

THE NAVY IN THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned chiefly with the military role of sea power during the English Civil War. Parliament's seizure of the Royal Navy in 1642 is examined in detail, with a discussion of the factors which led to the King's loss of the fleet and the consequences thereafter. It is concluded that Charles I was outmanoeuvred politically, whilst Parliament's choice to command the fleet, the Earl of Warwick, far surpassed him in popularity with the common seamen. The thesis then considers the advantages which control of the Navy provided for Parliament throughout the war, determining that the fleet's protection of London, its ability to supply besieged outposts and its logistical support to Parliamentary land forces was instrumental in preventing a Royalist victory. Furthermore, it is concluded that Warwick's astute leadership went some way towards offsetting Parliament's sporadic neglect of the Navy.

The thesis demonstrates, however, that Parliament failed to establish the unchallenged command of the seas around the British Isles. This was because of the Royalists' widespread privateering operations, aided in large part by the King's capture of key ports in 1643, such as Dartmouth and Bristol. The Navy was able to block many, but not all, of the King's arms shipments from abroad, thus permitting Charles to supply his armies in England. Close attention is paid to the Royalist shipping which landed reinforcements from Ireland in 1643-44.

The King's defeat in the First Civil War is then discussed, with the New Model Army, and greater resources, cited as the key factors behind Parliament's victory, with recognition that the Navy provided essential support. Finally, the revolt of the fleet in 1648 is examined. It is concluded that the increasing radicalism of Parliament alienated a substantial section of the Navy, but that the Royalists failed to capitalise on their new-found maritime strength.

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