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Jonathan R. Dull, *The French Navy and the Seven Years' War*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. xviii + 445 pp. Maps, notes, bibliography, and index. \$35.00 US (cl). ISBN 0-8032-1731-5.

Review by Geoffrey Symcox, University of California, Los Angeles.

Jonathan Dull's new book forms a complement to his two previous works on French diplomacy and naval affairs in the later eighteenth century: *The French Navy and American Independence: A Study of Arms and Diplomacy* (1975), and his *Diplomatic History of the American Revolution* (1985). Like them, this new book is very thoroughly researched. It is based on a wealth of archival material from Paris and London, and on an exhaustive bibliography of secondary works in English, French, and German, which runs to an impressive forty pages in length. The result is a clear, well argued narrative that takes the reader from the end of the previous Franco-British conflict in 1748, through the decade of uneasy peace and undeclared war that followed, and then year by year through the dramatic events of the Seven Years' War, concluding with an epilogue that brings the story up to the outbreak of the next round of conflict in 1774. Throughout, the author illuminates the conduct of naval operations by situating them in the wider context of the diplomatic negotiations and the land war that were unfolding simultaneously.

This book will appeal to specialists in French foreign policy and naval affairs, and to students of international relations under the Old Regime. Historians of colonial North America will also find it valuable because of the emphasis the author places on military and naval operations there. As he correctly points out, the war began in 1754 as a conflict on the open frontier between the expanding French and British colonial empires: it spread to the European theatre two years later. Its final result was to make Great Britain the master of North America as far as the east bank of the Mississippi. The naval war that forms the centerpiece of this book was essentially a struggle for colonial domination (in Africa, the West Indies and India too) that Great Britain won because of its vastly superior maritime strength.

Dull's primary purpose is to explain how and why France lost the war for North America. The French navy got off to a promising start in 1755, successfully ferrying reinforcements to Canada, and then in 1756 capturing the important naval base of Minorca by outmaneuvering the British fleet under Admiral Byng, who was made the scapegoat for this defeat, and executed (as Voltaire famously observed) to encourage his brother admirals. After this, however, the tide began to turn, and Dull now traces the cumulative downward trajectory of France's maritime power. By 1757 the British navy had reached its full wartime strength. Initially the French navy's numerical inferiority in ships of the line and trained seamen had been offset by good tactics, good planning, and a measure of luck, but from this point the British navy's overwhelming strength forced it onto the defensive. Badly needed supplies and reinforcements could only reach French Canada in a trickle. In 1758 a British fleet captured the great fortress of Louisbourg, opening the way up the St. Lawrence into the heartland of French Canada. The fall of Quebec in September 1759 was followed two months later by the destruction at Quibéron of a squadron from Brest and Rochefort earmarked to carry an invasion force to the British Isles. These twin disasters, coming in swift succession, marked the turning point of the naval war. The French government's already shaky credit was undermined, the naval budget was drastically cut, and in consequence a smaller number of French warships were fitted out for the coming campaign. Its lifeline to the mother-country severed, Montreal fell in 1760, spelling the end of the French empire in North America. Meanwhile in the Indian Ocean events followed the same course. Inadequate naval support

meant that the French East India Company's outposts fell one by one to superior British forces, culminating in the fall of Pondicherry, the main French base, in 1761.

By this time the British navy had established a crushing superiority both in the colonies and in home waters, so in the last years of the war few French warships put to sea, apart from a certain number that were leased out as privateers. In a desperate attempt to restore the balance of naval forces Louis XV's foreign minister the Duc de Choiseul drew Spain into the war, but with disastrous consequences: the key Spanish bases at Havana and Manila fell in quick succession in 1762, leaving the Spanish government with no option but to join France in making peace. Even before the peace treaty was signed, however, Choiseul had begun to plan for the next war. He was determined to avoid the mistakes that had destroyed French naval power in this climactic struggle. Appointed Secretary for the Navy late in 1761, he initiated a systematic program to rebuild the fleet, with the ultimate aim of surpassing Britain at sea and wreaking vengeance for the losses and humiliations of the Seven Years' War. By astute diplomacy he ensured that France retained access to the Newfoundland fisheries, for as Dull emphasizes, those stormy waters provided a vital training-ground for sailors: without the right to fish there, France would have been starved of naval manpower. Although Choiseul's shipbuilding program did not completely achieve its goal, for lack of funds, his dream would be fulfilled in the War of American Independence, when France, with the support of Spain and other maritime powers, defeated Britain.

In addition to providing a narrative of the successive campaigns, Dull analyzes the factors that contributed to the French navy's inferiority. First and foremost was the geographical imperative: as a land power with long frontiers, France was obliged to devote the bulk of its resources to its army. When money ran short, as in 1759, the naval budget suffered most. Britain, as an island power, could devote far more of its revenues to its navy, which was more than twice the size of France's, and which could draw on a reserve of trained seamen more than twice as big as the French. France also suffered the strategic drawback of being both a Mediterranean and an Atlantic power, which forced it to divide its navy between its two principal bases at Toulon and Brest. Concentrating the two fleets in the face of determined British counter-measures was a perennial difficulty that hampered the conduct of operations. Dull does not devote much time to the administration and logistics of the navy--that is unnecessary, since this is covered in the fine study by James Pritchard, *Louis XV's Navy, 1748-1762* (1987)--but what he says reinforces Pritchard's conclusions: above all, it was lack of money that hobbled French naval operations, limited building to replace lost ships, and kept the naval arsenals chronically short of essential supplies.

The fundamental thesis in Dull's book is that (as Choiseul realized from the first) France was fighting two parallel but distinct wars: one overseas, and one in Europe. Early on the French government recognized that its colonies would surely fall victim to superior British sea power, and that compensation must be found for them on the continent, by occupying the British principality of Hanover--always a hostage to fortune -- which could be exchanged for the lost colonies at the peace treaty. In the end, however, France failed to win its bargaining chip in Europe, and had to sign away its North American possessions to Britain. To demonstrate the relationship between the two sides of the conflict, Dull interweaves his narrative of the naval war with that of the war in Europe, recounting the sequence of events year by year. His intention is laudable: it is to demonstrate the diplomatic and military imperatives that determined French naval policy. Here however I must register a demurrer. In his effort to place the naval war in its broadest possible context, Dull devotes far more space to diplomacy and the conflict in the European theatre than to his central story-line: the naval war. Diplomatic chatter and the clash of arms on distant battlefields in Germany tend at times to drown out the story of events at sea. And this leads me to a second demurrer: because Dull's focus is fixed on fleet operations, he says very little about commerce--destruction by privateers, always a crucial element in French maritime strategy--especially in the later stages of a war when the battle fleet was confined to port by budget cuts. On p. 61 Dull remarks that privateering "was economically destructive and often

inhumane and did little good for the French navy.” Elsewhere he notes that it siphoned off manpower from the navy, but that it was financially profitable, and formed a significant diversion of British naval strength (p. 87). These arguments—which are not entirely consistent—need further amplification and explanation, if the whole story of the naval war is to be told. Apart from these criticisms, however, I found this a fine, carefully-argued work, which turns out to be far more than a study of the French navy, as its title implies. It is in fact a general history of how France fought the Seven Years’ War, in which the story of naval operations figures as one of many threads in a comprehensive narrative.

Geoffrey Symcox
University of California, Los Angeles
symcox@history.ucla.edu

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