A GOOD CHANCE FOR THE SCOTS?
THE RECRUITMENT OF ENGLISH ARMIES FOR SCOTLAND
AND THE MARCHES, 1337–1347

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‘It wes to Scotland a gud chance, that he [Edward III] set him to werray France.’ So wrote the Scottish chronicler Andrew of Wyntoun; and nor was he alone in his opinion.¹ The ‘good chance’ was that with the onset of war with France, England’s military resources were split, leaving the English with the problem of raising armies for service in Scotland and the Marches, at a time when the king’s attention was focussed primarily on the war with France.² The surviving evidence for armies in the Scottish Marches in this period is somewhat patchy, particularly for the personnel of individual retinues. Only two horse inventories survive: one for the army led by Thomas Beauchamp, earl of Warwick, in July 1337; and another for the army of the earls of Salisbury and Arundel in the winter of 1337–1338. Together these provide the names of some 600 men-at-arms.³ A couple of exchequer accounts list entire retinues, but these add up to only 100-odd men in total.⁴ Letters of protection and attorney provide some additional names, but men serving in Scotland were less likely to trouble themselves to take out letters of protection than those serving overseas.⁵ There is

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¹ Wyntoun, ed. Amours, vi, 90. See also Gesta Annalia, printed in Fordun, p. 363.
³ E 101/20/17; E 101/35/3. All documentary references are to TNA. My thanks to Dr Andrew Ayton for pointing out the existence of the latter roll.
⁴ E 101/612/2 (John Segrave, 1340 – misdated in the TNA online catalogue); E 101/23/25 (Thomas, Lord, Wake of Liddell, 1342).
⁵ Ayton, Knights and Warhorses, pp. 159–160; Andy King, ‘War, Politics and Landed Society in Northumberland, c.1296–c.1408’, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of...
therefore little scope for any detailed prosopographical study. However, other records, including writs for summons for military service, indentures and warrants for payment, provide plentiful information on the captains who were called upon to recruit retinues; and in many cases, pay accounts from the exchequer and the wardrobe reveal how successful their recruitment turned out to be. But this was also a time when the recruitment of armies in England was undergoing major change, a process which has been characterised as an essential part of a putative ‘military revolution’ – or for some recent military theorists, more precisely a ‘revolution in military affairs’ – which saw a fundamental change in the way in which the English waged war.6 How, then, did the recruitment of armies for service in the Scottish Marches change over the decade after the start of the French wars, and what factors drove this change? How was recruitment affected by Edward III’s changed priorities? And did this amount to a ‘military revolution’?

For the first few years of the Anglo-Scottish conflict after the ‘Disinherited’ expedition of 1332, royal armies had been raised by compulsion, with writs being sent to individual captains, ordering them to serve with specified retinues of men-at-arms. Archers were raised largely by array, a system developed by Edward I, whereby commissions were appointed to specified counties to select men for military service.7 However, different methods were called for when the parliament of March 1337 approved an expedition to Scotland, because it was not to be led by the king, who was busy preparing for war with France. In his place, Thomas Beauchamp, earl of Warwick, was appointed capitaneus et ductor (captain and leader) of the king’s army in Scotland and the Marches, on 25 March.8

In the absence of the king, the men-at-arms planned for Warwick’s army were all raised by indenture, marking a significant change in recruitment

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8 Rot. Scot., i, 488.