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A. J. B. Johnston, *Endgame, 1758: The Promise, the Glory, and the Despair of Louisbourg's Last Decade*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2007. x + 365 pp. Notes, illustrations, maps, appendices, and index. \$19.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-0-8032-6009-2.

Review by Kenneth Banks, University of Ottawa/l'Université d'Ottawa.

The course of eighteenth-century French overseas settlement, commercial ventures, and indeed, the very philosophy of a French version of an imperial vision were written into the stones of Louisbourg. Jutting from the eastern shore of what is today's Cape Breton Island, Canada, and now a stunningly restored site by Parks Canada, the French Marine (which handled both the Navy and overseas settlements) ordered the founding of Louisbourg on what was then called Île Royale in 1717. Its role was multi-faceted: to guard the Grand Banks cod fisheries; to stand sentinel over the sea entry into New France; and to provide a secure depot for West Indian sugar, French brandy, and smuggled goods, all the while wielding a heavy club over the brow of bustling New England. Ironically, this expensive, stout seaport fortress fell on both occasions that it was attacked, in 1745 and 1758. And while the first siege has been recounted in some detail by a number of historians, the second has been given surprisingly less print, in part due to the better known battle at Quebec that has assumed epic proportions as the end (incorrectly) of French fighting in the American phase of the Seven Years' War (or French and Indian War).

A. J. B. (Andrew John Bayly) Johnston aptly employs the extended metaphor of a chess game—which observes a strict etiquette, is played over a barren patch of territory, and relies on sacrifices of lowly pawns to advance positions—to convey the long, bloody match between the imperial forces of Great Britain and France over the fate of the French seaport fortress of Louisbourg. He is at pains to drive home one over-arching point. Just as one cannot understand a chess game by observing the moves of just one side, historians have for too long condensed or simply ignored the French element in understanding the events leading up to the capture of Louisbourg in 1758.

Johnston is uniquely qualified to write on colonial Louisbourg. One of the select group of Parks Canada historians at the Fortress of Louisbourg Project, he has written or edited at least eleven monographs and over three dozen articles or government reports since 1977, mainly on the eighteenth-century seaport fortress. His thesis is straightforward: "the imperial power that prevailed at Louisbourg was the one that brought and effectively used more resources" (p. 5). Strong on narrative, but thin on analysis, and peppered with armchair counterfactuals, Johnston's latest does not provide any new interpretation of Louisbourg's role in France's surging Atlantic economy in the first half of the eighteenth century, or advance any new perspectives on why the seaport fortress fell. In fact, he largely embraces the earlier assessments of Louisbourg's military weaknesses previously identified by Ian K. Steele, George G.F. Stanley, if not Louisbourg *eminence grise* John S. McLennan (1918).^[1]

Instead, Johnston's stated aim is to set right the omissions by historians, notably Fred Anderson's *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* that present only one side of the game of empire, as it were.^[2] In this

reviewer's mind, however, Johnston's greatest contribution is to bring his decades of experience at the site of Louisbourg and his formidable knowledge of the archives and archaeological reports to chart the hardships for civilians and the ever-constricting resources that colonial

administrators faced when trying to govern Louisbourg effectively and organize its defense. While at odds with another of Johnston's stated aims, which is to rescue Louisbourg's military history from the overtly civilian cloak thrown over the site by Parks Canada in its re-building program (pp. 289-90), the book nicely incorporates, if perhaps unconsciously on Johnston's part, the general trend in the new military historiography to encompass the totality of war on combatants and civilians alike.

The fall of Louisbourg was ten years in the making. Soon after the end of the inconclusive War of the Austrian Succession (in the Anglo-American colonies, King George's War, 1744-48), France negotiated the return of the seaport fortress, which had been captured by British and Anglo-American forces after a tough, three-week siege in the summer of 1745. The French Minister of the Marine, the comte de Maurepas, repatriated nearly two thousand civilians, doubled the size of the garrison, and assigned a professional engineer to rebuild and complete the walls of the town. Having lost Louisbourg in the game of diplomacy, the British government determined not to allow it to re-emerge unchecked. In 1749, it sponsored the founding of Louisbourg's alter-ego nearly two hundred miles further south, the new naval port of Halifax.

For the next six years, the French Louisbourg and British Halifax (the latter also supported by the governor and merchants of Massachusetts) engaged in a series of proxy skirmishes in the Île Royale-Nova Scotia region. Both sides understood that conflict would be renewed at nearly any moment, and they made that belief a reality. Johnston places the Louisbourg-Halifax rivalry squarely into the series of the formative military rivalries between French and British combatants around the world in the 1750s: India; the slave forts of the Atlantic littoral of West Africa; the closely-packed slave plantation islands of the Caribbean; and, of course, the Ohio backcountry.

French and British efforts focused on the strategic Chignecto isthmus (which bridges New Brunswick and Nova Scotia) to extend their influence in the region among Mi'kmaq, Kenebec, Abenaki, and other native tribes, as well as among Catholic, French-speaking Acadians under British rule. From his secure base at Halifax, acting Governor Charles Lawrence removed French palisaded forts, attempted (unsuccessfully) to buy off native warriors, and finally ordered the forced removal of the Acadians. Johnston notes that senior French officials in Louisbourg, quite aware of the deportation (or *la Grande Dérangement*) initially expressed little surprise or outrage. Louisbourg's governor, Augustin de Boschenry, Chevalier de Drucour, fretted more over the loss of livestock that the Acadians had traded to feed the town's garrison (86). The escalation of forces and the eruption of a shooting war (which premeditated the European theatre by nearly two years), brought early French victories. Louisbourg once again reprised its role as an impregnable fortress, filled with French regular soldiers and amply supplied by the French navy.

Or did it? Johnston shows how the town's officers and its leading merchants escalated their preparations for war against a background of increasingly severe deprivations and suspicions. As early as the summer of 1755, with the Acadian deportation underway and a clear example of what might befall them, Louisbourg's civilian and military populations began to feel the precariousness of their situation. British warships initiated regular cruises within sight of the harbor, picking off stray merchantmen. Louisbourg's chief engineer, Louis Franquet, begged the court for funds and men to repair gates, breaches in the walls, and forward positions, all to no avail. French regiments were plagued by desertions (although surprisingly, some Catholics also defected from the British side), which not only weakened ranks but also undermined security, as some deserters sought to sell information to the British in order to secure their safety. A fire at the king's bakery and a poor harvest in neighboring Île St. Jean (today Prince Edward Island) led to a serious shortage of bread. Even a highly-placed spy, a

governor's secretary, somehow revealed the extent of suffering in detailed reports to the military commanders at Halifax.

Most enervating of all, long-entrenched snobbishness and divisive struggles over scant resources, pitted authorities against each other: civilians against troops, of course; but also metropolitan regiments against French colonial troops; metropolitan naval against army commanders; and the chief civilian officer of *police* (technically, a *commissaire ordonnateur*) Jacques Prévost de la Croix, against pretty well all military officers. Well before William Pitt identified Louisbourg as the primary North American target, Johnston convincingly shows the fortress had already endured a protracted siege by the French themselves.

By early 1758, the situation for Louisbourg worsened dramatically. The French Navy possessed less than half the number of ships of the line (that is, those mounting seventy-four or more cannon) as did the British, commanded far fewer sailors (in part due to an outbreak of typhus), and were no longer able to send supply ships regularly to replenish the town. By late winter, Anglo-American workman and British soldiers engulfed Halifax to make preparations for the landing and siege, including the construction of six pre-fabricated blockhouses (p. 169). By mid-April, the first contingent of a force that would number over 160 vessels and some 27,000 men under General Jeffrey Amherst and (later) Admiral Edward Boscawen, took up its position off Louisbourg. In this section, Johnston navigates expertly through the labyrinth of official orders, diaries, personal letters, memorandums, and maps to recount the events over the summer of 1758.

The real drama concerned the landing, which almost did not take place. After waiting for nearly a week for foul whether to abate, the British commanders seized upon a break in the weather to begin. At first, the French, who could barely make out anything in the dawn fog, beat back the invaders; the British commanders began signaling a withdrawal. But by accident, three of the boats found a small, unguarded stretch of beach, deemed too rough by the French and therefore unguarded, and rowed in. The young Brigadier General James Wolfe, who would be the victor at Quebec the following year, noticed the boats' landing, reversed the retreat, and the British charged ashore. Once established on the 'board', their forces of some 16,000 went to work, slowly building batteries of cannon encircling the walls, a "noose tightening on the town," in order to choke it by bombardment (p. 250).

The section on the siege is long: events unfold like a horrible accident in slow motion. The narrative on the British side is carried forward by General Amherst's exceedingly cautious and minutely-planned preparations and actions. As Amherst apologetically explained in one letter to Prime Minister Pitt, "the difficulty of landing every thing in almost a continual Surf, the making of Roads [for artillery], draining and passing of Bogs, and putting ourselves under Cover, render our approach to the Place much longer than I could wish" (p. 246). In contrast to the bland pronouncements of Amherst and Boscawen, Johnston uses the diary and letters of Wolfe as a kind of comic foil to the serious and deadly business of siege warfare, who laments at one point, "My whole affair now is the spade and pickaxe" (p. 230).

On the other side of the walls, the portrait is unremittingly grim. Compounding the earlier problems of divisiveness and lack of funds (oddly, the food supply had apparently improved), a bitter feud erupted between French naval and military commanders over whether to allow French warships to sneak out of the harbor. The naval officers, led by Admiral Jean-Antoine Charry, Marquis des Grouttes, viewed Louisbourg as lost once the British had landed, and argued that the doomed French ships should leave Louisbourg in order fight another day. Governor Drucour, however, clinging to orders from court to defend Louisbourg at all costs, sought to prolong the siege as long as possible in order to prevent an attack on Quebec the same season, and refused des Grouttes permission to sail. Both sides wrote feverishly to Versailles to defend their positions. Des Grouttes even resorted to sending a stow-away officer on a small, fast-sailing ship to present his perspective at court.

Weakened by the rising number of wounded, outbreaks of illness, constant sleeplessness from bombardment, and worn down from moving both soldiers and armed civilians around at night to

anticipate the next British attack, a kind of morbid inertia seized the town. No one in command appeared sure what to do. In what could be a succinct summary of Louisbourg's officials and its inhabitants in this last decade, assistant engineer Grillot de Poilly, his advice on how to shore up the walls again ignored, could only scrawl in his diary, "I have the voice of man who cries in the desert" (p. 250).

The end arrived when honor and etiquette had been satisfied. Having held out against a force clearly far superior in size and heeding Prévost's call to protect the King's subjects, Governor Drucour reversed his initial decision to fight to the death and surrendered unconditionally on July 26. Despite holding all the cards, Amherst and Boscawen were clearly relieved, and reciprocated by imposing 'honorable' terms of surrender. Given the savage night assaults and brutal destruction on both sides of the siege, the virtually bloodless and relatively orderly occupation of the town still impresses the twenty-first century person exposed to news or realities of mass amputations, rape camps, and foul retributions. Honor had its uses.

The text is complemented by thirteen black and white, often grainy, reproductions of period maps, three outline maps created for the book and useful for locating the battle positions around Louisbourg, and four appendices summarizing naval and troop strengths on both sides. Johnston's writing style is generally clear and crisp. Not only is it well-suited to a more popular audience, but greatly aids in keeping the otherwise complex interplay and overlap of actions running in a smooth, comprehensible narrative. He has a kind of genius for capturing the right quote to express nuance of emotion or highlight ironies of the moment, no small feat for many academic writers. That being said, a stronger editorial hand might have been wished for, as the text suffers from more than the occasional trite sentence or repetitiveness. For example, to describe the painful experience of those Louisbourg inhabitants who returned to the port after the British restored it to France by the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748), Johnston writes, "Despite the overarching worries about security and food, the inhabitants of Louisbourg went on with their lives. The cycle of life continued." (p. 51).

To the degree that the book lacks a strong interpretative framework, it is a regrettable step backward from his previous *Control and Order in French Colonial Louisbourg*, which has become an invaluable study for French Atlantic historians.^[3] What Johnston has achieved is nonetheless considerable: a highly readable, energetic synthesis, that provides, for the first time, an equitable balance between French and English sources on a key historical match that defined a new political and social game in late colonial North America.

NOTES

[1] Ian K. Steele, *Warpaths: Invasions of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); George G. F. Stanley, *New France: The Last Phase, 1744-1760* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968); Lawrence Henry Gipson, *The British Empire Before the American Revolution*, vol. 7, *The Great War for the Empire: The Victorious Years, 1758-1760* (New York: A. Knopf, 1968); J. S. McLennan, *Louisbourg from Its Foundation to Its Fall, 1713-1758* (London: MacMillan, 1918).

[2] Fred Anderson, *The Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000).

[3] A. J. B. Johnston, *Control and Order in French Colonial Louisbourg, 1713-1758* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2001).

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