

THE FALL OF QUEBEC

Captain John Knox

1759

...Great preparations are making, throughout the fleet and army, to surprise the enemy, and compel them to decide the fate of Quebec by a battle: all the long-boats below the town are to be filled with seamen, marines, and such detachments as can be spared from Points Levi and Orleans, in order to make a feint off Beauport and the Point de Lest, and endeavour to engross the attention of the Sieur de Montcalm, while the army are to force a descent on this side of the town. The Officer of our regiment, who commanded the escort yesterday on the reconnoitring party, being asked, in the General's hearing, after the health of one of the gentlemen who was reported to be ill, replied, - 'he was in a very low indifferent state;' which the other lamented, saying, 'he has but a uny, delicate constitution.' - This struck his Excellency, it being his own case, who interrupted, 'Don't tell me of constitution, that Officer has good spirits, and good spirits will carry a man through every thing.'...

The Brigadiers Monckton and Murray, with the troops under their command, reembarked this day, from the parish of St. Nicholas, and returned to their ships. This evening all the boats of the fleet below the town were filled with marines, &c. covered by frigates and sloops of war, worked up, and lay half-channel over, opposite to Beauport, as if intending to land in the morning, and thereby fix the enemy's whole attention to that quarter; the ships attending them are to edge over, at break of day, as near as possible without grounding, and cannonade the French intrenchments. At nine o'clock this night, our army in high spirits, the first division of them put into the flat-bottomed boats, and, in a short time after, the whole squadron moved up the river with the tide of flood, and, about an hour before day-light next morning, we fell down with the ebb. Weather favourable, a star-light night.

Thursday, 13 September 1759

Before day-break this morning we made a descent upon the north shore, about half a quarter of a mile to the eastward of Sillery; and the light troops were fortunately, by the rapidity of the current, carried lower down, between us and Cape Diamond; we had, in this debarkation, thirty flat-bottomed boats, containing about sixteen hundred men. This was a great surprise on the enemy, who, from the natural strength of the place, did not suspect, and consequently were not prepared against, so bold an attempt. The chain of centries, which they had posted along the summit of the heights, galled us a little, and picked off several men, and some Officers, before our light infantry got up to dislodge them. This grand enterprise was conducted, and executed with great good order and discretion; as fast as we landed, the boats put off for reinforcements, and the troops formed with much regularity: the General, with Brigadiers Monckton and Murray, were a-shore with the first division. We lost no time here, but clambered up one of the steepest precipices that can be conceived, being almost a perpendicular, and of an incredible height. As soon as we gained the summit, all was quiet, and not a shot was heard, owing to the excellent conduct of the light infantry under Colonel Howe; it was by this time clear day-light. Here we formed again, the river and the south country in our rear, our right extending to the town, our left to Sillery, and halted a few minutes. The General then detached the light troops to our left to route the enemy from their battery, and to disable their guns, except they could be rendered serviceable to the party who were to remain there; and this service was soon performed. We then faced to the right, and marched towards the town by files, till we came to the plains of Abraham; an even piece of ground which Mr. Wolfe had made choice of, while we stood forming upon the hill. Weather showery: about six o'clock the enemy first made their appearance upon the heights, between us and the town; whereupon we halted, and wheeled to the right, thereby forming the line of battle.... The enemy had now likewise formed the line of battle, and got some cannon to play on us, with round and canister-shot; but what galled us most was a body of Indians and other marksmen they had concealed in the corn opposite to the front of our right wing, and a coppice that stood opposite to our center, inclining towards our left; but the Colonel Hale, by Brigadier Monckton's orders, advanced some platoons, alternately, from the forty-seventh regiment, which, after a few rounds, obliged these sculkers to retire: we were now ordered to lie down, and remained some time in this position. About eight o'clock we had two pieces of short brass six-pounders playing on the enemy, which threw them into some confusion, and obliged them to alter their disposition, and Montcalm formed them into three large columns; about nine the two armies moved a little nearer each other. The light cavalry made a faint attempt upon our parties at the battery of Sillery, but were soon beat off, and Monsieur de Bougainville, with his troops from Cape Rouge, came down to attack the flank of our second line, hoping to penetrate there; but, by a masterly disposition of Brigadier Townshend, they were forced to desist, and the third battalion of Royal Americans was then detached to the first ground we had formed on after we

gained the heights, to preserve the communication with the beach and our boats. About ten o'clock the enemy began to advance briskly in three columns, with loud shouts and recovered arms, two of them inclining to the left of our army, and the third towards our right, firing obliquely at the two extremities of our line, from the distance of one hundred and thirty-- until they came within forty yards; which our troops withstood with the greatest intrepidity and firmness, still reserving their fire, and paying the strictest obedience to their Officers: this uncommon steadiness, together with the havoc which the grape-shot from our field-pieces made among them, threw them into some disorder, and was most critically maintained by a well-timed, regular, and heavy discharge of our small arms, such as they could no longer oppose; hereupon they gave way, and fled with precipitation, so that, by the time the cloud of smoke was vanishd, our men were again loaded, and, profiting by the advantage we had over them, pursued them almost to the gates of the town, and the bridge over the little river, redoubling our fire with great eagerness, making many Officers and men prisoners. The weather cleared up, with a comfortably warm sun-shine: the Highlanders chaced them vigorously towards Charles's river, and the fifty-eighth to the suburb close to John's gate, until they were checked by the cannon from the two hulks; at the same time a gun, which the town had brought to bear upon us with grape-shot, galled the progress of the regiments to the right, who were likewise pursuing with equal ardour, while Colonel Hunt Walsh, by a very judicious movement, wheeled the battalions of Bragg and Kennedy to the left, and flanked the coppice where a body of the enemy made a stand, as if willing to renew the action; but a few platoons from these corps completed our victory. Then it was that Brigadier Townshend came up, called off the pursuers, ordered the whole line to dress, and recover their former ground. Our joy at this success is inexpressibly damped by the loss we sustained of one of the greatest heroes which this or any other age can boast of, - General JAMES WOLFE, who received his mortal wound, as he was exerting himself at the head of the grenadiers of Louisbourg....

...The Sieur de Montcalm died late last night; when his wound was dressed, and he settled in bed, the Surgeons who attended him were desired to acquaint him ingenuously with their sentiments of him, and, being answered that his wound was mortal, he calmly replied, 'he was glad of it.' his Excellency then demanded,--'whether he could survive it long, and how long?' He was told, 'about a dozen hours, perhaps more, peradventure less.' 'So much the better,' rejoined this eminent warrior; 'I am happy I shall not live to see the surrender of Quebec.'...

After our late worthy General, of renowned memory, was carried off wounded, to the rear of the front line, he desired those who were about him to lay him down; being asked if he would have a Surgeon? he replied, 'it is needless; it is all over with me.' One of them then cried out, 'they run, see how they run.' 'Who runs!' demanded our hero, with great earnestness, like a person roused from sleep? The Officer answered, 'The enemy, Sir; Egad they give way every-where.' Thereupon the General rejoined. 'Go one of you, my lads, to Colonel Burton; tell him to march Webb's regiment with all speed down to Charles's river, to cut off the retreat of the fugitives from the bridge.' Then, turning on his side, he added, 'Now, God be praised, I will die in peace:' and thus expired.

Captain John Knox. An Historical Journal of the Campaigns in North-America. (London: 1769), pp. 65-79.