The Amphibious Imperative of the French and Indian War

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Abstract: In the French and Indian War, Britain's arrogance in land warfare in North America resulted in two years of near constant defeat and devastation to its forces and colonial residents. However, through an open-minded analysis of the situation, Britain improved its planning, logistics, diplomacy, tactics, operations, and strategy to make the most of its naval superiority. In a war where agile, irregular, and amphibious warfare were required to win, Britain adapted and won. Their processes and actions provide a classic study for modern-day joint operations leaders to examine.

Keywords: amphibious operations, Roger's Rangers, light infantry, British Royal Navy, French and Indian War, Seven Years' War

The Pertinence of History to Strategy

As strategy studies professor Colin S. Gray has pointed out, there is a delicate relationship between historians and strategists. Although most will not dismiss history outright, many modern strategists think that history is too specific, and twenty-first century warfare too complex and dynamic, to derive much from it.[1] However, both Gray and the equally eminent naval historian professor emeritus Geoffrey Till have made the point forcefully that history case studies are thinking aids for the preparation of strategy, not prescriptive blueprints. In other words, the study of history is a mental exercise

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for the well-rounded strategist, not a how-to or how-not-to manual. Geoffrey Till's often-quoted advice is worth mentioning again:

> The chief utility of history for the analysis of present and future lies in its ability, not to point out lessons, but to isolate things that need thinking about. . . . History provides insights and questions, not answers.[2]

The long history of the British Empire provides a wide range of situations across the globe to study, especially in naval and amphibious operations. As each course of action is studied and categorized, an exception can be found. As each exception is studied, deeper appreciation of the decisions is obtained. Again, the goal is not to find a shortcut but to understand the decisions, courses of action, and outcomes better. This practice provides insights and better sources of inquiry. This article focuses on the French and Indian War at the beginning of the British Empire as a case study to examine the plentiful amphibious operations at the tactical, operational, and strategic level, comparing and contrasting the choices made by Britain and France in North America.[3] Specifically, it focuses on how Britain advanced from a naval power that could transport troops trained for warfare on the European continent around the world to a true joint operation superpower that could conduct a range of land operations amphibiously at will.

Background to Conflict

By the mid-1750s in Europe, diplomatic and royal machinations had led to a reversal of old allies. Prussia and Britain aligned against Austria and France contra their alignment in the previous War of Austrian Succession, which occurred from 1740–48.[4] Only France and Britain remained traditional enemies. Further, Russia, Spain, and Saxony aligned with France, while Britain's Hanoverian king George II protected Hanover and smaller German protectorates with Prussia. These alliances would dictate what would happen on the continent, but the overseas war would be primarily between the two strongest actors—Britain and France.[5]

From the late seventeenth century to the midpoint of the eighteenth, Britain and France had fought wars in North America that were generally extensions of European conflicts. Most of these wars began in Europe with the North American conflicts being ancillary to the main European theater. The fighting in North America was also primarily between colonial forces and their native allies. However, the war that became the global Seven Years' War—known as the French and Indian War in North America—was precipitated largely by North American issues and conflict. Previously, North American land claims had, for the most part, remained distinctly separate, with the Spanish in the south and

southwest, the English on the eastern coast, and the French in the northern lakes and interior river valleys. However, around 1750, the English began to aggressively explore and claim areas in western Pennsylvania and Virginia near the Forks of the Ohio River. The forks were a confluence of two major rivers—the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers—that formed the Ohio River.

The French had operated in the area using the soft power of trade with as little impingement on the indigenous way of life as possible. Few French settlers entered the area, preferring to stay near the Saint Lawrence River settlements. The interior was traversed by French frontier traders, *coureur de bois*, which sometimes intermarried with the Native Americans and adopted their lifestyle. As Richard White stated, the French government, traders, and trappers often sought a middle ground with the Native Americans by employing a light footprint model of colonialism. The various tribes of the Ohio region managed a largely peaceful coexistence with the French, because they were not entering the Ohio region in large numbers and did not try to acquire massive plots of land for agriculture or speculation.[6] This was not what the English had in mind. The French had a population of only 60,000 people in North America, while the British had 2 million. The British colonies were continuing to receive settlers from Europe who wanted land. The aggressive use of the soil on the East Coast also meant that some of the oldest plantations were exhausted from overuse. The British model entailed trading with the Native Americans as well, but the English traders were followed by settlers who came en masse and wanted land for cattle and farming. Some of the land on the East Coast had been obtained legally from the Native Americans, but other situations involved fraud, theft, and manipulation. As the English enticed eastern Ohio Country tribes with trade, tribes that had been aligned with the French leaned more toward the British. Fearing loss of influence, the French began to exercise more control over the area. Then tensions began to rise.[7]

In late 1753, Major George Washington of the Virginia militia was sent by the Virginia lieutenant governor Robert Dinwiddie to meet the French commander of the Ohio Country to claim the area for Virginia. The mission failed, as Washington was told politely but firmly that the French had no intention of leaving the area. Dinwiddie was not deterred. In 1754, Dinwiddie again sent Washington to the Forks of the Ohio with a military force to secure the area. The French had constructed forts and portages at key points along the major rivers and lakes in the Ohio Country. This gave them a movement and logistical advantage over the British, who had to traverse dense forests and the Appalachian Mountains to reach the forks. Before Washington could reach the forks, he came into contact with a French party who claimed they were on a diplomatic mission, but Washington attacked before the French message could be received. In the following altercation, a wounded French lieutenant was killed

by one of Washington's indigenous allies. Washington found out the hard way that his objectives and the objectives of his Native American allies were not exactly the same. Fearing his force would be overcome by a follow-on French force, Washington retreated to an impromptu fort and awaited the French response. A larger French force did come and enveloped the poorly constructed fort. Washington surrendered under what he thought were generous but normal terms written in French, only to find out later that he had admitted to assassinating the French diplomatic envoy. Thus, brewing tensions in Europe were further enflamed by actions in North America. Along with the reversed alliances in Europe, this war would reverse the history of where European wars would start.[8]

At this stage, the British forces were woefully underprepared for military confrontations in North America. Although less populated than the British colonies, New France did have considerable regular forces in their *Troupes de la Marines* (French Marine regulars in New France) who had significant experience in the wilderness of the Ohio Country and far more indigenous allies. The *Troupes de la Marines* were formidable fighters in European-style warfare as well as irregular warfare as practiced by the Ohio Country tribes. Washington's ill-trained militia and volunteers were no match in training or experience. Britain would need to improve its capabilities in North America if it was going to compete with the French.

The War Begins

When word of Washington's failure made its way to London, the British leadership felt they could not let the French insistence on retaining the Ohio Country stand. The British decided to send the experienced British Army major general Edward Braddock to take command of the military effort in North America. Braddock arrived in early 1755 with two understrength British Army regiments from Ireland. Upon arriving, Braddock managed to upset everyone he came into contact with due to his arrogance. Having had no experience in North America, Braddock developed an ambitious but complicated plan to subdue French influence in North America.

Braddock's strategic plan was to cut off French resupply by taking key points along the Saint Lawrence River while simultaneously taking the Forks of the Ohio forcefully with a main column that he would lead personally. His would be an overland route through wilderness with a huge logistical train. The other three would be amphibious campaigns in one form or another. One would have a small unit leader at its head and move to meet one of Europe's best French generals along the Lac du Saint Sacrament (later named Lake George) and the Lake Champlain corridor to secure the prominent French Fort St. Frederic (Crown Point). Another, led by the governor of Massachusetts, would

attack along Lake Ontario to secure Fort Niagara and control the Great Lakes supply chain. The final campaign would conduct a seaborne landing to secure French forts in Nova Scotia. The three amphibious operations were designed to cut off the Ohio backcountry from further French support.[9]

Had this strategic plan included the advantages of professional leadership in each campaign, reliable allies, knowledge of the wilderness, and solid infrastructure, it might have succeeded. However, none of the above had been prepared, trained, or executed at this scale by the British before. The British had great strengths in naval superiority over the French, but had decided to focus primarily on areas where the French had the greatest strengths. Poor leadership and an arrogant ignorance of the difficulties of supplying large forces in the North American interior hobbled the British effort from the beginning. Colonel Robert Monckton's expedition up the Bay of Fundy to take the French forts in Nova Scotia was the one campaign where British naval strength was brought to bear and that mission was a success. General Braddock's march on the Forks of the Ohio failed due to his inability to draw in native allies, a huge pack train, and, finally, undue haste. The remaining two amphibious operations along rivers and lakes were beset with political squabbling, logistical problems, and the loss of the allied Iroquois after disastrous Iroquois losses on both sides at the Battle of Lake George on 8 September 1755.[10]

Although each of the four campaigns would be conducted successfully later in the war, the British simply were not ready to execute the kind of missions required to support their correct strategic analysis in 1755. The French, on the other hand, very successfully played to their strengths early in the war, but feared that British naval superiority would hobble them by cutting them off from sea communications with France.

Following the debacle of the 1755 British campaigning season, the British colonists' frontier settlements were extremely vulnerable. The only thing stopping French forces from pushing east and suing for peace was the fact that a huge chunk of their force had expended itself at the Battle of Lake George, including the capture of senior French general Jean Armand, Baron von Dieskau. The New France governor general Pierre de Rigaud Vaudreuil de Cavagnial and his *Troupes de la Marines* officer brother, Francois-Pierre de Rigaud de Vaudreuil (often referred to simply as "Rigaud" to distinguish the two brothers), were both North American born and bred. They supported the indigenous way of war and released their native allies, with and without French accompaniment, to terrorize the British colonies' frontier. From the winter of 1756 to 1757, the British frontier was pushed back to within 200 miles of the Atlantic Ocean. The French wanted to create a buffer to protect their vulnerable line of supply from Canada to Louisiana. They thought that if they thoroughly demoralized those on the frontier, they could focus on keeping their native allies happy long

enough for French forces in Europe and at sea to mitigate the British numerical advantage in North America and at sea.[11]

In 1756, the French and the British sent new leaders to North America. France sent an experienced general named Louis-Joseph de Montcalm-Grozon. Montcalm was well respected in Europe and would be a serious challenge to British plans. However, Montcalm was not in agreement with Governor General Vaudreuil on how to prosecute the war, especially on the topic of unleashing native allies on the frontier. Vaudreuil held the political and military power in 1756 and into 1757, but Montcalm would not take the situation sitting down. The British sent General John Campbell, the Fourth Earl of Loudoun. From the beginning, much like Braddock, Loudoun managed to estrange virtually all of the royal governors and legislatures of the colonies by being imperious about what the colonies owed him as the British military commander and how they would be treated in the British military establishment. Loudoun's tenure produced no significant victories. The strategy on both sides would remain largely the same, but with infighting causing different results.[12]

The war in Europe began during this period and the military and diplomatic maneuvers there preoccupied both Britain and France. However, Montcalm did manage to take Fort Oswego on Lake Ontario in 1756, allowing France to retain its interior communication lines and putting pressure on the colony of New York from the west. He had prepared for taking Oswego by sending a raiding party of *Troupes de la Marine* and natives to sever the supply line at a key portage along the Mohawk River Valley. He also solidified his hold on the northern New York frontier by capturing Fort William Henry at the base of Lake George. Both of these fort actions were classic siege maneuvers marred by atrocities, as defined by European customs at least. After the British surrenders at Forts Oswego and William Henry, Montcalm's native allies pillaged and murdered many of the survivors. These actions would cause Montcalm to double his resolve to confront Vaudreuil on the wisdom of using the natives in warfare between two European powers. Montcalm thought that the defense of New France would be best accomplished by holding the line of French possessions using traditional European tactics of defense. As a traditional European officer, Montcalm abhorred the atrocities that he had little power to contain as long as Vaudreuil supported the use of natives in French operations. Vaudreuil, steeped in the native cultures and practices, saw the need for their indigenous allies as a necessary evil, because France could not fight Britain in the standard way due to their rival's superior navy and manpower advantages. Vaudreuil believed that if France lost the offensive initiative, it would be only a matter of time before Britain shut down its warmaking capability via the Saint Lawrence River. Objectives and means had rarely been so at odds in Europe for the French, but the conundrum was an old one in North America.[13]

For all their problems, mainly caused by Loudoun and the reticent colonial governments, the British Army was not totally complacent during this time. The younger officers in the British regiments, by necessity, experimented with frontier tactics, equipment, and formations. The British leadership also listened to the well-respected indian agent, William Johnson, on how to engage with the natives to secure their support, if not accepting all of their cultural norms in battle. British Ranger units, led by men such as Robert Rogers, operated in the French and native ways to attack isolated French units and French allied native villages in the northeast. Adopting the ranging way of war led to many improvements but also came with the downside of the irregular warfare tactics, such as killing prisoners because they slowed movements. Combat in the wilderness was proving costly to the European sense of honorable warfare.[14]

However, for all the logistical and tactical improvements in North America by the end of 1757, the war came at a low point for Britain. William Pitt was appointed as the secretary for the Southern Department and the de facto war leader in mid-1757 in a desperate effort to change Britain's fortunes in the war. By the end of 1757, the military situation for Britain, not to mention the London political situation for Pitt, was dire. Pitt and his council of war were highly motivated to leave nothing to chance. As for the Royal Navy and the British Army leadership, the stakes were very high indeed. In March 1757, Royal Navy admiral John Byng had been executed by a Marine firing squad on the quarterdeck of the HMS *Monarch* (1747) after being convicted in a court-martial for not being aggressive enough against the French in the Mediterranean in 1756 at the Battle of Minorca. The French philosopher, Voltaire, was waggishly quoted as saying, "In this country [Britain], it is thought good to kill an admiral from time to time to give courage to the others."[15] There was little laughing and few disagreements from the political class in Britain and the British officer class took notice. After the debacle at the raid on Rochefort, France, in September 1757, British Army major general John Mordaunt was tried in a December court-martial for his inaction in landing and pressing an amphibious attack. Colonel James Wolfe had been present at Rochefort and was critical of Mordaunt's hesitancy. The Royal Navy commander, Admiral Edward Hawke, was also critical of Mordaunt's lack of action. Mordaunt would later be acquitted, but the confusion about who was responsible for the various stages of the amphibious operations, as well as leaving decisions to councils of war to the last second, were seen as having contributed to the failure at Rochefort.[16]

Britain's naval prowess meant that the British Army was accustomed to being transported by the Royal Navy. However, it took the failed amphibious operation at Rochefort for the two services to reexamine the coordination, communication, and operational procedures required between naval, marine, and army units in seaborne amphibious assaults to change the situation in North

America. Colonel James Wolfe, a Pitt favorite, had learned much from Rochefort that would be applied later at Louisbourg and Quebec. During the winter of 1757–58, Pitt, First Lord of the Admiralty George Anson; and commander in chief of the forces, Field Marshal John Ligonier, focused on British Army and Royal Navy strategic coordination. The three examined British history, lessons learned, and expert testimony on amphibious operations. Britain may have had some bickering between the navy and the army at sea and in the field, but the London leadership was adamant that the strategic superiority of the Royal Navy had to be married with the British Army to make the most of the nation's strengths.[17]

What emerged was a British military that was still strategically strong at sea, but also was developing new capabilities on land and refining their amphibious capabilities. The interplay of the strategic concepts with operational procedures pored over in London by the British leadership were strikingly modern. In the current lexicon, they would be considered the very definition of "joint" operations. The higher levels of leadership were taking the situation seriously and adapting operational planning to meet specific strategic goals. What remained to see was whether that would translate to the tactical level where so much could go wrong even when the strategy and planning had been strong.[18]

In addition to their seaborne amphibious capabilities, Britain added their improved amphibious knowledge to their newfound light infantry tactics to create effective amphibious operations along the key rivers and lakes that would form their future offensive corridors. This combined effort included detailed planning, increased reconnaissance, nimble logistical trains, and local diplomacy with natives and colonists. The combination of the North American way of war with the Atlantic way of war bore innovative fruit for Britain that would serve them well for the next 50 years. Lighter equipment, looser but still controlled formations, and more nimble organizations allowed for faster action to seize opportunities as they presented themselves.[19] The ability to mass firepower and act decisively with unity of effort, then as it is now, is the essence of joint amphibious warfare. Combined with the threat of cutting off French support from Europe, the British were assembling the capabilities that, combined with political and leadership changes in 1757, would set them on a path to conquer New France.

In addition to planning strategic objectives, Pitt, Anson, and Ligonier were deeply involved in assigning the leadership to the specific campaigns. Anson and Ligonier were not averse to skipping over older, more experienced officers in their respective services for younger, more enterprising officers. They assigned Major General James Abercromby as military head in North America, who might have been the exception to the previous statement, but he had strong support from the king.

In any case, the plan was not much different from Loudoun's, but the key was in the preparation in London and the execution by more junior officers. Ligonier chose Brigadier General John Forbes and Major General Jeffrey Amherst for specific and separate campaigns to achieve while Abercromby would focus on the main thrust with the well-respected acting Brigadier General George Augustus Howe, acting as his deputy. Abercromby would attack Fort Carillon (later named Ticonderoga), where Montcalm had secured the Lakes Champlain and George corridor. Amherst's task was to complete the capture of Nova Scotia by taking the seaside fortress of Louisbourg. Forbes got the unenviable job of taking Fort Duquesne at the Forks of the Ohio. Forbes would be cutting a new road to the forks again and had both Braddock's and Washington's failures to avoid. However, the support infrastructure would be better this time, and he promised himself to be patient in the task.

Lord Loudoun's one major accomplishment was setting up a robust logistical system to support the obvious campaign lines. Along with the enhanced logistical capabilities came improved intelligence and movement security provided by Rangers and British regulars using newly adopted (by the British) woodcraft and irregular warfare techniques. Finally, Pitt removed the leadership regulations and funding issues that had so annoyed the colonial governments. The result was a surge of militia and recruits into the British regiments for use in the three campaigns. Along with the stronger footing of the land forces, Britain retained its naval superiority. The Royal Navy increased the number of ships and sailors under sail and committed a huge effort to seal off French ports and the Mediterranean. The result for New France was severe shortages of everything, including food. The Royal Navy and the British Army had developed a close working relationship and it would deliver huge benefits in 1758.[20]

As the 1758 campaign season opened in North America, the England-launched portion of the Royal Navy campaign, led by Admiral Edward Boscawen, fought adverse weather conditions crossing the North Atlantic, so progress was slow. However, a sizable chunk of the Louisbourg expedition's troops and supplies, led by Captain Alexander Colville, Lord Colville of Culross, had been harbored in Halifax during an icy and miserable winter. He sent scouting ships to Louisbourg to set up watch in February 1758. A small French squadron arrived with some supplies to great fanfare at Louisbourg, though little was to follow, and this shipment was not nearly enough to sustain Louisbourg from the siege that was to come. Rear Admiral Sir Charles Hardy, as the vanguard of Boscawen's force, arrived in mid-March and took command of the Halifax force and began intercepting French ships headed for Louisbourg. Some French ships made it through to shore up New France, but bad weather, disease, and Hardy's harassment took a heavy toll.[21]

A complicating factor for the land forces was that they were coming from

nearly every point around the British Atlantic, including Scottish Highlanders, Irish regulars, troops formally stationed in Hanover, English regiments, Royal Americans, and garrisoned troops in Nova Scotia. American Rangers were present, including companies from Rogers' Rangers, but led by his brother, James Rogers, because Robert Rogers was personally requested by Abercromby to assist with the Ticonderoga campaign.[22] These troops had never trained together as amphibious forces, so Boscawen took the lead when he arrived off of Halifax on 9 May 1758. Boscawen formed a joint staff and set them to formulating the command and control, organization, and plans to deliver this motley force onshore in an orderly fashion. Boscawen had attended many of the strategic sessions with Pitt, Anson, and Ligonier in London and had more experience in land warfare than most Royal Navy officers, having begun his career as an engineer, so his understanding of the mammoth task in front of them pressed on him. With less than a month to land at Louisbourg, the amount of tactical planning and training that needed to occur was immense. Most British amphibious doctrine that would prevail for 50 years was developed off the coast of Halifax in May 1758. Force organization, signaling, synchronization, command handover, supply, disembarkation, flat boat management, artillery support—among many other concerns—were all planned and coordinated in that month.[23]

Colonel Wolfe led the training of the troops on shore in the hilly terrain around Halifax with the focus on regaining unit integrity and command control once onshore. They also trained on siege techniques that were common in Europe, but rarely experienced in North America. Rangers, light infantry, and grenadiers were organized to land first and secure the landing zones, flanks, and routes off the beach. The concept of operation was to use these unique troops to secure a foothold, so the regular infantry could deploy quickly and provide a mass of firepower very early in the assault. The scale of the endeavor is impressive in the annals of military history. Historian Hugh Boscawen, a direct descendant of Admiral Boscawen, stated,

> Fourteen regiments, artillery, and rangers—two-thirds of the British regulars in America—and the fleet were transformed into a cohesive expeditionary force in eighteen days in Halifax in May 1758.[24]

On 28 May 1758, Admiral Boscawen's force departed Halifax with Amherst's force trained by Boscawen and Amherst's junior officers, including Wolfe. The entire operation had been planned and rehearsed without Amherst. Amherst's ship met Boscawen's fleet on the day it left Halifax. On the voyage up to Louisbourg, Amherst was thoroughly briefed and brought up to speed. Amherst was generally accepting of the plans he would have to execute, but did simplify some of the more complex plans onshore that James Wolfe had

instituted. This did not please Wolfe, but he complied. The bulk of the fleet anchored around Louisbourg on 2 June 1758. Anxious to press the attack, Amherst sent reconnaissance landings to the proposed landing sites. Not everyone was happy with the landing sites, but local informants arrived to better brief the fleet and army. By 5 June, Amherst was ready to deploy but was forestalled by bad weather and fog that continued through 7 June.[25]

On the morning of 8 June 1758, after a little bit of dithering, but not enough to stop the operation, Amherst sent Wolfe and the lead units ashore. At the chosen landing site, French guns opened up on the landing forces with withering effect. Seeing the devastation, Wolfe called off the attack. However, several junior officers, including some of Robert's Rangers, broke off from the flotilla and rowed for a small but hidden part of the beach. With the luck that comes to forces prepared and led by confident officers, they found a sheltered cove to land. It was very small but was masked from the French positions. Wolfe waved the rest of his initial landing forces forward to the cove. After landing, Wolfe was able to turn the French flank and avoid a full-frontal assault on the originally chosen beach. The main force followed and secured the full beach within an hour. Boscawen's men supplied the land forces fully within four hours. Amherst landed and took charge of the force on land and set up a standard siege, beginning the methodical steps to reduce the fortress. The British also soon destroyed several French naval vessels that had stayed to support the fortress. With the landings secured and supplied, the reduction of Louisbourg was a mere formality of siege work during the next six weeks. The French finally capitulated on 27 July 1758. Although the siege followed European protocol, the massacre after Fort William Henry in 1757 led Amherst to deny the honors of war to the surrendered fortress. The French were taken prisoner and the Micmac and Abenaki warriors present were chased down and killed by Rangers from Massachusetts.[26]

At Fort Carillon (Ticonderoga), Abercromby had not been so lucky. Abercromby had approached the French fort carefully and landed south of the fort, but lost his highly respected second in command, Lord Howe, in an early skirmish. Abercromby hesitated a day and Montcalm took full advantage to reinforce his position with trenches and an abatis.[27] An artillery barrage would have broken holes in the abatis and turned the splinters into thousands of tiny spears near the French line, but weak intelligence led Abercromby to attempt a full-frontal attack on the well-prepared French positions. The attack failed on 8 July 1758 with 2,500 British killed or wounded. Montcalm had lost 750 from a smaller force but was feeling vindicated in not using as many natives as before, therefore having better control and not experiencing atrocities. The battle had been fought in the traditional European manner, but Abercromby had choices that would have saved many of his men and driven the French farther north.

Nothing more can be said to explain the battle. It was simply poorly led by a British general, again.[28]

Abercromby was very worried that Pitt would fire him immediately with the news of Fort Carillon. Pitt had little time to prove his radical and costly plan and would not tolerate weak leaders. Abercromby decided to launch a long sought but delayed plan to attack Fort Frontenac at the head of the Saint Lawrence into Lake Ontario. Frontenac was the linchpin of all of the lower forts in supplying the natives and French forces. Lieutenant Colonel John Bradstreet would lead the mixed force of 3,100 regulars, militia, and Iroquois that Sir William Johnson had recruited. Abercromby was not sure of the bold plan but knew that he needed to take action. He had not heard of Amherst's success at Louisburg yet and was very concerned for his job. Bradstreet had been a critical player in Loudoun's logistical buildup and was sure he could lead the mission to success by keeping the details secret until the last second and being bold in his execution, avoiding leakage to the French local natives.

On 12 August 1758, his *batteau* (canoes of Canadian design) and whaleboat force headed for Oswego along creeks, rivers, and Lake Oneida. At Fort Oswego, they turned north onto the open Lake Ontario to Fort Frontenac. Upon arrival, he landed on a small island and immediately conducted a reconnaissance of the fort and found it lightly defended. The garrison was full of supplies and was completely surprised by his arrival on the beach below the fort. On 28 August 1758, Bradstreet took Frontenac after a light defense by the small French force. He had no desire to take prisoners, so he let them free with personal possessions and a promise from the French commander to release an equal amount of British prisoners on his honor. Bradstreet's force loaded up their boats with booty and destroyed what they could not carry. In the span of 24 hours, one of France's most important supply forts had been reduced to ashes. Bradstreet had not lost a single man in the amphibious raid. Although not anywhere near the size of the Louisbourg amphibious operation, Bradstreet knew frontier logistics, picked people who trusted him, and knew how to keep the element of surprise from being compromised—three critical components of an amphibious operation.[29]

In Pennsylvania, Forbes was hacking his way through the wilderness throughout the summer of 1758 on his way to claim the French Fort Duquesne at the Forks of the Ohio. The Ohio native tribes such as the Shawnee, Delaware, and Mingo were still supporting the French but noticed the change in the strategic situation. French trade goods were becoming scarce and no fresh French troops were arriving due to the British naval superiority. The Ohio tribes made tentative approaches to Forbes along his way. Since July, 700 Cherokee from the southern colonies were already in attendance due to their need for colonial aid in their fights with the Creek and the Choctaw in the South. A severely ill

Forbes eventually made it to Fort Duquesne at the Forks of the Ohio on 25 November 1758 only to find that the French had destroyed it and left. His methodical campaign while building relations with the Ohio tribes had paid off, and he had succeeded in taking the Forks of the Ohio where Washington and Braddock had failed. Other than river crossings, there had been no amphibious operations in Forbes's column, but the lessons of alliance building, planning, and logistical professionalism had paid off for the British.[30]

As 1758 closed out, the British had seemingly turned the tide of the war by capturing Louisburg, destroying Fort Frontenac, and securing the Forks of the Ohio. Abercromby had been a failure, but even after the defense of Fort Carillon, Montcalm had decided to move north to a stronger position. The Royal Navy was stronger than ever. The British Army had improved greatly since Braddock's defeat, but the improvement was not evenly spread yet. Relations with the Ohio tribes were better, Rangers were improving intelligence and movement security, and the critical coordination for large-scale amphibious operations had been developed, practiced, and executed in adverse conditions with great success.

As 1759 dawned, Pitt realized that Abercromby was not the man for the job of closing down the war in North America. Amherst was named his successor and Abercromby was sent back to Britain with a face-saving promotion to lieutenant general. After the great successes of 1758, including his own at Louisbourg, Amherst was eager to take advantage of the situation in 1759 and put together a plan to force the capitulation of New France. Forbes died from his illness in early 1759 but wrote stridently to Amherst to take his lessons about dealing with the tribes. Amherst learned much in 1758, but Forbes's prescient letters were not part of his education. Amherst was as arrogant as Braddock or Loudoun but took command when the strategic calculations of the tribes were changing. Wolfe chafed under Amherst's command and had gone back to Britain to lobby for the mission to take Quebec in 1759. Bradstreet was promoted to colonel but relegated back to his role as chief logistician for Amherst's army.[31]

During the winter of 1758–59, Pitt instructed Amherst to conduct an aggressive campaign season to end French power in North America. Amherst would lead the push up the New York lakes corridor to silence the twin threats of Forts St. Frederic (Crown Point) and Carillon (Ticonderoga). Major General James Wolfe, in an independent command, would deliver the assault on Quebec with 7,000 troops on 49 ships plus landing craft. To continue the chokehold on the French upriver forts, Fort Niagara would be secured. It was an ambitious plan that played to Britain's strengths and New France's weaknesses, but it would not be easy to root out a foe who knew the ground as well as the French knew the North American interior. The British also sought more native

assistance, but their main accomplishment in this area was convincing the tribes around the eastern Great Lakes not to openly support the French.[32]

The massacres and general mayhem along the frontier that the tribes had caused with their French allies from 1755 to 1757 were still fresh in the minds of the British commanders. Both Amherst and Wolfe had shown little mercy when taking Louisbourg. They had given their Rangers free rein to wreak havoc on the neighboring settlements. By 1759, the British were in no mood to show the honors of war to an enemy who had treated them so carelessly from 1755 to 1757. Almost as a side project in the 1759 campaign, but one that was intended to send a message, Amherst unleashed his Rangers, led by Robert Rogers, to raid the Abenaki village of St. Francis between Montreal and Quebec. Using 17 whaleboats to cover most of the distance in miserable conditions, Rogers led his force to destroy the Abenaki base. The results of this raid were as horrific as anything that had happened to date, with the entire village being set fire and many casualties of the elderly, women, and children. The French had found and destroyed Rogers's camouflaged whaleboats during the raid, so the Rangers had a near disastrous exfiltration march back to friendly lines. By 1759, the British forces had fully adapted to North American frontier warfare, for better or worse.[33]

Farther west, the Niagara campaign led by Indian Agent William Johnson had managed to keep most of the French allied tribes out of the fight. The British had moved from Fort Oswego along the shore of Lake Ontario and laid siege to Fort Niagara in early July but had to contend with a French relief force from the abandoned Fort Duquesne in the south. Johnson's Iroquois allies played a decisive role in the July 1759 battle at La Belle Famille, south of Niagara, by keeping the French-allied Iroquois out of the fight. With no further relief in sight, the French commander at Niagara surrendered on 25 July 1759. The loss of Fort Niagara was the final nail in the coffin for the French influence in the Ohio Valley. The British now controlled Lake Ontario with its supply chain to the interior. The Royal Navy controlled access to the Saint Lawrence from the sea from Louisbourg. By the fall of 1759, New France effectively existed only from Quebec to Montreal. The French faced the hard realization that many of the tribes they had relied on in the past were no longer at their service. However, if the British thought they had neutralized the native threat by separating the French from their indigenous allies, they would soon be disabused of this idea. The tribes of the Great Lakes realized that their old strategy of playing one European ally off the other would no longer be sufficient to maintain their independence. However, the British problems with the natives in 1763 were not yet to be realized in 1759.[34]

With the noose tightening on New France, General Montcalm pulled his French troops in close at Quebec, Trois-Rivieres, and Montreal to make a last

stand. The French government had promised him more troops if he could hold out until the spring of 1760. Whether this would have happened is debatable, as the French government was torn between fighting on the seas and in the colonies and doubling down on their land strength in Europe. This was the age-old strategic peer-power question of fighting to one's strengths or minimizing one's weaknesses. From 1755 to 1757, the French had thought that their greatest weakness of a smaller population in North America could be mitigated with the help of the Great Lakes native tribes and a superior tradition of wilderness warfare. However, the British managed to improve their skills in wilderness warfare, amphibious operations, and native diplomacy in 1757–58. What the French had not been able to deal with was the Royal Navy's command of the sea. Meanwhile, the British had managed to improve their weakness in land power in Europe by allying with Frederick II, king of Prussia, in 1756. British money and limited troops with Prussia's military superiority held France and Austria at bay. With the holding of Hanover and its Prussian alliance, the British were able to deliver a greater volume of troops and supplies by sea to North America and deny that ability to France.[35]

However, if General Wolfe could not take Quebec, the great British gamble might not have come to the resounding victory that it did. Throughout the summer, Amherst worried about the Quebec campaign led by Wolfe. By late July, he had hoped that Wolfe had taken Quebec, or at least laid siege to it, but no such word had come. Instead, word of atrocities being committed by Wolfe's troops in the communities around Quebec filtered down. Wolfe could not entice Montcalm to a fight, so he had resorted to terrorizing the area around Quebec in a desperate bid to get Montcalm out of the fortress at Quebec. Newly inspired by the great success of Louisbourg, Wolfe conducted a near continuous set of amphibious operations along the Saint Lawrence around Quebec to harry the French. With each amphibious deployment, the British became better at it, but none could lure Montcalm from the fortress Quebec. The heavily defended city seemed nearly impregnable if its defenders stayed close. However, the Royal Navy were reconnoitering the river channels and testing the French batteries of Quebec, which provided cover for other operations and much-needed intelligence about the river itself. By late July 1759, the lack of information from Wolfe and the slipping away of the summer campaign season made Amherst more tentative in approaching Montreal for fear of meeting a large French force that might have been freed if Wolfe had been defeated. Unbeknownst to him yet, Fort Niagara had been taken by William Johnson and Wolfe was making plans for a make or break amphibious operation near Quebec.[36]

Had Amherst realized Wolfe's true situation in July and August 1759, he would have had even more misgivings. Wolfe had lost much of the command support of his brigadier generals in executing the village terror operations. They

had honorable reputations in Europe to uphold and the nature of the warfare around Quebec was nasty. Additionally, Wolfe had fallen gravely ill and feverish, likely from kidney stones and rheumatism irritated by stress. With steep cliffs, artillery command of the river, and seemingly no suitable amphibious landing locations, the area around fortress Quebec was more challenging than Duquesne, Frontenac, Louisbourg, or Niagara. As for troops at Quebec, the French effectively outnumbered the British two to one. As the summer ebbed away, Wolfe became desperate. Would his legacy be death in the field from a weak constitution and dishonor from war crimes? The French remained hopeful that they could hold out until the winter, when the British advantages would be mitigated and the French advantages improved by the Canadian winter. By late August, Wolfe knew his chances of decisively engaging Montcalm were slipping away. He decided on an incredibly risky plan of landing upriver from Quebec on a small shingle beach named L'Anse au Foulon at the base of steep cliffs. He risked all for a final roll of the dice. Had he failed, it would have been one of the great disasters of British military history. Luckily, his boldness paid off.[37]

The Royal Navy had used its time around Quebec wisely and had sound intelligence of the channels, coves, and shoals of the Saint Lawrence. The naval force was commanded by Vice Admiral Sir Charles Saunders on the Saint Lawrence and the landing forces were led by Captain James Chads. Future Royal Navy legends such as James Cook amassed an enormous amount of knowledge about the tides, moonrises, currents, and peculiarities of the river in overnight reconnaissance missions.[38] Through practice, training, and routine planning, the British were unrivaled in their tactical and operational prowess in amphibious operations. During the night of 12–13 September 1759, they had anchored at Cap Rouge, nearly 10 miles above their chosen landing point. The French troops on land led by Montcalm acolyte, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, kept an overwatch.[39] The British conducted a diversionary maneuver farther downriver near the northeast side of Quebec where they had attempted an amphibious assault previously. With the French fooled by the anchorage upstream and the diversion downstream, the British boarded shallow draft boats that had been designed and delivered rapidly after the Rochefort debacle. They rode the ebbing tide and landed near L'Anse au Foulon, although the swift tide had taken the lead elements too far down.[40] Shortly thereafter, not finding the wagon path that had been reconnoitered earlier, the British light infantry scaled the bluffs and destroyed a small, surprised French detachment behind an abatis, facing down the path, near the top. The top of the bluff was at the western tip of a mile-wide plateau known as the Plains of Abraham, only two miles from Quebec.[41] The British had used all of their hard-won knowledge about amphibious operations from Rochefort and Louisbourg to deliver an incredibly difficult operation in the early hour darkness.

Overnight, Montcalm still thought the northeastern diversion was the main landing force and the Plains of Abraham force was the diversion. Bougainville's overwatch force near Cap Rouge feared the worst when morning came and they saw the British fleet and all of their landing craft sailing downriver to the landing site. Once Montcalm saw the situation for what it was, he had little time to decide what to do. Wolfe spared no time in getting the rest of his force to the plateau and deployed across the width of it. He posted Rangers and natives in the woods along the flank and began sniping at the forming French defenses. Montcalm decided to deploy the majority of his forces and face Wolfe immediately. Although Montcalm held a numerical advantage, much of his force was militia and allied tribes. These troops had been spectacular on the frontier, but this would be a traditional European engagement that would require discipline and precise maneuvers. These advantages belonged to Wolfe, whose force was almost entirely comprised of British regulars. Montcalm, fearing Wolfe's force would continue to grow, decided to advance to contact. The disorder in the French ranks began to show immediately with an uneven line and undisciplined movements. The British held fast and fired volleys in strict discipline. The British fire was far better controlled and more deadly. As French discipline broke down completely, the British fixed bayonets and charged forward and chased the French force back to the walls of Quebec. The two sides had lost an almost identical amount of men. Although Wolfe and Montcalm were dead, the British commanders pressed the advantage and reinvigorated the siege. Quebec surrendered on 17 September 1759. Wolfe's great gamble had succeeded.[42]

Having knowledge of the British success at Fort Niagara in August, but not knowing the outcome of Wolfe's actions and his death at Quebec until 18 October 1759, Amherst had hesitated in the late summer and not advanced on Montreal, consolidating at Crown Point. The French forces had already retreated and reorganized at Montreal during the winter of 1759–60. Given the situation in Niagara and Quebec, Amherst could be pleased with the progress, but all was not well. A Cherokee uprising in the South was underway where the British had few troops stationed. More worrisome were rumors that the Seneca, and tribes allied with them on the British southwestern flank, were making noise about resisting British rule of their homelands. Although 1759 had become the "miraculous year" for the British with victories against the French around the world, the French still held an important part of Canada and were well prepared to defend it. If the French could rally their erstwhile native allies, the British could be in for another difficult period.[43]

However, also unknown to Amherst late in 1759, another British victory would seal the French defeat in North America. At Quiberon Bay, off the Brittany coast, the last French operational squadron in the Atlantic was destroyed by the Royal Navy. The defenders of Montreal would have little to no reinforce-

ments in 1760. As the 1760 campaigning season began, Amherst dispatched a force to the Cherokee homelands to ruthlessly quell the Cherokee rebellion and secure the rear. The fighting with the Cherokee would drag on for more than a year, but it was never a serious threat to Amherst's plan for Montreal. The force with which the Cherokee war was handled may have given the Seneca and the other Great Lakes tribes pause in their consideration of an uprising as well. Therefore, with his rear and flanks secure, Amherst focused on Montreal and the remaining French forces. In the winter of 1760, the French had counterattacked Quebec, but had failed to take it. When the news of Quiberon Bay arrived and they realized that the spring would not bring supplies and reinforcements from France, they fell back to Montreal to await the inevitable British assault. Amherst's plan was to use the rivers to attack from the east, west, and south. Although, these were not large-scale amphibious assaults like Wolfe's in 1759, they were amphibious operations in support of the three prongs. Working methodically but successfully to convince the French-allied tribes to abandon the French, it took him the entire 1760 campaign season to move three columns on Montreal. However, by early September, Amherst had obtained the French surrender and New France effectively ceased to exist.[44]

Although the Seven Years' War would continue in a near stalemate in Europe through 1760, Britain had won North America from its primary rival. Additionally, the Royal Navy's dominance at sea meant North America, the Caribbean (1761–62), and India (1757–61) were no longer commercial and strategic assets to the French.[45]

The Spanish had entered the war with the French in early 1762. In early June 1762, the British would conduct another textbook amphibious assault against the Spanish at Havana, Cuba. Royal Navy vice admiral Sir George Pocock; British Army lieutenant general George Keppel, the Earle of Albermarle; and Commodore Honorable Augustus Keppel conducted a near flawless amphibious assault that built on the experience of the great operations at Louisbourg and Quebec. The coordination of naval gunfire in support of the landings was especially notable. However, Albermarle would be slow to finish the job once on land and Britain lost an enormous number of troops due to disease.[46] However, the tide of the war was firmly in Britain's favor at this point. By late 1762, the French and Spanish were negotiating peace. The Treaty of Paris in 1763 was a resounding victory for the British and secured the First British Empire.[47]

However, not all was well in North America. It had taken the British longer than they liked to put down the Cherokee uprising. The Great Lakes tribes noticed that Britain was sending troops back to Europe and would not be able to conduct the large-scale operations in the interior as they had a few years earlier. Diplomacy with the tribes was still very difficult for the British leadership. By 1763, the Great Lakes area was engulfed in war again as a confederacy of tribes

attacked undermanned British forts on the frontier. Pontiac's War was a direct consequence of the French and Indian War and its aims. The British managed to end that war, but with concessions that would enrage the British-American colonists. Another fire, though long smoldering, had been lit in North America. France had to lick their wounds, but the French Navy would reemerge to bedevil the British in the American Revolutionary War a mere 15 years later. The French Army would hound the British, and everyone else, all over Europe 25 years later. The British and French rivalry would continue for another century.[48]

Conclusion

Britain's strength at sea was not always a foregone conclusion. France did rebuild its navy after the French and Indian War and use it to a much greater effect during the American Revolutionary War. However, Britain's insistence on linking the Royal Navy to its core strategy in the French and Indian War, while also improving in other areas, was decisive. Although not continual, this concept of land and naval coordination was so important to Britain that a century and a half later British statesman Sir Edward Grey would say, "The British Army should be a projectile to be fired by the British Navy."[49] The strategic battle between France and Britain followed a familiar pattern of great powers deciding whether to reinforce strengths or minimize weaknesses, depending on their opponents, allies, and situations. An important but mundane point has to be made to ensure that we do not go too far into the weeds; British colonists in North America outnumbered their French counterparts 33:1 and had better geography to supply and support themselves. However, that fact was also true at the beginning of the war when New France drubbed British and colonial forces regularly.

Although amphibious operations were ubiquitous, both sides used them in different ways. France generally used small-scale riverine and lake amphibious operations to deliver combat power, often made up of irregular forces. Britain also learned to conduct these smaller-scale amphibious operations with light troops. However, Britain was far more effective in using large-scale lake, riverine, and seaborne amphibious operations to land large quantities of troops at strategic locations. The decisive difference in North America was the British Army's willingness to improve itself and learn from its earlier mistakes. Almost from a standing start, they grew and, in some cases, mastered frontier warfare. The same can be said for the rising competence in logistical concerns in the wilderness and in amphibious operations. Their competence in frontier war and logistics combined with their willingness to use the Royal Navy's professionalism in amphibious operations meant Britain was able to create and sustain an incredibly flexible force. In modern terminology, Britain became a truly joint force by mastering strategic operational planning, utilizing mass in support of

strategic objectives, and enforcing the terms of unity of effort between naval and land forces. From 1758 onward, Britain was able to deliver decisive combat power to almost any point on the globe. The Bay of Fundy, Louisbourg, Frontenac, Fort Duquesne, and Quebec campaigns were turning points at each stage of the French and Indian War. Without them and the combined force amphibious operations that enabled them, the war in North America probably could not have been won.[50]

Notes

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3. Gray, "History for Strategists," 20–22.
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5. Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754–1766* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), 124–32.
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20. Walter L. Dorn, *Competition for Empire: 1740–1763* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 346–50; and Anderson, *Crucible of War*, 232–36.
21. Boscawen, *Capture of Louisbourg*, 102–17.
22. Burt Garfield Loescher, *The History of Rogers' Rangers* (San Mateo, CA: Genesis, 1969), 27–28.
23. Cahill, *An Unassailable Advantage*, 17–19.
24. Boscawen, *Capture of Louisbourg*, 150.
25. Boscawen, *Capture of Louisbourg*, 152–63.

26. Sir Julian Stafford Corbett, *England in the Seven Years' War: A Study in Combined Strategy,* vol. I (London: Longmans, Green, 1918), 305–22; Fowler, *Empires at War*, 167–72; and Boscawen, *Capture of Louisbourg*, 163–70.
27. The term *abatis* refers to an obstacle or barricade of trees with bent or sharpened branches directed toward an enemy or a barbed wire entanglement used as an obstacle or barricade against an enemy.
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29. John Bradstreet, *An Impartial Account of Lieut. Col. Bradstreet's Expedition to Fort Frontenac: To Which are Added a Few Reflections on the Conduct of that Enterprize, and the Advantages Resulting from Its Success* (London: T. Wilcox, W. Owen, M. Cooper, and Mr. Cooke, 1759), 1–45; and Jennings, *Empire of Fortune*, 364–67.
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43. Fowler, *Empires at War*, 195–97.
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46. David Syrett, "The British Landing at Havana: An Example of an Eighteenth-Century Combined Operation," *Mariner's Mirror* 55, no. 3 (1969): 325–31, https://doi.org/10.1080/00253359.1969.10659492; and Cahill, *An Unassailable Advantage*, 29–35.
47. Dorn, *Competition for Empire*, 357–69.
48. Dixon, *Never Come to Peace Again*, 244–75; and Jennings, *Empire of Fortune*, 438–46.
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50. Richard Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare, 1650–1830* (Abingdon, UK: Taylor & Francis Group, 1999); Foster, *Hit the Beach!*, 16; and Cahill, *An Unassailable Advantage*, 35–39.