

BOOK REVIEWS

WAR AND SOCIETY IN EARLY-MODERN EUROPE 1495-1715

Frank Tallett

Routledge, London and New York, paperback: 1997

319 pages

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When in 1992 Frank Tallett first published this book in Routledge's War in Context Series, edited by Jeremy Black, it was very favourably received. Military historians will therefore welcome its re-issue in paperback.

This work, which grew out of a course Tallett taught at the University of Reading, is consequently one of synthesis, rather than of original research, but in it he has had to master the extremely complex and often contradictory literature that has grown up around the whole vexed question of the 'Military Revolution' that is supposed to have taken place in Early-Modern Europe. The great value of this book, however, does not lie simply in Tallett's clear-headed command of these academic debates. Rather, it should be of particular interest to all military historians (and not just those with an interest in the period of the Military Revolution) because in its approach it is the very model of what modern War and Societies Studies should be.

War and Society in Early Modern Europe is thus not a book primarily concerned with analysing battles, tactics and campaigns as would a more old-fashioned work of military history, and perhaps putting them into a rudimentary political context. Instead, its emphasis is on the inter-relationship between war and the institutional, social and economic structures of the period. This is not to say that the technicalities of waging war are ignored, for vital developments like use of the pike, improvements in firearms and artillery, changing cavalry techniques and, perhaps most crucially of all, the widespread adoption of the *trace italienne*, or bastion, are fully discussed. The effects of these military innovations on politics as the art of the possible are fully drawn out.

But where this book is particularly interesting and innovative is in the way in which it addresses other issues. Thus, it moves from an examination of soldiers' experiences in siege and battle and the treatment of prisoners-of-war to ask for what objectives wars at the time were fought, and what part confessional rivalries played in motivating the participants. It examines how armies were recruited and where recruits were mainly drawn from, and investigates the motives which impelled men to volunteer, and whether these were hardship, or a desire for plunder, adventure or social advancement. It probes the realities of life for the common soldier, including medical provisions and the relative chances of death from disease and wounds. The adequacy of payment for soldiers is investigated, as are the consequences when it was in arrears, namely pillage, desertion and mutiny, followed by the natural corollary of savage punishment. Tallett also investigates the compensations for this harsh life

which soldiers might gain, such as comradeship, the easy availability of recreation sex and periods of high life during a successful campaign.

Nor does Tallett ignore war's impact on society outside the armies. He queries the extent of militarization of society in general during this period of incessant and escalating warfare, delves into how easy it was for soldiers to be assimilated back into civilian society, and describes the destitution and life of crime that was the fate of those who were not. He shows how the effects of war differed from one region of Europe to another depending on whether it lay in a 'military corridor' or frontier zone or not; and weighs up the differing consequences to peasants, besieged townsfolk, international financiers or warrior nobility, and notes the perceived threats to social order of the dislocations consequent on war.

Tallett also investigates the growing burden to the state of the escalating size and costs of armies, the implications for the development of state institutions and bureaucracies, and the need for innovative financial expedients such as sale of offices, increased taxation and the raising of state loans. Finally, he looks at how attitudes towards war were affected by the printing press, propaganda and growing ethical debate, and shows how war was moving into arena of critical public debate.

Tallett has not extended his investigation to cover naval affairs as a discrete topic except where they affected the other matters he discusses. This can be excused, since they would require a full study in its own right. He has confined his coverage to western and central Europe and excludes Scandinavia and eastern Europe on the grounds that he lacks the necessary language skills and - more problematically - that trends in these outlying parts were in any case significantly different from those at the European core. Perhaps other military historians will yet prove him wrong.

What Tallett does demonstrate most convincingly is that war was a central, unavoidable element of life in Early-Modern Europe, and that its study in the full social, economic, political and ideological context is an ideal way of coming to grasp the basic dynamics on an entire era.

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THE BOER WAR- ARMY NATION AND EMPIRE

Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey (eds.)

Army History Unit, Department of Defence, Canberra

2000

235 pp

Price Unknown

As could be expected, the proliferation of publications on the Anglo-Boer, 1899-1902, in the centenary period continues unabated. The advantage of the providence of hindsight after a hundred years is that recently the experiences of a wide variety of people that participated in the conflict are being recorded. This is apart from the two main antagonists, the British and the Boers. In the case of the