

WAS THE BRITISH VICTORY INEVITABLE?

Knowing what we do about Canada today, it is tempting to conclude that the British victory was inevitable, or certain. However, when war breaks out, the outcome is never certain. Britain was determined to conquer North America, sending more and more troops and supplies to gain an advantage. The French and First Nations were equally determined to protect their interests in the area. Through their First Nations alliances, the French had learned about the land and how to survive, even through the harsh winters. Read the quote in **Figure 3.8** by William Clarke, a British colonist. How do you think the smaller population of French people could possibly defeat the British?



“For my own part, I cannot help thinking that unless there be a united and vigorous opposition of the English Colonies to them, the French are laying a solid Foundation for being, some time or other, sole Masters of this Continent, notwithstanding our present Superiority to them in point of Numbers.”

— William Clarke, British colonist

COMPARING MILITARY STRATEGIES

Britain and France had different strategies when fighting the Seven Years’ War. France focused its attention on fighting in Europe. This limited the number of troops it sent to defend its economic interests in North America. Protecting the sugar trade was a higher priority to France. By contrast, the British believed that success in North America would help them defeat the French in Europe. During the Seven Years’ War, Britain sent 20 000 additional soldiers to North America. The French, for the most part, let their colonists fight for themselves.

The British and the French had different styles of fighting in North America. The British fought in the way that they had always fought on the open fields of Britain and Europe. **Figure 3.9A** shows British soldiers in traditional line formation. They believed this was an honourable way to fight: to face your opponent head-on. **Figure 3.9B** shows **guerilla warfare**, which is surprise attacks carried out by small groups of people. This strategy was often used by the French and their First Nations allies during the Seven Years’ War. Which strategy do you think was more effective in North America at the time of the Seven Years’ War?

FIGURE 3.8 Clarke wrote this comment in a letter to Benjamin Franklin on May 6, 1754. **Analyze:** What is Clarke recommending that the British colonies do?

guerilla warfare a type of fighting using small groups of soldiers to carry out surprise attacks against an opponent



FIGURE 3.9 (A) This painting by Robert Griffing (2002) is entitled *A Charming Field for an Encounter*. It depicts British soldiers in traditional line formation before the July 1754 battle at Fort Necessity. (B) *One Mile to Bushy Run Station*, also painted by Robert Griffing (1997), shows a clash between First Nations warriors and British soldiers during a 1763 battle. **Analyze:** What are the advantages and disadvantages of the types of fighting seen in both paintings?

FIRST NATIONS ALLIANCES

The key to French military strategy in North America was alliances with First Nations, such as the Ojibwe. Similarly, the Ojibwe sought alliances with the French to help protect their interests and ensure their survival in North America. Not only were the French outnumbered by British settlers, but also by the thousands of British troops that began to arrive. Read a quote from colonial fur trader Edmond Aitken in **Figure 3.10**. Why were alliances with First Nations important for the French?

“The importance of Indians is now generally known and understood. A Doubt remains not that the prosperity of our Colonies will stand or fall with our Interest and favour among them. When they are our Friends, they are the Cheapest and strongest Barrier for the Protection of our Settlements; when Enemies, they are capable of ravaging in their methods of War.”

— Edmond Aitken, colonial fur trader

The trade alliance that the Ojibwe had with the French helped them obtain European goods. As well, the tributes, or gifts (such as weapons, tools, and clothing), that the French gave were seen by the Ojibwe as important symbols of respect and partnership. The Ojibwe honoured their alliance with the French by fighting alongside them against the British. The British, the French, and their First Nations allies all benefited from taking material goods from fallen enemies.

In southern Ontario, more than 1000 Ojibwe warriors supported the French. This support led to many victories in the war. In **Figure 3.11**, George Washington, who had become commander in chief of the British forces, gives a first-hand account of an attack he faced. The British were defeated in this battle, despite outnumbering their enemies. Why would First Nations choose to join the war?

When we came there, we were attacked by a party of French and Indians, whose number, I am persuaded, did not exceed three hundred men; while ours consisted of about one thousand three hundred well-armed troops ...

FIGURE 3.10 Aitken included this comment in a 1755 report to the British Board of Trade. **Analyze:** What is Aitken saying about the importance of First Nations alliances to winning the war?

How do you think the Ojibwe felt about their French trading partners and the new British settlers?

July 1755.

The farther they, that you will order the present which was sent by Governor Morris to the General, and his Family, with the care of Mr. de la Roze, the Seward, who is sent for that and other purposes.

The Horses that carry the wounded Gentlemen in litter, are so much fatigued that we dread their performance; therefore it is desired that you will be kind enough to send out eight or ten fresh Horses for their relief, which will enable us to reach the Fort by evening. I doubt not but you have had an account of the poor Gentlemen's death, by some of the affrighted Waggons, who ran off, without taking leave.

I am, Sir, Your most obedt. Servant

Lieut. Mearns.
15th July 1755.

To Mr. Washington near Frederickst
Hon. Madam

I doubt not but you have a view of our Defeat, and perhaps had it represent in a worse light, I might have taken this earliest opportunity to give you some account of the Engagement, as it happens within 7 miles of the French Fort on the Tuesday, the 9th Inst.

FIGURE 3.11 George Washington, commander in chief of the British forces, recounts an attack by First Nations warriors and the French in a letter to his mother in July 1755. **Analyze:** Why do you think Washington documented this account?

Not all First Nations allied with the French. Most of the Haudenosaunee nations, including the Mohawk, allied with the British during the fighting. These nations were hostile to the French due to French support of their enemy nations, such as the Huron, in the early 1600s. The Seneca tended to remain neutral. The Ojibwe maintained their French alliance until the French started to lose the war. As the war went on, many Ojibwe were killed. The survivors either retreated or joined the British side.

CHANGING MILITARY TACTICS

The Seven Years' War consisted of many battles that took place over a number of years. Forts changed hands, often more than once. As the war went on, both Britain and France began to send more and more troops to North America to fight. The side that controlled a fort controlled the trade, so neither side would give up control of a fort without a fight.

CHANGE IN COMMAND

The first few years of the war went badly for the British. This began to change in 1757. Focused on winning the war in North America, Britain developed a new strategy to take over New France completely.

Britain started sending a lot more money and troops to North America. Britain began to capture key French forts one by one, including Fortress Louisbourg, Fort Frontenac, and Fort Duquesne. The British worked their way toward Québec City. Québec City was the geographic and strategic centre of New France. It was a central point in the fur trade, a shipping centre, and a stopping point for soldiers, traders, and settlers moving west. Geographically, it was a **stronghold**, hard to attack, because of its location high on a cliff overlooking the St. Lawrence River.

As the British gained the upper hand, the French faced more problems. Lieutenant-General Louis-Joseph de Montcalm arrived from France in 1756 to lead the French army. Montcalm was an experienced military commander, but he was familiar only with European-style tactics. The guerilla fighting style used by the French and their First Nations allies horrified him.

Examine the painting in **Figure 3.12**. What changes in French fighting tactics does it show?

stronghold a fortified place, or fortress, that is difficult to attack



FIGURE 3.12 This 1908 painting entitled *Montcalm Leading His Troops at the Plains of Abraham* is by Canadian historical artist C.W. Jefferys. **Analyze:** What can you infer about the artist's perspective of Montcalm from this portrayal?

CREATING AND ANALYZING A THEMATIC MAP

A map, like a written document, is a communication tool. The features of a map tell a story and give information, just like paragraphs and words do. Maps connect the “what” to the “where.” We can use maps in history to tell stories about groups of people or places, and to show patterns and relationships.

A series of battles marked the Seven Years’ War. Forts were captured, lost, and recaptured. For example, the French Fortress Louisbourg was captured by the British in 1745, but was returned to the French with the signing of a peace treaty in 1748. Following another battle, it was recaptured by the British in 1758. Look at the data provided in **Figure 3.13**. The chart lists the locations of major battles over forts during the Seven Years’ War, as well as who was in possession of each fort before and after each battle.

In this activity, you will create a map that captures the information in **Figure 3.13**. You will then use your map as a secondary source to help you decide whether the British victory was inevitable.

| Location of Battle | Date | Outcome of Battle |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Fort Necessity (Farmington, PA) | July 3, 1754 | French victory |
| Fort Beauséjour (Aulac, NB) | June 16, 1755 | British victory |
| Fort Duquesne (Pittsburgh, PA) | July 9, 1755 | French victory |
| Fort Bull (Rome, NY) | March 27, 1756 | French victory |
| Fort William Henry (Lake George, NY) | August 9, 1757 | French victory |
| Fort Carillon (Ticonderoga, NY) | July 8, 1758 | French victory |
| Fortress Louisbourg (Louisbourg, NS) | July 26, 1758 | British victory |
| Fort Frontenac (Kingston, ON) | August 28, 1758 | British victory |
| Fort Duquesne (Pittsburgh, PA) | November 23, 1758 | British victory |

FIGURE 3.13 This chart includes the major battles over forts during the Seven Years’ War. **Red** indicates British possession and **blue** indicates French possession.

HOW TO CREATE A THEMATIC MAP

STEP 1 Choose a base map that includes the location of all the battles listed in **Figure 3.13**. You will need a base map that shows eastern North America. Ensure that your base map has space for a title, legend, scale, and north arrow.

STEP 1

Create a legend for the information you show on your map. You need a symbol to identify the location of a fort and a colour to represent British or French possession. For example, you could use a square to represent the location of a fort. You could use red to represent British possession and blue to represent French possession. A British fort that was captured by the French could be half red and half blue.

STEP 2 Use an atlas or the Internet to determine the location of the forts. (Modern-day locations are given in **Figure 3.13** below each fort.) Place the fort symbol at each location, and neatly write the name of the fort beside the symbol. Also, write the date of each battle beside the fort symbol.

STEP 2

STEP 3

STEP 4 Add a title, a north arrow, and a scale to your map. What information can you gather from your map about the progression of the war? In what year do you see a turning point?

BATTLE FOR THE HEART OF NEW FRANCE

After the expulsion of the Acadians and the capture of Louisbourg, the British closed in on New France. In the summer of 1759, British forces attacked Québec City, but they were not able to destroy the walled town. British General James Wolfe needed a new battle plan. His action plan is illustrated in the engraving in the chapter opener on pages 74 to 75. It shows the three stages of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham (or Battle of Québec): British ships coming down the river at night; British soldiers climbing the cliff to reach the plains; and the actual battle between the British and the French on the plains.

In the early morning hours of September 13, 1759, about 4500 British troops sailed down the St. Lawrence River, fooling the few French guards by speaking French. **Figure 3.14** contains an account by Rear-Admiral Charles Holmes, General Wolfe’s naval commander, of some of the other challenges the British faced.

The painting in **Figure 3.15** depicts the second stage of the battle plan. Just before dawn, the British landed in a cove called L’Anse au Foulon, which lay west of Québec City. Led by Wolfe, the troops climbed the 65 m cliff, grabbing roots and vines to pull themselves up. After reaching the top, the British arranged themselves in two lines on the Plains of Abraham. This forced Montcalm and his French troops to come into open space and fight the British head-on. The battle would prove to be the beginning of the end of New France.

Québec City fell to the British in less than one hour. This was an important win for the British, since the French were not able to recover from the loss.

“The Care of landing the Troops & sustaining them by the Ships, fell to my share—The most hazardous & difficult Task I was ever engaged in—For the distance of the landing place; the impetuosity of the Tide; the darkness of the Night; & the great Chance of exactly hitting the very spot intended, without discovery or alarm, made the whole extremely difficult ...”
— Rear-Admiral Charles Holmes

FIGURE 3.14 Excerpt from a letter written on September 18, 1759, by Holmes, General Wolfe’s naval commander. **Analyze:** What do you think Holmes might have said to Wolfe when he presented this plan?



FIGURE 3.15 This painting, entitled *Soldiers Climbing the Heights of Abraham* by Peter Jackson (1965), shows the British making the challenging and quiet climb up the cliff to make a surprise attack on the French. **Analyze:** How does the artist depict the challenges the British faced getting to the Plains of Abraham?



FIGURE 3.16 *The Death of General Wolfe* was painted in 1770 by Benjamin West. **Analyze:** Who do you think is surrounding Wolfe in this scene?

LUCK VERSUS GOOD DECISION-MAKING

Despite his victory, Wolfe was killed on the battlefield in the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, along with French General Montcalm. The painting in **Figure 3.16** shows Wolfe's death. This painting is considered famous today. Why do you think Wolfe's death is portrayed in this way?

Sometimes a war is won for reasons that have more to do with luck than good decisions. Read the quote in **Figure 3.17** by historian E.R. Adair. Adair is criticizing General Wolfe's military strategy. If Wolfe's strategy won the war, why would Adair criticize Wolfe?

FRENCH SURRENDER

After Britain's victory on the Plains of Abraham, the war in North America continued for another year. The British moved on from Québec City to take Montréal in 1760. The French had put up a strong fight over the winter, holding off the British troops. Both sides were waiting for more reinforcements (additional supplies and people) to come from Europe by ship. The first ship to come down the St. Lawrence River in the spring belonged to the British. The French surrendered. With the French surrender, the British had gained control of New France. In 1763, the Treaty of Paris was signed to officially end the Seven Years' War between Britain and France and all their respective allies. France had to give up all its main territory claims in North America to the British. If the first ship to come down the St. Lawrence River in the spring of 1760 had belonged to the French instead of the British, do you think New France could have survived?

“[Wolfe's strategy was] Unsound on the basis of any recognized military tactics.”
— E.R. Adair, historian

FIGURE 3.17 In a 1936 lecture to the Canadian Historical Society, Adair assesses Wolfe's decision making during the Plains of Abraham campaign. **Analyze:** What do you think Adair means by “unsound”?

HISTORY AT WORK

CARTOONIST

Kate Beaton (**Figure 3.18A**) has always been interested in history and art. These two passions became the basis for her job as a cartoonist. She earned a history degree from Mount Allison University in New Brunswick and went on to work at a museum in Victoria, British Columbia. She then decided to pursue a career in art through her web comics project *Hark! A Vagrant*. Her work became very popular because of its humorous and clever portrayals of historical figures and events, such as the Battle of the Plains of Abraham (**Figure 3.18B**) and the War of 1812.

Beaton eventually began to create comics for major publications and has now published several books.



Beaton's process involves reading, researching, and keeping a notebook with names of potential cartoon subjects. Selecting who and what to feature in her comics is something that Beaton takes seriously. She likes to draw lesser-

known historical figures because “they're always known to somebody.” To Beaton, historical topics are particularly great for storytelling. She remains committed to bettering her skills and continuing to educate and entertain people about history through her cartoons.



FIGURE 3.18 (A) Cartoonist Kate Beaton. (B) Beaton's comic gives a humorous take on General Montcalm's reaction to General Wolfe's death in the Battle of the Plains of Abraham.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. Beaton uses her artistic skills to draw historical cartoons. Name one skill or interest that you have. Brainstorm ways you could use that skill or interest to pursue a history-related career.
2. What challenges do you think a historical cartoonist might face?

CHECK-IN

1. **CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE** Identify several reasons for the British victory in North America. Rank the reasons in order from greatest to least impact. Justify your ranking.
2. **HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE** The Battle of the Plains of Abraham continues to be one of the most significant battles in Canadian history. Why do you think it is seen to be so significant?
3. **EVALUATE AND DRAW CONCLUSIONS** Think of what you have read about the series of events that took place throughout the war. What do you think could have been done differently to change the outcome for the French?