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## **[Michael Roberts, The Military Revolution, 1560-1660, p. 4-5]**

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been forced to interest myself increasingly in questions of military history; and I have been impressed, as any student of military history must be impressed, by the neglect into which the subject has fallen in this country. It is, no doubt, a historical commonplace that major revolutions in military techniques have usually been attended with the most widely ramifying consequences. The coming of the mounted warrior, and of the sword, in the middle of the second millennium B.C.; the triumph of the heavy cavalryman, consolidated by the adoption of the stirrup, in the sixth century of the Christian era; the scientific revolution in warfare in our own day—these are all recognized as major turning-points in the history of mankind. But the emergence of a strong British school of military historians, which might seem to be the logical consequence of such a recognition, is still a hope rather than a reality; and it is still perfectly possible for a man to get a first-class honours degree in History in absolute ignorance of the development of the art of war. My purpose in this lecture is to consider some of the effects of changes in that art within a comparatively limited period; and I have chosen this period because it seems to me to have witnessed what may not improperly be called a military revolution, and also because that revolution, when it was accomplished, exercised a profound influence upon the future course of European history. I shall propose to myself, then, two questions. First, what was the nature of this military revolution? And secondly, what were its wider effects?<sup>1</sup>

The effective combination of missile weapons with close action has always been one of the central problems of tactics; and in the sixteenth century it was posed afresh. For a thousand years the battlefields of Europe had been dominated by heavy cavalry, and on the whole arrows had not availed much against them. In the fifteenth century that domination had been overthrown. But it was not that chivalry had succumbed to the power of hand-gun or

1. For a general treatment of the period Hans Delbrück, *Geschichte der Kriegskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte*, (Berlin, 1920), IV, is the best authority, though this volume is on a slighter scale than its predecessors. Paul Schmitthenner, *Krieg und Kriegführung im Wandel der Weltgeschichte*, (Potsdam, 1930), is a stimulating and suggestive survey. Sir Charles Oman's *A History of the Art of War in the Sixteenth Century*, (1937) necessarily ends with Maurice of Orange. The best discussion in English of seventeenth-century armies is the chapter in Sir George Clark, *The Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1929).

arquebus; it was not that firearms had for the moment the advantage over the tactics of the *mêlée*: it was rather that a form of close action dependent upon the impact and mass of heavy cavalry was displaced by a form of close action dependent upon the impact and mass of heavy infantry. The line of charging knights was smashed by the massed pikes of the Swiss column. Firearms did, indeed, batter down the feudal castle; and the social and constitutional significance of that achievement needs no emphasis. But on the battlefield firearms for long represented a big step backward. The effective combination of archers and men-at-arms, not uncommon in the Middle Ages, reached its climax, perhaps, at Agincourt: the following generations, turning increasingly to firearms, and abandoning the bow, groped in vain for a tactical form that should take its place.<sup>1</sup> For by a curious paradox the coming of the hand-gun brought with it a steep decline in firepower:<sup>2</sup> the superiority of the longbow, in speed, accuracy, and mobility, was so marked that even in the late seventeenth century military writers were pleading for its reintroduction.<sup>3</sup>

The tacticians of the sixteenth century, seeking an effective form for the combination of firearms and *l'arme blanche*, had to take account of the fact that military fashion, and a well-grounded faith in the moral effect of loud detonations, had provided them with a thoroughly inefficient missile weapon. It followed that the missile arm must make up by numbers what it lacked in individual effectiveness. At the same time they saw no reason to abandon those huge squares of pikemen and halberdiers with which the Swiss had routed the chivalry of Burgundy. Thus massed pikemen must somehow be combined with massed musketeers. The upshot of this state of affairs was the Spanish *tercio*, 3000 strong, in which a square of pikemen was surrounded by a deep bordure of shot;<sup>4</sup> while to counteract the slowness and inaccuracy of musket-fire commanders evolved the countermarch. By 1560 this formation, or something

1. For suggestive remarks on the limitations of English long-bow tactics, see Piero Pieri, *Il Rinascimento e la Crisi militare italiana* (Turin, 1952), p. 225.  
2. See Otton Laskowski, 'Infantry Tactics and Firing Power in XVI Century' *Teki Historyczne*, IV (1950), 106-115; *id.*, 'Uwagi na marginesie nowego wydania Zarysu Historii Wojskowości w Polsce Generała Mariana Kukiela', *Teki Historyczne*, V (1951-2), 36.  
3. e.g. Sir James Turner, *Pallas Armata* (1683), p. 174. Even later, Folard was advocating a return to catapults: W. Y. Carman, *A History of Firearms* (1955), p. 47.  
4. For a discussion of *tercio*-tactics (with a good diagram) see G. B. C:sson Barkman, *Gustaf II Adolfs regementsorganisation vid det inhemska infanteriet* (Meddelanden från Generalstabens krigshistoriska avdelning I), (Stockholm, 1931), pp. 4-6, 21-4.

