Malcom MacLeod

DANIEL-MARIE LIENARD DE BEAUJEU, 1711-1755:

EMPIRE BUILDER AT WORK AND WAR

In the basement of the chapel-museum building at Grand Pré Park there is a water-colour portrait of Daniel-Marie Liénard de Beaujeu. It shows a man in typical aristocrat's costume for the mid-18th century—lots of frills, white powdered curls, a bunch of white lace at his throat. He seems a pastel man, soft and delicate looking.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

I. *A Life and a Death*

Far from being soft, Beaujeu was a weathered fighter and *voyageur* and, by dint of brawn and personality as well as by appointment, a leader of men of the most rough-and-tumble sort.[1] Born at Montreal in 1711,[2] he joined the Marine troops stationed in the French colony of Canada as an officer cadet while still a teenager.[3] He married when he was twenty-five. Of his several children only two daughters survived into adulthood, both named after their father—Marie.[4]

Beaujeu's military career consisted of punishing wilderness journeys; of boredom, discomfort and novelty far from civilization—an intricate mix of Indian negotiations, guerilla expeditions and the fur trade in positions of increasing responsibility. He rose to the rank of captain before being killed in action in July 1755. It was a very famous action. Newly-named commandant of Fort Duquesne in disputed Ohio country, Beaujeu led out a 900-man sortie to ambush a 2000-strong vanguard of an invading Anglo-American force under Major-General Edward Braddock. Directing the opening manoeuvres of a confused engagement when the two armies met unexpectedly in the forest,

he was cut down by British grapeshot before any particular advantage had been won by one side or the other. The French force—comprised two-thirds of Indian allies—gradually gained the upper hand by superior tactics. Before nightfall half the British unit had been wiped out in one of the most renowned frontier massacres of North American history, and the horror-struck survivors fled out of the Ohio Valley not to return for three years.

Beaujeu was buried where Pittsburg now smokes, and was promoted by his descendants into a genuine folk legend in the Province of Quebec, with the title *Héros de la Monongahéla*[5]—the Monongahela being the river near where he fought his last battle.

We now may ask: What on earth is the likeness of this Quebecois Ohio hero doing in the basement of a make-believe church at Grand Pré, Nova Scotia?

II. *Campaign in the East, 1746-1747*

In June 1746—Lieutenant Beaujeu was 35 years old—he was one of 20 officers named to lead an army of 700 men from Quebec into Acadia.[6] Remember the strategic situation at that time. Surprising themselves as much as anybody, volatile Yankees had captured Louisbourg the previous year. The French government decided on a big effort, led by the Duc d'Anville, to retake Louisbourg and perhaps seize Annapolis as well, which would completely cleanse Nova Scotia of Anglo-American control for the first time in 35 years. D'Anville's fleet and army were due to arrive in the harbour of Chibouctou (Halifax). The colony of Canada raised and dispatched the force of which Beaujeu was part, to link up with the European Frenchmen and wage a joint struggle.

The army that came down here from Quebec was, officers and men, entirely Canadian. The rank and file were from the colony's militia, stout sons of narrow farms running back from the Saint Lawrence River over the 250-mile settled stretch between Montreal and Malbaie. Their leaders—Beaujeu and his fellow-officers—were career soldiers serving in their own homeland, part of a social group that was one of the most conspicuous elites of French Canada.

The 700 came from Quebec by ship to Baie Verte—a five-week odyssey prolonged by unfavourable winds and proposals to sidetrack long enough to go clean out a nest of British troops in Charlottetown harbour. From Baie Verte they portaged their several tons of supplies in to the Acadian village of Beaubassin near Amherst. By mid-July they had their headquarters set up there.

As always in military matters, the most vital item to have, and the scarcest, was information. Army Commander, Captain Claude-Roche de Ramezay—the same man who 13 years later surrendered Quebec City to its attackers after the Battle of the Plains of Abraham—sent scouts and spies fanning out in all directions: to Prince Edward Island to count the enemy there; to Cape Breton for a report on Louisbourg; to Shubenacadie to get in touch with Abbé Le Loutre and his Micmac retainers; to the Annapolis Valley to check British dispositions and Acadian attitudes; to Halifax to learn if the fleet from France had arrived. D'Anville's ships, scattered by storms, were just beginning to trickle in. At the first of August, to conserve provisions, a detachment of 200 men was sent to camp at Grand Pré and requisition what they needed from the inhabitants there. At the end of the month they were politely asked to leave by spokesmen for the Acadian villagers, who stated they were entirely unable to feed so many extra mouths. From Beaubassin, over half of the expeditionary force was recalled to Quebec. Finally towards the end of September came the news that D'Anville and part of his fleet were at Halifax. Beaujeu was sent to Halifax to get D'Anville's orders and was four days getting there overland. Though the admiral had died in the interval, and his troops were riddled with plagues, the decision was nevertheless taken to proceed to the attack of Annapolis. When they were ready the French would sail around southwest into the Bay of Fundy, while the Canadian troops made their approach overland. For three weeks at the end of October, 250 Canadians surrounded and besieged the Anglo-American Fort Anne at Annapolis; but the expected French support never arrived. In November they withdrew, first to Grand Pré then all the way to Beaubassin.

Looking back at year's end, these Canadian soldiers shivering in winter quarters at Chignecto could very well think their six months of fatigues and feints had accomplished precisely zero. But they were to come to close grips with the enemy, and cover themselves with glory, sooner than they thought.

On January 8, 1747, an Acadian named Arceneau arrived at Beaubassin to report that 220 New Englanders had occupied Grand Pré and several hundred more were daily expected. They had brought with them the pieces for two pre-fabricated blockhouses which, once spring came and they were erected, would help put a stop to Canadian forces walking up and down over Nova Scotia as simply and safely and saucily as if it were their own back yard. This was a strategic escalation of the struggle similar to the Canadians' establishing themselves at Beaubassin, but it was not a move Ramezay and his men

were willing to permit lightly. That same day they decided to attack the Americans at Grand Pré.

Away sped the couriers again over the frozen country—to the mission at Miramichi to call in Indian assistance; to the resident priests at Shubenacadie and Truro (Cobeguit) to gather stores of provisions and rally the Micmacs. On 21 January, 250 snow-shoed soldiers who no doubt wished they were home snug with their families on the banks of the Saint Lawrence far away, set out from Beaubassin on the painful expedition. Louis Coulon de Villiers was commanding officer of the force, with Beaujeu as his adjutant-major or chief of staff. Their route was along Northumberland Strait to Tatamagouche (27 January), then over the regular portage to Truro (30th), then to Shubenacadie (5 February) which was the nearest place they could safely cross the Shubenacadie River on the ice—further downstream Fundy tides kept ceaselessly breaking it up. Their numbers swelled by half a hundred as Catholic Micmacs and adventuresome young men from isolated Acadian farmsteads joined the colours. They carried with them almost everything they would need in the way of food, and when they began to run short they began to do without. By regular routine, a squad of 20 men with the sturdiest snow-shoes would begin each day's march well in advance of the others, to tramp down the path and make the movement of the main force that much swifter. They were almost three weeks getting from Beaubassin to their target: marching, eating and sleeping out of doors in average daytime temperatures around the freezing mark. The average at night was 13 degrees. The sternest night on which they pretended to be warm while dozing with their feet to the fire and the smoke in their faces was probably about 12 below.[7] With bleary eyes, showing evident marks of exhaustion and exposure, too filthy to be smelled comfortably at close range and with icicles in over-grown beards, they stumbled into Pégéuit (Windsor) at dusk on 9 February—a worn but hardy band, and dangerous!

In his journal one of the officers summed up the expedition so far:

> After a march of 17 days, more fatiguing from the amount of snow and excessive cold than from the distance covered, we arrived 9 February at Pegiguit, about 15 miles from Grand Pré. We passed the night in the homes of the people, after having placed sentries on all the roads to stop all traffic, so that news of our approach would not leak through to the enemy. The 10th, we learned from several habitants who had recently been at Grand Pré, that the English were there to the number of about 600 men, under the command of Colonel Noble:

that their quarters were dispersed among [24 different houses]. . . . We also learned that the families whose homes were occupied had not wanted to stay there with them and had abandoned their houses. They did not at all doubt but that we would put up our best efforts to dislodge the enemy, and feared being mixed up in the fighting. They had assured the English that we would be coming, but the English did not believe it, persuaded that the rigour of the winter season would prevent us.

We learned that each of the occupied houses was a guard post where sentries kept watch day and night, because they were apprehensive of Indian attack.[8]

We can best follow the critical hours of their final approach to Grand Pré—where the enemy outnumbered them by almost 2 to 1—and the attack itself, in the words of Beaujeu's journal—the most detailed account of this exploit.[9]

10 February 1747—At noon we got underway again in snowfall and a drifting blizzard that barely allowed us to see our way. Coming to a little stream where we found space enough to line up the troops for review, M. Coulon ordered me to divide them into ten detachments. Then, proceeding quite deliberately so as not to arrive too early, we went on to the Gaspareaux River and made there a halt of almost an hour while waiting for night to fall. Soaked as we were, this halt was a most difficult interlude for us. Indeed, we experienced cold stiff enough to freeze us where we stood if we did not keep moving about. Night finally coming, we reached the houses of Gaspareaux. Each of the ten detachments occupied a different house, and the officers made sure roaring fires were stoked up to dry out the men and their arms, and put them in shape to fight. Sentries were stationed on all the roads. We were then only a mile and a half from Grand Pré.

In the house selected to shelter M. Coulon and his detachment we found quite a group of habitants gathered for a good time at a wedding reception. We practically broke up the festivities. But this happenstance was lucky for us because a lot of the guests were from nowhere other than Grand Pré itself. They gave us detailed intelligence concerning enemy dispositions—so that using the information picked up at the party, M. Coulon could give suitable orders. Here is a precis of them. Our force was composed of about 300 men including Indians. Several Acadians had also joined us, but their numbers came to only token representation. Although enlisted as combatants they served us only as guides—in which role they were indispensable. As the unit's adjutant-major I had already, following the commander's orders, divided the troops into ten detachments. The first comprised fifty men under M. Coulon, who also had several officers under his command—Messrs. Beaujeu (major), Deslignery (aide-major), Mercier and Léry, ensigns, M. de Lusignan, cadet, and some volunteers. The

second squad was of forty men under M. de la Corne with M. de Rigauville and M. de Langi for seconds. Then M. de Villemonde, 25 men; M. de la Colombière, 25 men (with Moreau the militia officer his second); M. de Repentigny, 25 men; M. de Boishébert, 25 men; M. de Gaspé, 25 men; M. de Lotbinière, 21 men, including a group of Acadians; Cadets Morin and Bailleul each leading 25 Indians.

All the detachment commanders gathered for briefing in the house M. Coulon had taken over. Each according to his rank settled on which guard house his men should attack and asked for guides to lead them to it. M. Coulon's own target was the stone house fortified with artillery; M. de la Corne's was the house that served as living quarters for the enemy's principal officers. When all was thus ready for the attack, everyone went back to his own post and waited for the signal to start out.

11th—At 3 a.m. the commandant gave the order to set out.

All the detachments were gathered to his flag while the chaplain gave general absolution; then each brigade commander took the particular route towards the guard house which was his target. After assuring us that he knew well the way to the stone guard house we were supposed to attack, M. Coulon's guide led us instead to the house which was the target of M. de Lotbinière's group. Lotbinière had not yet arrived. A sentry who spotted us cried Who goes there? and To arms! We saw the watch-keeper come at once to the door of the house. But the night was so dark, and we were hugging the ground so closely with our bellies, silent as thieves, that although we were within 30 paces, the enemy considered it to have been a false alarm and went back inside again. As we were getting set to move on to get to our proper station, the sentry cried out once more Who goes there? and To arms! A shaft of illumination was beaming through the open guard house door. We could see a great deal of bustle and movement getting underway inside. I was close to M. Coulon. He motioned me to let him get by. I understood well that he wished to go on to the guard house that had been reserved for him, and when I told him we did not seem to have passed it already, he charged and we followed him. The sentry cried To arms! and the whole guard gave us a volley. All this while I was intent on silencing that sentry, and indeed he was the first man I killed. But the joy I felt on felling the enemy was very quickly shattered by dismay when I saw our commandant fall wounded—dead, I believed—but fortunately he was able to drag himself back out of the action. This accident did not at all diminish our vivacity for combat. I was left as commandant with Messrs. Deslignery, Mercier and Léry, and in less than ten minutes we took the guard house. All our people did marvels there: 21 corpses and three prisoners were proof of the detachment's courage. Our satisfaction would have been complete if we had not had M.

Coulon cruelly wounded above the forearm, M. de Lusignan with a shoulder wound and a broken thigh bone, and one man killed.

It was necessary to leave Messrs. Coulon and Lusignan in a safe place; their loss diminished the squad considerably. However, having been joined by Lotbinière's detachment, I took all that group and the remnant of our own, and headed towards the musket shots we could hear. We found M. Marin. He and his Indians had attacked their designated guard house and were repulsed with a loss of one killed and three wounded, which made them abandon the project. I proposed to the officers we should attack it again and set it on fire. This project did not seem prudent to them—so much the more because the guard, which was a strong one, had withdrawn to the second storey after barricading the doors and were rattling down a continual fire upon us. To this point, we were in perfect ignorance of how the other detachments were making out. All around we could hear terrific musket fire. In every direction we could see men in movement without being able to distinguish if they were our forces or the enemy. No guides to lead us. We had almost all lost our snowshoes and the amount of snow prevented us from moving smartly. In this extremity, the officers suggested we should proceed to the old shed where the English had boats stored—to take them or to strengthen the detachments of M. de la Colombière and Boishébert in case they had been beaten off, as we then thought likely. I thought this proposition wise and consented to it. So we proceeded there, moving miserably and wearily through the snow. It was by then full day light. On linking up with the columns led by de la Colombière and Boishébert, we were greatly pleased to learn from those gentlemen themselves that they had each successsfully seized a guard house and had only three men wounded. We arrived in time to share the pleasure of seizing the two vessels in which the English had stored the lumber all cut for two redoubts and a good proportion of their munitions, but very little food. Ten men, mostly officers, were made prisoners. As this seizure was a great stroke against the enemy, we strongly expected to be attacked there. We made dispositions to repel them as best we could, or in case we were too weak to do so, to set the boats on fire. We would have been more gratified with our achievements if we had been able to know that the other detachments had experienced similar good fortune. But we were completely in the dark with regard to them; it was for this reason that I sent M. Marin to go search out the whereabouts of M. le Chevalier de la Corne—at that time commandant of the force—and ask for orders on what do to next.

Returning two hours later, Marin informed us that the English had withdrawn to the stone guard house outfitted with artillery—the one which M. Coulon had been scheduled to strike. M. Le Chevalier de la Corne was keeping them under attack from a house he had seized. He had been joined by the Villemonde,

Repentigny, Gaspé and Bailleul detachments, and all these squads had taken the targets assigned to them. As La Corne needed help, he ordered M. Marin to tell me to come join him with my own detachment and that of M. de Lotbinière, leaving the de la Colombière and Boishébert groups to guard the vessels. I immediately left with my men. I had reason to apprehend that we could not all get through to La Corne without meeting some check, since we were unable to avoid passing near the enemy's guard house. Indeed, we sustained from them over 200 musket shots—none, happily, did any damage, even though we were without cover and quite close. We continued skirmishing until 3 p.m. and probably would have gone on like that for a long while without coming to a decisive action. But among our badly wounded prisoners we had M. How, commissary of the English detachment. How was a resolute man—but when he perceived himself growing feeble from considerable loss of blood, with no hope of being treated by our surgeon who was busy at Gaspareaux River with Messrs. Coulon and Lusignan and our other wounded—he called on M. le Chevalier de la Corne not to let him perish without help, and to permit the English surgeon to come out. With the officers' consent, La Corne gave permission. M. Marin thereupon went towards the enemy waving a parley-flag. They sent out someone to blindfold Marin and lead him to their commandant. Receiving How's note, the English commander immediately dispatched his number one surgeon and kept Marin as a hostage. The English used this pause for the dressing of wounds to propose a cease-fire until the following morning; it was their second in command who came to us offering this suggestion.

M. de la Corne not being able to take such a decision without first informing M. Coulon of the developments and receiving his orders, wrote to Coulon at Gaspareau about the cease-fire. Coulon replied that his condition did not allow him to follow affairs; La Corne had good officers with him; Coulon left him in charge to decide what course was most for the honour of the service.

The liberty of action which M. Coulon gave to M. de la Corne, and the fatigue and hunger we had suffered for three days, urged us not to pause and deliberate with all the officers about the reply that should be given the English. However in order to impress the Englishman we pretended that his proposal raised great difficulties for us; we made sure he observed we were not so far reduced that we did not consider at some length the course we ought to follow. At last we accepted the cease-fire—but this did not prevent us from keeping ready all night with arms to hand, on guard against any trick.

So went the fighting, and Beaujeu's part in it, in the famous battle of Grand Pré. The next day the Americans surrendered and were permitted to withdraw to Annapolis. The column that emerged from the stone house on

February 14th was 350 strong; 130 men had been killed, and the Canadians held 50 prisoners. On the French side, casualties were 7 killed and 15 wounded. The Canadians soon returned to their headquarters at Beaubassin, and as the wording on the National Historic Sites plaque has it, "the British resumed their uneasy possession of mainland Nova Scotia".[10] Superb intelligence, which had enabled the Canadian striking force to move so far and so openly across country and still arrive unreported beneath the windowsills of sleeping, unwary troops, no doubt contributed to Anglo-American distrust of the Acadians—which culminated eight years later in their wholesale forced removal from the country.

III. *An Empire in the Making*

We are left with the same question we started with. Why is a faded pastel portrait of Beaujeu the Yank-slayer among 1001 items in the inventory of Grand Pré Park?

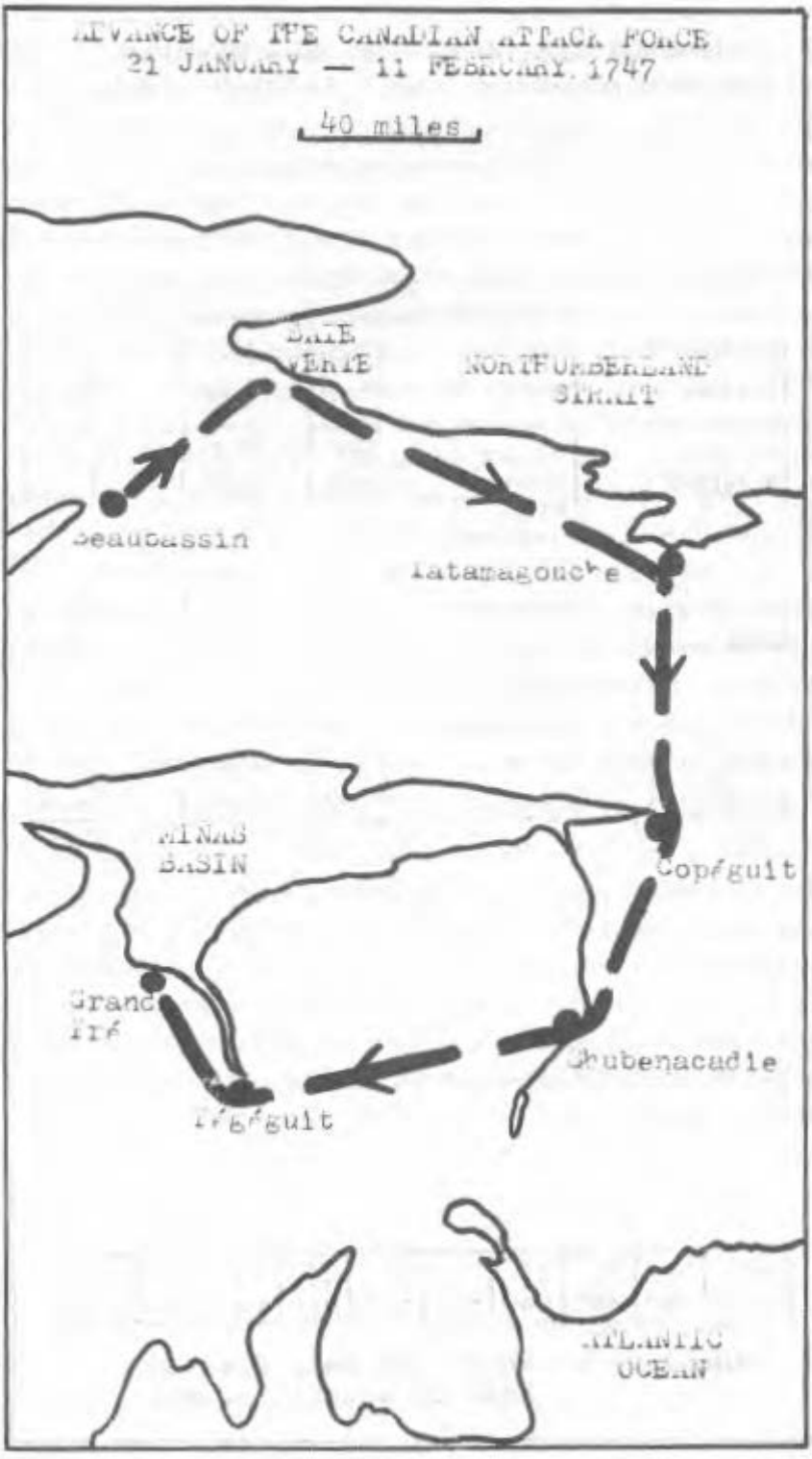
One plausible reason is that Beaujeu has significance for Grand Pré as one of the leading fighters from another colony who came down east to help protect humble Acadians from the oppression of Anglo-American soldiers and governors whom history had parachuted down on top of them. Plausible but insufficient. There is no particular indication that Beaujeu's unit came to help the Acadians. Indeed, by heightening tensions in the province, the Canadians may very well have hastened the decision to deport the Acadians—some help!

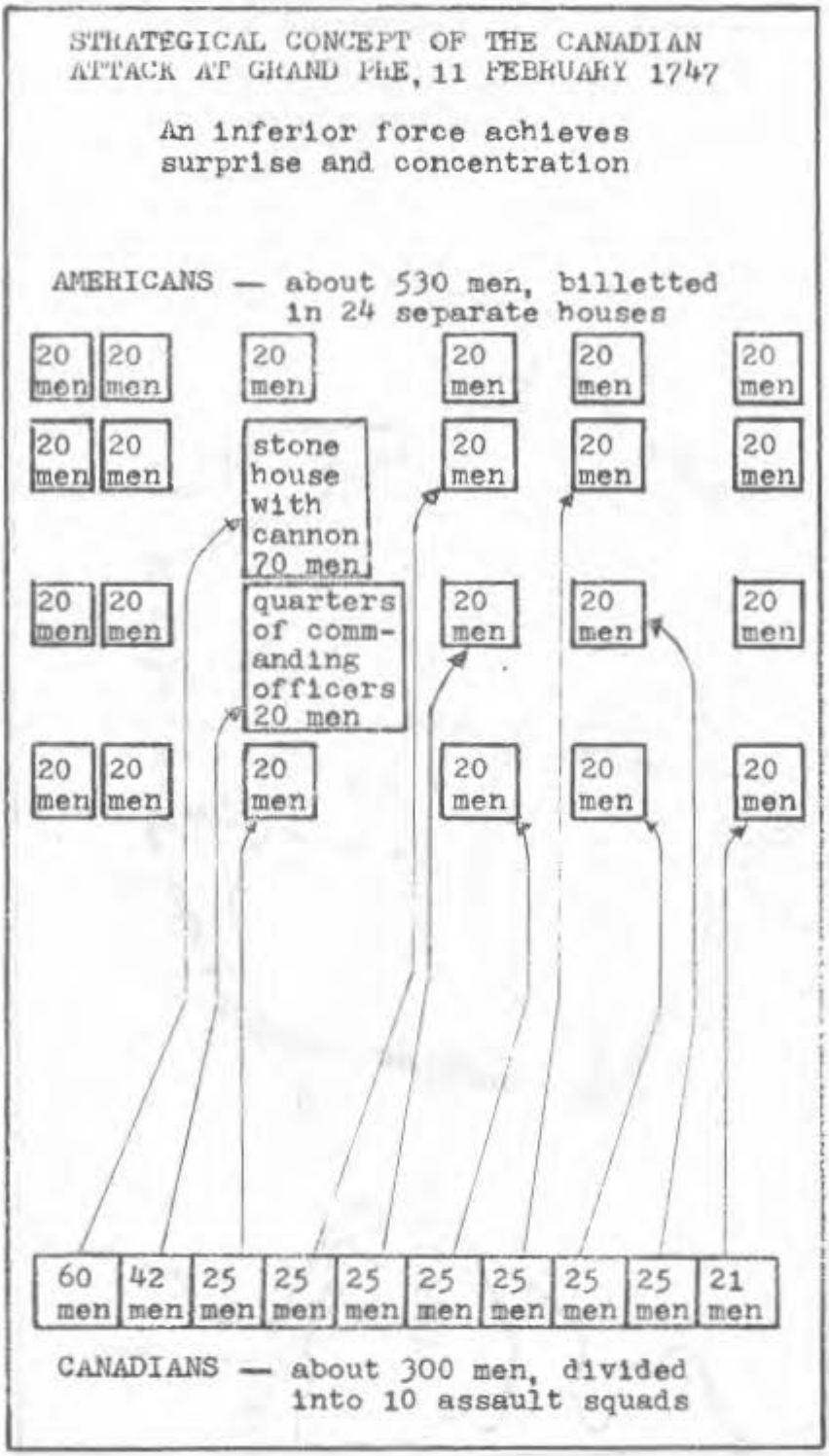
A second way to see the significance of Beaujeu's career is to consider him an actor caught up in a great dramatic struggle for imperial possessions between rival European peoples, the British and the French. This is fine as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. That is, French-British rivalry for control of North America now appears as a passing phase in the continent's history. Records and remembrance of that rivalry have scant relevance to us in the 1970's, now that France and Britain have both become foreign countries more or less like the others, with no great influence here and of no particular interest to us who live here.

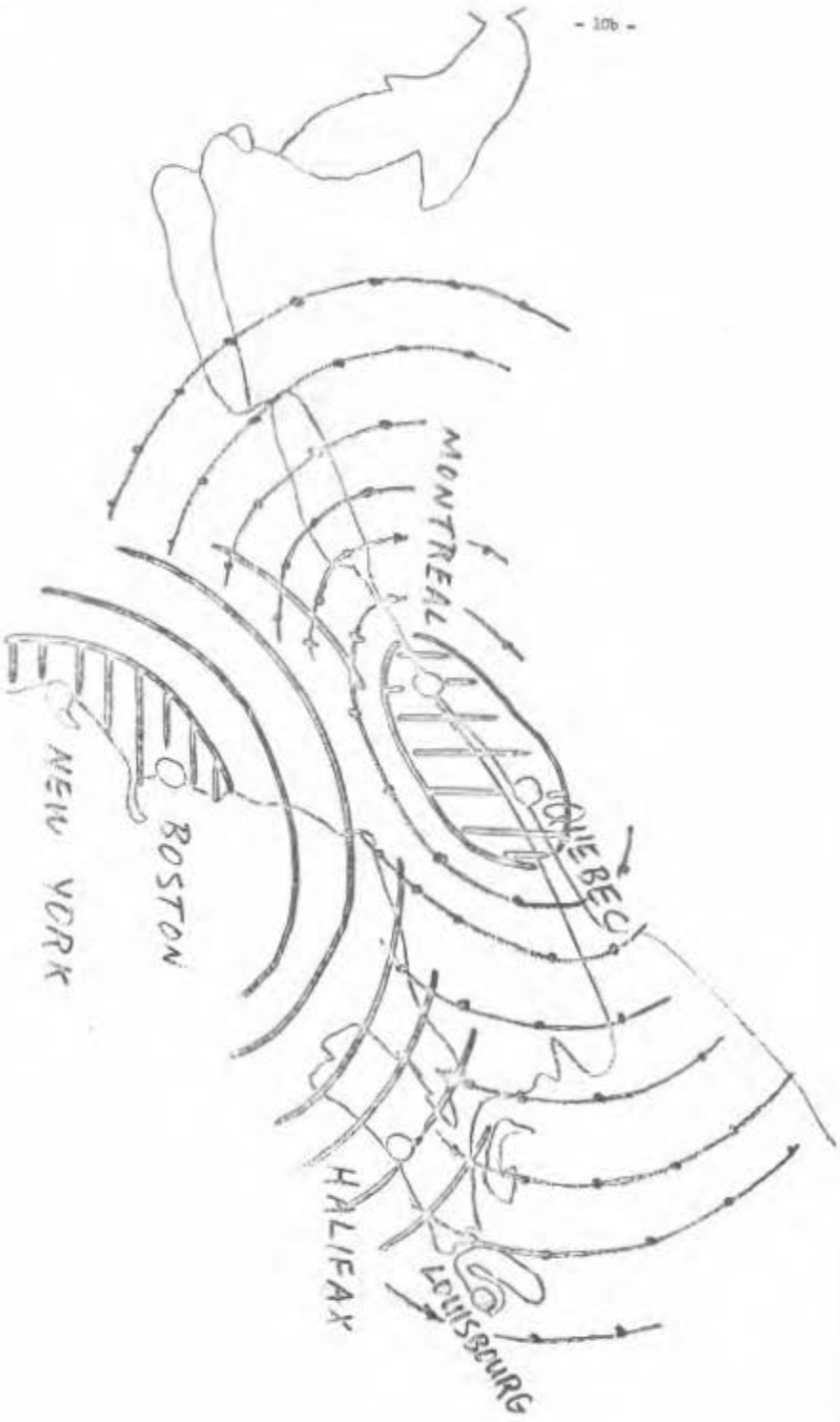
A third way of understanding the events we have been discussing is probably the most meaningful way of all. The map on page 308 shows the geopolitical tensions which have shaped, and still shape, the destiny of these seaside provinces during the last 300 years, since Europeans first came here in large numbers. Early on, two important centres of population and influence developed —in the Boston-New York axis, and in the Saint Lawrence Valley. These

two communities became rivals for control of the rest of the continent. What Beaujeu was doing in Nova Scotia and in the Ohio Valley was attempting to attach these fringe lands to the St. Lawrence rather than let them enter the enemy's sphere of influence. When, during the half-century 1710-1760, New Englanders and New Yorkers with help from overseas conquered the colonies of Acadia and Canada, it seemed that all the continent north of Mexico would form one political bloc. But the result of the American Revolution re-established the old split and the traditional rivalry. The northern communities maintained a close connection with a European mother-country for well over a century. This same map illustrates the strain of opposing forces 100 years ago. Confederation seemed to confirm that central Canada had a stronger pull upon the Maritimes than New England did. This map also illustrates the pull of opposing forces today. Through the control of Canada's federal government which their large population justifies, the people of the Great Lakes-Saint Lawrence Valley (Ontario and Quebec) continue to care about the east. They try to keep us contented in a common political and economic union through devices such as equalization payments and projects for regional economic expansion. Military and political expression of United States' attraction are muted (latent), while the degree of American influence over our culture and industries is a number one matter of Canadian concern.

Up to the present time, then, the tendency towards widespread influence and interference radiating out from central Canada—for which Beaujeu fought and died—has succeeded at least as well as could be expected. We can recognize in the weary soldier on snowshoes today's ambassador from upper Canada who defends some of our interests while living off our subsistence. Then and now, the best thing about him is that he does his best to chase out the Americans. And that is what I make of Daniel-Hyacinthe-Marie Liénard de Beaujeu—the 18th-century Canadian empire builder who is nevertheless a very contemporary figure.


ADVANCE OF THE CANADIAN ATTACK FORCE
21 JANUARY — 11 FEBRUARY, 1747
40 miles
BAIE VERTE
NORTHUMBERLAND STRAIT
Beaubassin
Tatamagouche
MINAS BASIN
Cobequid
Grand Pré
Chignecto
Cobequid
ATLANTIC OCEAN


STRATEGICAL CONCEPT OF THE CANADIAN ATTACK AT GRAND PRÉ, 11 FEBRUARY 1747
An inferior force achieves surprise and concentration
AMERICANS — about 530 men, billetted in 24 separate houses
20 men
stone house with cannon 70 men
quarters of commanding officers 20 men
60 men
42 men
25 men
21 men
CANADIANS — about 300 men, divided into 10 assault squads


- 10b -
MONTREAL
QUEBEC
BOSTON
NEW YORK
HALIFAX
LOUISBURG

NOTES

1. See my biography of D.-H.-M. Liénard de Beaujeu to be published in Volume III of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* in 1973.
2. Baptized 9 August 1711, Archives du Collège Bourget (Rigaud, Quebec), papiers de Beaujeu, registre no. 1, p. 16.
3. Le Jeune, *Dictionnaire générale*, I, 137-138.
4. Archives de Québec, Greffe de Claude Barolet 3 March 1737, no. 626. The girls were Marie-Charlotte, born in 1742 and Marie-Louise, born 1743. Le Jeune, I, 137-138.
5. Beaujeu, Monongahela de, *Le héros de la Monongahela* (Montreal: Desaulniers, 1892).
6. Unless otherwise noted, all the facts in this section are as stated in Beaujeu's 28,000 word journal of the 1746-7 campaign in Acadia, printed in *Documents inédits publiés par le Canada-Français*, II 1889), pp. 16-75.
7. At Debert, Nova Scotia, during the 15-year period 1946-60, the mean figures for January and February were (information from the Meteorological Service, Canadian Department of Transport, Halifax):

	January	February
Mean nighttime	12.7 Fahrenheit	12.5 Fahrenheit
Mean daytime	30.9	30.9
Mean daily (24 hours)	21.8	21.7
Mean extreme high for the month	51.0	49.0
Mean extreme low for the month	-13.0	-11.0

8. "Relation d'une expedition faite sur les Anglois . . ." par le Chevalier de la Corne, *Documents inédits publiés par le Canada-Français*, II (1889) 11-12. My translation.
9. See note 6 above. Beaujeu's entries for 10 and 11 February are on pages 65-69. My translation.
10. The best recent account which sets the campaign in Nova Scotia in its strategic relation to French and British ambitions in North America generally, is George F. G. Stanley, *New France: the last phase, 1744-1760* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), pp. 15-28.