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Review of *The Wandering Army: The Campaigns that Transformed the British Way of War, 1750-1850* by Huw J. Davies

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war effort. This is a surprising omission, given that it was a not insubstantial feature of the author's PhD thesis. Again, the opportunity for a provocative argument that the Civil Wars were, perhaps, the 'British theatre' of the Thirty Years' War is missed. However, Marks cannot really be faulted for this. Such argument and investigation would certainly worthy of its own book-length study, and we can only hope that Marks is planning to return to these themes in future publications.

These small disagreements should not detract from what the book has provided: a vital, foundational overview of a crucial, and hitherto ignored, moment in Britain's military history. It completely and utterly dismantles any notion that England and Englishmen had no military education in the lead up to the Civil Wars or that the Thirty Years' War was a conflict which happened 'over there,' only to be ignored by those 'over here.' Adam Marks' *England and the Thirty Years' War* simply cannot be ignored by those working on Britain in the early modern world or on early modern military history. It will hopefully capture the imagination of a generation of historians to come.

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Huw J. Davies, *The Wandering Army: The Campaigns that Transformed the British Way of War, 1750-1850*. London, Yale University Press, 2022. xix + 500 pp, 32 illustrations, 14 maps. ISBN 978-0300217162 (hardback). Price £25.00.

In the period between 1745 and 1815, which has been labelled the 'Seventy Years War', British troops saw service on all continents of the globe. Each campaign brought with it different challenges deriving from the terrain, environment and enemy faced. In his highly detailed and thought-provoking new book, Huw Davies tracks how British officers responded to these varied and unexpected challenges as they deployed new approaches to fighting war.

The Wandering Army opens with the losses at the Battle of Fontenoy in 1745 and Monongahela in 1755, which subsequently inspired a 'military enlightenment' among British officers. From this point forward, Davies argues, British commanders gradually acquired a greater appreciation for meticulous planning, the avoidance of frontal assaults and the value of light infantry. As the British Army 'wandered' through North

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America, India and Europe, the diverse experience of military personnel facilitated and perpetuated this 'military enlightenment'. The varied experience of army personnel led to the establishment of 'informal knowledge networks' where the lessons learned in previous wars led to experimentation and knowledge diffusion throughout the officer ranks. The transmission of these ideas fostered a process of gradual improvement in the British army. Through this interesting, highly original argument, Davies offers his perspective on the development of military tactics and technology throughout the eighteenth century – an area of considerable debate among British military historians over the last half century.

The Wandering Army is based on a wide range of archival research and provides a strikingly deep insight into the logistical and tactical considerations that British army commanders faced on campaign in this period. For example, Davies highlights how contrasting views on military theory underpinned the animosity between British commanders during the Seven Years War and the American War of Independence. This analysis of informal exchanges between officers is a highly interesting perspective to military historians and opens the door to future reappraisals of British commanders in this era.

Above all, Davies offers an excellent sense of just how well-travelled some of these officers were. Lord Cornwallis is a stand-out example. Born in Britain and trained in European fighting techniques, Cornwallis was introduced into combat in North America during the War of Independence and infamously forced to surrender at Yorktown in 1781. In 1786 Cornwallis was appointed Governor-General and commander-in-chief in India and led his Indian Sepoys against Mysore in 1790-2. Davies shows how Cornwallis actively utilised his rounded experience by pushing for tactical reforms of his Indian troops in innovative ways.

Davies' work is not without limitations, however. This is not an easily accessible book for a general audience. Readers without prior knowledge of Britain's wars in the eighteenth century may find themselves lost under the weight of detail. The structure of the book itself exacerbates this problem. The chapters stand either by themselves or in pairs rather than a part of a larger cumulative analysis. One suspects that Davies might have been forced to squeeze a large initial draft into a far smaller one for publishing, and that much of the connective tissue between the chapters has ended up on the cutting room floor.

Despite his many original insights, a harsh reviewer might argue that not all of Davies' conclusions strike home. At times, this reviewer feels that Davies might overestimate the adaptability and innovativeness of the British army commanders. For Davies, the period 1799-1801 is crucial as it witnessed the 'rebirth of the British army'. At this point, British commanders began to amalgamate European fighting techniques with the

light infantry tactics and formations that had been deployed in North America during the Seven Years War and the American War of Independence. Here, Davies' 'informal knowledge networks' play a central role. New generations of officers fighting in the French Revolutionary Wars, such as John Moore, were actively talking to and learning from the older generation who had served in North America. While it seems beyond doubt that such conversations about military tactics did occur, there is very little evidence that they took place. Frustratingly, it appears that few officers were compelled to record the nature and direction of conversations about military tactics with their peers in the 1790s.

Without this evidence, this reviewer was unable to agree with Davies that the wars in North America had a profound effect on British tactics in the French Revolutionary War. Instead, it seems more plausible that the British army only saw the need to reevaluate its order of battle after a string of repeated defeats in the 1790s at the hands of the French light infantry – the *tirailleurs*. It is strange that Davies does not highlight this as a possibility, even when he writes that 'the specific object of the light infantry and rifle units was to suppress the *tirailleurs*'. Combat between belligerents can be a powerful medium for the exchange of military knowledge and culture. Surely then, the British might have learnt these new tactics from their highly successful French opponent, rather than the older generation of commanders who served in America? Davies appears to concede this point in his conclusion, but this reviewer feels more could be done to highlight the limitations of the evidence over the course of the book.

While one may question some of Davies' arguments, overall, *The Wandering Army* remains a fascinating and thought-provoking work. It offers new and original perspectives on the British methods of fighting in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that will surely open opportunities for further study and academic debate.

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