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GENERALS AND GENERALSHIP BEFORE QUEBEC 1759-1760

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I

The two hundredth anniversary of the fall of Quebec is a good time for Canadian historians to take stock of the most famous series of events in Canadian history. After two centuries, these events are still, apparently, interesting to the public. At any rate, publishers seem to think so; for about half a dozen new books about them are being published in 1959.¹

There is an enormous literature about the Seven Years' War in America, and the Quebec campaign of 1759 in particular. In spite of this, many aspects of the period remain controversial. I shall today attempt a review of some of the controversies. But as a preliminary it seems desirable to review also the work of the historians who have contributed to them. Both things I propose to do in the light of a re-examination of the primary sources of information.

If I may begin with a personal explanation, some time ago I set out to write a short book on the events at Quebec in 1759. With what seems to me now considerable simplicity, I assumed that so much work had been done on these events that I could avoid doing much tiresome research and concentrate on producing a leisured and gentlemanly commentary on the well-established facts. Before I had done much reading I discovered that I had been too optimistic. I found myself driven on to start digging into the primary sources — a process rendered fatally easy by the fact that I was living in Ottawa, which possesses the greatest existing collection of such sources on the subject. In the end, I wrote, not the essay I had hoped for, but a documented history of the campaign, an attempt, however inadequate, at a new interpretation based on a new study of the contemporary evidence. I had come to feel, rightly or wrongly, that this was needed.

II

As a result of my reading I arrived at two disturbing conclusions. The first was that the history of the siege of Quebec had been, on the

¹ This paper is a by-product of a book by the author entitled *Quebec, 1759: The Siege and the Battle*, published in September 1959 by The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited. Since the book is fully documented, some documentation which would otherwise have been necessary has been dispensed with here.

whole, rather badly written. The second, I am sorry to say, was that the worst of the bad writing had been done in Canada.

Whatever the political, social or economic historian may say, military operations are not the easiest stuff of which to make history. The fog of war has a way of drifting into the historian's study and getting into his eyes; and when to the grey fog of war is added the golden haze of romance, visibility tends to fall close to zero. The haze of romance settled over the Quebec area within a few weeks of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, and it has not lifted yet. A good deal of what has been scribbled in the resulting murk seems to me not much better than romantic nonsense.

Prejudice, of course, has played a great part in the result. The influence of national prejudice is obvious. But there has been much personal prejudice too. Historians have become devoted adherents or bitter opponents of the leading personalities of the time. Moreover, some of them have suffered woefully from lack of military knowledge. Finally, there has been a considerable amount of just plain inadequate investigation. Writers of high reputation have been guilty of surprising lapses. I offer one example.

Sir Julian Corbett's book *England in the Seven Years' War* is regarded, not without some reason, as a standard military study of the war. In discussing the appointment of Wolfe to command the Québec expedition, Corbett asserts that the Army in America had asked for him. There is in the Record Office, he says, a "curious paper" in which three colonels (Monckton, Murray and Burton) recommended to Pitt that he appoint Wolfe. This seemed decidedly "curious", even in the eighteenth century, and with the aid of Mr. Ormsby of the Public Archives I checked the source cited by Corbett. It turned out to be a document sent, not from America to England, but in the opposite direction; it is in fact the "Proposals for the Expedition to Quebec" sent by Pitt to General Amherst for his guidance.² It begins by noting that Colonel Wolfe is to command, with the rank of major general "for and during the Expedition to Quebec only"; it then goes on to list as "Brigadiers to Act under the same Restrictions" the names of Monckton, Murray and Burton. Incredible as it may seem, there appears to be no doubt that Corbett read these three names as *signatures* to the document. This led him, not only to perpetrate an historical absurdity, but to miss a point of much interest. This is the fact that Ralph Burton was originally slated to be the third brigadier, but was displaced, in circumstances which remain rather obscure, by the better-connected George Townshend. Townshend

² Corbett, *England in the Seven Years' War* (2 vols., London, 1907), I, 398. Public Record Office, London, C.O. 5/213 (transcript, Public Archives of Canada).

was evidently forced upon Wolfe.³ Here we have, one suspects, part of the background for the serious rift that developed between Wolfe and Townshend before Quebec.

This example at least serves to indicate that not all the historiographical crimes in connection with the 1759 campaign have been committed by Canadians. The Canadians, however, have been responsible for more than their fair share. It is particularly astonishing that they have failed to make better use of the plans of Quebec available in the Ottawa archives. Nothing of the slightest value has ever been done on the state of the Quebec fortifications in 1759, though ample material lies ready to hand. The late Sir Arthur Doughty gave currency to the legend that there are no defensive works at Quebec today which antedate 1820 — though a mere glance at the plans immediately establishes the fact that, basically, the city walls today are the same that stood there in 1759. Sir Arthur also accepted as an accurate account of the fortifications the plan drawn by Patrick Mackellar (Wolfe's Chief Engineer) after his captivity at Quebec in 1757. Yet the defences on the land side in Mackellar's plan are those shown on Charlevoix's map of 1744. These were in fact wholly altered beginning in 1745. Mackellar's plan was thus fourteen years out of date in 1759.⁴ It was lucky for Wolfe that, thanks to the inefficiency of the engineers and administrators of New France, the new fortifications were about as bad as the old ones; and Mackellar's basic conclusion, that the best way to take the city was to attack its weak land side, remained sound, even though the information on which it was based was entirely inaccurate.

Of the individual historians who have written about the events of 1759 one could speak endlessly. Leaving earlier writers aside, we may begin with Parkman. It seems to me that *Montcalm and Wolfe*, published in 1884, has worn remarkably well. There is not much that his successors can teach the Bostonian; on the contrary, many of them could learn from him. It is true that he tells some stories (which incidentally have been repeated by virtually every writer since his time) which are probably unfounded. It is true that he takes liberties with documents⁵ — though never, so far as I have seen, to the extent of altering the sense. Also,

³ See Wolfe to Townshend, 6 Jan. 1759, Beckles Willson, *The Life and Letters of James Wolfe* (London, 1909), 414. Cf. Rex Whitworth, *Field-Marshal Lord Ligonier* (London, 1958), 278-80. Von Ruville in his *William Pitt, Earl of Chatham* (3 vols., London, 1907) notes that Burton was passed over; but his comment is not perceptive (II, 262, n.).

⁴ It is reproduced in A.G. Doughty's edition of Knox's *Historical Journal of the Campaigns in North America* (3 vols., Toronto, 1914-16), III, opposite p. 150. It should be compared with the subsequent *Plan of the Town of Quebec...*, also signed by Mackellar (P.A.C.)

⁵ E.g., the version of Vaudreuil's letter to Bourlamaque, 6 Aug. 1759 (Bourlamaque Papers, P.A.C.) printed in *Montcalm and Wolfe* (ed. 1910, III, 75) in inverted commas, is not a quotation but a very free paraphrase.

his account of the Quebec campaign is relatively brief, and much is left out. But on balance one can only salute him for his achievement.

Among the other writers who have dealt broadly with the Seven Years' War, and more incidentally with the Quebec campaign, Richard Waddington is an eminent figure. *La Guerre de sept ans*, so far as I can judge it, is a book impressive in research as well as monumental in scope. And it is pleasant to be able to say that North American scholarship in our own day has produced a work worthy to stand beside these triumphs of the past. Professor Gipson's book *The Great War for the Empire*, a part of his larger work, *The British Empire before the American Revolution*, is fine in its sweep and most admirable in its investigation of the sources. I would not agree with everything in it, but it is a splendid achievement of the historian's craft.

I turn now to the more specialized studies, and first to the group of Canadian historians who laboured in the field in the late Victorian period and early in the present century. Among the French-speaking scholars of this period the dominant figure was the Abbé H.-R. Casgrain. Following in the footsteps of Garneau, he interpreted the war of the conquest in terms of French-Canadian nationalism. This appears particularly in his championship of Vaudreuil, who, it may be recalled, was Canada's first native-born Governor General. The eighteenth-century division between the French of France and the French of Canada is reflected and paralleled in the nineteenth-century bickering between Casgrain and René de Kerallain, the biographer of Bougainville. De Kerallain observed, "L'abbé Casgrain appartient à la catégorie des écrivains patriotes; et, quand le patriote se double d'un Canadien, son patriotisme est deux fois plus nerveux."⁶

Casgrain's great achievement is, of course, his edition of the Lévis Papers, a vastly important group of documents.⁷ Since the original manuscripts are now in the Public Archives of Canada, it is possible to assess the value of the published version. It is certainly a most useful contribution. The documents which Casgrain did not publish are relatively few and unimportant. The transcription does not meet the meticulous standards of modern scholarship, but it is broadly accurate. Occasionally, it is true, Casgrain's transcriber made a real howler. Again one example, from the account of the Battle of the Plains in the journal called Montcalm's. The author of this part of the journal, apparently the artillery officer Montbeillard, describes a conversation with Montcalm just before the fatal attack. The Casgrain version makes the general say, "If we give him time to establish himself, we shall never be able to

⁶ See De Kerallain's *La Jeunesse de Bougainville et la guerre de sept ans* (Paris, 1896), 7.

⁷ *Collection des Manuscrits du Maréchal de Lévis* (12 vols., Montreal and Quebec, 1889-95).

attack him with the few troops we have (*le peu de troupes que nous avons*).” But the phrase in the manuscript is clearly not “le peu de troupes” but “L’Espèce de troupes” — *the kind of troops* we have.⁸ Fortunately, errors as bad as this are not frequent, and I must say that I should hate to have to pick my way through the Lévis manuscripts without the guidance of Casgrain’s printed edition.

The most famous monument of English-Canadian scholarship in this field is the six volumes of Doughty’s *The Siege of Quebec and the Battle of the Plains of Abraham*, published in collaboration with G.W. Parmelee in 1901. This book is partly a history, partly a collection of documents. The documents are — with some reservations — invaluable. The history belongs in a lower category. Doughty was one of those whose vision was seriously affected by the golden haze. He had a romantic regard for both Wolfe and Montcalm, and even for that versatile but inefficient soldier Bougainville. His knowledge of the Casgrain documents — a comparatively recent publication in his time — seems to have been imperfect. He devotes some indignation to the purblind people who insist on suggesting that Bougainville was at Cap Rouge on the eventful night of the 12th-13th September 1759, and produces some second-hand evidence to indicate that he was not there.⁹ Yet Casgrain had published the only letter by Bougainville himself describing that night. Bougainville wrote to Brouillade, “Un homme se laisse surprendre à l’anse des Mères; je suis au cap Rouge.”¹⁰ Doughty, like some other partisans of Wolfe, convinced himself, in spite of the absence of any real evidence whatever, that Wolfe had in mind from the beginning the landing at the Anse au Foulon which was finally executed on 13 September.¹¹

Even the documents Doughty presents, invaluable as they are, have to be treated with some reserve. I was surprised to discover that two paragraphs which the British government censored out of Wolfe’s famous dispatch to Pitt when it was first published in 1759 are still missing from Doughty’s version, as they are from almost every version in print. I found also that part of Wolfe’s almost equally famous and informative letter to Admiral Saunders written on 31 August 1759 is missing from Doughty’s text.¹²

A writer at least as influential in Canada as Doughty was Colonel William Wood, author of *The Fight for Canada* and several volumes in the “Chronicles of Canada” series. Wood was a devoted worker in Canadian military history, and it is not pleasant to have to depreciate

⁸ *Ibid.*, [VII], 612. MS of Montcalm journal, Lévis Papers, P.A.C.

⁹ *The Siege of Quebec*, III, 107.

¹⁰ *Collection des Manuscrits du Maréchal de Lévis*, [V], 357 (18 Sept. 1759).

¹¹ *The Siege of Quebec*, III, 301.

¹² The dispatch to Pitt is published in full in Kimball. The letter to Saunders was published in *Gentleman’s Magazine*, June 1801. For Doughty’s version, published he says “in full”, see *The Siege of Quebec*, II, 151-4.

his writings; but his influence, so far as the Seven Years' War is concerned, has been most unfortunate. He was an amateur soldier and an amateur historian, but he has been regarded by the authors of general histories of Canada as a reliable guide through the complexities of the Quebec campaigns. The results have been regrettable. Wood's predilections and prejudices were much the same as Doughty's: a romantic regard for both Wolfe and Montcalm, a deep hostility to Vaudreuil. How far his interpretation was really based on documents can be judged from the fact that he changed it late in life and published an account of Wolfe far less favourable to the general than the eulogistic one presented in *The Fight for Canada* some twenty years before.¹³

The fact is that Wood's work abounds in errors, major and minor. It would be no trick to compile a very long list of them. Perhaps the most egregious was his attribution to Vaudreuil of the phrase, "There is no need to believe that the English have wings", which was actually written to Vaudreuil by Montcalm on 29 July.¹⁴ In *The Passing of New France*¹⁵ Wood dramatically represents Vaudreuil as making this remark to Montcalm on 12 September, "Raising his voice so that the staff could hear him." An author who is capable of this is capable of practically anything. Wood popularized the story of Vaudreuil's countermarching Montcalm's order moving the Guyenne battalion to the site of Wolfe's landing the night before the Battle of the Plains, though as I have tried to show elsewhere the evidence for this is extraordinarily slight.¹⁶ He did not even know Wolfe's actual rank in the Army — having apparently not discovered the *Army List*.¹⁷ He asserts that books contain statements which, on inspection, turn out to be not there.¹⁸

Wood's works are less well known outside than inside Canada — and the writing done outside is none the worse for this, though it is worth remarking that British and American writers have neglected his useful compilation *The Logs of the Conquest of Canada* as much as his less valuable works. But Canadian writers have tended to swallow him whole. Evidence of his prestige is the fact that even so thorough and reliable an historian as Professor Creighton clearly relied on Wood as a basis for the pages on the 1759 campaign in *Dominion of the North*. The result is that he repeated a succession of unfounded tales, including the inherently impossible one (also in Parkman and many other books) of the Highland officer who answered the sentry's question about his

¹³ *Unique Quebec* (Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, 1924).

¹⁴ Letter of 29 July 1759, appended to Vaudreuil to the Minister, 5 Oct. 1759, P.A.C., F 3, vol. 15.

¹⁵ Toronto, 1920 (Chronicles of Canada), 128.

¹⁶ "The Anse au Foulon, 1759: Montcalm and Vaudreuil" (*Canadian Historical Review*, March 1959).

¹⁷ *The Fight for Canada* (ed. Boston, 1906), 142-3, 145. Wood calls Wolfe "a regimental lieutenant-colonel", but he had been Colonel of the 67th Foot since 1757.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 334, re Robert Stobo's *Memoirs*.

regiment with the words "De La Reine",¹⁹ and the oft-printed detail of the Royal-Roussillon battalion marching on to the battlefield "in its distinctive blue". (Royal-Roussillon, like all the other French regiments in Canada, wore white.)²⁰

Two Canadian biographies, both old books now, may be mentioned. Sir Thomas Chapais was devoted to his subject, as biographers tend to be; yet his life of Montcalm is distinguished by considerable objectivity as well as by careful research. W. T. Waugh's *James Wolfe, Man and Soldier*, on the other hand, is one of the romantic works, ready to take leave of the documents at any time to achieve an interpretation favourable to his hero. (Read his account of the correspondence between Wolfe and the brigadiers at the end of August 1759.)

A quite different approach to Wolfe, however, was that of Waugh's McGill colleague, Professor Adair, in his presidential address to this association in 1936.²¹ This was a realistic re-interpretation based on careful examination of a wide range of sources. It may be called, in fact, the most thorough account that could be compiled within the city limits of Montreal. I find myself of the opinion that Mr. Adair somewhat overdid his onslaught on Wolfe's reputation; he was not without prejudice against Vaudreuil; but his paper was certainly the most significant Canadian contribution to the subject and, in spite of its exaggerations, possibly the best thing on Wolfe ever written anywhere. More recently an eminent French-Canadian scholar, Mr. Frégault, has given us a full-length book on the Seven Years' War in America.²² Like so many earlier works written in Quebec, it presents a nationalistic view favourable to Vaudreuil. It is distinguished, however, by its careful use of primary sources in both French and English. On matters of fact, Professor Frégault's narrative is almost always firmly grounded; as to his interpretation of the facts, there is almost always room for discussion. Unfortunately, although he goes into great detail about the operations at Oswego in 1756, he has comparatively little to say about the much more important ones at Quebec three years later.

Finally, a general word about document collections. My initial assumption that everything important was in print turned out to be unjustified. I have spoken of Casgrain and Doughty. The other basic collection is that of Gertrude S. Kimball, *Correspondence of William Pitt... with Colonial Governors and Military and Naval Commanders in America*.²³ This has the virtue that the text of the letters is accurately

¹⁹ This battalion was with Broulmaque on Lake Champlain. And no French sentry would have asked such a question. Transport was no task for regular troops.

²⁰ *Etat Militaire de France, pour l'année 1759...* (Paris, 1759), 228.

²¹ "The Military Reputation of Major-General James Wolfe", Canadian Historical Association Report, 1936.

²² *La Guerre de la conquête* (Montréal, 1955).

²³ 2 vols., New York, 1906.

transcribed from the original manuscripts. But unfortunately none of the enclosures is printed; and often they are more important than the letter itself. The Kimball notes, moreover, have very little value.

Even at this late date, there are still significant documents that are not in print at all. A particularly striking example is Vaudreuil's long dispatch dated 5 October 1759 which is his description of the campaign and his *apologia* for the loss of Quebec.²⁴ A large number of very valuable papers are attached to it as appendices. I can only attribute the failure to print this document to the hostility to Vaudreuil which has been so evident among certain historians, including Doughty. Apparently it was considered that the governor was so prejudiced that it was unnecessary or undesirable to allow his views to go before the court.

III

With this background, we may pass on to discuss the much-controverted campaign of 1759.

To me, after a long period spent studying the documents, it seems that there was no really first-class military figure among the men present at Quebec on that famous occasion. The claims to genius made on behalf of both Wolfe and Montcalm have been advanced by writers unduly influenced by the romantic circumstances in which they fought and died. Both possessed military talents. Neither deserves to rank among the great captains of history. Montcalm's reputation has been gilded by a glorious failure and a gallant death, while Wolfe's has reflected the splendour of a famous victory which he apparently did not expect and probably did not deserve.

Pitt took a considerable chance when he appointed Wolfe to the Quebec expedition, for the young general had had no experience in independent command. And the campaign which he conducted during the summer of 1759, in spite of the success which finally crowned it, suggests that Wolfe was in fact unfitted for such command. Our knowledge of the development of his plans, though incomplete, is considerably improved by his letters to Monckton in the Northcliffe Collection at Ottawa,²⁵ which have not been used by his biographers or by any historian of the campaign. They serve further to document Wolfe's vacillations and uncertainties, which are already familiar to students and were emphasized by Adair. According to my calculation — and another person would probably arrive at another figure — Wolfe adopted and rejected seven different operational plans before finally settling upon the one which gave him his victory. To drag this audience through all the detail would be extreme cruelty; but I feel that I must at least attempt an outline.

²⁴ Above, note 14.

²⁵ Monckton Papers, vol. XXII.

Knowing before he reached Quebec that his basic problem was to get at the weak land side of the fortress, Wolfe's main idea was to seize and fortify the Beauport shore below the city, with a view to advancing thence across the St. Charles.²⁶ But when he landed on the Isle of Orleans on 27 June he at once discovered that Montcalm had anticipated him and had himself fortified that area. Wolfe's first plan was thus defeated. His second one, adopted on 3 July after consultation with Admiral Saunders, was to "get ashore if possible above the town".²⁷ To assist this scheme he proposed to bombard Quebec from the south shore of the St. Lawrence, and to make a landing below the Montmorency as a diversion. But by the 10th he had clearly abandoned this plan — probably partly because the Navy did not yet fully control the waters about Quebec, partly because of French military counter-moves — and had converted the Montmorency diversion into his main operation. On 16 July he outlined to Monckton in some detail a scheme for a frontal attack on the French entrenchments here.²⁸ This was his third plan. But on the night of 18-19 July a division of the fleet for the first time passed Quebec and got into upper river. Wolfe now, probably very wisely, switched back to that flank, abandoning the Montmorency scheme in favour of an enterprise above the town.

Early on the morning of 20 July he wrote Monckton²⁹ at Point Lévis ordering him to cooperate in an attack that evening which was apparently to be directed at St. Michel, a short distance above the Anse au Foulon. Preparations went forward actively; but at 1 p.m. the same day Wolfe postponed the operation, apparently because the French, alarmed by the movement of the ships, were moving men and guns. He kept this hopeful fourth plan alive for some days, but by 25-6 July he had abandoned it and was back to the eastern flank, reconnoitring the crossings of the Montmorency. Getting no encouragement here, on the 28th he announced that he had decided on an attack on an outwork of the French Beauport position. A small redoubt on the beach, which Wolfe calculated was out of musket-shot of the French entrenchments, was to be captured and strengthened. The hope was that Montcalm would attack it and allow the British to fight a defensive action. Wolfe wrote, "I take it to be better that the Marquis shou'd attack a firm Corps of ours w^h superiority of numbers, than that we should attack his whole Army entrenched, w^h what we can put on shoar at one landing..."³⁰

This was his fifth plan. He tried to carry it out on the eventful 31st of July. The first stage was to run a couple of armed vessels ashore

²⁶ Letter to Major Walter Wolfe, 19 May 1759, Willson, 427-9. This letter also refers to the possibility of entrenching a detachment *above* the town.

²⁷ Wolfe's Journal, McGill University version.

²⁸ Monckton Papers, XXII.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ To Monckton, n.d. (29 July ?), *ibid.*

close to the redoubt. Wolfe boarded one of them to reconnoitre, and at once saw that his calculations had been at fault. The redoubt was closer to the entrenchments than he had believed, and would not be tenable under their fire. With the French shot flying about him, Wolfe made a reappraisal. He decided to go on with the operation; but now it took the form he had rejected a couple of days before — a frontal attack on the French army in its entrenchments, the circumstances in which the Canadian militia were most formidable. This was so fundamental a change that it deserves to be called his sixth plan. And the attack was a bloody failure.

A pause followed, during which Wolfe continued his incendiary bombardment of Quebec, and began systematically devastating the farming communities above and below the city. He hoped that this might goad Montcalm into coming out of his inaccessible entrenchments and attacking him; but "the Marquis" refused to be drawn. Then Wolfe fell ill; and in a famous memorandum he sought, belatedly, the advice of his three able brigadiers. He asked them to consider three possible plans of operations, all simply variants of the Montmorency attack that had failed on 31 July. In their forceful reply the brigadiers politely rejected all three and put their collective finger on the dominant fact of the strategic situation — the fact that there was virtually no food in Quebec, and that the garrison and the inhabitants were entirely dependent upon supplies brought in from the west. Cut that line of communication, and Montcalm would have to come out and fight. Their advice accordingly was, abandon the Montmorency position and concentrate the hitherto divided army for action above the town. It was excellent advice, and Wolfe took it.

By 7 September, accordingly, the main body of the army was embarked in the ships above Quebec. The brigadiers recommended a landing above Cap Rouge, in the St. Augustin — Pointe-aux-Trembles area, a dozen or more miles west of the city. Orders were issued for this operation, which we may term the seventh plan; and it came close to being executed on 8 September. But the weather broke; and before the rain stopped Wolfe changed his mind again. He had adopted, and kept to, the most vital features of the brigadiers' plan (a point which Doughty did not understand or appreciate); but on the important matter of choice of a landing-place he now took leave of it. What drew his attention to the Anse au Foulon we simply do not know;³¹ but he decided to land there, less than three miles from Quebec, at a point where the steepness

³¹ The statements of Doughty and Wood that Robert Stobo cannot have suggested it because he left Quebec on 7 September with dispatches for Amherst have no validity — for it was on the very next day that Wolfe (according to Townshend) "went a reconnoitring down the river" and may have first observed the Foulon path. Stobo might well have made the suggestion in a final interview. But there is no evidence for this.

of the cliffs would make an opposed landing impossible, and where the main French force was close at hand. The brigadiers' scheme offered the same strategic advantage — the cutting of the supply line from the west — with much less risk and better hope of a decisive result; for an army defeated near Pointe-aux-Trembles would have had fewer facilities for a withdrawal towards Montreal than one defeated on the Plains of Abraham. But fortune, which is said to favour the brave, favoured Wolfe; every break went his way; a plan whose success depended entirely upon luck was blessed with that commodity in unlimited quantities. To the last, indeed, Wolfe himself seems to have found it difficult to believe in his own good fortune. There is a fairly well authenticated story that after reaching the top of the cliff he sent Isaac Barré back to stop the landing until he could be quite certain that the French were not in the area in strength. Barré, finding that the "second flight" of troops were already offshore ready to land, simply refrained from delivering the order and allowed the landing to proceed.³²

These are not the actions of a great commander. As a strategist — a big word for such small operations, but it seems to be the only one — Wolfe was painfully inadequate. There is no military figure so ineffective as a general who cannot make up his mind. Wolfe was the last man who should have been trusted with an independent command. Moreover, he had defects of personality which made it difficult for him to work effectively with his senior subordinates. Two of his brigadiers came to detest him, and while we know little about his relations with the third, Monckton, we do know that the general wrote Monckton two letters apologizing for some slight and begging him not to turn against him.³³ Wolfe's journal contains strictures on the Navy which suggest that he was a difficult colleague; Admiral Saunders' opinion of him unfortunately seems not to have been recorded. Add to this the policy of deliberate terror which Wolfe applied against the city of Quebec and the neighbouring parishes, a policy which did little or nothing to advance his campaign, and we get a total picture which is not impressive.

Nevertheless, Wolfe was not without valuable military qualities. He was an uncommonly fine fighting officer, at his best under fire; and this accounts for his great reputation among the junior ranks of his army, who knew nothing of his deficiencies as a planner. Once the army was ashore at the Anse au Foulon no mistakes were made. Wolfe was as decisive on the battlefield as he had been indecisive through the long weeks when he was fumbling with his strategic problem. To say that he was no more than "a good regimental officer" is I think to underrate him. It would be truer to say that he had it in him to be a good

³² Henry Caldwell to James Murray, 1 Nov. 1772, Amherst Papers, Packet 28 (transcript, P.A.C.).

³³ 15 and 16 Aug. 1759, Monckton Papers, XXII.

tactician, capable of vigorous and effective leadership and control in action. Working under a higher commander who could prescribe his tasks, he would have been a very valuable officer. He could win a battle, though he could not plan a campaign.

IV

Let us turn to Montcalm. As a strategist he seems to me to have been superior to Wolfe. French-Canadian writers, including Professor Frégault, have criticized him for adopting so exclusively defensive a policy; but this was the policy suited to his means and his circumstances, and therefore it was right. He had more men than Wolfe, but they were largely amateurs, confronting an army of professionals. Under these conditions, it was in Wolfe's interest to bring on a battle in the open field, and in Montcalm's to avoid one. And time was on Montcalm's side. If he could only hold his position and avoid a disaster, the approach of winter would drive the British out of the St. Lawrence. The best tribute to the soundness of Montcalm's policy is Wolfe's letters and dispatches, which testify repeatedly to the manner in which he was frustrated by the French defences and Montcalm's determination to remain within them. Yet Montcalm had made a fundamental strategic error in keeping the French food supplies in depots up the river, and thereby rendering his force dependent from day to day on an exposed line of communication. The object was to enable the field army to retire westward, and still be fed, in case of the loss of Quebec; and it is apparent that it was almost an article of belief among the French that major units of the British fleet could not get past the city. But when this happened, and the British cut the line of communication, Montcalm's whole defensive policy fell to the ground and he had to risk a battle.

Montcalm lacked one invaluable ability which some fortunate generals have possessed. He had no flair for penetrating his adversary's intentions. To him, as apparently to everybody else in authority on the French side, the landing at the Foulon was a thunderbolt out of a clear sky. All the evidence indicates that to the last he thought Wolfe's most probable course was a blow at Beauport, with a landing far up the river as second choice. And it is not to Montcalm's credit as a commander that he failed to observe the possibilities of the Foulon track — which offered a perfectly good means of moving cannon up from the river to the heights west of the city.

Montcalm, as has often been recognized, committed a serious tactical error on the battlefield. He certainly had to attack, to clear his line of communication; but he did not have to attack at ten o'clock in the morning instead of a few hours later. As I already mentioned, he feared that the British would soon establish themselves too firmly to be evicted; and with what seems to have been characteristic impulsiveness he launched

his assault without waiting for Colonel de Bougainville, who was only a few miles away and had the best troops in the French army with him. He thus threw away his best hope of victory.

Like Wolfe, Montcalm had defects of temperament which affected his military usefulness. His feud with Vaudreuil is well known. The pompous Governor undoubtedly gave him provocation, but Montcalm's own journal provides evidence that the general had a rather low boiling-point. I suspect that the same nervous impatience that drove him on to the premature attack on 13 September made it difficult for him to bear with Vaudreuil. The discord between the two men was a misfortune for New France, though its military effects have probably been somewhat exaggerated. The French Court ought to have removed one or the other. A proposal was in fact made at the end of 1758 to relieve Montcalm, replacing him with the Chevalier de Lévis; but the King seems to have decided against it. The decision was probably unfortunate, for it was important to restore concord to the colony, and Lévis, certainly a soldier of ability, would doubtless have conducted the defence as well as Montcalm did.

V

The more one considers the campaign of 1759, the more the conclusion emerges that the decisive factor in the result was not superior British generalship but the superior efficiency of the British forces. The professionals beat the amateurs, as they usually do. British sea power was of course the basic strategic determinant, but in addition the presence of a large and efficient British fleet before Quebec had enormous influence on the tactical operations. As for the military forces, the British superiority in quality, evident throughout the campaign, appears with special clarity in the final crisis of 13 September. The British tactical plan for the approach and landing at the Anse au Foulon, excellent in itself, was executed by the Navy with a skill which it requires some study of combined operations to appreciate. The same boats landed three flights of troops in rapid succession. The one hitch — the fact that the tide carried the first flight some distance below the intended point of landing — was offset by the resourcefulness of Lt.-Col. William Howe, who led his light infantrymen straight up the cliff before them, an athletic feat which was I believe no part of Wolfe's plan.

By comparison, the picture on the French side is one of extreme disorganization, beginning with the extraordinary fact that after ordering a movement of provision boats, and warning their posts to pass them through, the French authorities cancelled the movement without informing the posts. Everything else was of a piece with this. Control, communication and vigilance were all lacking, with the result that at dawn, when the British army was pouring ashore at the Foulon, the French army,

having manned its Beauport entrenchments much of the night, was retiring to its tents. In the actual encounter on the Plains, the result was clearly due to superior British discipline and training. The weak French regular battalions had been heavily diluted with militia, and the attackers were falling into hopeless disorder long before the British fired a musket-shot at them.³⁴ Wolfe had assumed with the utmost confidence that his highly-trained professional soldiers would have an easy victory if the French could only be brought to action in the open; and the result justified his calculations.

VI

The Battle of the Plains was only half a victory: partly because of the plan Wolfe had adopted, which gave the French the chance of retiring behind the St. Charles River and getting away to the west by way of Charlesbourg and the Lorettes, and partly perhaps because of Wolfe's own death, which deprived the British of effective higher leading at a moment when a skilful and energetic tactician might possibly have made the triumph really complete. The result was that the British got Quebec, but the French field army remained in being, and another year's campaign was needed to destroy that army and end the war in Canada. About the 1760 campaign I propose to say only a few words.

The French position this year was hopeless, first because the Court of Versailles sent inadequate assistance, and secondly because the assistance it sent never reached its destination — since in 1760 the British fleet got into the St. Lawrence first. But the campaign conducted by Lévis and Vaudreuil in the hope of large-scale help from France was both a valiant adventure and a skilful strategic performance. The popular French-Canadian legend of this campaign and in particular of its chief incident, the defeat of Murray in the so-called Battle of Ste. Foy on 28 April, seems to be that it was an improvised effort carried out with inadequate means largely by the Canadian militia. The material means available to Lévis were certainly pitifully inadequate, but it would be an error to assume that at Ste. Foy the British regulars were defeated by the Canadian amateurs. In this battle, as in the one in the previous September, the professional soldier was the essential figure. Montcalm in the Battle of the Plains had five battalions of the *troupes de terre*. Lévis at Ste. Foy had eight (less detachments spared for Lake Champlain), three of them having been virtually unengaged in 1759. The total force collected for his expedition was just under 7,000 men, including 3,889 regulars, while Murray reports that he himself had 3,866 officers and men in the battle.³⁵ Thus Lévis had almost exactly the same number of

³⁴ See, e.g., Malartic to Bourlamaque, 28 Sept. 1759, Bourlamaque Papers, *Variarum*, P.A.C.

³⁵ Lévis' Journal, April 1760, *Collection des Manuscrits*, I; strength return, *ibid.*, 257. Murray's dispatch to Pitt, 25 May 1760, C.O. 5/64.

regulars as Murray, plus his 3,000 militiamen as a bonus. Taking a "calculated risk" with respect to other fronts, he had effected a powerful concentration before Quebec.

Murray has been criticized for abandoning his excellent defensive position outside the walls of Quebec in order to attack Lévis. The criticism is probably just, for in the presence of so superior an enemy a defensive battle was Murray's best chance for a victory. Nevertheless, he came closer to winning than has been generally recognized. He explains that, reconnoitring the French, he "preceiv'd their Van busy throwing up Redoubts while their Main body was yet on their march"; and he attempted "to attack them before they could have time to Form".³⁶ Snow and mud hindered the movement of his guns. Yet it was a very near thing — so near that Lévis momentarily lost his nerve, decided that his troops were not going to succeed in forming and ordered the abandonment of a vital position on the left flank. The day was saved for the French by Lt.-Col. Dalquier, commanding the La Sarre brigade in this sector. Estimating the situation more accurately than Lévis, he took it on himself to countermand the general's order and led his men to the attack. Subsequently Lévis thanked him for this timely disobedience.³⁷ Since both the opposing commanders made serious miscalculations, the level of generalship at Ste. Foy cannot be said to have been particularly high.

* * *

What can one say in conclusion? Reviewing these great events of two centuries ago, and what has been written about them, it is hard to take much pride in our historiography. To a large extent, the chief actors have been interpreted in the light of prejudice and sentimentality. They have been made romantic heroes or villains rather than human beings to be studied on the basis of the records. Historians have approached the men and events of the time with their minds already made up, and have looked to the documents for evidence to bolster up their preconceptions rather than for facts to enable them to arrive at an objective appraisal. In his presidential address last year Dr. Lamb quietly made the devastating remark, "Real accuracy in Canadian historical writing is rare." Many of the histories of the conquest of Canada illustrate this observation only too forcibly. Much remains to be done in Canadian history. Unfortunately also, it appears that a good deal is going to have to be done over again.

³⁶ Murray's Journal, 28 Apr. 1760 (photostat, P.A.C.).

³⁷ Lt.-Gen. le Comte de Maurès de Malartic, *Journal des Campagnes au Canada de 1755 à 1760* (Paris, 1890), 317. Cf. Bourlamaque to Bougainville, 3 May 1760, de Kerallain, *La Jeunesse de Bougainville*, 167.