



# THE MAKING OF THE BRITISH ARMY

ALLAN MALLINSON

TRANSWORLD  
BOOKS

## About the Book

**Edgehill, 1642:** Surveying the disastrous scene in the aftermath of the first battle of the English Civil War, Oliver Cromwell realizes that war can no longer be made in the old, feudal way: there has to be system and discipline, and therefore - eventually - a standing professional army.

From the 'New Model Army' of Cromwell's distant vision, former soldier **Allan Mallinson** shows us the people and events that have shaped the army we know today. How Marlborough's momentous victory at Blenheim is linked to Wellington's at Waterloo; how the desperate fight at Rorke's Drift in 1879 underpinned the heroism of the airborne forces at Arnhem in 1944; and why Montgomery's momentous victory at El Alamein mattered long after the Second World War was over.

**From the Army's origins at the battle of Edgehill to our current conflict in Afghanistan, this is history at its most relevant - and most dramatic.**

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# The Making of the British Army

Allan Mallinson

*To  
SUE  
a soldier's wife who followed the drum  
and  
from German lodgings or Roman villa  
made a home*

*And in gratitude to  
Sir John Keegan,  
who taught a great many of us their history*

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## Introduction

All civilizations owe their origins to the warrior; their cultures nurture the warriors who defend them, and the differences between them will make those of one very different in externals from those of another.

Sir John Keegan, *A History of Warfare*

I came to write this book first and foremost as a soldier of thirty-five years. How and why 'my' army had become what it was - extraordinarily capable in spite of its small size - occupied me more and more. A soldier lives daily with his heritage - the uniforms, the pictures on the walls, the names of things, how people talk, what they do, and how they do it; never more so than on operations. And when you live with your history day in, day out, for thirty-five years you begin to see it in a different way from what is sometimes written in the history books, for certain things gain in significance, while others become mere 'noise'. So I began 'jobbing back' into history to try to understand what it was in our past that made us tick today. And when I made a link in the past I found that it immediately demanded I reach back even further, for there was never the equivalent of a military 'big bang' when suddenly the elements of the army were created. Indeed, even in the mists of the Dark Ages there are things that resonate in the modern army. Certainly I cannot believe that, say, Alfred's victory over the Danes at Ethandune on the downs overlooking the present-day battle-training area of Salisbury Plain is entirely unconnected with the spirit of that training.

So where to begin the story of the making of the British army? The Anglo-Saxon *fyrd* was a levy of free farmers assembled for a definite and short period, for the crops had to be sown and the harvest gathered. The Vikings with whom they battled were no better trained, however. The Normans were altogether better organized, but a single Roman legion would have routed William at Hastings, as it would any of the medieval peasant armies that fought in the Wars of the Roses, or the innumerable clan wars north of the border. Henry V's magnificent longbowmen would have found the Roman *testudo* hard to crack. And even gunpowder would not have dismayed a legion too much before the end of the sixteenth century, for muskets and artillery were then crude and cumbersome. The point was that Roman soldiers were professionals: the legions trained full-time. For twelve hundred years and more, neither England nor Scotland had a standing army; and without a standing army there could be no continuity. So a study of *the* British army is therefore best begun at the point from which there is unbroken continuity: the seventeenth century, at the restoration of Charles II to the thrones of England and Scotland, when events at last forced a standing army on the nation.

The next question is what to leave out, which almost every soldier I have spoken to about the book has asked. In a way everything matters, and the army has seen so much action. Conversely, however, it has never been monolithic: what happened in one part of the army, in one regiment perhaps, dramatic though it may have been, did not always change the overall picture. What matters are those people and events in the past that have made the army what it is today - an army emerging from a long and bruising campaign in Iraq, and fighting another in Afghanistan. I am not writing *the* history of the army; I am trying to explain its present in terms of its past.

There are of course different ways of doing this, but I felt that a continuous narrative would give the reader the best sense of the sweep of time, and therefore of the extraordinary way in which the army has advanced and retreated in size and efficiency over the years. It also puts into context some of the heroic actions that have imprinted themselves indelibly on the army's collective mind. And since any history of the British army is a part of the nation's story, it seems best to describe it from the perspective of Britain's history, which is not to say solely from the perspective of the history of these islands: try writing the history of the world without the British army. Of the 192 member states of the United Nations, the army has fought in or with well over half of these states or their predecessor polities.

Today only the United States and Britain (and possibly France) are capable of mounting independent operations of any scale overseas. This is not solely because of their armies' capabilities: overseas campaigns are joint operations, involving army, navy and air force. Nor is it just a matter of size: there are many larger armed forces than Britain's. The Indian army alone has five times the number of troops in Britain's three services put together (and as many again in the reserve). Even the Japanese army, or 'Ground Self-Defense Force' as constitutionally it has to be called, has some 40,000 more troops than the British. It is the range and balance of capabilities within a nation's armed forces that determine whether or not they are able to mount an independent campaign far from home. A force must be able to acquire intelligence on the enemy; manoeuvre against him; bring fire support to bear (from land, sea and air); protect against the enemy's own fire; and sustain itself. And when all these capabilities are lined up, a further capability - to command them - becomes key, for as Montgomery's American counterpart in Normandy,

Omar Bradley, said, 'Congress can make a general, but only communications can make him a commander.'

But 'Congress and communications' alone do not make a good general. 'Generalship' is a separate ingredient. When I was military attaché in Rome, an impressive Alpini brigadier once asked me who were the ten greatest British generals. I thought for a moment, then answered that there wouldn't be much debate about the top five, but for the rest . . . He stopped me, and with a sigh said: 'The point is, we don't have a single one. How do you think that makes an Italian officer feel?'

Generalship does indeed breed generalship. Sir David Richards, who in October 2010 became the new chief of the defence staff, led NATO forces in Afghanistan in 2006 during the Taleban offensive which looked as if it might succeed; giving evidence to the House of Commons defence committee afterwards, he described how he would retire to his office and 'have a conversation with Slim and Templer'. Field Marshals Slim and Templer had died in 1970 and 1979 respectively. They had both, however, been singularly successful fighting off the back foot east of Suez, and by extension had things to say about taking the fight to the enemy in Afghanistan today. When good generalship is a tradition, it becomes sustaining. Indeed, the same is true all the way down - to individual regiments, to the serjeants' mess, and to the most junior soldier. When asked why the Rifle Brigade had fought so well in the defence of Calais in 1940, their commanding officer replied simply, 'The regiment had always fought well, and we were among friends.'

The army's experience of mastering these various capabilities, the 'functions in combat' (manoeuvre, fire, communications, logistics, etc.), and generalship is an important part of this book. But *The Making of the British Army* is first and foremost a human story, for the old adage has much truth: navies and air forces are about manning

equipment, whereas armies are about equipping men. And this is why military operations, as opposed to air or naval, are less 'scientific', for the human factor is an elusive one. Other armies have fielded technically more able men than the British, men more ideologically driven, more combative (and certainly more brutal): for example, Max Hastings in his 1984 book *Overlord* argues that man-for-man the Germans were by far the best of the six armies in Normandy forty years earlier. But no army has so consistently fielded such all-round good soldiers - *regular* soldiers, certainly - as the British. Raymond Seitz, the former US ambassador in London, an anglophile but not an over-sentimental one, observes in his memoir *Over Here*: 'I know nothing kinder than an English nurse nor braver than a British soldier.'

There is another element in the making of the British army that is common to all armies, and that is the unique nature of war itself, and consequently of soldiering. The centurion in St Matthew's Gospel who says, 'For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh,' is saying that he is a man apart. Shakespeare's vision of the soldier in *As You Like It* is also of a man apart - 'Full of strange oaths . . . Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel, seeking the bubble reputation even in the cannon's mouth.'

The relationship between the warrior and society, between war and civilization, is intimately and personally explored in a little book called *Fusilier* by the late Reverend Professor John McManners, sometime Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Oxford, fellow and chaplain of All Souls, and alumnus of the theological college in which I was studying before I decided to join the army. In 1945 Jack McManners was a temporary major in the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, one of the toughest infantry

regiments the army has ever mustered. He had joined straight from Oxford in 1939 with a first in history, and was soon in action with the grenade and the bayonet in North Africa. Indeed, he was in action more or less continuously until the end of the war. In 2002 he turned his lifetime's 'recollections and reflections' on the war into *Fusilier*, in which he writes:

People tell academics and clergy to look at what the 'real world' is like. By this they mean dictating letters, selling and buying shares, instituting manufacturing processes, tapping information into computers. But behind their world is the real world they have forgotten: the battlefield. Here is the ultimate reason of the social order written in letters of lead and shards of steel.

*The Making of the British Army* is about the battlefield, the place where, ultimately, the peace of 'the social order' is decided: and it is indeed written in letters of lead and shards of steel.



# 1

## The First Dry Rattle of New-drawn Steel

*Edgehill, 23 October 1642*

ROBERT BERTIE, EARL of Lindsey, lay in agony on a pile of straw while his son, Lord Willoughby de Eresby, tried to staunch the flow of blood. Veteran of many a battle on the Continent, the earl was now a year short of sixty, bald and gaunt, but keen-eyed still. The musket ball was lodged deep in his thigh. Seeing his father fall Lord Willoughby had rushed to his side, only to be taken prisoner with him. It was evening, pitch dark and bitter cold. Outside the dimly lit barn which served as a Parliamentarian dressing station, 4,000 men lay dead or wounded on the gentle Warwickshire hillside near the little village of Radway: 'The field was covered with the dead,' wrote one who survived; 'yet no one could tell to what party they belonged.' The cold was a blessing, some were saying: it would make the blood congeal, save them from bleeding to death. But Lord Willoughby could do nothing to stem the haemorrhage, and he doubly despaired that it should have come to this: the noble earl of Lindsey, who had begun the morning as the King's general-in-chief, felled in the mêlée by a common musket!

There had not been a pitched battle on English soil for 130 years.<sup>1</sup> There had not been much of a battle anywhere for an English army in all that time. There *was* no English army. When it came to pushing the Scots back across the border, or putting down the Irish, as occasionally it did, the King would drum up a scratch force, engage officers who had gained a bit of experience with one of the continental armies, hire foreign mercenaries (Italian cavalry had fought against the Scots at Flodden in 1513) – and, when the job was done, quickly pay them off again. Standing armies were expensive. When war with France or Spain threatened, it was the navy to which the nation looked for the safeguard of the realm. Britain was the ‘sceptred isle’, and doubly blessed by her geography: only Denmark and the Kingdom of Naples had so favourably short a land border with their nearest neighbour as that between England and Scotland. Most of the inhabitants of the British Isles never saw a musket, let alone carried one.

And so in the opening moves of the Civil War, King Charles I had mustered a scratch army, derisively called Cavaliers, to do battle with Parliament’s scratch army, derisively called Roundheads, on a bright October morning in the green and pleasant English countryside between Stratford-upon-Avon and Banbury. The cores of both armies were the ‘trained bands’, the county militias under the lords lieutenant. But trained they scarcely were – certainly not *well* trained – except for some of the London bands, for the half-century since the Armada had been years of military decline. ‘Arms were the great deficiency,’ wrote one Royalist eye witness at Edgehill, ‘and the men stood up in the same garments in which they left their native fields.’ They stood, indeed – both sides – in the ancient line of battle, as the Greeks and Romans had, the Royalists at the top of the grassy slopes of Edgehill above the Vale of the Red Horse, many ‘with scythes, pitchforks, and even sickles in their hands, and literally like reapers descended to the

harvest of death'. Without so much as the customary sash to show their allegiance, it was little wonder that when they fell 'no one could tell to what party they belonged'.

The cavalry were not much better found, although the Royalist horse, whose *élan* became synonymous with the very word 'Cavalier', were superior to Parliament's. They were led by Prince Rupert of the Rhine, King Charles's nephew, dashing and ardent, who at only twenty-three had seen more recent service, in the Netherlands and Germany, than any officer in the field that day. Of artillery - 'with which war is made', as Napoleon Bonaparte would famously pronounce a century and a half later - there was pathetically little: just forty-odd guns between the two sides, neither manoeuvrable nor able to throw a great weight of shot. It wasn't that the country lacked the industrial base and technological know-how: since Tudor times there had been fifty iron foundries in the Kent and Sussex Weald capable of producing cannon as good as any in Europe, and of late the output of the gunpowder mills had been increasing in both quantity and quality. It was the skill to use the means of modern, continental warfare that was lacking. In Henry VIII's day every able-bodied nobleman had been blooded; now, not one in five had seen a battlefield. England, declared the fury in the Court's Twelfth Night masque of 1640, the last of Charles I's reign, was 'overgrown with peace'.

And so 28,000 men would do battle at Edgehill, with their officers scarcely knowing what they were about. Few on either side had any illusions about their situation, however. Sir Edmund Verney, the royal standard-bearer, confided to his son in a letter the night before: 'Our men are very raw, our victuals scarce and provisions for horses worse. I daresay there was never so raw, so unskillful and so unwilling an army brought to fight.' He did not live to receive a reply. The same was true of the Parliamentarian

army, although a certain religious zeal enlivened the ranks, like the rum ration of later wars.

Matters were made worse on the Royalist side by disputes among the senior officers. As King Charles's serjeant-major-general,<sup>2</sup> Jacob Astley, began his duty of forming up the infantry, a row broke out over what that formation should be. Astley, who had seen service with both the Dutch and Swedish armies, favoured the Swedish model of three ranks.<sup>3</sup> But his general-in-chief, Robert Bertie, the earl of Lindsey, favoured the Dutch model in which the infantry stood five ranks deep at least - a formation that was not able to cover as much ground but which was more solid and easier to control, especially with inexperienced troops. And Lindsey wanted also to keep the cavalry in close support, for the Parliamentary commander, the earl of Essex, had fought alongside the Dutch too; and Lindsey fancied therefore that he knew how Essex would fight.

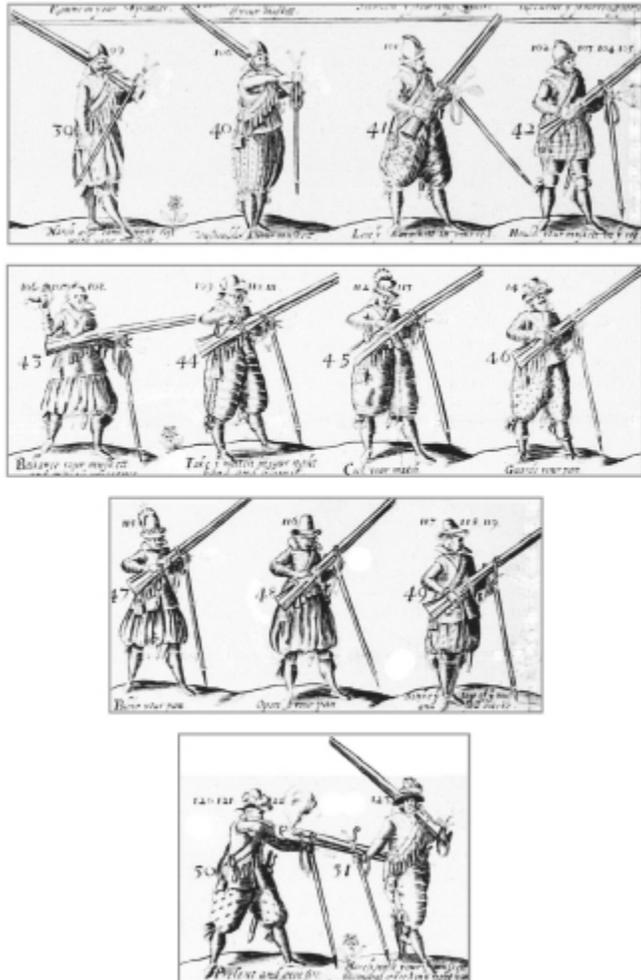
Prince Rupert disagreed. Serjeant-Major-General Astley had once been his tutor, and so he, too, favoured the Swedish model - not least in using the cavalry independently of the infantry. As the lieutenant-general Rupert was not just in command of the cavalry, he was second-in-command of the army; and since King Charles himself was at its head, he would answer only to the King. When Charles deferred to his nephew, Lindsey resigned his empty command and took his place instead at the head of the regiment he had raised in his native Lincolnshire. The earl of Forth, whose service had been with the great Swedish soldier-king Gustavus Adolphus, assumed the appointment, and the 'Swedish' troop dispositions were made.

There are better ways to begin a battle than with squabbling among senior officers and making infantrymen change their dispositions and then change back again. But to fight a battle without a common understanding of tactics

is asking for trouble, then as now. It was what happened when armies were brought together only on the eve of battle, and when officers received their training – some of it by no means up to date – in very different schools. These things were only avoided by having a professional, standing army. Did Charles wish for such an army, now, as he faced the earl of Essex's men? Perhaps. But what if the standing army had sided with Parliament instead? After all, Britain was an island, the Scots were manageable and the Irish, for all their intractability, did not threaten the peace of England. Best leave professional armies to the continental powers, for see how they had fuelled a war of religion across Europe for the past twenty-five years!<sup>4</sup>

It took time to draw up 15,000 men in line, all but a couple of thousand of them on foot, especially the semi-feudal companies of countrymen with scythes, pitchforks and sickles. The trained bands, if not drilled as well as once they had been, were at least uniformly equipped with the matchlock musket and the pike – in a 3:1 ratio of pikemen to 'the shot'. In some of the more poorly drilled county militias the proportion of pikemen was greater, for the matchlock was an unwieldy weapon, the barrel 4 feet long, so heavy, and so violent in its recoil, that it had to be fired from a rest driven into the ground. Inaccurate even over its short range, it was a crude device – in essence a steel pipe sealed at one end, with a thin bore-hole through to a 'pan' in which an initiating charge of powder was sprinkled and then sparked by a smouldering twist of rope (the slow match, hence 'matchlock') clamped in a trigger-operated lever. This fired the main charge – powder which had been poured down the barrel, with a lead or iron ball dropped in after it, all tamped tight by a ramrod. It was prone to misfire, for in rain the powder got damp and the match could go out. But with loose powder and glowing matches in close proximity, the risk of premature – and catastrophic – explosion was an even greater concern, and loading

therefore proceeded at the pace of the slowest musketeer, to words of command more akin to a health and safety notice than to battlefield orders:



A few of the dozens of 'words of command' needed to get the musketeers of both Royalist and Parliamentary armies to handle loose gunpowder safely and to fire volleys.

- Take up your Match;
- Handle your Musket;
- Order your Musket;
- Give Rest to your Musket;
- Open your Pan;
- Clear your Pan;
- Prime your Pan;

Shut your Pan;  
Cast off your loose Powder;  
Blow off your Powder;  
Cast about your Musket;  
Trail your Rest;  
Open your charge;  
Charge with powder;  
Charge with bullet;  
Draw forth your Scouring Stick;  
Shorten your Scouring Stick;  
Ram Home;  
Withdraw your Scouring Stick;  
Shorten your Scouring Stick;  
Return your Scouring Stick;  
Recover your Musket;  
Poise your Musket;  
Give rest to your Musket;  
Draw forth your Match;  
Blow your coal;  
Cock your Match;  
Try your Match;  
Guard and Blow;  
Open your pan;  
Present;  
Give Fire!

With such deliberate drill the rate of fire was glacial, even with alternate ranks firing and reloading. It was fatal, not just ineffective, to discharge at too great a range, for if the fire fell short the enemy's musketeers and pikemen would be able to close with them before another volley (fire by the entire line) could be got off. And if it were cavalry advancing against the line there was scarcely time to get off a volley at all before the pikemen needed to take post in front. At Edgehill the pike they carried was 16 feet long, making the line even more unwieldy to manoeuvre, for the

pikemen had to wedge the butts in the ground and brace themselves to make a solid wall of steel against cavalry or the enemy's pikes. Little wonder, then, that even in the best-trained bands there were three of them to every musket.

At Rupert's urging, King Charles placed his cavalry - the 'horse' proper as well as the dragoons (who fought dismounted with sword and musket rather than from the saddle)<sup>5</sup> - on either end of the line to prevent his flanks from being turned, and to allow freedom of movement when the moment came to charge. And Rupert, in command of the stronger right wing of the cavalry, would be looking for just that opportunity, for in many a battle on the Continent he had seen the enemy's line scattered by a well-timed charge.

Opposite Rupert's wing, three-quarters of a mile or so down the hill and beyond a hedge, the left wing of the Parliamentary cavalry was well supported by musketeers and cannon. Indeed, Parliament's line, comprising three 'tertias' (brigades) of infantry, outnumbered the Royalists by 3,000 musketeers and pikemen; but this margin was less than the earl of Essex had hoped for (there were many stragglers behind him still after his rapid march from Worcester), and he therefore moved two cavalry regiments from his right to behind the infantry, leaving just one regiment of horse supported by dragoons and musketeers on that flank.

But this, to Essex's mind, did not matter, for Parliament was not going to attack first. After all, Charles had the advantage of the slope, and Rupert had a reputation for dash. Essex was not going to risk his infantry to the shock action of a cavalry charge as they advanced uphill. And so the morning passed with little but mutual jeering and a desultory and ineffective exchange of artillery. The battlefield was still a quietish sort of place until the lines

came to close quarters; a man might say his prayers or play a game of cards until the moment came.

In the early afternoon Astley knelt down and in the hearing of all prayed: 'Oh Lord, Thou knowest how busy I must be this day. If I forget Thee, do not Thou forget me.' Then he rose, and with a 'Forward, boys!' led the Royalist line in a steady march down the hill. Half a mile on they halted and the cannon on both sides opened fire; but the smoke and noise was greater than the harm, and the guns soon fell silent again.

Essex, though dismayed by the passing of the day to no effect, and not least by Astley's half-advance, was not going to be tempted into attacking. But neither was he going to wait idly on Charles's whim. He decided to send dragoons to probe the Royalist right, following them up with horse and a few of the supporting musketeers from his left flank. It was about three o'clock, the sun was already low in the sky, and the Royalist right had little difficulty seeing them off. It was not exactly the opportunity Rupert had hoped for, but at this hour it was his best chance. He gave the order, and both wings of his cavalry began to advance, the plumed host surging forward at first in an amiable trot, for all the world like gentlemen taking their sport.

There was a tactic much favoured by Spanish cavalry, the *caracole*, in which successive lines of horse would canter elegantly up to the enemy line, wheel to the left and discharge their pistols. But Rupert was having none of this: he would have his men go at a gallop, firing as they collided with the enemy horse. Then, seizing sword from scabbard, they would forge a path through the mass of horse by sheer momentum. It was how Gustavus Adolphus's Swedes had borne down on so many of their German opponents. And there was only one way to deal with it - a counter-charge.<sup>6</sup>

Essex's cavalry, trained (in so far as they were trained) after the Dutch model, awaited the attack with pistol and carbine rather than preparing for a counter-charge. But

Rupert's cavalry, confident men on powerful horses, with the hill giving impetus to their advance, were a terrifying sight to men who might ride to church on a Sunday, or drive a plough in spring and autumn, but had never heard the thunder of so many unfriendly hooves. They fired an ineffective volley, turned and fled the field.

Rupert's men spurred after them, quickly overrunning the cannon and muskets on both flanks of the Parliamentary line. Without cavalry to cover them, the line might indeed have been rolled up from end to end, but the Cavaliers, high on the thrill of the chase, instead galloped on in pursuit of the fleeing Roundheads until, some miles on, they came upon their baggage train, where in time-honoured fashion they fell out to loot. A century and a half later the duke of Wellington would still be complaining about the cavalry's 'habit of galloping at everything'.

Seeing the collapse of the Parliamentary flanks, the Royalist infantry now advanced boldly. But in the centre of the Parliamentary line two brigades had stood firm, and with no Royalist cavalry in sight to oppose them, Essex counter-attacked with the two regiments of cavalry he had posted behind these stalwarts in the centre.

The situation suddenly looked dangerous for the King's side, for there was no mounted reserve, Charles having allowed his Life Guard to join Rupert's charge. But 'the foot soldiers stood their ground with great courage,' as one chronicler wrote, 'and though many of the King's soldiers were unarmed and had only cudgels, they kept their ranks, and took up the arms which their slaughtered neighbours left to them'.<sup>7</sup>

In the ensuing 'push of pikes', a cosy term to describe brutish hand-to-hand fighting, the Parliamentarians were just too strong, and at length the Royalist centre gave way. Indeed for a time it looked as if Charles would have to concede, but both sides had been badly shaken by their crude initiation to battle, and were rapidly exhausted by

the close fighting. At the last minute some of Rupert's men came cantering back to put heart into the Royalists, and the earl of Essex prudently broke off battle. Neither side had achieved a decisive advantage. It was the dead and dying who were left in possession of the field.

It had been during this last desperate push of pikes that the earl of Lindsey was shot through the thigh. The veteran of the Prince of Orange's service, who in vain had advocated the more compact battle line of the Dutch infantry (just as he had used Dutch engineers to drain the Lincolnshire fens to which he gave his name), now cursed in the bitter cold of the night. Why had the King not heeded his counsel, taking instead that of a 23-year-old thruster? 'If it please God I should survive,' he declared to his son, 'I never will fight in the same field with boys again!'

But it did not please God. Just before midnight the earl of Lindsey, like so many of his Lincoln regiment, joined the 'harvest of death'.

Others on the Royalist side were soon thinking the same as their late general-in-chief, if not directly blaming Rupert then recognizing that Edgehill was not the way to make war. And those who had recently seen service abroad also knew that a continental army would have swept them from the field. It was well that Britain was an island, and the navy capable - and that the Parliamentary army was no better found than they.

Parliamentarian officers were thinking along the same lines, too. Oliver Cromwell, MP for Huntingdon and a captain of horse, had arrived too late on the field at Edgehill to see action, but he had been able to see well enough what had happened. He wrote at once to his cousin John Hampden, one of the Parliamentary leaders:

Your troopers are most of them old decayed servingmen and tapsters; and their [the Royalists'] troopers are

gentlemen's sons, younger sons and persons of quality; do you think that the spirits of such base and mean fellows will ever be able to encounter gentlemen who have honour and courage and resolution in them? You must get men of a spirit that is likely to go on as far as gentlemen will go, or else I am sure you will be beaten still.

Cromwell may have been a puritan, but he was a puritan gentleman. However, he also recognized the weakness of the Royalist cavalry. Their lack of discipline had let slip a thorough victory at Edgehill, and he sensed it would not be the last time that Royalist *élan* would turn into unruliness. They could be countered by disciplined troops.

At Edgehill something profound had been, if not born, then certainly conceived:

Thank Heaven! At last the trumpets peal  
Before our strength gives way.  
For King or for the Commonweal—  
No matter which they say,  
The first dry rattle of new-drawn steel  
Changes the world today!<sup>8</sup>

The change that Kipling wrote of two and a half centuries later was not merely the overturning of the constitution but the dawning of the realization that war could no longer be made in the old feudal way; that there must be system and discipline, and thus (eventually) a regular, professional army. For although there would be another two years' inconclusive fighting (during which Cromwell would rise to lieutenant-general) before Parliament grasped the nettle and raised an army in which enlisted men received proper training and regular pay, and the officers were selected and promoted on professional merit, Edgehill was the genesis of the 'New Model'.

And when Parliament did at last grasp the nettle it did so resolutely and without too much scruple: puritan ministers might teach the Gospel, but it was the likes of Carlo Fantom, a Croatian (the Croats were famed for their irregular light cavalry), who would teach the sword. 'I care not for your cause,' he boasted: 'I come to fight for your half-crown and your handsome women.'

Fantom was indeed a notable ravisher, and would soon change sides for the promise of more half-crowns. But the Royalists, on that occasion at least, proved to have the greater principles and eventually hanged him - for ravishing.

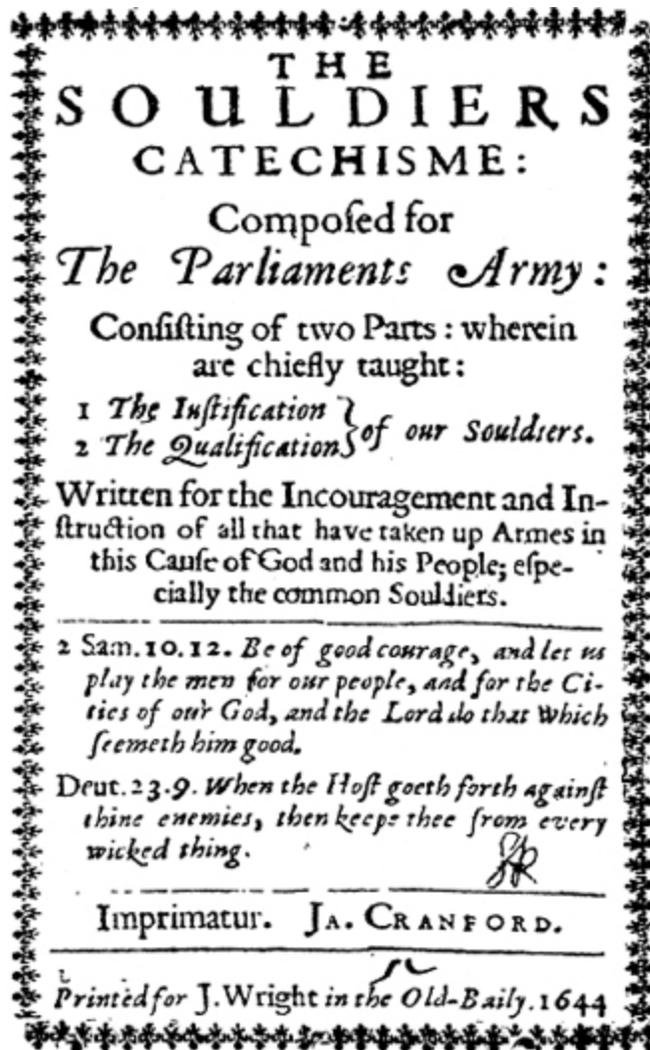
The New Model Army would not be especially large, however - 22,000 men and 2,300 officers, two-thirds infantry to one-third cavalry (about the number, indeed, of the British infantry today) - but it would be superbly disciplined, equipped and trained. And for the first time a British army would wear a true uniform - red. Cromwell was certain of the type of man he wanted to lead such troops, too: 'I had rather have a plain, russet-coated Captain, that knows what he fights for, and loves what he knows, than what you call a Gentleman and is nothing else.' Out went the officers who had attained their ranks as MPs, and in came those who had proved themselves capable. While theirs was not a vast army, the Parliamentarians believed that professional quality would make up for lack of numbers, although ironically Charles himself was never able to muster many more troops than they.

Curiously, attempting to raise more troops was in fact the only Royalist response to a war that was not going their way. Charles and his generals did little to change their tactics, nor did they develop any sound military strategy. There were some loyal and able supporters, such as the estimable Sir Ralph Hopton who raised a formidable little army in Cornwall and almost captured the earl of Essex. Hopton's *Maxims for the Management of an Army* (1643)

would have served the New Model admirably, with the terse injunction to 'pay well, command well, hang well!' But paying well became increasingly difficult for Charles, and commanding well, to his mind, remained synonymous with birthright, while capital punishment was no deterrent to a man who evaded service in the first place.

By the beginning of 1645, as the New Model was being readied for action, the Royalist forces were spread thinly about the country in a patchwork of sieges and counter-sieges, none of which was vital, and none of which promised a decision. The arrival in the field of the New Model could easily tip the scales irrecoverably in Parliament's favour, and Charles's more astute advisers urged him to attack before it was fully formed. But they urged in vain: Charles's want of military strategy, especially the planning of campaigns, was as great as his want of political instinct.<sup>9</sup> For without operational art war becomes a set of disconnected engagements, relative attrition the only measure of success or failure. Charles conflated sieges with sovereignty: not only were towns and cities the source of the money and arms with which war was made, they were key elements of his realm. The Parliamentarians, on the other hand, were not viscerally connected with borough or shire; they were intent only on defeat of the King. Raising the New Model Army was therefore a strategic stroke of huge significance - a move of war-winning potential, for an army that could not be beaten was, self-evidently, able to dictate the course of events in the field, and it was only in the field, now, that the political issue could be settled. Those of Charles's advisers who advocated attacking the New Model before it reached its full effectiveness had grasped this essential strategic fact. Unfortunately for the Royalist cause, Prince Rupert, by now general of the army, had not. He proposed instead to

recover the north of England and join forces with the Royalists in Scotland.



The *vade mecum* issued to every man of the New Model Army.

As the crow flies, from Edgehill where the war began in 1642 to Naseby where effectively it ended in June 1645 is but 30 miles. And in three years of fighting little appeared to have changed in the design for battle, although at Naseby it was the Parliamentarians who would form up on a ridge, with the infantry in the centre (five large regiments in the front line and three in reserve) under the New Model's admirable serjeant-major-general Sir Philip