies, and civilians still suffered at their hands. The number of mutinies certainly diminished after c. 1650, but they still continued to take place and might have serious repercussions, as John Prebble’s study of Highland troops in British service demonstrates.88 Nonetheless, there were significant developments taking place, and the eighteenth-century soldier may be seen as more dependent than his sixteenth- and seventeenth-century predecessors on his wage and goods-in-kind provided by his employer, unable to bargain about pay and terms of employment, increasingly hemmed about by regulation, and part of a military machine in which standardization and uniformity was becoming the norm.

86 Félix, “Victualling Louis XV’s Armies”. See also Côté, Joseph-Michel Cadet, for the supply of troops overseas.
87 Labourers in the sixteenth-century French royal army had been given uniforms to make desertion harder: Wood, The King’s Army, p. 166.
88 Prebble, Mutiny.
Social and cultural restraints on soldiering; duration of service

Some of the social and cultural factors that influenced recruitment – the identification of the nobility with military service and the ability of the better-off to avoid impressment and militia service – have already been alluded to, but it is appropriate at this point to look at two other socio-cultural aspects of fighting for a living, and also to ask how long the soldier might expect to serve. It should be noted at the outset that the labour market for soldiers was an international one throughout the period. Foreigners constituted a significant and sometimes the majority element within armies. For instance, around 70 per cent of Francis I’s forces in 1542 were non-native, though the record probably goes to Sweden: only 12 per cent of its forces in 1632 were native.89 Such examples may not represent the norm, but it nonetheless remained common for a ruler to have half his forces made up of foreigners. One reason for this high percentage figure in the sixteenth century was the need to employ specialist troops whose recruitment had a regional basis: Genoese crossbowmen, Albanian stradiots, German Reiter able to perform the complex manoeuvres associated with the caracole, Bohemian users of the Wagenburg, Savoyard light cavalry, and Swiss pikemen. Thus, in France a memoir prepared for Catherine de Medici, the queen mother, at the start of the first civil war in 1562, envisaged using foreign contract troops to provide 53.8 per cent of the crown’s infantry forces (10.8 per cent Swiss, 27 per cent German, 8 per cent Italian, and 8 per cent Spanish) and 48.6 per cent of the cavalry (21 per cent Flemish, 25.6 per cent German, 2 per cent Savoyard).90 The development of general military contracting further eroded the distinction between native and non-native troops. The enterprisers’ polyglot forces came from every nationality. As Parrott observes, high-quality soldiers were important; origins were not.91

A shift in the methods of recruitment after c. 1650, with an increased emphasis on impressment, militia, and recruiting by commissioned captains, reasserted the importance of national origins, since the captains were often subjects of the prince whom they served. Nevertheless, foreigners continued to represent a substantial proportion of the state’s forces, ranging from 14 to 60 per cent in the armies of Britain, France, Spain, and Prussia, though in the case of the latter many so-called foreigners were actually recruited

90 Wood, *The King’s Army*, derived from table 2.8, p. 56.
91 Parrott, “From Military Enterprise to Standing Armies”, p. 82.
from Hohenzollern lands. The pattern evidenced by the larger states held good for many smaller ones too. Thus in 1734 Piedmont fielded 14,000 foreigners and 26,000 native troops, the non-native contingent comprising some 35 per cent of the total. In the context of increased army size, non-national recruitment remained a resource that was too important to ignore. One incidental consequence of the international nature of the labour market for soldiers was the high levels of migration, particularly from fertile recruiting grounds such as sixteenth-century Italy and Ireland throughout the period.

If national origins presented little bar to army service, what about gender? This may seem a curious question to pose, given that combatant soldiers were male. But what John Lynn has called the “campaign community” comprised a large number of civilians—craftsmen, lackeys, tradesmen, sutlers, carters, and pawnbrokers, for example. The army’s “tail” included numerous women, though they did not figure on any muster lists. Their presence in armies was essential. They formed part of the libertine lifestyle that induced men to sign on; and they were integral to the maintenance and operation of armies. They were irreplaceable for the performance of gender-based duties: laundering, sewing, nursing, prostitution. They were also expected in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to assist with siege work, digging latrines, foraging, and pillaging. As governments acted to reduce pillage and as the state’s capacity to pay and supply armies grew in the eighteenth century, so women’s role in securing food supplies declined. Governments, which had always regarded women in armies as potentially troublesome and as extra mouths to feed, now acted to restrict their numbers. Fewer women than previously marched with the armies, and as numbers of women diminished so too did the soldier’s freewheeling libertine lifestyle.

What of the length and terms of service? Sixteenth-century contract troops were the most privileged in these respects. Their period of service was defined by the Bestallung and was usually limited to fighting a particular campaign. The contract also set out the conditions of service. Thus, 5,000 German troops contracted for service in Friuli refused orders from their Venetian employers

93 Loriga, Soldats – Un laboratoire disciplinaire, pp. 36-37, and tables 1/1 and 1/3, pp. 237-239.
95 Lynn, Women, Armies, and Warfare in Early Modern Europe; Wilson, “German Women and War, 1500-1800”.

redirecting them to the fleet because their original contract had ruled out their use at sea.\textsuperscript{96} Additionally, they were in theory free to choose their employer, though in practice this choice might be restricted, since governments in the sixteenth century felt it worthwhile paying retainers to contractors to ensure first call on their services in the event of hostilities.\textsuperscript{97} The hard-won victory of Francis I against the Swiss at Marignano (September 1515) ironically encouraged the French to make permanent treaties with the Swiss cantons to ensure a monopoly over their outstanding pikemen.\textsuperscript{98} Moreover, the leaders of contract forces sometimes received grants of land and titles that made it hard for them to switch sides; they were reluctant to change during a campaign lest they lose arrears of pay and taxes from their current employer; and they had to consider geographical proximity and political relationships with a prospective employer before signing any contract.

Unlike sixteenth-century contract troops, volunteers who signed on with a captain made an open-ended agreement, to serve until disbandment at the end of the campaign or the war, whenever that might be. In practice, troops were frequently laid off in the autumn, especially in the first half of our period. Impressed men had no choice with regard to the length and terms of employment, and there was a trend in the eighteenth century, especially in some German states, to extend the period of service dramatically. For example, service in the Prussian army for those who had been forcibly drafted was theoretically for an unlimited period, though it was restricted to twenty years in 1792. In practice, however, many recruits were discharged early, and most received long periods of furlough allowing them to return home at harvest time.\textsuperscript{99} The extension of periods of service went alongside a trend towards retaining a body of men throughout the year, leading to the establishment of permanent forces. True, this was not a novelty. Standing armies had emerged in many polities during the fifteenth century, and rulers additionally endeavoured to secure the ongoing availability of forces (not quite the same thing) by paying retainers to military contractors and through treaties with the Swiss cantons, as I have noted. But from the late seventeenth century onwards, the number of soldiers retained by the state throughout the year grew quite significantly.\textsuperscript{100} The need for peacetime forces grew with the decline of traditional and general contracting which

\textsuperscript{96} Mallett and Hale, \textit{The Military Organization of a Renaissance State}, p. 319.
\textsuperscript{97} See ibid., pp. 322-323; Parker, \textit{The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road}, p. 39, for examples.
\textsuperscript{98} Potter, \textit{A History of France, 1460-1560}, pp. 264-265.
\textsuperscript{99} Wilson, “Social Militarization in Eighteenth Century Germany”, pp. 5, 16.
\textsuperscript{100} Tallett and Trim, “Then Was Then and Now is Now”, p. 22, and Gunn, “War and the Emergence of the State”, pp. 54-58.
made it harder to hire an army “off the shelf”. A permanently retained body of forces, especially if they were veterans, provided the core around which the army could be expanded rapidly in wartime.

Once enrolled in the army, all soldiers were forbidden to desert, and only sixteenth-century contract troops had the opportunity (at least in theory) of changing sides during a war should the current employer not fulfil his side of the agreement. Desertion and enlisting with the enemy were offences that figured in all military codes of conduct. As with much else to do with army life, there were efforts from c. 1650 onwards to enforce these twin aspects of the disciplinary codes in an attempt to enhance the fighting efficiency of armies.

**Aggregate contract to state commission armies?**

Our review of early modern soldiers suggests that the broad outlines concerning the evolution of army style advanced by John Lynn in 1996 hold good.101 The aggregate contract army (1450-1650) was indeed pieced together by a variety of voluntary and involuntary methods, as well as through a quasi-feudal procedure that was a mixture of the two. The second half of our period (1650-1790) witnessed the development of the state commission army, a military force that was both better supported by the state and more tightly controlled by the prince. Regulation, discipline, and uniformity increasingly became the order of the day, and there was a growing move towards the direct state supply of goods that the soldier had previously been expected to provide himself, albeit this was generally conducted through the employment of private financiers and merchants. Numbers of soldiers increased, and the period witnessed the development of an existing trend towards the maintenance of standing forces. The Spanish Army of Flanders and the Swedes had been the paradigm forces in the period 1500-1650. After that point, two competing models emerged: the Dutch, who used subsidy forces, and the French army under Louis XIV, the latter being displaced by the Prussians, who became the paradigm for Europeans from the mid-eighteenth century until their defeats during the Wars of the French Revolution and debacle in 1806. However, if the broad outlines of Lynn’s thesis remain intact, some amendments are called for, as he has acknowledged.

It is important to stress the continuing importance of both entrepreneurship and the nobility in recruiting and supporting armies throughout the

---

101 Lynn, “The Evolution of Army Style in the Modern West".
period and not just between 1500 and 1650. Traditional contracting as well as general contracting did go into steep decline after the mid-seventeenth century. Yet the commercialization of warfare continued in two important respects. First, the role of the nobility, who had always been integral to the raising of forces, was developed in novel ways. Monarchs continued to play upon the longstanding twinning of military service and noble status to persuade their elites both to join the army and to bring men with them. As we have seen, in some armies, most notably that of France, the introduction of a system of venality further encouraged them to use their private wealth and influence to recruit and support troops in the hope of a profit in the long term. Elsewhere, the hope of profit from the management of a company similarly persuaded them to put their money and prestige at the service of the monarch. The regiment was undoubtedly under greater state control in the eighteenth century, but entrepreneurship endured. We should not be surprised by this continued use of the nobility, for much recent scholarship has stressed the extent to which rulers, even in supposedly “absolute” states, relied upon negotiation and compromise with the social and financial elites – whether these comprised the traditional nobility, members of the court, provincial worthies, administrative and legal personnel, merchants, or others – to conduct business. This was especially the case with respect to the creation and maintenance of an army, a body of a size and cost unmatched by any other institution in the state. As David Parrott has noted, “The creation or transformation of an army is not some act of will imposed by the ruler upon a passive body of subjects. Armies and military institutions represent the relationship between rulers and political elites.”

The commercialization of warfare endured in a second way. A number of mainly German polities, but also Savoy and Sweden for brief periods, began to lease their forces to larger, and richer, states in return for the payment of subsidies. The hire of soldiers for monetary gain to the highest bidder, with little regard for the welfare of the men involved, has led to it being described slightly as Soldatenhandel (soldier-trade); and the ruler of Hesse-Cassel in particular has been vilified for apparently bemoaning the fact that “only” 1,465 of his subjects were killed at the battle of Trenton when the British paid a premium for those killed in action rather than for those wounded or captured. Of course, we should not exaggerate the commercial aspect of this soldier-trade. As Peter Wilson has demonstrated, much more

102 Parrott, “From Military Enterprise to Standing Armies”, p. 77.
103 Ingrao, The Hessian Mercenary State, p. 1; Wilson, War, State and Society in Württemberg, pp. 74-77, reviews the literature.
than money was involved, the princes who hired out their subjects being concerned at least as much with the political, dynastic, and diplomatic returns to be gained. Indeed, the purely cash profits were frequently quite small or non-existent, most of the subsidy being eaten up by the costs of recruitment. Among the fortunate few to turn a monetary profit were Hanover and the much smaller Ansbach-Bayreuth in 1797. Hesse-Cassel too stood out by virtue of its exceptionality in making large profits from the soldier-trade. Moreover, German states were discriminating when choosing subsidy partners, not always going for the highest bidder; and contracts generally contained clauses protecting the rights of the soldiers by, for instance, insisting that they be kept together as a unit and operate under the command of their own officers. Nevertheless, even when these caveats are taken into account, there remained an important commercial aspect to this *Kriegshandwerk*, or “warcraft”.  

The *Soldatenhandel* poses a more significant difficulty for Lynn’s taxonomy of army style, which needs to be adjusted accordingly, as he has proposed. This is because these hired regiments exhibited characteristics both of mercenary forces and of conscript troops at the same time. The term “mercenary” in the early modern period has to be defined with care. Modern definitions centre upon the tripartite notions of fighting for pay, foreign service, and professionalism, and these have frequently and inappropriately been transposed to the early modern period. However, none of these qualities quite captures the essence of mercenary service in early modern Europe. First, after c. 1650 all soldiers expected to be paid, but that did not make them all mercenaries. Before 1650 pay was only one form of compensation for soldiering. Yet even if we extend the concept of monetary reward beyond pay to include the profits that soldiers hoped to make from ransoms and from pillage, this does not take us much further, since again all hoped to make a profit in this fashion. Secondly, the notion of foreign service is potentially misleading. To be sure, there is some reason to

equate mercenaries with foreigners because many of them in the sixteenth century were specialists with some regional basis for their recruitment. The instances of the Genoese crossbowmen, Albanian stradiots, German Landsknechte and Reiter, Savoyard light cavalry, and Swiss pikemen have already been noted. But all early modern armies contained large numbers of “foreign” troops, not all of whom were described as mercenaries and, conversely, there were many native recruits who volunteered to serve their ruler but who would be described as mercenaries. Thus, Thomas Churchyard referred to “mercenaries” taken by the Earl of Essex to Ireland, even though they were mostly men from Queen Elizabeth’s domains. Finally, professionalism: this has to do with expertise, standards, and longevity in service and, while well-established mercenary units, such as the Landsknechte and Reiter for example, would be expected to display these characteristics, professionalism could equally be a characteristic of non-mercenary forces.

These points are thrown into sharper focus if we establish what the identifying characteristics of the early modern mercenary actually were. First was the notion that they were “hyred souldiers”, as one sixteenth-century chronicler put it. A second and related point was the notion of free agency. The mercenary was not obliged to fight, by reason of feudal obligation or impressment, for example. He had a choice about whether to serve. Finally, the mercenary had no interest in the cause but fought simply for his own private interest. It is the second of these three, interlocking characteristics that raises problems for the classification of the eighteenth-century Soldatenhandel. The soldiers involved in it were hired, and they had no direct interest in the cause, and in these twin respects they were mercenaries, but many of them were not free agents since they had been forcibly recruited into their ruler’s army, either through impressment or the militia system (or some variant of it). This implies the need for a new category in Lynn’s taxonomy. He suggests a hybrid category, that of the “conscript-mercenary”.

Discussion of mercenaries leads to a final area in which Lynn’s model needs to be adjusted. He points to the unreliability of the aggregate contract

107 Though these contingents were actually not as homogeneous as is usually supposed and the geographical origins of “German” or “Swiss” units could be quite diverse. The Swiss were occasionally referred to as “Allemans”, and Landsknechte could be recruited in Guelders, the Vaud, and Savoy: Baumann, Landsknecht; Potter, Renaissance France, p. 131.
110 Quoted in Trim, “Fighting ‘Jacob’s Wars’”, p. 80.
army largely because it “was composed in the main of mercenary bands” with the consequence that troops felt little loyalty to the ruler they fought for and were ready to turn on their employer, to pillage his subjects, and to mutiny.\(^{112}\) But is such a judgement on mercenaries justified? Early modern contemporaries certainly had a low opinion of them, but this sprang from a distaste for men who made war a profession rather than a vocation, not from any criticism of their fighting abilities.\(^{113}\) So long as they were paid, mercenaries were loyal and prepared to fight to the death if necessary. Thus, at the battle of Dreux (1562) the whole Landsknecht regiment fighting for the Protestants was killed or captured while there were very high casualties among the Swiss infantry fighting in the royal army.\(^{114}\) Potter has concluded that in the sixteenth century mercenaries were employed precisely because “they were the best men available […] and usually, they did their job effectively”; and Parrott reaches similar conclusions with respect to the forces of the general contractors of the subsequent century.\(^{115}\) Thus the employment of mercenaries did not of itself render an army unreliable: quite the contrary, for they proved loyal and effective fighters. Failure to pay them meant they downed arms, mutinied, and turned to pillage. But, as I noted earlier, this was what all troops did in such circumstances, though mercenaries may have attracted the greatest attention and opprobrium. Whatever its composition, any army that went without pay and supplies was liable to desertion, mutiny, disorder, and pillage.

The drivers of change

John Lynn’s taxonomy proposing a shift from an aggregate contract to a state commission army in the early modern period thus appears broadly correct. But what were the reasons for the change? Technological innovation has traditionally been privileged as an explanatory factor in military matters. However, what is notable about the period as a whole is the relative lack of novelty with regard to weapons systems and the slowness of their deploy-

\(^{112}\) Lynn, “The Evolution of Army Style in the Modern West”, p. 517.
\(^{113}\) This was a significant factor for Machiavelli, who deplored “men who make war their only calling”, even though he also had little regard for their loyalty and fighting qualities. See Machiavelli, Arte della Guerra: Machiavelli, The Art of War, Wood (ed.), p. 20.
\(^{114}\) Wood, The King’s Army, pp. 120, 199.
\(^{115}\) Potter, Renaissance France at War, p. 151; Parrott, “From Military Enterprise to Standing Armies”, pp. 83–85. See too the favourable comments on mercenaries in fifteenth-century Italy in Mallett, Mercenaries and Their Masters, pp. 185, 195-198, 242.
ment. Pikes gradually gave way to hand-held firearms, and artillery came to have a significant place on the battlefield, but the pace of innovation was slow, and of itself purely technological innovation played little part in the transformation of army style.

Rather than highlighting the “material technology” of conflict as a driver of change, we would do better to concentrate on the “social technology” of warfare, especially the role of discipline, army size, and institutional structures. As noted earlier, one of the features of the state commission army was the attempt to enforce higher standards of discipline. Contrary to what has been argued by proponents of the “military revolution”, discipline was not primarily imposed as a means of ensuring that soldiers were able to handle their weapons and manoeuvre effectively on the battlefield, though these were certainly significant byproducts. Rather, discipline was necessary to avoid the resort to pillaging, mutiny, and disorder that all too often paralysed armies in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This was why the enforcement of discipline was only one of a package of measures designed to address these issues: paying soldiers more regularly; supplying them directly with items such as clothing, food, equipment, and housing; taking ransoms out of the hands of ordinary soldiers; restricting the number of women and “hangers-on” who travelled with the army; and limiting the ability of elite units to bargain over pay and conditions.

The rationale behind all these measures was the urgent necessity of making armies more effective as instruments of state power. This was also why the number of men under arms increased, albeit not in linear fashion, for quantity was as important as quality. A large military establishment allowed states to recover from defeat, to replace a routed field army, to sustain the demands of attritional warfare, and to occupy and control territory. To be sure, it could be argued that in imposing greater central control of their armies, governments were seeking to save money, and it was true that they were mindful of the desirability of curbing the activities of corrupt captains who swindled their own men and the royal treasury. But a search for economies was not what drove the transition away from aggregate contract armies, since the state commission forces actually cost more than their predecessors. They may possibly have been “cheaper man for man”; yet overall they were much more expensive. They were more regularly paid, they required more state-provided goods and services, and they were far

117 Rogers, The Military Revolution Debate, is the best introduction to the debate.
more numerous than their predecessors and consequently more costly. Thus, Joël Félix estimates the additional costs to the French treasury of the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years War at a staggering 2-2.5 billion livres tournois. Though eighteenth-century governments had a larger resource base on which to draw by comparison with their predecessors, the result of demographic growth and a burgeoning (and increasingly global) economy, military costs nevertheless ran well ahead of resources. To bridge the funding gap, eighteenth-century rulers resorted to a range of measures which varied from state to state, including raising levels of taxation, making use of loans, and expropriating resources, albeit with varying degrees of success. It was not, then, a search for economies that drove the transition from aggregate contract to state commission armies, but rather an attempt to make armies more fit for purpose even if this meant at its most basic level that the army simply stayed in existence.

We should finally recognize that what informed governments in their search for military efficiency was the intensely competitive relationship that existed between the states of western Europe that all too often spilled over into open conflict. The reasons for war were many and varied: dynastic claims, religion, trade rivalry, territorial aggrandizement, and the pursuit of gloire. Yet whatever the precise cause of conflict, western Europe was in a constant condition of tension, and sensible governments used intervals of peace to prepare for the next round of conflict. No wonder they were concerned with the war-waging capacities of their armies, for the fate of rulers and even of states might be decided by their military capacities. Portugal, Siena, and Scotland were absorbed by their larger neighbours as a result of failures in military campaigns, just as military success was crucial to the establishment of an independent polity in the case of the Dutch Republic. In 1742, France and others planned to dismember Austria, Prussia narrowly escaped such a fate at the commencement of the Seven Years War, Sweden’s dearly won Baltic empire was taken from it, and in 1772 Poland suffered the first of the partitions that would remove it from the map until 1919. This intensely competitive nature of the European state system was what the eminent jurist Emerich Vattel had in mind when he argued for a pre-emptive right of self-defence by coalitions of states against over-mighty neighbours.

121 Vattel, The Law of Nations or the Principles of Natural Law, bk 3 ch. 3.
The pressures to “keep up” in military terms by imitating or adapting perceived best practice of paradigm armies were therefore intense. It should be stressed that these competitive pressures did not operate in some simple fashion. All states had regard to their own particular circumstances. Some emphasized the use of impressment and militia service over the recruitment of volunteers; some preferred to hire troops, others to take subsidies; some employed especially harsh discipline; some – and Austria would be an example – were notably slow and inefficient in providing for their soldiers. Yet the direction of travel was clear: larger armies, stricter discipline, more direct state supply, and greater state control. The consequences for soldier-labour were profound.122

122 It should also be stressed that interstate competition did not lead inevitably to the emergence of the so-called absolutist or modern state in some Weberian fashion. There were a number of different national trajectories that could eventuate in the emergence of more or less coercive, absolutist states that existed alongside polities with quite different constitutional structures though all had responded to the demands of warfare. See James, “Warfare and the Rise of the State”, pp. 28-29 and *passim.*