

# John Hampden: War leader?

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## A third-year university dissertation

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### Introduction

“The nation looked round for a defender. Calmly and unostentatiously the plain Buckinghamshire Esquire placed himself at the head of his countrymen and across the path of tyranny”

- Lord Macaulay<sup>1</sup>

“The eyes of all men were fixed on him as their Patriae pater, and the pilot that must steer their vessel through the tempests and rocks that threatened it”

- The Earl of Clarendon<sup>2</sup>

“The chief of the wounded men was Colonel Hampden, and he supposed to be the chief or second man, to whom this rebellion and these miseries are much to be imputed”

- Royalist News Pamphlet<sup>3</sup>

On 11<sup>th</sup> January 1642, over two thousand Buckinghamshire petitioners marched on London to declare support for their local Member of Parliament in a display of personal loyalty unheralded in English History. The M.P. in question was John Hampden. They had come to the House of Commons to convey their shock and disgust at accusations of treason and attempted arrest of Hampden by Charles I in the notorious ‘Five Members’ episode and to express their allegiance to the House of Commons.

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<sup>1</sup> John Adair, *A life of John Hampden, The Patriot 1594-1643* (London, 1976) p.251

<sup>2</sup> Roger Lockyer (ed), *The History of the Great Rebellion- Edward Hyde; Earl of Clarendon* (Scarborough, 1967) p.122

<sup>3</sup> Royalist Pamphlet entitled ‘*Prince Rupert's beating up the Rebel Quarters*’ (Oxon.Wood 376, Bodelian Library).

What kind of character moved such a large body of people to spontaneously organise such a fierce demonstration of personal loyalty? Why was one individual so widely respected that so many ordinary citizens were prepared to defend him in such a manner against their sovereign monarch?

John Adair has gone so far to compare the role played by Hampden in the English Civil War to that of Churchill in 1940, stating that ‘...the country looked to him for direction much as it had turned to Churchill exactly three hundred years later’<sup>4</sup>. The illustrious biographer of John Pym, J.H. Hexter, shares a similar view, maintaining that Hampden was ‘...the living, talking, worshipping and fighting image of militant Puritanism’<sup>5</sup>. Even the Earl of Clarendon, one of Hampden’s principal political opponents and official Royalist historian of the Civil War, labelled Hampden as the ‘Patriae Pater’ of the Parliamentary cause. Whig politicians and historians idolised Hampden, viewing him as a noble patriot, a martyr in the defence of Parliamentary democracy against the threat of monarchical tyranny. Furthermore, although Hampden is often viewed solely as a politician, he was personally involved in virtually every major military engagement between Parliamentary forces and those of Charles I up until his death in June 1643, commanding a whole brigade at the Battle of Edgehill and during the siege of Reading.

Yet, the vital role played by this Puritan gentleman in the outbreak and opening stages of the first English Civil War has been almost entirely forgotten. Hampden, perhaps one of the most prestigious and revered historical characters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been relegated to ‘a bare mention as a footnote in a school book’<sup>6</sup>, usually in relation to his refusal to pay Ship Money in 1637. Hampden’s crucial role as a national figurehead for the Parliamentary cause in the chaos and anarchy of 1642 has been supplanted by the more eccentric characters of John Pym and Oliver Cromwell. The rise of the Marxist historiography throughout the twentieth century has further downplayed the role of individuals such as Hampden in the Civil War, preferring to view the conflict strictly along class lines. Even in Vernon Snow’s relatively positive assessment of Hampden it is admitted that he ‘...is not remembered for his words or spectacular deeds’<sup>7</sup>.

However, there ‘is more to Hampden than his refusal to pay his tax’<sup>8</sup>. The disparity between the extremely high regard in which his contemporaries and historians seem to view Hampden, and the current lack of knowledge on his contributions to English History is one of the key motives for choosing this topic of investigation. This investigation will attempt to unravel the precise role played by Hampden during the opening two years of the Civil war, in both the House of Commons and within the Parliamentary Army. The aim of this dissertation is not to eulogise the part played Hampden, for this has already been accomplished in Lord Nugent’s nineteenth century biography. In contrast, this investigation will endeavour to provide a sound critical evaluation of Hampden’s actions during the conflict, drawing on significant primary source material and the existing historical literature. The nature of Hampden’s political and military contributions will be assessed in extensive detail in an effort to understand just what kind of leadership he provided and what type of a War leader he can be classed as. Was Hampden a military strategist, a master of parliamentary politics, or a powerful religious icon? Furthermore, Hampden’s actions in the Commons and on the battlefield will be evaluated in order to establish whether his reputation as an idealistic patriot can be successfully maintained.

The first Chapter of this dissertation will focus upon Hampden’s political role in the outbreak and course of the Civil War. Both Hampden’s public and private influence on fellow Members of Parliament and various factions within the House of Commons will be analysed comprehensively. Furthermore, the use Hampden made of his extensive network of relatives and personal contacts will be explored in depth. The claim that Hampden was a *moderating influence* on the House will be

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<sup>4</sup> Adair, *The Patriot...* p.2

<sup>5</sup> J H Hexter, *The Reign of King Pym* (Harvard, 1968) p.116

<sup>6</sup> Adair, *The Patriot...* p.257

<sup>7</sup> Vernon Snow, *Essex the Rebel; the life of Robert Devereux, the third Earl of Essex 1591-1646* (Nebraska, 1970) p.391

<sup>8</sup> Adair, *The Patriot...* p.3

considered in order to ascertain whether he can be classed as a more radical or conservative member of the Parliamentary coalition. The question as to whether Hampden controlled those in favour of War or whether he simply responded to contemporary events will also be touched upon. Moreover, this assignment will investigate significance of the intermediary function that Hampden fulfilled between the Commons and Parliamentary forces in the field.

The second chapter of this investigation will focus solely upon the military role assumed by John Hampden in the first two years of the Civil War. Hampden's skill in both raising and leading his own infantry regiment, the notorious Buckinghamshire 'Greencoats' will be examined in depth. Hampden's own outlook and attitude towards military strategy will be analysed, as will his influence on and advice offered to Parliament's Lord General, the Earl of Essex. Likewise, the personal leadership provided by Hampden on the Battlefield will be analysed, and his contributions to the major Parliamentary military campaigns of 1642 and 1643 critically assessed. Finally, the importance of Hampden's financial input to the war effort and his role as a logistical organiser will also be examined further in this second chapter.

What is more, it is imperative to understand the religious and social context existing during mid-seventeenth century England in order to gain a greater appreciation of the significance of Hampden's actions. Hence, each chapter of this assignment will endeavour to provide an explanation as to why some aspects of Hampden's character and behaviour was so important to his contemporaries, which could otherwise be seen as irrelevant if viewed solely through a modern perspective.

Both chapters will not focus upon Hampden's actions in isolation, but upon the vital importance of his personal relationship with key individuals throughout Parliament's military and political hierarchy. In addition, the concluding part of this dissertation will focus and speculate upon some of the factors that could account for why Hampden's contribution to the Parliamentary War effort has been forgotten. The conclusion will also address the validity of Adair's comparison between the respective roles played Hampden and Churchill in the English Civil and Second World Wars respectively. Ultimately, the underlying premise of this investigation is to determine just why the M.P. Anthony Nichol was moved to write upon Hampden's death that 'Never Kingdom received a greater loss in one subject'<sup>9</sup> and why he has been labelled by historian Reed Brett as '...perhaps at that moment [the outbreak of the Civil War] the wisest head in England'<sup>10</sup>

The main primary source material used in this dissertation consists of letters written by Hampden himself or by others to him, contemporary journals detailing his actions in the House of Commons, and the coverage provided in various News pamphlets published by both the Royalists and Parliamentarians. Most of the primary sources referred to in this essay have been used in previous biographies of Hampden, yet there are many examples, particularly on Hampden's military career that have hitherto not been viewed in the broader context of Hampden's overall contribution to the Parliamentary war effort. This investigation hopes to analyse these sources in a way that has perhaps not been done before, by viewing them within the wider framework of Hampden's leadership role in the opening stages of the English Civil War rather than as anecdotal evidence of his political ideology.

The chronological parameters for this assignment range from the Grand Remonstrance debate in the Commons to Hampden's death in 1643. Although, this investigation is strictly into John Hampden's role as a *War leader*, and should not technically begin until midway through 1642, Hampden's role in the Grand Remonstrance demonstrated many of his key leadership skills. Furthermore, this example crucially reveals Hampden's wider influence in the commons and throughout the nation at large.

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<sup>9</sup> Adair, *The Patriot...* p.244

<sup>10</sup> Reed Brett, *John Pym; the statesman of the Puritan Revolution (London, 1940)* p.158

# Chapter One

## To what extent did Hampden provide political leadership and direction within the Parliamentary cause from November 1641 to June 1643?

### Hampden's Political Role: The Great Parliamentary Manager

“...a man of great political acumen, skilful in the management of his own affairs and those of Parliament...[Hampden demonstrated] sincere beliefs combined with intelligent calculation and noble vision is not always incompatible with astuteness in the daily struggle of politics. John Hampden was a good Parliament man in the political sense, but he was also in the widest sense a *good* Parliament man”

**C.V.Wedgwood<sup>11</sup>**

“Mr Hampden was a man of much...cunning, and it may be of [his] insinuation to bring anything to pass which he desired of any man of that time”

**C.E.Wade<sup>12</sup>**

“...he was a consummate politician, whose background and style suited him to be a ‘first amongst equals’...Besides his character and reputation he displayed a mastery of Parliamentary tactics”

**John Adair<sup>13</sup>**

Whilst John Hampden's political skill is generally accepted amongst historians in the manner in which he defended himself in the Ship Money trial of 1637, there has been little sustained investigation into how these skills were used in the political crisis of 1642 and subsequent conflict with the King. It seems somewhat illogical that while much attention has been paid to Hampden's role in the long-term causes of the English Civil War, his role during the struggle itself remains relatively obscure. This chapter will explore the various contributions and the nature of the leadership Hampden provided on a political level during the opening years of the English Civil war. The primary focus will be on Hampden's role in the House of Commons and his complex relationship with other key Parliamentary figures. The methods and tactics used by Hampden will also be scrutinised in order to gain a greater understanding on the degree of control he exerted over the house and his contemporaries. Ultimately, this chapter hopes to examine the extent to which John Hampden can be viewed as the central *War leader* for Parliament in the period November 1641 to his death in June 1643.

Before one begins to analyse the individual political contributions made by Hampden in the build up to and opening years of the English Civil War, it is imperative to understand his reputation for moral fortitude and piety. This had first come to light in the Ship money case of 1637 and remained a strong influence until his death. Hampden was respected by his peers for his honesty and for his unflinching adherence to his Puritan ideals. This reputation is reflected in the comments made by Lady Sussex to Sir Ralph Verney upon hearing of Hampden's death; ‘I am very sorry for Mr Hampden, I do not know him but I have heard he is a discreet good man’<sup>14</sup>. The Earl of Clarendon echoes this view in his estimation of Hampden's character, maintaining ‘his reputation for honesty was universal, and his affections seemed so publicly guided that no corrupt or private ends could bias them’<sup>15</sup>. Thus, when one is assessing Hampden's following actions it is crucial to bear in mind the contemporary importance that his reputation exerted on his peers.

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<sup>11</sup> C V Wedgwood, *The Kings War* (Manchester, 1966) p.209

<sup>12</sup> C E Wade, *John Pym* (London, 1912) p.302

<sup>13</sup> Adair, *The Patriot*...p.246

<sup>14</sup> Adair, *The Patriot*... p.244

<sup>15</sup> Adair, *The Patriot*... p.2

Perhaps the most logical place to begin the investigation into Hampden's political guidance in the English Civil War is the defining crisis that arguably made conflict between Charles and Parliament inevitable; the Grand Remonstrance debate. It is in this episode and its immediate aftermath we are provided with the most complete glimpse of Hampden's role in the Commons, and the influence he exerted upon it. Firstly, it should be noted that upon one of the most contentious issues in the Remonstrance debate - the abolition of Bishops within the Church of England - Hampden crucially supported those in favour of such a move. This fact is not surprising given his reputation as a Puritan ideologue and fierce critic of Archbishop Laud, but should not be overlooked. Indeed, the inclusion of this clause to discard traditional church clergy was an extremely divisive issue and it may be that Hampden's personal support tipped the balance of popular opinion in the Commons. The reasons for why Hampden's own decision may have proved so significant will hopefully become self-evident in the course of this chapter.

Yet, Hampden's most important contribution to the Grand Remonstrance came not in the process of its formulation, but at the debate's conclusion. Once the Commons had voted in favour (by an extremely narrow margin) of the passing of the Grand Remonstrance in its final form, the debate soon turned to the issue of its publication. It was at this point that Hampden displayed remarkable diplomatic skill in averting a potentially terminal division within Parliamentary ranks. During the early hours of November 22<sup>nd</sup>, with the Commons still in session it was suggested by some of the more militant members that the Remonstrance should be published immediately<sup>16</sup>. This caused great unrest in the House and led to M.P. Geoffrey Palmer, an opponent of the Remonstrance, calling for a protestation to be noted on behalf of the more conservative members who did not support the act. This almost led to an armed clash between rival Parliamentary factions and is remembered in the following extract by an anonymous witness:

'I thought that we had all sat in the valley of the shadow of death; for we...had caught at each other's locks and sheathed our swords in each other's bowels had not the sagacity and calmness of Mr Hampden, by a short speech, prevented it'<sup>17</sup>

Hampden successfully persuaded the house to 'postpone further action till a much needed rest had restored a truer perspective'<sup>18</sup>. This is further supported in the journals of Sir Simonds D'Ewes who noted that, 'At last it was resolved...to leave the said matter touching the printing to the morning'<sup>19</sup>. Clearly, Hampden's intervention was vital. Had the House of Commons split so violently as it appeared on the brink of doing, it is dubious as to whether the Parliamentary cause could have maintained such a strong stance in its negotiations with the King. Furthermore, at this stage in developments the Parliament had yet to be united against Charles by his aggressive attempted arrest of the Five Members in January 1642. Thus, the Commons were far more vulnerable to internal fragmentation than they would at any point in the near future. The very fact that Hampden's speech was successful speaks volumes for the general respect he commanded in the House of Commons, and demonstrates his ability to provide direction in a time of heightened political tension. This episode also lends weight to the notion that Hampden was a moderating influence within the House of Commons with the ability to compromise his own personal beliefs for the greater good of the Parliamentary cause.

Moreover, Hampden's timely intercession ensured that eventually the Grand Remonstrance was successfully published, marking a pivotal moment in the events preceding the outbreak of the English Civil War. As Williamson maintains, once Charles had been presented with the demands of the Remonstrance 'he [Charles I] and his opponents realised, as Hampden had realised for years that the dispute must end in trial by battle'<sup>20</sup>. This quote fits conveniently with Adair's historical comparison of

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<sup>16</sup> W H Coates, *The journal of Simon D'Ewes* (Oxford, 1943) p.187

<sup>17</sup> Hugh Ross Williamson, *John Hampden* (London, 1933) p.275

<sup>18</sup> Williamson, *Hampden...* p.278

<sup>19</sup> Coates, *D'Ewes...* p.187

<sup>20</sup> Williamson, *Hampden...* p.279

John Hampden to Winston Churchill, for both men enjoyed a degree of political foresight that was denied to their peers.

This foresight was again demonstrated in Hampden's dealings with the Army officers who had been disbanded following Charles's disastrous military intervention in Scotland. In December 1641 Hampden shrewdly brought the plight of these officers to the attention of the commons:

'Mr Hampden related from the officers of the armie that divers of them had desired him to move the house on their behalfe in respect of their great necessities to furnish them with the arreres of their pay due to them.'<sup>21</sup>

Clearly, Hampden knew the importance of keeping these professional soldiers well disposed towards Parliament in the increasingly likely event of military conflict breaking out with Charles I. What is more, Hampden's intervention proved successful and the Commons allocated a sum of one thousand three hundred pounds to reimburse the army officers in question<sup>22</sup>.

In contrast to his obvious diplomatic ability and astute sense of foresight, Hampden also demonstrated an aptitude in manipulating the atmosphere in the Commons to suit his own political agenda. This occurred frequently throughout the Long Parliament, though possibly the most obvious example of this political expediency can be seen in Hampden's actions in the House on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 1642. Essentially, Hampden informed his fellow members of Parliament that a well-known Buckinghamshire Papist had been arrested, and correspondence had been found on his person detailing a plot with the King's advisers to raise a Catholic Army. Once again the House of Commons journal of Sir Simonds D'Ewes provides a first-hand description of events, recording that 'After prayers, MR HAMPDEN shewed that one Adam Courtney...a papist had been taken in Buckinghamshire and been examined'<sup>23</sup>. Hampden must have known that such a revelation would have radicalised the political atmosphere, both in the Commons and the Lords. Moreover, it further strengthened those Members of Parliament that advocated an uncompromising stance against the King. Hampden's political acumen is also demonstrated in the timing of his actions. The 1641 Catholic uprising in Ireland had created a mood of paranoia and trepidation in both Parliament and the population at large. There existed a genuine fear throughout English society that Charles would use Irish troops to bring Parliament to heel in the political crisis of 1641/42. This situation would surely not have gone unnoticed for a man of Hampden's considerable political experience and personal connections. As such his actions in revealing this plot to the Commons display a large amount of political expediency on Hampden's part, and a considerable degree of Machiavellian cunning. Whether or not the accusations against the papist Adam Courtney were true or not, they achieved their purpose in further undermining Parliament's trust in Charles I. Thus, Hampden's behaviour in this regard sits uneasily with his reputation as the *honest broker*. However, it would be misguided to take too severe a stance on this episode. As Wedgwood states, Hampden actions were simply 'proof that intelligent calculation and noble vision is not always incompatible with astuteness in the daily struggle of politics'<sup>24</sup>. Hampden did not seek war with the King, yet perhaps he understood that by this stage military conflict had become inescapable.

Now let us turn to an incident that has already been mentioned briefly in the introduction to this assignment, the march of over two thousand Buckinghamshire petitioners on the House of Commons on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1642. The petition contained the following sentiments:

'...having by virtue chosen John Hampden knight of our shire, in whose loyalty we, his countrymen...have ever had good cause to confide; we have of late to our less amazement than grief, find him accused of treason'.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Coates, *D'Ewes...* p.330

<sup>22</sup> Coates, *D'Ewes...* p.330

<sup>23</sup> Coates, *D'Ewes...* p.201

<sup>24</sup> Wedgwood, *King War...* p.209

<sup>25</sup> Williamson, *Hampden...* p.287

The significance of this event is two-fold. Firstly, it reveals Hampden's enormous public popularity in his own county. Secondly, it lent a popular legitimacy to the actions of Parliament in the aftermath of the attempted arrest of the Five Members. Thus, Hampden's individual reputation can be seen as key yet again the political developments leading up to the outbreak of the first English Civil War. It seems whether or not Hampden viewed himself as a focal point for the Parliamentary cause, the population of his home county certainly did.

Hampden's role as a Parliamentary leader went beyond his very public contributions in the House of Commons. Once conflict with the King eventually broke out, Hampden acted as a crucial intermediary between senior Parliamentary commanders throughout England and the House of Commons. This is revealed in the large amount of correspondence still surviving between Hampden and other key Parliamentary figures, particularly with Sir John Hotham during the opening months of open conflict. Upon Charles' flight from London in January 1642, Hotham took control of the vital armoury in Hull in the name of Parliament. The letters between Hampden and Hotham throughout 1642 contain direct orders from the Parliamentary leadership in London. Furthermore, the content of these letters also suggest that Hampden had a large degree of logistical and financial influence over the Parliamentary war effort at this early stage in the war.

For example, in one letter Hampden informs Hotham to let him know immediately if he were to experience the 'least stoppe'<sup>26</sup> in his funds. In another letter<sup>27</sup> Hampden asks Hotham whether he requires a new Lieutenant Colonel to aid in the command of the Hull Garrison. In addition, Hampden's correspondence with Hotham contains crucial strategic intelligence on the movement of Charles' forces. For instance in a letter dated the 18<sup>th</sup> July 1642, Hampden states that 'Your courage and constancy have demonstrated that Hull is tenable...we are of the opinion the King's forces will not stay before Hull, but that he will move southwards'<sup>28</sup>. Further extracts from these letters reveal that Hampden also provided Hotham with news updates on events in the capital and south of England, informing him that '...we have many volunteers'<sup>29</sup> and that the Committee of Safety (of which he was a member) was 'extremely full of business'<sup>30</sup>. This information would undoubtedly proved vital to Hotham, who would otherwise have had no method of communication with the Parliamentary high command. It is of considerable historical significance that Sir John Hotham addressed Hampden personally rather than to the Committee of Safety or to the House of Commons directly.

Perhaps the aspect of Hampden's role in the Civil War that has attracted the greatest scrutiny is his relationship with the Lord General of the Parliamentary forces, the Earl of Essex. Hampden has been credited for protecting Essex from the criticisms of the War Party in the House of Commons in the wake of the Battle of Turnham Green and the ineffective campaign against Reading in April 1643. As such, Hampden can be viewed as the vital unifying link between those more militant M.P's who advocated the continuance of the conflict until the King ceded to their demands, and the more conservative Parliamentarians such as Essex himself who favoured a negotiated settlement to the war. J.H. Hexter eloquently summarises this role played by Hampden in his following evaluation:

'[Hampden] had acted as a sort of moral cement for the Parliamentary cause. Concentrated in him was all that was good in the opposition to Charles. He bound the conservative legalist party against the King and to the radical religious group'.<sup>31</sup>

Yet, to what extent did this unifying and liaison role played by Hampden amount to direct control over the Earl of Essex? It has been suggested that as the Civil War progressed beyond its opening year Essex became '...increasingly the instrument, if not the dupe of more radical and determined men with

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<sup>26</sup> Letter from Hampden to Sir John Hotham dated 14<sup>th</sup> June 1642 (NRA 5408, National Archives)

<sup>27</sup> Letter from Hampden to Sir John Hotham dated 18<sup>th</sup> July 1642 (NRA 5408, National Archives)

<sup>28</sup> Letter from Hampden to Sir John Hotham dated 18<sup>th</sup> July 1642 (NRA 5408, National Archives)

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid* 28<sup>th</sup> May 1642

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid* 18<sup>th</sup> July 1642

<sup>31</sup> Hexter, *King Pym...*p.94

subtler minds that his, in the Commons Pym and Hampden<sup>32</sup>. This view is echoed by Hexter who asserts that ‘for months he [Hampden] had helped Pym control...Essex, concerting schemes with the former and guiding the latter in the management of the army’<sup>33</sup>. If such claims are correct then John Hampden clearly enjoyed a position verging on political supremacy within the Parliamentary ranks. It was even rumoured in the *Mercurius Aulicus* that Hampden was in line to replace Essex during the spring of 1643:

‘It was this day reported exceedingly confidently by some who come from London lately, how it was noised in the city that the Earl of Essex was to leave in place of General unto Mr Hampden, as one more active and so by consequence more capable of the style of his Excellency’.<sup>34</sup>

These sentiments were echoed in the correspondence between a Royalist Spy and Prince Rupert that contained the news that ‘the two houses have sent to the Earl of Essex to deliver up his commission...and that they intend to make Mr Hampden their General’<sup>35</sup>.

However, the weight of primary source evidence does not insinuate that Hampden ever enjoyed a position of direct control over, or hoped to replace the Lord General. In fact, the correspondence surviving between Hampden and Essex suggests that Hampden was in a military capacity at least, a loyal and willing servant of Essex. The language in the letters from Hampden to the Earl of Essex, when Hampden was stationed with the Parliamentary Army at Northampton, reveals a great deal of respect for the General. This is demonstrated in the following extract:

‘My Lord, once more let us beseech your Lordship to put those unruly upon present action, which being commanded by your Excellency, shall with all obedience be performed by your humble servants’.<sup>36</sup>

Although many letters of this period were filled with such platitudes and etiquette, the tone of this extract is particularly telling. John Hampden himself was a powerful man of high social and political standing, yet he assumes the role of subordinate to the Earl of Essex extremely gracefully. Furthermore, in a subsequent letter Hampden expresses his fervent desire for the Lord General’s ‘...hastening to us, which we hope would be a means to appease these disorders, and would be a great satisfaction to the longing desire of your Excellency’s most humble servants’<sup>37</sup>. The ‘disorders’ Hampden is referring to are the widespread pillaging and looting that had occurred by some units within the Parliamentary Army when garrisoned at Northampton. Evidently, Hampden must have held the Earl of Essex in high regard if he believed that his presence with the army would restore discipline amongst its ranks.

Further evidence that suggests Hampden was a close confidant of Essex rather than his political master can be found in Hampden’s letters to his close friend, the Parliamentary cavalry commander Arthur Goodwin. In one such letter Hampden discloses the following information:

‘I read your letter to my Lord General, who was very sensible of that passage...where you express trouble that he should think you disobedient to his command - concerning which he, purposing to write with his own hand, I need say no more but that you should be assured that he neither hath nor ever had the least jealousy of your obedience.’<sup>38</sup>

Clearly, Hampden was a trusted adviser of the General’s, with whom he felt able to share the information contained within his own private military correspondence. The letters to Goodwin do not

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<sup>32</sup> G E Aylmer, *Rebellion or Revolution?* (Oxford, 1986) p.39

<sup>33</sup> Hexter, *King Pym...* p.115

<sup>34</sup> Adair, *The Patriot...* p. 215

<sup>35</sup> Williamson, *Hampden...* p.320

<sup>36</sup> Letters from Hampden to the Earl of Essex, 7<sup>th</sup> September 1642 (?) (Tanner MSS.lxii 115 and lxiii 153, Bodelian Library)

<sup>37</sup> Letter from Hampden to the Earl of Essex, 7<sup>th</sup> September 1642 (?) (Tanner MSS.lxii 115 and lxiii 153, Bodelian Library)

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Hampden to Sir Arthur Goodwin, January 1643 (Bodelian Library; Carte MSS.ciii 121,123)

hint at anything more than an extremely close working and personal relationship between the two Parliamentary figureheads. Furthermore, it is 'highly significant'<sup>39</sup> that Hampden was named as an executor of the Earl of Essex's Estate in his will. Clearly, the Lord General must have trusted Hampden explicitly to delegate him such considerable legal responsibility.

Perhaps the most compelling evaluation of the relationship between the Earl of Essex and John Hampden is provided by the celebrated historian S.R. Gardiner; 'The belief that he regarded the generalship of Essex as too cautious was so widely spread that it cannot be altogether false, but he never attempted, even indirectly to weaken his authority'<sup>40</sup>.

In conclusion, the tactics and skill in which Hampden manipulated the House of Commons throughout the Grand Remonstrance and the following months undoubtedly constitute a degree of Political leadership. Nevertheless, there is little evidence to suggest that Hampden's actions comprised of anything more than an attempt to guide the House in a political direction that he saw as most favourable for the benefit of the nation at large. Hampden was certainly no Parliamentary dictator. In contrast, Hampden's methods of influence were far subtler. During the opening two years of the English Civil War it appears Hampden made extensive use of his personal reputation and personal contacts to carefully manage and organise the Parliamentary war effort. In this capacity he was undoubtedly a crucial political leader. In addition, Hampden provided a popular figurehead for Parliament's cause and added a sense of legitimacy to its actions. Yet Hampden never worked in isolation, many of his actions were the result of careful planning with his close political ally, John Pym, to whom Hampden addressed his letters as 'My Brother'. Indeed, 'Hampden seems to have been the one man who shared Pym's views in every detail'<sup>41</sup>.

In evaluating Hampden's political role it is easy to overplay the importance attached to his reputation and the respect it commanded. After all, the petitioners who marched to London in January 1642 to support Hampden were citizens of his local county, not representatives from all over England. In reality, it is questionable whether in the far North and West of England that Hampden's name was as celebrated as it was in the Southeastern counties. However, it is undeniable that Hampden was a remarkably popular figure in London during the political and military crisis of 1642 and was turned to for leadership. Whilst Hampden did not monopolise political control over the Parliamentary war effort, he undoubtedly formed a vital, yet relatively discreet part of it.

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<sup>39</sup> Snow, *Essex the Rebel...*p.390

<sup>40</sup> S.R.Gardiner, *The English Civil War Volume 1* (London, 2002) p.53

<sup>41</sup> Brett, *John Pym...* p.239

## Chapter Two

Evaluate the significance of the military contribution and leadership provided by John Hampden from July 1642 to June 1643?

John Hampden: Military Commander

*“I have seen him in front of’s Regiment-in-greene,  
When death about him, did in ambush lie,  
And whizzing shot, like shewres if arrows flye,  
Waving his conqu’ring steel,  
As if the he from Mars had got the  
Sole monopolie Of never fayling Courage”*

Captain John Stiles of Hampden’s Infantry regiment<sup>42</sup>

“Hampden had probably learned much about the art of generalship since August 1642; certainly he possessed many of the essential soldierly qualities for command, such as courage, leadership, initiative and caution. Above all, he manifested the will to win...”

**John Adair<sup>43</sup>**

“And without question when he first drew the sword he threw away the scabbard”

**The Earl of Clarendon<sup>44</sup>**

There has never been an exhaustive study into the precise military role played by John Hampden in the opening two years of the English Civil War. Whilst Historians are keen to highlight Hampden’s political importance to the Parliamentary cause<sup>45</sup>, references to his military career are normally limited to the Battle of Chalgrove, in which he met his death. This is somewhat surprising given, as explained in the opening chapter of this investigation, Hampden was rumoured to be a potential replacement for the Earl of Essex, Lord General of Parliament’s forces. Perhaps this lack of knowledge is due to the fact that Hampden had no previous experience of warfare before the outbreak of Civil War, or that he never assumed a position of supreme authority within the Parliamentary Army. Yet upon closer inspection it appears that Hampden actually provided significant tactical and strategic contributions to all the major military campaigns of 1642 and 1643. Moreover, despite his relative inexperience in Military affairs Hampden soon developed an effective and aggressive attitude towards command. Furthermore, Hampden also provided crucial financial assistance to and logistical control over the Parliamentary military effort, using his position of influence to raise much-needed funds and manpower for the Earl of Essex’s Army. This chapter will provide a detailed examination into the importance of Hampden’s role during the English Civil War. In addition, Hampden’s competency as a military commander will be evaluated with the use of numerous case studies and substantial contemporary evidence.

Perhaps, the most obvious area in which to begin the investigation into Hampden’s Military role is in relation to his own personal financial contribution to the Parliamentary War effort. Upon the eventual outbreak of conflict between Charles I and Parliament in the spring of 1642, Hampden donated two

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<sup>42</sup>Parliamentarian News Pamphlet entitled ‘Elegies on the Death of That worthy and accomplish’t Gentleman Colonell John Hampden’ published October 16<sup>th</sup> 1643 (Thomas Tracts E339, British Library)

<sup>43</sup> Adair, *The Patriot*...p.246

<sup>44</sup> Lockyer, *Edward Hyde; Earl of Clarendon*... p.122

<sup>45</sup> At least in the direct causes of Civil War, although not during the conflict itself.

hundred pounds of silver plate and one hundred pounds of coin from his own personal fortune to aid in the recruitment and arming of Parliamentary forces<sup>46</sup>. Hampden also purchased one thousand pounds worth of Irish land, as part of a Parliamentary initiative to raise immediate capital for the impending struggle with the King<sup>47</sup>. Although, Hampden was a wealthy man by seventeenth century standards, owning land in numerous counties, he was not a member of the traditional English Aristocracy. As such, these donations mark a considerable personal financial commitment to Parliament's cause. What is more Hampden also organised the recruitment of an infantry regiment from his own Buckinghamshire constituency. The Hampden family paid for the uniforms and colours for this regiment, who would be subsequently known as the Greencoats. Through such actions Hampden demonstrated to other Parliamentary figures and the nation at large that he was prepared to back his political actions with a serious logistical commitment to the imminent military conflict. Furthermore, due to Hampden's reputation, this public display of commitment was likely to have inspired similar actions by key Parliamentary supporters throughout England. Thus, Hampden can be seen as providing an influential personal example to follow in the initial stages of the Civil War, providing yet more evidence to highlight the significance of his leadership role.

Yet Hampden's logistical management was not limited to the opening months of the conflict. In contrast, there is primary source material that reveals Hampden continued to make extensive use of his personal contacts to raise troops and funding for the Parliamentary forces up until his death in June 1643. One such example of this can be seen in the following letter from Hampden to Thomas Barrington, 'probably the most influential Gentleman in the wealthy county of Essex'<sup>48</sup>:

'Sir, my lord general hath written to the county of Essex to call in the well-affected people to his assistance...The work is so necessary that I cannot but improve the interest I have in yourself in the promoting of it...Our Army wants both men and money, and therefore help in this way would be very seasonable'.<sup>49</sup>

This extract clearly demonstrates that Hampden enjoyed a strong grasp of the logistical needs of the Parliamentary Army. Obviously, Hampden understood the vital importance of a continuing supply of fresh troops and funding. Hampden's effectiveness as a Parliamentary fundraiser was in no small part a result of his powerful persuasiveness in correspondence such as the aforementioned letter. Hampden constantly flatters Barrington and emphasises his local influence, stating that 'The Power of Essex is great, a place of most life and religion in the land, and your power in the county is great too'<sup>50</sup>. Hampden's message is further reinforced by a patriotic appeal to Barrington's sense of duty. 'I know that you need not to be moved to a thing that you apprehend for the good of the cause. Such I conceive this business for the good of the Kingdom in General'<sup>51</sup>. Thus, we are provided with perhaps the most telling example of Hampden's pragmatic skill in mobilizing Parliamentary sympathisers behind the war effort. Furthermore, this form of personal leadership is not likely to have been limited to this correspondence with Thomas Barrington, it is probable that many other letters 'in a similar vein...have not survived'. Hampden evidently realised how best to use his network of political contacts in order to mobilise the Parliamentary war effort.

Now let us turn to John Hampden's competency as a military commander on a Regimental level. As Colonel and founder of his infantry regiment of Greencoats, Hampden made several intelligent, though possibly naïve appointments when allocating his regimental officers. Ever the pragmatist, Hampden appointed a professional soldier, Joseph Wagstaffe, as his Lieutenant Colonel and managed to secure the well-known military author and tactician William Barriffe as a company commander. Although the appointment of a veteran such as Wagstaffe may have appeared a sensible option in 1642, Hampden's trust proved misplaced as he deserted to the King in late 1643. However, this incident should not

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<sup>46</sup> Adair, *The Patriot...* p.175

<sup>47</sup> Williamson, *Hampden...* p.290

<sup>48</sup> Adair, *The Patriot...*p.227

<sup>49</sup> Letter from Hampden to Thomas Barrington, June 9<sup>th</sup> 1643. (Bodolian Library)

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*

reflect too harshly on Hampden's judge of character as mercenary soldiers routinely changed allegiances throughout the Civil War, depending on the military fortunes of both sides and fluctuating rates in pay.

Perhaps, one aspect of Hampden's command that does deserve a degree of criticism is the amount of time he spent in the field with his men. Due to his commitments on the Committee for Public Safety and in the House of Commons, Hampden was forced to split his time travelling between London and the Army. This absence must have created a sense of distance between Hampden and the soldiers under his command, the results of which can arguably be seen in the aftermath of the siege of Reading campaign. On 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1643, Hampden's regiment mutinied and refused orders to leave their quarters in Reading town. The diary of cavalry commander Sir Samuel Luke provides the contemporary commentary on this incident; due to a lack of pay '...there was a kind of mutiny amongst them for a tyme; his Excellency's [the Earl of Essex] regiment and Colonel Hampden's being the chief mutineers',<sup>52</sup>.

However, if Hampden should be delegated partial responsibility for his regiment's mutiny, then he also deserves the credit for its resolution. Indeed, Luke goes on to explain that 'with good words and faire language...[Hampden] made them ashamed of their actions and they marcht cheerfully to Cawsham the next morning',<sup>53</sup>. If Sir Samuel Luke's account is to be trusted, Hampden's Greencoats must have had great personal respect for their Colonel. This episode demonstrates Hampden's ability to motivate troops under his command and again provides an example of the strong diplomatic ability that proved so vital in the House of Commons.

Yet, is there any evidence to suggest that Hampden had a greater military role than that of a Regimental commander? Did Hampden ever display an understanding of military strategy during his time with the Parliamentary Army? The answers to these questions are provided in part by the information enclosed in the correspondence between John Hampden and the Deputy-Lieutenants for Buckinghamshire in the aftermath of the Battle of Edgehill. These letters demonstrate that Hampden recognised the importance of accurate military intelligence and had a keen grasp of the national strategic situation. These qualities are displayed in the following extracts:

'Gentlemen, the army is now at Northampton moving every day nearer to you. If you disband not, we may be of mutual succour to each other; but if you disperse, you make yourselves and your country a prey...'<sup>54</sup>

'I desire you will send to me again, as soon as you can...that you may know what posture you are in...you shall do me a favour to certify me what you hear of the Kings forces; for I believe your intelligence is better from Oxford and those parts than ours can be'.<sup>55</sup>

One of the most striking aspects of these letters is Hampden's recognition that the actions of Parliamentary forces must be co-ordinated in order to achieve success. Hampden displays an acute geographical knowledge of the movement of the Parliamentary Army and the strategic consequences that this entails. Furthermore, it is clear that Hampden enjoyed a position of effective control over the actions of the Deputy-Lieutenants for Buckinghamshire and thus a degree of regional control over the Parliamentarian military campaign. This evidence subsequently lends far greater significance to his role as a military commander.

What is more, there is also primary source material that suggests Hampden understood the importance of winning the hearts and minds of the wider population if Parliament's cause was to eventually prove triumphant. This is revealed in certain passages of letters written from John Hampden

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<sup>52</sup> Williamson, *Hampden...* p.177

<sup>53</sup> Malcolm Bares-Baker, *The Siege of Reading, April 1643* (Electronically Published) p.177

<sup>54</sup> Letter from Hampden to Buckinghamshire Deputy-Lieutenants, October 31<sup>st</sup> 1642 (British Museum, Facsimiles 15,858)

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid* November 1<sup>st</sup> 1642

to the Earl of Essex when the Parliamentary Army was stationed at Northampton in September 1643. Hampden informed Essex that:

‘The soldiers are grown so outrageous that they plunder every place...we use all means possible to suppress it, sending out squadrons of Horse...We beseech your excellency to take this into your present and serious consideration, for it this goes on a while, the army will grow as odious to the country as the cavaliers...’<sup>56</sup>

‘...we that are eye witnesses of that state of the army do verily believe that without Marshall law it may prove a ruin as likely a remedy to this kingdom’.<sup>57</sup>

These extracts demonstrate that Hampden was aware of the significance of the negative impression the behaviour of the Parliamentary Army had created amongst the civilian population and reveal his determination to restore military discipline. For such an inexperienced commander, Hampden possessed an exceptional understanding of what basic measures were needed to sustain a successful military campaign.

So far we have assessed the logistical, regimental and strategic contributions made by Hampden to the Parliamentary military effort. Yet, an assessment of a military leader is not complete without analysing their actions on the battlefield. Conceivably, the key to understanding Hampden’s military ability lies within his tactical contributions to the major engagements of the opening two years of the Civil War.

Firstly, let us analyse the involvement of Hampden in the initial major clash of the Civil War, the Battle of Edgehill. Despite Malcolm Bares-Baker’s claim that Hampden’s Greencoats ‘missed Edgehill’<sup>58</sup>, the regiment actually played a vital, though secondary role in events. Although Hampden had been assigned to guard the Parliamentary artillery and so was late to deploy, his regiment found itself faced with Prince Rupert’s victorious cavalry who had routed their Parliamentary counterparts. Hampden’s forces ‘checked or at least deflected’<sup>59</sup> Rupert’s Cavalry by ‘expeditiously placing a battery’<sup>60</sup> across the road to Kineton (in the Parliamentary Army’s rear). Thus, Hampden’s Greencoats blocked the further penetration of Parliamentary supply lines and protected the complete loss of the Army’s baggage train. The Earl of Essex’s biographer, Vernon Snow, argues this tactical intercession by Hampden and the men under his command was critical, for if the ‘battle had been terminated with these first charges [of Royalist Cavalry] it would have been a victory for the King’<sup>61</sup>. Thus, in Hampden’s first significant experience of combat he proved an able battlefield commander. Likewise, in this action at Edgehill Hampden had also demonstrated an acute sense of timing that was to prove invaluable in the major military clash of the Civil War.

This leads conveniently to Hampden’s most significant tactical contribution in the conflict, during the Battle of Brentford on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1642. After Edgehill, Charles’ Army had advanced upon London in an attempt to re-take the capital for the King and effectively end the war. Simultaneously however, negotiations had re-opened between Charles and Parliament and a delegation had been sent to discuss terms with the King in Windsor. Much controversy still surrounds subsequent events, but whether under direct orders or not, Prince Rupert led a Royalist attack on the Parliamentary garrison in Brentford. The Parliamentary units based in the town, the infantry regiments of Denzil Holles and Lord Brooke, were soon overwhelmed and sustained heavy casualties<sup>62</sup> when forced to retreat eastwards towards London. It was at this juncture that Hampden’s Greencoats arrived on the outskirts

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<sup>56</sup> Letter from John Hampden to the Earl of Essex, September 7<sup>th</sup> (?) 1642 (Tanner MSS.lxii 115 and lxiii 153, Bodleian Library)

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>58</sup> Bares-Baker, *Siege of Reading...* p.181

<sup>59</sup> Wedgwood, *Kings War* p.129

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>61</sup> Snow, *Essex the Rebel...* p.336

<sup>62</sup> Holles’ Regiment of Redcoats were so badly decimated by the battle that the unit was dispersed amongst the Parliamentary Army and never fought as a single battalion again throughout the Civil War.

of Brentford, covering the Parliamentary withdrawal and blocking the route to London. The strategic importance of this intervention cannot be underestimated. If Rupert had been allowed to continue his advance on London, Essex's forces would have been caught unawares and dispersed throughout the city. Perhaps it is hyperbolic to suggest that the entire Parliamentary Army would have been completely destroyed had Hampden's regiment not intervened, but they would certainly have sustained extremely high losses and would have faced a fierce struggle to retain the capital. At the very least, Hampden's intervention allowed Essex time to concentrate his troops. The actions of Hampden and his troops are best described in the following account provided by Gervase Sleigh, a soldier in the Earl of Essex's Parliamentary Army:

'On Saturday ye 12 of November ye Kings forces came to Braineceford, to surprise Colonel Hollis his regiment...after yt they had act of those to march directly for London...But not withstanding they wanted powder they fell to it with their swords and fought until Coll.Hamden came to their rescue'.<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, it was noted in the report drawn up by the Committee of Safety that Holles and Brooke's regiments '...were like to have been cut to pieces if that Colonel Hamden with his regiment had not come to releve them'<sup>64</sup>. The report went to praise the conduct of Hampden who 'carried himself with so much resolution and judgment that by his assistance with losse...in Mr Hamden's [regiment] not above one man slayne'<sup>65</sup>. It was described in one Parliamentary News pamphlet how Hampden's regiment 'charged the Royalists five times in order to cover the retreat'<sup>66</sup>. Even allowing for the usual bias and exaggeration likely to have influenced such accounts it is obvious that John Hampden and his troops performed their military duties extremely proficiently and with requisite timing.

The day after the developments in Brentford, during the subsequent stand off between Royalist and Parliamentary forces known as the 'Battle' of Turnham Green Hampden again had an important role to play. According to the diaries of Bulstrode Whitelocke, Hampden was 'thought fit to command a Party of two regiment of Horse and four of foot to march around the Green by Acton and so get beyond the King's army...and so to have them between both parties of their [Parliament's Army]'<sup>67</sup>. Though the cautious Earl of Essex soon abandoned this flanking manoeuvre, the fact that he delegated Hampden command over such a large force reveals the high degree of trust that the Lord General placed in his military ability. Had Essex gone ahead with the planned encirclement it has been suggested that Charles I's army could have been trapped and destroyed by the superior weight of Parliamentary forces, thus Hampden could have been instrumental in bringing the English Civil War to a premature end. Yet such propositions are mere speculation and should not be given undue academic attention.

The importance of the events of Turnham Green to this investigation lie not in the actions of Hampden, but in the military advice he offered the Earl of Essex. The counsel provided by Hampden in this instance reveals clearly his attitude towards military affairs. According to Williamson, Hampden 'pleaded for immediate action'<sup>68</sup> to be taken against Charles army. This fits appropriately with a subsequent account of Hampden's attitude in the siege of Reading campaign of 1643, in which Bares-Baker claims he 'urged Essex to ignore Reading and march swiftly on Oxford'<sup>69</sup>. Undeniably, Hampden was an aggressive commander, who favoured direct and offensive action against any enemy forces he encountered. Essentially, Hampden favoured a direct military strategy that would bring the war to decisive conclusion in as short a time as possible.

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<sup>63</sup> Letter from Gervase Sleigh (?) to his Uncle (MS. Don c.184 f.29, Bodelian Library)

<sup>64</sup> Report from the Committee of Safety to the Parliamentary Commissioners of Hertfordshire. (HMC Portland MS.)

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>66</sup> London and South-East Battlefield Trust battle report, p.4. [www.btlse.co.uk](http://www.btlse.co.uk)

<sup>67</sup> Bulstrode Whitelocke, *Memorials of the English affairs, or, An historical account of what passed from the begging of the reign of King Charles I to King Charles II and his happy restoration* (London, 1682) p.62-63

<sup>68</sup> Williamson, *Hampden...* p.314

<sup>69</sup> Bares-Baker, *Siege of Reading...* p.56

Ironically, it was this eagerness to attack that arguably led to Hampden's death in the Battle of Chalgrove in June 1643. It was in this skirmish that Hampden demonstrated both his strengths as a military leader and his shortcomings. The battle came about as a result of a Royalist Cavalry raid through Parliamentary lines in Buckinghamshire led by Prince Rupert. Once Hampden had received news of the raid, he immediately formed a makeshift force of Parliamentary horsemen and began the pursuit of Rupert's party. Despite the fact that Hampden only commanded roughly 400 men to Rupert's 1,200<sup>70</sup> he decided to attack the Royalist forces when they had reached the outskirts of the village of Chalgrove in Oxfordshire. During the ensuing struggle, the Parliamentary cavalry were forced to retreat and were eventually routed after they had, in the words of the Earl of Essex '...charged them [Rupert's men] and slew divers of them'<sup>71</sup>. In the opening stages of the clash, Hampden received a mortal shot wound to his shoulder.

John Hampden's personal courage in this engagement cannot be doubted and is highlighted in the following account of the battle provided in a Parliamentary news pamphlet in the succeeding weeks:

'...Amongst those Colonels and commanders that were at an instant willing to hazard their lives upon this design, [was] Colonel Hampden, (who is a gentleman that hath never been wanting to adventure his life and fortunes for the good and welfare of his King and Country'.<sup>72</sup>

The Earl of Essex also states that Hampden 'charged with much courage'<sup>73</sup> in the frontline of the Parliamentary cavalry. The skirmish at Chalgrove also demonstrated Hampden's ability to motivate the men under his command and further underlines the power his personal reputation wielded over his peers. It is remarkable that even in the main Royalist account of the Battle it is conceded that:

'To say the truth; they [Hampden's men] stood our first charge of Pistols and Swords, better than the rebels have ever yet done since their first beating at Worcester, especially those of their right-wing'.

Clearly, the troopers who fought with or under Hampden in the battle were encouraged by his presence amongst them.

Yet the undoubted personal bravery displayed by Hampden and the inspiring effect his leadership had on his men cannot mask the fact that the decision to attack Rupert's force was a significant tactical blunder. Hampden had acted without sufficient military intelligence on the strength or location of his opponent, and the judgment to attack was a rash one. As Bares-Baker compellingly maintains, the loss of Hampden to Parliament's cause was so great that even 'if Chalgrove had been a genuine Parliamentary victory, the disappearance of the Buckinghamshire M.P. would have outweighed any advantage short of the death of Prince Rupert...or the total annihilation of his cavalry'<sup>74</sup>. Perhaps, due to his notorious modesty, Hampden did not realise his importance to Parliament's cause and Essex's Army. Nevertheless it seems inconceivable that a man of Hampden's intelligence would not have realised, at least in part, the significance his political and military role within the Parliamentary war effort.

There is however a school of thought that has suggested Hampden did not assume the command of Parliamentary force pursuing Rupert's raiding party, and should therefore not assume responsibility for its eventual defeat. Although the Earl of Clarendon states that Hampden 'was of that universal authority that no officer paused to obey him'<sup>75</sup> in the Chalgrove episode it is possible that he subordinated himself to more experienced cavalry commanders within his improvised unit. Bares-Baker supports this view, maintaining that Major Gunter, the senior cavalryman in the party, 'was an

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<sup>70</sup> Adair, find page reference, or Williamson/Bares-Baker

<sup>71</sup> Parliamentary Pamphlet entitled 'Two letters from the Earl of Essex', June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1643 (Thomason Tracts E55, British Library)

<sup>72</sup> Parliamentary Pamphlet, 'A true relation of a Great fight' (Thomason Tracts, British Library)

<sup>73</sup> Parliamentary Pamphlet, 'Two Letters', June 23<sup>rd</sup> 1643 (Thomason Tracts, British Library)

<sup>74</sup> Bares-Baker, *Siege of Reading...* p.191

<sup>75</sup> Adair, *The Patriot...* p.256

experienced officer, and it is unlikely that he would have let Hampden have browbeat him into anything he wouldn't have done himself".<sup>76</sup> Thus, the delegation of blame for the outcome of the Battle of Chalgrove is somewhat more complicated than one may originally assume.

A comprehensive assessment of Hampden's military contribution to the Parliamentary cause requires a detailed understanding of the various forms of leadership he provided during the opening two years of the Civil War. Perhaps the single most important contribution of Hampden's to Parliament's war effort was in his capacity as a successful logistical organiser. As it has been demonstrated in this chapter, Hampden used his personal and political contacts extremely effectively in order to raise essential funds and manpower for Parliament's main field army. Hampden also possessed the foresight to understand the importance of winning the struggle for the hearts and minds of the civilian population, something his Royalist opponents crucially lacked. For such an inexperienced commander, Hampden also demonstrated a keen grasp of military strategy and was not afraid to provide strategic leadership when required. On a tactical level, Hampden displayed a remarkable ability to deploy his regiment at the right place and at the right time, a vital quality of a successful commander. Evidence of this can be found in Battle of Edgehill, and most importantly for the Parliamentary cause during the Battle of Brentford. Moreover, Hampden never lacked personal courage in combat, and as an inherent motivator his influence on his fellow soldiers was considerable.

Yet the significance of Hampden's military leadership should not be overplayed. Hampden was certainly no tactical or strategic military genius, and neither did he claim to be. Furthermore, Hampden's military leadership was primarily limited to the control of his own regiment and the Deputy-Lieutenants of his own county constituency. The majority of contemporary evidence suggests that Hampden was perhaps an over-aggressive and potentially rash commander. Indeed, these traits eventually led to Hampden's eventual death in the Battle of Chalgrove. Yet, these failings should not detract from Hampden's overall military contribution to the Civil War. Hampden was certainly a natural leader, and Essex's Army undoubtedly benefited from his presence in the field.

## Conclusion

"Truly Jenny (and I know you may be easily persuaded to it), he was a gallant man, an honest man, an able man and take all, I know not to any man living second"<sup>77</sup>

**Arthur Goodwin**

"With Hampden died the most persuasive and generally popular member of the parliamentary party, but also one that was widely felt to be its noblest representative"<sup>78</sup>

**C.V.Wedgwood**

"Never was there such consternation and sorrow at one man's death, and when tidings thereof did reach London, in the Parliament and the people throughout the land; as if their whole army had been defeated; his private loss in unspeakable"<sup>79</sup>

**The Earl of Clarendon**

John Hampden provided crucial political and military leadership throughout the opening two years of the English Civil War. Yet his role never amounted to hegemony over the Parliamentary cause. Hampden provided guidance, rather than direct control over his peers in Parliament and its military forces. The real power that Hampden possessed was in his perceived nobility of character, which was

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<sup>76</sup> Bares-Baker, *Siege of Reading...* p.189

<sup>77</sup> Adair, *The Patriot...* p.242

<sup>78</sup> Wedgwood, *Kings War...*p.209

<sup>79</sup> Lockyer, *Edward Hyde; Earl of Clarendon...* p.123

widely acknowledged even amongst the supporters of Charles I. In the words of J.H. Hexter, John Hampden did indeed act as the 'moral cement'<sup>80</sup> that bound rival factions within Parliament together, in a united front against the King. The near universal respect commanded by Hampden in the Commons proved strong enough to overcome numerous personal animosities. Hampden thus lent a vital degree of legitimacy to Parliament's actions and provided an unspoken authority in the constitutional crisis of January 1642.

Hampden's political skills are undoubted. Although not a high profile public orator in the same vein as John Pym, Hampden understood the dynamics of Parliament better than any of his contemporaries. He enjoyed a powerful talent for judging the political atmosphere in House of Commons, and was consequently able to steer it in the direction he believed was for the good of the country. Evidence for these abilities is rife throughout the course of the Long Parliament and during the key Grand Remonstrance debate. Hampden was indisputably an idealist and fiercely believed in the legal privileges of Parliament. Nevertheless, he wedded this idealism with a steely determination to stay the course and an acute understanding of political expediency.

Yet Adair's comparison of Hampden's role in the Civil War to that of a seventeenth century Winston Churchill is fundamentally misguided. For whilst both individuals were natural leaders, Hampden never held a comparable position of absolute control over the Parliamentary campaign. Likewise, Hampden was certainly no master of military strategy in the league of Cromwell or Prince Rupert, but when he did see action he proved an able and fearless regimental commander. More importantly, Hampden understood the logistical and financial demands of the Civil War and was an efficient organiser of the Parliamentary war effort.

John Hampden was widely expected to provide leadership at the outbreak of the Civil War and he certainly never failed his countrymen in this regard. But, he was only ever one of a number of important Parliamentary figureheads, even if Hampden's reputation placed him as a first amongst equals within this group. Hampden's contributions to the Parliamentary cause were as diverse as they were significant. He provided Parliament with military leadership, political guidance, moral standing and a strong sense of pragmatism. What makes these contributions even more remarkable is that Hampden continued to fulfil these roles in the face of grievous personal loss, losing both a son and a daughter in opening stages of the war along with his close friend Lord Brooke in early 1643. Moreover, Hampden suffered a significant personal blow with the desertion of Sir John Hotham to the King, and in the public betrayal of Sir Robert Pye, his son-in-law's father who was also reconciled with Charles I. It speaks volumes for Hampden's strength of character and the respect he commanded from his contemporaries that he survived these challenges and continued to provide guidance to the Parliamentary cause.

In conclusion, it is an injustice of history that John Hampden's essential leadership role in the English Civil War has been so largely neglected. Perhaps the relatively understated nature of his role during the conflict has played a part in this. Conceivably, Hampden's discreet character and lack of obvious eccentricity have combined to make him inaccessible to historians. Perhaps the historical esteem in which Hampden was held in the nineteenth century led to a sense of academic complacency and resulted in a lack of relevant literature. Yet John Hampden was a successful and authoritative war leader, and his fundamental contribution to Parliament's ultimate victory should not be forgotten. To use Clarendon's earlier metaphor, Hampden was indeed the pilot that steered Parliament's cause from 1642-1643, but his hand was not alone on the tiller.

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<sup>80</sup> Hexter, *King Pym*.... p.94

## Appendix A

Recent research from local military historian Derek Lester has proved that Hampden and his Parliamentary forces were not significantly outnumbered during the battle, as both Hugh Ross Williamson and John Adair suggests. In fact, it can be estimated that total Parliamentarian cavalry forces in the battle amounted to approximately one thousand troopers and dragoons. Roughly speaking, this was a similar sized force to the Royalist Horse under Prince Rupert's command. Such evidence undermines the view that Hampden was guilty of a reckless and irresponsible attack on the Royalist cavalry, if indeed Hampden was in supreme command of the Parliamentary forces on the day of the battle.

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