

Introduction

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This volume examines the reception and employment of Huguenot soldiers in the armies of the Dutch Republic, Britain, Brandenburg-Prussia, Russia and Savoy between the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht. Huguenots had served abroad since the French Wars of Religion. Due to the forced exodus after 1685, however, large numbers would take service in the armies of foreign princes, who eagerly sought their expertise and experience in their efforts to develop professional standing armies. Two decades of almost continuous warfare in the 1690s and 1700s assured employment for the Huguenot soldiers. They mostly served in the Protestant armies of the coalition against Louis XIV. War, religion and service thus form the main theme of this volume of essays, which elaborates the high-point of the story of the Huguenot soldiers between 1685 and 1713.

It is a story typified by the experiences of the de La Billière family.¹ This family from the heartland of Protestantism in France's south, possessed a martial tradition dating back to the thirteenth century. Like many members of the *petite noblesse* they adopted Calvin's dictates and became firm Protestants.² At the time of the 1685 Revocation, Charles de La Cour, seigneur de La Billière, was forced to choose between obeying his king and following the dictates of his heart. He chose obedience, thus securing the family possessions and ensuring the survival of the family in France. Of his four sons, two took flight for the sake of liberty of conscience, and joined their great-uncle, Pierre de La Cour de La Gardiolle. Gardiolle died a refugee in London, while his nephews, Paul and Pierre, fought under William III in Ireland and the Netherlands. The first of them to be naturalised was Pierre, in 1701. Ironically, at the time of the Peace of Ryswick in 1698, Pierre and Paul were on leave in Brussels where they met their brothers, François and Charles, who had remained in France and fought for King Louis. This was the only time post-Revocation that they would see one another, but their relationship was maintained through letters, in which there appears no trace of animosity through fighting on opposite sides in the great conflict.³ Family members continued to face one another in wars throughout the eighteenth century until the last on the line in France, Louis Marie de la Cour de

1 For the history of this family, see Sir B. B. Burke, *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Colonial Gentry*, ed. A. P. Burke (2 vols, London, 1891–5), vol. 2, pp. 418–20; F. P. de Labillière, *History of a Cevenol Family: A Paper read before the Huguenot Society of London, January 11, 1888* (London, 1888).

2 See the will of Fulcrand de La Cour, Seigneur de La Billière, 30 March 1637, in which he declared himself to be a Protestant: Burke, *Colonial Gentry*, p. 418.

3 Burke, *Colonial Gentry*, p. 420.

La Gardiolle, fell foul of Admiral Nelson at the battle of the Nile. In Britain the only remaining male line of the de La Billière family served the professions in church, army and law.

The unique history of Huguenot soldiering has attracted much interest from historians, and it is useful to say something of its early historiography. Here Samuel Smiles can be mentioned, one of the first to broadcast the significant role played by Huguenots in the events of 1688. Smiles bemoaned the lack of knowledge in the English-speaking world of the number and nature of French Protestant military service. However, he himself referred to earlier complaints by the French themselves that so many of their countrymen had been, seemingly, forgotten by the British. It is worth quoting at some length the plea of the French historian Jules Michelet for the inclusion of Huguenots in the story of William III's army:

The army of William was strong precisely in that Calvinistic element which James [II] repudiated in England – I mean in our Huguenot soldiers, the brothers of the Puritans. I am astonished that Macaulay has thought fit to leave this circumstance in the background. I cannot believe that great England, with all her glories and her inheritance of Liberty, is unwilling nobly to avow the part which we Frenchmen had in her deliverance. In the Homeric enumeration which the historian gives of the followers of William, he [Macaulay] reckons up English, Germans, Dutch, Swedes, Swiss, with the picturesque detail of their arms, uniforms, and all, down even to the two hundred negroes with their black faces set off by embroidered turbans and white feathers who followed the body of English gentry led by the Earl of Macclesfield. But he did not see our Frenchmen. Apparently the proscribed Huguenot soldiers who followed William did not do honour to the Prince by their clothes! Doubtless many of them wore the dress in which they had fled France – and it had become dusty, worn, and tattered.⁴

Robin Gwynn has sought to defend Macaulay, claiming his appreciation of the Huguenots was greater than that of most nineteenth-century Britons.⁵ The problem for Michelet was not that Macaulay had said nothing of them, but that he said too little in his otherwise thorough (if stridently Whiggish) narrative of the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688. Yet, while Smiles was responsible for presenting the British public with the achievements of the Huguenots in all walks-of-life, continental historians had already done much to establish the facts of refugee service in the armies of Europe. In particular, the research of Pierre Charles Weiss and Eugene and Emily Haag has stood the test of time.⁶ It is important to note that these early and thorough historians placed on record information (primarily in biographical form) of

4 J. Michelet, *Louis XIV et la Revocation de l'Edit de Nantes* (Histoire de France, vol. 13, Paris, 1860), pp. 418–19. Cited in S. Smiles, *The Huguenots: Their Settlements, Churches, and Industries in England and Ireland* (London, fourth edition 1870), pp. 184–5.

5 R. D. Gwynn, 'Patterns in the Study of Huguenot Refugees in Britain: past, present and future', in I. Scouloudi (ed.), *Huguenots in Britain and their French Background, 1550–1800* (London, 1987), pp. 217–18.

6 C. Weiss, *Histoire des réfugiés protestants de France depuis la révocation de l'Édit de Nantes jusqu'à nos jours* (2 vols, Paris, 1853); E. and E. Haag, *La France Protestante, ou Vies des Protestants Français qui se sont fait un nom dans l'histoire depuis les premiers temps de la Réformation jusqu'à la reconnaissance du principe de la liberté des cultes par*

Huguenot soldiers which has not been significantly tested or stretched till the present day. However, even these authors drew upon older published works that pre-dated the emergence of History as an academic discipline.

The Haags based their pioneering, multi-volume work on original manuscript material in France, the majority of it still extant. Weiss based much of his incisive comments on a combination of printed primary sources, supplemented by secondary works. His comments on the Huguenots in Germany (and Brandenburg-Prussia especially) are a good case in point, being based on primary sources, such as Ancillon. He also relied upon the magisterial eighteenth-century works of Erman and Reclam, and on Beckman.⁷ Pierre Jurieu and Frederick the Great also feature among the sources used by Weiss for the Huguenots in Germany.⁸ In this way Weiss presented to the French reading public much information on the role and contribution of the Huguenots in countries as diverse as Germany, Sweden, Denmark-Norway and Russia (though there was little published material for him to digest here).

The same approach, though arguably more purely antiquarian in its scope, was adopted by Emmanuel Orentin Douen in France and D. C. A. Agnew in England, who both worked through the lists of abjurations, imprisonments, fines and pensions maintained by the *archives nationales* among other sources.⁹ Limited in approach to the Huguenots of Paris, Douen nevertheless demonstrated the value of manuscript sources for the study of the Huguenots. Agnew's interest was far more general, though he confined himself to Huguenots in the British Isles. This is evidence of the depth of interest created by earlier authors such as Weiss and Haag in France and Smiles in England. These two nations were brought together in the form of Baron F. de Schickler, whose work on the English refuge of the Huguenots complimented his ongoing research in France.¹⁰

Among other effects, these published works prompted the establishment of societies aimed at the study of the Huguenots generally. The Huguenot Society of London and that of South Carolina (both established in 1885) became natural homes for the investigation of the refugees and their descendants in national context. However, the loser in all this was the very internationalism inherent to the Huguenots diaspora from 1685, the very period of focus for this study of refugee soldiers.

l'Assemblée Nationale; ouvrage précédé d'une notice historique sur le Protestantisme en France, et suivi de pièces justificatives (9 vols, Paris, 1846–59).

7 C. Ancillon, *Histoire de l'établissement des Français réfugiés en Brandebourg* (Berlin, 1690); J. P. Erman and P. C. F. Reclam, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des Réfugiés François dans les États du Roi* (9 vols, Berlin, 1782–99); J. Beckmann, *Historische Beschreibung der Chur und Mark Brandenburg* (2 vols, Berlin, 1751–3).

8 Frederick the Great, *Histoire de mon temps. Instruction militaire du Roi de Prusse pour ses Généraux. Instruction secrète ... contenant les ordres secrets ... Traduite de l'original allemand par le Prince de Ligne* (Berlin, 1788); P. Jurieu, *Lettres pastorales* (Rotterdam, 1688).

9 E. O. Douen, *La révocation de l'Edit de Nantes a Paris, d'après des documents inédits* (3 vols, Paris, 1894); D. C. A. Agnew, *Protestant Exiles from France in the Reign of Louis XIV* (Edinburgh, 1866; 3 vols, London, second edition 1871).

10 Baron F. de Schickler, *Les Eglises du Refuge en Angleterre* (3 vols, Paris, 1892).

Early statements about the Huguenots as soldiers after 1685 were, however, accepted as fact. While much of the biographical detail of their lives has remained sound, little has been done to test the wider implication of their services to the armies of Europe. As a result of this interaction between long-accepted truths and recent scholarship, Robin Gwynn has charted the fortunes of Huguenot research in the English-speaking world, concluding that only recently has there emerged new interest among academic historians in the Huguenots.¹¹ Much new research has focused on reconstructing the French Protestant ‘world’, while other works have treated them within various contexts; as one group of immigrants among many, or as soldiers within broader expatriate communities of foreign servicemen.¹²

This volume focuses on the significance and nature of Huguenot soldiering between 1685 and 1713, but tries to widen the scope by charting their European experience by studying their role in England, Ireland, the United Provinces, Brandenburg, Savoy and Russia.¹³ The chapters in this book are grouped by national perspectives but deal with similar themes that cut right through this division; the themes of religion, service and war. An introductory chapter by David Trim provides a panoramic overview and analysis of the origins of Huguenot soldiering. He shows how the origins of the military skills of Huguenots must be traced back to the sixteenth century Wars of Religion. The Huguenots’ experience in the wars initiated a military tradition which would endure until the late seventeenth century.

The theme of refuge and religion deals with the direct results of the cataclysmic decision of Louis XIV to revoke the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Thousands of refugees who were determined to keep their religion fled France and were dispersed over Europe – mostly travelling to England, Brandenburg and the United Provinces. Dianne Ressler, for instance, describes the fortunes of one of them, Isaac Dumont de Bostaquet, who fled to The Hague and, although no professional soldier, was committed and obliged to take up arms in the service of William III. Two biographical chapters highlight the difficulties of some of the greatest officers of Huguenot origin. Randolph Vigne analyses the career of Henri de Massue de Ruvigny, Earl of Galway, who fled France in 1685 and became one of the highest officers in King William’s army, as well as a patron of Huguenot refugees in Ireland. Louis de Durfort-Duras, Earl of Feversham, had left France before 1685 and served in the armies of Charles II and James II, as Philip Rambaut describes. Detlef Harms as well shows how

11 R. D. Gwynn, ‘Patterns in the Study of Huguenot Refugees in Britain: past, present and future’, in I. Scouloudi (ed.), *Huguenots in Britain and their French Background*, pp. 217–36 (second revised edition, Brighton and Portland, 2000).

12 R. A. Mentzer and A. Spicer (eds), *Society and Culture in the Huguenot World, 1559 to 1685* (Cambridge, 2002); R. Vigne and C. Littleton (eds), *From Strangers to Citizens: The Integration of Immigrant Communities in Britain, Ireland and Colonial America, 1550–1750* (Brighton and Portland, 2001); M. R. Glozier, *The Huguenot Soldiers of William of Orange and the Glorious Revolution of 1688: The Lions of Judah* (Brighton and Portland, 2002).

13 The most thorough overview of the Huguenot regiments in Britain between 1688 and 1713 is V. Costello, ‘Researching Huguenot officers in the British army, 1688–1713’, *The Genealogists’ Magazine: Journal of the Society of Genealogists*, 28/8 (December 2005): 335–54.

the 'unfortunate banished people from France' found refuge in Brandenburg after 1685.

The second and main theme of this volume, service, is undoubtedly the actual contribution of Huguenot soldiers to foreign armies. It was perhaps the army of Louis XIV that first distinguished itself through its superior quality. Through the expulsion of the Huguenots, military expertise was unwittingly exported and utilised by foreign princes, in the process of building up professional standing armies. As Philip Rambaut shows, Huguenot soldiers were already attracted to England under Charles II and James II, partly through the efforts of the Earl of Feversham, but as John Childs argues, the mass of Huguenot soldiers entered Britain after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. In the United Provinces as well Huguenot soldiers contributed to the augmentation of the army at the eve of the Nine Years' War and were, moreover, instrumental in the success of the Glorious Revolution in 1688–9, as Matthew Glozier and David Onnekink point out. Huguenot soldiers were actively being sought in Brandenburg, as Matthias Asche, Detlef Harms and Helmut Schnitter show, through the 1685 Edict of Potsdam. But they were also recruited from France before 1685, making them less poor refugees and rather professional armies that played a vital role in the development of the Brandenburg army. Andreas Flick and Paola Bianchi study the contribution of Huguenots to the building-up of the standing army of the Dukes of Brunswick-Lüneburg and Savoy-Piedmont. After the Nine Years' War many Huguenots were demobilised but were eagerly sought by Peter the Great to enrol in the Russian army, as Matthew Glozier describes. That Huguenot soldiers could also cause friction in the armies in which they served is shown by David Onnekink, who analyses the reception and perception of Huguenots in the English army.

The last theme, war, returns in most of the articles. The Huguenots, forced to leave their native country after 1685, became soldiers in the armies of the Grand Alliance that turned against the Sun King. The only article that deals primarily with actual warfare though is by Harman Murtagh, who discusses the Irish campaigns. In England, the United Provinces and Brandenburg, Huguenots often fought in separate regiments that distinguished themselves on the battlefield, but these were mostly disbanded at the end of the Nine Years' War, after which Huguenots continued to fight in the War of the Spanish Succession but not in distinct regiments. Although the story of the Huguenot soldiers did not end in 1713, the Peace of Utrecht marks a crucial watershed after which French Protestants continued to serve abroad but not in distinct regiments or in grand wars.

The themes war, religion and service form the essence of historiography on Huguenot soldiers and have done so for a long time, but in this volume several additional themes emerge which may provide a direction for future research. Traditional (Huguenot) military historiography has largely focused on regiments and warfare. With the rise of the New Military History or 'War and Society' schools in the 1980s, emphasising the 'socialization of military history',¹⁴ attention has increasingly been paid to the integration of soldiers in the foreign armies, their professional contribution and their social context. Migrating French Huguenot

14 See C. Jones, 'New Military History for Old? War and Society in Early Modern Europe', *European Studies Review*, 12 (1982): 97–108.

soldiers distinguished themselves by their service record in foreign armies and were instrumental in the spread of knowledge about military affairs and so the development of professional armies outside France. They also established themselves as part of French communities abroad that developed new sets of loyalty and identity and formed part of international family networks. Three further themes therefore emerge from the articles in this volume: the contribution of professionalism and experience, the transfer of loyalties and the shifting identities.

Huguenot soldiers contributed to the professionalisation of European armies in several ways. Firstly, they brought with them experience from many years in the best army in Europe. As Trim shows, the Huguenots had a long established tradition of military service. On the whole Huguenot soldiers had a good reputation. William III held his Huguenot regiments in high regard. A similar picture arises, for instance, from the articles of Glozier, Flick, Asche and Bianchi, showing how Huguenot regiments contributed to the professionalisation of the armies of Russia, Celle, Brandenburg and Savoy. Still their skills should not be overestimated, since many soldiers, such as Isaac Dumont de Bostaquet for instance, as Ressinger points out, had had almost no military experience before taking service in the Dutch army.

Another way in which Huguenots contributed to the professionalisation of European armies was more indirectly. They brought with them knowledge of military literature as Schnitter points out, and as he and Glozier show, were at the forefront of the establishment of military academies. Schnitter also points out that their knowledge helped the Brandenburgers to reorganise the regiments in a way that contributed to their effectiveness. According to Harms as well 'The adoption of the French regimental structure and appropriate army tactics' were beneficial to the Brandenburg army. Trim argues that the clientele structures of the following of the Huguenot nobility also helped in creating well organised regiments. Most authors also point to the fact that Huguenots had the reputation of being well-disciplined, an important factor in the development of professional armies.

A second theme that emerges from the articles is that of loyalty, or rather of conflicting or transferring allegiances. A soldier serves his king, but many Huguenots were obliged to break their oath, flee for the sake of their religion and serve another prince. As Trim argues, during the religious wars many Huguenot soldiers served God before the king, and were consequently regarded as deserters by Catholics. Many mercenaries and soldiers of fortune served whoever would pay them, but in the age of emerging standing armies after the Thirty Years' War this would increasingly become problematic. Ressinger contends that 'Dumont's loyalty was always with the King', and argues out that William III had Huguenot officers take a new oath of loyalty to the States-General in order to break their ties with the French king.

The case of Huguenot soldiers in France may have been exceptional, as many Catholic princes, such as the Duke of Savoy, as Bianchi shows, had no qualms about establishing Protestant regiments of seasoned Huguenot soldiers. As John Childs shows, even James II, who tended to promote Catholic officers, was prepared to appoint Feversham as chief commander, as he had been a loyal friend. Feversham was even entrusted to suppress the Protestant Monmouth rebellion in 1685. But even so, many Huguenots like Bostaquet must have felt the pressure of such conflicting loyalties. Rambaut asks whether Feversham's loyalty to James II in

turn was ‘misplaced’; Miremont, for instance, indeed refused to fight for James II against William, but the Duke of Schomberg looked down on Marlborough when he deserted James II. Each officer had to make up his mind which choice to make. Where Huguenots served in the armies of Protestant princes, however, their loyalty and commitment was rather seen to increase. William III had every reason to trust his Huguenot officers, as Murtagh points out, even more than his English commanders. Onnekink, however, shows how some English pamphleteers suspected Huguenot soldiers of treasonable behaviour.

A last theme that comes out of this volume is that of identity. Ressinger illustrates the loyalty among Huguenot officers in the Dutch Republic; such mutual bonds guaranteed the continuous existence of Huguenot soldiering after 1685, and their organisation in Huguenot regiments in their identification as such. As Trim shows, their identity was in many ways entangled with their zeal for their religion, which indeed was ‘the very essence’ of their existence. Huguenots were able to maintain their identity and reputation abroad through the organisation of specifically Huguenot regiments. Bianchi, for instance, points out how important it was for Huguenots and Waldensians to maintain their identity by serving in distinct regiments in the Savoyard army. However, as Childs points out, they were not unique in serving abroad, as most European armies were polyglot and multicultural. Still, in this age of professionalisation, some degree of ‘nationalisation’ of the standing army reduced the reliance of princes on mercenary auxiliary regiments. In England in particular, as Childs shows, the separate Huguenot regiments were unusual and disappeared altogether after the end of the Nine Years’ War.

Huguenot soldiers were often part of larger French exile communities who remained distinct in the societies in which they were embedded. Ressinger and Flick, for instance, provide insights into the customs and fortunes of these communities in the United Provinces and Celle, and the ways in which the soldiers formed a part of those communities. Belonging to these larger exiled French communities undoubtedly strengthened the ability of the mercenary soldiers to regard themselves as Huguenots, and they continued to do so until after 1713 all hope of return to France was lost. Still, their self-perceived identity must have eroded over time, especially after a second migration. Glozier, for instance, describes how Huguenots who had fled to Brandenburg after 1685 ended up in Russia after the Nine Years’ War, by which time they could be regarded as ‘Germanised Huguenots’ building up a new life in Russia.

There remains the question of how important the ‘construction’ of identities was. As Childs points out, Huguenot soldiers were ‘paraded as religious refugees’ by William III to strengthen his own image as a Protestant prince. It was precisely William’s identification of his Huguenot soldiers with his Protestant cause that would be criticised. Pamphleteers and MPs in England, as Onnekink shows, often regarded William’s Huguenot regiments as mercenary armies, mistrusted their loyalties and forced many of them to remain outsiders by opposing acts of naturalisation. Even if they had lived for a prolonged time in their new countries and were naturalised, they were, as Rambaut points out about Feversham, ‘considered very much a foreigner and not always to be trusted’. Indeed, the perception of these foreign soldiers was often negative.

In conclusion, it can be argued, as Harms writes, that ‘the Huguenots distinguished themselves by demonstrating an ethos of loyalty to the state, religious piety and, usually, an assiduous attitude to duty and discipline’. It is the aim of this volume to offer a new overview, focused in time but diverging in geographical perspective, of the nature, contribution and actions of the Huguenot soldiers, but also to pose new questions and open up new avenues for research.