



Arquebusier

Selected Articles from Previous Editions: Vol XXIII/I

Clothing and Equipment of Queen Elizabeth's Army (*Continued*)

By John Tofts White

In 1595 Sir John Smithe, a prominent military "expert" under Queen Elizabeth, published a handbook of suggestions for improving the practices of the day under the title. "Instructions and orders myltarie. Requisite for all Chieftaines, Captaines, and higher and lower men of charge, and officers to understand, knowe, and observe."

Among other things he outlines a scheme for arming and equipping soldiers of all kinds. There is no record that he was ever able to put his designs into practice, and it appears that, like the remarkable cavalry outfit proposed by Maurice de Saxe (*Reveries. 1757*), and the rational uniforms proposed by Colonel Luard (*Dress of the British Soldier 1852*), they remained on paper only. His observations and proposals are, however, worth repeating. It will be noticed that they are a mixture of commonsense and what we should now call plain "bull".

First he deals with the equipment of officers. The Ensign, he says, should wear a light, sharp crowned Spanish burgonet, gorget, cuirass and tassets, He should have mail sleeves, which will not hinder the manipulation of the colour it is his function to carry. The armour need not be proof against firearms, because his position is in the middle ranks where he will be sheltered by the bodies of the men about him.

Sergeants should wear short tassets, because their duties involve doubling up and down the ranks, which would be impeded by heavy leg armour. Their weapons should be sword, dagger and halberd.

The Captain should march at the head of his company in a complete corselet, with his distinctive pike upon his shoulder. His burgonet and target may be carried before him by his page. His Lieutenant, similarly accoutred, marches at the rear. Elderly Captains may go lightly armed (that is to say, in cuirass only, or perhaps simply wearing the gorget). with sword and dagger as weapons, and leading staff in hand. A leading staff is a baton (It may also have been akin to a half-pike SEB). Should the years have taken a very heavy toll of a commander's energy he may ride a small hack, but not a horse great and swift, lest his men should suppose that he intended to lead them in the manner of the Duke of Plaza Toro. The reference to elderly is more readily understood when one

recollects that the famous Constable Montmorency was cut off in the flower of his seventy-fourth year by a pistol bullet, fighting in the front line at the battle of St. Denis.

Turning to the rank and file, Smithe observes that the levies mustered at Tilbury in 1588 were not equipped with proper arming doublets, and therefore "most them did weare their armors verie uncomlie." Slashed garments, tight fitting and bombasted clothing he condemns as unfit for military use, though he suggests that doublets should be a little padded round the neck to take the weight of the gorget. For nether garments he proposes loose breeches, called "greygescoes." reaching below' the knee, with stockings sewn on (which sounds distinctly insanitary).

Archers should have eyelet-holed doublets. These were defences of padded material quilted by sewing numerous eyelet's through the substance. This device would also increase the internal ventilation and prevent the wearer getting overheated by the weight. Overall jackets should cover these, and the sleeves of each doublet or jacket should be lined with mail or serecloth. They should also have light morions (Smithe adds they are to be brightly polished!), shooting gloves and bracers.

At this point it may be mentioned that Smithe was an advocate of a revival of the use of the bow. He argued that it was more accurate, had a higher rate of fire than the arquebus or musket, and was otherwise cheaper and more convenient for use than firearms. There was much in favour of this view, but it seems to me that the abandonment of the bow as a military weapon was due to the fact that soldiers lost confidence in its effectiveness. One recalls the case of a regiment, nearly a hundred years later, that preferred the matchlocks it was used to, to new untried flintlocks.

Smithe preferred swords not longer than a yard, with simple guards. They should be worn hanging "fore and aft." Daggers ought to be about ten inches long, with plain cross hilts, and he carried hanging down in frogs, not horizontally on the belt behind, Smithe is harking back to an old practice here: the horizontal position seems to have been pretty well universal, in his own time.

Arquebusiers ought to have mandillions, short loose jackets open at the sides below the sleeves, as outer garments to keep their tackle from the weather. These should be of uniform colour. They should wear morions tying beneath the chin with red tapes "Spanish fashion." These headpieces should be polished, not painted black (is this "bull" or is it because paint was used to disguise defective metal?). The arquebuses should have barrels about three feet long and uncovered sights. Tubular back-sights appear to have been in use at this time, I have seen them on later matchlocks.

Musketeers should be similarly equipped, but have muskets and rests instead of arquebuses, Smithe preferred flask charging to the use of bandoliers in both cases; though I fancy he had in mind parade ground conditions where just the right charge could be poured out. No doubt on active service an excited soldier would be liable to jerk enough powder into his gun to burst it. For some reason that I cannot fathom J.S. says that these shotmen need not carry daggers.

Pikemen should have arming doublets, and wear corselets with tassets reaching down to mid-thigh. The headpieces should be burgonets with red tapes (I suppose that it was an arbitrary custom that they should be red). Smithe says that Englishmen often left them untied and flapping. The arms should be protected down the gauntlets, as worn by the Spanish and Italians. The English habit of leaving the hands bare illustrates our habitual preference of comfort to protection. In fact Smithe makes special mention of the, as he saw it, deplorable practice of arming in headpiece, gorget, and cuirass only.

Halberdiers should be similarly armed, except that they should wear sleeves of mail instead of the plate arm pieces, the better to swing their weapons. These should be six feet long, with long cutting edges and iron straps down the shafts.

A useful suggestion is made here for the incorporation with the shotmen of halberdiers armed with weapons a foot longer than usual for defence against cavalry. They should wear light cuirasses without tassets, or buffjerkins, and have their sleeves lined like the archers, Being lightly equipped they will be able to manoeuvre with the unarmoured shot.

The common arming of light horsemen Smithe found most inadequate. The description he gives answers to the equipment of Border horse. They wore he says red or pied caps with steel skulls inside them and jacks and carried spears called "gads." Instead he would have them wear burgonets or Spanish morions, gorgets, cuirasses, short tassets, and sleeves of mail with mail gloves or gauntlets. They should have eighteen-foot spears designed to be handled like the ones seen in Derrick's Irish pictures. Their geldings should be ridden with "Morocco or Scottish" saddles having three girths, and fitted with one holster for a pistol

The next class of cavalymen are termed by Smithe, Stradiots, but they bear little resemblance to the old Balkan mercenaries with their long robes turbans, lances, scimitars and Hungarian shields. He would have them wear armour to the knees, the head being protected by a burgonet with a buffe, and the arms by mail sleeves. The hands should be defended by mail gloves or gauntlets with mail thumb and forefinger to facilitate the use of their pistols. They should have "lancegays" eighteen or twenty feet long with a point at each end. These were meant to be grasped in the centre, and served as well for thrusting backwards as forwards. They should have "Reiter" saddles for their horses or geldings, and headstall and reins should be lined with chains as a precaution against their being cut. A brace of twelve-inch wheel-lock pistols, with holsters, touch box, iron cartridge box for seven or eight rounds, and a horseman's axe hanging at the saddle bow complete the equipment. Smithe's preference of wheellocks to snaphaunce pistols may be simply conservatism. With their swords and daggers as well these stradiots would have been rather lavishly equipped. Actually, except that the lance is added, the outfit is that of the normal heavy cavalryman of the time the pistol-armed cuirassier. Nevertheless, one is reminded of Carroll's White Knight.

Demi-lances should be in complete plate from crown to shin, with close helmets, and gussets of mail to protect the joints. Heavy lances, swords, and daggers are the

weapons of offence, and at the saddle bow may hang curtilace, mace, or horseman's axe (a curtilace was a short sword apparently (if the falchion or scimitar family). No pistols should be carried, but a long straight thrusting sword (estoc) may be strapped to the saddle, passing under the thigh. Steel saddles and chain reinforcements to the vulnerable parts of the harness should be used, and Smithe recommends "gentlemen" to provide their horses with steel peytrels. In these proposals Smithe shows himself more than usually conservative. The old style man-at-arms, sheathed in steel, and charging home with lance and sword had passed out of general use. He was expensive to equip and maintain and was useless for anything except the charge in a set battle.

The two other types of horse soldiers described by Smithe are like-wise examples of his conservatism. The first are crossbowmen. In addition to their sword and daggers they are to have crossbows of two pounds and a half of the best sort (I am not certain what the two and a half pounds actually measures), "with crooked gaffles hanging at their strong girdle after the manner of Germanie, that they might on horsebacke bend their crossbowes the more easilie." Twenty-four quarrels are to be carried in a case on the pommel of the saddle. The men are to be mounted on small cold geldings, and are to wear Spanish morions, gorgets, backs and breasts, with mail sleeves, or the familiar lined sleeves, or else they may wear brigandines. Smithe is enthusiastic over the capacity of these troops for putting over covering fire, the crossbow having a strongly curved trajectory at long range.

The last type are horsed archers. These are to wear light morions or deep steel skulls under narrow-brimmed hats, jacks, brigandines, or eyelet holed doublets, lined sleeves, swords and daggers. They are to have bows, sheaves of twenty-four arrows in a case, shooting gloves and bracers.

His advocacy of heavy equipment shows Smithe to be one of those military theoreticians who forget that a soldier's life has more marching than fighting.

When Sir Philip Sidney died of a wound received at the battle of Zutphen (1586) his body was brought home to England for an elaborate public funeral. The next year Thomas Lant published a series of engravings of the funeral procession. This is very interesting as it shows Elizabethan soldiers in what may be called "church parade order." The first thing that strikes one is the comparative plainness of the uniforms, especially those of the officers and others who have come from the seat of war to take part in the ceremony. All the soldiers wear high-crowned hats with the brims very slightly cocked at the sides. Many of the London Train band men have loosely wrapped hatbands. Most of those who have no armour are wearing cassocks of varying cut. After twenty-two civilians comes a group of Sidney's own men. First come two sergeants of foot in short cassock-like garments, apparently sleeveless. They trail halberds. One has a ruff, the other falling bands. Next are two fifers and two drummers in short cassocks. The seventh figure is an ensign trailing a large colour wrapped round its staff. The device appears to be some of stars. The lieutenant of foot who follows him wears a large ruff, and holds in his hand a baton with a plain shaft. The following figures are cavalymen. First come two corporals of horse. They have long cassocks with hanging

sleeves ("horsemen's coats"), with their sword-belts buckled on the out-side. The infantrymen have their swords suspended below the skirts of their cassocks. The corporals of horse have daggers attached horizontally to their belts in the small of the back, and they wear boots and spurs. Next come two trumpeters in boots, spurs and short cassocks of slightly different pattern to the infantry ones. Next are a standard bearer trailing his guidon, and a lieutenant of horse. Both are dressed like the corporals of horse, but the lieutenant carries a baton with a crown head. All the horsemen wear bands as their neckwear. The two lieutenants have their clothing shaded, suggesting a rich material such as velvet.

After a long procession of civilians, which includes one James Glidmore carrying Sidney's pennon of arms (he wears the cavalry dress), comes the detachment of the London Train Bands.

Captain Thomas Smythe, preceded by his page carrying his buckler and his lieutenant march in front. The Captain wears a brooch on the upturned brim of his hat in front, bands, a doublet with rich buttons, a sash over his right shoulder, hoots and spurs. He carries a partisan reversed.

The lieutenant is similarly apparelled, but has neither brooch nor sash. He trails a half-pike, and has his sword suspended on a baldrick passing over the right shoulder, instead of on a belt.

Next are three targeteers carrying their scabbarded swords reversed in their hands. They have baldricks which may be intended to support these, or else the oval, fringed bucklers that they bear on their left sides. Like all the following shot and music they have short cassocks. Most of the Trained Band figures have small slashes in their breeches, and most of the pikemen have the sleeves of their doublets similarly slashed.

Next come twelve musketeers with collars of charges and hanks of match hanging below their cassocks. They carry their muskets under the arm, butt downwards, and trail their rests reversed. The thong for attaching the latter to the wrist can be plainly seen.

Next are two drummers and a fifer, then fifteen arquebusiers. These are dressed like the musketeers but have flasks hanging under their cassocks on the right in place of collars of charges and have no rests.

Next are fifteen pikemen and twelve halberdiers. They have breast, back and gorget but no cassocks. They trail their long weapons.

Next come three officers wearing what appear to be long doublets rather than cassocks. They button down the front and are belted at the waist. They also have large hanging sleeves. The officers carry plain batons.

Finally come two drummers and a fifer in short cassocks, an ensign in breast, back and gorget trailing his colour, and three sergeants of the Band, similarly armoured, and wearing sashes over their right shoulders. They trail halberds, one of them wears a ruff.

Some of the figures in these engravings are reproduced in "Shakespeare's England" (2 vols. Oxford University Press. 191?), and Cecil Lawson's "History of the Uniforms of British Army" (vol. 1. 1940).

There is a little book called "Mars his Field" which illustrates the outfits of an Elizabethan pikeman and a targeteer, it was formerly supposed to have been published in 1595, a date that corresponds with the dress of the figures in the illustrations, but the date is now supposed to have been 1625. At any rate, the plates will serve to illustrate military equipment for the last part of the reign of Good Queen Bess. Both types of warrior wear full breeches with large tasselled bows tied below the knee and, in some of the plates, bottons down the outside seams. The targeteer has close helmet, gorget, breast and back, tassels of two lames, and armour for the right shoulder and arm, The left arm is not armoured, being protected by the target, which covers that side from neck to knee. This target is, rectangular at the top, but semi-circular below, and is strongly concave in the fashion of a Roman scutum. It is suspended from a short strap about the neck. There are two straps for the left forearm, which passes horizontally across the back of the target a little above its centre. The targeteer has also leather gloves, steel shin guards, and a hook to carry his helmet on the right hand side of the back part of his tassels. The shoes of the figures are fastened with bows.

The pikeman is armed in morion, gorget, breast, back and tassels only. The tassels bear a hook for the headpiece too. He is equipped with a buckler which hangs on its strap at his back on the march. When he is wielding his pike the buckler is suspended freely over his left arm, but for swordplay the left forearm is inserted into straps similar to those on the target. The pikeman wears gloves likewise. All the figures carry swords but it is not clear how the scabbards are attached to the belt, as this part is always out of sight. There are no daggers to be seen.

These articles have been copied from notes made from the original sources with very little alteration. If anybody has noticed any errors, or can give me information on any of the points raised. I shall be glad to hear from him.