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“HIS GREAT OBJECT IS TO BE CONTINUED IN COMMAND IN THIS PROVINCE”: THE QUARTERING DISPUTE OF 1757-58

Abstract:

Colonel Henry Bouquet, best known for his illustrious military career in the British army during the Seven Years' War, set sailed to Charles Town, South Carolina, in the summer of 1757, after receiving an assignment from his superior Lord Loudoun to defend the southern provinces of British North America. His mission was to raise provincial troops, supervise fortification projects of the city, and suppress a potential slave insurrection in the colony where enslaved Africans outnumbered white colonists. A seemingly innocuous assignment, however, quickly turned sour for Bouquet when he landed in Charles Town's harbor with his troops.

An issue of quartering soldiers consumed most of Bouquet's nine-month stay in Charles Town as he clashed with the Commons House of South Carolina over the terms on how much should the colonial government ought to pay and what provisions should be provided to His Majesty's Troops. Traditionally, historians have treated this dispute as a military-civilian friction in which the both sides attempted to define the constitutional authority of British army in the American colonies.

On a closer examination of Bouquet's activities in Charles Town, however, a new alternative explanation emerges. Shortly after his arrival in Charles Town, Bouquet acquired plantations and slaves with the help of his fellow Swiss-Protestant officers in the British army and the French-Huguenot community in Charles Town. Upon learning that Bouquet had been "endeavouring to acquire Property," South Carolina Governor, William Henry Lyttelton, accused Bouquet and his fellow Swiss officers of pursuing their private interests. In short, ethnic politics shaped Charles Town's quartering dispute as much as the disagreement over constitutional ground as the colonial elites of Scottish background exercised their power to oppose and undermine the Swiss-French officer's mission in South Carolina.

Keywords:

Henry Bouquet, William Henry Lyttelton, Charles Town, Swiss-French Huguenots, Quartering Dispute, Scottish, Highlanders

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