



William P. Guthrie. *The Later Thirty Years War: From the Battle of Wittstock to the Treaty of Westphalia.* Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003. x + 307 pp. \$69.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-313-32408-6.



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In 2002, I reviewed William P. Guthrie's *Battles of the Thirty Years War: From White Mountain to Nordlingen [sic], 1618-1635* for *The Journal of Military History*.^[1] My conclusion was that Guthrie—an independent scholar—had provided students of the Thirty Years' War, and of European military history in the age of the “military revolution,” with a reference work that was at once both invaluable and highly flawed. Guthrie's successor volume, *The Later Thirty Years War: From the Battle of Wittstock to the Treaty of Westphalia*, continues in the same tradition set by its predecessor and only serves to reinforce my earlier conclusion.

The Later Thirty Years War is a detailed operational history, covering the major campaigns of the second half of the great European conflict. Like Guthrie's earlier work, it is neither a survey history of the war nor even a strictly narrative account of the military aspects of the war, nor does it pretend to be. After brief summaries of the diplomatic, confessional, and dynastic origins of the conflict, and of the campaigns of the period 1618-34, the author launches into a discussion of military technology, land tactics, strategy, and logistics during the period. The latter, the introduction to the “mechanics” of early seventeenth-century warfare, is quite valuable, for it demonstrates a thorough familiarity with topics often glossed over or misrepresented in much of the

current “military revolution” literature: the workings of seventeenth-century firearms and other weaponry, contemporary technical terminology, the structure of tactical units, prevailing tactical doctrines, and so forth. Since academic military historians, at least in the Anglophone world, tend to eschew the “nuts and bolts” of the military art in the early modern period, before the appearance of Guthrie's two volumes, one was compelled to glean such information from a myriad of arcane specialist literature, usually German, and even then the existing literature was frequently contradictory. In this regard alone, Guthrie has done a great service to students of the art of warfare in early modern Europe.

The bulk of the book is dedicated to the major operations of the period 1635-48. The format is highly formulaic, and reminiscent of the approach taken by the great German operational military historian, Hans Delbrück, in his elephantine study of the history of the art of war.^[2] Guthrie breaks down the second half of the war into six campaign-based chapters: the campaigns of Swedish field-marshal Johan Banér in the late 1630s, culminating in the battle of Wittstock (1636); the war in the west in the late 1630s, dominated by the actions of Bernhard of Sachsen-Weimar; Swedish operations in Bohemia, the Germanies, and Denmark 1642-45; Rocroi and the actions in France and Flanders in the

early 1640s; the campaigns of Franz von Mercy and the viscount of Turenne in the mid-1640s; and finally the last active campaigns of the war, centered around the Franco-Swedish victory at Zusmarshausen (1648). In each chapter, Guthrie discusses the leading commanders involved, the composition and size of the opposing forces, the strategic context of each campaign, and the details of the battles themselves. Though there is some analysis of political and other factors that conditioned the conduct of military operations, this is merely incidental to the campaign studies themselves. Where Guthrie really shines is in his analysis of leading personalities and his battle narratives. These sections are solidly researched, exhaustive, and to a large extent previously unavailable in a single treatment, certainly so in English. Each chapter is followed by a series of appendices detailing the organization of the opposing armies regiment-by-regiment and listing available published sources. Guthrie also provides a few high-quality battle maps, although the work as a whole lacks decent maps of operations at the campaign level. Though the author does cover naval actions sporadically, the emphasis is clearly on land warfare.

In these regards, Guthrie has made a major contribution to the English-language literature on the Thirty Years' War. That contribution, however, is significantly compromised by errors of fact, omission, and above all structure. Although the bibliography reveals that the author has assembled an impressive array of sources, including most (but by no means all) of the relevant German- and English-language literature, Guthrie is notably weaker in his utilization of French, Dutch, Spanish, Swedish, and Danish histories. The author's coverage of military actions outside of the main theatre of war, namely the Germanies and the Habsburg hereditary lands, is accordingly minimal, not well-balanced, and sometimes subject to factual error. The campaigns of the so-called "Torstensson War," the Swedish invasion and defeat of Denmark in 1643-45, for example, are accorded a mere two pages in the text, regardless of the fact that it was this conflict that brought Denmark's career as a great regional power to an end and solidified Sweden's reputation as the preeminent force in the Baltic. This same example can be used to demonstrate the occasional presence of factual and interpretational errors, particularly with regard to the political and diplomatic context of the war. Danish foreign policy in the 1630s and 1640s is incorrectly represented as being "covertly pro-Imperial and anti-Swedish"; the Danish-Swedish naval battle at Kolberger Heide is mistakenly labeled a Swedish defeat. Christian IV of Denmark is purported to have "so

alienated his Estates that they preferred being overrun to voting taxes for defense," when in fact—as Danish historians have repeatedly demonstrated—the king was on very good terms with the Estates (though not so with the ruling Council of State), and the Estates granted him unprecedented and large sums of money for the creation of a standing army and the construction of new fortifications against the Swedish threat.[3] This is, of course, but one example, drawn from my primary area of expertise, but it is symptomatic of a more general lack of erudition on the part of the author in the broader history of the war and its participants. Coverage of the wars in the Low Countries is similarly weak. The introductory and concluding chapters reflect another kind of imbalance. Guthrie begins the book with an introduction to the origins of the war, reaching back to the Reformation of the previous century—something already done in his first volume, and probably unnecessary given the purpose and scope of the book. But there is no corresponding conclusion. Discussion of the war ends abruptly with the battle of Zusmarshausen (May 1648). The author makes no attempt to analyze the political or diplomatic aftermath of the war and offers no overview of the peace settlements at Osnabrück and Münster, not even an assessment of the significance of the conflict within the framework of European military history.

Again, Guthrie's book is not meant to be a general history of the Thirty Years' War, but a history of its campaigns only, and for that reason the book should not be condemned for shortcomings that lay outside the parameters of its stated purpose. The organization of the book, or more accurately its reference apparatus, however, is a significant problem. The endnotes in this volume, as in its predecessor, are purely explanatory. The author does not directly cite the sources for the information he presents, beyond brief and vague notes on "sources" at the end of each chapter. Guthrie frequently makes mention of historiographical traditions without mentioning the works that embrace these traditions; he makes reference to specific interpretations without allowing the reader the opportunity to "follow-up" in the literature. The primary value of Guthrie's work, as a reference tool, is hereby deeply compromised, for without direct references to works consulted the book has little use from a bibliographic standpoint.

It should also be pointed out that, again like the first volume, Guthrie's *The Later Thirty Years War* exhibits some careless editing. While competently written, the book contains frequent spelling and punctuation errors. Diacriticals are completely absent: the names of

Swedish generals like Baner, Lilliehook, and Stålhammar are rendered as “Baner,” “Lilliehook,” and “Stalhans” respectively; French and German personal and place names suffer similar problems of transcription. There is not a single umlaut or accent to be found, nor even a suitable substitute (“Noerdlingen,” for example, instead of “Nordlingen,” but rather the incorrect “Nordlingen”). While many of these mistakes could be attributed to the publisher or editor rather than the author, others cannot. The author states his intention to prefer conventional English-language equivalents for proper nouns (e.g., “Gustavus Adolphus” instead of “Gustav Adolf”), but does not do so consistently. Thus “Frederick Henry” of Nassau, but “Georg of Luneburg” instead of “George of Luneburg”; “arkebusier” and “kontribution” (without italics) instead of “arquebusier” and “contribution.” The German title *Graf* and its English equivalent “Count” are both used, in one case appearing in the same paragraph. Bernhard of Sachsen-Weimar is inexplicably called “Bernhard Sax-Weimar,” as if his dynastic title were his surname.

The Later Thirty Years War is a profoundly useful book, but that said it should be pointed out that its value as a reference work has distinct limitations. Particularly on matters of politics and grand strategy, it should be approached with caution, and would be best used in conjunction with one of the standard survey histories of the conflict.[4] Readers looking for a thorough bibliographical treatment will still have to look elsewhere. Had Guthrie but included bibliographic footnotes, had he only made specific references to the sources he used in the composition of his battle summaries and analyses,

The Later Thirty Years War and its companion volume—regardless of their collective, lesser flaws—would have been a godsend for scholars of the period.

Notes

[1]. Paul Douglas Lockhart, review of William P. Guthrie, *Battles of the Thirty Years War. From White Mountain to Nordlingen, 1618-1635* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), *The Journal of Military History* 66 (2002): pp. 1196-97.

[2]. Hans Delbrück, *Geschichte der Kriegskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte* 7 vols. (Berlin: G. Stilke, 1900-36). Available in English translation as *History of the Art of War within the Framework of Political History*, trans. by Walter J. Renfroe Jr., 4 vols. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975-85).

[3]. See, i.a., Steffen Heiberg, *Christian 4. Monarken, mennesket og myten* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1988); Gunner Lind, *Hæren og magten i Danmark 1614-1662* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1994); Leon Jespersen, ed., *A Revolution from Above? The Power State of 16th and 17th Century Scandinavia* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 2000); Paul Douglas Lockhart, *Denmark in the Thirty Years' War, 1618-1648. King Christian IV and the Decline of the Oldenburg State* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1996).

[4]. The best brief surveys in English are Geoffrey Parker, ed., *The Thirty Years War* 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1997); Ronald Asch, *The Thirty Years War: the Holy Roman Empire and Europe, 1618-1648* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

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