

# H-Net Reviews

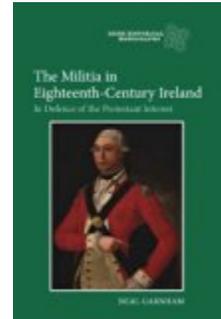
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Neal Garnham. *The Militia in Eighteenth-Century Ireland: In Defence of the Protestant Interest*. Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2012. 208 pp. \$115.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84383-724-4.

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The eighteenth century was certainly pivotal in political and military affairs, beginning with the after-effects of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the dawn of the Enlightenment, yet ending with the chaos and instability caused by revolutions in America and France (both inspired by that same Enlightenment). Britain especially was at the center of events in this period. The aforementioned Glorious Revolution in 1688, Act of Union in 1707, and Acts of Union in 1800, to say nothing of the myriad of conflicts she took part in, would help redefine Britain's place in European and global affairs. Parallel to these events was the debate over large standing armies or smaller, cheaper militias.

The eighteenth century was a violent one, indeed. While standard military histories often focus on the wars of Louis XIV and Frederick II, Britain was involved in most of the major wars of the period, either directly or indirectly. While the Crown did occasionally send large armies to take part in these conflicts, Britain's most effective fighting force remained the Royal Navy. As a result, the fleet received most of the funds. The British Army thus was an underfunded semi-professional force that, due to the common mistrust of large standing armies, was unpopular with most of English society and a source of worry for the government; it was most useful being deployed by the Royal Navy to defend the Crown's overseas possessions or acquire new ones. The genesis of the modern British Army, the "New Model Army" that was victorious in the English Civil War, had after all resulted in the capture and execution of the monarch Charles I. The situation in Ireland was a bit different, however. The same New Model Army had been wielded by Oliver Cromwell to enforce British control of the island. The resettling of Protestants in Ireland and the legal disenfranchisement

of the Catholic majority had completely altered the political and social landscape. To the Protestant elites, Redcoats were associated with security and prosperity.

It was the nature of security in Ireland or lack thereof that helped boost the militia's importance in Protestant Irish society. Even after the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, the threat of internal rebellion or, far more worrisome, troop landings from Continental powers made some type of military presence vital. With regular troops expensive and their numbers quite finite, the militia was attractive, both as a form of augmentation or as an alternative. The initial problem was that unlike standing armies, militias by their nature have voluntary participation. Professor Garnham's volume illustrates to good effect the myriad ways that the British and Irish Protestant governments attempted to ensure a functioning militia that could take the field in times of invasion or internal disorder.

As Garnham shows, the Irish militia in the eighteenth century can be divided into four major periods: a basic statutory militia; "Volunteers," which began as ad hoc units to counter any French invasions such as one in 1760, but which morphed into decentralized political units; "Fencibles," which attempted to pay short-term militia at the same rates as regular troops to ensure higher quality; and finally, a proper militia after the passage of the Militia Act of 1793, and a Catholic Relief Act the same year. The passage of these acts also meant that there would now be an appreciable number of Catholics enrolled in the militia, although the earlier Volunteer units included Catholics in the latter years. The militia as an extension solely of Protestant will was now over.

This is a fine book overall, but there are two major criticisms. There are no maps included, which is prob-

lematic when Garnham relates the French invasion in 1760 that spurred militia reform. This force was able to land and defeat a militia force defending the town of Carrickfergus, seizing the town. French losses and the loss of their commander prevented them from pushing on to storm Belfast. The proximity of Carrickfergus to the northern bastion of Belfast is quite important, and a map would have helped reinforce Prof. Garnham's point. The major criticism comes from the author's comparison of the various Irish militias with those of other British colonies, especially those seeing service in the American Revolution. Garnham makes the common mistake of confusing the Continental Army with the state militias that were often more a hindrance than a help in combating the British. Harold Peterson's *The Book of the Continental Soldier* (1975) and Robert K. Wright's *The Continental Army* (1983) are better sources for this relationship. Interestingly, General John Burgoyne, who was defeated at Saratoga by the Continental Army, served as

commander-in-chief, Ireland from 1782-84 and pushed forward the "Fencibles," while Charles Cornwallis, who surrendered to George Washington at Yorktown, later became lord lieutenant and commander-in-chief, Ireland from 1798 to 1801. Burgoyne knew that it was a better-trained, experienced force that had surrounded and defeated him, while Cornwallis's decent working relationship with both Protestant elites and Catholics, and especially having access to both regular troops and a fairly well-trained loyal militia allowed him to defeat a French Invasion force at the Battle of Ballinamuck in September 1798 that was working in conjunction with Irish rebels. Cornwallis was also instrumental in pushing forward the Acts of Union in 1800, which brought Ireland into the United Kingdom of Great Britain.

These criticisms aside, I would certainly recommend the book to anyone interested in Irish history or the eighteenth century.

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