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## **America, the War of 1739-1748 and the development of British Global Power**

### **Richard Harding**

The point at which Britain became a global power is not easy to identify. The definition of global power is slippery. Even if a definition could be agreed, power is fragile, being conditional on many physical and psychological variables which are in constant state of flux. Few powers have ever come close to exercising what would commonly be regarded as global power, but Britain is one of these and it is commonly accepted that this became evident in the Seven Years War (1756-1763)<sup>1</sup>. British maritime and military resources had developed sufficiently to take decisive military action in most of the coastal regions of the inhabited world and this action also had a clear diplomatic impact.

Gorée (1758), Guadeloupe (1759), Québec (1759), Montreal (1760), Dominica (1760), St Lucia (1760), Martinique (1761), Havana (1762) and Manila (1763) all fell to British forces. British positions in India were secured. The sophisticated use of seapower undoubtedly lay at the heart of this achievement. By tight blockade, the French and later the Spaniards were prevented from sending succour to their threatened colonies<sup>2</sup>. It enabled the British to move resources in America and Europe to their enemies' strategic weak points. It enabled them to shift the focus of attack when stalled, as they did at St Malo in 1758 and Martinique in 1759. Over 38,000 British regulars were carried to North America by 1759, who sealed the fate of New France by the end of 1760<sup>3</sup>. Without this level of sea domination, it is extremely doubtful that these campaigns in both hemispheres would have yielded the results that they did.

However, seapower alone would not have done the job. The ability of the Pitt-Newcastle coalition to manage Parliament was critical to the provision of finance for the war. The sums required to prosecute this war were unprecedented. Pitt's recognition that the political platform on which he had launched his assault on power – that of a colonial war – was flawed, is also an important feature of the overall success of the coalition. From 1758, money and large numbers of troops had to be sent to Europe to support the Prussians and revenge the fall of Hanover.

Equally important was the effective mobilisation of land forces which were supported from the sea. In North America and India the processes and work were very different but essential if British objectives were to be achieved. In North America, the provincial regiments played an important role. From a force of under 7,000 truculent New Englanders and New Yorkers around Fort Edward and Fort William Henry in the summer of 1756, the provincial contribution rose to just under 20,000 in 1758

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<sup>1</sup> T. Pocock, *Battle for Empire : The Very First World War, 1756-1763*, (London, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> G.S. Graham, 'The Naval Defence of British North America, 1739-1763', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, xxx (1948), 95-110. J.S. Corbett, *England and the Seven Years War* (London, Longmans, 1907) 2 vols ; C.H. Little, *The Influence of Sea Power on the Conquest of Canada*, (Halifax N.S., Maritime Museum of Canada Occasional Paper No.1, April 1958).

<sup>3</sup> *Journal of the House of Commons*, xxviii(1757-1762), 636.

and 1759<sup>4</sup>. The long lines of communication up the Hudson and the Mohawk Valleys were guarded by these troops, enabling the regulars to concentrate at the cutting edge of the attacking force. The colonies provided batteau-men, wagons and drivers. Some colonists were also induced to join the regulars – most significantly, the 60<sup>th</sup> (Royal Americans) which was four battalions strong. American provincial troops were also important elements within the successful expeditions sent to the West Indies under Lord Rollo in 1760 and joining Albemarle's attack on Havana in 1762.

The days when the victories of the Seven Years War were attributed primarily to the genius of William Pitt are now passed. A number of recent studies have charted the course of the war and noted how decisions were made, resources shifted and strategy carried out<sup>5</sup>. Fighting the Seven Years War was a complex operation. The development of law to reinforce naval policy, such as the Rule of 1756, and the use of the East India Company were both important additional factors. The war was an example of how the British government managed to integrate resources and, for want of a better expression, various social, economic and political 'systems' to a specific end – the defeat of France and Spain.

What is less clear is how the mechanisms for the success of the Seven Years War were developed in previous decades. A great deal had been inherited from precedent. We know, for example, that there was nothing particularly unusual about the way the naval administration related to the executive in this period. Pitt's relations with the Admiralty were little different from that of other first ministers<sup>6</sup>. We know that the formal processes by which Pitt corresponded with the commanders in the field were no different from precedents. We know that in most cases the contracting procedures were no different. There were important administrative modifications that became practicable and necessary as the infrastructure and resources for war developed during 1758, but it is also true that much had already been learned as a result of war in the previous decade. The raising of the provincial regiments was one of the aspects of successful imperial warfare that owed a lot to the experience gained in the previous war.

The War of 1739-1748 has not attracted the attention of other Eighteenth Century conflicts. Apart from the Jacobite Rebellion, the war probably has less drama than any of the other conflicts. Its conclusion, broadly on the basis of the *status quo ante*, suggests that it was a rather futile bloodletting that ended in little more than a truce, before war resumed to reach the great climax of rivalries in the Seven Years War. For Britain the war was problematic. Starting very clearly as a dispute with Spain over colonial trading rights, it merged with the dispute over the Austrian succession, the defence of Hanover and the United Provinces. The direction of the war and its various objectives were not easily reconciled. However, by the end of the war, the problems of conducting major campaigns in the colonies and the extent of the threat posed by

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<sup>4</sup> D. Syrett, 'American Colonial Governments and the Raising of Provincial Troops during the Seven Years War', *Journal of the Society of Army Historical Research*, xxxi (2003), 96-113 ; F.R. Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (Faber, London, 2000), 142-144; 805-6

<sup>5</sup> R. Middleton, *The Bells of Victory: The Pitt-Newcastle Ministry and the Conduct of the Seven Years War, 1757-1762*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985) ; F. R. Anderson, *Crucible of War*.

<sup>6</sup> R. Middleton, 'Pitt, Anson and the Admiralty, 1757-1760', *History*, lv (1970), 189-198.

France to Britain's colonial position were both in sharper focus than they had been in 1739<sup>7</sup>.

An important factor in sharpening that focus was the mobilisation of American resources during the war and the impact of events in America on its progress. It has long been recognised that maritime society in America played a great part in the Seven Years War. The coastal waters of North America were not covered effectively by the Royal Navy as a matter of course<sup>8</sup>. Trade to America and, particularly, the West Indies, was valuable but dangerous. It was an ideal ground for the working of privateers. American privateers disrupted the vital traffic in foodstuffs to the French and Spanish islands in the West Indies. Although American merchants also had the irritating habit of trading these same commodities to those islands, they, nevertheless, provided the victuals and stores that kept the British island economies going during the war. These activities were well established in the war of 1739-1748. At least 466 privateering voyages set out from North American and Caribbean ports during the war and 829 prizes were taken<sup>9</sup>. It has been estimated that about 30% of French trade fell victim to privateers in the war, severely damaging trade to Canada and the West Indies. In terms of overall impact it is difficult to argue with Carl Swanson's verdict in 1985 that in terms of numbers of men and economic resources employed, 'privateering operations played *the leading role in America's war effort and made a major contribution to British seapower by disrupting Spanish and French commerce*'<sup>10</sup>.

The thriving ports of British North America, particularly New England and New York, not only provided seamen for privateers, but also seamen for local guard vessels and Royal Navy ships. This pressure on manpower led to impressment<sup>11</sup>. The reaction of seamen in American ports to impressment was very similar to that in British ports. During wartime they did what they could to take advantage of the rising wages on merchant vessels or the prize opportunities in privateers. They were assisted by the ambiguous legal position of pressing in the northern colonies. Royal Navy captains considered that the act of 1707 which prohibited pressing in North America had expired with the peace in 1713. The colonists and the seamen believed otherwise. Pressing went ahead once the war had brought Royal Navy vessels into American waters. Tension increased throughout the war, especially after the outbreak

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<sup>7</sup> D.S. Graham, *British Intervention in Defence of the American Colonies, 1748-1756*, (Unpublished Ph.D., University of London, 1969); B. Harris, 'Patriotic Commerce and National Revival: The Free British Herring Fishery Society and British Politics, c.1749-1758', *English Historical Review*, cxiv (1999), 285-313.

<sup>8</sup> N.R. Stout, *The Royal Navy in America, 1760-1775*, (Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, 1973), 13-4.

<sup>9</sup> C.E. Swanson, 'American Privateering and Imperial Warfare, 1739-1748', *William and Mary Quarterly*, xlii (1985), 357-382. This can be compared with 1191 voyages from Britain. British privateers captured 480 prizes and Royal Navy vessels another 449. See, D. Starkey, *British Privateering Enterprise in the Eighteenth Century*, (Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 1990), 121, 137.

<sup>10</sup> C.E. Swanson, 'American Privateering and Imperial Warfare, 1739-1748', *William and Mary Quarterly*, xlii (1985), 359. However, the picture of declining French trade was not entirely uniform. The trade between Québec and France grew between 1743 and 1748. See J.F. Boshier, 'Guerre et activités de la marine marchande au Canada' in M. Acerra, J-P Poussou, M. Vergé-Franceschi, A. Zysberg (ed.s), *Etat, Marine et Société*, (Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1995), 49-71

<sup>11</sup> C.E. Swanson, 'The Competition for American Seamen during the War of 1739-1748', in R.L. Emerson et al., (ed.s), *Man and Nature: Proceedings of the Canadian Society for Eighteenth Century Studies*, (Ontario, University of Ontario Press, 1982), 119-129.

of the French war in 1744, when naval vessels were more commonly in American ports and American labour was under pressure for other warlike activities. It culminated in the 'Knowles Riots' in November 1747. Commodore Charles Knowles brought his squadron to Boston and began to press seamen. For two days a mob held naval officers captive and forced Governor Shirley to seek sanctuary at Castle William. The mob finally dispersed and the officers were released<sup>12</sup>. While the riots did not stop the practice of pressing, they have been examined by Lax and Pencak in the context of making a major contribution to developing the theory of resistance to British imperial authority.

Whereas Swanson is right in highlighting the contribution of privateering to the conduct of the war, and Lax and Pencak are also right to emphasise the role of impressment in forcing Massachusetts to become aware of what they called '*the imperial context of its existence*'<sup>13</sup>, there was another contribution to the British war effort that may also have had important consequences for the conduct of war and the future of the empire. This was the raising of the American regiment of foot in 1740. It did not have a long or glorious history, but it was a forerunner of the large military forces raised in America. As such it played an important part in converting British maritime power into effective imperial power.

### **The Military-Naval Situation 1713-1739**

Britain had emerged from the War of Spanish Succession in 1713 with the nature of her military power unclear. Marlborough's campaigns from 1703-1710 had been crowned with some spectacular victories, but they had not led to clear-cut, sustained advantage to the Allies. The campaigns in Italy and Spain had been equally devoid of apparently decisive results. The campaigns at sea and in the colonies were likewise, mixed in their results. However, the manner in which the Tory ministry engaged in the peace negotiations from 1710 gave a powerful boost to the belief that these latter campaigns were the most significant. A Bourbon king ruled Spain, but with some caveats to ensure that Spain remained an independent power. Although fragile, this was something which the allied armies had achieved in Europe. On the other hand, the defence of Great Britain against invasion in 1708 and the capture of Gibraltar, Minorca and Newfoundland were all achieved by naval power. The rhetoric that surrounded the negotiations and the justification for abandoning the Grand Alliance publicly juxtaposed the clarity of British conquests by naval power with the inevitably limited results that would be achieved by allied armies<sup>14</sup>. In March 1714, Queen Anne told the assembled Houses of Parliament :- '*Our situation points out to us by our true interest, for this country can flourish only by trade, and will be most formidable by the right application of our Naval Force*'<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> J. Lax and W. Pencak, 'The Knowles Riot and the Crisis of the 1740s in Massachusetts' in *Perspectives of American History*, x(1976), 163-214.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 214.

<sup>14</sup> D. Coombes, *The Conduct of the Dutch: British Opinion and the Dutch Alliance during the War of Spanish Succession*, (Nijhoff, The Hague, 1958), 277-291

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in J.R. Hattendorf, *England in the War of Spanish Succession: A Study of the English View and Conduct of Grand Strategy, 1702-1712*, (Garland, New York, 1987), 263.

How deeply held was this confidence in naval power is difficult to tell. Whether successive ministers believed that the naval force, as constituted in the 1720s and 1730s, was really the ideal tool for British diplomatic pressure, or whether they were simply pragmatic enough to accept that it was the only force that was politically acceptable, is impossible to tell. The track-record is ambiguous. Operations against the Jacobites, the expeditions to the Baltic, the operations in the Mediterranean and the West Indies in the 1720s all had mixed results. The importance of the French alliance between 1716 and 1731, which enabled British naval units to focus on events outside the Channel must not be under-estimated<sup>16</sup>. While the alliance held, the successes of the navy were enough to preserve the belief that naval power could achieve British diplomatic objectives.

The most significant problems faced by Britain in the 1720s related to Russia, whose control over the Baltic and threat to Hanoverian interests had to be watched carefully and Spain, whose Italian ambitions and distaste over the commercial treaty relating to the West Indies had left important unfinished business. While Russia did not prove particularly amenable to seapower, Spain at least seemed vulnerable. Squadrons in the Mediterranean, off Cadiz and in the West Indies could disrupt Spanish plans, and prevent the vital flow of silver from the New World to Spain. The crumbling of the Anglo-French alliance in 1731 changed the diplomatic situation. Throughout the 1720s French mercantile and naval power had been growing. The new generation of French ships of the line were larger than their British counterparts. French overseas trade was growing at a faster rate than British trade – possibly as much as 600% in the years between 1713 and 1744<sup>17</sup>. To some informed observers, there must come a time when France would overtake Britain in both trade and naval power, which when combined with her much larger standing army must make Britain extremely vulnerable<sup>18</sup>.

How was this new problem to be addressed? The principle defence lay in alliances to counter the French. The most obvious ally was Austria, and it had been the Treaty of Vienna in March 1731 that was the immediate cause of the breach with France. Sir Robert Walpole's ministry developed this alliance to include Spain and the United Provinces, but Britain's failure to join Austria during the War of Polish Succession (1733-5), undermined the confidence that the allies might have had in this treaty<sup>19</sup>. Professor Black has argued that Walpole was wise to stay out of the war. Black argued that Walpole recognised, unlike later historians such as Sir Richard Lodge, that Britain did not have the resources for effective participation European conflict and that there was a very real danger posed by Jacobitism. He may have been buying time or even hoping for fortune to provide a favourable outcome, but he could not

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<sup>16</sup> J.M. Black, 'The British Navy and Foreign Policy in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century', in K. Schweizer and J. Black, (ed.s), *Studies in History and Politics*, iv (1985). (Essays in European History in Honour of Ragnhild Hatton), (Bishop's University, 1985), 137-155 ; J. Black, *The Collapse of the Anglo-French Alliance, 1727-1731*, (Sutton, Gloucester, 1987).

<sup>17</sup> J.R. McNeill, *The Atlantic Empires of France and Spain : Havana and Louisbourg, 1713-1763*, (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1985),

<sup>18</sup> C. King, *The British Merchant* (London, 1721); R. Vaucher, *Robert Walpole et la Politique de Fleury, 1731-1741*, (Plon, Paris, 1924), 297-299

<sup>19</sup> J.Black, *Natural and Necessary Enemies: Anglo-French Relations in the Eighteenth Century*, (University of Georgia Press, Athens, 1986), 21-27; J. Black, 'When "Natural Allies" fall out: Anglo-Austrian Relations, 1715-1740', *Mitteilungen des Osterreichischen Staatsarchiv*, xxxvi(1983), 120-149.

have predicted a war with Spain would break out in 1739 nor that the Austrian Succession would be violently challenged in 1740. Whether or not this is true, the unfortunate result, whether Austria won or lost the war over Poland, was that Austrian resentment would underpin her future reaction to French threats to Britain.

If the diplomatic environment left Britain isolated and in some difficulty in the event of a crisis, the domestic situation only compounded this. Walpole's ministry was afflicted by twin difficulties in the 1730s. Opposition had been gathering since 1727. He was suspected of trying to create a tyrannical absolutist state, exemplified by the Excise Bill of February 1732 and the dismissals that followed its withdrawal in March. The 1734 election saw another tranch of political casualties as those that had opposed the Excise or shown support for those dismissed earlier fell victim to the *Robinocracy*. On the other hand, Walpole was suspected of being too weak towards France over British rights on St Lucia and the Dunkirk fortifications. Walpole survived the domestic crisis of 1733-4, but portrayed as a domestic tyrant and a weakling in foreign affairs, he appeared as the reverse of the ideal minister of a just and powerful prince.

### **The Colonial Situation**

Britain had emerged from the War of Spanish Succession with its colonial possessions in tact. While very different in social structure and economic activity and jealous of their individual charter rights, the colonies of North America and the West Indies were perceived a single unit to contemporaries in London. The importance of these colonies was not doubted, nor was the potential danger from Spanish and French expansion. The ability of the metropolitan powers to defend their colonial possessions was limited to the resources they could spare from home defence added to any resources that could be generated locally. In the 1680s the immature colonies had little defences and the metropolitan powers could spare little to send out to them. A treaty of neutrality had been negotiated in 1686 in the vain hope that war in Europe would not spread to the Americas. The war of 1689-1697 soon demonstrated the impossibility of this. Eight French or British expeditions were sent to the Americas in this war and another 21 between 1701 and 1713<sup>20</sup>. The results were not particularly impressive. Almost all of these expeditions went, primarily, to the West Indies. There were expeditions of conquest, although these had generally failed. There were, nonetheless, clear warning signs. Cartagena de las Indias fell to a French raiding force in 1697 and Rio in 1711. The message was not lost on the Spanish crown, which started to strengthen the fortifications of its principal ports as soon as the war ended. None of the European powers had adequate resources to spare to tackle the vast distances and spaces of North America. Some troops, probably less than 200, were raised in New England in 1702 for an attack upon the French West Indies<sup>21</sup>. 450 marines were sent to support American attacks upon Port Royal (Acadia) in 1709 and for a while the prospect of taking Québec led to the despatch of 5000 regulars to New

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<sup>20</sup> C. Buchet, *La Lutte pour L'Espace Caribe et la Façade Atlantique de l'Amerique Centrale du Sud (1672-1768)* (Librairie de l'Inde, Paris, 1991), 2 vols., I, 162-181, 260-1.

<sup>21</sup> H.L. Osgood, *The American Colonies in the Eighteenth Century*, (New York, 1924), 4 vols., I, 401-2

England in 1711<sup>22</sup>. This abortive expedition was the only large scale operation by regular forces on either side in North America. For the most part, the war in this region was carried on by local forces – militias, levies and Indian allies. It was brutal frontier war, but without the organisation and depth of resources to deal decisive blows at the centres of population or economy.

After 1713, the colonies continued to be seen as a vital part of the British economy. Sugar production continued to expand and employ more shipping, increasing 49% in the second decade of the century and a further 37% in the next decade<sup>23</sup>. Tobacco was also vital re-export commodity from the Chesapeake Bay area. North America was the bread basket, the victualling base, the storehouse, and the centre of shipping to service the West Indian economy. The trade to the Americas employed possibly as much as a quarter of British shipping in 1721<sup>24</sup>. Boston was the largest centre of shipping outside of Britain. It was a period of major expansion of colonial shipbuilding. Approximately one third of total British tonnage was built in the American colonies by 1775<sup>25</sup>. While large metropolitan resources could not be spared for attack or defence, the colonies had to be defended. The economic primacy of the West Indies, and the political relationship of these colonies with Britain led to significant expansion of the naval infrastructure, but North America was largely left alone.

The War of Spanish Succession had not left a clear legacy for the defence of these colonies. The hope that the 1686 treaty of neutrality could be revived appears periodically in the correspondence of the Board of Trade. The belief, also inherited from the previous century, that the navy could provide the defence was fine so long as British naval resources could be despatched in good time to thwart any European powers which launched large scale forces against the colonies. Also, so long as local forces were adequate to defend against locally raised threats to the colonies. On the whole, during the period between 1713 and the late 1730s the perception in Britain of a foreign threat by direct attack on her colonies was slight. Indeed, British naval power in the Caribbean was used to resolve disputes in Europe with Spain and Austria<sup>26</sup>. The worries were more indirect and long-term: that French colonial trade would eventually eclipse British commerce; that France could at some unspecified point outbuild British naval forces; that the Spanish aggressive defence of her own colonies by the *guarda costas* would disrupt and destroy British colonial trade.

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<sup>22</sup> R. Harding, 'The Expeditions to Quebec, 1690 and 1711: The Evolution of British Trans-Atlantic Amphibious Power', in P. Le Fevre, (ed.), *Guerres Maritimes (1688-1713)*, (Service historique de la Marine, Vincennes, 1996), 197-212.

<sup>23</sup> R. Harding, *Seapower and Naval Warfare, 1650-1830*, (University of London Press, London, 1999), 28

<sup>24</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Colonial (1721)*, (London, HMSO, 1933), 431, Council of Trade and Plantations to George I, 8<sup>th</sup> September 1721.

<sup>25</sup> R. Davies, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, (David and Charles, Newton Abbot, 1962), 66-68; J.A. Goldenberg, *Shipbuilding in Colonial America*, (Newport News, 1976).

<sup>26</sup> F.J. Manning, *The Duke of Newcastle and the West Indies: A Study of Colonial and Diplomatic Policies of the Secretary of State for the Southern Department, 1713-1754*, Unpublished Ph.D. Yale, 2 vols, 1925. Manning's thesis is that Newcastle had a consistent policy from 1724 of using naval power in the West Indies to pressure Spain. See pp.173-194



North America posed a different problem. While there is little evidence of a consistent British willingness to expand her North American possessions, there was colonial pressure to expand westward, and a constant fear of the 'unlimited inclination' of the French to expand from the St Lawrence to the Mississippi to 'set a girdle' on the British colonies<sup>27</sup>. In the view of the Board of Trade, French expansion was primarily stimulated by missionaries who converted or seduced the tribes rather than by the French crown. Their conventional wisdom seems to have been that while France was preoccupied with Europe, she would have little time for her colonies.

Throughout the period from 1713 to 1739 the question of large scale operations in the Americas had not been raised. While there lurked an undeniable long term indirect threat to the economic future of the colonies, Britain was slowly developing a solid maritime and colonial infrastructure that preserved her military advantage in the region.

### **The Outbreak of War**

By late May 1739 Britain was facing a crisis. The dispute with Spain over the right of search of British merchant vessels suspiciously close to Spanish colonies had reached an impasse<sup>28</sup>. Fear of French economic power, Spanish disruption of British trade and suspicion of Walpole's capability in foreign policy combined to stimulate a powerful and bellicose opposition. Some of these fears and suspicions were shared by ministers in Walpole's ministry. For them, like the opposition, war was unavoidable. While ministerial views on the conduct of the war were open, opposition demands for a substantial expedition to take and hold some part of the Spanish empire as a bargaining piece were tremendous. The widespread belief that the Spanish colonies were weak, that time was running out and that Britain held the advantage, was as widespread as it was misleading, but resistance to these ideas was politically impossible. The attitude of France was dangerously unclear. Britain had not got the manpower immediately to man the fleet, nor to provide troops for a substantial expedition. George II, who shared Walpole's concerns about war, would only allow 2 regiments of foot to be used on such an expedition. Despite raising six regiments of marines, politically, to signal the ministry's earnestness for an expedition to the West Indies, it looked unlikely in the early autumn of 1739. The two key factors changed this and made the expedition possible. The first was that the ministry became convinced that the threat from France was receding. The second was the prospect of raising 3000 Americans to support the 8000 British troops that could be sent to the West Indies. With this force it was concluded a successful attack on Havana, the strongest and most important post, in the Spanish empire was possible. Without these American troops it is likely that the ultimate destination of the expedition would have been Manila<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Board of Trade to George II, 8<sup>th</sup> September 1721, in C. Headlam, (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers Colonial Series (America and the West Indies), March 1720 – December 1721*, (HMSO, London, 1933), 435

<sup>28</sup> The best account of the diplomatic manoeuvres is P. Woodfine, *Britannia's Glories: The Walpole Ministry and the War with Spain*, (Royal Historical Society, Woodbridge, 1998).

<sup>29</sup> R.H. Harding, *Amphibious Warfare in the Eighteenth Century: The British Expedition to the West Indies*, (Royal Historical Society, Woodbridge, 1991), 26-38.

The possible use of American troops in a conflict with Spain was not new. It had been raised in 1727 by the Lieutenant Governor of Virginia, Alexander Spotswood, and it was he that revived the suggestion to the Duke of Newcastle in November 1739. However, the project would not have been possible without the detailed knowledge of the colonies provided by Colonel Martin Bladen of the Board of Trade. Bladen was a conscientious member of the board since 1717 and had been gathering information about the resources in the colonies since 1721. In 1726 he had advised the Secretary of State Lord Townshend, that American levies could help to defend the West Indies in the war with Spain<sup>30</sup>. Over the next few months, into early 1740, Bladen attended an *ad hoc* committee consisting of the two senior naval officers in the kingdom, Sir Charles Wager and Sir John Norris, General Wade, Colonel Lascelles, and the commander of the land forces for the expedition, Major General Charles Cathcart. Bladen provided vital advice in how to organise the Americans. He proposed that rather than the Americans being attached to British regiments, they be regimented together as a single regiment of four battalions, commanded by Spotswood. The commissions for the officers were to be divided. Local gentlemen would be commissioned to command the companies and provide one lieutenant per company. This would encourage local men to enlist. The lieutenant colonels (commanding each battalion), majors and other lieutenant per company would be half-pay regular officers who were to ensure that the unit was properly disciplined<sup>31</sup>.

The other important point was who was going to pay for these troops? Money that was to pay colonial assemblies for expenses incurred by British forces sent to Boston in 1711 still had not been paid. Much of the friction between the royal government and colonial society since 1713 had to do with financing royal government and the British government recognised that finances would be critical in the raising of these troops. . Despite precedent, it agreed to pay the men, equip and victual them at the same rate as the regulars. The responsibility for their victuals, pay and transport to the West Indies would rest with the colonial legislatures. In case the assemblies refused to provide funds, the adjutant general of the expedition was provided with bills of exchange to pay these necessities. With some of the most significant obstacles removed, recruitment began across the colonies from Massachusetts to North Carolina in April 1740. This was bound to lead to a variety of approaches. The Massachusetts the social makeup of the companies closely resembled British units. In New York the militia companies provided the basis for recruitment. In Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia, white labour was at a premium, and there were fears that indentured servants would use this opportunity to escape their bonds. The unemployed were conscripted in Virginia. Elderly Negroes were pushed into the ranks in Maryland. The slowness of some the legislatures in voting money meant men were not paid or properly victualled. To keep costs to a minimum the men were billeted in the back country rather than the towns. Only 500 uniforms arrived from England as these were sent as patterns to be made up locally. They would receive their arms in the West Indies.

The men who marched down to the transports in the autumn of 1740 were probably resentful, dishevelled and untutored in arms. One such man was James Stafford from

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<sup>30</sup> The National Archive (TNA) : Public Record Office ( PRO), CO5/ 4, f.101, Bladen to Townshend, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1726; ; f.153 et seq. ‘Some Considerations upon the Assistance that may be expected from the British Colonies particularly those in the Continent of North America in any Expedition to the Spanish West Indies’.

<sup>31</sup> TNA : PRO, CO5/4 ff. 153-158, Some Considerations.....

North Carolina. Like a number of other ambitious gentlemen, he had raised about forty men at his own expense in the expectation of being commissioned. They sailed for Jamaica on 29<sup>th</sup> November. On 12<sup>th</sup> December Stafford noted that a ‘mutiny’ broke out. Sixty men had signed a round robin to Captain Robert Halton, one of the commanders of the North Carolina companies. They had been promised pay, bounty and clothes, but *‘We are kept in such a manner we can bare it no longer, for Wee lye more like Hogs than Men, as for our provisions it stinks, so that we can’t eat it, besides small allowance of potatoes that are so rotten so hoping sir you will have a search to see whether the pork is not all so, for we are willing to serve his Majesty provided we have safisorlty (?) and if not we must seek out for our selves, for night is so cold and our clothes so thin that we diser a Speedy Answer as witness our hands’*<sup>32</sup>

A few nights later the soldiers were issued with a quart of rum. They got drunk started fighting and were difficult to calm until two of them were tied together by neck and foot. Men deserted as the ship anchored off the coast. Stafford noted that proper care had not been taken to keep the men clean between decks and water was squandered away extravagantly. By Christmas day fever and sickness were evident on the ship. They did not reach Port Royal until February, but at least they had not arrived before the British force and consequently they had not suffered the additional indignity of being refused their pay by the Jamaican legislature – something which further damaged morale of the regiment as a whole. On another ship, a lieutenant quarrelled with one of the men about his wife, which occasioned a mutiny in which one soldier was killed.

These men may not have been representative of the Americans and it will be noted that evidence of low morale had occurred long before they met the British forces. The commander of the expeditionary force, Lieutenant General Thomas Wentworth initially formed a low opinion of the Americans, but gradually, he came to respect their ability to work in the broken country of the tropics. More Americans joined as replacements during 1741. The operations at Cartagena de las Indias, Guatanomos Bay, and Panama were unsuccessful, but what little evidence there is suggest that they carried their role on shore and on the men of war honourably. During the course of the campaign they had not won riches or glory. They like the regulars suffered from disease. More than 1800 of 3600 died on the expedition, with many more left debilitated by sickness. Only 543 mustered fit for service in October 1742.

It was not a happy story, but it demonstrated the practicality of raising significant numbers of troops in America. However, one issue remained unresolved – should they be officered by British regulars or local gentlemen? The arguments were about effectiveness and the imperial future. The British army considered the American troops well suited to warfare in the tropics and wilderness. American officers, on the other hand, were considered amateur and incapable of rendering the men good soldiers. It was also recognised that Americans would be unlikely to enlist unless officered by the local gentry. The compromise of 1740 worked well. The initial commander of the expedition, Major General, Lord Cathcart, had decided to break up

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<sup>32</sup> National Maritime Museum (NMM), X96/073 A Journal Transcript (ca 1845) of Events at Cartagena, 1740-1. The original of this nineteenth century copy has not been located so far. The information in the document, such as names dates and places is consistent with cotemporary documents. Stafford is listed as commissioned in Gooch’s regiment on 14<sup>th</sup> March 1740/1 in TNA: PRO, CO5/13 (Miscellaneous Papers – Canada 1713-1764), unfoliated.

the regiment and brigade its battalions with British regiments<sup>33</sup>. His successor, Lieutenant General Wentworth originally intended to replace the American officers with British regulars, but did not implement the plan<sup>34</sup>. He promoted the British officers to replace American officers who died on service, but the promotion policy was not exclusive and was applied more to the subaltern ranks than the vital post captain. As the campaign progressed, Wentworth continued to worry about the Americans' discipline, but he saw their abilities in bush warfare and, when the regiment was disbanded at the end of 1742, Wentworth was willing to recommend some of the American officers for half-pay<sup>35</sup>.

The other argument related to the officers of the American troops was political. Since the 1720s there had been concern about the internal and external threats to the North American colonies. The Board of Trade, in particular, had to consider these linked problems. The French threat to the north had to be countered by the colonists militarily organising themselves, but this military organisation must not be used to threaten their imperial subordination. In 1721, the French encroachments, the need for Britain to recover from the two recent exhausting wars, inclined the Board to recommend that the colonies be organised under a single Captain General for mutual defence<sup>36</sup>. By 1726, friction within the colonies against royal government, had occasioned a rethink. Colonel Bladen was asked to report on the matter to Lord Townshend and recommended that the governments be kept separate *'for while they continue so, it is morally impossible that any dangerous Union can be formed amongst them'*<sup>37</sup>. In 1727, the French threat to Nova Scotia was seen as a possible means of reducing tension in Massachusetts. Raising forces to defend the frontier could be *'draine a great number of inhabitants from New England where they are daily aiming at an independency and very much interfere with the trade of the Mother Country'*<sup>38</sup>.

The urgency of the war with Spain in 1739 overcame any doubts that Bladen and the ministry had had about American independence<sup>39</sup>. Nevertheless, the problem remained. When war with France broke out in March 1744, the militia provided local defence against French incursions. However, for offensive operations, troops had to be enlisted. In January 1744/5 Governor William Shirley began to raise a force of New Englanders to attack Louisbourg<sup>40</sup>. Although support from outside Massachusetts was limited, the fall of Louisbourg to this force, supported by a small

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<sup>33</sup> Cathcart Mss, A.64, Orders and Instructions with Remarks Relating to the Expedition to the West Indies, 11<sup>th</sup> January 1740/1.

<sup>34</sup> TNA : PRO, CO5/42, ff.26-7 Wentworth to Newcastle, 20<sup>th</sup> January 1740/1 ; ff. 28-9, same to same, 9<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1740/1.

<sup>35</sup> TNA : PRO, T1/135, ff.4-11, List of Officers Deserving Half-Pay, 12<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1743/4

<sup>36</sup> Calendar of State Papers Colonial (1721) , Council of Trade and Plantations to George I, 8<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1721, 437, 448.

<sup>37</sup> TNA : PRO, CO5/ 4, f.101, Bladen to Townshend, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1726; f.102-152(?), 'A Short Discourse on the Present State of the Colonies in America with Respect to the Interest of Great Britain; f.153 et seq. 'Some Considerations upon the Assistance that may be expected from the British Colonies particularly those in the Continent of North America in any Expedition to the Spanish West Indies'.

<sup>38</sup> Calendar of State Papers Colonial (1727-28), Board of Trade to George I, 14<sup>th</sup> May to 7<sup>th</sup> June 1727.

<sup>39</sup> J.P. Greene, 'Martin Bladen's Blueprint for a Colonial Union', *William and Mary Quarterly*, xvii (1960),

<sup>40</sup> C.H. Lincoln (ed.), *The Correspondence of William Shirley*. (Macmillan, New York, 1912), 2 vols., I, 161, Shirley to Newcastle, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1744.

Royal Navy squadron under Commodore Peter Warren, on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1745, was the greatest conquest of the war.

The prospect of the conquest of Canada opened up before the ministry in London and an expedition was prepared to join American levies at Louisbourg, to attack Québec while another American force was to drive up the Hudson valley towards Montreal. It remained to be decided how these American forces were to be organised and officered. The Duke of Bedford, who was a moving force for this expedition, had concerns about the long-term impact of independent American forces. It was decided to transfer the garrison regiments at Louisbourg to the British establishment under the command of Shirley and William Pepperell. However, the American officers would be replaced by British officers except for half of the ensigns. Shirley warned Newcastle that this would be disastrous. He doubted whether 100 men could be raised under those conditions and it would be far better to bring regulars from England<sup>41</sup>. The message was not lost and the new levies were ordered to be raised under local officers appointed by the governors of the various colonies. The soldiers would be paid the same as regulars, have an equal share in booty, and the costs of arming and equipping them would be met by London<sup>42</sup>. In the event the expedition was aborted, but the message of effective recruitment had been learned.

The confidence that the American Regiment gave to the ministry in raising American forces was important in the wake of the capture of Louisbourg in June 1745. When news of the victory arrived in London opinion was divided, but it arrived at a critical time. The prospects of victory in the Low Countries had been dashed by the defeat of the field army at Fontenoy in May. This allied army had been painfully put together during the winter and great things were expected of it. Defeat left few hopes of a revival in this theatre. Louisbourg seemed to promise future successes in America. These was the first concrete evidence of what the ‘Patriot’ opposition had been claiming since 1742, that major colonial campaigns could be conducted successfully and have significant diplomatic consequences.

The overall contribution of America to this war was evidently less dramatic than during the Seven Years War and had more to do with opening possibilities and establishing administrative and political processes than a direct impact on the enemy. Privateering, while the largest and most obvious effort, was important as part of a much larger exercise of seapower. Administrative procedures were established or developed for exploiting the economic resources of North America to support the West Indies. Manpower for the fleet, victuals and stores were important in maintaining the fragile plantation economies. The procedures adopted to raise American troops, made possible the projection of British military power, founded on the Royal Navy, to the enemy ashore. New England initiative, allied to the Royal Navy, led to the capture of Louisbourg, which made an significant impact upon the tortuous negotiations leading to peace by October 1748.

By mid 1754, the perception of a powerful French threat to North America was again exercising London. The Board of Trade was ordered to set in train a “*Plan of General*

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 293, Shirley to Newcastle, 14<sup>th</sup> December 1745. See also PRO, CO5/44, f. 26v, Warren to Newcastle, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1746.

<sup>42</sup> British Library (BL), Add. Ms. 32707, f.40 Newcastle to the Governors of the Northern Colonies, 9<sup>th</sup> April 1746.

*Union should be entered into by His Majesty's several colonies for their mutual defence*"<sup>43</sup>. Once again the question of a single commander in chief in America was on the table and the issue of American officers in colonial regiments re-emerged. The tensions this generated have been explored by Alison Olson among others. It may be that these concerns in London led to Shirley and Pepperell being ordered to raise royal regiments on the basis of British officers filling a significant percentage of all the commissioned grades, contrary to the experience of 1740-2<sup>44</sup>. American company officers were to rank below the most junior British company officer of equivalent rank, and American general and field officers were not to rank at all. These expedients proved slow, barely adequate and contrasted clearly with the experience of raising provincial regiments to augment the British forces in the 1740s. While the precedent of American regiments was not without problems, it produced better results. By 1757 it was clear that the principle had to be conceded of raising American forces under local officers and ranking all American officers as the most junior by seniority on the establishment.

This decision to accept that American regiments must be officered by local gentlemen was very important for the future of the provincial regiments. It was one of a number of factors that opened the way to the mass recruiting of 1758-1759. While professional concerns from the regular army, and political concern to maintain colonial subordination, jointly caused this delay, the experience of the American Regiment between 1740 and 1742 and the Massachusetts forces in 1745 provided a guide for future.

It could be argued that, that despite the contribution of privateering, the regiment of 1740 was, at the time, America's most important contribution to the war. It made a credible expedition to the Spanish Indies possible, which was Britain's only politically acceptable offensive option. It contributed something to a shift in focus towards utilising American forces in 1745-6, which in turn was a significant, although distant, factor in altering the balance of power in North America in the 1750s. Thus it played a small part in making Britain a global power by 1763.

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<sup>43</sup> E.B. O'Callaghan, (ed.), *The Colonial History of the State of New York*, (Albany, 1855), vi, 844, Robinson to the Lords of Trade, 14<sup>th</sup> June 1754. See also A.G. Olson, 'The British Government and Colonial Union, 1754', *William and Mary Quarterly*, xvii (1960), 22-34.

<sup>44</sup> C.H. Lincoln (ed.), *The Correspondence of William Shirley*. (Macmillan, New York, 1912), 2 vols., ii, 97, Robinson to Shirley, 26<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1754.