

## Chapter Thirty-Seven

# WAR

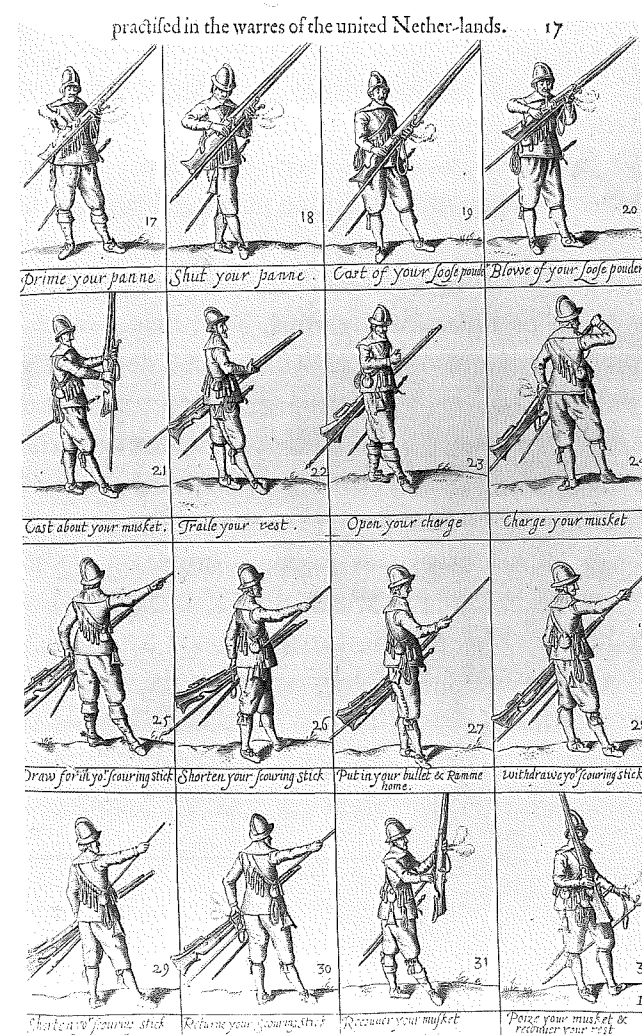
EVERYONE was stunned when it was realised that the country was about to be plunged into a war no one wanted. In the counties, frantic attempts were made to remain neutral and keep out of the impending conflict. Sooner or later, however, all were forced to take sides. Lucy Hutchinson, wife of a leading Parliamentary commander, wrote: 'Every county... had the civil war within itself', for every part of the nation had adherents of both sides. The Civil War was to cut right through society, dividing the nobility, the gentry, the merchant and professional classes. It even tore families asunder, leading to tragic confrontations. The motives which drove people to choose one side or the other could be various but the overwhelming divide was the one of religion. This was to be England's only religious war, one fought not between Catholics and Protestants, as on the mainland, but between two interpretations of the Protestant tradition.

The Parliamentary side saw itself as fighting to preserve an institution whose powers were not only under threat but whose very existence had been in danger. The Puritan members of the Commons cast themselves as the godly engaged in a struggle against the forces of Antichrist, embodied in some tremendous hidden Catholic plot to take over England. They lived in an atmosphere of intense religious fervour committed to a further reformation of the church, sweeping away any traces of what they saw as the dregs of popery. What form that reformation would take remained unclear, and in the long run would lead to division, but that could not be seen at the outset. What they yearned for was a return to the old days when king and Parliament jointly embodied the unity of the nation. The England of Gloriana assumed a golden glow. Indeed throughout the war the Parliamentarians maintained they were fighting for a king who had been misled by evil counsellors.

The Royalists too were fighting for the king and for the preservation of the Protestant religion, the Church of England as it had been established under Elizabeth with its order and liturgy enshrined in the Prayer Book. They stood also for the existing scheme of things, for a hierarchy which stretched down from the monarch and in

which each knew his place, and saw any threat to it as menacing social order and leading to anarchy.

This was to be a very different war from the Wars of the Roses which only affected a few people and a small part of the country. The Civil War was to be a bloody one of skirmishes, battles and sieges affecting virtually the whole country. It was a modern war, fought with firearms whose acrid smoke almost blinded the soldiers. By 1643 ten per cent of the male population was under arms. Over three and a half per cent of the population was to perish in one way or another and few families were unaffected. From the parish of Myddle in rural Shropshire twenty-one men had gone to fight. Of these thirteen did not return. Being killed while under arms was only one fate, for the war brought in its train disease and plague. No one involved in the siege of a town or castle was ever likely to forget the experience: the starvation of the inmates, the storming of the walls, the slaughter of those within, followed by the sacking and burning. Indeed the word plunder entered the English language at this period. A fifth of Gloucester was demolished, two thirds of Taunton destroyed and Birmingham, Bolton and Leicester were brutally plundered. Everywhere there was dislocation lead-



Part of a musket drill as recorded by Henry Hexham in his *The Principles of the Art Militarie* published in 1637. Hexham was a soldier for over forty years. His book is a manual for the most up-to-date techniques of his day, those used in the Civil War.



ing to hardship as rents fell and industry slumped. These were not the only side effects as the countryside had to face marauding armies ravaging crops, seizing cattle and horses and attacking those going about their daily work. The toll in taxes and the financial exaction on both sides was crippling. Most counties paid in a month as much as they had previously paid in a year in Ship Money.

Money and a means of raising it was the key to the war. The side which could raise most money efficiently was bound in the end to win because it could keep its soldiers not only paid but amply supplied in the field. The king began with the advantage of having the army, but for money he relied in the main on rich supporters, and that in the long run told against him. As the sole authority and source of command it would seem that he had another advantage, but he was indecisive and, worse, could follow contrary directions simultaneously. The Royalist side was divided also, between those who favoured an early return to peace, on the basis of back to 1641, and those, like the queen, for whom nothing less than the obliteration of the Parliamentarians would do.

When the war began the king's army was led by the Earl of Lindsey but the figure who was to capture the public imagination was the king's handsome nephew, Prince Rupert of the Rhine, General of the Horse. Son of Charles's sister, the widowed queen of Bohemia, Rupert brought to the Royalist cause all the latest skills in the handling of cavalry, cutting a brave and romantic figure on the battlefield. But he was arrogant. Collectively the Royalists came to be designated Cavaliers, a word used in scorn by those who saw them as little more than courtly gentlemen playing at being soldiers.

The opposition became labelled Roundheads, again a term of abuse referring to those amongst the godly who thought sobriety met by cropping their hair short. The Parliamentary side had one man of organisational genius, John Pym, leader of the Commons, who saw clearly the importance of a war machine. Under his direction Parliament created committees in the regions whose task it was to collect taxes and confiscate the lands of Royalists. Soon a sales tax, the excise, was introduced which was wildly unpopular but it meant that soldiers were paid. Although Parliament entered the war with only militiamen for its army under the Earl of Essex, the control of London with all its vast financial resources was to prove crucial to its success. Crucial also was the navy's declaration in Parliament's favour. From the first, however, the Parliamentary side was dogged by regionalism, for the troops from one region would not go to the assistance of those in another. Nor could a war be well run whose authority was divided amongst a series of committees. What was striking as the war progressed was how necessity forced Parliament effectively to take on the role of the king to act as the executive.



Van Dyck's painting of the eldest surviving sons of Charles I's sister, Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia, to the left Charles Louis, Elector Palatine, to the right, Prince Rupert, the future

royalist general at the age of eighteen. He was already then described as 'of a rare condition, full of spirit and action . . . whatsoever he wills, he wills vehemently.'

Although Charles raised the royal standard on 22 August at Nottingham the first battle was not fought until two months later. On 23 October the rival armies, both marching towards London, blundered upon each other at Edgehill in Warwickshire. It was a battle which set the pattern to be followed in others. The Royalists began by squabbling among themselves about tactics. The battle opened with Prince Rupert leading a brilliant cavalry charge, pursuing the enemy from the field, unaware that the rest of the Royalist army he had left behind was hard pressed, Lord Lindsey falling mortally wounded and the king himself in danger. In spite of this Parliamentary forces failed to carry the field, and the result was a draw. But the king then threw away his chances. Advancing on London the Royalists again confronted the Parliamentary army at Turnham Green but chose not to fight. Instead the king opted for a stately progress towards Oxford where he set up his court for the duration of the war.



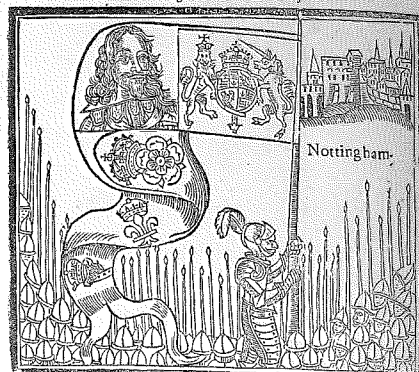
Edgehill had left the Parliamentary side demoralised and weakened. The winter months, during which there was no fighting, again took on a set pattern, being dedicated to abortive peace negotiations. Parliament on its side demanded its privileges, the king his prerogatives. The result was always stalemate, for Charles would never give way on their demands for the abolition of the episcopacy and his control of the army or cede his right to choose his own ministers and veto legislation. The full consequences of this inability to compromise were to come even more sharply into focus when the war was over.

Parliament looked north to Scotland and to the army of the Covenanters for a solution. In return, the Covenanters demanded not only that Parliament pay its army but that the Church of England be transformed into an English equivalent of the Scottish kirk with ministers, elected elders and assemblies to govern it, quite free from any control by the secular authority. With this a divide began to set in between those in the House who wished to go along this path and those who decidedly did not. For the moment that impending division was neatly side-stepped by referring the problem to a body called the Westminster Assembly which Parliament had set up in 1642 to bring forward proposals for church reform. Parliament then swore a Solemn League and Covenant with the Scots.

During the winter of 1642–43, the country began to divide geographically as counties fell under the control of whichever party happened to be the strongest. Parliament consolidated its control over East Anglia and the south-east, the Royalists the north and south-west. In the campaign of 1643 Prince Rupert took Bristol, giving the Royalists a major port. Another indecisive battle was fought at Newbury. Real change only came in the following year when twenty-thousand Covenanters crossed the border to attack the Royalist army in the north. On 2 July the most important battle of the Civil War was fought at Marston Moor in Yorkshire. Two Royalist armies faced three Parliamentary ones. Once again the Royalist cavalry, seemingly victorious, galloped off the field in pursuit of loot while the remainder of its army was left to face defeat. That victory was made possible by the action of the troops from the Eastern Association headed by a Huntingdonshire gentleman called Oliver Cromwell, who led the cavalry. Unlike the Royalist cavalry they did not leave the field but reformed and

**A true and exact Relation of the manner of his Maiesties setting up of His Standard at Nottingham, on Munday the 22. of August 1642.**

First, The forme of the Standard as it is here figured, and who were present at the advancing of it  
Secondly, The danger of setting up of former Standards, and the damage which ensued thereon.  
Thirdly, A relation of all the Standards that ever were set up by any King.  
Fourthly, The names of those Knights who are appointed to be the Kings Standard-bearers. With the forces that are appointed to guard it.  
Fifthly, The manner of the Kings coming first to Country.  
Sixthly, The Cavaliers resolution and dangerous threats which they have uttered, if the King concludes a peace without them, or hearkens unto his great Councell the Parliament: Moreover how they have shared and divided London amongst themselves already.



Pamphlet describing the king's declaration of war at Nottingham where his standard was raised on 22 August 1642.

charged again. 'God made them as stubble to our swords' was how Cromwell vividly described the cutting down of the Royalist soldiers. A fortnight later York surrendered, the governor securing the best terms he could. 'Thus disconsolate we march,' he wrote, 'forc'd to leave our country. . . not daring to see mine own house, nor take a farewell of my children. . .' The king had lost the north.

The 1644 campaign was nothing like so dramatic with a Royalist victory in the south-west at Lostwithiel when Essex was defeated and a second encounter at Newbury which was again indecisive. But the Royalist cause was already faltering, and its fate was to be sealed in the spring of the following year when Parliament created the New Model Army, lampooned by the Royalists as the 'New Noddle'. Until then Parliamentary troops had been regionally based with strong local loyalties. Now a new national army was to be established, with Sir Thomas Fairfax as its commander and Oliver Cromwell as its Lieutenant General of Horse. On 14 June this formidable force defeated the Royalists in the second decisive battle of the war, Naseby in Northamptonshire. Numerically the Royalists were outnumbered by two to one and the king almost fell into the hands of the enemy. Catastrophic from his point of view was the capture of his correspondence revealing his negotiations with the Catholics and the Irish, both actions which made him the epitome of perfidy in the eyes of Parliament. A Roundhead wrote of the battle: 'I saw the field so strewed with carcasses of horses and men, the bodies lay slain four miles in length, but most thick on the hill where the king stood.' A month later what was left of the Royalist army was annihilated by the New Model Army at Langport in Somerset. Cromwell saw the victory as divine judgement: 'To see this, is it not the face of God?'

Bristol surrendered in September and in Scotland a Royalist rising led by the Earl of Montrose was defeated. The war was over. The king, realising that he was finished in military terms, had to surrender, but to whom? In London Parliament was in a state of outrage at his dealings with the Catholics, which only confirmed all their fears that Antichrist was in their midst. In April 1646 the king, with two men, slipped out of Oxford in the disguise of a servant. After wandering for a week he turned northwards, choosing rather to surrender to the lesser of the two evils by putting himself in the hands of the Scots.

Now a whole new phase was about to begin, for the war, far from deciding anything, had only made matters worse. Everyone had seen the established order of things turned upside down. The squire had been reduced to the level of a common fugitive driven from his estates, the parson had been ousted from his living, houses had been requisitioned for billeting troops, merchandise had been confiscated. Everywhere people looked they had seen rank and degree challenged and property rights





A panoramic view of the battle of Naseby, 14 June 1645. The two armies face each other with the king alone on horseback in the

centre. To the far right of the Parliamentary army is 'The right wing of horse commanded by lieutenant general Cromwell'.

The engraving conceals the fact that the Parliamentary army outnumbered the Royalist by two to one.

disregarded. Men had been uprooted from the fields and turned into soldiers in a national army marching to defeat those whom they saw and were told were the forces of Antichrist. They believed their victory would signal the dawn of the age of the saints in preparation for Christ's Second Coming. Censorship had gone and voices never heard before gave utterance, foretelling a society in which not only would there be no place for the king but no room for privately owned property or for doffing one's hat to any man.