In February 1627 Duke Franz Albrecht von Sachsen-Lauenburg and his regiment were quartered in the Silesian principality of Schweidnitz-Jauer. A heavy burden of military taxes – contributions – had been levied on the local population since the beginning of the year, and, increasingly, the demands were being met not in cash, but in household goods, jewellery, clothing and livestock. Faced with the problems of liquidating these payments in kind, Franz Albrecht irritably declared that he was ‘no tradesman’; but, nonetheless, he and his lieutenant colonel, Melchior von Hatzfeld, set about the task of converting requisitioned goods into cash for soldiers’ wages and to provide payments against contracts for equipment and munitions.1 Moreover, ever since the duke had gained his commission to raise a regiment of 1,200 cuirassiers at his own expense back in 1625, an observer might well consider that a great deal of his activity in equipping, supplying and then maintaining his regiment had been ‘tradesmanlike’, involving him in multiple and extensive business transactions. It would certainly, in our eyes, mark him out as an entrepreneur: Franz Albrecht’s involvement in the ‘business of his regiment’ was an exercise in capital investment, management and risk calculation, involving the establishment and running of a military unit that would give him a shareholder interest in the various mechanisms by which the imperial army commanded by Wallenstein sought to recover its costs in the course of campaigning for the military objectives of Emperor Ferdinand II.2

Such direct involvement by unit commanders and senior officers in forms of military enterprise challenges received assumptions about the nature and control of military force. Though the use of mercenaries is recognized, usually with misgivings, as a time-honoured element in innumerable military establishments, its similarity with outright military enterprise was limited. Most traditional mercenary contracts were activated, not by the credit of the prospective commander, but by massive advance payments from the ruler or government, intended to cover the costs of recruitment, transport, and the first months of

1 J. Krebs, Aus dem Leben des kaiserlichen Feldmarschalls Grafen Melchior von Hatzfeldt (1593–1636), 2 vols. (Breslau, 1910–26), i. 82 (‘kein Handelsmann’).
2 Krebs, Hatzfeldt, i. 25–42, 240–253, and passim.
campaigning. Subsequent terms of service usually placed the hired mercenary units within an established, state-controlled military framework. Mercenary commanders might be greedy in setting their initial terms of service and, as humanist rhetoric tirelessly insists, unreliable and untrustworthy in combat, but they remained, in essence, wage-labour, albeit seeking some profits through close – or corrupt – handling of recruitment, accounting for losses of soldiers on campaign and other practices. Mercenary captains were not shareholders amongst a consortium of investors who had established an army through their own capital, and saw in the waging of war a means to recoup this investment with substantial interest.

Closer to an entrepreneurial model were the private supply contractors, provisioners, munitionnaires and other mercantile groups, who in the past – and present – have, more often than not, provided the food, munitions and equipment that allow armies – and navies – to campaign. Bywords for corruption and maladministration in most military histories, such provisioning contractors can be seen, nonetheless, as a recognizable and consistent face of military enterprise through and beyond the early modern period.3 But the entrepreneurs are clearly and reassuringly confined to ancillary and supporting roles: they may build warships under contract or supply artillery at a profit, but they do not actively deploy these weapons in warfare; this remains the responsibility of those who are assumed to be the military ‘professionals’, that is, employees of the state.

The rise and flourishing of what Fritz Redlich, in his great study, referred to as the ‘fully-fledged’ military enterpriser, is a phenomenon closely linked in most accounts to the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48).4 Hitherto, rulers had hired mercenaries on a vast scale – and at vast expense – and they had delegated the supply, equipment and transport of armies to private contractors.5 But the outsourcing of direct military functions to military enterprisers was a new phenomenon. Particular circumstances encouraged the growth of this devolved system of warfare. In the first place, the intensity and complexity of the political

3 The traditional dismissal of supply contractors as corrupt and inefficient has been subject to considerable recent re-evaluation. See, notably, G. Bannerman, Merchants and the Military in Eighteenth-Century Britain: British Army Contracts and Domestic Supply, 1739–63 (London, 2008); and R. Knight and M. Wilcox, Sustaining the Fleet, 1793–1815: War, the British Navy and the Contractor State (Woodbridge, 2010).


5 The French campaign army in 1558, for example, was composed of 40,000 men, of whom over 70 per cent were foreign mercenaries: J. Wood, The King’s Army. Warfare, Soldiers and Society during the Wars of Religion in France (Cambridge, 1996), 38–42.