



## *The Struggle for North America, 1754–1758: Britannia’s Tarnished Laurels*

by George Yagi.

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The epic conflict recalled as the Seven Years’ War in North America (or the French and Indian War, or *la Guerre de la Conquête*) has been covered in print so often<sup>1</sup> that one might think there is little left to be written on the subject. Nonetheless, historian George Yagi (Univ. of the Pacific) has produced an eminently readable, wide-ranging rehabilitation of Britain’s first three commanders in chief in North America.<sup>2</sup> The French and First Nations appear in Yagi’s narrative alongside many familiar British blunders: Braddock’s Defeat, Oswego, Fort William Henry, and Loudoun’s false start against Louisbourg. He focuses much more, however, on the British military’s struggles with a tangled chain of command, intractable Anglo-American colonists, and the formidable American wilderness.

Yagi presents an excellent survey of the challenges for British military administration, logistics, and campaigning during a period of crisis and overall defeat. With an organization more thematic than chronological, he offers several views of Britain’s fledgling war effort. His densely footnoted text is reminiscent in some respects of J.A. Houlding’s classic book<sup>3</sup> on the British Army, or Stanley Pargellis’s still valuable reassessment of Lord Loudoun.<sup>4</sup> Yagi’s subtitle, however, is precisely correct: his is indeed an institutional history of the British war effort and should not be mistaken for a general campaign history.

Yagi begins in chapter 1 with the orders, organization, and expeditions of British forces in 1753–54 and concludes in chapter 7 with the successful amphibious operation against Louisbourg in 1758. In between, chapters 2 and 3 lay out various problems in British-colonial relations and cooperation; chapter 4 assesses Amerindian diplomacy and warfare; chapter 5 concerns issues of military supply; and chapter 6 reconstructs the day-to-day routines and hazards for British and colonial land forces. The war’s early battles and campaigns often fade into the background of discussions of colonial price gouging, light infantry formations, sanitation for camps and forts, and the natural terrors of fog and forest in and around eastern North America.

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1. See, esp., Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years’ War and the Fate of British North America, 1754–1766* (NY: Knopf, 2000) and *The War That Made America* (NY: Viking, 2005); Matt Schumann and Karl Schweizer, *The Seven Years’ War: A Transatlantic History* (NY: Routledge, 2008); Daniel Baugh, *The Global Seven Years’ War, 1754–1763* (NY: Longman, 2011); and William R. Nester, *The French and Indian War and the Conquest of New France* (Norman: U Okla Pr, 2014).

2. The author draws heavily on his dissertation, “A Study of Britain’s Military Failure during the Initial Stages of the Seven Years’ War in North America, 1754–1758” (Univ. of Exeter, 2007).

3. *Fit For Service: The Training of the British Army, 1715–1795* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 1981)

4. *Lord Loudoun in North America* (New Haven: Yale U Pr, 1933).

The author's stress on the testing conditions of warfare in North America serve to mitigate the failings of British commanders in chief. Maj. Gen. Sir Edward Braddock, Massachusetts Governor William Shirley, and John Campbell, 4th Earl of Loudoun, as well as Adm. Sir Francis Holbourne come off better here than in the previous historiography. All four men had to master military administration, the treacherous patronage-driven politics of Georgian Britain and its colonies, and, not least, the elements of nature, before they could even come to grips with the French and their indigenous allies.

Yagi's main argument merits the careful scrutiny of present-day military scientists and historians. As though working backward from Clausewitz's maxim that the best laid plans seldom survive first contact with the enemy, the author invites us to consider *precisely which* enemy disrupted those plans: the one against whom war has been declared, the one presented by the environment, or even the one within a commander's own military and/or political ranks?

Two segments of chapter 6 stand out as the most original and compelling in the book; they reflect Yagi's expertise in the British army's diet in the field<sup>5</sup> and the medical acumen of Dr. John Pringle.<sup>6</sup> Conventional wisdom preaches that an army marches on its stomach and Yagi demonstrates over and over how much more important were British supplies of fresh food (ready or scarce) than even the stereotypical vitals of arms and ammunition.

In sum, *The Struggle for North America* is a fine, succinct work of military history, well organized and indexed, cleanly printed, replete with apt references, useful endnotes, and a full bibliography. But it has its flaws, some trivial,<sup>7</sup> others more serious. Among the latter, Yagi's treatment of psychological warfare in chapter 6 might have gained much from the Lyttleton papers in the Clements Library, which frequently attest to the panic in South Carolina about an imagined expedition from Fort Toulouse. It is also surprising to find no mention of the siege of Fort Bull, following the fall of Oswego. Finally, amid Yagi's discussions of scalping bounties and British-allied Amerindians, there are no references to the Phips Proclamation against the Penobscots (1755), the Native American recruits among Gorham's Rangers in Nova Scotia, or the hopes vested in the mixed-race village of Stockbridge, Massachusetts.<sup>8</sup>

Given that Britain's relations with Native Americans are so central to Yagi's book, why devote so much of chapter 4 to downplaying their role? I agree with him that Amerindians appeared no more formidable than many European irregular formations by 1758, and for many good reasons. Still, just off the battlefield, it is curious, given Yagi's wide reading in the subject, that he should

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5. See his "Surviving the Wilderness: The Diet of the British Army and the Struggle for Canada, 1754-1760," *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 89.357 (2011) 66-86.

6. Author of *Observations on the Diseases of the Army* (London, 1752).

7. E.g., on page 2, "By the 1758"; on 63, "scare supplies"; on 102, "soldier's" (read soldiers'); on 154, "most deadliest." Duplicated quotations include Loudoun "on horseback but not riding on" (23, 25), orders about provincial officer ranks (21, 61), Baron Dieskau lamenting of the Bloody Morning Scout that he would have "cut them all off" (58, 59), and poor progress on the bateaux at Albany (114, 176). Last, but not least, different figures for colonial populations (5, 95).

8. See Spencer Phips, "Proclamation of 3 November 1755" (Boston, 1755); William Clements Library, John Gorham MSS; John Grenier, *The Far Reaches of Empire: War in Nova Scotia, 1710-1760* (Norman: U Okla Pr, 2008); and Patrick Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge* (Lincoln: U Nebraska Pr, 1992).

say so little about efforts at Amerindian diplomacy.<sup>9</sup> Though it would do little to change the narrative of the Houdenosaunee and other groups failing to come on side, material in the voluminous published letters of Sir William Johnson and the *New York Colonial Documents* series would have buttressed Yagi's argument (shared with Fred Anderson, who makes much of the diplomacy at Easton, Pennsylvania) that Amerindian neutrality, not alliance with the British, made such a major strategic difference by 1758.<sup>10</sup>

These criticisms aside, Yagi makes a generally persuasive argument that Braddock, Shirley, and Loudoun have received far less credit than their efforts deserved in the early stages of the French and Indian War. As noted in the author's conclusion, Braddock may have been a less than ideal choice to conduct warfare on the American frontier, but before his famous defeat at the Monongahela, he had already overcome recalcitrant colonists, strained logistics, and many natural obstacles. Shirley also, Yagi reminds us, had a successful career directing Massachusetts's energies against Louisbourg in 1745–46 and toward the Kennebec in 1754; his insights about British finance and colonial relations ultimately proved correct, as Pitt restored the hierarchies and systems of finance and provision in 1758 that had encouraged colonial activity in the 1740s. And, though Loudoun's reputation was rescued by Stanley Pargellis (note 4 above), Yagi offers a poignant reminder that the conquering armies of Amherst and Wolfe (and Bradstreet and Forbes) owed much to Loudoun's efforts to unite colonial governors and assemblies in the wider British war effort.

For its wide purview, extensive documentation, and meticulous attention to detail, George Yagi's lively new survey should become standard reading on its subject. Complementing Anderson's chronological history, it offers a needed administrative study of British war making in North America during the early stages of the Seven Years' War.

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9. On which, see Matthew C. Ward, *Breaking the Backcountry: The Seven Years' War in Virginia and Pennsylvania, 1754–1765* (Pittsburgh: Univ. Pr, 2003), and James H. Merrell, *Into the American Woods: Negotiators on the Pennsylvania Frontier* (NY: Norton, 1999) chap. 6.

10. James Sullivan, et al., eds., *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, 14 vols. (Albany, 1921–65); John Romeyn Brodhead and E.B. O'Callaghan, eds., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, 1st series, 11 vols. (Albany, 1856–61).