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THE LAKE CHAMPLAIN ARMY AND THE FALL OF MONTREAL

By THOMAS M. CHARLAND

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF Amherst might have captured Montreal as early as 1759. In accord with his character, he did not want to act in haste; but the precautions he took were termed as excessive by his opponents. He spent the most precious time of the season in preparatory works which were not imperative. When he was ready to launch the attack, the season appeared too advanced, and he had to postpone the attempt. He had just the time to sound the outworks of Isle-aux-Noix, up St. Johns on the Richelieu River.*

Along the road leading from Fort Edward to the head of Lake George he managed to have opened a wide gap on each side, so that his army might travel in open field without the slightest danger of ambush, and to have fortified posts at intervals of three or four miles. His move was delayed by the completion of these works. It was July 21 before his flotilla of barges could enter Lake George.

The army he was proceeding with outnumbered four to one the forces headed by his opponent Broulmaque. The latter had been given orders to blow up Forts Carillon and St. Frederic, if they were to be besieged by too far superior forces. This he did in the night July 26 for Carillon, and in the morning July 31 for St. Frederic. He retreated to Isle-aux-Noix. Instead of pursuing him and preventing him from erecting fortifications there, Amherst loitered in restoring Fort Carillon (renamed Ticonderoga) and in building, near the ruins there to protect it, three small additional forts on the neighboring hills.

Finally, as he had learned from deserters that the French had four armed vessels on Lake Champlain—as a matter-of-fact three sloops built at St. John and a schooner with eight pieces of ordnance taken away from the Quebec fleet—he ordered Captain Loring, the naval commander, to build a brigantine, a floating battery and, later on, an armed sloop, all this to protect his advancing army.

As soon as he heard of these works from deserters, Broulmaque inferred that the English offensive might well be postponed to the

next spring. From Isle-aux-Noix he wrote to Governor Vaudreuil August 29:

The English are now building at St. Frederic a boat armed with eighteen pieces of ordnance and two floating batteries bearing 24 pieces each. They claim they will come and capture Fort St. John as soon as these boats are ready to sail. Wise people believe they will defer to the next spring. . . . Mr. Amherst is having repaired what has been destroyed at Carillon, and is building a large fort at St. Frederic. . . . There is no probability that the English will come this year to try something on the St. Johns River. No doubt they will not have their boats built soon enough, although deserters say Mr. Amherst announced they would be ready by the end of August and that he would leave immediately. Even with many things to be done yet to put the island in good condition, it is suitable to wish the enemy would come about.¹

On September 5, Broulmaque wrote again:

According to what I have been able to extort from deserters and prisoners, the odds are that Mr. Amherst has no intention to come here this year, and that he is satisfied with the building of a large fort at St. Frederic.²

If Amherst had kept going on, he would have easily beaten his path towards Montreal. Broulmaque himself agreed his sloops and his armed schooner might well incommode, but not stop, the advancing English. Fort St. John could not defend itself alone. There remained Isle-aux-Noix. When Broulmaque landed there, he found the entrenchments which had been started, "badly done, without strength, without regularity: essential defects."³ Of course, he thought, the island would not be attacked head on, but it could be easily outflanked by batteries erected on the neighboring grounds, dry enough for the purpose. In order to prevent such an erection, he undertook the building of an *estacade* to stem the waters and flood the woods above the island. However, this was a long-range work he could not hope to complete on time.

Isle-aux-Noix had not even to be attacked. One could have gone around it easily. Landing opposite Langevin Island, at the mouth of the Lacolle River, the English would have found a high and dry slope leading to Fort St. John by a portage of six short leagues, with no other obstacle than one or two small brooks to be bridged. Much better still, they could have penetrated Missisquoi Bay, and, by a portage of three and a half leagues only, have fallen into the South River, which joins the Richelieu one league below Isle-aux-Noix. In a letter dated June 11 to Levis, Broulmaque had this to say:

If you were on Lake Champlain, you would soon know Missisquoi Bay and this [South] River, and, passing by Isle-aux-Noix, you would succeed

to capture St. John without bothering about this island, or at least you would compel the enemy to reinforce considerably the army at St. Johns. But fortunately . . . they will not do what can be done.⁴

In another letter of September 21 to the same, he wrote again:

I have been on a reconnaissance in Missisquoi Bay. I would like to be in Mr. Amherst's place. I would launch an attack that way without difficulty.⁵

According to an English deserter, a rumor was spreading at the camp of Crown Point that the English would march only after they had heard of the fall of Quebec. So, by the end of September, Bourlamaque expected to be attacked very soon. Amherst, he thought, was surely aware of this fall, and he would soon move forward towards the Richelieu River. However, it was October 11 before the English army left Crown Point. As it reached Isle-aux-Quatre-Vents (Four Brothers Island), the French sloops stationed there attacked its boats; but the brig, by which they had not been seen at first, came back chasing them and forced them to flee to Sonnoouthouans (or Squenonton) Bay (Cumberland Bay), where Mr. de Laubara the commander had them sunk. As for Mr. Saint-Onge's schooner, which was stationed at the southern point of Grande Isle to watch the pass to Missisquoi Bay, it escaped the pursuing brig which ran aground, and it took shelter at the end of the bay, in the mouth of the Missisquoi River.

The English boats now had free passage. On October 20, fifteen or twenty of them came into sight of the entrenchments of Isle-aux-Noix, but turned back at once. They were missed by a cannon shot directed at them. Soon after, four or five others landed in Missisquoi Bay, went on scouting and reached the lake.

Since that time, Chevalier Le Mercier wrote from Isle-aux-Noix, scouting-parties after scouting-parties, the finest days in the world, no news of the army . . . I come to the conclusion they will not attack this fall, in this season; for this reassures us of not being swept away. To let an army behind, carry boats overland, be exposed to be caught in the ice, of this I cannot convince myself. Here is, Sir, my way of thinking: they have armed to destroy our navy and proclaim themselves masters of Lake Champlain. That's what I think; but for fear of making a mistake, I will stay here till November 1, the day I expect to go back to Montreal, provided that the enemy is not in the vicinity.⁶

As for Bourlamaque, he wrote to Levis, October 25: "I believe it is too late in the season for Mr. Amherst to undertake. I cannot see how he will keep his post: he is making a foolish campaign."⁷

By October 28, it was quite sure Amherst had withdrawn two days

before. Subsequently, Vaudreuil wrote to him to propose an exchange of prisoners. Mr. de Cadillac who carried the letter to Crown Point learned from the aide-de-camp Abercrombie that the main body of the English army had not passed beyond the Sonnouthouans Bay (Cumberland Bay). "Amherst, on receiving a letter from Boston announcing the capture of Quebec, had turned back immediately, not wanting to lose any man for the conquest of a country he considered already surrendered."⁸

As I feared my criticism, based on French sources, might be unfair to General Amherst, I looked into the *History of the United States* by George Bancroft. I happened to find there a very consonant appreciation. The great American historian concludes his chapter on these words: "Amherst was a brave and faithful officer, but his intellect was dull. He gained a great name, because New France was occupied during his chief command; but had Wolfe resembled him Quebec would not have fallen."

Nevertheless, I am not at ease to appraise Amherst's military strategy. So let me switch for a little while to my favorite subject and tell you an episode of this campaign which took place within the territory of your State. I will add further details to those I have already given in my *Histoire de Saint-Francois-du-Lac*, which details I have borrowed from a Journal kept at the camp in Isle-aux-Noix by captain Nicolas Renaud d'Avène des Meloizes.⁹

In August 1759, General Amherst sent to the Abnakis of St. Francis Captain Kinton Kennedy, of Forbes' 17th Regiment, and Lieutenant Archibald Hamilton, of the 31st Royal Regiment, to promise them his friendship, provided that they would consent to be neutral. In case the Abnakis would accept, the two officers were to proceed to Quebec and inform General Wolfe that he was to take this agreement into account.

Guided by seven Wolves, they made for St. Francis by Missisquoi Bay and the Yamaska River. The camp of Isle-aux-Noix got wind of their departure as early as August 22: one of the three English deserters arrived the day before told that few days past one officer and ten Indians had left carrying letters to General Wolfe at Quebec. On August 24, they were met in the vicinity of St. Francis by a hunting party of about twenty Abnakis. As they looked suspicious, the Abnakis brought them, not to the St. Francis chiefs, but to the governor of Three Rivers, who imprisoned them aboard Captain Canon's frigate.

Besides the instruction given to them by General Amherst, they were found having letters written by officers of the Lake Champlain army to General Wolfe's officers. The authors of these letters announced with pride the capture of the forts Niagara, Carillon and St. Frederic, and set a rendezvous in Montreal, where they would have the pleasure of opening an excellent bottle of French wine. One of them considered that Bourlamaque misbehaved when he blew up his forts instead of resisting. Another praised General Amherst's prudence, coolness and cautious direction. Would the general launch the attack on St. John? It would depend on Wolfe's success at Quebec.

Montcalm informed immediately General Amherst of his own right to treat the two officers like spies, as they were found disguised, adding however he would be satisfied with not letting them out of sight and would raise no objection to exchange them with other French prisoners when fall would come. The English could not forgive Montcalm for what they termed an act of the "most cruel and refined barbarity" toward one of the two officers. Montcalm supposedly invited him at his table and delivered him afterward to the Indians, who tortured him horribly and cut off one of his ears.¹⁰

Amherst knew the misfortune of his two messengers by Montcalm's letter, which he received on September 10. He became exasperated. Three days later, he ordered Major Robert Rogers to proceed to St. Francis and destroy the Indian village, sparing none but women and children. Rogers set out that very night, with two hundred Rangers and a few Indians. When he got to Missisquoi Bay, he hid his boats and provisions for his return, leaving two Iroquois to watch them from a distance, and he entered the woods toward St. Francis, more than a hundred miles away.

The same day that Rogers left Missisquoi Bay, one of Bourlamaque's officers, Mr. de la Durantaye, came back at night from a scouting operation with an English made paddle he had found on the lake. Moreover, returning Indian hunters reported that, the previous night, they had heard a noise as of a boat slipping on the water. The officer set out again, the next morning, with forty men, and he found Rogers' seventeen boats. He broke up some of them, and brought the remainder back to the Portage. Then Bourlamaque sent three hundred men after the English. As these English seemed to be directing their steps towards St. Francis, he conjectured they were going to punish the Abnakis for their perfidy toward Amherst's two emissaries, and he soon gave the alarm to the governors of Montreal and Three

Rivers and to the missionary of St. Francis. By order received from Vaudreuil, two parties were formed with picked Canadians and Abnakis from St. Francis and Bécancour to meet Rogers' men on the Yamaska River. As for Bourlamaque, he placed four hundred men where the seventeen boats had been found. Rogers knew it from his Iroquois guards, who joined him about forty miles from Missisquoi Bay. He then sent Lieutenant McMullen back to Crown Point, asking Amherst to forward supplies to the Ammonoosuc River, on the Connecticut, along which he meant to pass on his way back.

Allow me to omit the adventures of Rogers' journey through the swampy country he crossed, also the details of the destruction of the Abnakis village, which took place on October 6, as I had the opportunity to establish lately.¹¹ Let me rather point out some of the circumstances of the Rangers return connected with the territory of your State.

The day after Rogers' departure from St. Francis, a band of Canadians from Three Rivers, joined by the surviving Abnakis, rushed after him along the St. Francis River. At Isle-aux-Noix, news of the slaughter of the Abnakis and the burning of their village came in as soon as October 6 in the morning. Then, Bourlamaque set out two parties to meet Rogers. One of them, formed of Indians and Canadians under the command of Mr. de Langy-Montegron, came back to the camp on the 14th, saying that Rogers' party had gotten away. About four or five leagues deep in the woods, they had found footprints of nine or ten men going towards Crown Point, plus the remains of an extinguished fire whose ashes were still warm. But, ten days later, it was learned from the Indians that the English party had been encountered, fifty men had been scalped, and the remainder were being pursued. The story was confirmed with more accuracy by Mr. Degannes, Captain aide-major from Three Rivers, who came in Isle-aux-Noix on October 28, with nineteen regulars and thirty-three militiamen. This was the news: the English party had been divided in three bands, one of thirty-five men had been found and exterminated, another headed by Rogers was under pursuit, but there was no hope of catching the third one. On the evening of November 2, Mr. de Sabrevois came back from Missisquoi Bay, where he had been hunting with the Indians. He had been told by some Indian women that, while crossing the bay in bark canoes, they had seen few men shooting at ducks. Then, some of the Abnakis set out to go by land to their fort on the Missisquoi River, which they had deserted since the beginning of the campaign. When they

arrived, they saw a heavy smoke rising up. Coming nearer cautiously, they heard English words, and they noticed that of the five horses they had left only four were remaining: the English must have killed one for food.

As soon as he heard of that, Bourslamaque forwarded a party to the Missisquoi River. The same night, around seven o'clock, gunshots and savage howls resounded—the party was coming back with five English prisoners captured in the fort by three Indians. These prisoners told that they had left ten of their companions up the Missisquoi River, of whom four were dying of starvation and want. Thus the Abnakis set out to search that country. On November 7, they met five Englishmen coming back from St. Francis with an Indian woman prisoner. As they found on two of them pieces of human meat, the flesh of a young Indian they had killed for food, they strangled and scalped them on the spot, and came back to the camp with the three other prisoners.

Captain Pouchot, who had been made prisoner after the capitulation of his fort at Niagara in July, and who was now being taken to New York, witnessed the arrival at Crown Point of Major Rogers with "twenty-one of his Rangers, all pale and emaciated", as he pictured them in his *Memoirs*.¹³

Now back to the 1760 campaign, which culminated in the fall of Montreal, September 8. I have not much to say about this campaign, since it was not much more than a route march. Having won a bright victory over the English army at Sainte-Foy, near Quebec, April 28, General Lévis looked forward to the recapture of the city. It would depend on the arrival of supplies from overseas. Unfortunately for him, the first ships to come in were the English ones. From them, every hope the Canadians had kept, collapsed. Militiamen started quitting and returning to their homes. Murray threatened to burn their properties, should they take up arms again. The inhabitants did not want to advance more money, as they had learned that the French government would not refund but a small part of the paper money already issued.

Amherst resumed his project of the previous year for the capture of Montreal. The three armies were to converge on the city, from Quebec, from Lake Champlain and from Lake Ontario. But this time he chose Haviland to lead the Lake Champlain army, taking for himself Gage's place on Lake Ontario. The year before, he had directed Gage to oust the French from Fort Levis erected on *Isle-aux-Galops*, on the Rapids of *la Presentation* (Ogdensburg, New

York). Gage had alleged he had not sufficient men and time for so important an attempt. Amherst was resentful because of this, as he relied on his own junction with the army coming from Oswego. Bourlamaque, to whom this project of junction was known from English prisoners, has this comment in his *Memoire sur le Canada* (1762): by his choice of the Lake Ontario frontier, Amherst "wanted to demonstrate that, had he not conquered Canada by 1759, the fault should be put down to Brigadier Gage, who had been commissioned by him to penetrate through these Rapids."¹³

Once more, Amherst, by his slowness, delayed the capture of Montreal. Murray had sailed from Quebec by July 14. An attempt was made to prevent his junction with Haviland at Lake St. Peter, near Sorel. As it was feared Haviland's army might proceed through the woods, an officer, Mr. le Chevalier de la Pause, was sent to scout between Missisquoi Bay and Lake St. Peter, along the Yamaska and St. Francis Rivers. Moreover, Bourlamaque was commissioned to erect entrenchments and batteries on the islands of Sorel and to obstruct the channel along Isle-de-Grace. It was hoped these works might at least delay Murray's flotilla. But Bourlamaque had to interrupt them when he realized they would not be completed on time.

As a matter of fact, the English ships were moving so fast, that Murray wrote to Haviland, on August 16, that he would not wait for him nor for Amherst for his attack on Montreal. He was eager to beat Levis and bury in oblivion his own smarting defeat at Sainte-Foy. Whether he hesitated, at the last moment, before this new bold action, or whether he received strict orders, Murray did not dare to outrun the two other armies; and he made his stop at St. Therese Island, opposite Varennes, four leagues from Montreal.

The Lake Champlain army, which had left Crown Point, August 11, was delayed before Isle-aux-Noix, while trying to take it head on. After having it shelled for ten days, Haviland bethought himself of taking it by the flank. He succeeded carrying by night three pieces of artillery through the forest at the mouth of the South River. There stood three armed vessels and several gunboats, which were captured easily after few cannon shots. When Bougainville realized he had been outflanked, and since he had provisions for two more days only, he decided to evacuate his fort. This he did successfully in the night of August 27-28, the roar of his guns concealing his crossing on the western shore. Two days later, resistance being thought impossible, Roquemaure left Fort St. John, which he had previously set afire.

Haviland proceeded on his way. On September 1 he attacked Fort Chambly, which surrendered that very day. He moved then to encamp at Longueuil, opposite Montreal, until Amherst would come. Levis thought of going to attack him, but he was compelled not to do so. Just as he was deliberating with the Five Nations Indians and having them disposed for the action, an Indian came in saying his people had concluded peace with Amherst, and the latter would master the whole Canada within four or five days. Then, all the Indians gave up, leaving Levis alone.

Montreal could not withstand a siege. She had only 2000 men against the 28,000 of the three English armies, and her walls had been built to protect her against the attacks of the Iroquois, not to hold out against cannon shots. The day Amherst landed at Lachine, Bougainville was directed to negotiate the surrender of the city. Amherst's conditions were found acceptable, and were subscribed to, September 8, by Governor de Vaudreuil, in spite of Levis' wish of a fight to the end on St. Helen Island. The next day, a detachment of soldiers from Amherst's troops, and this alone, entered the city with two field guns. The historical documents do not mention whether they found excellent bottles of French wine. But one thing is certain: neither Murray's nor Haviland's men were invited to share in the contents.

*The Richelieu River was also called St. Johns River and Chambly River.

NOTES

¹ *Collection des manuscrits du marechal de Levis* (Montreal et Quebec, 1889-1895), V 39-40.

² *Ibid.*, V 41-42.

³ *Ibid.*, V 14.

⁴ *Ibid.*, V 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, V 46.

⁶ *Ibid.*, X 108.

⁷ *Ibid.*, V 68: "Je ne comprends pas comment il mettra sa tete en surete; il fait la une sorte campagne."—Vaudreuil to Bourlamaque, July 25, 1759: "Wolfe, tres contrarie par la conduite d'Amherst, dit qu'il en repondra sur sa tete." (Public Archives of Canada, Coll. Bourlamaque, v. II, 319).

⁸ *Ibid.*, V 78.

⁹ This Journal has been published in the *Rapport de l'Archiviste de la Province de Quebec pour 1928-1929*, 29-86.

¹⁰ Bernier to Levis, 20 Oct. 1759. *Collection des manuscrits du Marechal de Levis*, X, 18.

¹¹ "C'est arrive le 4 Octobre 1759," in *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amerique française*, Dec. 1959.

¹² *Memoires sur la derniere guerre de l'Amerique Septentrionale entre la France et l'Angleterre* (Yverdon, 1781) II, 151.

¹³ In *Bulletin des Recherches Historiques* (Levis), XXV (1919), 265.