CHAPTER SIX

THE HUGUENOTS AND THE EUROPEAN WARS
OF RELIGION, c.1560–1697: SOLDIERING IN NATIONAL
AND TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT*

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Much of the history of French Calvinists is military history, but historiography has not sufficiently done justice to the Huguenot penchant for military service. There is still no overall history of the Huguenot war effort in the French Wars of Religion (1562–1629), though this partly reflects the destruction and dispersion of Huguenot archives.¹

But while there are some studies of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Huguenot military activity, they are relatively few in number and most are short.² In contrast is the body of scholarship on the

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¹ I adopt here the periodisation of Mack P. Holt, The French Wars of Religion 1562–1629 (2nd edn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), rather than the more traditional one of 1562–98, although the hostilities of the early seventeenth century were more limited both geographically and demographically, and did not involve as large a portion of the Huguenot community, as the wars of the sixteenth century.

service of French Protestant immigrants in the armies of the Maritime Powers in the last two decades of the seventeenth century and first decade of the eighteenth. However, these studies have tended to create an impression that the history of Huguenot soldiering is essentially the history of Huguenot émigrés in the armies of Britain and, to a lesser extent, the Dutch republic in the Nine Years’ War (1688–97) and the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–13). Yet the contribution of Huguenot soldiers to the wars against Louis XIV was not restricted to British and Dutch armies. Nor was it groundbreaking in character (as opposed to numbers); Huguenot service in foreign armies already had a history of 120 years when they went with William of Orange to England to overthrow James II in 1688.

The French Reformed military experience was frequently a foreign one throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Many Huguenots served in foreign armies even during the Wars of Religion. In particular, they developed a very close relationship with the rebellious provinces of the Netherlands and their leader, William I, Prince of Orange, which continued after his death in 1584 and the emergence of a new nation, the Dutch republic (more formally, the United


4 See Gozier and Onnekink, War, Religion and Service, chs. 9–14, on Huguenot soldiers in the service of Brandenburg–Prussia, Brunswick–Lüneburg, Savoy, and Russia.