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Making War Part III: Benedict Arnold and the Invasion of Canada

Lauren Gray 00:07

So obvious question to get us started with is this season is about the American Revolution, so why are we talking with someone from the Canadian National Battlefields Commission?

Luc Nicole-Labrie 00:17

Could be weird, right, because in the end, if we focus on most of the War of Independence the Canadian, I would say, theater of war was probably not the most important, but in the first couple of months of the War of Independence, actually it was a major, major point of interest, I would say, for the Continental Army. So, in the first couple of months, the first major operation, actually, of the war, apart from maybe the siege of Boston, but the first actual military operation was the invasion, the planned invasion of what was then known as the Province of Quebec.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 00:50

[Intro music fades in] This is Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai.

Lauren Gray 01:01

This is Lauren Gray.

Cassie Cloutier 01:03

This is Cassie Cloutier.

Lauren Gray 01:05

And this is The Object of History, the podcast of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 01:10

Since 1791, the MHS has sought to collect, preserve, and communicate the building blocks of history.

Lauren Gray 01:17

Each episode examines an object, document, or set of items from the Society's millions of manuscript pieces and artifacts.

Cassie Cloutier 01:25

We take you on a behind the scenes tour of our stacks to explore the incredible stories held within our collections.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 01:32

We are dedicating the entirety of season five of The Object of History to topics related to the American Revolution. This is the final episode of a three-part look at the geography, characters, and events that shaped the first years of the American Revolution. In looking at the invasion of Canada, which took place between late 1775 and mid-1776 we are joined by Luc Nicole-Labrie, the Senior History Advisor at the National Battlefields Commission in Quebec. Back at the MHS, we also examine a few items from the collections that shed light on the difficulties of this endeavor to make Quebec the 14th colony. Let us now return to our conversation with Luc Nicole-Labrie, the Senior History Advisor at the National Battlefields Commission about the origins of this invasion.

Lauren Gray 02:23

First, I guess the Americans are phrasing it as kind of a more diplomatic, let's bring in Canada as the 14th colony, but really what it was is becomes an invasion. So, can you tell us why did the Americans want to invade Canada?

Luc Nicole-Labrie 02:37

There are a few forces at play here, right? I would say, as you're implying, there is the human aspect of it, like the individual, because there were individuals who were very much involved and very much wanted this to go down, and there's also the whole, I would say, diplomatic, a little bit more macro, like zoomed out point of view from all this. So, this is, we are basically late spring, early summer 1775. The second Continental Congress will basically create the Continental Army at that point. So, this is in June 1775. They will appoint General George Washington as the Commander in Chief of that army, and while they have a mission at that time is to kind of secure the coming weeks and coming months, what

are going to be the most pressing matters. So, right, Boston at that point is starting to boil over, and we know that the siege of the city is coming, and everything that's going to happen in the winter, 1775 1776 but at the same time, 13 colonies seem to be on somewhat, I would say, the same page, right, at that moment, not everyone is super high on taking arms and going out fighting, but they know that this situation is basically unacceptable, untenable for them. So, they will realize that at this point, while the province of Quebec is still a British colony in North America, but while we do not have control over them. So we could reach out and try to have them join us, right, but keep in mind that at this moment they don't have any form of assembly, and the British governors and the British authorities are still, well, very much British, right, because they have not been there for the longest time. The Governor General is Guy Carleton, who has been there in since 1766 so not even 10 years. He is a veteran of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham. So, he has been in Quebec for a couple of years now, very much in line with what the British Crown wants at that moment. So, they don't have like super high expectations that the British authorities will join their side, but they say, okay, so strategically speaking, if war escalates and we end up in a full-fledged war with the British Crown, well, this is going to be a thorn in our side, right? The province of Quebec is going to be a major problem, because from there you could get reinforcements. It's, you can reach Montreal very easily with ships if you reach Montreal, you reach the Great Lakes, Lake Champlain. You can reach Ticonderoga. You can reach very far inside, like inland. It's going to be a major, major threat for us. So, we need to deal with this first threat very quickly, right? And also, well, if we deal with that, maybe - who knows - maybe the population will join us. So, it could be nice. So, the first idea is to deal with that problem, right? So, how do you deal with that problem? Well, probably the best wish, the best-case scenario is, well, everyone revolts in the province of Quebec, and now it's the 14th colony, and they join us, and it's super easy, and their military force, however small, joins us. The militia, so the French Canadian, the Canadian population, which were so very effective during the French and Indian War, take up arms and then join for the fight in liberty, and everyone's so happy about that. That's probably the first idea. The second idea is basically, well, if this does not work, at least we will secure this, we take over, you know, control of the province of Quebec, and make sure that the British cannot use the province of Quebec as a basically landing area to send more troops and send reinforcements, and basically we make their life very hard, so that's kind of the second possible second option. So far invading or basically taking over the province of Quebec makes sense in these two scenarios, and the third scenario is basically if we capture the province of Quebec and the war goes on, and we've, and we get into a war with the British Crown, and the war goes on well,

basically, at the end, it's in the last ditch effort, it's going to be like our last bargaining chip. So that we can say during the negotiations where any sort of peace treaty, which was very much the case, still is, but was very much the case in the 18th century. Well, we can say, 'Hey, British Crown, let's give you back, you know, the province of Quebec, and give us back more rights, our independence, or whatever needs be,' right? So that's kind of like the mindset for these three possible scenarios. So, you have the authorities of the 13 colonies were very much aware of that. Washington also is, but also you have to keep in mind that there are some individuals who in the spring of 1775 had some clashes and went very far up all the way up to Montreal. I'm thinking about men like Ethan Allen or Benedict Arnold, who actually fought and captured Ticonderoga in the spring of 1775. They went to Montreal, and they also realized that, well, time is right, like the time is now to capture the province of Quebec, not only for these great grand strategic reasons that I talked about, but keep in mind the city of Montreal, which is basically the turning, yeah, Quebec is the seat of power, but Montreal is truly the place where you want to go if you want to navigate and travel in North America, right, but at Montreal is very, very poorly guarded. There is not a main British garrison there, even in Quebec, there's no like large British professional regular troops there, so and they are easy to capture. So, if we act now, all these advantages that we talk about, we can actually secure that. So, these are the kind of situations. So, on the one point that, yeah, the high commanders have this grand strategic plan, but there are individuals who also will kind of push for a quick action to try to capture the province of Quebec in the first months as the first military major military action of the continental army.

Lauren Gray 08:33

What happens to the poor fellows who are on this expedition?

Luc Nicole-Labrie 08:36

A number of things, right. So basically, you can point it back or trace it back to poor planning. I would say is what's going to be the main, the main culprit here. When I say poor planning, some part of it is lands on the shoulders of Benedict Arnold himself, probably wanted to be a little bit too enthusiastic about his endeavor there, but he also has a number of, I would say, a number of issues during the planning phase that were out of his hand, right? Among chiefly among them, the first maps he was given were inaccurate. The man who was supposed to give him the maps to basically map his whole expedition gave him inaccurate map on purpose, because he was, he was a loyalist. So, he was on the

side of the British ground, trying to put problems up for Arnold. Could be good for the end of the war on his view. Arnold also commissioned basically a number of people all the way from the on the coast of Massachusetts, but all the way up to Fort Halifax and Fort Western to make him bateaus. So basically, flat bottom boats to be able to sail up the Kennebec and Chaudière River. The problem is they were hastily made, and many of these ships were poorly made, and also, I think that the whole expedition, you have shoddy craftsmanship on ships. You will have many of these ships and bateaus be remade. So, he basically loses time quite a lot at the beginning. You have to understand that when he finally leaves, right, he leaves Cambridge, Massachusetts, on September the 11th. He makes it to Newburyport on land, and from Newburyport he leaves on September 19th. So that's a big week, eight days after he left. We are late September. Now you might say, 'Oh, late September in Massachusetts, that's gorgeous.' You're right, late September in northern Maine is another story, right? So, and this is basically the trail he'll have to go up to. So, they start the expedition, so it takes much more time than they wanted, and also keep in mind that he planned for a trip that was about 180 miles. It will end up being a trip over 350 miles. He planned for two weeks long trip. It ends up being nearly two months long. So, and this is all late, you know, fall, so basically starts in mid-September, but just to give you an idea, he will reach Norridgewock Falls, so this is, would say, middle of the state of Maine today, one of the last settlements, he will reach it and leave that place late September. You're in late September, just go out camping early October in northern Maine, you will find that if it starts to rain, it's not that fun. Wind goes up, it's very chilly, very cold, so it starts to rain. Also, there were many carryings portage that they needed to go, including a place called the Great Carrying Place, right today, that you could still, if you like hiking, you can still go there. It's lovely. It has over 1000 feet of elevation. It's a very lovely walk, but keep in mind you have to carry on your back, you know, a bateau. You have to carry equipment, you have to carry supplies, you have to carry weapons. So, this became quite quickly a trek to hell, quite literally. Things were not looking good for the soldiers. They had to face, as I was saying, rainfall, snowfall. They had a lack of supplies quite early in the trip. I would say around late October. Keep in mind they have been gone for a month and a half at this point. They are completely out of supplies. They had flash floods on both the Kennebec, the Dead River, and the Chaudière River throughout the trip, which basically took away their ships, took away some extra supplies. They had around late October a group of out of the 1200 roughly volunteers who joined, they had a group of 450 under Colonel Roger Enos, who decided to walk their way back, and they noped out of the trip, basically over a month in. So, because it was, it was too harsh, Enos was tried as a traitor and as basically someone who had no honor, but he was not

found guilty in the end because the conditions were too hard, and he probably saved his man's life, right. So, it's a plague, a cursed expedition, which then again they will arrive around Quebec in, I would say, on the night of November the 13th, and I can guarantee you that if you do not have winter clothes on, do not come to Quebec in November. This is what they did after two months of trekking in the wood after nearly a month without supplies of any sorts, they were forced to eat the leather of their shoes. They were forced to eat their soaps. I will spare you the details of what they did to one of the officer's dog who had survived with them for a month and a half, but you can't imagine. So this is really a trek from hell. And in the end, they arrive in Quebec. So, mission accomplished, right? They arrive in Quebec, so that's November 14th. They cross the St. Lawrence River, they scale the cliff, just like General Wolfe did in 1759. They arrive on the Plains of Abraham, and this ragtag group of volunteers with basically no clothes on their bodies, very weak, not looking good at all, will ask for the surrender of the last walled city north of Mexico today with big fortifications that had been prepared since summer to face an invasion with militia, with some soldiers, with some veterans, with cannons, and artillery. Well, then Benedict Arnold's mission or expedition was not a quick, simple task, and they, well, obviously on November the 14th, they did not get the surrender of the city of Quebec.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 14:41

Back at the MHS, we examine some items from our collections related to this episode in the early part of the American Revolution.

Lauren Gray 14:52

We have many items related to the siege overall, to the Arnold expedition in Maine, and for the events in Canada just generally in 1775 and 1776 and many of the sources we do have are secondary sources, meaning they are published after the fact, and they're kind of from a wide range of historical time periods. There has always been interest in the Quebec or Arnold expedition, and I think especially because it was led by Benedict Arnold, and Arnold has had such a lasting memory in American history as the traitor who turned against the Continental Army, turned against George Washington, turned against his country, and turned against the cause, but I really think we see Arnold in 1775 at his best, and as we'll see in one of the documents, the letter from General Gates, he really didn't get the respect or recognition that he deserved for his role in these events. He was really a mover and shaker in this time, and I think this is a period where personalities are driving the action behind some of these events.

We have large, bombastic, driven, ambitious people like Benedict Arnold, like George Washington, like John Adams, and all of them are coming to the fore during this period, and we see that especially in the history of the Quebec expedition. So I say this as a librarian here at the MHS, but if anyone is interested in coming in to learn more about the materials that we hold related to the siege of Quebec, related to the invasion of Canada, we would invite them first to go online to see a special subject guide that we hold for it, which includes an array of primary and secondary sources. It includes maps, publications, diaries, letters written by and about the people who were involved in these events, and it really demonstrates the larger historical themes and narratives. And this is an incredibly well-documented moment in history. There are at least 20 diaries in existence about the expedition, the siege. Unfortunately, we don't hold them all at the MHS, sadly, but we do hold a couple of diaries that talk about the events of the expedition up through the Maine wilderness and, of course, outside the gates of Quebec, and that's where we get a lot of this information about the events. The diaries are occasionally duplicative, of course, soldiers copied off of one another, helped each other remember, people copied off of each other, just generally in that period. It was very well-known practice, and I suppose some of the diaries are a little contradictory in terms of dates or times, memories, of course, capricious, but some of these diaries, they really focus on the big picture events. Others are more interested in this kind of mundane minutia. The weather is always a big topic. It would have been absolutely miserable to live through this moment in history, and these events. It was winter, and it was up north, and that is just terrible. And some of these diaries were written after the fact as memoirs. People are looking back on the events that they had participated in, especially following the war. Diaries are subjective sources. When you put them together, though, they really reveal the range of experience, and it humanizes these events in ways that official documents and maps just otherwise do not do. We hear from the soldiers about what they are thinking, what they're experiencing, and it's just a fascinating glimpse into an often-overlooked part of the American Revolution.

Cassie Cloutier 18:25

We have one of those diaries here in front of us. Can you tell us a bit more about who wrote this diary and what their experience was?

Lauren Gray 18:34

The diary we're looking at right now was written by William Dorr. He was a soldier from Roxbury, Massachusetts, and it's a very small diary. Just putting my hand up next to it just gives us a sense of, you know, its scale, and it goes from about the tip of my middle finger down to the bottom of my palm, and, you know, the width is all of my fingers pressed together, so we get a sense of, you know, this is something that he probably would have had on him while he was living through these events. They probably fit into a pocket. It's very lightweight, and it's in really rough shape. And this diary has been conserved at some point in its history, and the first couple of pages, at least, are very rough. We're missing large chunks of the first page. The letters are faded. They are waterlogged, you know. This diary has had water damage at some point, which is, you know, not surprising, considering the history of the expedition, and it could have happened when this was in Dorr's possession, as he's writing it, and this looks like it was written over the course of the event, so when he leaves Cambridge, Massachusetts to embark on the expedition through Maine, and then it wraps up as he is a prisoner in the spring of 1776. We know Dorr did survive the war. We actually have an unpublished thesis in our collection that talks a little bit more about the diary and Dorr's history and experiences, but what I think is really important to note in it is that the pieces of the diary that have survived, at least, and it's definitely missing some pages, Dorr doesn't question the commands of his superior officers, and we could speculate on the reasons why, but if you're being drugged through this wilderness and forced to besiege a northern city in war during a smallpox epidemic, you have to wonder why Dorr is not like, 'Hey, is this is this something we really should be doing? Should we really be here?' but we don't see him questioning that, and that's really interesting, and he also corroborates another story that has been passed down in other diaries, where he is talking about as they're moving down the Chaudière River into Quebec. They've been on the expedition for several weeks. They're on the road. They're on the trail. Food supplies are running out, and he corroborates that they did indeed eat one of the officers' dogs. We actually know from other accounts that they ate a couple of dogs on the expedition, but this just again humanizes it because they were quite literally starving, and they had to do what they had to do to survive, and I think we can all appreciate that we have to make difficult choices when it's about our own survival.

Cassie Cloutier 20:58

"November the first. This morning started very early and hungry and little satisfied with our rest. Traveled all day long very briskly. At night and camped in a miserable situation. Here we killed a dog

and we made a very great feast without either bread or salt. We having been four or five days without any provision, and we went to sleep that night, a little better satisfied. Our distress was so great that dollars was offered for bits of bread as big as the palm of one hand." Just looking at the tattered condition of these pages, it's so surprising that not only this diary survives, but 20 diaries from this expedition survive. That's really incredible.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 21:43

Luc then told us more about what happened once American forces reached the outskirts of Quebec.

Lauren Gray 21:52

So that leads us to December 31st, 1775, a very momentous day, at least for them. What happened?

Luc Nicole-Labrie 21:59

Yeah, you're absolutely right. During this month, right, keep in mind the Continental Army did not stay on their hands, and they tried to do some stuff. They tried to besiege properly, besiege a city like Quebec, but you could not dig trenches and get some artillery. They will make even like an ice battery. This is like very interesting and funny when you, when we look at it now, but they basically take snow and ice and try to create a fortification or a small battery of cannons, like you would do with earthworks, right, but it's not as sturdy. It's not as good. While this is happening, they will realize that there are buildings close to the city, so maybe they could use the building to try to besiege the city, but the British will try to destroy the buildings of their own inhabitants. At that point, the suburbs, so outside the city walls, had been evacuated. The population was inside the city walls. There was practically no one outside. It was very.. there were a few people, most of time people were very, very poor. Some merchant that left some slaves in their building to kind of protect their buildings, because it's still Quebec, so even if you had French Canadian merchant or British merchants, many of them had slaves at that time. So it's not fun for the people out there, trust me, but the Continental Army is still kind of in a hotspot, but yes, there is probably an opportunity mid-December to try to attack. The blizzard is not strong enough, and around the 25, 26 could be an opportunity. Then again, the blizzard dies down, but on December 31st as much as they said, as you were saying, yes, now the blizzard looks good. The operation is simple at that point. Well, simple enough. The city of Quebec is built basically on a promontory, so you have a high part of the city and a low part of the city. On basically three sides, it's river. You have on the south side

of the city you have the St. Lawrence River. On the north side you have St. Charles River. So you have a small lane of land, basically a small patch of land on either side of these rivers, but most of the city is walled and on top of the promontory. So, the idea for both Arnold and Montgomery was this: starting on the Plains of Abraham, you are west of the city, just outside, you will have two armies, basically split up. One goes to the north; one goes to the south. Both go on the lower part of town and try to follow the rivers. They will meet at Place Royale, which is the public place, marketplace, right at the heart of old Quebec, and from there it's one of the least guarded gates around the city walls. You could scale up La Côte de la Montagne, so the Mountain Hill, as it's called, basically in Quebec, and make your way back to the governor's palace and subdue the governor and subdue the authorities and basically capture the city. That's the idea. So, December 31st, it's about 4:30, 5:00 in the morning. You will have decoys, decoy attacks right on the planes. You have a group, some group of volunteers, and for that, they will use there are two extra continental regiments that have been formed. Well, one is formed, one is not formed yet, but basically of volunteers from Canadian, volunteers, so people from the province of Quebec, who decided to join the Continental Army. First of these regiment, the first Canadian regiment, you have about 200 men, and the second it's 100-150 men, and basically, they will be two decoys. One is going to be sent out to storm St. John's Gate, so La Porte Saint Jean, which is one of the main gates outside the city walls. Another one is to storm a position, which is probably the highest position, so south of the promontory from the Plains of Abraham. This is where the British had small buildings, so just on the city wall. So, if you have two groups, that's about 300 men, were supposed to storm these gates. As soon as they storm the gate, and we start to hear bells ringing from the city, basically sounding the alarm. So to get you know the defenders on the walls facing the Plains of Abraham, flares are to be shot in the sky. When the flares are shot, now Arnold can go north and Montgomery can go south. So, they can scale down the cliff and make their way around the city. That's the plan, right? Let's start with Montgomery's side of thing. So, it's 5:00, 5:30, the flares go up. Montgomery has a few 100 men with him. He scales down the Plains of Abraham. He goes on the south side of the city, so on the side of the St. Lawrence River. Basically, there's a small path that he can follow. It's a winding path. It's a full-on blizzard, though. It's not a great place to be, honestly. You're right by the river. It's very windy. It's a full-on blizzard, and he will reach the area of the city where you have a number of wharves. So, basically, ship buildings and buildings where storage facilities for merchants in the lower part of the city. He makes his way there, and the defenders had set up barricades because they knew that there was no walls, you know, no city walls down there. So, they set up barricades. They had the navy set up

barricades. They had militiamen set up barricades. Montgomery has his old commanding officers, along with him and the men, were following suit. Gets through a first barricade, basically crosses the first barricades. Blizzard seems to die down a little bit. He realizes there's a barricade right in front of him with a few buildings. He says, 'We're good to go. Let's storm that second barricade. We should be very close, maybe a few blocks away from Place Royale, and we should make it there.' So, they start to scream their orders to storm the first barricade, but they had no idea that there was an actual group of militiamen right beside that barricade, hidden in a building. As soon as Montgomery himself starts to storm the barricade, there's a door that opens, there's a cannon right in that opening, and that cannon is aimed straight at Montgomery. They will fire grape shots, they will have militiamen fire their muskets, and they will kill Montgomery, his senior officers, right there on the spot. When his men realized that this is happening, they will retreat right away. This attack has a few, a few dozens of casualties, not more than that. And this is the end of it. These men will basically be safe when they retreat, but that's going to be the end of the southern attack. It lasts less than an hour. It's very quick. Arnold's side, though, is a different story. Arnold will be able to get down, and he has basically, I would say, a deeper hold in the city. So instead of, you know, these commercial buildings, I would say, and shipping buildings on the south shore, he's on the north part of the city, so he has the suburbs. So basically, he has more buildings, it's really as much as we can say for the 18th century, this is guerrilla warfare that is going to happen there, right? So, he needs to walk through streets of the city. There are buildings like two, three stories tall building all around him and his troops, and they will make it. There are not that many defenders in these buildings because they had been evacuated, as I was saying. Rather quite quickly, Arnold is going to be under fire, so at this point he doesn't know what's happening, right? He doesn't know that pretty quickly, while he does that, Montgomery on the south shore has been completely obliterated by the defenders, but he doesn't know that. He still expects the decoys to work, but the decoys were not that effective, and rather quite quickly in the city, the defenders realize that these attacks from the Plains of Abraham are not the real deal. Something else is at play here. They will hear gunshots from the south side, and they will basically realize that, oh, there might be, you know, other ways that the Continental Army is trying to attack us. So quite rapidly, Arnold is going to be under heavy fire from the city walls, but keep in mind he's in the lower part of the city. He wants to be as bad a target as possible, so he will get his troop very close to the promontory, so very close to the cliff on the north side, follows the closest street as he can, and he will make good progress. He will pass a place which is called La Porte du Palais, Palaces Gate. So, one of the city gates of the city, which is on the

north part of the city, he passes that, and this is going to be very important for what's going to happen. He has a small cannon with him, but there's too much snow, they need to leave the cannon behind. They get through like close to first barricades, closer to denser streets with denser houses, and after first barricade, Arnold is going to be badly wounded. Actually, he was shot through the legs, so he has to retreat. And Captain Daniel Morgan basically takes command. Morgan, for all his, I would say, in this case, all his fault, he's going to be, he's going to have a very successful career after that, but for that he's very courageous. He wants to prove himself, and he wants to see that operation go through, right. So, there is going to be some heavy fighting, but all while that happens gives more time. His progress is not quick in the city, gives more time to the defenders. The defenders on the south side of the city will basically tell the officers, the commanding officers, that they blocked a possibility of circling the city from the south. The troops that were coming in to defend the city walls from outside realize that there is nothing there, it's not the actual threat. So, the commanding British officers will regroup most of the defenders of the city, and they will send them out through Palaces Gate, which at this point is behind the force of Arnold or the force of Morgan, right? So, you have Morgan, who is continuing north shore. So, keep in mind when I say this and try to paint the picture in your head, you have a river, St. Charles River, which is basically straight up north, you don't have that many houses. It's probably one, maybe two streets wide that you have to try to progress towards Place Royale, which is around basically the promontory or the city of Quebec. So, they are progressing through that. There are barricades. They need to get, you know, basically ladders to go up the barricades. There is some fighting sometimes in houses. It's very, it's very.. it's a hard-fought progress. So, with this hard-fought progress, it slows them down quite a bit. And Morgan, quite astutely, wants to wait for most of his troop to always be with him before they cross an extra barricade, right? Because he knows that if he spreads his army out, he's going to be like an easier target for the defenders, but while he does that, the defenders have just enough time to slow him down enough, so that the defenders come out from Palace's gate, and they get closer and closer and closer to Morgan's army, so very close to Old Quebec, where it was supposed to happen, very close, about two blocks out from Place Royale, Morgan tries to storm a barricade. He will be stopped, and they will be caught in a pincer situation by the defenders at the barricade, and most of the army, the British Army, regular troops and militia that come right behind them. And about 400 Continental soldiers will have to surrender there. It's about 10:00 in the morning. The battle is over. Battle of Quebec, December 31st, 1775, is going to be a Continental Army defeat.

Cassie Cloutier 33:35

So now it looks like we're going to zoom out and take a look at a map.

Lauren Gray 33:39

We are, we have a map here, and the map is from September 1776 and it is a plan of the city environs of Quebec, with its siege lines and the blockade lines that the Americans had in place from the eighth of December 1775 to the 13th of May in 1776 and it also demonstrates the natural fortifications along the St. Lawrence River, and how these feed into the upper and lower towns of Quebec, and support the heights or Plains of Abraham. And what this map does not show, and what it really takes a visit in person to demonstrate, is how naturally fortified this city is, and how it sits up so high. So, if you are a soldier in 1775 and you're looking to besiege the city and get over these natural fortifications. It's almost kind of this sheer hillscape. It would be incredibly difficult, but Benedict Arnold manages it. He takes his men to what is now Wolf's Cove, which is named after General Wolf, who was the British commander during the Seven Years War, the French and Indian War here, when he took the city from the French, and Arnold's expedition, or the troops are actually following in these footsteps from a decade, decade and a half earlier, and on the map we can see where the American siege lines would have been, and we can also see some of the key buildings or points that would have been important. Important for the time of the siege, we've got the place of arms, we've got the powder magazines, we have the hospital general, the suburbs, the barracks. It really gives us this great bird's eye view of what Arnold and his men would have been encountering as they're attempting to lay siege to and take Quebec, and we know from speaking with Luke that it was a failed attempt on December 31st 1775 when they did actually attempt to take the city in battle. Arnold is wounded, Montgomery is killed almost instantly, and the Americans have to withdraw to their siege lines, where they sit out a wicked cold winter and a smallpox epidemic. And then we know that they're basically later ousted by the British when they arrive in early-ish May of 1776, but it was pretty much just a stalemate during those cold, long winter months. Even though it was ultimately a defeat for the Americans, it's still, it's still just a fascinating moment.

Cassie Cloutier 35:52

This map really shows the vast size of the city they were attempting to take control of, and combining that with their poor health, the poor weather, it really paints a grim picture. So, then let's talk about what others were saying about the invasion. What do we have here?

Lauren Gray 36:11

So, we have here a letter from General Horatio Gates, writing to John Adams, is written from New York on the fourth of May, 1776 and at this time the siege was still ongoing, and they did have hopes at that time that the Americans would be able to relieve Arnold's forces outside of the city and provide support and be able to effectively break the siege and take Quebec in the spring of 1776 but of course, as we know, those hopes were dashed, which General Gates could not have possibly been aware when he was writing on May 4th, but what we have here is a letter basically praising Arnold's role or merit in these events, and the American military command under Washington and Gates and others were supportive of the invasion of Quebec. They felt it was a necessary next step to secure independence and further and win the war, and the situation is that the American military command has sent up a general named General Worcester to take command from Arnold, because he has been wounded, Montgomery has been killed, Arnold doesn't have the seniority of rank to really conduct a siege of this size. So they send this other general up, and Gates is not entirely thrilled with this other general's conduct and his abilities, and it's kind of ironic knowing what happens with Gates later, he was relieved of command, but in an event, in May of 1776 Gates writes to Adams that General Worcester, upon his arrival at Quebec, 'thought it proper to slight and neglect my worthy friend Arnold, who, having received considerable bruise in his wounded leg by a fall from his horse, applied for leave to go to Montreal for recovery. This was granted by Worcester, and this altogether convinces me that Worcester is not the man fit to command there or anywhere. How happy must every good officer be to find himself seconded by so capable and brave a spirit as that possessed by Arnold, but men of little merit are ever jealous of those who have a great deal,' and, like I said earlier, it's really very telling about Arnold's capabilities, and they have been in large part overlooked, and his role in these events has been overlooked, just kind of in the general memory, his sacrifices have been overlooked or diminished, and I mean reasonably and rightfully so, because of his conduct later, we can't excuse that, but he was such a driving force. He had this ability to command men. He dragged these 1100 guys, or whatever it was, up through the Maine wilderness. He lost a few through desertion and death, but he got them to where they needed to be. He got them to Quebec, and they did indeed attack the city, and this is a really incredible feat. And, of course, we see later how that contributes to the Battle of Saratoga, which is also so critical because of Arnold, and you know some of the people at the time recognized his abilities, but unfortunately, it's just not enough. And I think looking at the long scope, that's probably what broke him. He was so sensitive and just did not

feel that his role in these events was given the credit that it should have been. And it's really a shame, because if you look at an alternate timeline of history, if he felt he got what he deserved, what else might he have contributed for the American cause? But that is, I think, what defines a tragedy, perhaps.

Cassie Cloutier 39:24

Yeah, Arnold is such an infamous figure in this narrative, and these documents really paint a different picture than we're familiar with.

Lauren Gray 39:33

I mean, you're absolutely right, and this has been left out of our American memory, and that's unfortunate, because he did sacrifice a lot. He was an ardent patriot from the very beginning. Did he have his flaws and failings as a human? Absolutely. I mean, he was ambitious. Maybe that's a flaw, or maybe it just gets the job done. He was extremely sensitive, especially to criticism. He may or may not have copied love letters to multiple women after his wife died. I don't think we can hold that against him, if ink is so expensive. And I guess he's trying to save time, but I think I'm glad we're able to highlight his role in these events in these early years of the war and the roles of the other soldiers who were with him and who also sacrificed so much. Looking at this expedition in just the suffering that came along with it, having been on the Arnold Expedition Trail in modern times, I've followed it a couple of times at that time of year. It is icy. It is cold. It's difficult to navigate, you know. And I'm doing this in a car with GPS and shoes and food, and I just can't imagine what they would have been through without all of these things, you know, carrying these heavy bateaus going up and down mountains, and then knowing you have to besiege the city at the end, and it really defies imagination.

Cassie Cloutier 40:50

This is such an overlooked episode in the general memory of the Revolution, and so it's really special that these individuals kept these diaries, kept these documents, but it's even more special that they survived not only the invasion of Canada, but these last 250 years.

Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai 41:18

[Outro music fades in] To look at the items discussed in this episode, visit our show website at www.masshist.org/podcast. The object of history is produced by the Research Department at the

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