Fighting for a Living

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The Scottish mercenary as a migrant labourer in Europe, 1550–1650

James Miller

Between 1550 and 1650 the government in Scotland, whether as the monarch or as the Privy Council acting in the royal name, permitted more than sixty levies of troops to fight in continental Europe. This occurred throughout the period of study but with peaks in the 1570s and the 1620s-1640s, corresponding with periods of fighting in the Low Countries and later in the Germanic lands in the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). This is summarized in Table 6.1. As the raising of soldiers to fight overseas also took place before and after these dates and as there were unofficial levies, despite attempts to stop them for fear of unrest or political embarrassment, the true extent of recruitment of men to fight overseas may never be fully known. The size of a licensed levy varied considerably, from as few as sixty men in the licences granted to Patrik Murray on 25 March 1602 for service in the Low Countries and to Thomas Moffat on 23 July 1635 for Swedish service in Prussia, to as many as several thousands. In at least some instances, for example for the 3,000 men each to Robert Earl of Nithsdale, Alexander Lord Spynie, and James Sinclair of Murkle on 3 April 1627 for Danish service, these ambitious targets were not reached; and in the case of others, for example to Robert Stewart for Poland in 1623, very little, if any, recruiting took place. The more usual figures mentioned in the licences are 200 or 300 men. With a proviso in mind about the accuracy and reliability of these figures, it has been estimated that during the Thirty Years War (1618–1648), when the recruitment of soldiers for overseas service was at its height, as many as 50,000 Scotsmen bore arms in European conflicts.

1 I am grateful to Dr David Worthington, Head of the Centre for History, University of the Highlands and Islands, Dornoch, Scotland, for his help and encouragement with this paper.

2 Murdoch, “Introduction”, p. 19. Steve Murdoch and Alexia Grosjean have produced a database on Scots active in the military and other walks of life in northern Europe in the period between 1580 and 1707; this can be accessed at http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/history/ssne.
Table 6.1 A summary of some recruitment of soldiers in Scotland between 1550 and 1650 to join continental armies, as detailed in the Register of the Privy Council of Scotland (RPCS) and other sources. Some of the levies failed to achieve much or to reach the designated target numbers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Destination</th>
<th>Number of men designated in the source, with name of senior officer or recruiter in some instances</th>
<th>Source (all RPCS* unless otherwise stated)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1552</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>300 footmen and 400 cavalry, followed by recruitment of “2 ensigns” (Gilbert Kennedy, 3rd Earl of Cassillis)</td>
<td>I, pp. 131-136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1564</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>XIV, p. XLVII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1568</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Unknown (Captain Moncur)</td>
<td>I, p. 640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1573</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1,600 (Archibald Ruthven)</td>
<td>II, p. 235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1573</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>300 (Captain Campbell)</td>
<td>II, p. 238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1573</td>
<td>Low Countries</td>
<td>900, under three separate licences; it is likely that many more went without licence</td>
<td>II, pp. 237, 256.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1577</td>
<td>Low Countries or Flanders</td>
<td>13 licences issued – numbers of men not specified but possibly 3,500</td>
<td>II, p. 643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1577</td>
<td>Danzig</td>
<td>150 (Captain Rentoun)</td>
<td>II, p. 621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1578</td>
<td>Low Countries</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>III, p. 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1578</td>
<td>“Protestant service abroad” (Low Countries?)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>III, p. 213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1602</td>
<td>Low Countries</td>
<td>460 (including licence to Patrik Murray)</td>
<td>VI, p. 721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1602</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Unknown (Colonel Thomas Ogilvie)</td>
<td>Fischer, p. 70**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1605</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1,600 foot and 600 cavalry (Sir James Spens)</td>
<td>Fischer, p. 71**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1607</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>200 cavalry (Robert Kinnaird)</td>
<td>Fischer, p. 71**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1610</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>VIII, p. 619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1612</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>300 (Andrew Ramsay’s illegal levy)</td>
<td>IX, p. 430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1620</td>
<td>Bohemia</td>
<td>1,500 (Sir Andrew Gray)</td>
<td>XII, pp. 255-259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1621</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>XII, p. 412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1622</td>
<td>Low Countries</td>
<td>Unknown (Archibald Campbell, 7th Earl of Argyle’s recruitment for Spanish service)</td>
<td>XIII, p. LVI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1623</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>8,000 (Robert Stewart)</td>
<td>XIII, p. LVII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1624</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1,200 (James Spens)</td>
<td>XIII, p. 478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Destination</td>
<td>Number of men designated in the source, with name of senior officer or recruiter in some instances</td>
<td>Source (all RPCS* unless otherwise stated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1625</td>
<td>Count Mansfeld’s army (Palatinate)</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>2nd ser., I, p. 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1626</td>
<td>Denmark (later Sweden)</td>
<td>Possibly 3,000 (Sir Donald Mackay, Lord Reay)</td>
<td>2nd ser., I, p. 244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1627</td>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>9,000 (probably fewer than 5,000 recruited) (Nithsdale-Spynie-Murkle levies)</td>
<td>2nd ser., I, p. 565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1628</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>300 (James Spens)</td>
<td>2nd ser., II, p. 397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1629</td>
<td>Low Countries</td>
<td>Unknown (Hay of Kinauns)</td>
<td>2nd ser., III, p. 99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1629</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1,200 (Alexander Hamilton), 1,200 (Sir George Cuninghame)</td>
<td>2nd ser., III, pp. 136, 208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1631</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>2,000 (Sir Donald Mackay, Lord Reay)</td>
<td>2nd ser., IV, p. 218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1631</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>6,000 (Sir James Hamilton, Marquis of Hamilton)</td>
<td>Burnet, p. 5***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1632</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1,400 (Sir James Lumsden)</td>
<td>2nd ser., IV, p. 483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1632</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>200 (Lt Col McDougall)</td>
<td>2nd ser., IV, p. 525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1633</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>1,200 (Sir John Hepburn)</td>
<td>2nd ser., V, p. 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1635</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>60 (Thomas Moffat)</td>
<td>2nd ser., VI, p. 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1636</td>
<td>Low Countries</td>
<td>300 (Lord Almond)</td>
<td>2nd ser., VI, p. 225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1637</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>1,120 (Captain Robert Hume)</td>
<td>2nd ser., VI, p. 401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1637</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1,200 (Cuninghame, Monro, Stuart)</td>
<td>2nd ser., VI, pp. 458, 484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1638</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>1,000 (Andrew, Lord Gray)</td>
<td>2nd ser., VII, p. 103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1639</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>2,000 (Colonel Alexander Erskine of Mar)</td>
<td>2nd ser., VII, pp. 106, 136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1642</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>6,000 (James Campbell, Earl of Irvine, and others)</td>
<td>2nd ser., VII, pp. 247, 281, 302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1656</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>2,500 (William, 3rd Lord Cranstoun)</td>
<td>Fischer, p. 122**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes
* Register of the Privy Council of Scotland (1545-1689)
** Fischer, The Scots in Sweden

It can be argued that the term “mercenary” is not appropriate in describing these men. The term current in Scotland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was the phrase “waged men of war” – in Scots, “wageit men of weare” or variants of it. “Mercenary” remains, however, a convenient word
to describe the soldiers who were fighting for a commander or a political state other than that which from their place of birth or normal residence could be deemed their own, and it is used here in this sense. In discussions during the workshops in the Fighting for a Living project, it was suggested that a “mercenary” had to be free from social ties or obligations, available to be hired, and with no stake in a conflict other than as a paid man. These conditions do not apply to all the Scots who fought on the continent of Europe and, as will be apparent from this chapter, it was often social ties or obligations that led to them being recruited as soldiers in the first place. Often, too, their stake in a conflict sprang from religious leanings or a sense of honour; they were not always serving simply for the money.

The military roles the Scottish mercenaries played in the wars of the period lie outside the scope of this chapter and are only summarized below. The focus here is on the circumstances or pressures in Scottish society that led so many to soldier abroad, in practice to constitute a form of migrant labour, rather than follow another livelihood at home. The chapter briefly describes the labour conditions they accepted. The information sources to which we can turn comprise contemporary legal and administrative records, letters, and other documents. Ordinary soldiers leave little trace in the records of the period and what does survive as evidence of their actions and motives is scant and unevenly spread in space and time. Other sources are the many histories of families and clans: they were usually written much later than the events they describe and are always subject to embellishment, but are our only access to a rich oral culture and tradition and, when treated with care, can provide valuable additional detail.

The socio-economic background

Lying on the periphery of Europe and having a relatively poorly developed economy, Scotland was open to the experience of economic emigration, a phenomenon enhanced during the years between 1550 and 1650 by population growth and by frequent seasons of severe dearth with resulting high food prices. Several attempts have been made to estimate the population of the country in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and they agree that

3 See, for example, Murdoch, Scotland and the Thirty Years’ War; Miller, Swords for Hire.
4 Socio-economic conditions are explored in general histories, e.g., Smout, A History of the Scottish People; Lynch, The Oxford Companion to Scottish History. David Worthington, British and Irish Emigrants and Exiles in Europe, has an overview of emigration studies.
the total must have stood between 800,000 and a little over 1 million. The emigration of so many soldiers, therefore, represents the loss, occasionally temporary but often permanent, of a substantial proportion of the country’s able-bodied young men and immediately provokes the question of why it took place, when it might appear to have been detrimental to the country’s own well-being.

The bulk of the population was scattered in rural villages and townships, and most burghs were small enough to ensure almost everyone was closely dependent on a relatively primitive agriculture that was dangerously susceptible to harvest failure. Time and again evidence of distress occurs in the historical record, and we find repeated attempts by the authorities to impose alleviating measures, such as the banning or licensing of the export of grain and livestock, and even attempting to limit the number of dishes that could be served at meals (although gradated in number according to status so that a bishop could have eight, but a burgess only three). On 21 June 1572 the Privy Council ordered people to remove themselves from the city of Edinburgh to stay with friends in the country where they might be “best staikit [best provided for]”. In the Chronicle of Aberdeen for the year 1578, we read that at that time there was “a great dearth of all kind of victuals through all Scotland, that the like was not seen in no man’s day before. The meal was sold for six s[hillings] the peck, the ale for tenpence the pint, the wine from the best shipment forty pence the pint; fish and flesh were scant and dear.”

Epidemics of plague and other diseases added to the woes undergone by the general population. The Privy Council attempted to counter the spread of infection through restrictions on travel and the quarantining of sea travellers. There is no information on the numbers of people affected by such catastrophes, but their seriousness comes over clearly in what evidence does survive. In October 1606 the Earl of Dunfermline wrote to the king that “The tounes of Air and Striveling [Ayr and Stirling] ar almoste desolat”; this outbreak of plague lasted from 1603 to 1609, and took 500 lives in Perth in the winter of 1608-1609.

For Scots who were free to go, therefore, the incentives to emigrate were strong. Some moved to England, despite long-standing hostility between

5 Register of the Privy Council of Scotland (1545-1689) 14 vols (Edinburgh, 1877) [henceforth, RPCS], I, p. 94.
6 Ibid., II, p. 148.
7 Author’s translation of Scots original; in “The Chronicle of Aberdeen”, Miscellany of the Spalding Club (Aberdeen, 1842), II, p. 47.
8 Letters and State Papers During the Reign of King James the Sixth, p. 91.
the neighbouring nations and the fact that there was legislation in England targeted against the Scots as enemy aliens. These emigrants, predominantly men, practised various trades and professions but, unsurprisingly in view of the frequent outbreaks of warfare between the two countries, none is listed as having been a soldier. The pathways to the continent were also well established through trade. In the later sixteenth century the favoured destination for Scottish emigrants was the Baltic area, in what are now Poland and its neighbours. Several thousand Scots are estimated to have taken ship for such ports as Stettin (Szczecin) and Danzig (Gdańsk) and then to have spread throughout central and eastern Europe. Many became respectable merchants, while others remained poor itinerant pedlars. Scotland also had a trading base in the town of Veere at the mouth of the Scheldt – and there was steady traffic across the North Sea. As the Dutch had embraced Calvinism, a form of Protestantism shared with Scotland, it is easy to understand why Scots should be drawn to this part of Europe, where many joined the armed struggle in the Netherlands. When he wrote a prospectus in 1624 to attract settlers to the lands he had been recently granted in maritime Canada, Sir William Alexander observed that “Scotland by reason of her populousness being constrained to disburden herself (like the Bees) did every yeare send forth swarmes, whereof great numbers did haunt Pole [Poland] with most extreme kind of drudgerie (if not dying under the burden) scraping a few crummes together, til of late that they were compelled, abandoning their ordinary calling, to betake themselves to the warres against Russians, Turks or Swedens.” What did the emigrants expect to find abroad? Overwhelmingly they tried to make a living through some kind of trade or mercantile activity, making use of family connections to obtain employment and opportunity. What Sir William Alexander remarks on – abandoning trade for soldiering – was a response to economic misfortune wherever there was a demand for men to fill an army’s ranks.

Emigration as soldiers

Men also emigrated specifically to find employment as soldiers. The Privy Council was aware in June 1573 of “a gude nowmer [good number] [...] of

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9 Galloway and Murray, “Scottish Emigration to England 1400-1560”.
10 See, for example, Fischer, The Scots in Eastern and Western Prussia; and the international conference on “Scotland and Poland, a Historical Relationship, 1500-2009”, Edinburgh, 2009.
this realm" prepared to go abroad “under pretens to serve in the wearis [wars] in foreyn countries”. The Council also saw an opportunity here to relieve social pressure at home: in 1572, mindful of “the present hunger, derth and scarcitie of viveris [scarcity of food]”, it allowed men freely to travel to the Low Countries to fight in the cause of Dutch independence. The licensing of recruitment was an attempt on the part of government to control what was already happening irrespective of the wishes of the authorities and, perhaps more importantly, counter any attempt to hide an armed conspiracy under the cloak of recruitment for overseas service. In September 1587 the Privy Council issued a proclamation to be read at the market crosses in all the main burghs forbidding anyone to raise “bandis of men of weare [bands of men of war]” or to put themselves in arms, enrol under any captain, or go abroad as a soldier without royal licence. It was forbidden to attract soldiers away from royal service and for levies to assemble within sixteen miles of the young James VI’s residence at Stirling Castle. Recruiting captains were urged to embark their men at the nearest port, and at times were ordered to recruit without using drums, presumably for fear of rousing excitement or animosity in the general populace. Coping with the unruly behaviour of mobs of would-be soldiers on their way to seaports was a concern of the Privy Council in 1605, and the presence in the country in 1609 of two companies of Irish mercenaries forced by bad weather to land at Peterhead while en route to Sweden worried the Council greatly.

As an example of an unofficial levy that was also declared illegal, we have the episode in 1612 when the Privy Council tried to prevent recruitment for service in the Swedish army against Denmark. The Council informed James VI, now resident in London as the king of Britain, that men had been violently pressed and taken against their will. Official attempts by the Privy Council to nip the levy in the bud included searching ships about to sail, ordering the discharge of recruits, and summoning to its presence Alexander Ramsay, the senior officer (who did not appear and was thereafter denounced as a rebel).

12 RPCS, II, p. 235.
13 Ibid., II, p. 148.
14 Ibid., IV, p. 211.
15 Ibid., VIII, p. 390.
16 Ibid., IX, pp. 430-461.
Indigenous military practices

One factor that made soldiering a viable option for young men going abroad and enhanced the feasibility of recruiting was the long tradition in the country of armed service. It was the custom for nobles to keep trains of armed men. The traditional view of Scotland as a country where, up until the Treaty of Union in 1707, the tension between the monarch and the nobility often caused the latter to break into rebellion or take up arms in pursuit of their own interests against either the crown or each other has been queried by recent historians, but it remains true that feuding, raiding, and the signing of bonds of manrent were common and that Scotland was a country prone to the violent resolution of difference. Comments from the writings of John Major (or Mair) are relevant here. “If two nobles of equal rank happen to be very near neighbours, quarrels and even shedding of blood are a common thing between them; and their very retainers cannot meet without strife”, he observed in 1521 in his History of Great Britain. “The farmers [...] keep a horse and weapons of war, and are ready to take part in [their lord's] quarrel, be it just or unjust, with any powerful lord, if they only have a liking for him, and with him, if need be, to fight to the death. The farmers have further this fault: that they do not bring up their sons to any handicraft. Shoemakers, tailors, and all such craftsmen they reckon as contemptible and unfit for war.” Major was more critical of Highlanders: “They are full of mutual dissensions, and war rather than peace is their normal condition. The Scottish kings have with difficulty been able to withstand the inroads of these men.”

The social structure of the country was complicated by major cultural differences between the various regions, the most important being the one between what can be usefully, though crudely, termed the Lowlands and the Highlands, a cultural frontier often termed the Highland Line. John Major was aware of this but it is also commented upon by John of Fordun, a cleric who wrote what is regarded as the first full-scale history of Scotland in the mid-fourteenth century: “The people of the coast are of domestic and civilised habits, trusty, patient and urbane, decent in their attire, affable and peaceful, devout in divine worship, yet always prone to resist a wrong at the hands of their enemies. The highlanders and people of the islands, on the other hand, are a savage and untamed nation, rude and

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17 Wormald, Lords and Men in Scotland; Grant, Independence and Nationhood.
18 Hume Brown, Scotland before 1700 from Contemporary Documents, pp. 58-59.
19 Ibid., p. 60.
independent, given to rapine.”20 Fordun’s view was biased, but the cultural divide had become real by his lifetime. His “savage and untamed nation” comprised of course the mainly Gaelic-speaking clan society that played a prominent part in the Jacobite risings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This was a largely pastoral culture with a strong warrior ethos, grouped in kindreds and adherents holding territories, very prone to feuding with each other and capable of moving quickly into military mode. Within clan or kindred, blood relationships were important, and war parties of the clan were usually commanded by the chief himself or blood relatives. Writing in 1578, Bishop John Leslie, himself Highland born, showed that this warrior society persisted for a very long time: “A peculiar and proper vice is among these men, and to their well-being most pestilent, that naturally they are fond willingly and vehemently, if their masters command them, to sedition and strife: they rather be esteemed as noble, or at least as bold men of war, than as labourers of the ground or men of craft, irrespective of poverty or riches.”21

Mention should be made in passing of a special class of mercenary soldier that sprang from the Gaelic Highland world. This was the “galloglass”, a term Anglicized from the Gaelic word galloglaigh, meaning “foreign warrior”. They were a restricted class of professional fighters from the western seaboard of the Highlands who found service in the retinues of Irish chieftains from the thirteenth century until the early 1600s. A few found service in Sweden during the Thirty Years War but, as a specialized group, they lie outside the main scope of this chapter.22

In the south of Scotland, in the Borders, the country marking the frontier with England, in the same period existed a society similar to that of the clans in having a pastoral economy and a predilection for raiding and feuding. Here there were kindreds loyal to particular territory-holding families who could switch easily into military mode. In Bishop Leslie’s opinion in 1578, fear of war inhibited the cultivation of the soil among them. The similarity between Highlander and Borderer was recognized at the time: “The roll of the clans that have captains, chiefs and chieftains on whom they depend often against the will of their landlords on the Borders as in the Highlands.”23

20 Ibid., p. 12.
21 Author’s translation of Scots original from ibid., pp. 165-166.
22 A general introduction can be found in Cannan, Galloglass.
23 Author’s translation of Scots original, RPCS, IV, p. 782.
Between the Highland and Border regions, in which the Scottish monarchy had a continuous struggle to maintain some hegemony, lay the Lowlands where approximately 60 per cent, from the best estimates, of the population lived, in a society divided between rural settlements and larger burghs. This region formed a belt across the centre of the country and extended up the east coast to the environs of Aberdeen and beyond to the Moray Firth. Presumably these were the people Fordun considered of domestic and civilized habit, yet in his study of bloodfeud in Scotland, K.M. Brown noted that 40 per cent of the 365 feuds he identified as occurring between 1573 and 1625 took place in the Lowlands with a further 23 per cent in the Borders.24

Although the Highlands and the Borders had the potential to be a good recruiting ground, it is significant that, as far as we can tell from the surviving evidence, including the names of the men involved, the bulk of the recruiting for overseas service took place in the Lowlands, in the most settled part of Scotland. The recruitment of soldiers in the Highlands did not become significant until quite late in the period of study, when Mackay’s Regiment was raised in 1626. One of Mackay’s officers, Robert Monro, named the senior Scottish officers in Swedish service in 1632: of the thirty colonels in his list, nine are known to have come from the Lowlands or the north-east; another sixteen probably from the same regions, judging by their surnames; only four from the Highlands; and one, the son of Scots emigrants, actually from Finland. Of the fifty-two lieutenant colonels in Monro’s list, only six are Highland, and five of these are from the Lowland-influenced parts on the east coast.25

In his major work on the Scots Brigade in the Netherlands, James Ferguson provides plenty of evidence for the Lowland contribution to this notable example of Scottish military service abroad.26 To give one example, in a document concerning soldiers to be paid after the death of their captain, Archibald Arskin (Erskine) at Zwolle in December 1608, of the forty-one legible signatures, fifteen are indisputably Scots and a further ten could be Scots, and the names suggest a Lowland origin for all of them. As a general comment, Ferguson says in his introduction: Forth-side counties, especially Fife, “had the closest connection with the brigade, but Perthshire, Forfar, Aberdeenshire and the Highlands, more especially after General Mackay [1640-1692] entered it, and other parts of Scotland had their representatives

25 Monro, Monro His Expedition with the Worthy Scots Regiment.  
under its colours”. The General Mackay referred to is Hugh Mackay of Scourie (c. 1640–1692), with no connection to the earlier Mackay’s Regiment. Proximity to the east-coast ports and ease of travel played an obvious part in this preponderance of recruitment in the Lowlands but, as we have seen, the Lowlands were only relatively more peaceful and ordered than the farther-flung Highlands.

The nobles were capable of laying aside their own differences, at least to some extent, when an external threat appeared – always from England. In February 1546, for example, the Privy Council called on two Border families – the Kerrs of Cessford and Ferniehurst, and the Scotts of Branxholme – to set aside their own raids on each other “during the time of this present war between the realms of Scotland and England” and instead seek redress through the courts of law. The Minute in the Privy Council papers gives a vivid impression of the kindreds involved in these quarrels when it details “their kin, friends, men, tenants, adherents, allies and supporters” as coming under the order. Robert I (1274–1329) was able through violent suppression of his enemies to unite much of the country behind him during the Wars of Independence. His army contained men from different parts of the country, Highland as well as Lowland and Border, but despite such periods of near unity it remained true for most of the Stewart period, from 1371 onwards, that the levying of troops to prosecute the many outbreaks of hostilities with England was primarily a Lowland affair, with only a relatively small contribution of men from the southern edges of the Highlands and from the Borders. In a national emergency, though, the propensity of the Borderers for raiding and feuding allowed the rapid raising of a skilled and mobile cavalry force. This is described in a Minute in the papers of the Privy Council in October 1545: it charges three commissioners with the raising of 1,000 horsemen to “pass and remain upon the Borders for the space of three months for defence of the realm against our old enemy of England”, and notes that they will be paid from an allotted sum of £18,000 Scots.

At various times during the sixteenth century the Privy Council ordered a full levy of foot and horse. The example, noted in the Register of the Privy Council for 21 August 1546, to muster men for the siege and capture of Saint Andrews Castle, divided the realm into four parts, which included the sweep of coastal territory up the east coast via Aberdeen to the shores of the Moray Firth. All four were mainly part of the Lowlands and only impinged

27 Ibid., I, p. xxv.
28 RPCS, I, p. 22.
29 Ibid., I, p. 16.
on the Highlands, although there were also at times Highland elements in
the assembled army. Such summonses were proclaimed at market crosses
in all the burghs, and called on men between the ages of sixteen and sixty,
dwelling in the countryside or in the towns, to assemble for military service
with their weapons and enough provisions for twenty days. The resulting
army was commonly called the Scottish host. A significant feature of the
system was that it allowed the monarch to raise an army at minimum cost
to the usually impoverished royal treasury, as the men called on to fill the
ranks were unpaid.

To maintain a degree of preparedness for fighting there existed a system
of training called wappenschaws (weapon shows) held at regular intervals in
local districts. The first relevant act, in 1424 during the reign of James I, called
on all men to begin training in archery when they reached the age of twelve
years. The wappenschaw acts were reconfirmed and amended throughout the
following years and reigns some fifteen times before 1600. This was partly to
promote them when they had lapsed and partly to keep pace with technologi-
cal change. In 1456 we come upon the first mentions of artillery: “it is thought
expedient that the king make request to certain of the great barons of the land
that are of might to make carts of war, and each of them to have two guns,
and each of them to have two chambers with the remnant of the gear that is
appropriate thereto, with cunning [skilled] men to shoot them. And if they
have no craft in shooting them, as now, they may learn before the time comes
that it will be needful to have them.” Hand guns in the form of hackbuts are
first mentioned in the wappenschaw legislation in 1535. Every man who held
land to the value of £100 was required to have a gun and people trained in
its use. Fines of livestock or money were imposed upon defaulters who failed
to attend wappenschaws. Those who had no skill for archery were called on
to appear with hand weapons such as a spear or axe. This act from the reign
of James II (1437-1460) is illustrative of the wappenschaw system and also
reveals why it may not always have been popular among the common people.
“It is decreed and ordained that wappinschawings be held by the lords and
barons, spiritual and temporal, four times in the year, and that football and
golf be utterly cried down and disused, and that the bow-marks be made at
each parish kirk, a pair of butts, and shooting be made each Sunday. And that
each man shoot six shots at the least under the pain to be raised upon them
that come not; at the least 2d to be given to them that come to the bowmark

30 Ibid., I, p. 38.
   rps.ac.uk (accessed 3 February 2011).
to drink. And this to be used from Christmas till Allhallowmass after [...] And as touching the football and the golf we ordain it to be punished by the baron’s fine.”32 The ordinary men of the realm may have preferred their football or their golf to spending what little time they had free from labour in a kind of home guard. Surviving court books from burghs and baronies contain references to men being fined for failure to attend the wappenschaw. For example, the Court Book of the Barony of Leys in Aberdeenshire states, regarding a wappenschaw held on 24 January 1626, that on the following day fourteen men who had failed to attend were fined between 10s and 40s each.33

Despite some resistance to attending training, by the time of the main period of recruitment for armed service in Europe, there was a pool of manpower with at least some basic military experience on which to draw. There was also a ready precedent for sending troops abroad. In the early fifteenth century, contingents of men, several thousand strong, had been sent to France to fight for the Dauphin against the English. Before that period, individual knights had gone abroad from Scotland to fight in various conflicts but this was the first time there was a deliberate export of soldiers to aid a continental ally, a significant episode in the long-standing relationship between France and Scotland, known as the Auld Alliance. The Alliance also produced the Garde Ecossais, a small elite unit that comprised part of the French royal bodyguard.34 An attempt to reinvigorate this alliance in the mid-sixteenth century led to the raising of more troops for service in France. In 1552, the Privy Council ordered commissioners “over all parts of the realm” – though significantly no commissioner is named for the western Highlands – “to vesy [recruit] the men of the shire, including the men in the burghs if they are said to be able and reliable” to go to France. The same order included the raising of 400 horsemen in the Borders and the Lowlands for the same service.35

“The laudable profession of arms”

Against this sixteenth-century background of economic hardship and emigration stands a major factor in our study – the attitude of the noble

34 See, for example, Macdougall, “An Antidote to the English”.
35 RPCS, I, p. 134.
and landowning classes to warfare, an attitude summed up in the phrase coined by Robert Monro in his account published in 1637 of his experiences in Mackay’s Regiment in the Thirty Years War and used as a heading above.36 For this section of society, being a soldier was a natural calling. In his study of this class, in Noble Society in Scotland, Keith Brown describes how the nobility held a martial ethos as an “integral facet of their identity”.37 In the system of national defence the nobility provided the monarch with his officer corps and also, through their tenants, with his manpower. In turn the non-noble landowners, the lairds, imitated the actions and shared the attitudes of their social superiors. In the period under study, the revolt against Spanish hegemony in the Low Countries and from 1618 the Thirty Years War, with smaller outbreaks of warfare elsewhere across the continent, offered plenty of opportunity for the members of these leading classes to exercise their love of arms and, in the process, they hoped, win fortune as well as glory. The temptation was particularly strong for those unlikely to inherit family wealth – younger sons, illegitimate sons – and those with a military talent but no patron to help them up the social ladder at home. In his book, Robert Monro talks of his comrades as “worthy Cavaliers [...] whereof some from meane condition have risen to supreme honour, wealth and dignitie”.38 Finding employment as soldiers on the continent became almost a tradition in a few extended families: from the family of the Lords Forbes, three younger brothers, all sons of the tenth Lord Forbes, and the illegitimate son of one of these brothers were killed in the Thirty Years War.39

It was also recognized that military service abroad could open the door to other opportunities, as is illustrated by the Innes family of Cotts in Aberdeenshire. Alexander Innes of Cotts had several sons: the eldest son John served in the French guard before he inherited from his father in 1634; the second son Alexander wrote to his father from London on 12 December 1627, “My brother Robert is [...] shortly to return to Germanie. I assure you Sir he has made ane gaynfull voyage. He hes imployed in London [2,000 merks] whitch I hope within half yeir will be in returne foure, and in Germanie he hes foure thousand moir. He hes ane angel in the day allowance from the Regiment so long as he is abrod”; Robert was Alexander’s fifth son and was at this time a captain in the English army after previously being in the French guard.40

36 Monro, Monro His Expedition with the Worthy Scots Regiment, title page.
37 Brown, Noble Society in Scotland, p. 3.
38 Monro, Monro His Expedition with the Worthy Scots Regiment, Address to the reader.
40 Forbes, Ane Account of the Famillie of Innes, p. 215.
The recruitment of soldiers

These sons of nobles and lairds, who saw themselves as professional soldiers, had a better chance of finding a place in a continental army if, especially in times of war, they could arrive with their own contingent of men, already armed or not. There was also the incentive of benefiting financially from levying men, always a tempting prospect for lairds who had landed themselves in debt, although this did not always work out well. In August 1661 Lord Forbes petitioned Charles II for payment he had never received for levying men for the king of Denmark’s service in 1626 as part of Mackay’s Regiment; the failure to pay him on time had resulted in a serious debt burden.41 The attractions of military service and cash payments for recruiting men are obvious for landowners struggling to make ends meet during years of climatic difficulty, and would have been especially marked in the case of younger or illegitimate sons with no prospect of an inheritance. Unfortunately we know very little about most of the named military captains to whom the Privy Council issued recruitment licences. Many would have been professional soldiers but it is not clear how many were already in the service of foreign armies and had returned home to levy men.

Alongside the professional military men appeared some merchants, referred to as enterprisers, who offered to provide recruits to any needy commander. A prominent example of this group was Sir James Spens of Wormiston, a Fife landowner and merchant adventurer born in 1571. He was probably already trading in the Baltic area when he and his brother were approached by Karl IX of Sweden in 1605 to recruit 1,600 foot soldiers and 600 cavalry for Swedish service against Poland. This service was to be done with the British monarch’s permission, and Spens was to be paid 1,600 daler for every 300 men and appointed as colonel in overall command of them, presumably ensuring for himself a regular salary.42 The daler, rex-dollar, or riksdaler was the Swedish equivalent of the German reichsthaler, the international European currency of the time. This was the start of a rewarding career for the Fife merchant: he went on to organize further troop levies, serve as an ambassador for the British and Swedish monarchs, and was eventually ennobled as a Swedish baron before his death in 1632.

41 Tayler and Tayler, The House of Forbes, p. 185.
As an example of a recruiter who failed to fulfil the terms of a recruitment contract, let me summarize the career of John Gordon of Ardlogie. The second son of an Aberdeenshire laird, Gordon received funds to levy and transport men to Germany as part of the larger recruitment under James Sinclair of Murkle in March 1627. This he failed to do and was outlawed – in the Scots legal expression, “put to the horn”. He evaded arrest and eventually escaped to Germany where, it appears, he was killed in 1638 in the contingents commanded by fellow Scot, also called John Gordon.43

During the reign of Karl IX’s son, Gustavus Adolphus, contracts for recruitment were based on rates laid down by the Swedish government.44 A letter dated 21 April 1629 contains articles of agreement between Sir James Spens and a Captain Alexander Hamilton for the recruitment of 1,200 men.45 Hamilton received the sum of £1,696 “lawfull English money” as equivalent to 7,680 riksdaler, or 4.5 riksdaler per £1. The captain’s expenses in recruiting included the provision of food and drink for recruits, usually some clothing, and their transport costs across the North Sea, as well as a hand-out when a man signed on. In his study of recruitment for Sweden in the 1620s, J.A. Fallon calculated that it cost 6s 8d to ship a man from Scotland to the Elbe, and that two weeks’ food and drink for a recruit cost 9s 4d. This leaves a balance of 4s, almost 1 riksdaler, a sum that Fallon suggested would have been handed to the newly signed-on recruit.46 This seems very generous and we must allow the possibility that some of the money might have stayed in the recruiter’s pocket, particularly as a recruiter could face a fine if he failed to bring in the number of men promised or required.

Other factors and motivations

A factor of some importance in recruitment in the 1550-1650 period was religion. Solidarity with other members of the same religious denomination led many to take up arms: this was true of the recruitment to fight in the 1570s in the Low Countries against the Habsburgs; in the effort to restore Frederick and his queen, Elizabeth Stewart, daughter of James VI, to the Rhine Palatinate after 1618; and in the perceived defence of the Protestant cause under Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden. The fall of Haarlem to the Span-

45 Quoted in Fraser, Memorials of the Earls of Haddington, p. 92.
ish in 1573 aroused an unknown but sizeable number of Lowland Scots to volunteer in the Dutch cause, and the Privy Council noted the issue of a recruiting licence to Captain Thomas Robesoun to be in the “defence of Goddis trew religioun”.47

The Scots Brigade in the Low Countries

It can be seen in Table 6.1 that there was a sizeable movement of fighting men from Scotland mainly to France and Scandinavia in the mid-sixteenth century. This was followed by a significant series of levies for service in the Low Countries in the 1570s after the Dutch rising to throw off Habsburg rule. The levies began as the raising of companies under individual captains but in 1586 these companies were amalgamated into two regiments. The organization of the Scots in Dutch service thereafter went through a number of changes but a Scots Brigade, as the units were collectively labelled, remained a feature of the Dutch army until 1782. As already stated, the units of the brigade were initially recruited mainly in the Lowlands, and it was not until the mid-seventeenth century that we find significant recruitment from the Highlands. In an age when sons were often inclined and indeed expected to follow the same trade as their fathers, it is no surprise to find it being said of the Scots Brigade: “Probably no military body ever existed in which members of the same families were so constantly employed for generations.”48 The records of the Brigade include note of Dutch authorities making the journey across the North Sea to seek men, for example in 1594 when ambassadors crossed from Veere to Leith on such an errand, and again in 1632 when the States General sought to reinforce the existing four English and three Scottish regiments in Dutch service.

Recruitment for service in the Thirty Years War

The second major phase of recruitment of soldiers for overseas service came during the Thirty Years War. The early levies were used to reinforce the army of Count Ernst von Mansfeld, the mercenary commander, in the campaign in Bohemia in support of James VI’s son-in-law, Frederick of Bohemia, against the Holy Roman Empire. Later levies were also destined to

47 RPCS, II, p. 237.
fight in the effort to restore Frederick to the Upper and Lower Palatinate and to strengthen the Danish opposition to west-bound Habsburg forces, as well as to join the forces of Gustavus Adolphus. Large levies were implemented in the late 1630s and early 1640s for French service in the latter stages of the Thirty Years War when France entered the war in alliance with the Swedes and others against the Holy Roman Empire.

Attitudes to military service

The social hierarchies that existed in Scotland made the recruitment of men easier than it might otherwise have been. In the rural Highlands, the clan system could be readily adapted to secure men for continental levies. In 1633 the parish minister of Wardlaw near Inverness recorded that Thomas Fraser, son of a local laird, used his clan connections and the assistance of Lord Lovat, the clan chief, to raise recruits.49 In another instance involving the Frasers, in 1656, clan leaders helped a recruiter enlist forty-three men in three days. It seems that the use of such social networks was standard procedure. When Sir Donald Mackay of Strathnaver issued commissions in his proposed regiment to the leading young men in neighbouring clans, he undoubtedly expected at least some of them to respond with enthusiasm and bring men with them to the colours, and this is indeed what happened.

In the Lowlands, the subordinate classes appear not to have shared the attitude to martial glory found among the nobles and lairds. The poor socio-economic conditions in the late sixteenth century and the familiarity with travel to the Low Countries prevalent on the east coast of Scotland may have helped in the recruitment of men in the Lowlands to join the conflict in the Netherlands, but later during the seventeenth century there is clear evidence of passive and even active resistance to recruitment. In April 1620, for instance, the levy to provide 1,500 men to go with Colonel Andrew Gray to Bohemia was proceeding slowly, and towards the end of that month the Privy Council ordered all beggars, vagabonds, and “masterless” men with no lawful trade or means of livelihood to enlist. Failure to comply with this command could result in a whipping or being burnt on the cheek for a first offence, and hanging for a second, at first glance a seemingly counterproductive threat.50 The Council also directed criminals to be placed in the army, and in the Borders a proclamation was read out at market crosses

49 Fraser, Chronicles of the Frasers, pp. 255, 417.
50 RPCS, XII, p. 259.
to announce that reivers, men convicted of feuding and cattle raiding, were to be marked down for transportation. Early in May Colonel Gray had sufficient men to set off for Hamburg, but in the last days before sailing some of the recruits deserted and went into hiding in the Edinburgh area. From 1620 onwards it appears to have become common for courts to offer criminals the opportunity to go abroad in military service and for recruiting officers to visit jails in the search for men.

A major levy was launched in the spring of 1627 to provide men for the service of the king of Denmark, then facing the advancing forces of the Holy Roman Empire in north-western Germany. The three commanders – Robert, Earl of Nithsdale, Alexander Lord Spynie, and James Sinclair of Murkle – were each granted £4,000 sterling for the task. The target of 9,000 men – 3,000 each – was extremely ambitious. Efforts to help recruiters attain it included another pronouncement from the Privy Council about taking up vagabonds and idle men, except that this time the Council went into more detail and mentioned “all Egyptians [gypsies]” and fugitive soldiers from other levies.51 The Council also noted reports of the targeted recruits forming themselves into “societies and companies” and preparing to use firearms to resist recruitment. The Council warned sheriffs and burgh magistrates to apprehend all potential recruits from among the idle and masterless in their jurisdictions and asked them to assist the recruiting officers “in bringing of these people to their colours”. Sea captains were forbidden to give fugitives passage to Ireland. The levy proceeded during the summer but it soon brought objections from respectable sections of the community. Recruiting captains were clearly desperate to fill their quotas and were resorting to dubious tactics. The Council learned in June of men going into hiding and deserting, and also of men being violently taken against their will.52 In July, leading burgesses in Edinburgh protested that their sons and grandsons at the college were being induced to enlist by “alluring speeches”, causing some families to withdraw their offspring from the college and send them to other burghs for safety.53 There were complaints from the town of Burntisland in Fife in September that the soldiers waiting to go abroad were causing “manie great disordours”.54 In the midst of this troubled time around the Forth, Charles I launched a new war against France and called for a levy for men for an expedition to relieve

51 Ibid., 2nd series, I, p. 565.
52 Ibid., 2nd series, VIII, p. 379.
53 Ibid., 2nd series, II, p. 7.
54 Ibid., 2nd series, II, p. 79.
the siege of La Rochelle. The Nithsdale-Spynie-Murkle levy probably raised only 5,000 men by the time the contingents sailed for Denmark in October. In 1629, Murkle was still trying to reach his original target of 3,000, had exhausted the recruitment grant, and had “ingaged his awin estait for the furtherance thairof”.55 Interestingly, in his petition to the Privy Council describing his unfortunate predicament, Murkle seems most concerned over being disgraced in the eyes of the king of Denmark and asks for a hearing with Charles I in the hope the British king will plead his case in Copenhagen.

By the late 1620s, therefore, it is evident that recruiters were finding it difficult to attract sufficient numbers of men to fulfil their obligations in the Lowlands, hitherto the main part of the country for the recruitment of soldiers for overseas service. The articles of agreement for recruitment of men for Sweden between Sir James Spens and Captain Alexander Hamilton in April 1629 refer to “the scantnes of men in Scotland”.56 During this period, the Lowlands enjoyed improvements in trade and the economy, better seasons for agriculture, and fewer outbreaks of infectious disease.57 Prospects at home must have appeared better than they had in the previous half-century. It is only at this point that recruitment in the Highlands becomes significant. Charles I asked for 200 Highland bowmen for his La Rochelle expedition in 1627 but in the previous year Sir Donald Mackay of Strathnaver (ennobled as Lord Reay in 1628) in the far north of the country had taken it upon himself to escape some domestic difficulties by obtaining from the king a licence to raise troops for the continent on a much larger scale. Sir Robert Gordon, a neighbouring landlord, and possibly a cause of some of Sir Donald’s domestic difficulties, recorded the eventuality as follows:

The yeir 1626 Sir Donald Macky (a gentleman of a sturring spirite) finding himself crossed at home, and matters not succeeding according to his expectation, either in his owne particular estate or against his neighbours he taks resolution to leave the kingdome; and to this end he causeth his freinds to deale at court with the king for a licence to transport men to the Count Mansfeild into Germanie.58

55 Ibid., 2nd series, III, p. 147.
56 Quoted in Fraser, Memorials of the Earls of Haddington, p. 92.
58 Gordon, A Genealogical History of the Earldom of Sutherland, p. 401.
Count Mansfeld’s army was defeated before Mackay’s contingents reached it but Mackay’s Regiment, as it became called, entered the service of Denmark. After the Peace of Lübeck in July 1629, its officers offered their allegiance to Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden and took their men with them. In contrast with the struggle faced by Nithsdale and his colleagues to fill the ranks, the levy in the northern Highlands proceeded relatively quickly. Mackay received his licence in March 1626 and by October at least 2,000 men were ready to embark for the Elbe estuary.\(^{59}\) There were two possible reasons for this: this part of the country had not been really affected by previous recruitments, and it was a reflection of the ease with which clan society could be mobilized. Mackay was ably assisted in recruitment by the Forbes family in Aberdeenshire, where a proportion of the recruits were raised.\(^{60}\) Despite the relative speediness of the levy, Mackay’s recruitment drive suffered, probably like all levies, from desertion, from men enrolling, receiving the initial payment, and then going into hiding. According to the Privy Council, “a grite number of thame” did this, and severe punishment was proclaimed for them and any who helped them evade justice.\(^{61}\)

In the long run, even the clan system came under stress and did not always produce recruits: in September 1636 Captain Robert Innes, a laird’s son from Mackay’s Regiment, was angered enough to strike tenants of Gordon of Dunkinty near Elgin when they refused to allow their sons or servants to be recruited. Efforts to find new recruits by Mackay himself in 1629 also had some trouble in finding men, partly a reflection of the low population density of the northern Highlands. Possibly to avoid stirring up public unrest over continual recruitment, when the Privy Council granted a licence to raise 300 men as replacements for regiments already in Swedish service, it added the instruction that this was to be done quietly, without drums or display of colours.\(^{62}\)

In July and August 1632, the Dutch States General sought to recruit 2,000 men in England and 1,500 men in Scotland to reinforce existing regiments.\(^{63}\) Charles I gave his permission readily enough to the Dutch ambassador and his colleagues but warned them that the conditions on offer — each recruiting officer to receive 8 guilders per man and the command of a company — would attract no one. Various reasons were put forward — that it

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59 RPCS, 2nd series, I, pp. 244-245.
61 RPCS, 2nd series, I, p. 311.
was the wrong time of year, as high wages were on offer during the harvest; that recruiting was going ahead daily for Sweden and Muscovy, the latter offering 15 guilders per short month to the soldiers; that the targets per recruiting officer were too high; that officers would not like to recruit men and then not be put in command over them; that money was still owing to the Earl of Morton for a previous levy in 1629. These excuses were advanced in England; the ambassador failed to contact anyone in Scotland to find out if there was a better chance of success there. The levy failed. In 1633 the English government prohibited taking men out of the country for foreign service unless they were recruits to keep existing regiments up to strength.

The large levy in 1642 for service in France also ran into difficulties, producing in the Privy Council records of the by-now familiar resorts to impressing “idle persons” and handing over convicted criminals to the recruiters. The Council records also show, however, that the authorities were not undiscriminating: for example, when eleven men complained that they had been taken by force and thrown into prison “where they are yitt lying almost starving for want of maintenance and their wyves and children ar begging through the countrie”, the Council sent officials to investigate with the result that five were set free and six were retained, the latter having been deemed to have freely volunteered.64 There are also instances of landowners seeking the release of members of their workforce who had either volunteered or been inveigled into enlisting, an interesting point to which I shall return below.

**Conditions of service**

No written agreements or contracts covering the recruitment of the rank-and-file soldiers have been located during the research for this chapter, and it is possible they were rarely if at all used. Verbal agreements founded on the existing conditions of trust and hierarchy could be expected in clan societies with their strong oral cultures, but they were also probably the norm in other parts of the country. The correspondence and contracts that do survive relate to official sources and educated elites.

The soldier serving abroad could usually hope for regular pay and the provision of food and clothing. These conditions appear to have been accepted at the time as reasonably fair, although it is difficult to compare wages and prices in the various currencies of the day. Complaints and

64 *RPCS*, 2nd series, VII, p. 450.
dissension, amounting at times to mutiny, seem to have occurred only when pay and provisions were not issued when expected. In the late sixteenth century in Scotland, in one year a male farm servant could expect to earn from £1 6s 8d to £6, depending on skill and experience as well as regional variations. Rural wages were often supplemented with accommodation and some food but they seem very low when compared to what soldiers could hope for. The pay scale set by the Privy Council in 1586 for armed men to police the Borders ran from £20 a month for a horseman and £6 for a foot soldier to almost £70 and £50 respectively for their commanding captains.65

As an example of pay given to Scottish soldiers in Dutch service in the 1570s, we have in the records totals paid out to commanding officers for the fourteen months between 1 June 1573 and 31 July 1574. The largest sum went to Captain Baulfour (Balfour) – £8,015, the smallest to Colonel Ormeston – £50, with widely varying amounts to other officers, which presumably reflect the respective lengths of service and complements of men, as well as the costs of bringing recruits over the North Sea.66 At the same time, under “pay”, Colonel Ormeston received £500, and this seems to have been the going annual rate for a man of this rank. In October 1575, the salary of Henry Balfour, by this time a colonel, was set at 800 guilders per year by the Dutch authorities. In May 1577, Colonel Balfour received £6,000 Artois for his services, as a lump sum at the termination of his period of service; he was soon requested to return to the Low Countries when war broke out anew in October that year.

In 1577 the Dutch laid down that “All captains [are] to pay their men 45 stivers each, half monthly, while the engagement remains at 1,100 guilders monthly for 100 men.”67 A village worker’s salary in the Low Countries at the time was around 200 guilders per year.68 In 1579, the pay scale for a company of soldiers under the command of a Colonel William Stewart ran from 12 livres per month for the drummer, the lowest paid, through 16 for a corporal, 24 for a sergeant, 40 for an ensign, and 45 for a lieutenant, to 90 for the captain.69 In September 1586 the authorities in Amsterdam were asked to pay to 150 Scottish soldiers who had newly arrived in the area 1 florin (1 guilder) per day to the captain, 10 patars (14 pence) to the lieutenant, 6 patars each to the ensigns, sergeants, cadets, corporals, and clerk, and 3

65 Ibid., IV, p. 111.
66 Ferguson, The Scots Brigade in the Service of Denmark and Sweden, I, p. 36.
67 Ibid.
68 Israel, The Dutch Republic, p. 353.
patars to the ordinary ranks.\footnote{Ibid., I, p. 77.} The request to Henry Balfour to return to fight for the States General in the renewal of hostilities in October 1577 included the remuneration (apparently per year) offered to him and his men: £500 for himself, £200 for his lieutenant, £100 for his sergeant major, £40 for the quartermaster and the provost, £16 for the halbardiers, and £12 for the provost sergeants.\footnote{RPCS, II, p. 641.}

An attractive feature of service in the Low Countries in the Dutch cause was that the widows and children of officers killed in action were given state pensions, amounts varying from 800 guilders per year awarded to the widow and son of Colonel Balfour in April 1581, to sums in 1610 of the order of £50 to £100 for each surviving relative.\footnote{Ferguson, The Scots Brigade in the Service of Denmark and Sweden, I, p. 226.}

Costs forced the States General government of the United Provinces in the Low Countries to review the pay scales in 1587, when they dismissed companies they could not afford, asked officers against assurance of a final settlement in the future not to seek payment for arrears as long as the war continued, required soldiers to swear to accept a 48-day month (officers were given a 32-day month), and assigned garrisons to different provinces according to the province’s ability to pay.\footnote{Grimeston, A Generall Historie of the Netherlands, p. 890.} The commission dated 26 June 1588 to Colonel Bartholomew Balfour included the statement that his company of 200 men would receive “2,200 pounds, of 40 groats the pound, every 32 days, with the reservation that henceforward he shall content himself with these payments every 48 days. With this he and his subordinate officers and his soldiers, like others in the country’s service, must content themselves.”\footnote{Ferguson, The Scots Brigade in the Service of Denmark and Sweden, I, p. 85.} A similar commission, dated 15 April 1593, to Captain Patrick Bruce commanding a company of lancers of 100 horses provides higher remuneration for mounted men – “his payment to be 3,000 pounds per month of 32 days, the officers’ salaries and horse fodder included therein, provided he shall take care to procure [...]. all such payments out of said levies on the country districts of Flanders, the which he is to exact with all diligence and put in train, so that his pay beyond the present incomes can be escheat (or claimed) out of them; and he, the captain, his subordinate officers, and cavalry shall like others rest satisfied with receiving a month’s pay every 48 days.”\footnote{Ibid., I, p. 92.}
The imposition of 32-day and 48-day months was not popular with the Scottish officers. In June 1588, three captains, named as Meurrey, Nysbeth, and Waddel, told a committee of the States General that they were willing to serve “but that they must have the means to make their soldiers willing and to satisfy them”. There ensued a round of negotiations that lasted several weeks, in which Colonel Balfour tried to win the best deal for his men but which ended with the discharge of some officers and the continuation of the 48-day month.

The pay scale for men to be recruited for Swedish service by Sir Donald Mackay is set out in a letter of June 1629: colonel – 300 riksdaler Swedish per month of 31 days; company captain – 100; lieutenant and ensign – 50; sergeant – 16; drummer or piper – 8; ordinary pikeman or musketeer – 6; scout and reserve – 5. The letter also sets out what would be expected of the mercenary:

[Officers and men] participating in our adventures, shall not turn away from us in times of misfortunes, and as becometh such honourable and brave cavaliers and soldiers, they shall always be ready cheerfully and indefatigably to venture body and life.

There follows a list of the types of action in which the mercenary may expect to find himself – battles, skirmishes, watches, attacks, sieges, by day or night, on water or on land. The Swedish king undertook to provide a sufficient monthly allowance with a twice-yearly settlement of accounts. Pay would not be reduced but there would be deductions for careless damage or breakage. The rate of exchange at the time is revealed in the articles of an agreement drawn up between Sir James Spens and Alexander Hamilton in April 1629 for the raising of 1,200 men, as mentioned earlier. The rewards for senior officers could be very high and come in the form of grants of land and hereditary titles among the nobility as well as in payments of money, although only a few men benefited in this way.

For most soldiers the regularity with which they received their pay, food, and clothing was a major factor in keeping up their morale, and the reputations of commanders often rested on their performance in this regard. On long campaigns across great distances, the systems of victualling and payment could easily break down, and even Gustavus Adolphus, generally a reliable payer, had to deal with threats of mutiny from time to time. Some

76 Ibid., I, p.98.
77 Fischer, *The Scots in Germany*, p. 280.
mercenary commanders made no special arrangements for the support of their men and expected them to forage and plunder, practices that naturally visited misery on civilians and brought the reputation of the soldier to the level of the thief or rapist.

By the standards of the time, the Dutch were good at maintaining regular payment of salaries, although, as we have seen, there were still occasions when the soldiers were stirred to complain. The conscientious paymaster was always aware that the loyalty of a mercenary could be severely tested by a breakdown in pay, an eventuality that could easily occur when an army was in the field. The provision of clothing appears to have been very important for the attraction of recruits and the morale of the newly formed contingents. In 1627 Lord Ogilvie noted that his recruits would not “imbark with good will except they get their clothes” and realized how important this was: “it does much good, and incourages many, quhen they sie the soldieris weill used, and speciall quhen they sie them passe throch the cuntrey weill apperelled”.

Robert Monro records that the men in Mackay’s Regiment were issued with clothing and muster money after they had arrived in Holstein from Scotland to join the king of Denmark’s forces, and briefly described how the officers refused to wear the Danish cross with their Scottish colours, a short-lived instance of ethnic loyalty that was dispelled when King James VI’s officials told them to obey who was paying them “in a matter so indifferent”. After six months of training and what Monro describes as getting in good order, the regiment was inspected by the king, took an oath of fidelity and heard the articles of war read, completing a comparatively well-organized and measured initiation that may have been far from typical of the mercenary experience.

Mention of duration of service seems to be missing from what we know of the contractual arrangements for the rank and file. It seems to have been customary for a soldier to serve as long as he was fit and the continuation of hostilities required his presence, his time ending when successful peace negotiations brought about disbandment.

Conditions of service related mainly to the active soldier. As mentioned, the States General in the Low Countries provided pensions for the widows and offspring of officers but this was not true of every employer. The conditions offered by Gustavus Adolphus to Sir Donald Mackay included provision for the care of wounded and disabled men: “we shall provide a temporary home for them in our own dominions, but should they prefer

79 Monro, Monro His Expedition with the Worthy Scots Regiment, p. 2.
going beyond our kingdom a month’s pay shall be given to each.”80 Evidence is very hard to obtain as to what really happened to the ordinary soldier in the ranks when he became too old to continue or had to retire from active duty through injury. A few seem to have found a role behind the lines as cooks or orderlies; many may have been forced to resort to begging or a scrape-by-existence in some menial occupation. We know from anecdotal evidence – the mention of veterans in later contexts – that some of the Scots found their way home from mainland Europe, likely taking advantage of the Swedish offer of a month’s pay, but no figures on this are readily available. On his return to Britain in 1633, Robert Monro launched a venture to provide a hospital for wounded veterans.81

The response of the enlisted man to the conditions of service seems to have been generally one of acceptance, unsurprising in view of the options open to them once they had enlisted. The soldiers keenly perceived unfairness in treatment. Sir Donald Mackay sought more money from the Danish authorities for his men when they protested that English units in the same army were being paid in a different manner. As Robert Monro put it – “It is a hard matter when the diligent and industrious Souldier is disappointed of his hire, and that he is rewarded with injury who did merit better.”82 Diligent officers in the field during the Thirty Years War were often exercised in maintaining the payment and hence the morale of their units.

At the last resort, the aggrieved soldier could always withdraw his service. A simple refusal to obey orders and mutiny, although this was an ultimately disastrous step, was made easier in the period under study by the accepted custom that defeated troops could switch sides and join the army of the victor. With the mercenary, loyalty was usually to comrade and commander rather than to country. Of his service with the Swedish army in northern Germany in the 1630s, James Turner commented in his memoirs: “I had swallowed without chewing, in Germanie, a very dangerous maxime, which militarie men there too much follow; which was, that so we serve our master honestlie, it is no matter what master we serve.”83 In the 1570s-1580s in the Low Countries, when sieges of towns were common, a besieged garrison whose pay had fallen into arrears was often open to negotiation and surrender.

80 Fischer, *The Scots in Germany*, p. 281.
81 RPCS, 2nd series, V, p. 353.
82 Monro, *Monro His Expedition with the Worthy Scots Regiment*, p. 196.
Back home

One of the most difficult aspects of this subject to explore is the effects mercenary service had on the society from which the soldiers came. Although the removal of a significant number of active men from the population must have had some consequences, there seems to be a complete lack of evidence for a shortage of manpower in normal homeland socio-economic life. In times of dearth such a shortage may have been a blessing but this would have been a short-term benefit. The loss of manpower may well have been one reason for increasing resistance to recruitment and may have contributed, for example, to the Aberdeenshire laird’s tenants resisting the efforts of Robert Innes of Cotts to recruit their sons and servants.

In 1635, the Privy Council became so concerned over the amount of foreign “dollars [sic]” in circulation in the country, leading to fraud and a devaluation of the currency, that they passed in August an act allowing traders to use only domestic money for transactions and followed this in February 1636 with an act prohibiting the importation of amounts greater than 56s.84 The continental currency could well have been brought by returning veterans.

By 1650 there must have accumulated in Scotland a pool of men with military experience, men who had served abroad and found their way home again. At least, this seems to be implied by the petition in November 1641 by Alexander Lord Forbes to the London Parliament stating “there are many soldiers desirous of employment […] Your Petitioner having formerly engaged in foreign wars desires that he may have leave to entreat such of the officers and soldiers as shall not be any longer employed here and will willingly put themselves under his command in the service of any foreign prince.”85

Events within Britain were soon to provide plenty of opportunity for the man with military training. Growing political tension in Scotland led to the military confrontation of the First Bishops’ War in June 1639. This was followed by further hostilities in 1640 and a gradual worsening of affairs until full-scale civil war broke out in England in 1642. Many of the Scottish mercenaries found their way home from the continent to fight, where their experience served them well. After the mid-century, although individual soldiers and officers still found places in continental armies, the raising of troops on any scale for the service of foreign powers became a memory.

84 RPCS, 2nd series, VI, p. xvii.
85 Tayler and Tayler, House of Forbes, p. 195.
Military service in transition

In the first part of this chapter, I put forward a number of factors as determining the movement of mercenary soldiers from Scotland to continental Europe between 1550 and 1650. These factors are: a tradition of emigration in general, and previous experience of armed service in continental Europe, especially in France; socio-economic hardship at home; domestic military custom; the attitudes of the leading members of society to a military life; and new opportunities for armed service in continental Europe after the Reformation. This expansion of military service abroad as a feature of Scottish society can be seen in labour terms as the response to a growth in demand for a particular skill in a population where other opportunities for making a living were constrained in several ways.

Men with basic fighting skills and experience in handling weapons could be found throughout the country. In the Borders and the Highlands, cattle reiving and clan feuds provided experience in campaigning over rough country, but even in the more settled Lowland areas the nobles maintained bands of armed men in their own service; among the mass of peasants and townsmen the wappenschaw system ensured that experience in handling weapons was normal. The custom of raising a host or army whenever an armed force was needed for national defence or security also kept alive the practices of military service.

Economic hardship at home, experience with weapons and armed service, and existing emigration pathways to the continent were three strong “push” factors in encouraging men to look abroad. This was combined with a strong “pull” factor, the attitude of the nobility and the landowning classes to military service and their enthusiasm for “seeking fortune in the field”. Recruitment for overseas service was also encouraged from time to time by government for several reasons: as a way of coping with food shortages, as a way to get rid of social undesirables, and as an instrument of foreign policy. When mercenary activity by Scots may have had a negative effect on foreign relations, the government took steps to curtail or prevent it, for example, by issuing recruiting licences or, in the case of the Ramsay recruitment in 1612, by seeking to suppress it completely.

It is also useful to see the phenomenon in terms of the work options that were open to a young man at the time. There was a high degree of hereditary employment, with the son of the merchant, tradesman, or labourer generally following in his father’s footsteps to earn a livelihood. This did not militate against some upward mobility but the absence of widespread, accessible education meant that only a few young people were given the opportunity
to attend any classes and benefit from formal tuition outside the family. Talented youngsters were probably spotted and encouraged, especially after the Reformation when a great need for new clergy arose, but this route of advancement lay open only to a relative few. Among the landowning classes, only the eldest son could hope to inherit an estate. Military service of some kind became, therefore, a real career option for many young men, especially when, as Major commented, a positive attitude to military service existed among farmers who scorned trades. To an extent, rural men shared the outlook of their social superiors and may have enlisted willingly, an attitude most likely to be prevalent in clan society and to have been an important factor in the comparatively rapid recruitment of Mackay’s Regiment in 1626.

It is possible that some labourers, urban as well as rural, saw enlisting as a soldier as a means of escape from the restricted life on offer at home and surrendered to the lure of adventure in preference to tedium and familiarity. For those who were fugitives from justice, answering the call of the recruiting officer was an obvious way to evade arrest and a grim fate, and was probably a gamble worth taking, but even for men who had committed no wrong the prospect of soldiering may have been seen as an opportunity. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland that came into existence with the Reformation after 1560 spoke against the oppression of poor tenants, although it failed to do much to ease their plight.86 In the burghs only merchants and craftsmen enjoyed the privileges that came with burgess status; all the other inhabitants, the majority that included servants, journeymen, labourers, and the poor, were called “unfree” and had no say in local affairs. As the seventeenth century wore on, conditions almost akin to serfdom were imposed on the labour force in the small coal-mining and salt-panning industries around the Firth of Forth.87 Exchanging the constraints of civilian life in such circumstances for the discipline of an army, which at least offered the prospect of regular food, shelter, and comradeship, may have been a relatively easy decision to make. When some masters complained that their servants had been seized by recruiters and sought to have them released, the servants may not always have been so keen to return to civilian servitude. It seems that enlisting did not necessarily take the soldier away from some kind of family life, as in July 1581 the Privy Council complained that the women following the troops abroad were

87 Ibid., p. 168.
bringing dishonour on the country and called on ship captains to allow only legitimate wives of good repute to embark with the soldiers.88

Determining where the Scottish mercenary contingents fall on the axis of free/ unfree labour must take account of the clear distinctions between officers and men in the conditions of service. Officers were seen as professionals and were free to resign a commission, the most famous and exceptional example of this being the resignation of Sir John Hepburn from the Swedish army in 1632 after a perceived insult and a quarrel with Gustavus Adolphus.89 Sir John was, of course, a senior commander; a more junior officer may not have felt so free to take such an independent course. The rank and file were unfree in the sense that they were expected to stay in service once enlisted, and were subject to laws on desertion.

With regard to the classification of labour relations used by the IISH, the Scottish mercenary soldier appears to accord with more than one category, depending on his individual status. The conscripted and pressed men in the contingents recruited in the Lowlands fit the definition of forced tributary labour. As well as receiving pay, they were paid partly in kind with food and clothing. With recruits who volunteered, the definition of labour relations becomes a little more complicated. In effect they were exchanging one form of labour relationship for another. For those who belonged to the “unfree” section of society, willingly leaving self-employment as a tradesman or employment as a labourer to become a soldier was surrendering a degree of personal independence for indentured tributary labour, but in times of economic hardship the gains could well have been seen as outweighing the drawbacks. Some volunteers from the burgess or landowner classes exchanged a non-working status for soldiering. An example here is James Turner who, in his own memoir, describes how as a student, aged eighteen, studying history and religious philosophy, he responded to “a restless desire [...] to be, if not an actor, at least a spectator of these warrs which at that time made so much noyse”, and enlisted in Sir James Lumsden’s regiment bound for Rostock in 1632.90 Robert Monro, the laird of Foulis in Easter Ross, volunteered to join Mackay’s Regiment to escape from domestic difficulties: deep in debt, he engaged his estate revenues to his creditors for ten years and went off to be a military officer.91

88 RPCS, III, p. 399.
89 Grant, Memoirs and Adventures of Sir John Hepburn, p. 182.
90 Turner, Memoirs of His Own Life and Times, p. 3.
91 Monro, Monro His Expedition with the Worthy Scots Regiment, p. 3.
The professional soldier, and in the context of this study, this usually means someone of officer rank, was much more a self-employed individual free to accept a commission and, as circumstances permitted, move from one employer to another. With their enlistment in the military ranks, mercenar-ies from the Highlands, where clan society prevailed, and from among the Borders kindreds can be seen as moving from a status of reciprocal labour, whether household- or community-based, or tributary labour to indentured employment. In the case of Mackay’s Regiment, one can argue that Sir Donald Mackay saw the possibility of exploiting clan ties to find an honourable way out of personal constraints at home, taking it on himself to “offer” men, for whom he was their natural leader, to the service of others. In doing so, he was pioneering the exploitation of the clan system that the British state deployed from the latter half of the eighteenth century to furnish its army with men. The Scottish host, as raised by the government for a national cause, and expected to serve without pay for a fixed number of days, was a form of tributary serf labour, a development from the feudal hosts of past centuries.

Scottish mercenaries, therefore, came from a variety of backgrounds to reach the status of paid soldier, transitions driven in the period under study, as we have seen, by a growth in overseas demand for soldiers against a background of socio-economic hardship at home, with ideological fac-tors, principally motivations arising from the post-Reformation hostility between Protestant and Catholic, playing a subsidiary part. The period saw the transformation of the men who in an earlier generation would have comprised the post-feudal forces of the Scottish host and the armed followers of regional and clan leaders into the elements of an aggregate contract army. Some of those who survived the fighting in Europe and returned to Scotland then became members of armies commissioned by the contesting forces in the civil wars in the British Isles, armies which were soon to be transformed once again into the forces of the state and the early modern conscript army. In this context, it is significant that a connecting thread can be traced from Sir John Hepburn’s recruitment for France in 1633 and the British line regiment, the Royal Regiment of Foot, more popularly known as the Royal Scots, that was designated in 1684.