

= Battle of The Cedars =

The Battle of The Cedars (French : Les Cèdres) was a series of military confrontations early in the American Revolutionary War during the Continental Army 's invasion of Quebec that had begun in September 1775 . The skirmishes , which involved limited combat , occurred in May 1776 at and around The Cedars , 45 km (28 mi) west of Montreal , Quebec . Continental Army units were opposed by a small number of British troops leading a larger force of Indians (primarily Iroquois) , and militia .

Brigadier General Benedict Arnold , commanding the American military garrison at Montreal , had placed a detachment of his troops at The Cedars in April 1776 , after receiving rumors of British and Indian military preparations to the west of Montreal . The garrison surrendered on May 19 after a confrontation with a combined force of British and Indian troops led by Captain George Forster . American reinforcements on their way to The Cedars were also captured after a brief skirmish on May 20 . All of the captives were eventually released after negotiations between Forster and Arnold , who was bringing a sizable force into the area . The terms of the agreement required the Americans to release an equal number of British prisoners . However , the deal was repudiated by Congress , and no British prisoners were freed .

Colonel Timothy Bedel and Lieutenant Isaac Butterfield , leaders of the American force at The Cedars , were court @-@ martialed and cashiered from the Continental Army for their roles in the affair . After distinguishing himself as a volunteer , Bedel was given a new commission in 1777 . News of the affair included greatly inflated reports of casualties , and often included graphic but false accounts of atrocities committed by the Iroquois , who made up the majority of the British forces .

= = Background = =

The Cedars is located on the north shore of the Saint Lawrence River , about 45 kilometres (28 mi) from the center of modern Montreal , to the southwest of the western tip of the island of Montreal , from which it is separated by the Ottawa River . The nearby rapids in the Saint Lawrence required portage , making The Cedars a strategic landing point for anyone navigating the river to or from Montreal . Crossing of the Ottawa River was made between Fort Anne and Quinze @-@ Chênes , now Vaudreuil .

= = = Montreal = = =

In September 1775 , early in the American Revolutionary War , a Continental Army under the direction first of Major General Philip Schuyler , and later of Brigadier General Richard Montgomery , invaded the British Province of Quebec . The city of Montreal was taken without a fight on November 13 , following the Siege of Fort St. Jean . Montgomery left a garrison of troops under the command of Major General David Wooster in control of Montreal before leading the rest of the army to Quebec City . The occupation of Montreal was poorly managed , and relations between the Americans and the population , including those supportive of the Americans , deteriorated for a variety of reasons . One major factor that contributed to the poor relations was the American interdiction of trade with the Indian populations on the upper St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes , since the trade goods might be used to support British garrisons in those areas . The fur trade was economically important to the city , and its absence affected both supporters and opponents of the American cause .

Following the American losses at the battle of Quebec at the end of 1775 , Wooster eventually led reinforcements to Quebec . He arrived early in April 1776 , and the military administration of Montreal passed temporarily to Colonel Moses Hazen before going to Brigadier General Benedict Arnold , who had been in command at Quebec . The American forces occupying the city numbered about 500 , with additional forces at posts outside the city . Wooster had reported to General Schuyler as early as March 5 of rumored scheming between British troops and Indians to the west of the city . In response to these alarming reports , as well as the unauthorized departures of two fur

traders and Claude de Lorimier , a British Indian agent from Montreal , Hazen had sent 400 troops commanded by Colonel Timothy Bedel of Bedel 's Regiment to occupy a strategic position at The Cedars in early April . Lieutenant Isaac Butterfield led an advance force that arrived at The Cedars on April 26 and began construction of a wooden stockade fort , fortifying it with two 4 @-@ pound cannons . Bedel and the rest of the detachment arrived on May 6 .

= = = British call to arms = = =

The Indian agent Lorimier traveled west to Oswegatchie , where a company of the 8th Regiment of Foot under the command of George Forster had occupied Fort de La Présentation . Lorimier proposed recruiting a force of Indians to launch an attack on Continental forces at Montreal from the west . When Forster agreed , Lorimier went to Saint Regis , where he recruited 100 Mohawk men from Akwesasne . Word of these activities led the American rebels to fortify The Cedars .

At Fort Niagara in early May the Loyalist captain , John Butler , held a conference with several hundred tribesmen , primarily from the Six Nations of the Iroquois , in which his goal was to break pledges of neutrality some of them had made in 1775 . Butler , an experienced Indian agent , plied the natives with liquor and tales of combat ; he convinced more than 50 Seneca , Cayuga , and Onondaga warriors to join the British cause , as well as some warriors from further west . Historians are uncertain whether any of these recruits participated in the action at The Cedars , but it appears unlikely . Stanley (1973) is of the opinion that Indian participation was limited to those recruited by Lorimier , who went as far as Gananoque to recruit . Lanctot (1967) and Smith do not identify any specific tribes participating in the action .

James Stanley Goddard , one of the fur traders who left with Lorimier , traveled further west in an ultimately unsuccessful effort to raise an Indian force to oppose the Americans occupying Quebec . He reached Fort Michilimackinac in June , where the British commander , Captain Arent DePeyster , sent him recruiting among the Menominee and Winnebago tribes near Green Bay . DePeyster also sent out Joseph Ainsse , a local Indian interpreter , to recruit from tribes closer to the fort . None of the Indians recruited by these men reached Montreal until well after the Americans had left the city .

= = Prelude = =

Once forces began assembling at Oswegatchie , Lorimier made arrangements with a sympathetic priest near The Cedars for the provisioning of supplies for the troops . With the assistance of some men of the 8th Foot , he strategically hid several shallow @-@ draft boats , known as bateaux , near a point where the Saint Lawrence River could be crossed .

Forster left Oswegatchie on May 12 with about 40 regular troops , 10 British and French @-@ speaking Canadian militia , and 160 Iroquois . On May 14 , they picked up 44 more Iroquois at Saint Francis , and camped at the western end of Saint Francis Lake on May 16 . On May 17 , Forster received scouting reports about the troop strength at The Cedars . The Indians were concerned about the number of troops , but news that the Americans were in retreat from the city of Quebec emboldened them to act .

On May 15 , Bedel left The Cedars , leaving Butterfield in charge of the fort . Bedel later claimed that the reason for his departure was to meet with the friendly Caughnawaga Indians . In his court martial , the judges concluded this claim was suspect . He returned to Montreal and reported that a force of 150 British troops of the 8th Foot and about 500 Iroquois commanded by Forster was approaching . On this news , Colonel John Paterson sent Major Henry Sherburne with 140 men from his regiment toward The Cedars . Arnold , who was meeting with the retreating Continental Army command at Sorel , returned to Montreal when the news reached him and set about organizing a larger relief force .

= = Battle = =

== The Cedars ==

Forster 's force landed near the American @-@ occupied fort on May 18 , and sent in a demand for surrender . Butterfield countered with a request to withdraw under arms , which Forster refused . The parties exchanged fire . During the course of the exchange , Forster received word that Sherburne had crossed the Ottawa River from the island of Montreal to Quinze @-@ Chênes , but , believing The Cedars to have fallen already , had retreated back across the river . This news caused the besiegers to redouble their efforts the next day . Additional help arrived for the British in the form of about 40 Canadiens under Jean @-@ Baptiste Testard de Montigny ; Forster sent them to harass Sherburne . Word then came to Forster that Sherburne had resumed his advance ; Butterfield , unaware of this , surrendered the fort . The terms of capitulation included a guarantee of the personal safety of the captured men . The Iroquois plundered the fort 's stores , and denied some of the captives small pouches of sometimes valuable personal items .

== Quinze @-@ Chênes ==

Sherburne reached Fort Anne , across the Ottawa River from Quinze @-@ Chênes , on May 17 . A scout he sent across the river the next day was captured by Lorimier . The scout was allowed to notify Sherburne of his capture ; in his message he included a claim that 500 Indians had surrounded the fort at The Cedars . Consequently , Sherburne decided to delay crossing the river , and sent word back to Montreal requesting further assistance .

Sherburne decided to advance on May 20 . Some of his men were apparently suffering from the aftereffects of smallpox , so these were left behind . Sherburne landed about 100 of his men at Quinze @-@ Chênes , about 16 kilometres (10 mi) from The Cedars . When word of this crossing reached Forster , he ordered Lorimier to take 100 Indians and stop Sherburne . Lorimier was at first only able to raise 40 warriors , but was joined on the way by another 40 . Sherburne , not realizing that Butterfield had already surrendered , marched his troops right at Lorimier 's advancing force . They fought for about 40 minutes before Sherburne , believing he was being attacked by a much larger force , surrendered . The Iroquois claimed these captives as war spoils , since they were not part of the fort 's garrison , and prepared to kill some of them in retaliation for their own losses . Only the intervention of Forster , who paid a ransom , prevented this ; it did not prevent the Iroquois from stripping the prisoners of all but their clothes .

== Arnold 's relief ==

Following his successes , Forster moved his forces , including all of the prisoners , down to Quinze @-@ Chênes , where more Loyalist militia had assembled . Leaving some of the prisoners there , he advanced on May 23 to Fort Senneville , a fortified works located on the southwest tip of Montreal island that was owned by Montigny . In the meantime , Arnold gathered most of the few remaining forces in Montreal , and sent requests to the outposts around the city for additional troops . By May 24 , he was entrenched at Lachine , south of the city , and his force had reached 450 men . Forster began to advance on Lachine , but decided to retreat back to Quinze @-@ Chênes when his scouts notified him of Arnold 's position . He also received intelligence from Montreal that Arnold 's force was going to be massively reinforced ? the reported number of reinforcements was 1 @,@ 500 to 2 @,@ 000 men , more than Arnold had available in the area .

Once his scouts reported Forster 's retreat , Arnold gave chase . He reached Fort Senneville (which he burned) on May 26 , just as Forster 's men were landing on the far shore at Quinze @-@ Chênes . Arnold decided to send a group of Caughnawagas , who were friendly to the Americans , with a demand that Forster release his prisoners and a threat that he would destroy area Indian villages if any of the prisoners were harmed . Forster countered that he would permit his Indians to kill the prisoners if Arnold attacked . Arnold attempted to cross the Ottawa River with a number of his men in bateaux , but Forster used the four @-@ pounders captured at The Cedars to drive them back .

Arnold called a war council so the Americans could consider their options . He wanted to mount a surprise attack the next morning ; Hazen , who had acquired significant experience fighting Indians in the French and Indian War , argued against the idea . The disagreement between the two men was severe enough that it nearly provoked Arnold to file charges of insubordination against Hazen . The council decided not to act , voting Arnold 's proposed attack down . Early in the morning of May 27 , a boat crossed the river carrying Sherburne and Forster 's deputy , Lieutenant Parke . Forster , whose forces were somewhat reduced as some of the Indians had returned to their homes , had negotiated a prisoner exchange with Sherburne and Butterfield . After further negotiations , both Arnold and Forster agreed to terms . The American prisoners were returned to Arnold at Fort Anne on May 30 , after being delayed for two days by high winds on the river .

= = Aftermath = =

The Americans never held up their side of the prisoner exchange . Formally repudiating the agreement over the protests of George Washington , Congress accused Forster of mistreating American prisoners by turning them over to the Indians . In a breach of etiquette , the letter containing the repudiation was delivered to Lieutenant General John Burgoyne , instead of the British commander @-@ in @-@ chief and governor of the province , Guy Carleton . The Congressional action may have been tainted by overly lurid accounts of the action ? Charles Carroll , part of a Congressional delegation that was in Montreal at the time , reported that " a hundred or more [American troops] were barbarously murdered by savages . " Arnold 's report of the incident included otherwise unsubstantiated allegations that two prisoners were killed by Forster 's Indians . Some histories of the action (for example , the 1882 history by Jones) include accounts of significant atrocities committed by the Indians , but little supporting evidence has been found . The Congressional repudiation complicated an attempted prisoner exchange in 1781 involving Burgoyne and Henry Laurens , a congressman from South Carolina whom the British were holding in the Tower of London ; Laurens was eventually freed in exchange for a promise to help negotiate Lord Cornwallis 's release .

Arnold initially blamed Bedel for the defeat . He removed both Bedel and Butterfield from command and sent them to Sorel for court @-@ martial . Due to the army 's retreat , the two men were not tried until August 1 , 1776 at Fort Ticonderoga . Both were convicted and cashiered from the army . Bedel continued to volunteer his services , and following Burgoyne 's surrender at Saratoga in October 1777 , he was given a new commission by Congress .

The site of some of the skirmishes was designated a National Historic Site of Canada in 1928 .