

= Siege of St. John 's =

The Siege of St. John 's was a failed attempt by French forces led by Daniel d 'Auger de Subercase to take the fort at St. John 's , Newfoundland during the winter months of 1705 , in Queen Anne 's War . Leading a mixed force of regulars , militia , and Indians , Subercase burned much of the town and laid an ineffectual siege against the fort for five weeks between late January and early March 1705 . Subercase lifted the siege after running out of provisions and gunpowder .

The siege was part of a larger @-@ scale expedition that was an attempt to repeat the highly destructive expedition led by Pierre Le Moyne d 'Iberville in 1696 . Many outlying English communities were destroyed by Subercase 's men , leading to reprisal raids by the English . Fishing activities on both sides suffered for the duration of the war , which ended with the French cession of its claims to Newfoundland .

= = Background = =

The island of Newfoundland had been contested territory between France and England for some time before Queen Anne 's War broke out in 1702 . French raids during King William 's War in the 1690s had completely destroyed almost all of the English settlements , including the principal port of St. John 's , located on the east side of the Avalon Peninsula of southeastern Newfoundland . However , an English squadron led by Sir John Gibson and Sir John Morris persuaded the displaced fishermen to return and rebuild along their side of the peninsula . The Treaty of Ryswick signed in September 1697 led to the English receiving Newfoundland and the French retaining Acadia . However , the terms of the treaty became void when the French re @-@ established their capital in Plaisance , on the Avalon Peninsula 's west side .

In 1702 , English Captain John Leake raided a number of French settlements in Newfoundland , but avoided Plaisance due to the presence of French warships in the harbour . In 1703 , Daniel d 'Auger de Subercase arrived in Plaisance as the new governor and took command of a 150 @-@ man garrison and facilities that were in poor condition . After raiding Ferryland , he learned of a planned English attack on Plaisance , and prepared for the assault . It never came , as Admiral John Graydon , in what was widely seen in England as a cowardly move , called off the attack despite of having significant advantages . Graydon was subsequently court martialled and dismissed from the service over his conduct in the entire campaign , which also included the failed Siege of Guadeloupe .

= = = French preparations = = =

In late 1704 , Subercase began planning an attack against the English settlements . In addition to his garrison , he recruited Canadiens and Abenakis from the mainland and as many settlers as possible to participate in the effort . In all , his force numbered about 450 when it set out across the peninsula on 8 January 1705 . His corps included a company of over 100 men led by Josué Dubois Berthelot de Beaujours that included Jacques Testard de Montigny and the Abenaki war leader Escumbuit , both of whom had participated in Pierre Le Moyne d 'Iberville 's 1696 raid against English settlements . While most of the company went overland , a brigantine was sent around the peninsula with some heavy guns .

= = = English defences = = =

St. John 's was under the command of Lieutenant John Moody , with Lieutenant Robert Latham , a military engineer and mason , as his second in command . The principal defences of St. John 's were Fort William , a stone fortification on the north side of the harbour built after the French expedition of 1696 , and the South Castle , a stone fort on the south side of The Narrows which commanded the harbour entrance . Moody had put Latham in command of South Castle , while he commanded at Fort William . The combined defense force numbered between 50 and 60 men , with

about a dozen under Latham 's command .

= = Siege = =

The progress of the French was quite slow , due to the extreme winter cold and snow . They first captured Bay Bulls and Ferryland (small coastal communities south of St. John 's) without opposition , and then moved on to St. John 's , where they arrived near the town on 31 January . Subercase had wanted to surprise the English , but the opportunity was lost when his advance guard approached within sight of the English defences (the remaining force having been delayed by poor conditions) , and was driven off by cannon fire . Most of the community then fled to the protection of Fort William , and Subercase had to content himself with occupying the town while waiting for the brigantine to arrive . While he did take prisoners , he released the women and children to the fort in order to increase the burden on the English supplies . The women ended performing valuable assistance in helping with the fort 's defence .

After about two weeks ' siege , Subercase attempted to use the divisions between Moody and Latham to diminish English morale and possibly achieve a negotiated surrender or gain control of Latham 's post . He sent letters to both men , one from himself to Moody , and a second from one of the prisoners , addressed to Latham . The letter to Latham implied that a deal was in the works with Moody , and Subercase 's agents tried to convince Latham to leave his works to meet with Moody . Latham refused , and Subercase 's effort was ineffective .

After 33 days of waiting , in which the brigantine with the heavy guns never appeared , Subercase , running low on munitions and provisions , lifted the siege . He destroyed the town 's houses and fishing stages , and returned to Plaisance , taking with him 200 civilian captives . Subercase detached Montigny and 70 men , who continued to raid English settlements through the rest of the winter .

= = Aftermath = =

The French expedition took 1 @, @ 200 prisoners in all , most of which were released due to a lack of provisions , and destroyed forty cannon , 2 @, @ 000 fishing shallops , and 200 wagons , but failed to eliminate the stronghold . John Moody returned to England in late 1705 , and was rewarded with a lieutenant 's commission in the Coldstream Guards . He feuded with Latham , charging him with irregularities in his administration of the fortification works and poor command of South Castle , and his complaints led to Latham 's recall .

Subercase continued to develop the French colony in 1705 , which flourished despite the war . He was rewarded for his efforts with the Order of Saint Louis and the governorship of Acadia . There he presided over Port Royal 's defences , successfully fending off British sieges in 1707 , but was then forced to capitulate to overwhelming force in 1710 .

Subercase 's replacement at Plaisance , Philippe Pastour de Costebelle , negotiated an exchange of prisoners from the siege , and successfully captured St. John 's in January 1709 . France gave up claims of sovereignty over Newfoundland in the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht and , under Costebelle 's supervision , moved the French settlers from Newfoundland to Louisbourg .

The site of Fort William is a National Historic Site of Canada (marked by a plaque) , and the South Castle location is part of the Signal Hill National Historic Site .