

GENERAL WOLFE IN GASPE

When Louisbourg surrendered in July, 1758, it was only after stubborn resistance and it had become too late in the season to carry out the plans for the intended advance of the fleet upon Quebec. General Amherst had received a hurry call to New York where Montcalm had beaten off the colonials and regulars at Ticonderoga. With him they took 6,000 troops, so that the army at Louisbourg was considerably weakened, but to keep the ships employed and prevent their too early return to England, he despatched orders to the remaining troops, and Admiral Boscawen to the squadron, to spend the rest of the season in cruising along the French coast as far as Gaspé, in order to despoil the fishing villages. Colonel Wolfe, as he was at Louisbourg, Brigadier-General Wolfe as designated in these orders, was to command the troops with Sir Charles Hardy as Admiral of the fleet.

It was not a dignified undertaking. But it had taken England so long to set her fleet free from European waters to pursue the drama in America that some such supplementary byplay was necessary to keep the ships from getting back to the other side while the critical moment in the great maritime war was impending. The plan would serve in a measure too, to forestall any purpose of the French to strengthen the portals of the St. Lawrence river.

"Sir Charles Hardy and I." Wolfe wrote to his father, "are preparing to rob the fishermen of their nets and burn their huts. When that great exploit is at an end I return to Louisbourg and thence to England".

On this mission seven ships with three regiments, the 15th 28th and 58th, ~~set~~ sail August 28th and arrived off Gaspé on September 4th. Bougainville says the soldiers numbered 1,500 men and that the equipment included 12 houses "completely fashioned" which would seem to indicate the intention of the general to winter a part of his army in Gaspé, his objective point, whatever his own purpose of return may have been. We have no record of any stops being made on the way, or of any settlements disturbed.

On arriving in Gaspé Bay the gun ships of the squadron anchored off Sandy Beach at the historic spot where in all probability Cartier made his landing in 1534 and where Edward VIII as Prince of Wales, was run aground in 1861, his first contact with American soil. The transports of the fleet went further up the bay within the cove of the Peneuil or Peninsula. The French settlement in the Bay was then, so far as we can ascertain, almost wholly on the broad triangular sandpits of Peninsula point. Quite the only intimation we can find in regard to it is from Capt. Hervey Smyth's picture drawn while he was here as aide-de-camp to Wolfe engraved and printed in 1760. Of all the seven published pictures made by Smyth of views in Canada, this one of Gaspé Bay is much the worst in drawing, for the artist has taken enormous liberties with nature in bringing into his picture both sides of the bay, compressing the head of the bay thus from a width of three or four miles to a space so narrow one might almost jump across. The point of view is close outside the Peninsula, and this brings the sand bar into the foreground with strong effect and displays,

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with very great precision as it proves, the location of the building of the settlement. The principal one of these is a two storied, steep-gabled structure of considerable dignity for such a settlement, the main part having a large double door and a little shed lean-to. Each wing has a chimney, and altogether the building is in strong contrast to the four cabins or settlers houses which lie in a row behind it at the edge of the spruce woods. Over on the other side of the bay, on the shore of what is to-day called Lobster Cove, stands a single cabin, enough to indicate that settlement had already extended to both shores. But the main house was evidently the residence of the intendant, Reval, who, Bougainville says, had died three days before Wolfe's arrival. It was in this house that the General took up his habitation while he remained at Gaspé. Bougainville speaks of the building as a storehouse from which the English obtained a large quantity of dried cod. It was all of these, beyond doubt; an official residence and seat of the French customs, a storehouse and the summer cottage of General Wolfe during his vacation of 1758. The date of its destruction is not known. It is probable that the tender-hearted Wolfe left it standing after it had sheltered him. Its relics evince a confusion of French and English belongings and its debris which have been, in a way, casually known, to some of the residents during all the years past, are spoken of variantly as from the "French houses" the "old French custom house" or "General Wolfe's house."

Upon arrival General Wolfe demanded the surrender of the place but, as just said, found the intendant already dead and the settlers gone up the rivers. Only two or three responded to the order. The "surrender" of Gaspé to the English dates from September 5th 1758. One wonders, in searching for contemporary accounts of the doings of the army and fleet in the bay, how the men departed

themselves during their month's stay here. The twelve houses "completely fashioned" probably for a winter's stay, were not taken ashore. There were above a thousand soldiers and the crews of seven ships to be kept busy at something. Our wonder may be qualified as we think of the waters of the bay, its rivers and brooks teeming with trout, salmon and tuna, cod, mackerel and ~~and~~ herring; the wooded hills with moose, caribou, elk and bear and much lesser game. The general who esteemed lightly the dignity of his mission had opportunity to solace his pride and enjoy the fruits of his "conquest." Brigadier General Murray afterward to be whipped on the Plains of Abraham by General Levis and even so to become Canada's first English governor was in the meantime despatched to the mouth of the Miramichi river with orders to destroy the French settlement there and, according to his own report, he did this effectively, though Bougainville, writing with contemporary knowledge, says he didn't, that the settlers blocked his passage to the river and that the English left without doing any damage. Miramichi and its "battle" are the subject of one of Smyth's sketches and this shows the church and religious establishment standing on the south bank of the river; the present site, Dr. Ganong says, of the village of Burnt Church, which he believes embodies in its name the assault made by Murray's soldiers, A part of the fleet was also sent by Wolfe to destroy the religious establishment at Mont-Louis on the south shore of the St. Lawrence.

In the early days of October General Wolfe withdrew his forces and returned to Louisbourg. He and his men had had "a much needed rest" in Gaspé and, in modern parlance, that means, "the time of their lives."