

The Maligned Militia: The West Country Militia of the Monmouth Rebellion, 1685. Christopher L. Scott.

New York: Routledge, 2016. xxii + 334 pp. \$144.95.

The central focus of this book is a statement by King James II that has been often repeated but seldom investigated: “The Militia, which have hitherto been so much depended on, is not sufficient for such Occasions” (2). The king gave this assessment of

the West Country armed forces shortly after Monmouth's Rebellion in the summer of 1685. Subsequent generations of historians have accepted the idea that local troops were ineffective and, perhaps, a bit of a joke.

Christopher L. Scott investigates the state of the militia and discovers that they did a creditable job of securing the West Country during the crisis. His book explains the criteria for military effectiveness, the historical origins of the militia, and the requirements for leadership, organization, and strength. It details the ways in which militia units were funded and shows how soldiers were paid, supplied, and housed. It describes how units were summoned and mustered during the 1685 crisis and reveals that they had sufficient training, obedience, clothing, weapons, and equipment to be an effective force. Militiamen were mobile, walking from nine to thirteen miles a day, and prepared to engage in combat. Scott puts aside the romantic idea that West Countrymen were reluctant to fight neighbors who had joined Monmouth's band of rebels. The issue of loyalty led to a bloody clash between the residents of Burnham and Huntspill in Somerset. In fact, towns often engaged in the kind of violent rivalries that we associate with football clubs today.

The author also investigates accounts of the militia's failure at Axminster in June 1685. The Devon and Somersetshire militias should have pinched Monmouth's army between them and won a victory; instead, they withdrew, leaving the rebels in possession of the town and the road to Taunton. Historians have characterized this as "a panic-stricken flight" (219). In fact, the militias' commanders made a strategic decision to withdraw, believing it to be nearly impossible to dislodge Monmouth from his stronghold. With limited information and royal troops on their way, "to throw away the local force on a dangerous gamble would have been very foolish" (225). Scott concludes that this was no rout, as the Somerset militia later pulled together and prevented Monmouth from recruiting in the eastern part of the county. The author draws from a variety of sources, including a contemporary account of the Duke of Beaufort's 1684 progress through Wales in which the lord lieutenant made sure that soldiers under his command could defend the Crown in the event of a rebellion. Beaufort's narrative of his defense of Bristol supports the thesis of this book and can be found in Yale University's Beinecke Library.

Scott attributes the denigration of the 1685 militia by contemporary writers to personal and political bias. James II, for example, "needed to create both an imperative requirement for a large standing army and a source of financial savings to fund it" (266). Historians, meanwhile, tended to view the militia through the smudged lens of time. They either lumped them together with the West Country forces that failed to deter William of Orange in 1688 or with the drinking clubs of subsequent times. The author reminds us that militia volunteers were usually of higher social standing than members of the royal army. Under the command of the country nobility and gentry, they operated as "the government's military tool for self protection and internal social control" (56). Militias throughout England were used to influence mayoral and parliamentary elections, dissuade potentially rebellious factions from mobilizing, seize arms and arrest suspicious persons, and break up gatherings of dissenters and other suspected

radicals. At the same time, they were groups of like-minded men who enjoyed “the satisfaction of doing one’s patriotic duty and the sense of adventure, coupled with the change from routine that militia service could bring” (77).

The Maligned Militia provides an organized, clearly narrated, and well-researched account of the late seventeenth-century West Country forces. It will be very useful to historians, military enthusiasts, and reenactors who seek detailed information about a form of organization dating back to Anglo-Saxon times.

MOLLY MCCLAIN, *University of San Diego*