

## **(Not) Learning the Lessons of War?**

### **The Scottish experience of conflict in the Second War of Independence (1332–1357)**

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Scottish sources suggest that the Scottish king, Robert I, left instructions to his commanders on his deathbed for how war with England should be fought in the years to follow. Although it is unclear as to whether this “testament” was based on any sort of reality, or was simply a literary creation of later years, it is referred to commonly in Scottish historiography as something of a manual for the Scots, based upon the lessons learned by their warrior king. In the years after Robert I’s death, however, the Scots lost three battles in fourteen years, and would go on to lose more examples in the decades to follow. Historians of medieval Scotland have, therefore, deduced that those Scottish military leaders who had gathered around their king’s deathbed either ignored or forgot the advice of their king. This article aims to challenge this dominant historiographical view of the military history of this period of conflict, with particular focus given to the Second Scottish War of Independence (1332–1357). It will reconsider the extent to which the Scots adhered to the testament of “Good King Robert”, and the degree to which they continued the type of war that their king had fought during his own time. It will re-examine the main battles of this second conflict with England and re-assess the extent to which the results of these set pieces should be seen as the dominant factors in relation to this period of war. Ultimately, this article will reconsider the extent to which lessons were indeed learned by Scottish commanders during the Second War of Independence, and the degree to which Scottish commanders, rather than abandoning hard-learned past lessons, instead prosecuted a style of war that aligned closely with the warfare advocated by Robert I.

According to some manuscript copies of a medieval Scottish chronicle, Robert I, the king who had led Scotland to freedom from English domination during the First Scottish War of Independence (1296–1328), called his nobles to his deathbed in his final days.<sup>1</sup> Here he supposedly presented to them his testament. This was a set of instructions to his commanders, and to those who would tutor the king's young successor, David II. They included lessons learned by the king himself on how to best fight the English foe. Included in this testament was military advice of a type that aligned with the style of war the king had prosecuted during his own reign, and with which he had ultimately been successful. As it is reported in verse form:

On foot should be all Scottish war  
Let hill and marsh their foes debar  
And woods as walls prove such an arm  
That enemies do them no harm.  
In hidden spots keep every store  
And burn the plainlands them before  
So, when they find the land lie waste  
Needs must they pass away in haste  
Harried by cunning raids at night  
And threatening sounds from every height.  
Then, as they leave, with great array  
Smite with the sword and chase away.  
This is the counsel and intent  
Of Good King Robert's Testament.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Johannis de Fordun Scotichronicon cum Supplementis et Continuatione Walteri Boweri*, ed. W. Goodall, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Robert Fleming, 1759), ii, 232; see also Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon*, ed. D.E.R. Watt *et al*, 9 vols (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1993–1998), ix, 37. The earliest accounts of the king's deathbed scene suggest no last-minute instruction to his men about fighting the future war. Instead, the accounts focus on Bruce's determination to secure the safety of his soul, and for his nobles to choose one from among them who would take the king's heart on crusade (John Barbour, *The Bruce*, ed. A.A.M. Duncan (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1997), 748–754; *The True Chronicles of Jean le Bel, 1290–1360*, trans. N. Bryant (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011), 52–53).

<sup>2</sup> Colm McNamee, *Robert Bruce: Our Most Valiant Prince, King and Lord* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2012), 299. The earliest version of this military strategy may come from a now-lost chronicle

Robert I's advice was, then, to continue the guerrilla tactics that had effectively denied English forces an outright conquest of Scotland, and which had been used in turn to transform a largely defensive form of war into an offensive one, with violent raids unleashed against English interests and possessions.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps implicit within such advice was a suggestion that the Scots should avoid facing the English in battle at all. Although this is not stated explicitly in the earliest iteration of this tale, it was developed in sixteenth-century retelling of the episode to form one of the key statements of supposed Scottish medieval military policy. For example, George Buchanan wrote that the Scots should,

never...bring their whole force against the English at once, nor risk their fortune on the issue of one battle...the English, who inhabit a better country than the Scots, exceed them in the number of men, in money, and, in fine, in all the materiel of war, and, therefore, on account of these advantages, are more accustomed to ease, and more impatient of fatigue; but the Scots, nurtured in a sterner soil, are by their parsimony and constant exercise rendered more healthy, and by the nature of their education better fitted to undergo military toil, and, therefore, better adapted for irregular skirmishes, wearing out the enemy by degrees, and breaking them by occasional attacks, than for meeting them at once in a pitched battle.<sup>4</sup>

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from the period just after Robert I's reign, written by Bernard of Arbroath, chancellor of Scotland (see *Chron. Bower*, vi, 321, xvii-xviii; Michael Penman, *Robert the Bruce: King of the Scots* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 118). The interpolation of this chronicle fragment into Bower's fifteenth-century *Scotichronicon* makes no reference to this being part of a kingly deathbed instruction. Indeed, a similar description of Scottish tactics, again without reference to a deathbed testament, is also made in Jean Froissart's *Chroniques*, written in the last decades of the fourteenth century. Here the basic tenets of Scottish military strategy are discussed in relation to the events after the battle of Halidon Hill (1333) (*The Wars of Edward III: Sources and Interpretations*, ed. Clifford J. Rogers (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), 40-41).

<sup>3</sup> For Bruce's military career, see for example Michael Brown, *Bannockburn: The Scottish War and the British Isles, 1307-1323* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 93-103.

<sup>4</sup> George Buchanan, *The History of Scotland*, trans. J. Aikman, 4 vols (Glasgow and Edinburgh: Blackie, Fullarton & Co., 1827-1829), i, 444-445.

Other accounts from the same period would further develop these points and similarly stress the importance of battle-avoidance when it came to fighting the English.<sup>5</sup>

Importantly, however, such declarations insisting that facing the English in battle should be avoided came from a period in which the Scots had indeed faced their enemy several times, and lost on almost every occasion. In particular, the sixteenth-century Scottish disasters at Flodden (1513), Solway Moss (1542) and Pinkie (1547) provided all the examples that contemporary writers undoubtedly needed to stress this particular facet of military strategy.<sup>6</sup> As such, it is little surprise that these writers placed within Robert Bruce's last words an instruction to avoid the battlefield catastrophes that they knew followed the king's reign. However, as indicated above, this statement is a later addition. While the Scots are encouraged to attack the English through "cunning raids at night," and to "smite with the sword and chase away" the enemy upon their retreat, the original account of "Good King Robert's Testament" makes no explicit comment on the importance of battle-avoidance to Scottish strategy. Despite this, historians continue to emphasise the importance of battles, and in particular of battlefield defeat, in their analyses of fourteenth-century Scottish warfare.<sup>7</sup> In part this is because some fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century examples, such as the battles of Dupplin Moor (1332),

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<sup>5</sup> *The Chronicles of Scotland Compiled by Hector Boece*, translated into Scots by John Bellen-den, 1531, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1938–1941), ii, 291–292; *Leslie's History of Scotland*, ed. E.G. Cody, 4 vols (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society, 1884–1895), ii, 12–13; John Major, *A History of Greater Britain* (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1982), 264–265.

<sup>6</sup> For discussion of all three battles, and this period of sixteenth-century conflict more widely, see Gervase Phillips, *The Anglo-Scots Wars, 1513–1550: A Military History* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> For example, see Alexander Grant, "Disaster at Neville's Cross: The Scottish point of view," – *The Battle of Neville's Cross, 1346*, ed. D. Rollason and M. Prestwich (Stamford: Shaun Tyas, 1998), 15–35; Alastair J. Macdonald, "Triumph and Disaster: Scottish Military Leadership in the Middle Ages," – *Scotland and England at War, c.1296–c.1513*, ed. A. King and D. Simpkin (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 255–282; Michael A. Penman, *The Scottish Civil War: the Bruces and the Balliols and the War for the Control of Scotland, 1286–1356* (Stroud: History Press, 2002), 129, 131; Michael Brown, *The Black Douglases: War and Lordship in Late Medieval Scotland, 1300–1455* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1998), 149; Kelly DeVries, *Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1996), 177–178; J. Anthony Tuck, "War and Society in the Medieval North," *Northern History*, 21 (1985): 33–52, at 39.

Halidon Hill (1333), Neville's Cross (1346) and Homildon Hill (1402), appear to be the examples that prove the rule. These large-scale Scottish defeats reinforce the idea that battle-avoidance could have served Scottish forces far better than choosing to face the English on the battlefield. And as a result of this view there has developed an overriding perception that the period of the Second Scottish War of Independence was solely one of Scottish defeat, or at best Scottish survival against the odds. It is one of the objects of this article to question this accepted view.

Another reason for the modern historiographical stress on battle-avoidance relates to the debate currently ongoing regarding the nature of medieval strategy and tactics more broadly. A vigorous discussion continues in which historians have suggested opposing views on the importance of either battle-seeking or battle-avoidance as the key driver of military affairs in the medieval period.<sup>8</sup> This historiographical debate has also influenced those analysing military activity in fourteenth-century Scotland and, while the principal tenets of the wider discussion have not been adopted in their entirety, they have helped to reinforce a particular assumption regarding this period of conflict. This is that the Scottish nobles who gathered around the king's deathbed took apparently little regard of their king's wishes. For the aforementioned battlefield defeats in the period up to 1402 appear to act as exemplars of how not to fight the English. It is this perceived error of the post-1329 generation of Scottish commanders in fighting pitched battles at all that has been a major focus of Scottish historians. As Macdonald has argued, the period of the Second Scottish War of Independence is seen as one in which there was "[a] most radical shift...from highly effective military activity conducted during the reign of Robert I to the military disasters that occurred in 1332–1333, after his death."<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Macdonald underlines that the commanders of this next phase of conflict appear "to have been suddenly incompetent,"

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Stephen Morillo, "Battle Seeking: The Contexts and Limits of Vegetian Strategy," *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 1 (2003): 21–41; Clifford J. Rogers, "The Vegetian "Science of Warfare" in the Middle Ages," *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 1 (2003): 1–19; John Gillingham, "'Up with Orthodoxy!': In Defence of Vegetian Warfare," *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 2 (2004): 149–158.

<sup>9</sup> Macdonald, "Triumph and Disaster," 256.



*Statue of Robert the Bruce, King of Scots from 1306 until his death in 1329, on the esplanade at Stirling Castle, Scotland, by Andrew Currie. Courtesy Pixabay*

and he describes the years of 1332–1333 as “the apogee of apparent Scottish military incompetence.”<sup>10</sup> Michael Brown has also argued that only by returning to the ideas laid out in “Good King Robert’s Testament,” to the policy of deliberate guerrilla warfare, were the Scots able to put behind them two years when they “paid a heavy price in defeat.”<sup>11</sup> The fact that later Scottish nobles failed to take on board the hard lessons learned by Robert I has condemned those who led the war effort in the years that followed. Little has been attempted, however, to question this accepted view of medieval Scottish warfare in the years after Robert I’s death.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 256, 261.

<sup>11</sup> Brown, *Bannockburn*, 93–94.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed reconsideration of this period of conflict, see Iain A. MacInnes, *Scotland’s Second War of Independence, 1332–1357* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2016).

## Experience, leadership, and the Brucean way of war

To begin, it is worth returning to Robert I's testament. Although unlikely to have been the words of the king himself, the themes addressed in the testament nonetheless reflect a logical set of tactics to overcome a more numerous, wealthier and better-equipped foe, whether in the fourteenth, fifteenth or sixteenth centuries. The strategy provided in the testament is given greater potency by the idea that Robert I had himself learned these lessons during his own wars as a result of changing tactics following his early defeats. For Robert I's own wartime experience had begun inauspiciously when, adopting "conventional" tactics of siege and battle, he had been defeated by both the English and by his Scottish enemies, to the extent that he was forced to flee the kingdom.<sup>13</sup> Following his return in 1307, Robert I apparently changed his approach and adopted more "unconventional" guerrilla tactics. He attacked castles by stratagem and surprise, and destroyed them after their capture to deny their use to the enemy. He employed destructive raiding as an offensive weapon of war across Scotland, England and Ireland, in an effort to enforce his will on the Scottish people, and enforce the reality of his kingship on England. And he largely avoided pitched battles with English forces, unless in circumstances that suited the Scots.<sup>14</sup> This is, then, the standard against which later Scottish commanders, their strategy and their tactics, have been compared in modern historiography. And looking at the principal war years of 1332 to 1338, it would appear that Scottish commanders actually did, to a great extent, follow the tactics attributed to Robert I. This should not come as any great surprise. Some historians have viewed this second phase of the conflict as being led by a new generation of commanders whose skills were not up to the task, or who did not have experience of the Brucean form of warfare. Macdonald suggests that the years of peace between 1327 and 1332 may have "blunted [the] skills to some extent" of

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<sup>13</sup> See G.W.S. Barrow, *Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 188–212; Michael Brown, *The Wars of Scotland, 1214–1371* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 197–202.

<sup>14</sup> Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, 213–242; Brown, *Wars of Scotland*, 202–231; David Cornell, *Bannockburn: The Triumph of Robert the Bruce* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 152–162.

Scottish soldiers and commanders.<sup>15</sup> He also argues that the new generation of Scottish commanders “fatally failed [their] test...[because] there was no reliable way that battlefield experience could be passed on to inexperienced leaders. They would have to learn lessons from scratch, if they lived long enough.”<sup>16</sup> This is, however, something of an exaggeration.

There is no doubt that the Scottish military leadership was deprived of continuity by the deaths in quick succession of the two most experienced commanders of the previous conflict. Thomas Randolph and James Douglas had been Robert I's most trusted and skilled wartime leaders over the course of the preceding war and their loss, in 1330 (Douglas) and 1332 (Randolph), undoubtedly created a leadership vacuum for the Scottish war effort.<sup>17</sup> But beyond these two, the military leadership at the commencement of the Second War of Independence was more representative of continuity from the previous conflict than has been previously acknowledged. Many leading figures had participated in the wars of Robert I. They had experienced victory and success and would take that knowledge into the next conflict. Included amongst their number were the two senior military officers of the Scottish crown, the marshal Robert Keith, and the constable Gilbert Hay. Both men lived on into the period of the second conflict and should have been able to pass on their knowledge and experience to newer commanders and to the men who fought under them.<sup>18</sup> Other figures too had gained battlefield experience, were themselves veterans of Bannockburn and other victories, and again should have been able to bring their experience to bear in the renewed conflict after 1332. These included men such as Earl Malcolm of Lennox, Alexander Fraser, Robert Boyd, and Alexander Seton, prominent figures within the Scottish military leadership and the heads of militarily active kin groups.<sup>19</sup> They represented a potentially quite high degree

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<sup>15</sup> Macdonald, “Triumph and Disaster,” 279.

<sup>16</sup> Macdonald, “Triumph and Disaster,” 279.

<sup>17</sup> No complete account has been written on Randolph's military career, but for some examples of his importance to the Bruce cause in the first war, see Penman, *Robert the Bruce*, 137–138, 140–141, 164–174, 235–239. For Douglas, see Brown, *Black Douglases*, 14–31.

<sup>18</sup> MacInnes, *Scotland's Second War*, 138–140.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 118, 141–142.



of continuity of military leadership for Scottish forces in war. Indeed, it was the deaths of some of these men in the battles of 1332 and 1333 that, arguably, diluted the pool of talent available to lead Scottish forces in war in later years and forced the demands of leadership on others with less experience.<sup>20</sup> For this early part of the war, however, Scottish forces were not led by inexperienced men with little understanding of how contemporary war should be fought. It is worth, then, re-examining the nature of Scottish warfare throughout the Second War of Independence, and the extent to which it really aligned with the tactics attributed to Robert I's testament. Through such examination it should be possible to reconsider the pitched battles of the period and fit these into a more refined picture of Brucean warfare across this conflict.

## Scotland's topography

Turning first to the use of topography, there is little doubt that Scottish commanders were able to utilise Scotland's terrain and turn it into one of the kingdom's greatest assets in the war with England. Firstly, it ensured that Scotland, unlike Wales before it, could not be encircled by English castles and garrisons and thus controlled in the aftermath of English invasion armies withdrawing south.<sup>21</sup> Successive English kings discovered that the geography of Scotland forced them along well-defined routes when marching their armies through the kingdom, and that these routes were prone to ambush from Scottish forces hidden in areas of

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<sup>20</sup> For discussion of the leaders of the Scottish war effort in the period that followed 1333, and of the military experience gained by leading Scottish figures more generally, see MacInnes, *Scotland's Second War*, chapter 4.

<sup>21</sup> Rogers argues that Edward III attempted to pacify Scotland by establishing a "system of fortifications similar to the one his grandfather had built in Wales" (Clifford J. Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp: English Strategy under Edward III, 1327–1360* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2000), 87). But it is difficult to see how this could have functioned in reality. While Edward III did try and establish a system of fortifications to control southern Scotland, this was only ever intended to impose English order on that part of Scotland ceded to England by King Edward Balliol as recompense for the military aid granted to him by the English king during Balliol's attempts to seize the Scottish throne.

wood and bog.<sup>22</sup> In the Second War of Independence, when English invasion armies crossed the border successively in the winter of 1334–1335, and the summers of 1335, 1336, 1337 and 1338, Scottish commanders consistently avoided direct confrontation with the invading enemy. Instead, they retreated before the English armies, choosing to pick off smaller English bands of raiders and attack the less-protected rear of the enemy force, or to launch counter-raids into England following English retreat back across the frontier.<sup>23</sup> Even in 1333, when the English besieged Berwick-upon-Tweed, an action that led to the battle of Halidon Hill, the Scots at first attempted to lure English forces away by outflanking the besiegers and raiding Northern England. The sight of these northern territories in flames was meant to give the English pause for thought, especially as many of those serving within the besieging army were themselves northern lords.<sup>24</sup> The same tactic had been used by James Douglas during the first war, when in 1319 he successfully raided England and drew off the besieging forces of Edward II from Berwick as a result.<sup>25</sup> That the tactic failed to work a second time, in 1333, was down to Edward III's determination to remain, and the stronger control he had over his force than had his father previously. Although unsuccessful on this occasion, the tactic of withdrawing before an English advance, utilising the topography of Scotland to melt away before reappearing elsewhere when least expected, was one that the Scots would return to time and again in the years that followed.

A particularly detailed example of this Scottish ability is provided by the campaigns of 1336.<sup>26</sup> Led by the pre-eminent commander of the

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<sup>22</sup> For discussion of invasion routes and the topography of Scotland, see Geoffrey W.S. Barrow, "Land Routes: The Medieval Evidence," – *Loads and Roads in Scotland and Beyond: Land Transport over 6000 Years*, ed. A. Fenton and G. Stell (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1984), 49–66.

<sup>23</sup> For a combination of these various tactics in relation to the English invasions of 1337 and 1338, see MacInnes, *Scotland's Second War*, 30–36.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 14–16; Ranald Nicholson, *Edward III and the Scots: The Formative Years of a Military Career, 1327 to 1335* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 119–133.

<sup>25</sup> Penman, *Robert the Bruce*, 207–208.

<sup>26</sup> For a detailed account of these campaigns, see Iain A. MacInnes, "To subject the north of the country to his rule": Edward III and the "Lochindorb *chevauchée*" of 1336," *Northern Scotland*, 3 (2012): 16–31; see also Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp*, 115–123.

period, Andrew Murray, Scottish forces successfully negotiated difficult terrain to appear successively where they could do most damage, at least cost. During the early weeks of the English invasion, Edward III's forces were attacked at various points as they marched through southern Scotland, including ambushes in the "forests and mountains" of the West March, and at the key strategic river crossing point at Stirling.<sup>27</sup> Later in the campaign, while besieging Lochindorb Castle, in northern Scotland, Andrew Murray and his troops were forced to withdraw at the approach of a small English army under Edward III himself. Successfully avoiding a possible attempt by the English king to force them into a confrontation, the Scots headed south as Edward III continued his campaign through northeast Scotland.<sup>28</sup> While Edward III was sacking Aberdeen in the Scottish northeast, Andrew Murray appeared in the south, in Lanarkshire, to recruit forces from his own lands and to foment trouble in areas recently converted to English allegiance by the activities of Edward III.<sup>29</sup> In response to Murray's movements, another English force under John of Eltham, the king's brother, invaded southern Scotland, possibly with the intention of forcing a confrontation with Murray, or to drive him back north towards the waiting Edward III. Once again Murray was able to withdraw from any such confrontation, and made his way back north once more, utilising his knowledge of Scottish terrain and topography to avoid the army of Edward III as he did so.<sup>30</sup> By October, when Edward III was at Andrew Murray's castle of Bothwell repairing its defences, Murray himself was in the Scottish northeast, systematically devastating the lands through which the English king had progressed only two months earlier.<sup>31</sup> No doubt, this ability to appear where the enemy was not had much to do with the smaller forces available to the Scots. Large English invasion armies could not move with much speed, nor could they progress over difficult terrain without leaving baggage trains and supplies behind. Even Edward III's smaller, more mobile force of 1336 struggled at

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<sup>27</sup> MacInnes, "Edward III and the Lochindorb *chevauchée*," 17.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 19–20, 23–24.

<sup>29</sup> MacInnes, *Scotland's Second War*, 27–28.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 28–29.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, 29.

various times to locate sufficient food for themselves and fodder for their horses.<sup>32</sup> Record evidence shows that English knights even learned to take smaller horses to Scotland as their large destriers were of little use in the Scottish terrain.<sup>33</sup> There is, then, little doubt that Scotland's topography played its part. The knowledge and utilisation of Scottish terrain to allow the ambush and outflanking of English forces was as important in the 1330s as it had been during Robert I's wars.

## The tactics of destruction

In relation to the second point of King Robert's testament, scorched earth tactics, this had been a Scottish policy since before Robert I's leadership in war. Indeed, William Wallace was said to have ordered that the fields of southern Scotland be laid waste in 1298 to afford the English armies of Edward I nothing with which to sustain them.<sup>34</sup> The tactic almost worked. Deprived of supplies, the English army was starving and about to return south when word reached them of the whereabouts of Scottish forces, and an English victory at the battle of Falkirk was the eventual outcome.<sup>35</sup> The devastation of the Scottish south in anticipation of English invasions continued in the years to come, as did the removal of sheep and cattle to wooded or upland areas to deny the enemy easy access to such resources. Slash and burn tactics in anticipation of English invasions were, however, only part of the policy of destruction employed within Scotland during this time. For the ravaging of lands with fire and sword was also a regular tactic of Scottish forces within Scotland, as well as during their regular raids into Northern England, or indeed their campaigns

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<sup>32</sup> *Original Letters Illustrative of English History*, 3rd series, ed. Henry Ellis, 3 vols (London: Harding, Triphook and Lepard, 1846), i, 36; Rogers, *Wars of Edward III*, 49; Thomas Gray, *Scalacronica*, ed. A. King (Woodbridge: Surtees Society, 2005), 123.

<sup>33</sup> Andrew Ayton, *Knights and Warhorses: Military Service and the English Aristocracy under Edward III* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), 213–214.

<sup>34</sup> Fiona Watson, "Sir William Wallace: What We Do – and Don't – Know," in *The Wallace Book*, ed. Edward J. Cowan (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2007), 26–41, at 34.

<sup>35</sup> Fiona Watson, *Under the Hammer: Edward I and Scotland, 1286–1307* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1998), 65–67.

in Ireland.<sup>36</sup> For the Anglo–Scottish wars were at various points also periods of civil conflict within Scotland between supporters of different claimants to the throne. Robert I of Scotland had won the kingdom to his rule as much at the point of the sword as he had through persuasion, and his destruction of territory in northeast Scotland was said by one chronicler to have reduced it to such utter devastation that people still spoke sorrowfully of it fifty years later.<sup>37</sup> Taking into account chronicle hyperbole, it is undeniable that the Scots fought a war within Scotland that included the deliberate destruction of crops, spoliation of goods and ruination of land that was intended to force submission and allegiance to the Bruce regime. This was a war fought for the loyalty of the people of Scotland during a period when lordship over them was keenly contested. The lord who was able to devastate another's lands demonstrated the weakness of he who currently possessed them. He was, after all, unable to look after his tenants and prevent such destruction. More than this, the lord who was capable of creating such devastation was also, by extension, also powerful enough to prevent its repetition in future and was, therefore, a lord worth following.

This strategy continued during the Second War of Independence in a time where an alternative ruling dynasty was supported by Edward III of England, and the adult male representative of that dynasty (Edward Balliol) was actively campaigning in Scotland. The already-discussed Andrew Murray was to the fore in meting out devastating punishment against the territories of those who supported the other side, or those who wavered in their allegiance. As already stated, he targeted northeast Scotland in 1336 as soon as Edward III had departed the area, devastating the region to reassert the continued reality of Bruce

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<sup>36</sup> For Scottish raiding of Northern England and Ireland, see Colm McNamee, *The Wars of the Bruces: Scotland, England and Ireland, 1306–1328* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1997), chapters 3 and 5.

<sup>37</sup> Barbour, *The Bruce*, 332–334. The “herschip” of Buchan, as this event was called, witnessed the particularly violent devastation of lands that belonged to Bruce's enemies, the Comyn family. The actions of Robert I's forces in the region, where they “[burned] all Buchan from end to end, sparing none,” was undoubtedly intended to live long in the memory and served as an object lesson to others of the dangers of non-submission.

dominance.<sup>38</sup> The results of this devastation are outlined by one chronicler who commented that “by the continual depredations of both sides the whole land of Gowrie, Angus and the Mearns was reduced to almost irredeemable devastation and extreme poverty.”<sup>39</sup> Other regions, such as south-west and south-east Scotland, respectively supporters of the alternate regime and territory conquered by the English, were similarly visited repeatedly by attacking Scottish forces. The Scots used such raids to exact tribute and ransom from local people, and to reinforce the message that the Bruce regime remained active and militarily ascendant.<sup>40</sup> All of this was a deliberate policy. It was intended to enforce submission to the Bruce regime. It was also to remind those who lived in Scotland that, while English armies could traverse through Scotland almost at will in the summer months, it was the Scots who remained during the rest of the year and who were able to enforce their lordship more consistently. This was a direct continuation of the war that Robert I had himself fought in the early years after his seizure of the throne. And while it has far more of a “shock and awe” approach to it than “winning hearts and minds,” it was the war that needed to be fought to ensure that the allegiance of the Scottish people remained solidly with the Bruce regime. Medieval lordship had to be enforced. It had to be seen to be operating. As already indicated, the physical demonstration of strong lordship was an essential component of the war being fought. This was a war fought for people’s loyalty, as much as it was fought over territory. And as such, the slash and burn approach worked well for the supporters of David II as an offensive tool, to be wielded against recalcitrant or wavering Scots, as much as it could be used as a defensive measure against invading English armies.

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<sup>38</sup> Iain A. MacInnes, “Shock and Awe: The use of terror as a psychological weapon during the Bruce-Balliol Civil War, 1332–1338,” – *England and Scotland in the Fourteenth Century: New Perspectives*, ed. A. King and M. Penman (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), 40–59, at 46–47.

<sup>39</sup> *Chron. Bower*, vii, 115.

<sup>40</sup> MacInnes, “Shock and Awe,” 43–49.

## Battle-seeking or battle-avoidance?

As for Bruce's supposed instruction that the Scots always fight on foot, there can be little doubt that this referred to battlefield tactics. The Scots, when raiding Northern England and campaigning throughout Scotland, were based predominantly around fast-moving, mounted forces. These allowed them to cover large distances on organised raids, dispensing damage and destruction against the countryside, but with little chance of being pinned down and forced into a confrontation.<sup>41</sup> The Hainaulter chronicler, Jean le Bel, famously wrote of the Scots that,

when they mean to invade England their army will cover twenty or thirty leagues at a stretch, by day or night. Anyone who didn't know their ways might well be amazed. The fact is that when they invade they're all mounted, except for the rabble who follow them on foot; their knights and squires ride good sturdy rounceys and the others little hackneys. And because of the mountainous terrain in those parts they have no baggage train and carry no supplies of bread or wine...<sup>42</sup>

It was a form of warfare that the English would themselves take up during the Hundred Years War in the tactic which became known as the *chevauchée*.<sup>43</sup> This was the Scots' main means of combating the English, as well as internal enemies, and cannot be aligned with the words of Robert I's testament, where fighting on foot was stressed as the key element.

This comment must, therefore, relate specifically to battlefield scenarios (including smaller-scale skirmishes and ambushes), with the specific adaptation of this point in later years to more explicitly stipulate that the Scots not fight the English in battle at all. As Buchanan had argued in the sixteenth century, the Scots should "never...bring their whole force against the English at once, nor risk their fortune on the issue of one

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<sup>41</sup> Alastair J. Macdonald, "The Kingdom of Scotland at War, 1332–1488," – *A Military History of Scotland*, ed. Edward M. Speirs, Jeremy A. Crang and Matthew J. Strickland (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 158–181, at 163–164.

<sup>42</sup> *Chron. Le Bel*, 35–36.

<sup>43</sup> Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp*, 5–8.

battle.”<sup>44</sup> It appears clear, however, that this was not what was originally intended. The suggestion that the Scots fight on foot was nothing new. They had been doing so since at least the twelfth century.<sup>45</sup> Although the Scottish cavalry arm did not fully disappear in the fourteenth century, the role of knights in battle changed as Scottish warfare followed broader medieval trends. Here the knights dismounted and fought as heavily armoured and heavily armed infantry, reinforced by missile troops and lesser-armoured foot.<sup>46</sup> But Robert I’s supposed advice appears at first glance to have been of little assistance. For the Scots fought on foot in numerous fourteenth-century examples of catastrophic battlefield defeat. The battles of Dunbar (1296), Falkirk (1298), Dupplin Moor (1332), Halidon Hill (1333), Neville’s Cross (1346) and Homildon Hill (1402) provide apparently ample evidence of a basic Scottish inability to succeed in large-scale pitched battles, whether they fought on foot or not. Indeed, such defeats appear to align with sixteenth-century and modern-day comment that the Scots should have learned not to fight large-scale battles against the English at all.

Those sixteenth-century writers, and their modern successors, have benefited from hindsight in knowing what would happen in the battles that followed, and in being able to perceive longer-term patterns of defeat in such situations. The commanders of the Second Scottish War of Independence did not. They may be seen by some historians to have ignored the advice of Robert I and marched to their ultimate defeat at Dupplin Moor (1332), Halidon Hill (1333), and Neville’s Cross (1346).<sup>47</sup> But it is arguable that, instead of disregarding the lessons of the past, these men actually fought the battles that they did because they were following where their late king had led. There is no denying that the Scots fought in the post-1329 battles on foot, just as Robert I had supposedly

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<sup>44</sup> Buchanan, *History of Scotland*, i, 444–445.

<sup>45</sup> For Scottish warfare in this earlier period, see Matthew J. Strickland, “The Kings of Scots at War, c.1093–1286,” – *A Military History of Scotland*, 94–132.

<sup>46</sup> See Michael Prestwich, “The Wars of Independence,” – *A Military History of Scotland*, 133–157; MacInnes, *Scotland Second War*, chapter 2.

<sup>47</sup> For detailed discussion of these three battles, see DeVries, *Infantry Warfare*, 112–128, 176–187.



instructed them. Even if his testament was a later creation, Robert I's war-time example was one where battles were shown to be of major importance. More than this they were battles that the Scots could, and indeed did win. Robert I's success over the English at Bannockburn (1314), as well as smaller-scale victories at Loudon Hill (1307), Myton (1319) and Old Byland (1322), may have been interpreted as just the sort of template for battlefield success that the testament also purported to be for warfare more generally.<sup>48</sup> That Robert I's testament in its earliest form made no mention of battle avoidance should come as little surprise. Why would it? Robert I's victories in battle showed up the myth of contemporary English battlefield dominance, and emphasised that success could be gained, as long as the conditions under which the battle was fought were advantageous.

It is arguable that at least two of the three examples from the Second Scottish War of Independence fit this model of advantageous conditions. Dupplin Moor was a battle against a very much smaller invading Anglo-Scottish force that lacked widespread support.<sup>49</sup> The supporters of David II appear to have been organised in their planning to meet the invasion, and summoned two armies to meet a threat that was thoroughly anticipated. The invading forces met the northern army in battle, and so did not face the full extent of the Scottish military on the field. Still, the Bruce forces outnumbered their enemies to a large extent and appear to have fully expected to win at Dupplin.<sup>50</sup> The Scottish defeat that followed was caused by a combination of Scottish overconfidence, a disorderly charge against a static English defensive line, and good tactics on the part of the invading forces that utilised the potent combination of archers and infantry.<sup>51</sup> Neville's Cross was fought by a young, energetic Scottish mon-

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<sup>48</sup> For modern discussion of Bannockburn and Loudon Hill, see DeVries, *Infantry Warfare*, 66–85, 49–57. For medieval description of the battles of Myton and Old Byland, see *Bruce* (Duncan), 640–646, 684–694. For further examples of Scottish battlefield success, this time in Ireland, see McNamee, *Wars of the Bruces*, 166–205.

<sup>49</sup> MacInnes, *Scotland's Second War*, 11–13.

<sup>50</sup> DeVries, *Infantry Warfare*, 112–119.

<sup>51</sup> *Chron. Bower*, vii, 77–79; *The Chronicle of Lanercost 1272–1346*, ed. H.E. Maxwell (Glasgow: James Maclehose & Sons, 1913), 269–271; *Scalacronica* (King), 109–111; *The Brut or Chronicles of England*, ed. F.W.D. Brie (London: Early English Text Society, 1906–1908), 276–279;

arch during a period when the English king, and the bulk of his army, was fighting in France. David II was also confident of battlefield success because the period immediately before had been one of increasing Scottish military activity and accomplishment.<sup>52</sup> The Scots even went into battle with new tactics, Scottish soldiers wearing improved head protection and lowering their heads when English archers fired upon them to ensure that they did not experience the same blinding effect from English arrows that they had suffered at previous defeats.<sup>53</sup> There was, it could be argued, no better time to fight the English in battle.<sup>54</sup> The eventual defeat outside Durham against a hastily-arrayed force from Northern England occurred in part as a result of the terrain, which broke up the Scottish attack, and the retreat of the Scottish rear division when it could have been brought to bear against the English, as well as the efficacy of the English longbow.

Halidon Hill was somewhat different. It was, at first glance, a battle that could have been avoided.<sup>55</sup> Coming as it did as a result of an agreement reached with the garrison of Berwick to surrender to Edward III if not relieved by a Scottish army in the field, the Scots could have chosen to accept the loss of the town. That the battle occurred at all may be in part a result of the importance which Robert I himself placed on the retention of Berwick-upon-Tweed in Scottish hands. Its capture had been an important symbolic victory for Robert I, and its successful defence against English siege had further enhanced the king's

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*Chronica Monasterii de Melsa*, ed. E.A. Bond (London: Rolls Series, 1868), ii, 363–364; *Johannis de Fordun, Cronica Gentis Scotorum*, ed. W.F. Skene (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1871–1872), ii, 347; Andrew of Wyntoun, *The Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland*, ed. D. Laing (Edinburgh: William Paterson, 1872–1879), ii, 388; DeVries, *Infantry Warfare*, 119–120.

<sup>52</sup> *Chron. Lanercost* (Maxwell), 337–341; *Chron. Bower*, vii, 259–261; *The Anonimale Chronicle, 1307 to 1334, from Brotherton Collection MS. 29*, ed. W.R. Childs and J. Taylor (Leeds: Yorkshire Archaeological Society, 1991), 27–28; Clifford J. Rogers, “The Scottish Invasion of 1346,” *Northern History*, 34 (1998), 51–82, at 61–66; DeVries, *Infantry Warfare*, 183–187; Michael Prestwich, “The English at the Battle of Neville’s Cross,” – *The Battle of Neville’s Cross*, ed. Rolason and Prestwich, 1–14; Grant, “Disaster at Neville’s Cross,” 25–33.

<sup>53</sup> *The Chronicle of Geoffrey le Baker*, trans. D. Preest, ed. R. Barber (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), 77.

<sup>54</sup> MacInnes, *Scotland’s Second War*, 48–49.

<sup>55</sup> DeVries, *Infantry Warfare*, 120–128.

reputation.<sup>56</sup> As the chief port of Scotland, it was also of prominent economic value to the Scottish kingdom in its attempts to financially afford to continue the war with England. The fact that the Scottish Guardian, Archibald Douglas, like Robert I before him, could not countenance Berwick's loss, and fought an ultimately unsuccessful battle to retain it, may have been as much a result of Robert I's attitude towards the town as Douglas's own.<sup>57</sup> Even so, the Scots attempted to first draw away the English besiegers by means of a diversionary raid into Northern England. When this did not work, they sought to take up a defensive position and invite the English into attacking them. Such tactics could have proven successful, were it not for the reality that the Scots were forced by the siege agreement to attack the English or forfeit the town. As a result, Douglas surrendered his own defensible position and attacked a well-positioned enemy, one that also utilised the same combination of archers and infantry that had been so devastatingly successful at Dupplin.

The defeats of the Second War of Independence can, therefore, be seen as battles that were fought in imitation of Robert I's own success and in response to his supposed advice, or at the least in imitation of his past actions. Dupplin Moor was fought to head off a possible takeover of the Scottish throne by an alternative claimant. It was fought against forces that were smaller in number and with the benefit of Scotland's most recent battlefield experience having been a success. Neville's Cross was fought against the hastily-arrayed forces of northern England, and was a battle that the Scottish commanders could have expected to win, just as they had previously against the local levies assembled against them at Myton. And although Halidon Hill was a battle that was somewhat forced upon the Scottish leadership, it remains that they likely had a numerical advantage, and attempted to manoeuvre the English forces in such a way as to negate their tactical advantage. Moreover, the defeat at Dupplin could have been considered something of an anomaly, considering its nature and the fact that it had been a battle that the Scots should have

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<sup>56</sup> Penman, *Robert the Bruce*, 177–190, 206–210.

<sup>57</sup> *Chron. Lanercost* (Maxwell), 279–280; *Chron. Bower*, vii, 93; *Chron. Anonimale*, 1307 to 1334, 163–169; *Brut*, 283–286; DeVries, *Infantry Warfare*, 120–128.

won. In such examples, then, far from ignoring the lessons of Robert I, Scottish commanders may have been following quite closely what he had taught them, and indeed were seeking to repeat his victories. That these later commanders were ultimately unsuccessful has led to their actions being seen negatively. And while defeat or victory are the only real outcomes with which to judge medieval battles, greater consideration of the wider context is required before contemporary commanders should be condemned in modern writing. At the very least, they were looking to continue periods of previous Scottish military success, and were attempting to learn from victory, rather than from defeat.

## Conclusion

This article has, from necessity, only dealt briefly with the history of this period. A longer and more detailed analysis of the events of this conflict may provide further important points regarding the nature of the war fought at this time, and the extent to which the Scots, and indeed their English foes, learned lessons from their experience. What this article has tried to do is challenge what appear to be accepted views on this war and on those who took part in it. Individuals who were able to survive their experience of one battle, one siege or one campaign, were better placed to do so again in future, and Scottish leaders were similarly well-placed to learn lessons from their experience and to implement changes of tactics and strategy as a result. That a number of Scottish leaders served militarily in the early years of the second war, having experienced success in battle in the first, suggests that there was less of an experience deficit than has previously been suggested. Far from being unable to learn lessons from past defeat, and to implement change to ensure future success, Scottish leaders were also arguably following forms of warfare that had been successful under the leadership of Robert I. They used Scotland's topography to their best advantage to undermine and frustrate a more numerous foe. They used the tactics of devastation and destruction of Scotland's landscape as both a defensive and offensive weapon of war, to deny supplies to the enemy and to ensure that the Bruce cause was

either supported or feared. They adopted the raid as a major form of offensive warfare and employed this successfully in various theatres. And they sought to reinforce these successes through fighting battles. That the examples presented here all resulted in Scottish battlefield defeat should not be allowed to obscure the overall military picture. To focus on battles as the defining military events of the period is misleading for the simple reason that battles were irregular events, and they were rarely decisive. By taking a different perspective towards this period of warfare, it is possible to suggest that the Second Scottish War of Independence was a period of Scottish accomplishment. Armed with the strategies and tactics of Robert I, the Scots were to a large extent successful in their prosecution of a war that resisted English attempts at conquest, rejected English overlordship and successfully denied the imposition of an alternative royal dynasty on the kingdom.

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