CHAPTER FOUR

THE ‘MARQUE FLEETS’ OF SCOTLAND, 1618–1638

John Daw, Captain of the ship called The Consort of Carrail, will make lawful use of the letters of marque grantit him, dated 19th July instant, viz for the pursuit of the common enemy, and not against his Majesty’s friends and allies unless they be found carrying supplies to the enemy.¹

The collective series of conflicts that made up the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648), came to involve almost every part of Europe and also drew in resources from the Americas and Asia. As a consequence of the Bohemian Revolt, Britain became drawn into the conflict when King James’s son-in-law, Elector Frederick V of the Palatinate, accepted the ‘vacant’ throne of Bohemia in August 1619. Despite his public declaration that Frederick’s election and acceptance of the Bohemian throne were illegal, James permitted his subjects to contribute both financial and military support to the cause, ostensibly to provide protection for his daughter Elizabeth’s household. Over the next thirty years around 100,000 British and Irish soldiers volunteered in various armies, predominantly in a bid to reinstate Elizabeth and her family to their electoral and regal titles.² The first Scot to raise the standard of the Bohemian army was the Catholic Sir Andrew Gray, who recruited 1500 Scots and 1000 Englishmen in 1620 to fight in Bohemia alongside 1000 men in Colonel James Seton’s Scottish regiment, which had been ‘borrowed’ from the Dutch Republic.³ Some 4000 Scots enlisted

² S. Murdoch, (ed.), Scotland and the Thirty Years’ War, 1618–1648 (Leiden, 2001), pp. 15–19 and the contributors, passim. For the Irish serving for Elizabeth of Bohemia see A. Grosjean and S. Murdoch, ‘Irish Participation in Scandinavian Armies during the Thirty Years’ War’ in Irish Sword, XXIV, no. 97 (Summer 2005), pp. 277–288. While the Scottish contribution has been the focus of considerable academic attention, the English contribution has been woefully under-researched. The fruits of Adam Marks’ doctoral research on ‘England and the Thirty Years’ War’ at the University of St Andrews are eagerly anticipated.
³ J. Polišenský, ‘A Note on Scottish Soldiers in the Bohemian War, 1619–1622’ in
with Count Mansfeld’s army in 1625; another 14,000 enlisted with the Danes between 1626 and 1629; over 30,000 more served with the Swedes (1630–1648), and at least 10,000 joined Franco-Scottish regiments (1635–1648). A much smaller cadre of Scots, largely officers, opted to serve within the Habsburg armies. Most of this group were happy to fight for what they believed was the Roman Catholic cause though some, like Walter Leslie, claimed to be working for Elizabeth Stewart.

While allowing his subjects to engage in military support for his daughter without actually declaring war himself on the Habsburg Emperor, James also sought to test the reaction of other European monarchies to the Bohemian revolt and relied on several prominent Scottish ambassadors to do this. In 1619 James Hay, Earl of Carlisle, undertook diplomatic missions to the Spanish Netherlands and the Imperial Court at Salzburg to establish the grounds for compromise between the contesting parties. The same year, Sir James Spens of Wormiston conducted embassies to both Christian IV of Denmark-Norway and Gustav II Adolf of Sweden to prepare a more militant response should diplomacy fail. Nonetheless, before the British could make any impact, either militarily or diplomatically, the Bohemian army collapsed under the Imperial offensive at White Mountain in November 1620. News of the victory spread quickly and further


4 Many of these men served in multiple armies so these numbers refer to enlistments rather than individuals. For Danish service see Murdoch, Britain, Denmark-Norway and the House of Stuart, pp. 202–225; for Swedish service see Grosjean, An Unofficial Alliance, pp. 74–111. For French service see M. Glozier, ‘Scots in the French and Dutch Armies during the Thirty Years’ War’ in Murdoch, Scotland and the Thirty Years’ War, pp. 117–124. Smaller numbers of men also saw service in Russian and Polish service. See the contributions by Robert Frost and Paul Dukes in the same volume.


6 For James Hay see the Oxford DNB article by Roy E. Schreiber, accessed 5 January 2009; CSP, Venice, XV, 1617–1619. Letters No. 515, 587, and 600. Ferdinand II was not elected as successor to Emperor Matthias until August, though his election was a formality.

7 SRA, Anglica III. James Spens to Gustav II Adolf, 8 December 1618; SRA, Anglica V. King James’s instructions to James Spens, 30 July 1619; SAA, VII, pp. 428–9; RPCS, first series, XI, p. cxi. Spens did not actually leave until much later, but conducted his diplomacy by letter to begin with.

8 Nonetheless, Seton held the Bohemian town of Trebon until 1622, nearly a year and a half after the rest of the army had disintegrated. See Polišenský, ‘A Note on Scottish Soldiers’ in Murdoch, Scotland and the Thirty Years’ War, pp. 109–115.