

STATE OF SIEGE



Episcopal palace, LAC



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June 27, 1759. France and Great Britain are at war and the conflict has moved to their American colonies. On that day, Major General James Wolfe, commander of the British expedition against Québec City, landed at the Île d'Orléans. For this mission, which was to take Québec, he was accompanied by an imposing army consisting of 7,929 soldiers from 10 infantry regiments of the regular army, 890 American soldiers and 330 members of the Royal Artillery, for a total of 9,149 troops. He was also assisted by a powerful and efficient navy composed of 15,600 officers and seamen divided among 186 vessels, including 49 war ships.



James Wolfe, LAC



British ship, LAC

To defend the city against this attack, the Marquis Louis-Joseph de Montcalm had five infantry regiments of the regular French Army consisting of 2,337 soldiers; the various militia corps – including the cavalry – grouping together 11,325 men. The Troupes de la Marine provided 1,108 troops, and approximately 1,775 Amerindians were also available. The Navy, for its part, consisted of some 2,100 men, and its rather small fleet was used mainly to provide fresh supplies to the town.

From the time he first set eyes on the site and on the French position, General Wolfe realized that he would have to reconsider his initial plan, to land at Beauport, since Montcalm had anticipated his intentions and fortified the place. However, he noticed that the Pointe Lévy heights were unprotected and that he could therefore occupy this strategic site fairly easily.

The setting-up of batteries in this location would allow the British fleet to drop anchor west of the Île d'Orléans and, above all, would allow for the bombing of Québec. For two months, cannonballs, bombs, fireballs and shells rained down on the city, causing considerable devastation. In addition to the numerous civil buildings, several symbolic buildings were destroyed. For the town's inhabitants who had remained, this threat added to the concerns caused by the rationing and the looting. The spring of 1759 was truly a



Fire ships, LAC

period of famine, fear, destitution and uncertainty.

Generally speaking, the siege of Québec by the British forces is marked by hesitations. General Wolfe had in fact developed various plans of attack, which he did not carry out. The failed attempt to land in the Montmorency sector on July 31 is in fact the first large-scale action of the siege.

On the other hand, the strategy adopted by the French was mostly defensive, apart from the fireship attack on the British fleet – which proved unsuccessful and costly – and the *Coup des Écoliers* –, an improvised aborted attack on enemy positions, led by a majority of militiamen.



Battle of Montmorency, LAC



Notre-Dame-des-Victoires church, LAC

In fact, throughout the siege of Québec, General Wolfe tried to force the Marquis de Montcalm to abandon his positions so that he could pursue an European style confrontation, that is, in a battle line, knowing that his troops would have the advantage in this type of situation. Since he was unable to achieve this goal he tried out numerous strategies, even opting for a terror campaign. And so, for weeks at a time, in addition to the increased bombing attacks on the city, punitive expeditions were led on both shores of the St. Lawrence, upstream and downstream from Québec. According to a fairly conservative assessment, close to 1,400 houses and farms were destroyed and the crops wiped out.

Despite all this devastation, Montcalm stood his ground. Aware that time was running out and that he needed to act urgently, General Wolfe resigned himself to consult with his staff officers to develop a new plan of attack. And thus, on September 13, 1759, the battle of the Plains of Abraham took place. The British won, and this outcome had a decisive influence on the history of Québec City.



Marquis de Montcalm, LAC

For more information, please refer to the section concerning the history of the battles of 1759 and 1760 at

www.theplainsofabraham.ca



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