

= Quebec Expedition =

The Quebec Expedition , or the Walker Expedition to Quebec , was a British attempt to attack Quebec in 1711 in Queen Anne 's War , the North American theatre of the War of Spanish Succession . It failed because of a shipping disaster on the Saint Lawrence River on 22 August 1711 , when seven transports and one storeship were wrecked and some 850 soldiers drowned ; the disaster was at the time one of the worst naval disasters in British history .

The expedition was planned by the administration of Robert Harley , and was based on plans originally proposed in 1708 . Harley decided to mount the expedition as part of a major shift in British military policy , emphasizing strength at sea . The expedition 's leaders , Admiral Hovenden Walker and Brigadier @-@ General John Hill , were chosen for their politics and connections to the crown , and its plans were kept secret even from the Admiralty . Despite the secrecy , French agents were able to discover British intentions and warn authorities in Quebec .

The expedition expected to be fully provisioned in Boston , the capital of colonial Massachusetts , but the city was unprepared when it arrived , and Massachusetts authorities had to scramble to provide even three months ' supplies . Admiral Walker also had difficulty acquiring experienced pilots and accurate charts for navigating the waters of the lower Saint Lawrence . The expedition reached the Gulf of Saint Lawrence without incident , but foggy conditions , tricky currents , and strong winds combined to drive the fleet toward the northern shore of the Saint Lawrence near a place now called Pointe @-@ aux @-@ Anglais , where the ships were wrecked . Following the disaster , Walker abandoned the expedition 's objectives and returned to England . Although the expedition was a failure , Harley continued to implement his " blue water " policy .

= = Background = =

In 1710 , late in the War of Spanish Succession , a mixed force of British regulars and American colonists captured the French fort at Port Royal on the northwestern coast of Acadia (present @-@ day Annapolis Royal , Nova Scotia) . Francis Nicholson , the leader of the expedition , brought news of the victory to London , where he and Jeremiah Dummer , who represented the Province of Massachusetts Bay in London , lobbied for an expedition against the heartland of New France , Quebec .

The British government , however , was in some turmoil , and in August 1710 , the ministry of Lord Godolphin fell . Queen Anne replaced him with Robert Harley , a political opponent of the Duke of Marlborough , who had also fallen out of favour . Harley wanted to change Britain 's military strategy , implementing a " blue water " policy that emphasized strength at sea , at the cost of a reduced army . He also sought to blunt Marlborough 's continuing influence with a victory of his own devising . To these ends , he authorised expeditions by land and sea to capture Quebec ; however , he fell ill , so most of the work of organisation was done by his Secretary of State , Henry St. John (the future Lord Bolingbroke) .

The basic plan followed one first proposed by Samuel Vetch in 1708 for the 1709 campaign season , with the main thrust to be a naval expedition carrying a combined force of regular army forces and provincial militia . Rear Admiral of the White Sir Hovenden Walker was given overall command of the expedition , with Brigadier John Hill in command of the land forces . Walker , who was promoted to admiral in March , had led a squadron on an expedition to the West Indies earlier in the war that had failed to produce significant results , and may have been chosen due to his friendship with St. John and his Tory sympathies . St. John probably chose Hill to curry favour at court : he was the brother of Queen Anne 's confidante Abigail Masham . The duchess of Marlborough , presumably echoing the opinions of her husband , wrote of Hill that " he was no good as a soldier " . Five regiments from Marlborough 's force in Flanders were added to two from Britain to build a force of some 5 @, @ 000 land troops . This force sailed from ports in southern England in April and May 1711 . Its destination was a tightly guarded secret : Walker was not immediately informed of its destination , nor were the Lords of the Admiralty informed , and it was provisioned only with sufficient supplies for a typical voyage in European waters in an attempt to mislead spies .

= = Boston = =

Francis Nicholson arrived in Boston in early June 1711 with news and details of the expedition plans , and a meeting of provincial governors was quickly arranged in New London , Connecticut . The naval expedition was to include provincial militia raised in the New England colonies , while Nicholson led a provincial force raised in provinces from Connecticut to Pennsylvania up the Hudson River and down Lake Champlain to Montreal . The provincial forces that were to go with Walker 's expedition were led by Samuel Vetch , who became the governor of Nova Scotia in 1710 . They consisted of 1 @, @ 500 men , most from Massachusetts , with smaller contingents from New Hampshire and Rhode Island .

The fleet arrived in Boston on 24 June , and the troops were disembarked onto Noddle 's Island (the present @-@ day location of Logan International Airport) . The size of the force was , according to historian Samuel Adams Drake , " the most formidable that had ever crossed the Atlantic under the English flag . " Since the fleet had left with insufficient supplies , its organizers expected it to be fully provisioned in Boston . Since the number of soldiers and sailors outnumbered the population of Boston at the time , this proved a daunting task . Laws were passed to prevent merchants from price @-@ gouging , but sufficient provisions were eventually acquired . Additional laws were passed penalizing residents found harbouring deserters from the fleet ; apparently the attraction of colonial life was sufficient that this was a significant problem during the five weeks the expedition was in Boston .

During the expedition 's sojourn in Boston , Walker attempted to enlist pilots experienced in navigating the Saint Lawrence River . To his dismay , none were forthcoming ; even Captain Cyprian Southack , reputed to be one of the colony 's best navigators , claimed he had never been beyond the river 's mouth . Walker intended to rely principally on a Frenchman he had picked up in Plymouth prior to the fleet 's departure . Samuel Vetch , however , deeply distrusted the Frenchman , writing that he was " not only an ignorant , pretending , idle , drunken Fellow " , but that he " is come upon no good Design " . Following this report , Walker also forced a Captain Jean Paradis , the captain of a captured French sloop , to serve as navigator . The charts Walker accumulated were notably short in details on the area around the mouth the Saint Lawrence , as was the journal Sir William Phips kept of his 1690 expedition to Quebec , which Walker also acquired . Walker interviewed some participants in the Phips expedition , whose vague tales did nothing to relieve his concerns about what he could expect on the river . These concerns prompted him to detach his largest and heaviest ships for cruising duty , and he transferred his flag to the 70 @-@ gun Edgar .

= = Disaster = =

On 30 July , the fleet set sail from Boston . It consisted of a mix of British and colonial ships , including nine ships of war , two bomb vessels , and 60 transports and tenders . It carried 7 @, @ 500 troops and about 6 @, @ 000 sailors . By 3 August the fleet reached to coast of Nova Scotia , and Samuel Vetch piloted the fleet around Cape Breton and Cape North and into the Gulf of Saint Lawrence .

On the morning of the 18 August , just as the expedition was about to enter the Saint Lawrence River , the wind began to blow hard from the northwest , and Walker was forced to seek shelter in Gaspé Bay . On the morning of the 20th , the wind veered to the southeast , and he was able to advance slowly past the western extremity of Anticosti Island before it died down and thick fog blanketed both shore and fleet . By the 22nd , the wind had freshened from the southeast , and there were intermittent breaks in the fog , but not sufficient to give sight of land . At this point the fleet was west of Anticosti at a point where the Saint Lawrence was about 70 miles (110 km) wide , but it narrowed noticeably at a point where the river 's North Shore made a sharp turn , running nearly north @-@ south . This area , near what is now called Pointe @-@ aux @-@ Anglais , includes a number of small islands , including Île @-@ aux @-@ Oeufs (Egg Island) , and numerous rocky shallows . After consulting his pilots , Walker gave the signal to head the fleet

roughly southwest at about 8 : 00 pm .

Walker had thought he was in mid @-@ stream when he issued the order . In fact , he was about seven leagues (about 20 miles (32 km)) north of his proper course , and in the grasp of strong currents which steered his ships towards the northwest . Aided by an easterly wind , the fleet was gradually closing on the north @-@ south shore near Île @-@ aux @-@ Oeufs . When Captain Paddon reported to Walker that land had been sighted around 10 : 30 pm , presumably dead ahead , Walker assumed that the fleet was approaching the south shore , and ordered the fleet to wear , and bring @-@ to on the other tack , before he went to bed . This manoeuvre put the fleet onto a more northerly heading . Some minutes later , an army captain named Goddard roused Walker , claiming to see breakers ahead . Walker dismissed the advice and the man , but Goddard returned , insisting that the admiral " come upon deck myself , or we should certainly be lost " .

Walker came on deck in his dressing gown , and saw that the ship was being driven toward the western lee shore by the east wind . When the French navigator came on deck , he explained to Walker where he was ; Walker immediately ordered the anchor cables cut , and beat against the wind to escape the danger . Two of the warships , Montague and Windsor , had more difficulty , and ended up anchored for the night in a precarious situation , surrounded by breakers . Throughout the night , Walker heard sounds of distress , and at times when the fog lifted , ships could be seen in the distance being ground against the rocks . One New Englander wrote that he could " hear the shrieks of the sinking , drowning , departing souls . " Around 2 : 00 am the wind subsided , and then shifted to the northwest , and most of the fleet managed to stand away from the shore .

It took three days to discover the full extent of the disaster , during which the fleet searched for survivors . Seven transports and one supply ship were lost . Walker 's initial report was that 884 soldiers perished ; later reports revised this number down to 740 , including women attached to some of the units . Historian Gerald Graham estimates that about 150 sailors also perished in the disaster . After rescuing all he could , Walker and Hill held a war council on 25 August . After interviewing a number of the pilots , including Samuel Vetch , the council decided " that by reason of the Ignorance of the Pilots aboard the Men of War " , the expedition should be aborted . Vetch openly blamed Walker for the disaster : " The late disaster cannot , in my humble opinion , be anyways imputed to the difficulty of navigation , but to the wrong course we steered , which most unavoidably carried us upon the north shore . "

The fleet sailed down the Gulf of Saint Lawrence and came to anchor at Spanish River (now the harbour of Sydney , Nova Scotia) on 4 September , where a council was held to discuss whether or not to attack the French at Plaisance . Given the lateness of the season , insufficient supplies to overwinter in the area , and rumours of strong defences at Plaisance , the council decided against making the attack , and sailed for England .

= = Return = =

Francis Nicholson 's land expedition learned of the naval disaster when it was encamped near Lake George ; Nicholson aborted the expedition . He was reported to be so angry that he tore off his wig and threw it to the ground .

The expedition 's fortunes did not improve on the return voyage . Walker had written to New York requesting the HMS Feversham and any available supply ships to join him ; unbeknownst to him , the Feversham and three transports (Joseph , Mary , and Neptune) were wrecked on the coast of Cape Breton on 7 October with more than 100 men lost . The fleet returned to Portsmouth on 10 October ; Walker 's flagship , the Edgar , blew up several days later , possibly due to improper handling of gunpowder . Walker lost a number of papers as a result , and claimed that the journal of William Phips was lost in the blast .

Despite the magnitude of the expedition 's failure , the political consequences were relatively mild . The failure was an early setback in Robert Harley 's " blue water " policy , which called for the aggressive use of the navy to keep England 's enemies at bay ; however , Harley continued to implement it , withdrawing further resources from European military campaigns . Since the project had been organised by the current government , it was also not interested in delving deeply into the

reasons for its failure . Walker was sympathetically received by the queen , and both he and Hill were given new commands . Walker eventually wrote a detailed and frank account of the expedition , based on his memory as well as surviving journals and papers ; it is reprinted in Graham . Walker was stripped of his rank in 1715 (amid a larger change of power including the accession of King George I) , and died in 1728 .

Popular sentiment in England tended to fault the colonies for failing to properly support the expedition , citing parsimony and stubbornness as reasons . These sentiments were rejected in the colonies , where Nicholson and Governor Dudley instead blamed Walker . The relations between the military leadership and the colonial populations was not always cordial during the army 's stay outside Boston , and foreshadowed difficult relations between civilians and military occupiers in the political conflicts that preceded the American Revolutionary War . One of Hill 's officers wrote of the " ill Nature and Sowness of these People , whose Government , Doctrine , and Manners , whose Hypocrisy and canting , are unsupportable " , and further commented that unless they were brought under firmer control , the colonists would " grow more stiff and disobedient every Day . " Colonists noted with some disgust the fact that both Walker and Hill escaped censure for the expedition 's failure .

= = French actions = =

Authorities in France were alerted as early as March 1711 that Nicholson was organising an expedition against Quebec . They also knew the composition of Hill 's force , but were apparently unaware of his destination until July . The Governor @-@ general of New France , the marquis de Vaudreuil , sent Louis Denys de La Ronde to Boston ostensibly to oversee a prisoner exchange in early June . La Ronde also had secret instructions that he was to try to convince authorities to withhold support from expeditions sent from England . La Ronde , who coincidentally arrived in Boston on 8 June , the same day as Nicholson , was apparently unsuccessful in his attempts to influence British colonial opinion . Nicholson became suspicious of his behaviour and eventually had him arrested . When copies of his secret instructions were found aboard a captured French vessel and brought to Boston , La Ronde was held in Boston until November .

Governor Vaudreuil was warned again in August that expeditions against Quebec and Montreal were being organised . He called out his militia , rallied local Indians , and prepared his defences as best he could , putting the whole colony on a war footing . In mid @-@ October word reached Quebec that large ships were approaching , heightening tensions further . It turned out they were French , and on board was a scout Vaudreuil had sent downriver on 19 September to watch for the British fleet . The scout reported finding the wreckage of seven ships and an estimated 1 @, @ 500 bodies . Although locals were already plundering through the wreckage , the colony organised a formal salvage operation that recovered items like anchors , chains , tents , and cannons ; the items recovered were auctioned .

= = Fleet = =

The fleet is listed in the order of sail drawn up by Admiral Walker . Ships generally sailed two abreast .