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Hugh Boscawen, *The Capture of Louisbourg, 1758*. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2011. Pp. xxxviii, 466. ISBN 978-0-8061-4413-9.

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The siege of Louisbourg in 1758 has been the subject of contemporaneous accounts<sup>1</sup> and later, classic overviews of both the siege and the Seven Years' War in general.<sup>2</sup> Yet, two new, complementary studies of the battle published since 2007 deserve our attention. The first, A.J.B. Johnston's *Endgame 1758*,<sup>3</sup> presents a "biography" of the key colonial fortress, with exceptionally valuable insights into its evolution under French rule. In the second, *The Capture of Louisbourg, 1758*, Hugh Boscawen offers an alternate analysis, focusing more narrowly on the British amphibious operation that finally wrested control of the citadel from its defenders. He also aims to place the battle within the context of the wider military conflict and carefully assess the leadership and professional abilities of important figures on both sides. Boscawen's thesis, which reflects his primary interest in traditional military history, is that the fall of Louisbourg represented a pivotal "milestone in the Seven Years' War" (335), one that precipitated Britain's subsequent victory in North America.

The book proceeds chronologically, beginning with three chapters on the initial planning of the operation, the background of the French fortress, and British preparations for the attack. The following eight chapters describe the course and aftermath of the siege itself. The book also features an introduction and conclusion, as well as such enhancements as maps and tables, four appendices,<sup>4</sup> and an invaluable eleven-page glossary of "selected terms used in fortification, siege warfare, and at sea" (411).

Boscawen's opening chapters examine the background of the campaign. He points out that the coalition government formed by Prime Minister Thomas Pelham-Holles (Duke of Newcastle) and William Pitt remained somewhat divided between colleagues who respected, rather than liked, each other. Regardless, they formed an effective partnership, as Newcastle generally deferred to Pitt on directing the war itself (3-4). Boscawen regards the Royal Navy as a "lackluster" force prior to 1758: many of its ships were disabled by "wood rot" and it suffered from a weak command structure that permitted indifferent officers to lead fleets into action. He even speculates that the trial and subsequent execution of Adm. John Byng after his defeat at Minorca (1756) "may indeed have had a salutary effect" (15-17) on the navy. As for King George II's army, the quality of its regular units deployed in America steadily improved following the opening years of the war. Although its "structure, peacetime size, and training constraints militated against continuous effectiveness," Boscawen notes that its "campaign record in America (and Germany) suggests that it had the professional officers who could train it, over time, for success against both regular troops and irregulars in close country," though the "attitude maintained by some [that] Provincial officers' opinions could be ignored ... led to setbacks" (19).

In contrast to the redcoats, who conducted nearly all of the fighting for the British at Louisbourg, French ground forces were a mix of four types of formations: the "Troupes de la Marine," who excelled in "field craft" techniques adapted "from their Indian allies"; local militia known as "Volontaires Bourgeois";

1. Thomas Mante, *The History of the Late War in North-America, and the Islands of the West-Indies ...* (London 1772), and Robert Beatson, *Naval and Military Memoirs of Great Britain from the Year 1727, to the Present Time* (London 1790).

2. Julian Corbett, *England in the Seven Years' War: A Study in Combined Strategy* (London: Longmans, 1907); J.S. McLennan, *Louisbourg, from Its Foundation to Its Fall, 1713-1758* (London: Macmillan, 1918); Guy Frégault, *Canada: The War of the Conquest* (Toronto: Oxford U Pr, 1969); Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (NY: Knopf, 2000).

3. Subtitle: *The Promise, the Glory, and the Despair of Louisbourg's Last Decade* (Lincoln: U Nebraska Pr, 2007).

4. A, "Louisbourg Today"; B, "British Order of Battle"; C, "French Order of Battle"; D, "Louisbourg Ships and Residents—Past and Present."

the “Troupes de Terre” of the French regular army; and the “Volontaires Étrangers,” which included many professional soldiers recruited in Germany who expected to use formal European methods on campaign. Boscawen notes, however, that the inadequacies of their commanders effectively nullified the evident quality of these forces (21–23). The French navy, by contrast, possessed some competent officers, but suffered from a chronic shortage of sailors, a problem often exacerbated by the poor diet and rampant outbreaks of disease on board ships (24–25).

Upon receiving word that a hurricane had unhinged Lord Loudoun and Vice Adm. Francis Holburne’s attempt on Louisbourg in 1757, Pitt convened a special “Secret Committee” and initiated a novel “military policy” that shifted emphasis from Europe to America. The goal of this renewed endeavor remained the same, but the ministers determined to assail the French stronghold with the largest combined arms force that Great Britain had yet deployed overseas (49–51). At this critical moment, with the French fleet tottering under the ravages of typhus and a shortage of matériel, the Marine still attempted to funnel relief into Louisbourg, which they correctly surmised to be the foremost British objective in the coming season. Despite this effort, Boscawen shows, the British upset French plans with a successful campaign in the Atlantic to prepare the waters for their design in North America (80–84).

The victory of Adm. Henry Osborn’s squadron in the Mediterranean induced his counterpart—Vice Adm. Jean-François de la Clue—to retreat into the port of Toulon, thus preventing ships bound for New France from sailing through the Straits of Gibraltar. Other British fleets blockaded ports on France’s Atlantic coast, further constraining the flow of goods into Louisbourg (50, 98). Meanwhile, British forces assembled at Halifax began final preparations for their amphibious assault. During their hiatus in Nova Scotia, the remarkably proficient joint staff of expedition commanders Adm. Edward Boscawen and Maj. Gen. Jeffery Amherst oversaw coordination of land and sea forces and instituted a diverse training regimen for their troops, who practiced landing shallow-draft vessels in the surf, building entrenchments, forming up for battle on the beach, and firing at targets (125, 130–39).

Boscawen’s chapters on the actual operations before Louisbourg constitute the most detailed modern account of the siege now in print. His intelligent assessments of tactics and topography appear especially impressive. The author ably demonstrates that the British assault landing at Cormorandière almost failed amid roiling coastal swells and torrents of enemy fire (163–64). Lt. Col. Mascle de St. Julien’s defenders retired in reasonably good order after a party led by Brig. James Wolfe, which had organized within an isolated cove, finally mounted an attack against their flank. This maneuver allowed the rest of Amherst’s forces to land on the beach. Nevertheless,

James Wolfe described the landing as rash, injudicious, and undeserving of success. He may have been distancing himself from an attack ordered by Amherst, but planned and commanded by himself, an operation rescued at the critical moment by a few quick-thinking and gallant officers and men.... The assault landing had been hazardous—all such operations are—but Wolfe had failed to appreciate the significance of the abatis at Cormorandière and the artillery and infantry positioned to fire into it. (169)

As the redcoats relentlessly expanded their new beachhead, Amherst and his officers initially deemed Louisbourg’s fortifications to be quite formidable and advanced with due caution. Despite this deliberate pace, sharp divisions rapidly emerged between the garrison’s military and naval commanders as their more numerous and better equipped attackers arrayed against them. Notwithstanding abiding French concerns for their deteriorating position, Boscawen shows that, after their landing, the redcoats required considerable outside assistance, including Col. Nathaniel Meserve and his detachment of over a hundred New Hampshire carpenters, some female camp followers who volunteered to drag several cannons into firing position, and, especially, several hundred personnel recruited from the fleet to serve as laborers (208, 223, 225, 253, 265, 269, 273). The importance of the naval component of the combined arms operation became most obvious at a crucial moment in the battle, when a force of British sailors rowed undetected past unsuspecting sentries on the shore and boarded two French warships in the early morning hours of 26 July. The assault teams, which filled nearly fifty large whale boats, swarmed onto the decks of the *Bienfaisant* and the *Prudent*, ultimately towing away the first vessel and setting fire to the second (277–79). In the raid’s aftermath,

the governor of Louisbourg, veteran naval officer Augustin de Boschenry, Chevalier de Drucour, summoned a council of war, which eventually agreed to request terms.

In addition to identifying himself as a former officer of the Coldstream Guards, who ranked as a colonel after thirty-two years in the British army, author Boscawen also acknowledges that he is a direct descendant of the admiral who led the naval component of the expedition. Despite his close professional and familial connections to his chosen subject, his book shows relatively little bias. Boscawen astutely observes that British commanders carefully considered “and adopted” advice offered by Brig. Samuel Waldo, a New Englander who led part of the provincial expedition that first captured Louisbourg in 1745 (54–57). On occasion, he might have clarified some of his conclusions. For example, he assigns great significance to the extensive training that Amherst’s regulars received while at Halifax—“an important phase in the army’s development” (118)—but he never conclusively explains how Gen. William Pepperell’s “ill-trained” force of New England provincials managed to subdue the fortress, despite considerable infighting with supporting units of the Royal Navy (314).

More controversially, Boscawen states that the victory at Louisbourg was a “crossover point [which] may mark ... the beginning of the end of the American colonies” (334–35) in the empire. This overstates the impact of the operation. British victories at Forts Frontenac and Duquesne, and the role of Maj. Gen. James Abercromby’s defeated army in drawing a significant proportion of French strength away from Louisbourg, also contributed to the success of the campaign. Subsequent triumphs at Guadeloupe, Quebec, Montreal, Martinique, and Havana exerted additional influence on the treaty negotiations that eventually granted much of Canada to Britain, as well as on political, military, and economic developments that followed the Seven Years’ War.

These reservations aside, Hugh Boscawen’s comprehensive yet nuanced analysis of the Louisbourg operation merits considerable acclaim for its elucidation of eighteenth-century land and sea warfare and its assiduous attention to the maneuvering of individual units. The provision of names and descriptions of specific Royal Artillery companies, which rarely appear in archival records, deserves particular praise. While Johnston’s superb biography of Louisbourg remains essential to our understanding of the importance of the fortress during the French regime, *The Capture of Louisbourg, 1758* is the most perceptive in-depth account of the siege now available.