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Poseidon's Sphere:
Early Naval History in Atlantic Canada

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See table of contents

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Poseidon's Sphere:
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THE EARLY NAVAL HISTORY of Canada's east coast is rich in resources, but if not actually neglected, it is rarely studied. Few naval historians have made Canada's Atlantic seaboard their special focus, and none has made it a lifelong inquiry. By contrast, the role of the military, especially in the defence of Halifax and St. John's, is well-studied and understood.[1] Of note are the fine works by Gerald Graham on the abortive 1711 expedition against Quebec and his study of the Anglo-French contest for North America, characterized as a maritime struggle.[2] In addition, there is a study of the British navy on the North American coast from 1736 through 1746, much of which focused on Louisbourg,[3] and a doctoral thesis on the navy in Nova Scotia waters to 1766.[4] Another doctoral thesis dealt with the navy and Newfoundland during the American Revolution.[5] If the navy's role at Quebec in 1759-60 needs new analysis, certainly its part in lifting the 1775-76 siege of Quebec has been studied.[6] As well, there are many entries for British naval figures to be found in the first four volumes of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* [*DCB*]. These include a succession of commodores on the Newfoundland station, including John Byng, and those associated with the recovery of the colony from the French, especially John Norris.[7]

Yet, if the naval role at the two sieges of Louisbourg in 1745 and 1758[8] has received due attention, the era from the mid-1760s until Confederation has remained obscure. Little has been published on the naval world in the Canadian context after the Conquest to the end of the War of 1812. In Canada, the chief contribution has been a string of *DCB* entries on contemporary naval notables.[9] But of these only Broke,

1 See especially Stuart MacKinnon, "The Imperial Fortresses in Canada: Halifax and Esquimault, 1871-1906", Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1965 and J.B. Johnson, *Defending Halifax: Ordnance, 1825-1906* (Ottawa, 1981).

2 Gerald S. Graham, ed., *The Walker Expedition to Quebec, 1711* (London, 1953), *Sea Power and British North America 1783-1820* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1941) and *Empire of the North Atlantic: The Maritime Struggle for North America* (Toronto, 1950).

3 Julian Gwyn, ed., *The Royal Navy and North America. The Warren Papers, 1736-52* (London, 1973).

4 W.A.B. Douglas, "Nova Scotia and the Royal Navy, 1713-1766", Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, 1973.

5 Olaf Janzen, "Newfoundland and British Maritime Strategy During the American Revolution", Ph.D. thesis, Queen's University, 1984; "The Royal Navy and the Defence of Newfoundland During the American Revolution", *Acadiensis*, XIV, 1 (Autumn 1984), pp. 28-48; "The American Threat to the Newfoundland Fisheries, 1776-1777", *American Neptune*, 48 (Summer 1988), pp. 154-64.

6 William H. Whiteley, "The British Navy and the Siege of Quebec, 1775-6", *Canadian Historical Review*, 61, 1 (March 1980), pp. 3-27; *James Cook in Newfoundland, 1762-1767* (St. John's, 1975) and *Duckworth's Newfoundland: The Island in the Early Nineteenth Century* (St. John's, 1985).

7 Among the more celebrated of those concerned with the defeat of French ambitions in North America include Edward Boscawen, Alexander Colvill, Philip Durell, Charles Holmes, Charles Saunders, Isaac Townsend and Sir Peter Warren. However, there is no *DCB* entry for Admiral Sir Charles Knowles, who succeeded Warren in 1746 as governor of Cape Breton.

8 Julian Gwyn, "French and British Naval Power at the Two Sieges of Louisbourg, 1745 and 1758", *Nova Scotia Historical Review*, 10, 1 (June 1990), pp. 63-93.

9 These entries include: Mariot Arbuthnot, Sir George Cranfield Berkeley, Sir Philip Broke, Sir Isaac Coffin, Sir George Collier, James Cook, Sir John Duckworth, James Gambier, Thomas Graves, Sir Andrew Snape Hamond, Sir Charles Hardy, Sir Richard Keats, Sir Hugh Palliser, Molyneux

Julian Gwyn, "Poseidon's Sphere: Early Naval History in Atlantic Canada", *Acadiensis,* XXXI, 1 (Autumn 2001), pp. 152-163.

Cook and Palliser have received recent attention.[10] Much greater and continuing interest has focused instead on the naval war on the Great Lakes in 1812-15, the building of the naval dockyard at Kingston (Upper Canada) and the construction of the 102-gun *St. Lawrence*,[11] a feat not matched at the Halifax careening yard which never built anything larger than a 14-gun sloop of war.[12] However, American historians of the United States navy have made remarkable contributions to this body of scholarship through the publishing of a massive documentary history of the War of Independence, and two volumes on the War of 1812.[13]

The very naval officers who ensured the *Pax Britannica* in the 19th century have ceased to interest the *DCB*'s editors. To the editors, these officers' most memorable achievements were either the organizing of regattas in Halifax harbour, when the Bermuda-based squadron visited for a few weeks each summer,[14] or contributing to the sometimes disastrous Arctic explorations. If the Arctic and Great Lakes hostilities in 1812-15 remain subjects of continuing interest to publishers, early naval history in Atlantic Canada should be expected to escape the doldrums and begin to match the historical interest now manifested in merchant ships and their crews.

A number of books, articles[15] and an occasional thesis in recent years indicate that the subject may yet attract the attention it deserves.[16] In general, such naval history separates those who write on naval operations of fleets and squadrons, naval exploration and produce biographies of naval figures, from those who focus on the

Shuldam, William Waldegrave and Sir John Borlase Warren. There is no *DCB* entry for Sir Alexander Cochrane, who succeeded Warren and who earlier had served in the Halifax squadron. Nor, except Captain Henry Duncan, are the resident commissioners of the Halifax naval yard noted.

10 Peter Padfield, *Broke and the Shannon* (London, 1968); H.F. Pullen, *The Shannon and the Chesapeake* (Toronto, 1970); J.C. Beaglehole, *The Life of Captain James Cook* (Stanford, 1974); Olaf Janzen, "Showing the Flag: Hugh Palliser in Western Newfoundland, 1764", *Northern Mariner/Le Marin du nord*, 3, 2 (July 1993), pp. 3-14; William Whiteley, "James Cook, Hugh Palliser, and the Newfoundland Fisheries", *Newfoundland Quarterly*, 69, 3 (October 1972), pp. 17-22.

11 Robert Malcomson, *Lords of the Lake: The Naval War on Lake Ontario, 1812-1814* (Toronto, 1998); David Curtiss Skaggs and Gerard T. Altoff, eds., *A Signal Victory: The Lake Erie Campaign, 1812-1813* (Annapolis, Maryland, 1997).

12 Marilyn Gurney Smith, *King's Yard: An Illustrated History of the Halifax Dockyard* (Halifax, 1985).

13 W.B. Clark and W.J. Morgan, eds., *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* (Washington, District of Columbia, 1964). To date, ten volumes have been produced which cover the period until the end of 1777. See also the two volumes on the War of 1812: William S. Dudley, ed., *The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History* (Washington, District of .Columbia, 1985 and 1992).

14 Sailing regattas were held in the harbour at the initiative of the navy from at least 1826 on. That year more than 30 boats participated, as competitions were held for three classes of sailing boats: one reserved for fishers, flats rowed by boys under age 18 and canoes paddled by Mi'kmaq. People crowded the wharves, from the naval yard south to George's Island, and put out in small boats. The day ended with an elegant ball on the flagship. See D.C. Harvey, "The Genesis of the Royal Nova Scotia Yacht Club", *Dalhousie Review*, 29, 1 (January 1949), pp. 21-36.

15 Paul Webb, "British Squadrons in North American Waters, 1783-1793", *Northern Mariner/Le Marin du nord*, 5, 1 (January 1995), pp. 19-34; John Dewar Faibisy, "Penobscot 1779: The Eye of the Hurricane", *Maine Historical Society*, 19, 2 (July 1979), pp. 91-117; Barry J. Lohnes, "British Naval Problems at Halifax During the War of 1812", *Mariner's Mirror*, 59, 2 (April 1973), pp. 317-33.

16 Roger Albert Evans, "The Army and Navy at Halifax in Peacetime, 1783-1793", M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1970; William R. Miles, "The Royal Navy and Northeastern North America, 1689-1713", M.A. thesis, Saint Mary's University, 2000.

logistical support needed to keep ships at sea and the related biographies of naval administrators.[17] Of the two approaches, the study of wartime operations, exploration and naval biography easily predominates. Few such studies attempt to link the navy to Britain's expanding imperial role.

W. Baker Emerson and John G. Reid, *The New England Knight: Sir William Phips, 1651-1695* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1998) is in part about North American naval history. The first American-born to be knighted, Phips is best known in Canada for his failed attempt to take Quebec in 1690 and in Massachusetts for putting an end to the Salem witch trials. The authors have skilfully unearthed as much as we could possibly want to know about this first governor to be appointed after the new Massachusetts charter of 1692. To them, the central theme of his public life is "his continuing attempt to reconcile his rapid ascent to imperial office with the shakiness of whatever respectability he enjoyed in New England" (p. xx).

Born into impoverished gentry in 1651 on the Sheepscot River, his parents cultivated a little soil, fished, and traded pelts with aboriginals. Without formal education, he clung to literacy throughout his life by the slimmest hold. By the age of 30 he was known on the Boston waterfront as a merchant captain. It was as a successful "projector" – an impecunious soul "who sought wealth and advancement through money-making schemes financed by others" (p. 26) – that Phips eventually elevated himself when he sailed to England in 1687 with more than £200,000 in salvaged Spanish treasure. The authors, for the first time, unravel the details of his success in attracting English sponsors and then of persisting in his treasure hunt, with a 20-gun frigate borrowed from an English navy not yet in the control of the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty. Knighted by James II, Phips enjoyed his £11,000 share.

Success as a treasure hunter brought him official appointment. Allying himself to the Mather family by joining Cotton Mather's North Church, he was put in command of the 1690 naval expedition to seize Port Royal and Quebec for William and Mary. The authors satisfactorily explain for the first time Phips's political apprenticeship, which resulted from this important alliance. Port Royal capitulated without a shot, under terms which were immediately violated by the New England militiamen. The plunder, sold at auction in Boston, was inadequate to meet the cost of the expedition, for Acadie was a place of small population and little economic significance.

Quebec was altogether a more attractive target for plunder. Yet the expedition, which included 2,300 militiamen, departed Boston only in mid-August, without either adequate ammunition or a pilot for the dangerous St. Lawrence River. The attempt on Quebec proved a debacle, with the loss of approximately 30 men, while in the retreat to Boston four vessels foundered. As well, 400 men on board, and others upon their return to Boston, died from a raging epidemic of smallpox which had first manifested itself at Quebec. The estimated cost of M£50,000 forced Massachusetts to the then novel expedient of issuing paper money to pay its debts to both troops and suppliers.

17 Barry M. Gough, "The Royal Navy and the British Empire", in Robin W. Winks, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. 5: Historiography* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 327-41; John Hattendorf, ed., *Ubi Sumus? The State of Naval and Maritime History* (Providence, Rhode Island, 1994); W.A.B. Douglas, "Canadian Naval Historiography", *Mariner's Mirror,* 70, 2 (April 1984), pp. 349-62.

Under these circumstances Phips sailed to England to transform this fiasco into a "great and noble undertaking" (p. 117). Once his novel interpretation was accepted at court, Phips was named the first governor of Massachusetts under the new royal charter. The details of this *renversement* have never been so clearly argued as by Emerson and Reid. Considered a failure as governor, he wisely ended the Salem village witch trials when the accusatory gaze turned toward his own family. Phips also urged, as long as he was to be in command, a renewed expedition against New France. Emerson and Reid's full analysis of the governor's failed attempts to secure the northeastern frontier and create the basis of his own commercial wealth makes us further indebted to the authors. His brief governorship, which ended with his sudden death in London, where he had been summoned in 1695, left his grasping ambition as his only legacy. Employing their understanding of native history and an appreciation of recent trends in New England economic and social history, Emerson and Reid have fashioned a political biography that should satisfy several generations.

Eighteenth-century French naval history is a subject rarely treated by French scholars. They presumably have little reason to dwell on the operational side, where the exploits of French squadrons were rarely glorious. If it were not for the interest principally of Canadian, British and American scholars, the subject could hardly have been said to have advanced in two generations. With his second book, *Anatomy of a Naval Disaster: The 1746 French Expedition to North America* (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), James Pritchard, now Professor Emeritus at Queen's University, makes his first major contribution to the operational history of the French navy. Almost alone, he has transformed our understanding of the French navy in the 18th century, in a manner that Daniel Baugh, N.A.M. Rodger, David Syrett and others have done for the British navy in the same era.[18]

His focus here is the d'Enville expedition sent to recapture Louisbourg, which had been lost the summer before to combined colonial American and British naval forces. The expeditionary force was of an unprecedented size, comprising 64 vessels of all sizes and 11,000 men, including 3,500 infantry. Not until 1778-81 was another French fleet seen in North American waters, and then under very different circumstances. Yet as the fleet wholly failed in all its objectives, scholars hitherto have merely alluded to, rather than studied, the debacle. The expedition's objectives were the restoration of the prestige of both Louis XV and his ministre de la marine, through the recovery of Acadie and Isle Royale. As well, success would have allowed France to dominate the region's fisheries.

Like the British expeditionary fleet sent to the West Indies in 1740, which suffered much the same fate, d'Enville's armada never encountered the enemy at sea. "Nature, in its climatic and pathogenic guises", Pritchard writes, "destroyed the French" (p. 15). To the centrally important concerns of winds and disease, which Pritchard has recounted with great skill, was added the usual distracting confusion of human ambition and frailty. Pritchard's account is a sobering reminder of the limits of 18th-century naval power.

18 Daniel Baugh, *British Naval Administration in the Age of Walpole* (Princeton, 1965) and *Naval Administration, 1715-1750* (London, 1977); N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (Annapolis, 1986).

As background, he describes the "social-political chaos" (p. 15) of France in 1740-45. Effective French diplomacy masked French military weakness until 1740, when the war party pushed France into a scramble for Hapsburg territories in the wake of Prussia's seizure of Silesia. Towards the war effort the French navy was thrown, until 1746, but a few crumbs. Rather than either concluding peace negotiations, then underway, or supporting the Scottish uprising in 1745 and thereby helping to deliver perhaps a mortal blow to Britain, France uncharacteristically employed its fleet in an American campaign.

The French navy, then, suffered from a "politically isolated, bellicose minister, too few ships, inadequate funds, poorly supplied arsenals, and weak administration" (p. 28), all of which Pritchard examines. He shows that, owing to extreme age, none of the senior officers were fit to serve at sea. D'Enville himself had only briefly commanded galleys, and usually within sight of the French Mediterranean coast. Chosen for his family connection to the minister, he was ignorant of the Atlantic, and innocent of high command.

Contrary or failing winds and vicious storms first confined the fleet to home ports so late in the year that the expedition ought to have been cancelled, and then when at length it put to sea the weather inordinately prolonged the crossing. The outcome, owing also to the very poor quality of some of the victuals, was a major disaster, both human and strategic; death descended on both crews and soldiers. No fewer than 1,500 people died from scurvy and typhus on the outward passage or were buried in Nova Scotia. Some 40 per cent of those who actually reached the rendezvous in Chebucto Harbour fell ill, and several hundred of them died on the homeward leg or shortly after reaching France.

The fiasco entailed no recriminations, bureaucratic witch hunts or naval court martial. The navy buried the matter. If reports had been written, they, and much of the relevant correspondence, were removed from official dossiers. This makes Pritchard's achievement all the more admirable. His is an impressive piece of historical reconstruction, in which he has drawn very successfully on his now unequaled knowledge of French naval administration. This study places Pritchard atop the naval pinnacle among the pre-Confederation historians.

Victor Suthern, *To Go Upon Discovery: James Cook and Canada, from 1758 to 1779* (Toronto, Dundurn Press, 2000) is a popular survey written by an administrator-historian who has extensive experience at sea in sailing vessels. His study largely depends on the work of other historians, especially that of J.C. Beaglehole.[19] The book's value is its emphasis on Cook's early career in the British navy, when he charted, among other places, Halifax harbour (ignored in this book),[20] the St. Lawrence River and much of the coasts of Newfoundland. The book lacks an index,

19 See Michael E. Hoare, "Two Centuries' Perception of James Cook: George Forster to Beaglehole", in Robin Fisher and Hugh Johnston, eds., *Captain James Cook and His Times* (Vancouver, 1979), pp. 211-28.

20 See "A Draught of the Harbour of Halifax and the Adjacent Coast in Nova Scotia. Survey'd by order of Commodore Spry, by James Cook, when Master of his Majesty's Ship the *Mars*. Humbly dedicated to Henry Ellis Esq., F.R.S., late Governor of Nova Scotia", Special Collections, Killam Library, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

which halves its value. The chapter which ought to have ended the book, on the charting of Newfoundland, fails to make use of either Whiteley's (Suthern spells his name incorrectly) or Olaf Janzen's work on Palliser, in whose ship Cook first sailed in North American waters. The last chapter covers Cook's first two voyages to the Pacific, a subject clearly beyond the scope of the book's title. The chapter, however well-told, adds nothing to what is already known and accessible to readers.

Ernest Clarke's prize-winning first book, *The Siege of Fort Cumberland 1776: An Episode in the American Revolution* (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995) provides as much detail as one could possibly desire about the 1776 siege. In so doing, he places the activities of the modest Halifax-based squadron, under Commodore Sir George Collier, within a suitable context. Crucial to the outcome of the siege were the actions of Commander James Featus, captain of HM sloop *Vulture*, who arrived with a detachment of marines the day after a sally from the fort had finally broken the resolve of the rebel insurgents. The naval reinforcements merely confirmed the solid military achievement. Clarke's appetite for detail was rewarded somewhat by his use of ships' logs, especially those kept by lieutenants, from the National Maritime Museum (Greenwich, England) and the Public Record Office (Kew, London, England) that provided descriptions of the small-scale activity of the sort the navy's little vessels found themselves involved in in the Bay of Fundy. Such logs sometimes provide rich detail, of the sort historians find irresistible, but which are rarely found in descriptions of large naval operations at sea. Clarke's belief that the defeat of the rebels turned most others in Nova Scotia into loyalists remains interesting speculation.

Robert Gardiner's copiously illustrated edition of essays, *Navies and the American Revolution, 1775-1783* (London, Chatham Publishing, 1996) is the first significant study of the naval war against rebel America since Syrett's masterful account published in 1988.[21] The bulk of the contributions are by Gardiner himself, with important contributions by the Canadian scholar Nicholas Tracy and by David Lyon and Roger Morriss. None of these essays breaks new ground. However useful the essays, the value of the book is found principally in its large number of illustrations. These were drawn largely from an enormous collection housed in the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich.

There are several important oversights in the text. It was not just issues of trade laws that helped distance colonists in port towns from the home country. Nor was it simply a matter of post-1763 reduction of stress after France ceased to be a major threat to frontier settlement. What still seems little understood is the degree of hostility engendered by the navy in many colonists, especially in port towns from Halifax to Savannah. Not even Neil Stout's study of the navy's role in enforcing trade regulations brings this out fully.[22] Long before the celebrated events of the Stamp Act crisis (1765), the Boston "massacre" (1770) and the "Boston tea party" (1773), some Americans had found the British navy nothing less than the most intrusive and sinister instrument of unchecked imperial power. Prior to British redcoats occupying Boston,

21 David Syrett, *The Royal Navy in American Waters 1775-1783* (Aldershot, 1988).

22 Neil Stout, *The Royal Navy in America, 1760-1775. A Study of Enforcement of British Colonial Policy in the Era of the American Revolution* (Annapolis, Maryland, 1973).

impressment had triggered bloody riots there. It remained a hot issue which defied solution until after 1815. As the number of British warships stationed on the American coast increased after 1763 in a failed attempt to regulate trade, incidents relating to impressment multiplied. No town had a longer tradition of resistance to the "press" than Boston, which became the most important centre for radical dissent.

As to the war against rebel America itself, it is probable that more violence against individuals and property took place on the water or at the water's edge than in the American interior. For the first time the navy found itself engaged in war with an enemy which lacked a battle fleet. The British navy could raid any part of the rebel coast it selected; it could burn and pillage a virtually defenceless people. The navy could land on or withdraw from any coast it chose, all with virtual impunity. It could also destroy or capture every warship afloat: either launched, purchased or captured by the continental navy. It could attack American shipping wherever it sailed: on the American coast, the West Indies or in European waters. Yet it could not contain American privateers. However many of these raiders were captured, more escaped to prey on the huge target offered by British merchant shipping. The British navy wholly failed even to prevent such rebel privateers from raiding Nova Scotia, whose Halifax careening yard was a major British installation. Incidentally, though the contribution of the royal dockyards in England is duly noted, that of the careening yards in the West Indies and North America is ignored.

In the same series, which was designed to highlight the illustrative material in the National Maritime Museum is Gardiner, *The Naval War of 1812* (London, Chatham Publishing, 1998). The editor wrote two of the three major parts of the book, the third of which deals with the war on the Great Lakes, authored by Canadian historian Robert Malcolmson. Malcolmson believes that the war was won or lost by the relative success of the yards that built the warships. Sections were contributed by, among others, the noted naval scholars Andrew Lambert and Roger Morriss.[23] The war on the Atlantic coast is treated very lightly, with emphasis on naval actions at sea. Naval yards at Halifax, Boston, Baltimore and elsewhere are ignored. When will historians of this war, by undertaking new research, accord naval yards at least some importance in determining the outcome of the naval war in the Atlantic?

Richard Buel, *In Irons: Britain's Naval Supremacy and the American Revolutionary Economy* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998) is not concerned with naval operations. Rather he enhances the role played by the British navy during the American War of Independence by showing the impact of the navy's attempted blockade of the American coast. However porous, the blockade was sufficiently effective to curtail sea movements of American flour, a major colonial export commodity, and thereby shape American economic behaviour. He argues that an acute grain scarcity occurred in the middle and northern states in 1778-80. He believes that the British navy took a far greater toll on American trade and shipping than the

23 Morriss, who has authored an outstanding biography of Rear-Admiral Cockburn, wrote the section on the Chesapeake campaign in 1813-14, where Cockburn commanded the squadron involved. See Roger Morriss, *Cockburn and the British Navy in Transition: Admiral Sir George Cockburn, 1772-1853* (Exeter, 1997); *The Royal Dockyards During the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars* (Leicester, 1983) and with Peter Bursey, eds., *Guide to the Naval Papers in North America* (Greenwich, 1994).

opening of foreign ports compensated American trade. As American overseas trade declined by as much as 80 per cent, the price of imported goods rose. In response, Congress attempted to create an economy based on import substitution and issued its own paper money. Payment in depreciating currencies turned agriculturalists against production of surpluses. Such neglect of agriculture created shortages, which in turn raised food prices.

The entry of France into the war failed to reverse this trend, as the loss of major ports to the British for extended periods – Boston, Newport, New York, Philadelphia, Savannah, Charleston and Wilmington – further seriously exacerbated the American economy. Losses among the French merchantmen trading to North America remained high. Demand in America for French-traded West Indies and European goods remained weak unless generous long-term commercial credit, similar to the sort American importers had enjoyed from pre-war British suppliers, was extended to American buyers. The one consistent American bright spot was the New England market, where privateering profits enabled Boston to emerge as a major entrepôt for the exchange of American-produced goods for French merchandise. As the British focused on the war in the south from 1778 onwards, their attempts at close blockade off New England failed. This arose as much from the huge extent of Massachusetts Bay as from its frequent fogs – "the blockade runner's friend" (p. 73). The British navy was unable until 1782 to effect a close blockade of much of the eastern seaboard. This only came about, oddly enough, by Parliament's post-Yorktown refusal to authorize major land operations in North America. Free to blockade, the navy experienced many successes against American trade in the last two years of war.

Attempts to resist the British navy proved largely ineffective. American navies authorized either by Congress or by state governments fared poorly against the British navy, while they never managed to cooperate effectively with those French squadrons which reached safe American anchorages. Privateering was "at best only a partial substitute for commerce" (p. 104). Unlike commerce, privateers had no control over the nature of the cargoes they happened to capture. Warehouses became overstocked in unwanted luxuries or excessive amounts of prize flour.

Buel also argues that American economic recovery began with the Rochambeau expedition's immobility at Newport in 1779-80. Viewed as a military disappointment, the prolonged French presence brought so much coin into the region to pay troops and to purchase supplies that the local economy prospered, "the next best thing to military victory" (p. 157). Simultaneously, the arrival in Cuba of a large Spanish fleet created a local demand there for American provisions which were supplied, especially through Philadelphia. To this was added major hurricane damage that both affected the British squadron in the Caribbean and created severe food shortages in the French-controlled islands. American attempts to meet this unexpected demand, from as far away as New England, added to the recovery along the Delaware, from where the exports were chiefly shipped.

The war "has broke one-half of the merchants here, the peace is like to break the other half", stated a Philadelphia merchant in August 1782. Were American merchants strapped for capital by war's end? This question and many others, Buel wisely begs. He suggests that, after a very difficult decade, recovery came only in the 1790s with the outbreak of a new war between France and Britain, a war in which the United States, until 1812, remained neutral. Buel's account indicates yet again that

non-economists, if they make the effort, can write so much more engagingly about the historical working of an economy than economists who have little skill at decoding historical documents and rely instead on inappropriate application of modern theories to economic history. Buel also manages to make pro-British naval enthusiasts among historians feel a little better about the dismal results the war engendered for the Empire.

Faye Kert, *Prize and Prejudice: Privateering and Naval Prize in Atlantic Canada in the War of 1812* (St. John's, International Maritime Economic History Association, 1997), looks at the issue of privateering in the context of Atlantic Canadian history and the War of 1812.[24] The book relies principally on the detailed study of a large collection of Halifax vice-admiralty court records, long available but little studied, at the National Archives in Ottawa. Kert examined 88 boxes containing every file for each of the roughly 700 prize cases before the court in 1812, 1813, 1814 and 1815. She supplemented this with information available in the Nova Scotia archives and prize appeal papers in the Public Record Office in London, England.

In terms of the activities of the privateers, this work constitutes by far the best study of Nova Scotia's involvement in the maritime war on American coasts. In dealing with Nova Scotia's privateers, it is matched only by Dan Conlin's 1996 M.A. thesis,[25] since the topic has remained almost entirely in the hands of enthusiastic amateurs.[26] It should be compared to earlier studies of privateers in Portsmouth, Baltimore and Charleston,[27] as well as to general studies of American privateers by James Lydon and Carl Swanson.[28] Of the prizes dealt with by the Halifax court, privateers from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick took 293 prizes, amounting to at least 16,293 tons. Other privateer captures, which were condemned elsewhere, such as in the West Indies, Bermuda or the Bahamas, are not noted. The book deals with naval prizes as well; indeed, almost two-thirds of the prize cases involved capture by

24 The book is the author's unrevised 1997 Ph.D. thesis, on a topic developed almost twenty years earlier from work on an earlier thesis, "The Fortunes of War. Privateering in Atlantic Canada in the War of 1812", M.A. thesis, Carleton University, 1986 and her "Taking Care of Business: Privateering and the Licensed War of 1812", in *Global Crossroads and the American Seas* (Missoula, 1988), pp. 135-43.

25 Dan Conlin, "A Private War in the Caribbean: Nova Scotia Privateering, 1793-1805", M.A. thesis, Saint Mary's University, 1996 and *Northern Mariner/Le Marin du nord* 6, 4 (October 1996), pp. 29-34. See also Conlin, "They Plundered Well: Planters as Privateers, 1793-1805", in Margaret Conrad and Barry Moody, eds., *Planter Links: Community and Culture in Colonial Nova Scotia* (Fredericton, 2001), pp. 20-35.

26 John Leefe, "The Atlantic Privateers", *Nova Scotia Historical Quarterly* 8 (1978), pp. 1-17, 109-25; Janet Mullins, *Liverpool Privateering, 1756-1815* (Liverpool, Nova Scotia, 1936); George Mullane, "The Privateers of Nova Scotia, 1756-1783", *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society*, 20 (1921), pp. 17-42; George Nichol, "Notes on Nova Scotian Privateers", *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society*, 13 (1908), pp. 111-52.

27 Richard E. Winslow, *"Wealth and Honour": Portsmouth During the Golden Age of Privateering, 1775-1815* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 1988); Jerome R. Garitee, *The Republic's Private Navy: The American Privateering Business as Practiced by Baltimore during the War of 1812* (Middletown, 1977); Melvin H. Jackson, *Privateers in Charleston, 1763-1796: An Account of a French Palatinate in South Carolina* (Washington, District of Columbia, 1969); Harold Alwyn, *Privateers of Charleston in the War of 1812* (Charleston, 1954).

28 James Lydon, *Pirates, Privateers, and Profit: New York Privateering, 1689-1763* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 1970); Carl E. Swanson, *Predators and Prizes: American Privateering and Imperial Warfare, 1739-1748* (Columbia, South Carolina, 1991).

warships, which amounted to another 50,100 tons of captured shipping.

The war, declared by the United States in June 1812, created peculiar problems for prize hunters, whether British warships or colonial privateers. First, no capture could be declared a prize without a declaration of war, and this the British did not issue until late in 1812. Thus, most of the 144 cases involving prize vessels brought into Halifax harbour in 1812 were not dealt with by the vice-admiralty court until January 1813. The seized vessels clogged the harbour's anchorages, rotting along with their cargoes. Only perishable commodities were preserved, which the court allowed to be removed and sold at auction, the net proceeds being lodged with the court. Any coin was likewise secured. As a consequence, some of these early cases remained unresolved for years after the war had ended.

A second problem involved what was called the "licensed" trade. To maintain the supply of provisions to the British expeditionary force in Spain, unarmed vessels of at least 100 tons were issued nine-month licences to carry provisions from the United States. In 1812 the regulation was expanded to include certain naval stores. Despite the United States declaration of war and the severe penalties imposed by the United States government, the licensed trade thrived, as the British army's food needs remained in part dependent on American supply. As a consequence, a great many more enemy vessels were stopped by British warships than were actually brought into Halifax harbour as prizes. Of such cases brought before the Halifax vice-admiralty court, most were "eventually restored to their owners" (p. 25).

It is stated here, as well as by many other authorities, that New Englanders were generally upset about the United States declaration of war. This view needs modification, as so many New Englanders took to the sea as privateers the moment war was declared. Within days, they began to seize British and colonial vessels both in the West Indies and on the North American coasts, and were themselves captured.

"Inconclusive and futile as a military exercise", the author writes, "the War of 1812 merits further study from an economic viewpoint as a war against trade" (p. 1). Yet only the last substantial chapter of her account attempts an economic assessment of the war on Great Britain and the United States. Little of it relates to the economic impact on the Maritime colonies. We learn only of the high court costs in relation to other custody costs (p. 66), and that court costs in Halifax were twice as high as those in Shelburne and two and one-half times higher than those in Liverpool and Saint John (p. 76).

Kert could have attempted at least an estimate of the value of the prizes. A study I have made of the 40,045 tons of American vessels seized between 1793 and the outbreak of war in 1812 estimates American losses at $5.5 million.[29] By the same measure, the value of American-owned vessels condemned in Halifax as prizes of war, including the legal and agency costs borne by American owners in attempts to recover their vessels and cargoes, may have amounted to at least $9.1 million. Little enough of this sum would have stuck to the fingers of Maritimers, though the bulk of the net proceeds of prizes taken by privateers can be counted an asset. Income from court, custodial, auction and agency fees, perhaps at least 15 per cent or $1.4 million,

29 Julian Gwyn, "Treatment of American Prize Vessels by the Halifax Vice-Admiralty Court, 1793-1812", unpublished paper presented at the 13th Naval History Symposium, Annapolis, 1997.

would have largely remained in the Maritime colonies. Auction purchases, whether of ship or cargo, when afterwards profitably sold outside the region, would have added to this income.

The lion's share of prize money went to the officers and crews of British warships, who also earned bounty money when enemy ships were captured. The bulk of these funds was transferred for distribution in Britain. By this route, most of the prize money departed the Maritimes without circulating or having the least economic or financial impact. Some, when still in the hands of the Halifax court, was loaned either to the military or to the Halifax careening yard, to pay workers and to meet the smaller bills of local suppliers. Against all this income must be counted the losses suffered by the colonials, who owned either vessels or cargoes seized by Americans or other of the king's enemies. This has yet to be studied.

Often-neglected Sydney receives impressive treatment in Brian Tennyson and Roger Sarty, *Guardian of the Gulf: Sydney, Cape Breton and the Atlantic Wars* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000) and the discussion in this review is limited to the authors' treatment of the early era in the first three chapters. Until the English settlement at Sydney began, the strategic importance of the vast harbour was limited to sporadic coal mining, first exploited by the French. Continuous mining by British soldiers occurred in 1758, when Louisbourg was seized and the whole island passed under British control. Private development of Cape Breton coal, begun in 1766-70, resumed in 1780. Regular naval protection was afforded these workings during the war with rebel America. Only one of the war-time coal convoys was threatened, when two French frigates were beaten off in 1781.

The outbreak of war with France in 1793 saw the garrison reduced to one officer and 20 men, and Sydney was almost totally neglected by the navy. Once a year the Halifax careening yard refitted Cape Breton's revenue cutter, the only direct benefit the colony received from the navy. In 1796, a French squadron off Newfoundland detached units to destroy the coal mines and burn Sydney. Autumn gales, not the British navy, thwarted the operation. The only threats thereafter – and they were remote – until the outbreak of war with the United States in 1812, came from the occasional French privateer. As American privateers were expressly forbidden to attack coastal settlements, which they had so successfully done to Nova Scotia in 1776-83, their activity now posed no threat to Sydney. It turned out that the Americans were so absorbed with seizing British merchant ships around the British Isles, the West Indies and even off Nova Scotia, that Cape Breton's slim overseas or coastal traffic was too small a target to interest them. All of Sydney's official and commercial anxiety proved needless, and the erection of defences a great waste of energy and money.

The post-war history of Anglo-American relations could be characterized in much the same way. The British navy, with its bases in Halifax, and after 1819 at Bermuda, remained so strong even with sharply reduced peacetime budgets, that no enemy could deal Sydney a mortal blow until the entire British Empire had been vanquished. Like the Falkland Islands, Cape Breton hardly registered on the Empire's map; and Tennyson and Sarty's carefully researched account provides the details.

At least one additional good story can be encountered in a source such as the ship captains' letters which reveal a more intimate picture of the dismal side of the naval experience. One of the naval sloops sent regularly to escort colliers from Sydney

harbour to Halifax was commanded in 1812 by Commander John Evans. We first learn of Evans in a letter he wrote from Sydney to the secretary to the Lords of the Admiralty from Sydney prison, where he was confined by the governor of Cape Breton, Brigadier Hugh Swayne. The governor he describes as an "inflexible, inhuman brute" who held him "legs in irons, with a chain attached to them". Jailed since mid-December 1812 without charge, Evans was allowed a daily ration of "half a pound of rancid salt pork and half a pound of bread with water to drink". Unable to exercise after six months he began to fear for his health. The governor's only reported reply was "Let him die. What do I care?"[30]

A month later, still without trial, Evans wrote an account of the circumstances which led to his confinement.[31] In it, he describes his encounters with various military and civilian Sydney residents including a Mr. Wilson who attacked him and a Major General Nepean who refused to assist him. According to Evans, he was treated roughly and was afraid for his personal safety: "Finding no protection on shore was afforded me by the Governor, I ordered three marines to be sent to protect my person from insult to keep a regular watch outside and not to go elsewhere, two of them to stay in the kitchen and one to walk outside of the door until sunset". Apparently Evans was attacked yet again: "In passing down the street a short time after Mr Leonard knocked me down with a stick".[32] Sydney certainly seemed dangerous indeed for ship captains such as Evans.

His trial took place on 16 July 1813, where he was defended by Jared T. Chipman. The judge refused to release him, and Chipman stated that he would report the judge's "infamy and marked contempt" to the court of appeal. He was still confined to prison, but without irons, and allowed a half pound of bread daily. Chipman started a civil suit for damages against Wilson and planned to attach all his property. Evans claimed to be the innocent party, attacked by Wilson in the street where he had been innocently strolling. His accusers were "lunatics trampling on the rights of an innocent man".[33] He was shipped back to England, never again to serve the king at sea.

Taken together recent publications on various aspects of the naval world within the Canadian colonial and imperial context provide readers with a growing sense of the variety and value of this as a topic worthy of study and analysis. To be sure, there are as yet unasked and therefore unanswered questions. There are other sources to which historians should turn their collective eyes and other areas of naval history and historiography which need to be examined. However, as this overview suggests, a rich groundwork has been laid for further investigation.

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30 Commander John Evans to J.W. Croker, Secretary to the Board of Admiralty, 16 June 1813, ADM1/1771, Public Record Office [PRO], London, England.

31 Evans to Croker, 6 July 1813, ADM1/1771, PRO.

32 Evans to Admiralty, Sydney Prison, 10 September 1813, ADM1/1771, PRO. Evans encloses a letter he had written to Lord Ellenborough on 30 August 1813.

33 Ibid.