

'He would not meddle against Newark...' Cromwell's strategic vision 1643-1644

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ABSTRACT

Cromwell with some justification is identified with East Anglia and this is often true of his early military career. However, his earliest campaigns were often focused on the area west of the Eastern Association counties and in particular they centred on the royalist garrison at Newark. This heavily defended town dominated several important communications arteries which Cromwell saw capturing the town as crucial to winning the war, at least in the region. Cromwell's ruthless pursuit of his goal led him to criticize and even attack his superiors who did not see things his way. This article explores Cromwell's developing strategic sense in the initial two years of the first civil war.

Introduction

The royalist garrison at Newark was not only one of the most substantial and successful garrisons in England during the civil wars: its steadfast loyalty had a devastating effect on the military careers of several parliamentary generals and colonels. Between 1643 and 1645 Newark was responsible for, or played a role in, the severe mauling and even the termination of the careers of no less than five parliamentary generals. The careers of two major generals in command of local forces, Sir Thomas Ballard and Sir John Meldrum, and three regional commanders, Thomas, Lord Grey of Groby, commander of the Midlands Association, Francis, Lord Willoughby of Parham, Lord Lieutenant of Lincolnshire and Edward Montague, Earl of Manchester, commander of the Eastern Association, all suffered because of it. Furthermore, Newark dented the ambitions, if not the careers, of two parliamentary governor-colonels: the Derby governor Sir John Gell and the Nottingham governor John Hutchinson. It is also true that being governor of Newark did little for the careers of three royalist officers who served in the role: Sir John Henderson (1642-1643), Richard Byron (1643-1644) and Sir John Willys (1644-1645). More significantly from the perspective of this article, in the cases of three of the aristocrat or *magnate*

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generals, Lord Grey of Groby, Lord Willoughby and the Earl of Manchester, it was Oliver Cromwell that played an equally decisive role, alongside the midland garrison town, in terminating their field commissions. This article argues that whilst the actions, or rather, the often alleged inactions of the three aristocrats in relation to Newark, may have done the aristocracy, or at least aristocratic military appointments, no favours in Cromwell's eyes, it was his perceptive vision of the importance of Newark which was most remarkable. In the early stages of his military career Cromwell demonstrated his ability to conceptualise strategy, during a period of his life he might have been expected to have been paying attention solely to developing of his talents as a regimental and later a field officer in a growing horse regiment.

Newark upon Trent

Often referred to as a 'gateway to the north' there were several strategic angles to the importance of Newark involving the roads and river upon which the town stood and which its inhabitants used to make their living. Of the two, the river should have been more important during the war than it seems to have been in practice. The River Trent was a major waterway in the seventeenth century, made so by the shipping of goods from the Baltic and near Continent and the transport of coal and grain into and out of the county. Thus, there was the potential both to supply, and to deny supply, to the towns and villages which housed soldiers, garrisons and outlying billets for the armies raised and quartered in this region during the war. Newark of course was not alone, Nottingham too could be seen in this light. Holding the county town and its castle would enable a garrison to prevent goods being shipped either north and eastwards towards Newark or the port at Kingston upon Hull or westwards into south Derbyshire and Staffordshire. Yet little of the fighting in the area seems to have related specifically to the control of the river trade as it is rarely referred to in the literature. In February 1643 *Certain Informations* reported that the *Newarkers* had stopped barges heading towards Nottingham, but this is an unusual reference to the shipment of waterborne goods.¹ It may be that the early seizure of Hull (April 1642) by parliamentary forces had rendered the river less usable and the almost simultaneous royalist seizure of Nottingham, Trent Bridge and Newark later in the same year prevented the free movement of river traffic. This was underscored by their occupation of the inland port of Gainsborough in 1643. The use of a pinnace to carry the royalist Earl of Kingston away as a prisoner following his surrender of Gainsborough in July 1643 and his subsequent death on the boat, serves to underline the absence of other references.² Nevertheless, we must not neglect the importance of the river as a source of power for the mills in the town which had to produce an increased amount of flour for the garrison and the surrounding area, a point not lost

¹ British Library, Thomason Tracts, *Certain Informations* (London, 1643), No 4, 6-13 February, np.

² Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, *The Life of William Cavendish*, (London: George Routledge, 1906), (henceforward Newcastle, *Life*), p. 80.

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on the *Third Leaguer* surrounding Newark from 1645 to 1646. The river was also important because of the road-crossing points: at Newark itself, Muskham Bridge, Trent Bridge, and the ferries in south Derbyshire, Cavendish Bridge south of Swarkstone and the bridge at Burton on Trent which were all the focus of actions aimed at their control as crossing points rather than as trade centres or as inland ports. Their importance was such that the same issue of *Certain Informations* which highlighted the stopping of river traffic referred to Sir John Gell's intention to break the bridges at Swarkstone and Burton on Trent to hamper troop and materiel movement. The role of bridges serves further to underline the importance of the major roads, the Great North Road and the Fosse Way, that made Newark the conjunction of east-west and north-south travel and made the town a gem for the royalists who based themselves there. The royalist commander of the north and East Anglia, the Earl of Newcastle, could send or receive men and supplies into the southern reaches of his command via this route. Naturally, the control of these roads confirmed Newark as a target for the parliamentary Eastern Association who wished both to interrupt the royalist hold on the Midlands and to establish communications with the parliamentary garrisons at Derby and Nottingham, and from the Association to the parliamentary stronghold at Hull as well as to the north in general. It was for these latter reasons that Newark became important to Colonel Oliver Cromwell and his Regiment of Horse as early as Spring 1643. Quite simply Newark was the gateway to the east, the west, the south and to the Midlands just as much as it was the gateway to the north, it simply depended on the strategic viewpoint of the observer.

Newark had been garrisoned by the royalist Nottinghamshire County High Sheriff, Sir John Digby, and by a Scottish veteran of the war in Europe, Sir John Henderson, under the orders of the Earl of Newcastle who had assumed command of the north and east of England at the tail end of 1642.³ This occupation offset the parliamentary seizure of Nottingham by John Hutchison and Sir John Gell who had also seized Sheffield Castle and Derby and had begun to establish control of Derbyshire. At the same time, the region as a whole was being organised by the royalist Henry Hastings, who had been appointed colonel-general of the north midland counties in February. A parliamentary attempt to crush Hastings's developing central garrison at Ashby de la Zouch was the cause of much acrimony within parliamentary circles in late January.⁴ Hastings's parliamentary counterpart, the young Lord Grey of Groby along with Gell had attacked Ashby de la Zouch and its castle, but when Grey heard that Prince Rupert was on his way north to the garrison's rescue he had drawn off and moved into south

³ Gell, J. 'A True Relation of What Service Hath been Done by Colonel John Gell', unpublished tract, in Glover, S., *The History, Directory and Gazetteer of Derbyshire*, (Derby, 1829), (Henceforth Gell, 'True relation), p. 62.

⁴ British Library, Thomason Tracts, E86/1 *Special Passages no.24 January 17th – 24th*, np, Gell, J, 'True Relation', p. 63.

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Leicestershire to block the prince's march.⁵ Gell was furious at what he saw as a precipitous end to the parliamentary siege, as the Ashby based royalist forces were a serious barrier to Gell's ambition to dominate the region.⁶ Newark and its garrison was located within the region over which Hastings had command, but, because the garrison had been established on the direct orders of the Earl of Newcastle, it remained independent of Hastings to a great extent; nevertheless he would still be expected to support the garrison when necessary. At the end of February, it was the Newark garrison's turn to suffer a siege, albeit a fairly half-hearted affair led jointly by the parliamentary Lord Lieutenant of Lincolnshire, Lord Willoughby of Parham and Sir Thomas Ballard the recently appointed major general of Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire.⁷ This assault lasted just two-days, the 27 and 28 February and involved an attempted storm. Despite the fact that Newark's defensive works were not yet completed the attack was poorly coordinated and ended in failure. Failure led to acrimony as Sir John Gell and the Nottingham Governor John Hutchinson both claimed that they had been let down by the other despite them both holding Ballard chiefly responsible for their defeat.⁸ As a result of this attack the royalist garrison began the re-development of Newark's defences.⁹ Thus in early 1643 the two parliamentary commanders in the east Midlands, Grey of Groby and Willoughby, who along with Ballard, had failed to prevent the growth of the royalist hold on the region had both incurred the wrath of Sir John Gell and were now both firmly on the back foot and would shortly come into contact with Cromwell.

Simply put, Newark acted as a serious brake on the activities of, and interfered with, several parliamentary organisational structures: the Association of Eastern Counties and communications between that Association and London and, through Lincolnshire, to the north; Lord Willoughby's charge, Lincolnshire, part of Lord Fairfax's Northern Association; the town itself was located within Lord Grey of Groby's Midland Association; and the garrison's activities in South Lincolnshire threatened the territory

⁵ British Library, Thomason Tracts, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 3rd week, np.

⁶ British Library, Thomason Tracts, E86/1 *Special Passages no.24 January 17th – 24th*, np, Gell, J, 'True Relation', p. 63.

⁷ British Library, Thomason Tracts, *England's memorable Accidents*, 9-16 January 1643. Northamptonshire Record Office, Finch Hatton Mss 133, under Lincolnshire; Lord Willoughby was appointed Lord Lieutenant on 5 March 1641 (2) originally for Lindsey: the Earl of Lincoln was initially in command of Kesteven and Holland.

⁸ Hutchinson, L., *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson*, (London: Longman, Orme and Rees, 1806) (Henceforth Hutchinson, *Memoirs*), pp. 121-123; BL Thomason Tracts, E92/3 *Certain Informations*, February 20th to March 6th, E86/41, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 9th week 1642(3); Lord Journal, Vol. 4, 5 March 1642, pp. 624-629.

⁹ Hutchinson,, *Memoirs*, pp74-76; British Library, Thomason Tracts, E92/3, *Certain Informations*, , 20 February-6 March, 1642-3, British Library Thomason Tracts E86/41, 9th week, 1643.

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of Lord Grey of Warke's Eastern Association. With Newark's royalist garrison growing in strength it was realised by them all that another parliamentary attempt to capture the town would need to be made, and made soon.

Royalist troops of horse from Newark could conduct logistical expeditions – what parliamentary newspapers of the time would refer to as raids – to establish taxation collection as far eastwards as the North Sea coast and as far north as the Humber Estuary. The royalists attempted to do the same in counties south of Lincolnshire from outposts such as Stamford and it was through this latter activity that the Midlands royalists first began to impress themselves upon the counties of the Eastern Association in early 1643.

The parliamentary command structure into which Cromwell fitted was anything but clear cut: his civil line of command was divided between the two Lords Grey, the commanders of the Midlands Association and the Eastern Association. This came about because Cromwell served on two of the County Committees established by Parliament over the winter to manage the resources of each county under, or soon to be under, its control. Cromwell sat on the Cambridgeshire Committee which was in the Eastern Association and on that for Huntingdonshire which was initially in the Midlands Association.¹⁰ Furthermore his regiment was raised in both areas. For the most part, Cromwell acted as part of the Eastern Association forces which had been placed under the command of Major General William, Lord Grey of Warke in late 1642, but for much of the time during the early part of the war Cromwell was involved in affairs in Lincolnshire, Lord Willoughby of Parham's command. Willoughby tended to keep his distance from Fairfax and the Northern Association and also may have resented the interference, if not the material support, from the Eastern Association. Cooperation between the Eastern Association and the Midlands Association under Thomas, Lord Grey of Groby was stilted by the 21-year old lord's inexperience and caution. It is clear that this hazy and conflicted command structure was responsible for a range of problems.

Much of the immediate funding of the Eastern Association tended to come from within, including the Isle of Ely and Cambridgeshire, and the borderland between the Association and disputed territory to the north. Protection of resources was at the forefront of Cromwell's financial as well as military strategy for much of 1643.¹¹ Troops serving in the Isle of Ely and Cambridgeshire also depended upon receiving

¹⁰ Northamptonshire Record Office, Finch-Hatton Ms 133, np, under Cambridgeshire, dated 5 March 1641(2). And Huntingdonshire dated 1 March 1642(3) He was also appointed again on 3 December and to the Sequestration Committee the following March.

¹¹ Cromwell and others' letter to the Inhabitants of Fen Drayton, 8 March 1643. Abbott, I, p. 217.

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money from across the region, including far-away Colchester from where Cromwell received men in March 1643.¹² The presence of such troops enabled not just a defensive posture to be maintained in Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire, it also made possible offensive action in southern Lincolnshire – the Holland division - during April.¹³ On 7 April 1643 Lord Grey of Warke left his Association to join the Earl of Essex's field army within which his troops became a brigade. In his absence, Cromwell focussed firstly on the garrison which had been established by royalists from Newark at Crowland, on the River Welland about half way between Stamford and Wisbech, and which blocked communications with Willoughby's Lincolnshire. Willoughby's parliamentary forces were defeated at the Battle of Ancaster Heath on 11 April and as a result Grantham and Stamford on the Great North Road were garrisoned by royalist forces. Stamford and Crowland now held the line of the Welland west of the fens. Peterborough had also been occupied giving the royalists a toe hold in the Eastern Association itself. This string of setbacks prompted Cromwell to go on the offensive.¹⁴ Peterborough was only held briefly by the royalists before Cromwell retook it and turned on Crowland on 25 April. With Grey of Warke serving with Essex's field army and the Association forces depleted, Cromwell could not act alone so he needed to cooperate with Willoughby to his north and Grey of Groby to his west if he wanted to achieve further security.¹⁵ He took his growing Regiment of Horse and was joined by foot from Norfolk and Willoughby's Lincolnshire troops. The aim was to enable a general parliamentary advance northward from the centre and the eastern flank of the Eastern Association via Crowland and King's Lynn to Boston and towards beleaguered Lincoln. Cromwell and Miles Hobart seized Crowland on 29 April.¹⁶ It was however, according to Clive Holmes, a three-day bombardment which persuaded the garrison to surrender rather than the actions of Cromwell and Hobart's regiments on that last day. Nevertheless, the attack on Crowland was an early example of Cromwell coordinating a combined arms offensive.

Cromwell was not satisfied with the level of cooperation he was receiving and five days after the seizure of Crowland, he complained about the contribution made by the neighbouring Association under Grey of Groby. Cromwell pulled no punches in his letter to the Committee at Lincoln on 3 May 1643, writing:

¹² Wilbur Cortez Abbott. *The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1937-1947). Henceforth Abbott, *Writings*, Vol. I, pp. 220-21

¹³ Abbott, *Writings*, Vol. I, p. 224.

¹⁴ British Library Thomason Tracts, *Certain Informations*, 17 April 1643, np

¹⁵ Clive Holmes, *Seventeenth-century Lincolnshire*, (Lincoln: History of Lincoln Committee, 1980), pp. 70-72.

¹⁶ *A True Relation of a Great Victory*, (London: Benjamin Allen, 27 May, 1643). p. 4; Holmes, *Lincolnshire*, p. 166.

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My Lord Grey hath now again failed me of the rendezvous at Stamford, notwithstanding that both he and I received Letters from His Excellency, commanding us both to meet, and, together with Sir John Gell and the Nottinghamshire forces to join with you.¹⁷

Cromwell was not backward at suggesting a strategic approach at this early stage in his career. Grey was very much concerned that in his absence royalist Colonel General Henry Hastings would go on the offensive in Leicestershire and be well-placed to attack his rear. Cromwell clearly believed and demonstrated that attacking Newark was more important:

Believe it, it were better, in my poor opinion, Leicester were not, than that there should not be found an immediate taking of the field by our forces to accomplish our common ends.

This seems at first just to be a swipe at Grey's caution, but the logic is sound; he was suggesting dis-garrisoning Leicester and making use of the additional soldiers in a field army. The town was to play no significant role in Parliament's cause, and the garrison there was for the most part overawed by the royalist Hastings' larger regional army at Ashby. When Leicester was attacked by the king in May 1645 it was largely because the royalists judged it a quick win. However, Hastings had recently succeeded in recapturing Lichfield, which he and Prince Rupert had besieged for eleven days.¹⁸ His next concern seems to have been the parliamentarians in Derbyshire and Cheshire and possibly a rendezvous with the Earl of Derby, rather than an attack on Grey of Groby.¹⁹

More broadly, Cromwell might have been making a case for developing field armies capable of besieging major strongholds rather than dispersing soldiers into a large number of garrisons. Clearly at that early point in his career he was not frightened of playing one noble general off against the other for he was clearly prioritising Grey of Wark or even Willoughby's strategy over Grey of Groby's. Cromwell had assured the Lincolnshire Association Committee that he would meet Grey of Groby the next day and remonstrate with him; if the committee could send someone to Cromwell on time he could then lend the weight of the Committee's opinion to it. Nevertheless, it is probable that Grey was involved in skirmishing around Loughborough on 4 May and not receiving an ear-bashing from Cromwell.

At the beginning of May the queen dispatched southwards a large convoy of ammunition from the cache she had brought into England from the Continent, under

¹⁷ Abbott, Writings, Vol. I, p. 228-229.

¹⁸ William Salt Library, Burney's Newspapers, Vol. I. *Mercurius Aulicus*, 16th week, p4.

¹⁹ William Salt Library, SMS 550, no 4, Henry Hastings to Prince Rupert, 29 April 1643.

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the command of Sir Charles Lucas. The convoy was joined at Newark by General Hastings who then enabled its journey to join King Charles at Oxford.²⁰ There was little in the way of an attempt to stop this convoy despite the royalist preparations in the belief that such an event was likely. Grey of Groby had again failed to leave his county, leaving Oliver Cromwell and Captain John Hotham at Sleaford in Lincolnshire without sufficient forces to make any move on Newark, and the ammunition was soon safely in Banbury.²¹ Even so, this campaign was instrumental in Cromwell's development as a soldier. Despite failing to interrupt the convoy he and Hotham approached Newark and faced the garrison. The Newark royalists drove them off and chased them towards Grantham. Near there Cromwell turned to face them and defeated his pursuers.²² It was a minor fight in many ways, the convoy had passed, the queen's ammunition train was by then in Oxford and the parliamentarians continued their retreat to Lincoln despite it but important lessons had been learned and had been put into practice. It is clear that Cromwell had not only developed his battlefield ability but a wider view of the war in the region that shows his developing strategic vision.²³

By 24 May Cromwell and Hotham had joined Lord Grey of Groby at Hutchinson's base at Nottingham.²⁴ Grey may have felt safer there because whilst Hastings's headquarters was to his west and rear leaving his home territory vulnerable, should the royalists have made a move on Leicester, Ashby de la Zouch would in turn be exposed along with Hastings' own rear. Grey was certainly not averse to taking action, but his attack on the royalist outpost at Wiverton was driven off. Otherwise, there was little fighting. More serious than any disagreement about strategy was the fact that Captain John Hotham and his father, Sir John, were attempting to switch sides; something which would have gone a long way to handing the north to King Charles on a plate.²⁵ Moreover, there were already large numbers of royalist forces in the

²⁰ HMC *Hastings* Vol. 2, pp. 98-99, Sir Edward Nicholas to Hastings, 3 May 1643; Warburton, Vol. 2, pp. 189-190, Sir Edward Nicholas to Prince Rupert, 11 May 1643.

²¹ Warburton, *Memoirs* Sir Edward Nicholas to Prince Rupert, p. 189.

²² *A True Relation of Great Victory*, p4. John Vernon, *The Young Horfe-man, or the honeft plain-dealing Cavalier*, (London: Andrew Coe, 1644), p3.

²³ S.R Gardiner, *History of the Great Civil War*, (Gloucestershire: Windrush Press, 1991 edition), Volume 1, p. 143. Charles Firth, *Oliver Cromwell and the Rule of the Puritans in England*, (Oxford: OUP, 1966 edition), p. 98; Ian Gentles, *Oliver Cromwell God's Warrior and the English Revolution*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 27.

²⁴ R. Bell, ed., *Memorials of the Civil War Comprising the Correspondence of the Fairfax Family, with the Most Distinguished Personages Engaged in that Memorable Contest.*, (London: Richard Bentley, 1849), Vol. 1, Ulan Press edition, no date, (henceforth *Fairfax*) p45: John Hotham to Lord Fairfax, 24 May 1643.

²⁵ Martyn Bennett, 'The royalist war effort in the north Midlands, (Unpublished PhD thesis, Loughborough University, 1987), p. 191.

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vicinity of Newark and according to Hotham 'we could not come to them without great disadvantage'.²⁶ The queen left York on 4 June with 4,500 men, having asked Hastings to join her for the journey beyond Newark.²⁷ It took two weeks for her army to reach Newark which she achieved without interference and joined Hastings there.²⁸ The assembled parliamentarians claimed that they had prepared to fight the royalists, but they then made no substantial attempt to stop the queen's army.²⁹ Despite initial reports to the contrary, they remained together at Nottingham where they were attacked by the queen and Hastings a few days later. The parliamentarians were paralysed, Hastings and the queen took over the town trapping the parliamentarians in the seemingly impregnable castle, before moving on to attack and capture the parliamentary garrison at Burton on Trent.³⁰ By the time that Cromwell and Grey left Nottingham, the latter's reputation was damaged, and Hotham had been exposed as a would-be turncoat. Essex ordered Hotham's arrest and he was detained at Nottingham before escaping and asserting that his accusers were men without honour or status. Cromwell he claimed, associated with religious radicals and both he and the Nottingham Colonel of Horse Charles White were iconoclasts.³¹ Hotham made his way to Hull, where he and his father were arrested by the mayor and sent to London.

Cromwell's war-effort was still in the hands of commanders like the two Lords Grey and Lord Willoughby and he could exercise little initiative off the battlefield, yet he was showing a keen interest in strategic matters, trying to ensure that his home territory was protected against the queen's army even though he himself was serving out of the region. In any case by mid-July one of the Greys was out of his hair, for Grey of Warke, who in any case was still in the south Midlands was relieved of command and at least temporarily imprisoned for refusing to join a commission being sent to Edinburgh to treat with the Scots.³²

Despite Newark being secure and seemingly untouchable Willoughby scored a major parliamentary success when he managed to capture Gainsborough. With a ferry crossing and its standing as an inland port, Gainsborough, whilst not as important as

²⁶ *Fairfax*. Vol One, p. 46, Hotham, Cromwell, Miles Hobart and Lord Grey to Lord Fairfax, 2 June 1643.

²⁷ Letter, Queen Henrietta Maria to Hastings, 1 June 1643, Historical Manuscripts Commission *Report on the Papers of Reginald Rawdon Hastings*, London, HMSO, 1930, Volume 2, pp. 102-103.

²⁸ British Library, Thomason Tracts, *Perfect Diurnal*, 26 June – 3 July, 1643, np.

²⁹ Abbott, *Writings*, Vol 1. pp. 234-235.

³⁰ Luke, Sir Samuel, *Diary of Sir Samuel Luke*, (Oxford: Oxford Record Society, 1950), Vol. 31, pp104-105, 117. Luke had heard that Lord Fairfax had captured 2000 of the queen's forces and that Grey had attacked her near Newark.

³¹ Abbott, *Writings*, Vol 1. p. 237.

³² Abbott, *Writings*, Vol 1, p. 236; House of Lords Journal, 25 July 1643, pp. 147-150.

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Newark, gave Willoughby a route to the rest of the Northern Association and by extension he had given the Eastern Association a route to the north and to the parliamentary garrison at Hull, also cutting communications between Lincoln and the northern royalists.

The captured royalist governor, the Earl of Kingston, commander of Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire and Rutland, was killed by friendly fire as he was being shipped northwards along the Trent to Hull, sliced in two by a cannon ball in a grisly enactment of the prophesy he had made about being divided in his loyalties.³³ With the town in his hands, Willoughby set up base in Gainsborough. This could have been his most important contribution to parliament's war-effort in the region, and potentially offsetting his defeat at Ancaster Heath; he could now disrupt Newark's control of eastern Nottinghamshire and curtail royalist expansion into Lincolnshire. However, almost immediately, he in turn was besieged by Lieutenant General Sir Charles Cavendish and Newark royalists. Willoughby of Parham's success in taking the town from Kingston's royalist forces had to be challenged and the Newark royalist garrison had responded quickly.

Cavendish's quick response prompted a counter move by the Eastern Association. In the absence of Lord Grey of Wark who was with the Earl of Essex in the south midlands, Sir John Meldrum assembled forces from Grey of Wark's Association and from Lord Grey of Groby's Midlands Association on 27 July at North Scarle west of Lincoln. He had about 300 horse and Cromwell brought in another six or seven troops of horse and dragoons. These forces marched on Gainsborough from North Scarle via Lea and pushed back a royalist *forlorn hope* of dragoons once they were close to the town. The ensuing battle of Gainsborough saw Cromwell and Meldrum win a convincing victory and rout Cavendish's horse. The royalist commander was killed having been trapped in a bog between the Lea road and the River Trent during the latter stages of the battle. However, whilst it appeared that Gainsborough was relieved and Willoughby rescued, the day was not over. As Cromwell, Meldrum and Willoughby met in the town news reached them that suggested that the royalists had rallied to the north of the town so Cromwell was sent out to reconnoitre and chase them off. The initial units of royalists were pushed from Windmill Hill near Morton, but then a great shock hit the parliamentarians when those first units were joined by another, and

³³ Hutchinson *Memoirs* p. 127; Newcastle, *Memoirs*, pp. 27-28; British Library, Thomason Tracts, *Mercurius Aulicus*, Week 24, 1643, np.

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after that another and another and another and as some counted about fifty colours of foot, with a great body of horse, which was indeed my Lord Newcastle's army.³⁴

Newcastle chased the startled parliamentarians, but Cromwell managed to bring his troops off in an orderly manner and the garrison troops also returned to the town. Gainsborough was quickly made ready for a new siege whilst Cromwell and Meldrum hurriedly retreated to Lincoln pursued by part of Newcastle's Northern Horse. Although the horse and dragoons of Meldrum's relief forces got away without loss, within days, the garrison had been forced to surrender the town and Willoughby and his troops were allowed to march to Lincoln and the royalists reoccupied Gainsborough on the 30th.³⁵ Willoughby made it to Lincoln but was soon driven out by Newcastle who had pursued him closely. Of this stage of the war, the Member of Parliament and diarist Bulstrode Whitlocke later noted that Willoughby was thanked by Parliament for having 'done very considerable service' even though he then recounted the loss of Gainsborough; somewhat ironically noting of Cromwell that this campaign was the point which was 'the beginning of his great fortunes and now he began to appear to the world'.³⁶ On 5 August, in a plea for help addressed to Cromwell, Willoughby claimed abjectly that his men were demoralised: 'deaded' as he put it and many had run away, and asked Cromwell to join him at Boston in order to try and hold the town and thus keep Newcastle out of East Anglia. The following day, Cromwell enclosed Willoughby's letter with his own to the Association Committee at Cambridge, thus revealing Willoughby's military position and psychological state to its members. Furthermore he asked them to pass both letters to the County Committees of Suffolk, Norfolk and Essex, thus spreading far and wide news of Willoughby's failure to hold Lincolnshire.³⁷ To hammer home the message about Willoughby's unsuitability, during September Cromwell complained of Willoughby's men 'who did run away and gave no alarum to any of the rest of his forces'.³⁸ Within three weeks, Parliament allocated Lincolnshire to the Eastern Association, theoretically at least dealing with Willoughby's incompetence. Although it was the beginning of the end of Willoughby's career as the Lord Lieutenant of Lincolnshire, he was still involved in the next month's campaign in the county, although the Earl of

³⁴ Abbott, *Writings* Vol I, pp. 239, 241, Cromwell's account refers to 50 colours, the equivalent of five full regiments of foot, but the joint account suggests that there were 19 in Newcastle's regiment alone which would have made that almost a double-regiment, which was the second one in the line of march. West, J., *Oliver Cromwell and the battle of Gainsborough*, (Boston: Richard Key, 1992), p. 12.

³⁵ Luke, *Diary*, p127.

³⁶ Whitlocke, Bulstrode, *Memorials of the English Affairs*, (Oxford: OUP, 1853), Vol I, 209.

³⁷ Abbott, *Writings*, Vol I. pp. 250-251.

³⁸ Abbott, *Writings*, Vol I. p. 260.

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Manchester had replaced Grey of Wark and was firmly in charge. The earl had established a new regiment in Lincolnshire and appointed Edward King its colonel.³⁹ The appointment is usually discussed in relation to King's Presbyterianism and the potential ructions this had caused amongst Cromwell's men. But King's appointment as a counterpoint to Willoughby's command in his own county is more important. Cromwell appreciated King's superior military ability compared to Willoughby and put that and the need for unity of purpose ahead of any religious differences and any qualms he may have felt.⁴⁰

Although Manchester was given command of Lincolnshire with the same powers as he had in the other six counties, Willoughby, with support in Parliament, hung on to his command. In early 1644 Cromwell made a very personal attack on Willoughby in Parliament, detailing not just his military failings, but suggested moral impropriety as well and he was not alone in that condemnation.⁴¹ There were a series of attacks on Willoughby's continuing authority, but he had a number of defenders too and there were even scuffles in a London pub between his supporters and detractors. Indeed, the view within the Commons was mixed; Bulstrode Whitelock's perspective was that the matter was less controversial than it appeared from Cromwell's perspective and commented that 'all was well reconciled'.⁴² Even so Cromwell's attack had damaged Willoughby and he did himself no favours when it was discovered just over a week later, that he had challenged Manchester to a duel. Willoughby was then initially, as Cromwell had suggested, simply retained in Westminster on business. The Commons then ordered Willoughby's regiments of horse to remain in Lincolnshire and placed them under Manchester's command. However, within weeks Willoughby had managed to return to the county and, playing the role of regimental commander, had joined Sir John Meldrum's attack on Newark at the end of February 1644. This, the second siege of Newark, ended in disaster when Prince Rupert and Lord Loughborough defeated and received the surrender of Meldrum's entire army on 21 March.

Whilst he was not involved in the second siege of Newark, Cromwell had participated in seriously damaging the military reputations of two aristocratic generals: Willoughby was now finally removed and out of the way; Grey of Groby was still in post, but his reputation was severely damaged and would be out of the way before the end of the year.

³⁹ Leicestershire Archive Office, DE216, the Earl of Newcastle to Henry Hastings of 18 September which asks him to support Henderson who is under pressure from 'Lord Willoughby, Cromwell and their adherents'.

⁴⁰ Holmes, *Lincolnshire*, p. 200.

⁴¹ House of Lords Journal, Vol 6, pp384-387. House of Commons' Journal, Vol 3, p. 372. Clive Holmes, 'Colonel King and Lincolnshire Politics'. *The Historical Journal*, 16/3 (1973), pp. 458-460.

⁴² Bulstrode Whitelock, *Memorials*, Vol One, pp. 238-239.

It was as Grey of Groby's first military career sputtered to its end that Cromwell embarked on the course which would bring about the demise of the Earl of Manchester's career in the field. This followed the lack lustre performance of parliament's combined forces during and in the aftermath of the Second Battle of Newbury. Parliament's failure to defeat the king decisively in what seemed to be propitious circumstances at Newbury had many causes and not one of the generals involved, Essex, Cromwell, Manchester or Waller comes out of an analysis of the battle unblemished. However, unlike that of Manchester's other detractors, Cromwell's attack on Manchester in November 1644 brought Newark to the fore again. Originally a quarrel between Manchester and Cromwell it would embrace the Earl of Essex and drag into it Sir William Waller and Major General Lawrence Crawford and embroil the Scots in a proposal to indict Cromwell as an incendiary.⁴³ 'Lieutenant General Cromwell's Narrative' is perhaps the best known of the accounts of the case Cromwell made against Manchester and it reiterated something of the spoken attack on him that Cromwell had made in the House of Commons on 25 November.⁴⁴ However, it may not have been a single-author piece: the style of the writing suggests that the soldiers Sir William Waller and Sir Arthur Hesilrige and the politician Sir Harry Vane may also have had a hand in its composition. The latter part of the 'narrative' is far better known as it is there that it focusses on the charges made against Manchester's behaviour at the Second Battle of Newbury and because of the inclusion in the narrative of the debate when Waller, Cromwell and others were witness to Manchester's lugubrious statement:

If we beat the King 99 times he would be King still, and his posterity, and we subjects still; but if he beat us but once we should all be hanged, and our posterity undone.⁴⁵

This rightly famous passage highlights the lack of commitment shown at the parliamentary high command level to the gaining of an outright victory over the king when in a position of strength.⁴⁶ On the other hand, the earlier part of the narrative centres upon the weeks following the conclusion of the earl's participation in the northern campaign and the days after he left York following its surrender. Cromwell claimed that it took some time for him to understand what was going on, and that

⁴³ Journal of the House of Lords, Vol., 7, 22 November, 1644, p76; Indeed, Whitelock believed that Cromwell attacked officers from Essex's army more than any other. Whitelock, vol. I. pp. 338 & pp. 343-347. The attempt to charge Cromwell with being an incendiary involved the Scots' English Presbyterian allies, including the commander of the regiment Cromwell's initial troop had been assigned to, Sir Phillip Stapleton.

⁴⁴ Journal of the House of Commons. Vol 7, pp. 703-705.

⁴⁵ Abbott, *Writings*, Vol I, p. 310.

⁴⁶ Abbott, *Writings*, Vol I, p. 302.

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only later in the year did he realise that Manchester's actions were predicated on the earl's desire that the war should be ended through negotiation rather than by gaining a dominant position through an outright victory. The earl, he argued, was:

most at fault for most of those miscarriages and the ill-consequences of them. And because I had a great deal of reason to think that his Lordship's miscarriages in these particulars was neither accidents (which could not be helped) nor through his improvidence only but through his backwardness to all action.⁴⁶

Cromwell explained that he had at first hand observed that the earl's 'continued backwardness' was 'contrary to advice given him' and 'contrary to commands received'. In other words, the earl was not only failing to act in the collegiate way expected of a commander in the seventeenth century, he was also disobeying orders. It was pointed out that in the six weeks or so between leaving York on 15 July and 3 September when the earl moved south from Lincoln, he had held just one Council of War.

After a successful campaign in the middle of 1644 which saw the defeat of Prince Rupert and the capture of York, the earl, Cromwell claimed, had frequently thrown away chances. These chances, he argued, mainly focussed on Newark. Cromwell asserted that the earl had plenty of time and opportunity to attack Newark and its satellite garrisons before being ordered south to after the summer's defeat of Sir William Waller at Cropredy Bridge and the destruction of the Earl of Essex's veteran army at Lostwithiel. However, according to Malcolm Wanklyn Manchester was well aware of the importance of Newark and on 22 July proposed attacking the garrison himself. This would not be surprising, Manchester's successes in Lincolnshire in late 1643 had largely been negated by the Newark forces, especially after the second siege in March 1644. It may also be the case that Manchester was becoming annoyed by Cromwell's various urgings, firstly Newark and then perhaps for a vigorous march to the west: in any case he was caught in the middle for the Committee of Both Kingdoms had ordered the earl to remain where he was as it feared that Prince Rupert was rebuilding his army.⁴⁷

Newark and indeed the north Midlands royalist cause as a whole was vulnerable in the late summer of 1644. It moved swiftly from being a communications hub between north and south, east and west to being the front line following the collapse of the royalist north. Most importantly a good deal of the region's man-power and materiel had been invested in Prince Rupert's York venture and in the north in general. From January 1644 when Sir Charles Lucas took contingents of Hastings's army northwards

⁴⁷ Wanklyn, M., 'A General Much Maligned: the Earl of Manchester as army commander in the second Newbury campaign: July to November 1644', *War in History* 14, 2 (2007), p. 137.

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to combat the invading army of the Solemn League and Covenant, onwards Newcastle had called upon the resources of his lieutenant general. Shortly after the relief of Newark in late March, the Newark Horse under Major General George Porter had been called north to support the Yorkshire royalists hold down territory in the wake of challenges from Hull, and he had taken part of the Belvoir garrison with him. Later whilst the Earl of Newcastle had become bottled up in York following the defeat of Sir John Belasyse at the Battle of Selby on 10 April, Lord Goring and the Northern Horse had been sent to camp on Newark's lush but already hard-pressed meadows. Not only had these extra brigades eaten into the resources of the region, but Loughborough was asked to reinforce Goring when he returned north.

When Prince Rupert began organising his relief force for the march to York. Lord Loughborough and Newark's governor, Sir Richard Byron committed yet more of their forces to the war in the north. Derbyshire and Staffordshire regiments under Sir Thomas Milward, Sir Rowland Eyre, Sir John Freschville and Sir Thomas Leveson had been involved in the Battle of Marston Moor as had horse regiments, like Sir Anthony Eyre's from Newark. Somewhat over a thousand men from the region had been on the field of Marston Moor on 2 July 1644. Leveson's horse had been scattered during the defeat of the royalist right, whilst the others, after their initial success under Goring's leadership on the royalist left wing were swept up in the final rout. The subsequently dispersed regiments would make their way back home over time, but as Manchester bore down on the midlands, they were still a long way north.

Loughborough and Byron had first heard that the Battle of Marston Moor had been a victory and later that it had been 'an Edgehill battle' of unclear outcome, and were preparing yet more reinforcements for Rupert to be sent to join him at Doncaster.⁴⁸ It would be the 8 July when real doubts began to set in and Byron suggested to Loughborough that they stay put: but even then Manchester was still outside York and would be for another week.⁴⁹ It would be a further eleven days before the truth emerged and the scale of the defeat in battle and the subsequent loss of York reached Lord Loughborough, by which time Manchester was on his way.⁵⁰ Cromwell and other officers in the Eastern Association army realised Newark was vulnerable and urged Manchester to attack the town quickly, and about this time Manchester indeed had suggested to the Committee of Both kingdoms that he should do so. Instead the earl stayed lingered further north around Doncaster for over a week before moving towards Lincoln, where he would then stay for a month.

⁴⁸ HMC, *Hastings*, Vol II, pp. 129-130. Loughborough to Byron and Byron to Rupert, both dated 6 July 1644.

⁴⁹ HMC *Hastings*, Vol II, p. 131, Byron to Hastings, 8 July 1644.

⁵⁰ HMC, *Hastings*, Vol II, pp. 131-132, Byron to Loughborough, 19 July 1644.

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Cromwell and others suggested that garrisons close to Doncaster, such as Sheffield, Tickhill, Bolsover and Welbeck were also ripe for the picking. Indeed the royalist governor Major Monkton surrendered Tickhill Castle on 26 July as soon as John Lilburne and Eastern Association army dragoons quartered in the town an action to which Manchester reacted with anger directed at Lilburne. Welbeck surrendered on 2 August and Sheffield followed on 11 August, surrendering to Major General Crawford and Colonel Pickering. As the earl made Lincoln his base, Crawford marched into Derbyshire to support Sir John Gell and John Hutchinson in their siege of [South] Wingfield, which had begun back on 17 July.⁵¹ Wingfield fell on 21 August.⁵² Bolsover also fell and thus the Eastern Association army had bagged five north Midland and south Yorkshire garrisons.⁵³ Essentially the new royalist front line had ceased to exist in less than a month.⁵⁴ Cromwell believed that more could be done, identifying Newark and its satellites, Shelford and Wiverton and the fortress on the edge of the vale, Belvoir Castle as preliminary targets. Manchester, perhaps angrily listened to the advice Cromwell claimed he had offered, and had already tried to get the Committee of Both Kingdoms to authorise an attack. Had they agreed he would have swept away the eastern flank of the royalist midlands as well as its northern front. Instead Manchester was ordered to stay put for the time being and in the eyes of his detractors, he began to prevaricate, claiming to be waiting for the advice of the absent Lawrence Crawford, and would take no action until the major general returned.

When he did return, Crawford supported the idea of an attack on Newark. Manchester now called a council of war which, according to Cromwell's narrative, decided upon action against Newark. Faced with a decision promoted by his two subordinate generals Manchester reluctantly agreed and plans were made for a campaign. However, soon afterwards Manchester possibly feeling under pressure from London let the plans.

However, Manchester was then ordered by the Committee of Both Kingdoms to march westwards to support Sir William Brereton who had found himself beset by Prince Rupert, in a move which seemingly confirmed parliament's and the committee's fears about the prince's resurgent forces. Manchester had little inclination for a march

⁵¹ William Salt Library, Burney's Newspapers, Vol. I. *Perfect Diurnal*, no 53, 29 July – 5 August, 1644, p. 23. Refers to 500 of Manchester's horse preventing Hastings's attempted relief of the siege.

⁵² William Salt Library, Burney's Newspapers, Vol I. *Diary or Exact Journal* 21-28 August 1644, p. 25.

⁵³ Cavendish, *Newcastle*, pp. 22, 87-88; *Diary or Exact Journal*, (London, 1640) no. 14, 21-28 August, np. British library, Thomason Tracts, *Perfect Occurrences*, no. 3, 23-30 August, 1644, np.

⁵⁴ Gell, 'True Relation', pp67, 69; Abbott, *Writings*, Vol I, pp303-304; *Newcastle, Memorials*, pp. 87-92.

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westwards and told the committee that he intended to attack Newark, using the arguments advanced by Cromwell that Newark represented too great a threat to the Eastern Association, Lincolnshire in particular for him to leave the area. As a temporary measure Manchester firstly agreed to send Brereton a detachment of horse, but then reneged on even this token gesture.⁵⁵ Cromwell was to go on to complain that Manchester had billeted his army on areas of Lincolnshire already controlled by parliamentarians whilst leaving the rest of Lincolnshire open to 'raids' from Newark.⁵⁶

The earl continued to dissemble in the face of both orders from London and his officers by appearing to suggest targeting Belvoir and the Newark satellite garrisons, Wiverton and Shelford to close in on Newark. His officers, possibly making the best of a bad job encouraged the proposal to attack satellite garrisons 'in case he would not meddle against Newark', in other words they feared that he would never tackle the main garrison and at least capturing the smaller ones would damage Newark's potential. However, Manchester spent an inordinately long time deciding which garrison to attack first as a means of attacking none of them.⁵⁷ The earl's commanders were not alone in feeling frustrated with the lack of decisive action in the midlands. The newspaper *Parliamentary Scout*, declared that none of the region's smaller garrisons would have taken Manchester much time to capture: 'they being apprehended a work of no great difficulty' which would have leave Manchester able to tackle Newark. On the other hand just a week later the paper had some backhanded praise for Manchester a week later pointing out that Leicestershire and Derbyshire parliamentarians owed much to him as their own forces 'appear little outside their own counties'. Rather prophetically it suggested that it would now be left to the Earl of Leven to come south and capture Ashby de la Zouch and Newark: this would partly come true, but not for over year and a half.⁵⁸ *Parliamentary Scout's* criticism of the midlands forces was one of the last nails in the coffin of Lord Grey of Groby's first civil war military career, the royalist newspaper, *Mercurius Aulicus* had already somewhat sarcastically noted a month earlier that Grey had surrendered his commission as it meant nothing by this point.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Abbott, Vol I, p. 304.

⁵⁶ Whitelock, *Memorials*, Vol. I. p. 339: some of these raids were effective and in November a part of the Lincolnshire County Committee was captured.

⁵⁷ Abbott, *Writings*, Vol I, p. 304.

⁵⁸ British Library, Thomason Tracts, *Parliamentary Scout*, no 64, 5-13 September, 1644, np; *Parliamentary Scout*, no. 65, 12-19 September, 1644, np.

⁵⁹ British Library, Thomason Tracts, *Mercurius Aulicus*, 33rd week, 1644, np. Ironically Grey's career would continue to have links to Cromwell's. He helped Colonel Thomas Pride identify Presbyterian MPs during the Purge of the Commons on 7 December 1648 and in 1651 he would play a not unimportant role in Cromwell's greatest victory at Worcester.

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Cromwell was perhaps less aware of the catastrophe down south. The Committee of Both Kingdoms and Parliament had been focussed on the Earl of Essex's increasingly precarious campaign in the south west during August. However, shortly after Crawford had re-joined the Eastern Association Army the Earl of Essex was defeated at Lostwithiel, although he had managed to pass his horse through the royalist cordon trapping him on the Fowey Peninsula, the foot had been taken prisoner and disarmed before being sent on a long march towards Plymouth. Parliament had invested its hopes for rescuing the earl or at least distracting the attention of the king's forces pursuing him into Cornwall, Waller's army was simply not up to the task following its defeat in the summer. Parliament and the committee were forced to turn to Manchester. On 7 September they gave him his orders:

We are commanded, by the Houses of Parliament, to desire you with all possible Speed to march towards *Dorchester*, in *Dorsetshire*, with all the Forces you can of Horse and Foot; the great Importance whereof, upon the sad Accident in the West (of which your Lordship hath received Intelligence from the Committee of Both Kingdoms), requireth your best Care and Diligence, and will admit of no Delay.⁶⁰

Essex was informed that both Manchester and Waller had been ordered to march with 'all possible speed' and that plans were afoot to rearm his forces, something which Manchester confirmed the following day from Huntingdon in a letter to his predecessor, Lord Grey of Wark, now the speaker of the House of Lords.

I have received your Lordship's Letter; and shall obey the Command of the House of Peers, to make all possible Speed I can to march towards *Dorchester*. I am very sorry to hear of the sad Accident in the West. I trust, God will make up this great Loss.⁶¹

With matters in hand regarding rescuing Essex and restoring the balance of power in the south, parliament took time to thank its servants: Cromwell in particular was singled out in terms which matched the press accounts of the Battle of Marston Moor; and gave thanks to

Lieutenant General *Cromwell*, for his Fidelity in the Cause in hand; and in particular for the faithful Service performed by him in the late Battle near *York*,

⁶⁰ Journal of the House of Lords, Vol 6, 7 Sept. 1644, p498; this and all subsequent entries for this Journal are accessed through the British History Online website.

⁶¹ Journal of the House of Lords, Vol 6, 9 September, 1644, p490.

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where God made him a special Instrument in obtaining that great Victory over Prince *Rupert's* and the Marquis of *Newcastle's* Armies there.⁶²

About a fortnight later, Parliament resolved that Manchester and Waller join forces as soon as they could and remain together to cooperate as the Committee of Both Kingdoms saw fit.⁶³ Three weeks later, by 12 October, Manchester had based himself at Reading and sent them a report on all of his recent movements.⁶⁴

Cromwell as we know of course did not limit his attack on Manchester to his actions in the East Midlands, but he linked his accusations about the earl's dilatoriness there to the campaign in the south, realising that even late in 1644, parliament still prioritised the defeat of the king's Oxford field army rather than maintaining the local associations. He would also be familiar with the parlous state of Waller's army since the Battle of Cropredy Bridge back in June and the devastation wrought on Essex's army at Lostwithiel in early September, in any case at least by the time he was denouncing Manchester in parliament even if the battle itself had coincided with the start of Manchester's sluggardly march. Therefore, Cromwell made explicit the important point that Manchester's perceived failings in the midlands had limited his contribution to the campaign in the south because he had to leave far more of his army behind in the region because of the threat from Newark, whereas if it had been captured, local forces would or should be sufficient to hold the territory, an argument similar to that advanced by *Parliament's Scout* issue 65.⁶⁵ At this point Cromwell's narrative turned to the earl's slow march towards the south and onto the better known sections on the Newbury campaign itself.⁶⁶ The narrative was in its turn supported by the testimony of Waller and Hesilrige and somewhat more damningly several of the colonels from Manchester's own army, some of whom would have been smarting from Manchester's threat in mid-September to have them hanged for suggesting that he move southwards more quickly. This outburst is perhaps suggestive of Manchester's patience wearing thin. It may be possible that he resented his juniors, including Cromwell pressing their strategic views upon him. But if he did only hold one council of war, then this may be symptomatic of him failing to share information with them about his orders from London that prevented him from attacking Newark when he and his officers were actually in agreement on the importance of the garrison. Even though Major General Crawford was, like the earl himself, a Presbyterian, and no friend to Cromwell, he supported the gist of the attack on the earl's performance: Manchester may have isolated himself from his own commanders in September 1644.

⁶² House of Commons Journal, Vol 3, 13 Sept 1644, pp626-627 this and all subsequent entries for this Journal are accessed through the British History Online website.

⁶³ Journal of the House of Lords, Vol 6, 21 September 1644. p711.

⁶⁴ House of Commons Journal, Vol 13, 14 October 1644, p662.

⁶⁵ Ibid, np; Abbott, *Writings*, Vol 1, pp304-305.

⁶⁶ Abbott, *Writings*, Vol. 1, pp. 305-311. Wanklyn, 2007, pp137-8.

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Even though he had the support in parliament to enable him to attack Cromwell's lacklustre performance in the Newbury campaign failing to nurture his juniors' support proved costly.⁶⁷ The aftermath of the assault on the earl is well known: following Cromwell's decision not to continue his attack on the Earl of Manchester, parliament introduced a self-denying ordinance which made it mandatory for members of the Commons and the Lords to hand in their commissions and left it up to parliament to reappoint a select few on exceptional bases. At the same time a new, remodelled army was established from the remnants of the three armies of Essex, Manchester and Waller. This decision left three chief armies in the north and south west untouched, and for a time sections of Waller's and the Earl of Manchester's armies operated together in the west under the command of Waller and Cromwell who were granted temporary commissions as the new army was modelled.

Conclusion

Thus Newark had become a stick with which Cromwell beat down the careers of aristocratic generals during the war. It is unlikely that Whitelock was correct when he claimed that he was told that the whole point of the attack on Manchester and Essex in late 1644 was a plot to bring about a levelling process which would remove the aristocracy or at least the two earls from the traditional role in army command.⁶⁸ It is far more likely that Cromwell was concerned to remove what he saw as half-hearted warriors from command. It would be a consistent policy of his during 1643 and 1644. Cromwell's commitment to prosecuting the war vigorously was demonstrated in other ways too, including the willingness to support people like Colonel King, with very different religious conviction to his own, if he believed they could 'do the job'.

Cromwell's view of Newark was sound at every stage. In the early part of 1643, Newark was able to exert control over much of Lincolnshire, breaking links between parliamentarians in the north and the Eastern Association. Even when the Eastern Association periodically occupied central Lincolnshire and the county town from late summer onwards, the Newark garrison continued to interfere in parliamentarian attempts to control the county fully. This state of affairs continued throughout the following year and into 1645, as Cromwell predicted in his complaints about Manchester's war record. Even when Newark was neutralised from November 1645 onwards, it took two armies to keep it in check and surrender six months later was ordered by the king as part of the politics of his surrender deal rather than for military reasons. Cromwell thereby had proved, even as an early career soldier, to have a clear strategic vision. Moreover, it was a vision which he felt should be shared by his aristocratic commanders, Willoughby and Manchester and his associate Lord Grey of Groby. Whilst all three were to lose their field commands in 1644, ironically Lord Grey was to work with Cromwell again in 1651 during the Worcester campaign with

⁶⁷ Whitelock, *Memorials*, Vol. I, p. 341, 343

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 349.

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greater success. There is little surprise that certain parliamentary aristocrats saw Cromwell as a challenge and that Whitelock thought that in terms of military command Cromwell was a 'leveller'; three coronets was a high tally even if at least half the credit belonged to the Newarkers. Cromwell's concern was military but whilst Newark remained a major concern throughout the war, in the wake of the Battle of Naseby Cromwell showed clearly that it was not simply an obsession and demonstrated that he could identify a different strategic purpose. On 15 June 1645, the North Midlands lay wide open. The king was retreating north westwards with the remains of his army, Lord Loughborough and the Newark garrison had invested heavily in the king's advance through the midlands in May and June and they were, like they had been a year earlier, vulnerable to concerted attack: Loughborough surrendered Leicester within days. Yet it seems that Fairfax and Cromwell had decided to prioritise the destruction of the chief remaining royalist field army, that in the south west led by Lord Goring. Destroying that army would in essence make holding on to increasingly isolated pockets of territory less and less strategically valuable. However, Cromwell had been right to identify Newark as a major strategic priority in 1643 and 1644; reduction of the garrison either before or after Marston Moor would have probably hastened the end of the war dramatically; it was to parliament's cost that it appointed a series of commanders who did not share Cromwell's strategic vision, nor his aggressive determination.