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## **The Siege of Louisbourg and Its Aftermath, 1745-55**

He'd rather leave his body at Louisbourg than not take the city.<sup>1</sup>

England's focus on the Gulf of St. Lawrence region arose primarily from a commercial concern with the fisheries. For Westcountrymen, this dated perhaps as early as the 1490s. For the next two and a half centuries in the North Atlantic, Newfoundland, whose fisheries England shared uneasily with France, was England's principal American preoccupation.<sup>2</sup> Before 1745, in contrast to France's policy of great interest in North America in general and in the Gulf of St. Lawrence region in particular, that of Great Britain was ambivalent. Even after the successful capture in 1710 of Port-Royal (renamed Annapolis Royal), the Admiralty Board's enthusiasm was tempered by the tragedy that engulfed the 1711 expedition in the St. Lawrence River on its way to besiege Quebec.<sup>3</sup> Rear Admiral Sir Hovenden Walker, who earlier had failed in an attempt to capture Guadeloupe, led the most ambitious force yet assembled to threaten New France. With nine ships of war, two bomb vessels, and sixty transports and tenders, he

sailed from Boston on 30 July 1711 with some 7,500 regulars and colonial volunteers. With inadequate charts and unreliable pilots, seven transports and one storeship were lost, and with them almost 900 sailors, soldiers, and women. This disaster unnerved Walker, who promptly cancelled the expedition. The historian Gerald Graham believed Walker's was a wise decision. The army, had it taken Quebec, would have probably starved, as three provision ships bringing food foundered off Cape Breton six weeks later.<sup>4</sup> That expedition, which formed no part of any long-considered plan of imperial expansion,<sup>5</sup> ended for more than four decades the fleeting interest evinced by the Admiralty in this enormous region beyond Newfoundland.<sup>6</sup>

After the vast Hudson Bay and peninsular Nova Scotia were added to Great Britain's territories in the New World by the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, no new strategic concern emerged for North America. For the next generation, naval policy in the region, and indeed all along the western Atlantic, remained little changed. For instance, the Admiralty ignored repeated requests by every leading Nova Scotia official to appoint a station ship to the colony, like those regularly sent since 1677 to Newfoundland; from the mid-1680s to Massachusetts, New York, and Virginia; in the 1720s to South Carolina; and in the 1730s to Georgia.<sup>7</sup> Occasional orders for warships from the Newfoundland or New England stations to undertake short summer cruises to the Canso fishing station, which looked across Chedabucto Bay to Petit de Grat on Île Madame off the Cape Breton coast, were the only concession made by the Admiralty, which itself came under no special pressure from the Board of Trade and Plantations.<sup>8</sup>

Such brief and occasional cruises by British frigates along the Atlantic coast of Nova Scotia did nothing to lessen French influence over the peninsula. While few English were attracted to Nova Scotia after 1713, the Acadien population was both expanding through high birth rates and low mortality, and thriving by exporting its annual agricultural surpluses to ready markets both in New England and at Louisbourg, the port established by France in 1713. Simultaneously, the French fishery based on Île Royale flourished. The rare appearance of a British frigate, though it secured Canso in Chedabucto Bay as an English and New England fishing station, could not prevent Mi'kmaq natives from seizing vessels owned by New England fishermen and frightening them off the coasts of this British colony. Under such conditions, the English share of this fishery never flourished, as was anticipated when peninsular Nova Scotia was acquired in 1713.

When hostilities broke out in 1743 between France and Britain and then escalated the following year to an official declaration of war, it was not obvious that the Gulf of St. Lawrence would become a major theatre of hostilities. By the mid-1730s, the rivalry over the fisheries had largely been won by the French, a matter no longer seriously disputed by New England. British war aims, as far as they were articulated by Walpole's government, did not include ambitions to monopolize the fisheries of North America. As American colonies, especially Massachusetts, carried on considerable direct trade with Louisbourg in provisions and wood products, there was no clear intention in New England to allow this useful market to be forsaken just because Britain and France were now at war.

DESPITE THREE DECADES OF PEACE, during most of which France and Britain were allies, there was at times considerable Anglo-French tension on the coasts of Nova Scotia, especially before 1725. Such tension arose partly from the imprecise boundaries between the new British colony of Nova Scotia and New France, as described in the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht. It also arose because the British crown laid claim through conquest to all the land in Nova Scotia occupied by the Mi'kmaq, when they had little ability to enforce that claim. As the 1710 conquest of Annapolis Royal had not been followed by the plantation of new settlers, the land of Nova Scotia remained in either the hands of Acadian farmers or Mi'kmaq, who, depending on seafood and seasonal hunting, continued their traditional migratory patterns of life.

When New England fishermen established small fishing stations along the Nova Scotia coasts after 1713, they were attacked by the Mi'kmaq, who frequently seized their boats and then, to display their navigational skills, sailed them for a few days before abandoning or destroying them.<sup>9</sup> The British navy had become involved first in 1716, when *Rose*, the station ship at Boston, had sailed to Louisbourg harbour to confer with the French governor of Île Royale. The issue concerned Canso, the newly established fishing station, used then both by New Englanders and the French. The French were ordered off the station, but returned the next year. Then in 1718 the crew of *Squirrel*, *Rose*'s successor at Boston, upon complaints from New England fishermen, visited Louisbourg. Acting under orders from the governor of Massachusetts, the warship sailed into Canso and destroyed or confiscated all French property there. This high-handed act ignited an international incident, in part because France and Britain had become allies in 1716.<sup>10</sup>

Subsequent Anglo-French negotiations had the effect of strengthening Britain's support for including Canso within the boundaries of Nova Scotia, a policy that the New Englanders pressed. This policy did not result in the Admiralty assigning a station ship to Canso. Instead, beginning in 1721, the frigate stationed in New England was required most summers to cruise along Nova Scotia's Atlantic coast as far as Canso. In 1723, for instance, *Solebay* cruised between Cape Sable and Canso, while in 1724, *Ludlow Castle*, fearing Mi'kmaq attack on fishing vessels at Canso, sailed there from Placentia.<sup>11</sup> In 1727 and 1728, again it was the Newfoundland station ship that sailed to Canso, though thereafter protection came from the warship stationed at Boston.

Besides the need to secure the local fisheries, the navy was drawn to the Nova Scotia coast after 1713 to create accurate charts. Such surveys are associated principally with Capt. Thomas Durell, who first commanded the New England station ship *Seahorse* in 1722. Between 1732 and 1736, Durell produced charts, first of Canso, then one of the coast from Canso to Chebucto harbour (renamed Halifax in 1749).<sup>12</sup>

In 1739, Capt. Peter Warren in *Squirrel* wrote, at the Admiralty's behest, the most detailed report on the situation of Nova Scotia hitherto prepared by the captain of a New England station. It argued that the English fishery had greatly declined since the 1720s but made no mention of clandestine trade between Massachusetts and Louisbourg, perhaps because Warren himself was involved in it. Still, Massachusetts maintained a small guard vessel at Canso, which in 1743 had seized three Île Royale vessels and one Acadien vessel with a cargo of livestock bound for Louisbourg.<sup>13</sup>

Neither the local vessel nor the small garrison resisted when a French expeditionary force took Canso without a shot in May 1744, on the outbreak of war, while Louisbourg-outfitted privateers swept New England vessels off the fishing banks. That summer some thirty New England vessels, valued at almost \$28,600, were condemned as prizes of war at Louisbourg.<sup>14</sup>

New England's response was swift. Massachusetts despatched colonial troops to strengthen the garrison at Annapolis Royal, under attack in the summer of 1744. Massachusetts also took the lead in January 1745, by planning and outfitting an expedition against Louisbourg.<sup>15</sup> Even before this decision had been taken by the Massachusetts House of Representatives, the governor, William Shirley, asked London for substantial naval assistance.<sup>16</sup>

While Governor Shirley was whipping up enthusiasm for the expedition among the New England colonies, he was also writing to Commodore Peter

Warren, then commanding the station ship at New York in summer and the Leeward Islands squadron in winter.<sup>17</sup> This important request, which reached him in Antigua on 23 February 1745, Warren originally felt obliged to refuse. This must have caused him some anguish, for in 1743 and 1744 he had informed the Admiralty that “nothing could be a greater acquisition to Great Britain and its dominions than dispossessing the French of Île Royale and Quebec, by which the whole fur and fish trade would be in our hands.”<sup>18</sup> The New England expedition, of which he was now informed, had not been sanctioned by London, and Warren would not risk denuding the Leeward Islands of naval protection at the very moment when a French squadron was expected at Martinique.<sup>19</sup> Warren had to decline Shirley’s suggestion until fresh orders reached him on 8 March, commanding him to form a new North American squadron composed of ships stationed to the north of the Carolinas. He was ordered to “attack and distress the enemy in their settlements, and annoy their fishery and commerce.”<sup>20</sup>

This commission, issued weeks before the British ministry learned of New England plans to attack Louisbourg, allowed Warren the latitude to sail north to the Canso rendezvous. On his passage from Antigua, Warren expressed his doubts about the prospect of success at Louisbourg.<sup>21</sup> The Massachusetts force fell far short of what he had wanted, which included British regulars supported by colonial levies, with an artillery train. Now he had the prospect of working with William Pepperrell, a merchant politician and acquaintance, leading a volunteer force of 3,000, devoid of military training. There were cannon, but no trained gunners, all with an escort of about a dozen colonial small-armed vessels. Several of the larger of these vessels Warren included in his line of battle during the siege.<sup>22</sup> Together they enhanced his squadron until it was reinforced from England, allowing him to send patrols along the coasts of Cape Breton, and greatly easing his ability to communicate with Pepperrell during the siege.

Louisbourg, a fortress-town located on a coast notorious for its fogs at certain seasons, appeared formidable to the untrained observer. At the entrance to a commodious harbour, it was surrounded on the land side by two bastions and two demi-bastions linked by a curtain wall and protected by a ditch, covert way, and glacis. The mile-wide harbour entrance was protected by a 36-gun battery on an island near the middle, and by the so-called Royal or Grand battery mounting 42-pounders, located separately on the mainland. It commanded every part of the harbour as well as the harbour entrance. The French garrison numbered about 700 officers and men, with an equal number of militia drawn from shopkeepers, artisans, and fishermen, and included some native Mi’kmaq.

The fortress proved vulnerable to landward attack, as some nearby hills overlooked the walls and, once occupied by an invasion force, allowed fire to be directed into the town. The masonry fortress also had its limitations. Even the well-appointed walls, because of the winter cycle of frost and thaw, threatened to tumble into the surrounding ditch. A system of revetting, by which stout planks were clamped over the stone face, was devised to support the walls, but these could not withstand the pounding of cannon balls.

During the siege, Warren's principal fear was that a French force would arrive, more powerful than his own, and lift the siege. In 1745, a policy developed a decade earlier in France, which determined that the town would be reinforced from France to counteract any threatened British expeditionary force, was still in force. His fears were well founded. The 32-gun *Renommée* was sent to Louisbourg in January, but owing to ice conditions she was unable to enter Louisbourg harbour when she arrived late in March. When chased later by New England vessels near Canso, she abandoned her mission and sailed for France. *Mars*, ordered to follow her to Cape Breton, was so slow in refitting that the new 62-gun *Vigilant* was despatched in her place. Departing Brest in mid-April, she was loaded with powder and provisions, with a full complement of almost 600 sailors and marines.<sup>23</sup>

About noon on 20 May, *Vigilant* approached the entrance to the harbour from the southwest. This surprised Warren, who believed that French ships habitually made their landfall northeast of the harbour. His squadron was well placed to receive her, as the commodore had the day before received intelligence, false as it transpired, from a prize vessel taken the day before that a French squadron was daily expected.<sup>24</sup> He had stationed his squadron, with *Launceston* (44) about sixty nautical miles northeast of Louisbourg lighthouse, *Eltham* (44) and *Superbe* (60) off the harbour's mouth, and the colonial vessels *Massachusetts* and *Shirley* (20) with *Mermaid* (44) to the southwest. Note that the name of a naval warship, the first time mentioned, followed by parentheses with a number inserted, such as *Launceston* (44), indicates the number of carriage guns mounted.

*Mermaid* was the first to sight the enemy, and sailed away from her, drawing her on toward the rest of the squadron for more than an hour, while exchanging fire from her stern guns. When *Vigilant* at length discovered her peril, she came about, gave *Mermaid* a broadside, and attempted to flee. Now *Mermaid* and the rest of the squadron gave chase. It was early evening before the squadron came within range. The battle raged into the night amid thick banks of swirling fog. With her sails torn and rigging shattered and more than sixty of

her crew casualties, *Vigilant* struck her colours at about nine at night and wore under *Superbe*'s stern. A prize crew was put aboard, and the warships sailed the next morning into Gabarus Bay, where the expeditionary force had successfully landed three weeks earlier.

Once safely ashore early in May, having encountered only light resistance from a surprised garrison, the troops dragged their cannon through bogs and tangled spruce forest. The abandoned Grand battery, with its cannons intact, was seized a few days later.<sup>25</sup> As the bombardment of the walls and town began, and as a summons to capitulate was rejected by the French governor, an attempt was mounted to storm the Island battery with a force of 400 drawn from the Grand battery.<sup>26</sup> On the night of 26 May, this attack was bloodily repulsed with the loss of 189 New Englander casualties.

This failure was partly offset by the arrival of naval reinforcements. These included *Eltham* and *Bien Aimé* (24) from New England, *Lark* (44) from Newfoundland, and *Princess Mary* (60), *Sunderland* (60), *Canterbury* (60), *Hector* (44), and *Chester* (50) from England. Early in March, the Admiralty had learned of French warships fitting out at Brest. When, a week later, firm news of the New England expedition reached London, ships were detached from the home fleet to sail for Louisbourg. This gave Commodore Warren the largest British naval squadron in North American waters since Rear Admiral Walker's expeditionary force against Quebec gathered off Île Royale thirty-five years earlier. The Brest force actually made for the coast of Newfoundland before Louisbourg's fall. After taking a number of prizes, among them both British and New England vessels, this small squadron returned to France in October without ever having entered Cape Breton waters.

The fate of Louisbourg was sealed not only by the arrival of these powerful naval units but by the decision on 31 May to erect a battery at the lighthouse, which was situated on a height of land overlooking the Island battery. Six 18-pounders were landed on the exposed coast at a point about a mile beyond the lighthouse, then dragged over the rough stone. Within hours of opening fire on 10 June, the barracks were destroyed, the magazine blown up, several cannon dismounted, and the battery left untenable. With the harbour entrance now defenceless, Warren wrote to Pepperrell of "our present prospect of success, which I think very great, therefore hope soon to keep a good house together, and give the ladys of Lewisbourg a gallant ball."<sup>27</sup>

The plan was now laid for the final assault.<sup>28</sup> Once 500 New England troops had come aboard the squadron, and an assault force of 1,000 was readied to

charge into the breaches in the fortress walls, the ships in line would sail into the harbour, bombarding with their more than 300 port guns the least defended part of the town. When Warren consulted his captains on 14 June, they unanimously gave their opinion that it would be dishonourable not “to go into the harbour, and use our utmost endeavour to reduce it to his Majesty’s obedience.”<sup>29</sup> Warren went ashore and addressed the troops readying for the attack, saying that “he’d rather leave his body at Louisbourg than not take the city,” for which he was given “three cheerful huzzas.”<sup>30</sup>

The skill and determination of the land forces and the squadron were never tested, as the French governor suddenly asked for terms. His enthusiasm had waned only when the Island battery had been demolished. This led to a petition, perhaps inspired by him, being circulated among the principal inhabitants of the town begging him to capitulate to avoid pillage, the inevitable outcome of a successful assault. The petition encouraged the governor to negotiate for the best possible terms. The town engineer detailed the damage to the walls and reported that of the 670 barrels of powder at the beginning of the siege only 47 remained, while provisions for a long siege were fast being consumed. With such evidence, the Louisbourg council voted unanimously in favour of capitulation.<sup>31</sup>

The terms were generous, in part because Warren still feared the sudden arrival of a French squadron, and wanted Louisbourg as a base of operations. Pepperrell’s principal concern was the news that a large force of Canadiens, Acadiens, and Mi’kmaq, estimated at 700, was on its way to succour the garrison. Already during the siege his troops had become casualties in several ambushes sprung by the Mi’kmaq. By the treaty, the inhabitants would be repatriated to France with the effects they could carry, at the cost of Parliament, and would enjoy religious freedom on their passage. Once the Island battery was handed over and the fleet safely at anchor within the harbour, the garrison would march out with the honours of war, having promised not to take up arms against his Britannic Majesty nor any of his allies for the balance of the war. The governor was allowed to remove his effects in two covered wagons.<sup>32</sup>

At five o’clock the next morning, 400 marines landed by boat to take possession of the Island battery, while Warren secured the keys of the city when his squadron sailed into the harbour unmolested. In the meantime, the New Englanders marched into the town through the ruined Maurepas gate. At six o’clock that evening, the French flag came down.

THE NEWS WAS GREETED GRIMLY IN CANADA AND FRANCE, but with great acclaim in New England, the British Caribbean islands, and the British Isles.<sup>33</sup> For a few days, the name of Louisbourg, hitherto unknown in Britain, was on everyone's lips. Bonfires were lit in celebration. Church bells pealed. Guns of the Tower of London were fired. For the first time, news from North America commanded widespread attention. The popular acclaim surprised the politicians. The king was reported to be delighted. Chesterfield described the capture as the "darling object of the whole nation ... ten times more popular than ever Gibraltar was." Granville, the former prime minister, saw it as the "first opening of the dawn of glory," while Pitt called it a "national success," with which both Bedford and Sandwich agreed. Newcastle was swept up in the initial euphoria, though his brother Henry Pelham, the prime minister, deeply concerned about the spiralling costs of the war, thought it a serious obstacle to peace negotiations.

Rewards were dished out. Warren was promoted rear admiral and named governor of Cape Breton. When his commission reached Louisbourg in the following spring, he immediately tendered his resignation as governor of Cape Breton colony to which he found himself appointed. Pepperrell was made a baronet and given the right to raise a regular regiment from among the New Englanders to garrison Louisbourg. The governor of Massachusetts was given the same extraordinary privilege.

Meanwhile at Louisbourg, Warren's principal concern was the disposition of his squadron. *Lark* returned to the Newfoundland station. *Launceston*, stripped of her guns, was sent to France crammed with 1,200 deported town inhabitants. *Hector*, *Eltham*, and *Bien Aimé* transported the French prisoners of war to France. *Superbe* and *Wager* cruised as far as the Chesapeake in a fruitless search for French privateers. This left *Vigilant*, *Canterbury*, *Princess Mary*, and *Sunderland* to look to the seaward defences of Cape Breton. These four flew French colours, as did the fortress and the Island battery. Warren's hope, to lure unsuspecting French shipping into the harbour, was amply rewarded. Among the several prizes easily made this way, three were richly laden returning East India-men, and a fourth was carrying 100,200 pieces of eight.<sup>34</sup> They were taken without difficulty or the loss of life. Warren's one-eighth share of the prize money laid the basis of his great fortune.<sup>35</sup> It also ignited understandable jealousy among some New England soldiers, who were excluded from a share in the prize distribution.

With the capture of Louisbourg, Warren showered the government at home with his ideas about the future direction of policy toward North America; most

unusual behaviour in an eighteenth-century sea officer. The success, he believed, now enabled Britain to conquer Canada and thereby dramatically throw open the rest of the continent to Britain. These suggestions left him open to the accusation that he exaggerated the role of America to future British concerns. His advice might be criticized as it would entail deflecting scarce resources from the strategic centre in European waters to the periphery, where they would be of marginal help in containing French and Spanish power, which was the central problem. The future, as we shall see in later chapters, supported Warren's vision and those who adopted it.

Warren proposed a ten-ship squadron to be based in Louisbourg harbour, where he wanted an expanded careening wharf to be constructed, capable of handling 60-gun ships. In suggesting that Louisbourg be elevated to the status of careening yard, Warren was taking up an idea he had first mentioned to the Admiralty in 1742.<sup>36</sup> Constructing such a facility would have created the first British naval base in North America, like the one then being enlarged at English Harbour, Antigua, and the one laid out in Jamaica a decade earlier. Warren's view held sway, for the temporary trappings of a base were acquired at Louisbourg, where a naval storekeeper was appointed and careening gear sent out from England.

WARREN RESIGNED THE GOVERNORSHIP OF CAPE BRETON in June 1746 when he received the ministry's permission, shortly after large naval and military reinforcements reached the port. In April, under convoy of *Dover* (44) and *Torrington* (44), two regiments from Gibraltar, having wintered in Virginia, had sailed into Louisbourg harbour. Then, early in May, Vice Admiral Isaac Townshend had arrived from Antigua with two 60-gun ships – *Kingston* and *Pembroke* – and *Kinsale* (44). They were joined shortly thereafter from England by *Canterbury* (60) and *Norwich* (50) under Warren's successor, Commodore Charles Knowles. Knowles, who had overseen the building of fortifications at English Harbour, was appointed governor of Cape Breton partly owing to this experience.

Before Warren departed Louisbourg, he outlined to both the new naval commander and the governor what he thought should be attempted that summer. Repairs to the battered fortifications should be completed. The Acadian population on Île St. Jean and at Baie Verte should be repatriated to France. The St. Lawrence should be blockaded to prevent provisions and troops from reaching Canada and to enable sea officers to become familiar with its navigation.

Meanwhile, part of the squadron would best be used to cruise off the coast for early notice should France prepare a force to attempt the reconquest of Louisbourg.

His orders were to sail to Boston in *Chester*, which he had retained over the winter with *Vigilant*, to concert plans with Shirley and other colonial governors for “attempting new conquests upon the enemy.” The anticipated tranquillity of a relatively unhurried summer proved an illusion. He was but a few hours sailing from Louisbourg when sloop *Hinchingbrook* brought him new orders. The ministry had determined that very summer upon an assault on Canada with forces from England and the colonies, under the protection of a large fleet from Portsmouth. Returning to Louisbourg immediately, Warren gave the startling news to Townshend, who summoned a council of war. It was immediately decided to despatch *Kinsale* into the St. Lawrence, while the removal of the Acadien population was postponed, as all available shipping would be needed to serve as transports for the colonial troops sent to Quebec.

As Warren sailed anew for Massachusetts, he was thoroughly discouraged. He was irritated that neither his nor Shirley’s advice about timing had been heeded in London. He saw no hope now of giving the American colonies willing to participate in the expedition sufficient time to raise the necessary forces and gather the required military supplies and provisions. New England, the most enthusiastic among the colonies for such an undertaking, would be especially hard-pressed to fulfill British expectations. New Englanders had died in their hundreds from disease that winter in Louisbourg, while others had enlisted at Louisbourg in the two new American foot regiments raised by Shirley and Pepperrell. The remainder were either already serving on the extensive New England frontier or had returned to their families, the period of their enlistment having ended. Warren feared the ministry plans, with the huge expenditures they entailed both for Britain and the colonies, would end in failure. Disgrace now seemed to menace him. He imagined his career ending in ruins, simply because the strategy, however wise, had been projected a year too soon.

The ministry had reached its decision at a 3 April meeting of the cabinet council. Though the capture of Louisbourg the year before had raised hopes of destroying French power in North America, a decision about the details and timing of the new initiative was delayed by the seriousness of the Jacobite uprising, which required the concentration of military and naval forces at home. With the Young Pretender in retreat, a decision about the 1746 campaigns in both North America and in Europe was further delayed by a political crisis at

home. In mid-February 1746, when the Pelhams and their friends resigned from the administration, the king was obliged to stop consulting his long-deposed minister, Lord Granville. Upon the Pelhams' return to office they insisted that the king give office to William Pitt, who was out of favour in part for his pointed attacks on the king's foreign policy, which seemed to favour Hanover's interests over Britain's. Only then could a war strategy be determined.

The plans that emerged were largely those of Bedford and Sandwich, whose support now sustained the Pelhams in power. Warren had penned a melancholy account of the state of Louisbourg in January, and to replace the huge losses from disease in the garrison, about 1,000 troops were embarked at once. Warren's proposals to concentrate a naval force for the protection of Louisbourg against any French countermeasure were also adopted. Within ten days, as a result of a memorandum prepared for Bedford, the conquest of Canada that season was proposed. When a committee endorsed the concept, a detailed plan was speedily devised and given cabinet approval immediately.<sup>37</sup>

The scheme involved a two-pronged attack on Canada, the main thrust of which would be up the St. Lawrence to seize Quebec, with a secondary force pushing toward Montreal via Lake George, Lake Champlain, and the Richelieu River. The force to be thrown against Quebec was to consist of 4,000 men with reinforcements from the Louisbourg garrison and from the newly raised New England levies, together with an artillery train. Warren was to command the squadron composed of whatever ships Vice Admiral Townshend spared him, together with the force sent from England. This latter, to rendezvous by the beginning of June at Louisbourg, consisted of one 80-gun ship, two 70-gun ships, three 60-gun ships, one 50-gun ship, and three 44-gun ships, with sloops, a bomb vessel, and a fireship. Added to this naval force was a "sea militia" of colonial armed vessels of the type that Warren found so useful in the 1745 siege.

The force bound to Montreal was to consist entirely of colonial levies from New England, the middle colonies of New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, and the two southern colonies of Maryland and Virginia. The support of the Six Nations Iroquois was also anticipated.

Townshend, while awaiting the arrival of the British fleet from Portsmouth, sent *Shirley* to Île St. Jean to inform the Acadiens there that they would now be permitted to remain rather than face deportation to France. There were two conditions: hostages would be brought to Louisbourg to ensure Acadien conformity with the "Articles of Indulgence," while half their livestock was to be sold for the use of the Louisbourg garrison.<sup>38</sup> The sloop *Rye* was sent to assist

before it was learned in Louisbourg that *Shirley's* landing party had been ambushed by Acadiens and had suffered heavy casualties.<sup>39</sup>

Townshend ordered *Torrington* to join *Vigilant* and *Pembroke* off Newfoundland, while *Kinsale* reconnoitred the St. Lawrence to a point about 100 miles upriver from the western tip of Anticosti Island, the farthest inland a British warship had ever sailed until 1758. This left him only *Kingston*, *Canterbury*, *Norwich*, and the frigate *Rye* to defend Louisbourg harbour should the French mount a counterattack that summer. When *Kinsale* reported the presence of five enemy frigates in the Bay of Gaspé, Townshend sent *Norwich* and *Vigilant* to her support.<sup>40</sup> By mid-August, his squadron, largely reassembled, was strengthened by the arrival of *Hampshire* (50) from the West Indies.<sup>41</sup>

In the meantime, when Warren reached Boston on 24 June, he found *Shirley* equally distraught about the ministry's ill-considered plans. Keeping their pessimism to themselves, they set about writing to colonial governors in a futile attempt to raise the necessary forces. By mid-August, fewer than 7,000 men had been enlisted, and fewer still had reached the rendezvous at Albany. They then knew no assault on Canada was possible. Instead, they proposed an attack on Fort St. Frédéric, a key defence of the Lake Champlain corridor. The force of 1,200 troops that eventually departed from Saratoga in October, however, soon abandoned the march in the face of inadequate supplies, sickness, and difficult weather. Subsequent desertions further reduced the ranks of this miserable body of men.<sup>42</sup>

As Warren and *Shirley* were trying to salvage something from the 1746 campaign, the ministry abandoned its Canada strategy. Adverse winds and administrative lethargy prevented troop transports from reaching Portsmouth before 12 June. Contrary winds further delayed the sailing of the entire expeditionary force. Before the winds abated, the wisdom of despatching such a force was called into serious question by the report that a considerable French force had already sailed from Rochefort. Only on 15 July was there clear intelligence that the French force had sailed, not against England, but to America. The squadron, now greatly augmented, sailed with orders to winter in Boston and thereby be well placed to attack Canada in 1747. Contrary winds again prevailed, so that the fleet reached Plymouth only on 29 August. By then the ministry's second thoughts, led by Prime Minister Henry Pelham and his brother, Newcastle, had taken hold. Orders now directed the expedition to "make a descent on some part of the western coast of France." The subsequent fiasco when a landing was made at l'Orient, the site of the principal warehouse of the *Compagnie des Indes*,

and Warren's own later insistence that a much larger naval force was needed to conquer Canada, ended the Pelhams' flirtation with an offensive strategy against France in America.

The French fleet, which the British had failed to detect early enough to intercept, represented France's desire to regain the initiative in North America. As soon as Louisbourg's fall was known, its recapture was planned for 1746. The subsequent history of this failed expedition, expertly reconstructed by Pritchard, is one of the sorriest episodes in French naval annals, and little of it was due to the deployment of the British navy.<sup>43</sup> The French force consisted of sixty-four vessels with 11,000 men, of whom 3,500 were infantry. Held in port so long by the same contrary winds that bedevilled British plans, the expedition should have been cancelled. Once at sea, unusually bad weather prolonged the crossing. A major disaster developed as a result of the poor quality of some of the provisions, which caused some 1,500 to die from scurvy and typhus on the crossing or when they reached the shelter of Chebucto harbour. By then, there were no less than 2,300 sick, while several hundred more died on the homeward voyage. No raid was made on Louisbourg or even on Annapolis Royal, which was defended by only one frigate.

Only gradually did the fate of the French fleet become apparent in Louisbourg and Boston. Both Warren and Townshend sent ships off Chebucto to gain intelligence, while Warren reinforced Annapolis with *Chester*, which replaced *Dover*, and 300 New England soldiers sent from Louisbourg. Warren also ordered vessels into the Atlantic to warn the phantom British fleet of the presence of the French.

When Warren and Townshend, separately but almost simultaneously, became aware of the sorry condition of the French fleet and its withdrawal from Nova Scotia, they sailed for England. Before Warren departed, he had sent the ministry his considered views about the force needed to defeat the French in Canada. He now recommended a squadron increased to eighteen ships of the line with frigates, sloops, and fireships. He urged the ministry to keep a sufficient force to winter at Louisbourg in order to enter the St. Lawrence as soon as it became ice-free and no later than 25 May. He recommended a force of 8,000 British regulars and 12,000 colonial troops to accompany the fleet.<sup>44</sup> He outlined, as well, the supply requirements of winter clothing, once Montreal and Quebec were occupied, and of reserves of naval stores, provisions, and ammunition to be stored at Louisbourg, which he designated as the logistical base for the St. Lawrence expedition.

When he reached London, Warren discovered that none of this mattered any more to the administration. The navy's failure to destroy the French naval force in the Atlantic or even inflict on it serious damage meant that any British expeditionary force sent into the St. Lawrence River in 1747 risked being bottled up there by a larger French force stationed at its mouth. The navy lacked the confidence to blockade the French navy in its Atlantic ports, while despatching a strong fleet to Canada. Instead Warren was required merely to draft plans of a defensive nature for North America.<sup>45</sup> He recommended, besides a strong naval force at Louisbourg and an adequate garrison, the erection of fortifications both at Canso and Chebucto, with a blockhouse on the Chignecto isthmus on Nova Scotia's frontier with New France.

THE VALUE OF LOUISBOURG TO THE BRITISH EMPIRE in the eyes of Governor Knowles was very different from Warren's. With Knowles's first despatches, the ministry received a new view of Louisbourg. Instead of a place of promise and value from a naval viewpoint, Knowles described it for the Admiralty as "the most miserable ruinous place" he had ever beheld. He described its harbour as "very indifferent both as to the anchoring and security against winds."<sup>46</sup> He told Secretary of State Newcastle that the climate alone made a mockery of any attempt at effective masonry fortification. He heaped scorn on Warren's proposal to make Louisbourg the general rendezvous of American and West Indies homeward-bound trade, as offshore fogs were so persistent in the sailing season and the prevailing winds from October almost impossible to beat against. As a careening yard, the facilities at Louisbourg he found "very bad," though he did not deny that one was needed in North America. In his detestation of New Englanders, he proved the worst possible choice as governor. He described them all, from Pepperrell "down to the corporals," as "rum sellers," and, to reduce intoxication among the garrison, confiscated 640,000 gallons of rum.<sup>47</sup>

When Townshend sailed out of the fog-enshrouded Louisbourg harbour toward the end of October 1746, Knowles assumed command of what remained of the North American squadron, which consisted of *Canterbury*, *Norwich*, *Chester*, *Fowey* (44), frigate *Aldbrough* (24), sloop *Hind* (10), bomb *Comet* (8), and armed vessel *Success*. Detached, and still guarding Annapolis Royal, were *Shirley* and armed vessel *Montague*, which had orders to winter in the Bay of Fundy. The ships of the line, except *Chester*, which carried Warren to England, and the frigate, sailed for the West Indies where they wintered. Suspecting that

the French had landed military supplies, Knowles sent *Hind* and *Success* to sail along the Nova Scotia coast for enemy vessels.<sup>48</sup>

To leave in command a sea officer whose vision of British prospects in North America was so uninformed and so hostile as that of Knowles was certain to appeal to the traditional views of the Admiralty and the ministry at home. Knowles hoped all thought within the administration of renewing the American adventure in 1747 was dashed. "Certain I am," he wrote, as much in earnest as in ignorance, "that were we in quiet possession of the town of Quebec tomorrow, it would be impossible to keep it had we no other enemy than the weather to encounter." Throughout that winter Knowles, who was cold and ill, continued his campaign against Louisbourg – and indeed against Warren. He advocated the demolition of the fortifications, writing, "It was forty years' work to pile it up in the manner it is. If it was once leveled, it would take as long time again ... if it was ever attempted."<sup>49</sup> Knowles, appointed to command in the West Indies, departed Louisbourg in September 1747, no doubt pleased to see the fortress evaporate from the Admiralty's strategy. As confirmation of this, his successor in 1748, Charles Watson, as commander of the North American squadron, spent most of his time on the Newfoundland station.<sup>50</sup>

The ministry at first disagreed with the advice it was receiving from Knowles. Instead, in 1747 it appointed Warren again to the command of the North American squadron to ensure British naval superiority in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Besides those ships already appointed to various American stations, he was given an additional eight ships of the line.<sup>51</sup>

A quite sudden change in the orders came as a result of intelligence received of a naval armament reportedly outfitting in Brest. At a cabinet council meeting on 30 March, attended by both Vice Admiral Anson and Warren, it was decided to strengthen the squadron under Warren, and send it, under Anson's command, immediately to sea. If Anson learned that any part of the French force had got away, he was to detach Warren in command of a strong flying squadron in pursuit. This idea Warren had first broached with Anson a year earlier,<sup>52</sup> and which the noted naval historian, Richmond, rightly considered of great importance.<sup>53</sup> On 3 May, with Cape Ortegal about thirteen leagues to the east south-east, Anson and Warren at last engaged the enemy's force. It consisted of six ships of the line, four well-armed East Indiamen, and three sloops of war. Every warship was taken except a 24-gun frigate. Of the twenty-five merchantmen, five were seized, the rest escaping to their destinations either in Canada or in the East Indies.

However pleasing to Warren personally – his share of prize money amounted to £31,496, while he was made knight of the Order of the Bath – the strategic importance of the engagement was slight. France still retained strong naval forces both at Brest and Toulon. The trade between France and Quebec, and between Quebec and the *Antilles françaises* was left relatively unhindered. The frigate that escaped the battle safely convoyed six vessels to Quebec, while ten other merchant vessels sailed that summer to Quebec from ports in western France. Indeed, that summer a small squadron of three French ships of the line sailed from Rochefort to Quebec to protect the settlement, in case Warren had been ordered to the St. Lawrence. All three ships returned home safely.

As the Admiralty's gaze shifted away from Nova Scotia waters in the spring of 1747, the squadron based at Louisbourg was rather hard pressed for the last two years of the war to attend to all the demands placed on its services. Patrolling along the American coast and into the Gulf of St. Lawrence as far as the Gaspé was the principal concern. None of this prevented French shipping from sailing unmolested in the St. Lawrence, though, and no attempt was renewed to clear the Acadiens from Île St. Jean. One ship was lost when *Hind*, caught in a vicious September storm, sank with all hands as she approached the entrance to Louisbourg harbour. *Comet* was also nearly lost when on her passage from Annapolis to Boston she was laid on her beam ends. To survive, her crew cut away her mainmast and jettisoned her guns and bower anchor.

The plan to invade Canada did not resurface, despite the destruction of much of the French navy at the battle off Cape Finisterre in 1747. This success gave the British navy, supported by a small Dutch squadron the following spring, general command of the Western Approaches from the English Channel to Gibraltar. Peace preliminaries, based in part on the mutual restoration of conquests, were signed in April 1748, news of which reached Louisbourg two months later. Before then there occurred a brief clash of arms at the coal mine at Spanish River on Île Royale, when a party of French and Mi'kmaq seized ten small vessels preparing to load fuel for Louisbourg.<sup>54</sup> Aware that Île Royale with its fortress was to be restored to the French, the squadron commander, Commodore Watson, sailed for home, having shipped to England the remaining naval stores at Louisbourg.

THE DEGREE OF THE BRITISH NAVY'S FUTURE COMMITMENT to a forward policy in North America was unclear as peace descended on the western Atlantic in 1748. Stirring events of an unprecedented scope had occurred in Nova Scotia's

waters. Powerful squadrons had been drawn to the theatre for the first time, and as a result, a significant minority of British sea officers had become familiar with those northern waters. To clever and passionate men like Charles Knowles, without any ties to North America, whether familial, financial, or emotional, it was an experience to be avoided. For him, the West Indies, with all its dangers from yellow fever and malaria, were a preferred setting both for profit and for comfort. One need know nothing more about that officer's views about the colonists than those expressed when he ignited a major riot in Boston in 1747. Unable to recover his deserters, he pressed men from the merchant vessels in harbour. With several of his officers held hostage, and the governor unable to get the militia to answer the call to arms, the rear admiral's considered response was to threaten to land his marines and bombard the city.<sup>55</sup> He recovered his officers and retained his pressed men, but his actions helped permanently to sour relations with the navy among some Americans who were later to prove to be very influential.

In contrast, behaviour such as Knowles displayed would have been unthinkable to Peter Warren, who had long served on various stations on the American coast, whose wife was born in New York, and some of whose children were born in Boston. He knew enough of the colonists' tendencies, especially their "notions of the rights and liberties of Englishmen."<sup>56</sup> He longed at one time to be appointed governor of New York, where he held extensive property and had extensive financial interest. No British sea officer in the eighteenth century was so expressive or so imaginative in his enthusiasm for North America. Whether in advocating new policy toward the aboriginals, or the French in Canada, or about mundane matters touching the economic development of Île Royale, the settlement of Nova Scotia, or shipbuilding for the navy in New England, Warren was prepared to press his ideas on both the politicians and leading naval figures in England.

In general, Warren advocated a large new role for the navy in America. His policies had a twofold purpose. First, defensively they aimed to put limits on French power in North America, which was then bent upon confining British interests to a long narrow enclave from the Gut of Canso to the southern frontier of Georgia. Second, they urged on the Admiralty a forward offensive strategy. Warren's plan called for the creation of a North American squadron, the deployment of many more warships in North American waters, and the building of warships for the navy in New England.<sup>57</sup> His further idea of building armed vessels on Lake Ontario, Lake George, and Lake Champlain was yet in

the future. For him, economic motives outweighed all others, as a British monopoly in the North American fisheries, and fur and timber trades was touted as a certain development, once French power was extinguished.

Historians often write as if the 1748 peace treaty was merely a truce, as they know with the advantage of hindsight that hostilities were renewed in North America just seven years later. Contemporaries did not express such thoughts. Nor, once hostilities resumed in 1755, did they imagine that a British victory over the French in America was inevitable. The establishment of the town of Halifax, and the removal there of the seat of government from Annapolis Royal, was not so much an act to seize the offensive against French ambitions in North America as the perceived need to defend New England. This was for the northern colonies a policy similar to one followed fifteen years earlier when Georgia was established as a colony to secure the southern borders of South Carolina. If the town of Halifax was erected at the cost of British taxpayers, it was no different from the costs they had footed in the earlier construction of Savannah. In theory, Halifax with its assigned garrison and naval units protected New England port towns from the French at Louisbourg, as Savannah with its warships shielded Charleston from the Spanish in Florida. If there was any difference, it was in the scope of the Nova Scotia experiment. Public costs were greater because more troops and more warships, owing to the power represented by Louisbourg, were assigned to Nova Scotia than ever were sent to Georgia. France, not Spain, loomed as the greater enemy, and the capture of Louisbourg and the naval victories of 1747 had not altered that.

This raises the question of the relative strength of naval power between Britain and France. To write as if British naval victory before 1759 was inevitable in any clash of arms on the high seas would be to assert claims not made by the Admiralty itself, or indeed anyone close to the centre of British political life. A careful reading of the French and British official records of the period demonstrates that, before 1759, there was in Britain very little confidence that, either diplomatically or in combat, Britain would be able to contain its principal rivals, France and Spain, especially if they were allied. In this light, the settlement of Halifax in 1749 was not a major change in policy, but a response to France's reoccupation of Louisbourg and the perceived need for some reasonable countermeasure. In the 1730s, Capt. Thomas Durell had prepared a draft of the harbour, while Warren in 1739 had suggested it as a suitable site for settlement. Still, it took the dramatic use of the harbour by the French in 1746, which Vice Admiral Townshend failed to challenge, to emphasize its strategic value.

In a phrase, if ever Louisbourg had again to be besieged, Halifax harbour was preferable to the port of Boston. It was in this atmosphere that the duke of Bedford asked Lord Halifax at the Board of Trade to draft a post-war plan for Nova Scotia. Its form as well as its details especially reflected New England concerns and experience.<sup>58</sup>

THE AGREEMENT TO ABANDON LOUISBOURG, under the terms of the peace treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, was put into effect only in the summer of 1749. Rather than withdraw the garrison to Britain or some other colony, a decision was taken in March to establish a new settlement in Chebucto harbour. Ships hired in England to convey settlers to Nova Scotia were then used, once they had discharged their passengers in Chebucto harbour, to collect the soldiers and supplies in Île Royale and transport them to Halifax, the new town under construction.

Permission to settle the harbour site, as well as other selected places of new settlement, such as on the LaHave River, had not first been negotiated with the Mi'kmaq. This contrasted with the French authorities, who had first sought native permission before constructing the town of Louisbourg, its fortifications, and other sites on Île Royale intended for settlement and fortification. The result of this oversight was the hostility of the Mi'kmaq, paid for by the lives of both soldiers and English settlers. British officials appear to have been unduly influenced by New Englanders in adopting, not Warren's policy of conciliation, but one of unremitting hostility toward the Mi'kmaq. British behaviour at Halifax was resented, which helped to trigger untold misery and anxiety among settlers for the next several years. This in turn helped bedevil relations with the French, who maintained close contact with the aboriginals throughout Acadie and on Île Royale. The turmoil that resulted inevitably drew in the naval forces assigned to the station, thereby complicating their tasks. Sent to escort the new governor and settlers were *Sphinx* and sloop *Albany*.

The navy, almost from the outset of peace, found itself on the defensive in Nova Scotia waters. French determination to maintain active contact, both commercial and political, with the aboriginal peoples and Acadiens in peninsular Nova Scotia transformed what otherwise might have been a rather truncated presence in Nova Scotia waters after 1749-50, into something of far greater importance. The French, in 1749, immediately set about fortifying the mouth of the Saint John River, across the Bay of Fundy from Annapolis Royal. In 1750, when an armed French brigantine bound for the Saint John River from Quebec

was seized, the French reinforced their naval squadron at Louisbourg. Thereafter, French ships sailed unhindered into the Bay of Fundy, while Acadiens regularly sent their agricultural surpluses to the fortress-town.

For the next four years, the French maintained this naval superiority in the whole area, despite the presence of warships at Halifax. To maintain lines of communication between the scattered English settlements, successive governors, when denied adequate patrol vessels by the Admiralty, simply hired as many as they deemed necessary and charged the cost to the Board of Trade for the colonies, not to the Navy Board.<sup>59</sup> The policy began with Governor Edward Cornwallis who, in 1749 for example, retained five armed vessels, all commanded by New Englanders newly settled in Nova Scotia.

THE ADMIRALTY'S DECISION TO ESTABLISH A SQUADRON for North American service, and hence begin a flirtation with an "American policy," arose in 1745 from a New England initiative to mount an expeditionary force against Louisbourg. These decisions, in turn, were reactions to French initiatives, when upon the outbreak of war in 1744, a force from Louisbourg seized Canso and then laid siege to Annapolis Royal. The squadron, commanded by Warren, was cobbled together from ships drawn from the Leeward Islands, America, and Newfoundland. It included several armed vessels, as large as small frigates, outfitted by the colonial governments, and to these were later sent strong reinforcements from home waters.<sup>60</sup> In the face of feeble French naval reinforcements, the squadron proved singularly effective.

The decision to settle Chebucto harbour and appoint an almost phantom force of warships to the defence of the Nova Scotia colony was the first indication of a permanent role for the navy across the Gulf of Maine so long as France remained a serious rival on the continent.

With peace still obtaining uneasily with France, events changed rather dramatically in 1755. Then, without Admiralty knowledge, local naval units supported an expedition composed of 2,000 men drawn from Massachusetts with the support of some 300 British regulars. Their purpose was to oust the French from Fort Beauséjour and Fort Gaspereau, established since 1749 on the Chignecto isthmus far up the Bay of Fundy. Their quick success led to the destruction not only of these forts, but also of the one built earlier at the mouth of the Saint John River. This victory also led directly to the decision, in which sea officers participated, to remove the bulk of the Acadien population then

still inhabiting Nova Scotia. The successful deportation obliged those Acadiens who escaped to depart the shores of the Bay of Fundy and settle farther up the Saint John valley or in the Gaspé. These dramatic events, in which the navy played an important role, transformed Nova Scotia, as we shall see in the next chapter, into a major strategic zone for the next four years.