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# **The 1711 Expedition to Quebec**

Politics and the Limitations of British  
Global Strategy

Adam Lyons

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# The 1711 Expedition to Quebec

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LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

**Bloomsbury Academic**

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square  
London  
WC1B 3DP  
UK

175 Fifth Avenue  
New York  
NY 10010  
USA

**[www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com)**

First published 2013

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**British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

EISBN: 978-1-4411-5386-9

Typeset by Newgen Imaging Systems Pvt Ltd, Chennai, India

*For Louise and my parents*



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## Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful for the conversation, suggestions, help and support of the following: Colonel (Retd) Hugh Boscawen, Dr Stephen Brumwell, Professor Dean Jobb, Dr Victoria Henshaw, Dr John McAleer and Dr Keith McLay. Thanks must also go to Professor Jeremy Black and Dr Jerzy Lukowski for supporting the publication of my research; and to Michael Greenwood, Rhodri Mogford and Claire Lipscomb at Continuum. I am also forever indebted to Dr Michael Snape for his friendship and guidance. Finally, thanks to both Louise for her patience and to my mother for funding my visit to the wonderful city of Quebec in memory of my father.

## Notes on the Text

All dates follow the 'Old Style' convention, which is prevalent in the source material, unless otherwise specified. The Julian calendar was ten days behind the 'New Style' Gregorian calendar during the seventeenth century and 11 days behind after 1700. For clarity, the year begins on 1 January and not 25 March, which was the convention at the time.

This book covers the period surrounding 1707 when the Act of Union came into force, therefore 'England' and 'Britain' are both used where appropriate.

The spelling in quotations has been modernized. Names of people and places have been standardized to one form as there are numerous variations in the manuscripts.

Bracketed numbers after a ship's name denotes the number of guns it carried.

# Maps



**Map 1** Northeast America

Source: Adapted from [http://d-maps.com/carte.php?lib=east\\_coast\\_of\\_north\\_america\\_map&num\\_car=1686&lang=en](http://d-maps.com/carte.php?lib=east_coast_of_north_america_map&num_car=1686&lang=en)



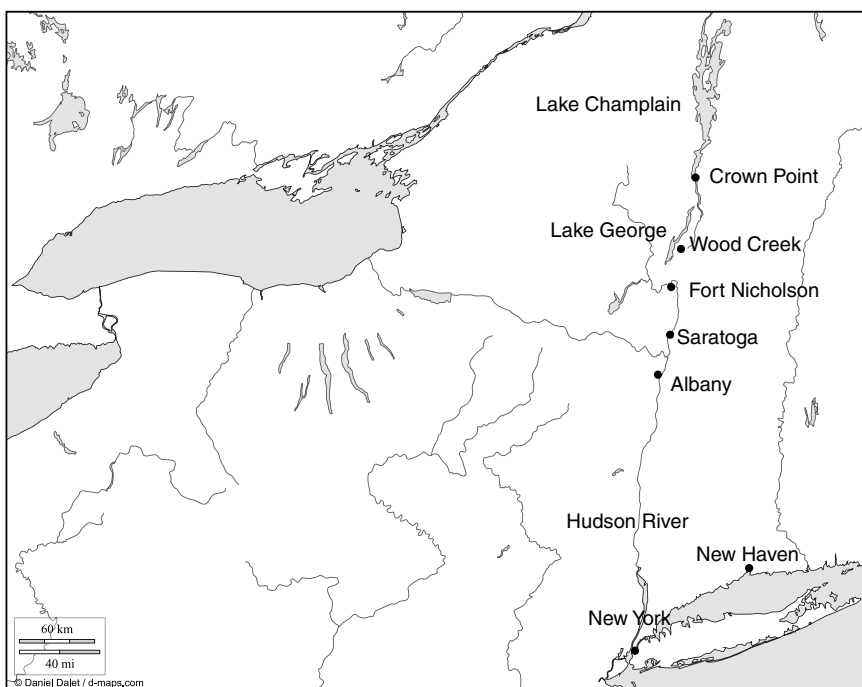
**Map 2** The approach to Quebec

Source: Adapted from [http://d-maps.com/carte.php?lib=quebec\\_map&num\\_car=1868&lang=en](http://d-maps.com/carte.php?lib=quebec_map&num_car=1868&lang=en)



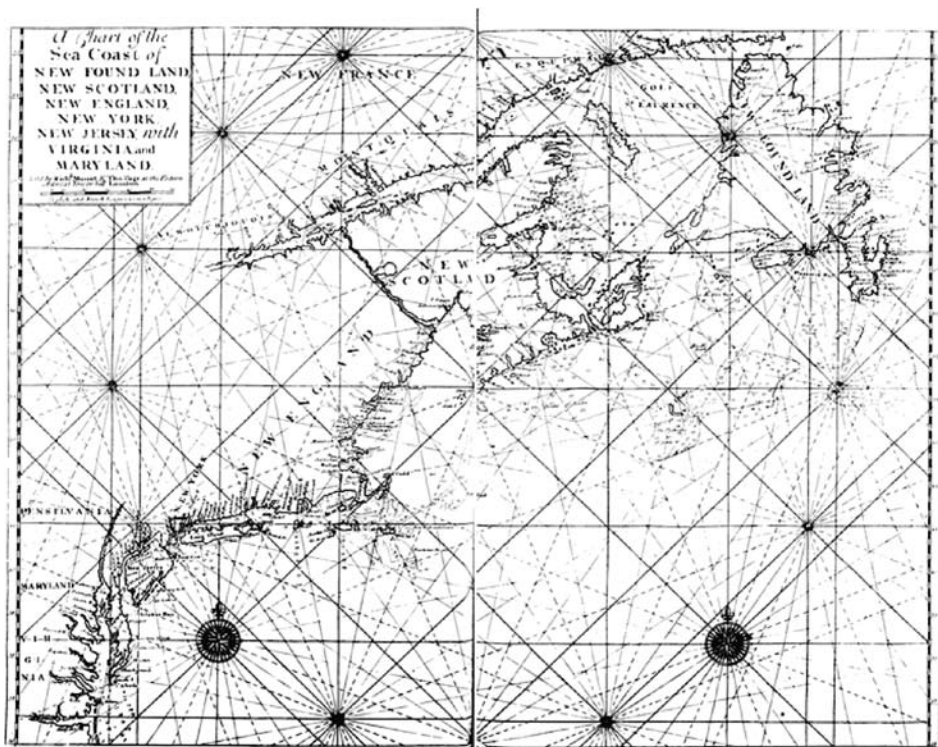
**Map 3** Colonial area of operations

Source: Adapted from [http://d-maps.com/carte.php?lib=north\\_East\\_usa\\_map&num\\_car=1818&lang=en](http://d-maps.com/carte.php?lib=north_East_usa_map&num_car=1818&lang=en)



**Map 4** The route to Montreal

Source: Adapted from [http://d-maps.com/carte.php?lib=new\\_york\\_map&num\\_car=7478&lang=en](http://d-maps.com/carte.php?lib=new_york_map&num_car=7478&lang=en)



**Map 5** Chart from *The English Pilot* (London, 1706)

# Introduction

The abortive expedition to capture Quebec, sent under the auspices of Secretary of State Henry St John towards the close of the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14), was the first large-scale British military endeavour to combat the French in Canada. Led by General John Hill, it comprised an impressive array of units needed to conduct military operations in New France and was then the largest military force ever assembled in that part of the world. The fleet which carried them, commanded by Rear Admiral Sir Hovenden Walker, met with ruin on the approach to Quebec on the night of 23 August 1711. Several troop transports and hundreds of lives were lost off the rocky north shore of the notoriously dangerous St Lawrence River, which brought to an end this unprecedented combined operation. Upon receiving news of the disaster, the colonial force making its simultaneous landward thrust towards Montreal, under Lieutenant General Francis Nicholson, also withdrew.<sup>1</sup>

The expedition could easily have succeeded given better political leadership. As this was lacking, it was doomed to fail from its very conception. The ambitious St John had enforced a culture of secrecy surrounding the expedition's organization because it was his personal project and so it needed to be hidden not only from the French, but also from the scrutiny of his political opponents. He did this by acquiring an insufficient quantity of provisions, which would imply that the fleet being assembled would be sent somewhere in Europe. This proved to be extremely detrimental to the expedition's chances of success as not only was it dispatched from England precariously late in the year for a Canadian campaign, but this plan also required the fleet to rendezvous at Boston to acquire further supplies. Logistically, this was very problematical and served to expose differences between the British and the colonials which would become even more apparent several decades later. Another reason for failure was the St Lawrence itself. It had never before been sailed upon, or charted, by the Royal Navy. The river was a dangerous enigma to sailors unfamiliar with its navigation. Considering how events unfolded and escalated into catastrophe, Walker and Hill ultimately arrived at a sensible conclusion when they decided to return to Great Britain.

The expedition was a result of the turbulent political environment towards the end of Queen Anne's reign. Interminable military campaigning and high



wartime taxes had served to quell public enthusiasm for both the war and the Whig government. Their misguided impeachment of the High Tory Anglican clergyman, Dr Henry Sacheverell, altered the British political landscape and ultimately brought down the Whig ministry in 1710. The duumvirate of the Captain General, John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough and the Lord High Treasurer, Sidney Godolphin, Earl of Godolphin, had dictated policy for too long. In an age that lacked freedom of speech, Sacheverell was brought to trial by Godolphin for attacking the 1688 revolution and the rise of the Whigs and their dissenting allies. Sacheverell consequently became a rallying-figure for the Tory cause, securing great public support, prompting the London mob into action. Godolphin's old colleague from the days of the triumvirate delivered the death blow to the Whig ministry. After becoming disenchanted and forced to resign from office in 1708 by the partnership of Marlborough and Godolphin, Robert Harley had returned to prominence as a Tory leader. His steady efforts to gain royal influence had succeeded through his ties with the Queen's favourite, and Hill's sister, Abigail Masham, who had supplanted Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough. Queen Anne began appointing Tories to ministerial positions and Harley eventually became head of the new ministry in August 1710 when he was awarded the position of chancellor of the exchequer. The new political configuration was confirmed in the following month by the electorate's overwhelming support.

The Marlborough-Godolphin period had ended and their place was filled by two experienced politicians who were also great friends. Harley and St John dominated the political scene in the final years of the Stuart era. Once they assumed office, their immediate agenda was to find a way to end the war. To do so, the Tories had to disentangle Britain from its commitments to Austria and the United Provinces. These allies had stood together with Britain on the battlefields of Europe, but Marlborough's victories fostered hugely inflated expectations of what could be achieved against France. For St John, a change in strategy was required, which would see disengagement from Europe combined with a maritime expedition that would serve purely British interests. Although contemporaries did not themselves use the term 'strategy', they were well acquainted with the concept (often termed as a 'design') and followed a policy that maintained a balance of power within Europe. This was often linked to the prevention of 'Universal Monarchy' – the English particularly feared that Louis XIV's France would dominate the continent, especially when the potential for union with Spain had arisen out of Spain's succession crisis. Many of their Tory opponents believed that the Whig's 'continental' approach to strategy

was disastrous and unpatriotic by contributing vastly expensive land forces to the cause of their Austrian and Dutch allies. Instead, a significant number of Tories thought that a 'blue water' policy should have been implemented; the concept being that a cheaper war should have been fought in the maritime and colonial sphere, which would have reaped huge rewards in terms of trade and territory. Many Tories believed that a naval strategy should have been pursued given the establishment of British naval dominance during the war; however, it was certainly easier for many Tories to express such an opinion considering the length of time spent in opposition and free from the responsibilities of office.

The death, in 1700, of the childless King Carlos II of Spain was the catalyst for war. Complex royal bloodlines resulted in two principal rival claimants to the Spanish throne from each of the two most powerful royal houses in Europe – the Austrian Habsburgs and the French Bourbons. This would have serious implications for the European balance of power. King Louis XIV of France recognized the Will of Carlos II, and thus his grandson, Philippe, Duc d'Anjou, became Felipe V, King of Spain, in direct contravention to the Second Partition Treaty that was agreed in conjunction with King William III of England. To protect his grandson's position, Louis ordered French troops to occupy the barrier fortresses of the Spanish Netherlands to prevent a Dutch challenge to Felipe's authority. This was unacceptable to William as he was also Stadtholder of the United Provinces. A French army also moved to occupy parts of the Spanish Italian territories, resulting in war with Austria in 1701 as the Emperor Leopold was concerned about French encroachments on territory that he felt should be under Austrian influence. The French had also gained advantages in trade with the Spanish colonies and, upon the death in September 1701 of the deposed king of England, James II, Louis blatantly disregarded the Treaty of Ryswick he signed in 1697 and openly recognized James's son, the Old Pretender – James 'III', as England's new monarch. For these reasons the maritime powers (the English and Dutch) joined Austria in a 'Grand Alliance' to preserve the balance of power against the threat of a Bourbon European hegemony. England's growing influence, both militarily and politically, had established it as the central pillar of the alliance, and English power would dominate both on land and at sea.

Marlborough became captain general of the allied armies in Flanders shortly before William's death in 1702. An ambitious strategic vision was realized in that same year when it was recognized that permanent naval superiority in the Mediterranean would provide great benefits for the alliance. This was an extension of the Williamite policy during the Nine Years War (1688–97) that

sought to establish, after the French naval threat was largely extinguished at Barfleur and La Hogue in 1692, naval superiority in the Mediterranean to support a large army deployed in Europe.<sup>2</sup> With the outbreak of war in 1702, Admiral of the Fleet Sir George Rooke was therefore dispatched to capture and secure the Spanish port of Cadiz as a naval base for further Mediterranean operations. Cadiz would also offer the added benefits of denying the Spanish a significant proportion of their trade, while offering the opportunity to open an Iberian front. Rooke did not meet with success, however; the troops employed lacked discipline and committed several atrocities against the local populace while in a drunken stupor, outraging much of Europe. After re-embarking the soldiers, Rooke, who had been worried about French encirclement by both the Brest and Toulon fleets, was about to stumble upon a symbolic opportunity that would serve to reassure some of the politicians in London who were sympathetic to a maritime strategy (Marlborough had taken almost as many fortified cities in 1702 as had been taken in Flanders by the Allies during the entire preceding Nine Years War). It was essential that the Navy should prove its worth. Illustrating the global vision that then gripped naval thinking, part of Rooke's force was detached from his fleet, led by Commodore Hovenden Walker, which sailed for the West Indies to attack French colonies there, specifically Martinique.

After the disappointing news about Cadiz reached London, St John's uncle – the Tory Secretary of State, Daniel Finch, Earl of Nottingham – imparted his vision for naval strategy to Marlborough. Acknowledging that Cadiz had been an ignominious failure, Nottingham declared that England's honour must be restored, especially considering the outrage caused by the dishonourable actions of some of the troops. These incidents, which had included the desecration of churches and the torture of locals, had been a public relations disaster for the administration. Nottingham believed it was imperative to counter this negative press with a naval victory as soon as one could be achieved. For this, he suggested that Rooke intercept the French squadron sheltering at Vigo, in north-west Spain, which had accompanied the Spanish treasure fleet from the Americas. Nottingham emphasized the value of Mediterranean operations when he noted that the French had 30 capital ships located there and therefore thought it necessary to counter them by sending a fleet of no less than 40 ships-of-the-line there each campaigning season. He also recognized, despite Rooke's failure, that a Mediterranean base remained essential to maximize the amount of time a fleet could be maintained there, so that ships could repair and winter on station. A base would also deny the French the Levant trade and vital corn supplies from North Africa.

Nottingham also stressed the importance of Britain's coastal waters when he decided that 64 frigates and men-of-war were necessary to both protect trade and defend home territory from any enemy threat. To counter French aggression, Dunkirk was specifically mentioned as a suitable candidate for blockade as it was a haven for French privateers. Nottingham also indicated that colonial operations could offer huge advantage to England, pointing out that Cartagena and Havana presented opportunities to increase power and influence in the West Indies and that the Dutch allies should assist in this wider strategy.<sup>3</sup> The Secretary of State attached great value to naval policy as he feared that a purely land-based conflict would result in a similar outcome to the Nine Years War, where little advantage was gained from a great effort.<sup>4</sup>

Much of Nottingham's foresight proved accurate. Although he was oblivious to the fact, Rooke had already displayed some initiative by either taking or destroying the vessels of the Spanish treasure fleet and its accompanying French squadron at Vigo Bay. Walker's squadron had been dispatched to the West Indies to assist in operations there, but this did not exactly follow its intended plan. The expedition instead focused on Guadeloupe and did not receive the planned support of a Dutch contingent, which Nottingham and the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the Earl of Rochester, had organized in a secret Cabinet committee – a body that was not again seen until St John began to plan for the Quebec expedition.<sup>5</sup>

Several ports were acquired over the course of the war to assist Mediterranean operations. Lisbon was utilized from 1703 when Portugal switched sides. The action at Vigo and the blockading presence of an Anglo-Dutch fleet off Lisbon demonstrated to King Pedro II that the maritime powers were best placed to defend (and threaten) his South American empire. He thus agreed to join the war against France and Spain; however, this also altered the alliance's war aims to include the ridiculously optimistic ambition of placing the Archduke Charles upon the Spanish throne and committed English troops to defend Portugal's borders. This ultimately prolonged the war as the armies fighting for Charles were confronted by a largely hostile Spanish population and now had to support the territorial integrity of a weak ally, though England did gain advantage through the commercially profitable Methuen Treaties. Another army was based on the east coast in rebellious Catalonia, dividing the alliance's power within Iberia to the western and eastern extremities which, therefore, relied upon maritime power to maintain a logistics network. After gaining the use of Lisbon's port facilities, a permanent naval presence was established in the Mediterranean when Gibraltar was taken in 1704 after a council of

war decided not to attack the original target of Cadiz, while Port Mahon, the valuable natural harbour at Minorca, was captured in 1708.

The war's only major fleet battle took place off Malaga in 1704, where approximately 50 line-of-battle ships on each side pounded one other, inflicting thousands of casualties. Although not a single vessel was lost from either fleet, Rooke's Mediterranean presence was preserved as the French fleet, under Louis's illegitimate son, the Comte de Toulouse, withdrew to its base at Toulon. Some Tories absurdly attempted to place Rooke's victory above that of Marlborough's at Blenheim, which had occurred almost two weeks earlier, as an example of the benefits of a maritime over a continental strategy.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Malaga secured Gibraltar and Rooke had unwittingly prevented the junction of the entire French Navy for the duration of the war, as France later scuttled its inactive Mediterranean fleet in 1707.

Nottingham's vision of a primarily naval strategy had also been communicated to the Grand Pensionary of the United Provinces, Anthonie Heinsius, when he argued that maritime superiority in the Mediterranean would be beneficial in several ways: it would block French involvement with the Barbary States; help the Huguenots in the Cevennes; assist with operations in Sicily; allow the free transportation of Austrian troops between Italy and Spain and persuade Savoy to switch sides.<sup>7</sup> Every one of these advantages was achieved during the war primarily due to the efforts of the Anglo-Dutch fleet (though the Huguenots later suffered brutal reprisals, their uprising served to divert some French regiments from the front). After 1707, the Royal Navy, accompanied by a small number of Dutch warships, dominated the Mediterranean. The fleet was able to prevent enemy naval activity and deny France access to North African sources of grain, which had a devastating effect when the French harvest failed over the winter of 1708–9. British ships were also able to freely transport Austrian troops between the Italian and Spanish theatres of war. This establishment of maritime superiority in the Mediterranean was clearly a turning point in British fortunes. The French Navy no longer possessed control over their coastal areas or obvious spheres of influence. The danger posed by the possible link-up of the French Brest and Toulon squadrons had passed to be replaced by a new threat from state-sanctioned privateers. Consequently, the importance Nottingham had previously subscribed to Dunkirk soon became evident.

After the Battle of Malaga, the French were unable to maintain an effective fleet to counter the Anglo-Dutch presence due to poor finances and the need to provide for their large armies, which faced strong opposition in the characters of

Marlborough and Prince Eugene of Savoy. French naval policy was instead reduced to issuing letters of marque for privateers to target allied trade. Such activity was primarily centred on Dunkirk which protected over 100 privateering vessels, although St Malo also harboured 40. Allied convoys were not well protected and the privateers had a devastating impact on trade. With the concentration of the Royal Navy on maintaining a fleet in the Mediterranean its other duties were neglected so much that, in 1707, London merchants created uproar and demanded an end to their constant losses at sea. An Act of Parliament was passed in 1708 for the 'better securing the trade of this kingdom by cruisers and convoys' – it is surprising it took so long given the experience of the attack on the Smyrna Convoy in 1693 and the scale of losses that occurred during the Spanish Succession War. The first article of this Act was to secure 43 vessels for the sole purpose of trade protection around Great Britain.<sup>8</sup> Six years earlier, Nottingham had first identified the need to station cruisers in such numbers to protect Britain's trade.

The strategy outlined by Nottingham in the early stages of the war, when the Tories still retained some influence, allowed England to become a member of the first rank of European powers, owing to its political assertiveness and increased financial and military might. An expansive maritime strategy ensured that England would maintain a leading status within European affairs. Nottingham resigned his office in 1704 in protest at the steadily increasing dominance of the Whigs in the ministry. Blue water policy therefore received a blow as no major operation outside of Europe ensued and supporters of the Tory strategy fell silent when Marlborough delivered several successful land campaigns. Nottingham did, however, understand the need for balance, unlike Rochester who advocated an exclusively naval war.<sup>9</sup> Marlborough himself understood that a Mediterranean presence was crucial to divert French attention.<sup>10</sup> However, Nottingham did not entirely agree with the Duke's perspective and argued that the war should not be prosecuted in Flanders, but in Italy, Spain and the West Indies, where colonies and trade could be seized without maintaining a large and expensive army.<sup>11</sup> The Mediterranean and the Americas were clearly central to his vision of a global maritime and amphibious strategy.

Despite the Royal Navy performing a supporting role during the war, it nevertheless established superiority at sea. Its operations were primarily intended to support land forces in the Mediterranean and also had a role in protecting British trade. Other theatres were clearly peripheral as naval operations in the colonies generally occurred at the request of colonial governors intent on securing their interests.<sup>12</sup> A grand imperial strategy had not been laid down in London; successive ministries were often only concerned with trade protection and the

Whigs only agreed to colonial operations as long as they did not interfere with their European strategy.<sup>13</sup> Had Tories such as Nottingham held power during the course of the war then Britain's role in the war may have produced a remarkably different outcome. Success in the Mediterranean allowed the opportunity to expand naval strategy and concentrate on other geographical areas – including North America.

As Marlborough's campaigning had still to win the war by 1710, the Tories highlighted the ineffectiveness of the continental strategy. Harley and St John recognized that political propaganda could further their goal of ending the conflict. To detract from the previous administration, Jonathan Swift was employed to comment on the failings of the Whigs and to sell the Tory point of view. In his famous pamphlet, *The Conduct of the Allies*, Swift stated that the war was fought by the Whigs as 'principals' when many Tories thought the British should have been mere 'auxiliaries'. Essentially, Swift mirrored the Tory argument that the war should have been prosecuted primarily in Spain, which was the focus of their war aims, and at sea and in the colonies, where wealth could be acquired, rather than in the costly and protracted land campaigns – that had already spanned a decade – in Flanders. Swift's thesis offered a contrasting view to Joseph Addison, who wrote *The Present State of the War* at the height of Whig rule, arguing that French power should be tackled where it is strongest – in Europe. Though he was not against colonial and maritime operations (as, indeed, were many Whigs, though the realities of power shaped their continental approach), Addison called for them to be 'collateral project[s], rather than our principal design . . . [as] the fate of Europe, should not turn upon the uncertainty of winds and waves, and be liable to all the accidents that may befall a naval expedition'.<sup>14</sup> This type of maritime versus continental debate would permeate a series of British administrations throughout the century.

*The Conduct of the Allies* was also used to convince an already sceptical public of the benefits of ignoring their treaty obligations and negotiating a unilateral peace at the expense of their allies. Swift called for British disengagement from the 'Dutch' war as he alleged Britain was fighting for foreign interests. Both Allies had duplicitously broken the articles of the Grand Alliance, for example, when the Dutch contrived to trade with the French and did not meet their naval quotas, while the Austrians had held secret negotiations with France in 1706. Swift also declared that, through the Whigs' unquestioning support for the Allies, the cost of the war had ruined Britain. There was truth in these accusations, yet the Tories were themselves engaging in secret negotiations with the French. In essence then, the Whigs should have followed a blue water strategy to achieve

security and success, and left their allies to perform a holding action against France on the continent. With the rise of the Tories and the instigation of the Quebec expedition, Britain saw the reversion to traditional English foreign policy, harking back to the privateers of Elizabeth I, and the official blue water policies of the Commonwealth and Charles II.<sup>15</sup> William's Mediterranean naval policy had not invoked blue water thinking as it was initiated to maintain the army in Europe, rather than be the focus of strategy itself.<sup>16</sup> Ironically, Swift's pamphlet was published in November 1711 after Walker had returned from Canada in his unsuccessful bid to demonstrate the advantages of blue water warfare.

Harley and St John were two contrasting personalities, and by securing office their great friendship soon turned sour. Harley came from a dissenting background and had changed his political colours, but was never a High Tory. He believed in moderation, disliking the rise of party within parliament, and thought the interests of the Court and Crown were best served if they were not hampered by factional fighting between the growing forces of Whig and Tory. As *de facto* head of the new ministry, Harley was able to put his thoughts into effect by offering positions to moderates in both parties, and he secured an ally in the form of Queen Anne. Yet he found difficulties in implementing his scheme for moderation. As the election of 1710 had returned a huge majority for the Tories in the House of Commons, many Tory politicians expected the High Tories to gain positions of power. By creating a moderate government, Harley had made himself vulnerable and his position ensured that the majority of High Tories would serve to hamper his ministry rather than support it. Though the Cabinet was overwhelmingly Tory, he would have to rely on the support of a handful of moderate Whigs to remain in power.<sup>17</sup> Harley's philosophy was a creditable one yet the strength of the Tories, which ironically allowed him to form a ministry in the first place, would eventually bring about his demise.

The High Tories looked elsewhere for leadership and found the young Secretary of State for the Northern Department, Henry St John. This office had been held by Harley when he was part of the triumvirate and St John served under him as Secretary at War. Despite returning to office, St John was disappointed with his new appointment; he desired the more prestigious southern department instead. His personal qualities were the opposite to those of the 'incorruptible' Harley.<sup>18</sup> He was young, atheistic, ambitious, adulterous, astute and he picked up the baton for the High Tory cause when he sensed opportunity. St John's ambition was plain for the world to see and he was convinced by traditional Tory blue water strategy.<sup>19</sup> To feed this ambition for advancement he concocted the idea for the expedition to capture Quebec that had originally been considered, but



not executed, by the previous Whig ministry. The fall of Quebec would help to end the war quickly and serve as a bargaining chip at the peace negotiations. It would also divert attention from Marlborough at a time when the ministry still relied upon him, especially as several of his regiments were withdrawn from Flanders for the expedition. Whereas Europe was deemed a priority by the Whigs, North America had been considered to be of little importance to overall grand strategy.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, for politicians in Europe, the area of North America and the West Indies was viewed as a geographical whole.<sup>21</sup> Even St John himself had once referred to his Quebec project as the 'West India Expedition.'<sup>22</sup> Such a vast area was inconceivable to the imagination of most Europeans, perhaps resulting in a misunderstanding of its strategic value which did not mature until the Seven Years War (1756–63). St John attempted to alter this lack of interest in blue water and colonial policy.

Similar to St John's efforts, this book shall endeavour to turn away from Marlborough's land-based European campaigns. A Whiggish perspective of the War of the Spanish Succession has continued to influence historians, resulting in three primary characteristics concerning the British historiography in particular: first, and perhaps unsurprisingly, it is overwhelmingly Anglocentric; second, its naval dimensions have been severely neglected; and third, most works have concentrated solely on the career of Marlborough. Even here, his campaigns in Flanders and the 1704 march on the Danube have received the greatest interest to the detriment of other aspects of the war. As a result, the actions of the other participating nations are largely ignored unless Marlborough was personally involved and, according to many, the war seemingly ended after his final campaign in 1711. Little attention is given to the conduct of the war in Germany (excluding the 1704 campaign), Iberia, Italy or the Americas. The campaigns in which the British did not engage (those of 1701, 1712 and 1713) are only rarely and fleetingly examined. Furthermore, though British naval ascendancy was confirmed during this period, the maritime sphere has received scant attention in comparison to other periods in the Royal Navy's history, with only Ruth Bourne and J. H. Owen focussing on the British naval war in any great detail.<sup>23</sup>

Of course, that is not to say Marlborough was unimportant, nor his biographies worthless.<sup>24</sup> Clearly his dominant role in both military and political affairs necessitates much discussion, but this has come at a cost. For instance, English biographies of Prince Eugene of Savoy are a rarity despite his influential presence at all but one of Marlborough's famous victories and the fact that he went on to command the allied army in Flanders after the Duke's dismissal in 1712.<sup>25</sup> The war was fought over the Spanish inheritance, but very few works

have covered that theatre of war and the Whig mantra of 'no peace without Spain' has not been adequately reflected in the historiography. Only the works of David Francis, J. A. C. Hugill and Henry Kamen have provided a detailed analysis of that theatre. The French are equally neglected, but slightly better served thanks to studies of the French army during the reign of Louis XIV.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to the great Duke, Marlborough's most able opponent, the Duc de Villars, has just a single biography written in English to his name.<sup>27</sup> The French victory in 1712 at Denain – the last battle in the Flanders theatre that reversed much of Marlborough's gains – is largely absent from the British record because the Duke did not command the allies there. Likewise, the Quebec expedition has been largely ignored because of its failure at a time when Marlborough took the fortress at Bouchain – his last great victory.

Although Marlborough is unavoidably featured in these pages, they shall mostly be punctuated by the lesser names of Hill, Nicholson, St John and Walker. The expedition's failure and the later collapse of the Tory ministry would, however, consign a negative view on St John's scheme in the historiography, though he has largely escaped from being associated with its failure. Walker, when not omitted from the annals of history, has instead received most of the blame for the disaster on the St Lawrence. C. T. Atkinson has even absurdly claimed that the Quebec expedition denied Marlborough ultimate victory at Paris because of the reallocation of five battalions from his army.<sup>28</sup> Walker does not deserve such derision and too much has been repeated about him without sufficiently analyzing his background – this is addressed in the second chapter. As the naval commander, he undoubtedly held responsibility for the tragedy on the St Lawrence; however, Walker was operating under very difficult circumstances, much of which were outside of his control. His considerable naval experience indicates that he was a competent mariner, especially as he had convoyed ships on numerous transoceanic voyages. Still, a modern view of naval operations should not be allowed to distort the huge challenge of safely conveying a fleet to Quebec. Walker took command in an age when maritime journeys were extremely perilous. Crossing the Atlantic in the early eighteenth century was a difficult and dangerous task in itself, yet he then had to continue into the confines of a dangerous river without adequate charts or pilots. Indeed, the majority of combined army-navy operations of the period resulted in failure and Walker's mission of sailing to Quebec was a much harder prospect than might be imagined today. He later suffered, like many suspected Tory sympathizers, from the political turmoil resulting from the accession of the Hanoverians in 1714 and

the long ascendancy of the Whigs. Consequently, Walker later felt the need to defend his record by publishing his journal from the expedition in 1720.

Walker's reputation needs to be rehabilitated and Hill should be held more accountable for much of the operational detail. Though he cannot take responsibility for the navigation of the St Lawrence, Hill was instrumental in the decision to return to England without attempting to attack the French in Newfoundland, which was the expedition's secondary target. As brother to the Queen's favourite, Hill obviously received his position through patronage, whereas Walker achieved his command through operational merit. Many historians have thought it absurd that these commanders were picked to command in the first place. The biographies of Walker and Hill should challenge their perceived shortcomings and show that they were capable and competent commanders.

Little material has been published about the expedition in modern times. Gerald S. Graham's indispensable 1953 republication of Walker's 'Journal', which also includes relevant correspondence, provides a great source of information, but is the last significant work about the expedition.<sup>29</sup> William Thomas Morgan contributed articles concerning the expedition in the 1920s and, more recently, Richard Harding addressed the issue with the publication of a conference paper, but it is surprising that there is little more than this.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, most secondary works that have referred to it have often relegated the expedition to a couple of sentences, usually to merely acknowledge its existence and note its failure. This is because it is often included to illustrate the political fluctuations of the time, rather than as an indication of a new strategic element in the war against the French, especially as it serves as an example of the decline in Marlborough's power. With such little published, an examination of the expedition overwhelmingly relies on archival material – much of it never before consulted. St John's ambitiousness dictated that the operation would remain secret from both foreign and domestic enemies; this secrecy filtrated into many of the records. To add to this, Walker's flagship – the *Edgar* – unfortunately exploded at Portsmouth on its return from Canada and destroyed the majority of Walker's personal papers and documents, ensuring that some details will forever remain hidden.<sup>31</sup> Any analysis of the expedition therefore suffers from incomplete evidence through the destruction of some records and the deliberate obfuscation of others, though fortunately enough documentation survives to give an understanding of an often overlooked episode of history. Reconstructing the expedition allows for a detailed examination of how an early eighteenth-century expeditionary force was organized and assembled, albeit in unusual circumstances that reveal the imperfections of the process – particularly

the glaring lack of institutional safeguards. This is examined in the third chapter, often using a great deal of new source material.

Despite being an abject failure, the expedition had little impact on events in the closing stages of the war. Fortunately for the British, its consequences were not overwhelmingly negative; though unfortunately for Walker, his reputation suffered and he deserves to be exonerated. It is understandable that, upon first glance, historians have relegated the expedition as being just one of many ambitious military operations which failed as the result of incompetent command; however, this expedition should not be dismissed as an inglorious folly, but counted as something quite different, even unique. It represented an alteration in strategy which attempted to divert attention away from the costly land campaigning of continental Europe. This was a new commitment to the American theatre never seen before, where for at least 20 years the colonials had sought to neutralize the threat posed by their northern French neighbours using their own resources. It was the first time Britain had acted on the colonial desire for large-scale imperial expansion on the North American continent. Such was this commitment that the force led by Walker and Hill was the largest ever seen in that part of the Americas up to that point. In short, the expedition opened up North America to the potential of European campaigning. The 1711 expedition is naturally overshadowed by Wolfe's successful victory at Quebec which dominates the military historiography of North America during the pre-American Revolution era. Although not a success, the 1711 expedition set a precedent for British administrations later in the century when the great project finally succeeded in 1759 on the Plains of Abraham. This book brings together for the first time, using many new archival sources, the varying aspects of the expedition (including Nicholson's often overlooked Montreal diversion): from the political background and an analysis of its commanders, to its organization and execution, as well as an examination of the history of the various attempts to conquer Quebec and how this corresponds with British global strategy.

