HDMS Journalism

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October, 2026

Hillcat History Corner!



Quebec Campaign, Part 2: Siege of Quebec City!

You awaken from your daydream, remembering the Siege of Louisbourg. It's the 13th of September, 1759. The British have come a long way from Louisbourg, and now their fleet moves down the uncharted Saint Lawrence river. You were there at the assault at Montmorency and now you sit in your boat approaching the bluffs of Quebec city. These bluffs lead up to the plains of Abraham near the city walls. “Why would we climb these, for what purpose”? You wonder. Yet, questions would be in vain as the order comes to scale these bluffs.

Quebec, the city on the entrance to the Saint Lawrence. Quebec had been important for a long time for it is on the bottleneck between the Saint Lawrence River and the Gulf of Saint Lawrence. The French explorer Samuel de Champlain originally founded the city in 1608. Over time it grew to be the biggest city in Canada (though this spot was taken by Montreal shortly after the Revolutionary war). It was given walls and a proper outfit for its defense with a garrison and cannons after its importance in New France was realized. The city had been captured many times already before the 7 years war. In 1629 the city was captured by a British expeditionary force, starving to death the French surrendered. In 1690 a New England force attacked the city but were repelled in King WIlliam’s war. In 1711 during Queen Anne's war the British sent troops dubbed “The Walker Expedition” up but ultimately, didn’t make it. It goes to show how many times Quebec had repulsed its attackers, but that would be put to the test.

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The British had taken Louisbourg in 1758 and, needing to eradicate French resistance in Canada they would make a move to Quebec. A force of 8,500 redcoats would be sent on ships up the Saint Lawrence river. The river had not been charted thoroughly up to this point so this would be a fairly dangerous expedition up. The river's currents were fierce and low lying reefs, rocks, and sandbars would halt ships if hit. Even with these obstacles the fleet would sail through. The French would not expect a war fleet arriving near their city for they thought that large ships were unable to sail on the river. The British made it up the river thanks mostly to the most famous captain James Cook. He would sail up the river with a small fleet taking the coasts and him charting out the river and giving the information of the Zig-Zagging straights to British command. He and his boat the HMS Pembroke would allow the landings later at Quebec.

Major General James Wolfe would move his troops down the St Lawrence anchoring near Quebec on June 26 1759. They would set up for the siege on the Ile D' Orleans, an island on the Saint Lawrence river 3 miles (5km) down from the city. Wolfe would order all French Canadian civilians to remain neutral for if they took up arms their property would be burned. Wolfe would also order Pointe-Levy, a hill directly across from the City of Quebec to be taken. This hill would be unfortified and ripe for the taking. Cannon batteries would be set up on this hill locking down the Quebec port and a battery to pummel the Quebec walls. Needing to make a landing near the city Wolfe would order an attack on the Beuport Flats near the Montmorency Falls.



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Major General Wolfe would order his attack on July 31st 3 Miles east of Quebec near Montmorency falls. He assembled a fleet of ships that would set off around 12:30 in the afternoon that would rendezvous with him later that day. The landing ships would encounter a river shoal by the falls, halting them and wasting time until they could find a spot to land. Wolfe would reassess the landscape and decided on a nearby French redoubt closer to their boats. The attack would happen at 5:30 in the evening. Around 4000 British soldiers would wade and row to the shores of the Beauport flats during the river's low tide. The French would be entrenched on the road leading to the redoubt and the houses on it. As the British landed they would take insanely high casualties on the muddy flats. British forces would be pinned down on the beach with bullets flying by their faces. Undisciplined grenadiers would try to rush up without order and would be shot down indiscriminately. The British would take 440 casualties when the French would only take 60. Wolfe would order his men to pull back off of the beach to the boats.

After taking such major losses General Wolfe had to change his strategy. He would look upon the nearby French villages providing the French food, and he would order them to burn. The British started using scorched earth tactics on the French civilians throughout August of 1759. Hamlets, farms, houses, they would all be burnt in an effort to stop supplies going to Quebec and to demoralize the defenders of the city. Wolfe would also see an opening near the Anse au Foulon. An undefended Qubecois cove and walkway. Above the cove and up the bluffs were the plains of Abraham. Wolfe would make his landing at the cove on the 12th of September through the 13th, making a move to go up the bluffs from the cove and face the French headon outside their city. The L’Anse au Foulon would come to be known as Wolfe’s Cove.

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On the 12th, Colonel WIlliam Howe and 24 volunteers would approach the cove under the cover of darkness. The group would climb up the 177 foot tall bluffs and overpower the garrison watching over the area. As dawn approached 4,000 other men had climbed the bluffs and formed up outside the city and on the plains of Abraham. The Marquis de Montcalm would move his troops outside the city to face the incoming wall of red. The French forces would move across the uneven terrain and would become ragged and out of order. The British would hold their fire until the French were in 40 yards of their line. By 10 AM, a double volley would fire off and smash into the French. The bullets would rip into the disorganized Frenchmen. An exchange of fire would occur for 15 minutes and by 10:15 the French began to route. In the crossfire Wolfe would be hit and be wounded fatally. He would die on the field of battle. Montcalm would also be hit by a musket and carried off into Quebec, he would die the next morning. The battle would last 30 minutes, and the results would devastate the French effort to hold onto the city.

Wolfe's death would not be in vain. Demoralized and starving, the French would surrender the fortress of Quebec on the 18th of September. The capture of the city would open the gateway to Canada and Montreal. Although, the French would not allow the takeover of Canada so easily. A French force would assemble and be ready to meet the British outside of Quebec to retake the city.

