

Paul Scannell, *Conflict and Soldiers' Literature in Early Modern Europe: The Reality of War* (Bloomsbury: London, 2015), 221pp., ISBN 978-1-4725-6670-6, hbk £76.50, pbk £26.09

This useful study undertakes a detailed analysis of the writings of English, Scots and Welsh soldiers engaged in continental warfare from the 1570s to the 1640s. It aims to provide a 'bottom up' survey of this literature to provide insights into the practicalities and realities of warfare as experienced by the soldiers themselves. Scannell argues repeatedly that early modern military history has tended to neglect soldiers' writings in favour of more 'official' types of sources such as state papers and the correspondence of civilian statesmen that 'rarely expose the historian to the grim reality of battle' (p. 36). He also points out that soldiers' prominence amongst seventeenth-century British autobiographers ensured that by the outbreak of Britain's civil wars in the 1640s, the officer class was not filled with the uninformed novices so often described in outdated historiography. In this sense, Scannell's work is a specialised piece of research that reinforces many of the conclusions found in Mark Charles Fissel's more broad *English Warfare 1511-1642* (Routledge: London, 2001).

The book's focus on the soldiers themselves is important because of the growing thirst for military literature in early Stuart Britain, and because as Scannell rightly points out, this literature often had a political edge to it. Therefore the book discusses the authorship, audience, purpose and context for the memoirs and observations of a variety of military writers ranging from the famous Sir Francis Vere and Sir Robert Monro to the less celebrated Thomas Churchyard, Geoffrey Gates, Henry Hexham, Sydenham Poyntz and Sir Roger Williams. In doing so, Scannell makes a worthy contribution to the ever-growing historiography of honour, outlining a broad concept of military honour that embraced both officers and the rank and file. He argues, with some justification that professionalism was not incompatible with adhering to strict codes of military honour. Indeed this was necessary to maintain one's good name and reputation. Yet that so many military writers adopted a self-vindicatory tone suggests that their actions were challenged by some, and that consequently they recognised the need to rigorously defend their reputation in print. How far the rank and file really were part of the community of military honour is also open to doubt, given that Scannell himself quotes William Lithgow who wrote in 1637 that 'none, or very small reckoning' was ever made of the common soldiers. Indeed commanders were quick to take the credit for victories, and equally swift to shift blame for defeat onto the treachery, cowardice or other shortcomings of their rank and file. The issue of false modesty as a literary convention in military writings is also raised, but how far such modesty might have

been genuine and shaped by the growing taste among officers for neo-Stoic and Calvinistic notions of honour might have been further elucidated. As was the case in the British Civil Wars, Scannell demonstrates how side-changing was often justified in relation to perceived slights or to avoid harsh treatment. Given this, he might have revealed how Poyntz's change of sides in Germany, like that of so many others, was a consequence of his capture by the enemy.

The book charts the pitfalls of attempting to impose problematic labels such as 'gentlemen volunteers', 'professionals' and 'mercenaries' onto these soldiers. It levels some justified criticisms at some of Roger B. Manning's work, and picks out a wider tendency amongst historians to use the term 'mercenaries' in an anachronistic manner. The work's shortcomings are few, and sensibly limited by its rather narrow focus, but it is regrettable that Scannell only briefly touches upon the experience of Irish soldiers on the continent. He also concedes that reflecting on the experience of common soldiers is difficult because no writings from the rank and file have survived. There are a handful of minor errors. The use of the term 'sniper' (p. 126) is an anachronism. The practice of army commanders issuing challenges to duel their opposing counterparts had not died out by the time of the civil wars in Britain, as the cases of Prince Rupert, the earl of Newcastle and Lord Brooke underline. The argument that forced billeting was not extensive until 1642 neglects the depredations of the lengthy occupation of England's northern counties by the Scots in 1640 to 1641. However, these are relatively minor quibbles when contrasted with the achievements of this work. The book opens the way for further comparison of the writings of British soldiers with their European counterparts. Paul Scannell is to be congratulated for his timely and worthwhile contribution to our understanding of the largely grim experiences of early modern British soldiers fighting overseas.

Text: 787 words

Dr Andrew Hopper
Centre for English Local History
University of Leicester
Marc Fitch House
3/5 Salisbury Road
Leicester, LE1 7QR.
Email: ajh69@le.ac.uk