

CARLETON, MONTGOMERY, ARNOLD

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HISTORY would be almost as dry as it is supposed to be were it not for a happy leavening of adventure. Canadian history is judiciously punctuated with adventure, with military adventure, in this entertaining fashion and made as readable and popular as it is, perhaps, largely for this reason. It would of course, be idle to pursue the speculation with the suggestion that this state so enlivening in the abstract is desirable in reality, and one can only hope that our own times will proceed unruffled on the peaceful tenor of their way, no matter how confoundedly boring perusal of the history we are now making may consequently prove to generations of future students.

A phase of Canadian history thus brightened was most certainly that coinciding with the opening of the American Revolution, when Canada was invaded and her strongholds taken in relentless succession, until Quebec alone withstood the arms of the insurgents. The successful resistance of the garrison of Quebec on this occasion constitutes both an event of the keenest military interest and a turning-point of the greatest political significance in the history of the continent and the Empire. This siege of Quebec of 1775-1776 is now further commemorated by a tablet erected on the wall of the Chateau Frontenac in remembrance of the services of the men of the Seventh Royal Fusiliers and others, and upon that subject, in so far as space herein permits, it is our intention to dwell. An interjectory remark in appreciation of historical tablets in general is appropriate here. They are a great boon to the writer, for they give such convenient excuses for the resurrection of closeted skeletons whose recall would not otherwise be permissible.

Movement is lacking in Canadian history following the conquest of Canada by the British, and a series of knotty domestic political problems of a nature non-existent elsewhere preoccupied the country during the critical period when more serious trouble was brewing in the other North American colonies. This decade of difficulties was rudely terminated by an invasion that threatened to change the whole character of the country and continent, and it in turn was succeeded by another epoch whose early stages brought complications to Canada of a new and even more precarious variety.

To attempt here, however, even to sketch the political environment of the military situation under discussion, no matter how intimately it may be associated with the question, would be both futile and presumptuous for the author. A brief reference is essential, notwithstanding, to some of the principal events and developments leading up to the attack upon the ancient capital.

The siege of Quebec during the winter season of 1775-76 was the culminating and turning point of the campaign of the American forces in Canada. The strategical considerations inspiring this undertaking were chiefly two. First it was a defensive measure, calculated to guard against the danger of an attack being conceived in Canada against the northern flank of the states with the object of penetrating and severing the colonies by securing command of the Hudson from Lake Champlain, such as was in 1777 unsuccessfully attempted by Burgoyne. Secondly, it was an ambitious political gesture, an effort to convert by occupation and intercourse the comparatively colourless temper of the French Canadians towards sympathy with the rebellious colonists, and thus accomplish the annexation of the province.

From a military standpoint the campaign, and more particularly the siege, are of peculiar interest, for they demonstrate the handicaps and difficulties encountered by troops in active service under winter conditions, of which there have been few important examples in Canadian history.

The storm that gathered about the ramparts of Quebec began remotely early in the autumn and hung threateningly on the distant horizon from that time on, breaking out unexpectedly from an unforeseen direction early in the winter. The strategical scheme approved of by Washington, was to invade Canada from two quarters; Montgomery being directed against Montreal up the valley of the Richelieu, guarded by the forts of St. John's and Chambly, and Arnold charged with an expedition to strike up the Kennebec through Maine and overland to the Chaudiere, and so reach the St. Lawrence and Quebec City through wild and untravelled country.

On the more distant phases of the invasion and the details of the campaign that followed the siege, we are unable to dwell, and can afford to introduce the forces to the reader only as they draw within reach of Quebec, wherein our interest centres.

Quebec, the strongest and most important of Canada's strongholds, remained long unalarmed and secure in her strength and removal from the theatre of operations to the south of Montreal, and weakened herself to supply reinforcements to Carleton. That

a move was being made against the city from the south through the wilds of the Maine frontier was unknown, and not until Arnold's force had passed the height of land and entered upon the final and easiest state of the journey did the place know of that danger. A letter, somewhat ill-advisedly sent ahead to merchants within the city understood to be in sympathy with the rebel cause, was intercepted. Cramahé, the Lieutenant-Governor, was thus advised of the approach of Arnold more than two weeks before he was able to effect a crossing of the St. Lawrence, and at the same time made aware of the existence of disaffected elements within the town.

Thanks to this warning, however belated, every reasonable precaution was taken to relieve the really critical situation. Although Arnold's force proved to be of inconsiderable strength when it actually appeared, its composition was then unknown. With only a handful of regulars left, and the few militia recently enrolled in an ill-trained and inexperienced state, the problem of defense was baffling. It was bettered somewhat by the arrival of Malcolm Fraser with a hundred recruits and artificers from Newfoundland for the Royal Emigrants, and the appearance of a ship bearing £20,000 and equipment for 6,000 men. This latter was a somewhat ironic item of reinforcement, the home government having optimistically ordered Carleton to raise six thousand French Canadian militia when he had appealed for assistance from Great Britain early in the summer. Both money and stores proved useful, although the army to be equipped was not forthcoming, the united efforts of Carleton, the seigneurs, and the clergy having failed to raise more than a few hundreds of rather unreliable militiamen. This represented the only outside help received at the time of the siege; it was learned that they could expect no help from Boston as had been hoped, since the admiral in charge of the transports refused to risk entry into the St. Lawrence at so late a season of the year.

By November 8th, Arnold had reached Ste. Marie, eight miles from Levis, where he heard from Montgomery of the fall of Chambly, and the following day he arrived at Levis itself on the shore of the St. Lawrence opposite Quebec. Here he was delayed for some time in seeking passage across the river, all water craft on either bank for some miles above and below having been removed. With the aid of Indians and friendly inhabitants, however, a fleet of canoes, boats, and conveyances of all descriptions was constructed and collected, many from the Island or Orleans, and a crossing accomplished on the night of November 13th-14th, successfully evading the two British warships guarding the channel.

In the meantime active steps had been taken by the Lieutenant-Governor. The condition of the defences had been improved and the units of the garrison further organized and apportioned to duties. The merchant ships then in the harbour were restrained from leaving and their crews pressed into service with the garrison, as were those of H. M. S. "Lizard" and "Hunter" whose sailors and marines served valiantly as soldiers on land during the siege that followed. A council of war called together at this moment decided that "it is for the Benefit of His Majesty's Service, at all events to defend the Town to the Last Extremity", and recommended the destruction of buildings in the suburbs likely to shelter the enemy. Although this was eventually carried out, the demolition of property on these grounds was regarded with apprehension due to the questionable loyalty of many of the merchants and property owners concerned.

On the day of his landing, Arnold, with optimistic bravado, drew up his force of a few hundreds and demonstrated his scanty strength before the walls, demanding instant surrender. His flag of truce was reported to have been fired upon, although the message to the defenders, threatening "every severity practised upon such occasions" were he obliged to take the town by assault, was eventually delivered. It was then made clearly understood that no further communications would be received from them, unless, as rebels, it were a "humble petition for the king's pardon." On a later occasion Arnold himself was reputed to have been the bearer of a flag and message, but in the words of Carleton, "he was sternly refused admittance and ordered to carry back the letter", to his profound annoyance. Discovering that only five rounds of ammunition remained for each man in his force, Arnold decided to withdraw to Point-aux-Trembles, which he did on the 19th, to await the arrival of Montgomery with reinforcements.

In this period Colonel MacLean with a detachment of the Royal Emigrants had returned from an attempt to aid Carleton south of Montreal, and Carleton himself had escaped from the ill-fated flotilla at Sorel and reached the city. Thus supplemented the garrison was greatly heartened, and Quebec's prospects perceptibly brightened. Energetic measures were at once instituted by the Governor, and all those capable of bearing arms but unwilling to do so were ordered to leave, thus ridding the population of a dangerous and disaffected element. Many merchants anxious to "sit on the fence" are reported to have retired to their summer homes on the Island of Orleans to await the turn of events before casting their lot either way. During the absence of the enemy

from the immediate vicinity of the town, work on the improvement of the fortifications was carried on, gun platforms and emplacements were constructed on the ramparts and by the water front, and palisades erected where required. When the united forces of Montgomery and Arnold, who had met at Point aux Trembles, where the latter had billeted his men pending reinforcement from up the river, reappeared before the city, a new face had been put on affairs and the situation taken well in hand by the British.

Not until towards the close of the month of December did an assault against the city materialize. Demoralizing sniping from various points including the cupola of the Intendant's Palace, which had to be destroyed by artillery for this reason (I believe the site is occupied by a brewery now,—and so well known), and a rather ineffective bombardment by inferior artillery, alone marked the return of the invaders before the city. A gun emplacement was constructed on an eminence on the St. Foy road of ice and snow bound by fascines and reinforced by gabions, but this material had scant resisting qualities and the position was speedily rendered untenable.

Effective and accurate fire appears to have been put up by the garrison artillerymen who on one occasion shot Montgomery's sleigh horse but missed the general himself. This may have inspired him to swear he "would eat his Christmas Dinner in Hell or Quebec". He did neither, and was not able even to attempt anything until towards the close of the year though urged all the time by the knowledge that many New Englanders fully intended to leave for home on the New Year as their term of service then expired. The attackers had been in readiness for some time and but awaited a dark and stormy night to carry their plan into execution. It was postponed at the last moment by the escape of Caldwell's confidential clerk, who acquainted Carleton of the enemy's plans, and not until the early hours of December 31st, 1775, did it take place.

Documents, letters, diaries, and records of various sorts have been left us, detailing every phase of the invasion and siege. Although it would be impossible to incorporate all of this vast source of material herein, quotations from the accounts of participants in the actual assault deserve space, for they describe events in a lively, graphic style, and it would be indeed a pity to substitute for them a less partial resumé.

The following account of the siege is given by Colonel Henry Caldwell, whose exercise of initiative and conduct during the period of the assault exercised a not inconsiderable influence upon the situation.

They (the enemy) remained quiet until the 31st of December; about five o'clock in the morning we were alarmed at our picket by Captain Malcolm Fraser, who was captain of the main guard, and returning from his rounds, told us that there was a brisk firing kept up at Cape Diamond. The morning was dark, and at that time a drizzling kind of snow was falling. McLean (who was second in command of the garrison and who really, to do him justice, was indefatigable in the pains he took) begged that I would take part of my corps to Cape Diamond, and if I found it a false attack (as we both supposed it to be) after leaving the necessary reinforcements there, I might return with the rest. I accordingly went there, found the enemy firing at a distance, saw there was nothing serious intended, and after ordering a proper disposition to be made, proceeded to Port Louis. There, I met Captain Laws, an officer whom the general had given the command of an extra picket, composed of the best men of the detachment of the 7th and McLean's corps there; him I ordered back again to wait the General's orders, and proceeded to St. John's gate, where I first learned the enemy had surprised the post at Sault-au-Matelot, and had got into Lower Town. I still had part of the B. Militia with me, and took upon me also to send some whom I found unnecessary on the ramparts, to the party to wait for orders; and took an officer with a small party of the Fusiliers with me, by Palace Gate, just at the time when the officer I had mentioned to you, with about 70 men, was ordered to make a sortie and attack the enemy at the Sault-au-Matelot in the rear. I hastened, with what expedition I could, by the back of the Hotel-Dieu in the Lower Town, and on my way passed by the picket drawn up under the field officer of the day, who was Major Cox, formerly of the 47th and now Lieutenant-Governor of Gaspé. I got him to allow me to take your friend Nairne, with a subaltern and thirty men, and then proceeded to the Lower Town, where I found things, though not in a good way, yet not desperate. The enemy had got in at the Sault-au-Matelot, but, neglecting to push on, as they should have done, were stopped at the second barrier, which our people got shut just as I arrived. It was so placed as to shut up the street of the Sault-au-Matelot from any communication with the rest of Lower Town. As I was coming up, I found our people, the Canadians especially, shy of advancing towards the barrier, and was obliged to exert myself a good deal. To do old Voyer, their Colonel, justice, though he is no great officer, yet he did not show any want of spirit. However, my coming up with Nairne and a Lieutenant, with fifty seamen, gave our people new spirits. I posted people in the different houses that commanded the street of Sault-au-Matelot; some in the house where Levy, the Jew, formerly lived, and others at Lymeburner's; the bayonets, ready to receive the enemy in case they got on our side of the barrier; they had on their side of it, fixed some ladders, and then another to our side as it were to come down by, that was useful to us. I ordered it to be pulled away and fixed it to the window in the gable end of a house towards us; the front of which commanded the street of the Sault-au-Matelot, and their side of the barrier. Then I sent captain Nairne with a party of their people; Nairne and Dambourges entered

the window with a great deal of spirit, and got into the house on that side, just as the enemy was entering it by the front door. But Nairne soon dislodged them with his bayonets, driving them into the streets, nor did they approach the barrier afterwards. They however, kept up a brisk fire from back windows of the houses they had occupied in Sault-au-Matelot street on our people in Lymeburner's house, on his wharf, and the street adjacent, from one of their houses. . . Their fire, however, a good deal slackened towards nine o'clock, especially after I brought a 9-pounder on Lymeburner's wharf to bear upon them; the first shot killed one of their men and wounded another. I then called out to Nairne in their hearing, so that he should let me know when he heard firing on the other side; our General had sent 500 men to hem the enemy in on that side; they soon after began to give themselves up and surrendered to Nairne, who sent them through the window to us. They then began to crowd in such numbers, that we opened the barrier, and they all gave themselves up on that side. while the party that made the sortie were busy in the same manner on the other side of the post, and which had delayed so long from coming up, in taking and sending in by Palace Gate some straggling prisoners; but they had not a shot fired at them and just arrived on that end of the post, the enemy surprised at the time the officer I had sent to take possession of our old post, arrived with a small party, supported by Nairne with 100 men; thus ended our attack on that side, in which the enemy had about 20 men killed, upwards of 40 men wounded, and about 400 made prisoners. Had they acted with more spirit they might have pushed in at first and possessed themselves of the whole Lower Town, and let their friends in at the other side, before our people had time to have recovered from a certain degree of panic, which seized them on the first news of the post being surprised. In the meantime, Mr. Montgomery made his attack at Pres-de-Ville; rockets were thrown up as a signal to Arnold that both attacks might be made at the same time. He got past some pickets, where we at first established our advance post; the guard was alarmed in time and prepared for his reception, but the post was much stronger than, I believe, he imagined, and defended by four cannons there and a 4-pounder; they were served by some seamen under the orders of a master of the transport; his name was Barnsfare. The guard was under the command of a Canadian officer of militia; the men, Canadians and British mixed. Barnsfare declared he would not fire till he was sure of doing execution; and with the utmost coolness, waited till the enemy came within his view, at about 30 yards distance, where they received a general discharge from the cannon and musketry. Nothing but groans were heard, and the rebels immediately retired; their General, his Secretary, two or three other officers, and about five privates being killed on the spot; their wounded were got off. . . We had a block-house on Cape Diamond, over Drummond's wharf, where the enemy formed. Had the officer of the Canadian Militia who commanded there done his duty, great havoc might have been made among the enemy, who was quite exposed directly under them and not a shot fired at them. Soon after the enemy was repulsed at that side, some old women brought an account that the rebels had surprised the

post at Sault-au-Matlot, and had got into the Lower Town; part of the garrison that had lately behaved so well were struck with panic and began, some to hide their arms, some to throw them into the river; the officer began to feel a little frightened when a Mr. Coffin, a British gentleman, who, with his wife and twelve children had taken refuge there, expecting to find there peace and quietness, and who had served previously in our militia, drew his bayonet, and declared he would put the first man to death who laid down his arms, or attempted to abandon his post, by which means he re-established order, and with the assistance of Captain Barnsfare, who commanded the seamen, got two of the guns pointed on the opposite side, in case Arnold's people having got into the Lower Town should attempt to force the post on that side, they, however, at that time surrendering themselves prisoners. . . .

The journal of another participant, one Judge Henry, on the American side, makes equally interesting reading and gives another vivid version of the attack. An extract reads as follows:

It was not until the night of the 31st (30th) of December 1775, that such kind of weather ensued as was considered favourable for the assault. . . By 2 o'clock we were accounted and began our march. The storm was outrageous, and the cold wind extremely biting. In this northern country the snow is blown horizontally into the faces of travellers on most occasions; this was our case.

January 1st. We came to Craig's house, near Palace Gate a horrible roar of cannon took place, and a ringing of all the bells in the city, which are very numerous, and of all sizes. Arnold, heading the forlorn hope, advanced perhaps one hundred yards before the main body. After these followed Lamb's artillerists. Morgan's company led in the secondary part of the column of infantry. Smith's followed, headed by Steele; the captain, from particular causes, being absent. Hendricks' company succeeded, and the eastern men, so far as known to me, followed in due order. . . .

In those intervals we received a tremendous fire of musketry from the ramparts above us. Here we lost some brave men, when powerless to return the salutes we received, as the enemy was covered by his impregnable defenses. They were even sightless to us—we could see nothing but the blaze from the muzzles of their muskets. . . .

We proceeded rapidly, exposed to a long line of fire from the garrison, for now we were unprotected by any buildings. The fire had slackened in a small degree. The enemy had been partly called off to resist the General, and strengthen the party opposed to Arnold in our front. Now we saw Colonel Arnold returning wounded in the leg, and supported by two gentlemen, a parson Spring was one, and in my belief, a Mr. Ogden the other. Arnold called to the troops in a cheering voice as we passed, urging us forward; yet it was observable among the soldiery, with whom it was my misfortune to be now placed, that the Colonel's retiring damped their spirits. A cant phrase, "We are sold", was repeatedly heard in many parts throughout the line. Thus proceeding, enfiladed by an animated but lessened fire, we came to the first barrier, where Arnold had been wounded in the onset.

This contest had lasted but a few minutes, and was somewhat severe; but the energy of our men prevailed. The embrasures were entered when the enemy were discharging their guns. The guard consisting of thirty persons, were either taken or fled, leaving their arms behind them. At this time it was discovered that our guns were useless, because of the dampness. The snow, which lodged in our fleecy coats, was melted by the warmth of our bodies. Thence came that disaster. Many of the party, knowing the circumstance, threw aside their own, and seized the British arms. . .

From the first barrier to the second, there was a circular course along the sides of houses, and partly through a street, probably of three hundred yards, or more. This second barrier was erected across, and near the mouth of a narrow street, adjacent to the foot of the hill, which opened into a larger, leading soon into the main body of the town. Here it was that the most serious contention took place; this became the bone of strife. The admirable Montgomery by this time (though it was unknown to us) was no more; yet we expected momentarily to join him. The firing on that side of the fortress ceased; his division fell under the command of a Colonel Campbell, of the New York line, a nerveless chief, who retreated without making an effort, in pursuance of the General's original plans. The inevitable consequence was, that the whole of the forces on that side of the city, and those who were opposed to the various detachments employed to make the false attacks, embodied and came down to oppose our division. Here was sharp shooting.

We were on the disadvantageous side of the barrier for such a purpose. Confined in a narrow street, hardly more than twenty feet wide, and on the lower ground, scarcely a ball, well-aimed or otherwise, but must take effect on us. Morgan, Hendricks, Steele, Humphreys, and a crowd of every class of the army, had gathered into the narrow pass, attempting to surmount the barrier, which was about twelve feet high, and so strongly constructed that nothing but artillery could effectuate its destruction. There was a construction fifteen or twenty yards within the barrier upon a rising ground, the cannon of which much overtopped the height of the barrier; hence we were assailed with grape-shot in abundance. This erection was called the platform. Again, within the barrier, and close in to it, were two ranges of musketeers, armed with musket and bayonet, ready to receive those who might venture the dangerous leap. Add to this that the enemy occupied the upper chambers of the houses in the interior of the barrier, on both sides of the street, from the windows of which we became fair marks. The enemy, having the advantage of the ground in front, a vast superiority of numbers, dry and better arms, gave them an irresistible power in so narrow a space. Humphreys, upon a mound which was speedily erected, attended by many brave men, attempted to scale the barrier, but was compelled to retreat by the formidable phalanx of bayonets within, and the weight of fire from the platform and the buildings. Morgan, brave to temerity, stormed and raged. Hendricks, Steele, Nichols, Humphreys, equally brave, were sedate, though under a tremendous fire. The platform, which was within our view was evacuated by the accuracy of our fire, and few persons

dared venture there again. Now it was that the necessity of the occupancy of the houses on our side of the barrier became apparent. Orders were given by Morgan to that effect; we entered. This was near daylight. The houses were a shelter from which we could fire with much accuracy. Yet even here some valuable lives were lost. Hendricks, when aiming his rifle at some prominent person, died by a straggling ball through his heart. He staggered a few feet backwards and fell upon a bed, where he instantly expired. He was an ornament to our little society.

The amiable Humphreys died by a like kind of wound, but it was in the street before we entered the buildings. Many other brave men fell at this place; among these were Lieutenant Cooper, of Connecticut, and perhaps fifty or sixty non-commissioned officers and privates. The wounded were numerous, and many dangerously wounded. Captain Lamb, of the York artillerists, had nearly one half of his face carried away by a grape or canister shot. My friend Steele lost three of his fingers as he was presenting his gun to fire; Captain Hubbard and Lieutenant Fisdle were also among the wounded. When we reflect upon the whole of the danger at this barricade, and the formidable force that came to among us, it is a matter of surprise that so many should escape death and wounding as we did. All hope of success having vanished, a retreat was contemplated; but hesitation, uncertainty, and a lassitude of mind which generally takes place in the affairs of men when they fail in a project upon which they have attached much expectation, now followed. The moment was foolishly lost when such a movement might have been made with tolerable success. Captain Laws, at the head of 200 men, issuing from the Palace gate, most fairly and handsomely cooped us up. Many of the men, aware of the consequences, and all our Indians and Canadians (except Natanis and another) escaped across the ice which covered the bay of St. Charles, before the arrival of Captain Laws. This was a dangerous and desperate adventure, but worth the undertaking in avoidance of our subsequent sufferings. Its desperateness consisted in running two miles across shoal ice, thrown up by the high tides of this latitude—and its danger in the meeting with air holes, deceptively covered by the bed of snow.

Speaking circumspectly, yet it must be admitted, conjecturally, it seems to me that in the whole of the attack, of commissioned officers we had six killed, five wounded, and of non-commissioned and privates at least one hundred and fifty killed, and fifty or sixty wounded. Of the enemy, many were killed and many more wounded, comparatively, than on our side, taking into view the disadvantages we labored under; and that but two occasions happened when we could return their fire, that is at the first and second barriers. Neither the American account of this affair, as published by Congress, nor that of Sir Guy Carleton admits the loss of either side to be so great as it really was, in my estimation.

With the assault over, the wounded collected, the dead buried and the prisoners safely interned, there seems little more to relate. The movement and excitement that may have spurred the writer,

and encouraged the reader before the climax, is lacking now. The American army, vastly inferior in strength and unable to take any further decisive action even with reinforcements is no longer dangerous. The Quebec garrison, content with their victory and secure within their defences, have no intention of taking advantage of their superiority, and so remain motionless. A strategical check-mate exists.

The prisoners, in the period that followed, made efforts to escape, but failed. The besiegers added to their siege batteries, but inflicted little more damage with their hot-shot and solid shells. A fire ship was sent against shipping in the Cul-de-Sac, but was abandoned too soon, and she too failed to enliven the scene by burning or blowing up anything other than herself. Two efforts to reinforce or relieve the garrison were made by volunteers from without, but both expired at their outset. With the exception of the brave militiamen in Quebec itself, Canadian volunteers serving on either side, as they did, were not distinguished by their fortitude or valour, and the two relief expeditions were betrayed and put to prompt route ere they could be of service.

On May 6th the forerunners of an army of some thousands arrived at Quebec, and the siege was raised. A sally was immediately made from the walls by the delighted garrison, and the enemy put to a hurried and unexpected route. The precipitate withdrawal from before Quebec was carried on into a speedy evacuation of Canada in the face of a superior force. The campaign of that year, 1776, and the counter-attack under "Gentleman Johnny Burgoyne"—the title of a charming book by F. J. Hudleston, librarian of the British War Office—in 1777, are both beyond our ken, and we bid farewell to Quebec, her brave defenders, and her daring attackers.