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Our history made us who we are

by BRIAN LOCKHART

It was the morning of September 13, 1759, when French General Louis-Joesph, Marquis de Montcalm, emerged from his lodgings to find a British firing line of soldiers a kilometre wide had assembled on the Plains of Abraham, near Quebec City, ready to do battle.

The French were surprised. They did not expect the British troops to be able to scale the cliffs from the St. Lawrence River and bring two bronze 6-pounder cannons with them.

The British were led by General James Wolfe.

The British had placed the city under siege for several months and smaller skirmishes occurred before the main battle.

The French were already in trouble before the battle even started. They were a mix of both regular soldiers and local militia units who were poorly trained and armed.

Montcalm was trained for set battles in which regiments and soldiers moved in precise order. His soldiers were not trained for this.

Oddly, General Wolfe ordered his soldiers to charge their muskets with two balls each for the initial engagement when they were ordered to fire on their opponents.

During the battle, Wolfe was struck in the wrist by a musket ball. He wrapped the wound and continued to lead his men.

Several minutes later, Wolfe was struck by two shots ? one in the lower stomach and a fatal wound in the chest.

During the French retreat, Montcalm, while on his horse, was struck by either a canister shot or repeated musket fire and was hit in the lower abdomen and thigh. He died in the early morning hours from his wounds.

The British victory on the Plains of Abraham not only changed the course of Canadian history, it changed the course of an entire continent.

I think we quite often forget the rich history that has created this nation. I learned none of this in history class when I was a student.

I learned about this battle when my parents took us on a long road trip out east and stopping at the battle site was part of the itinerary.

Unlike the U.S., where pretty much every battle fought on U.S. soil has been made into a movie, our history has never really been captured on film in the same way.

On the morning of October 13, 1812, during the War of 1812, American forces began crossing the Niagara River at Queenston.

Defending forces opened fire on the invading troops. The two sides exchanged artillery fire across the river.

Twenty miles downstream, General Isaac Brock, who was at Fort George in Niagara-on-the-Lake was awakened by the noise of the artillery.

Brock rode the 20 miles on horseback to the site of the skirmish.

Taking charge of the situation, Brock led the charge up the hill at Queenston Heights. He was struck in the wrist by a musket ball but continued the charge.

Moments later, an American sniper found his mark and Brock was hit in the chest and mortally wounded.

His last words were reportedly, ?Push on, brave York Volunteers.' However, that is regarded as folklore.

Struck through the middle of his chest and killed almost instantly, Brock's last words were more likely a gurgle before dying on the battlefield.

Brock's legacy was so great, that the site of his death is marked, and there is a park on the battlefield.

A 185-foot column that was created in his honour is a dominant feature of the park and is one of the most impressive monuments in the country.

On July 25, 1814, an invading American army and British and Canadian forces met at a place called Lundy's Lane, on a very hot day, just a few miles from Niagara Falls.

One of the bloodiest battles of the War of 1812 ensued.

The fighting went on until midnight, with artillery exchanging hands several times at the crest of a hill.

Fighting in the dark, there was a lot of confusion on the battlefield. It must have been quite the sight to see volleys fired in the darkness among the yells of soldiers and screams of the wounded.

In the morning, the battlefield was littered with the dead and dying. There were over 1,700 casualties.

The battle site is now paved over with houses, churches, and commercial buildings.

It is the only main battle site in Canada that was never preserved. However, a church cemetery on the site, which was actually started before the battle, contains many historic graves including the grave of Laura Secord, a heroine of the war.

There are many more historic battles and events that shaped this country.

Every student should be taught the importance of these events that created the country we now enjoy and thrive in.