

Battle of Quebec

Battle of Quebec, also called Battle of the Plains of Abraham, (September 13, 1759), in the French and Indian War. This was a major decisive defeat of the French under the marquis de Montcalm by a British force led by Maj. Gen. James Wolfe. Both commanding officers died from wounds they got during the battle. By 1763, France surrendered almost all of its colonial possessions in North America.



British troops climbing the heights of the Plains of Abraham

The Seven Years' War

The early years of the conflict were characterized by French victories, as French regular troops demonstrated their superiority to the British and their American colonial allies. In July 1755 British commander Edward Braddock was mortally wounded near Fort Duquesne, and in early July 1758 Montcalm defeated a significantly larger

British force at Fort Carillon (later Fort Ticonderoga). Within weeks of the later event, however, the British began to make significant gains. On July 26, 1758, they captured the fortress of Louisbourg on Île Royale (now Cape Breton Island), which led to the seizure of other French positions in Atlantic Canada. New France was left exposed to British ships, which could now sail up the Saint Lawrence River. One of the brigadiers of the Louisbourg expedition was Wolfe, who was praised in Britain and its American colonies for his role in taking the fortress.

The British Landing and Montcalm's Attack

Wolfe decided on an amphibious landing at L'Anse-au-Foulon, about 2 miles (3 km) upstream from Quebec, at the base of a cliff some 170 feet (50 meters) high. While historians have debated the logic and merits of this decision, the British were fortunate, as the area was



The mortally wounded Braddock being carried from the field after a battle near Fort Duquesne.

only lightly defended. Operating in darkness and silence, the British boats fought the strong currents of the Saint Lawrence and landed an advance force at just after 4:00 AM on September 13, 1759. Three companies of light infantrymen led by James Wolfe scrambled up the cliff and subdued a French outpost. By the time the sun rose, Wolfe and the first division were on the plateau, and by 8:00 AM the entire force of 4,000 men had assembled. The British stretched across the Plains of Abraham in a shallow horseshoe formation about half a mile (1 km) long and two ranks deep.

When Montcalm heard about the British landing and climb, he decided to attack quickly before the British had the chance to establish themselves. Historians have criticized his response, suggesting that he should have waited for reinforcements to arrive. The French force consisted of about 4,500 men from the army at Beauport, many of whom were militia. Wolfe's army was very close in size, but was composed almost entirely of regular soldiers, highly disciplined and trained for the field battle to come.

Montcalm's men advanced and began firing at the outermost limit of their muskets' effective range. However, Wolfe's soldiers stood firm until the French were less than 130 feet (40 meters) away, when they opened fire to devastating effect. Coordinated volleys of British musketry quickly halted and then reversed the French advance. Wolfe was shot three times, with the third wound proving to be fatal. After hearing that the French force was retreating, Wolfe reportedly stated, "Now, God be praised, I will die in peace." Several other high-ranking British officers were killed as well, and the British were left without their leaders. Brig. Gen. George Townshend assumed command and organized two battalions to counter a French relief force under Col. Louis-Antoine de Bougainville. Bougainville decided to pull back, and the British combined their position on the heights. While this allowed Montcalm's army to escape, Montcalm himself was wounded during the retreat and died the next morning in Quebec. Townshend's decision to entrench the British position instead of aggressively pursuing the French army had significant consequences; the French marched that night and bypassed their enemy on the way to Pointe-aux-Trembles, leaving only a small force in the town. The British laid siege to Quebec, and on September 18, the French commander surrendered the city to the British.

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