The French and Indian War

*Standards: 4.22, 8.19*

*Essential Question: What were the causes and outcomes of the French and Indian War?*

The French and Indian War stands as perhaps the most consequential pre-Revolutionary conflict not only in the history of colonial America, but also in the entirety of the 18th century. At the war’s outbreak, France, Britain, and Spain all vied for territory and influence in North America. By the war’s end, Britain would not only control all of the European territories in North America, but also extend its influence throughout Africa, India, and the Caribbean. Meanwhile, at the outset of the war Native American nations and tribes were viewed as both powerful allies and enemies of the European empires. However, the end of the French and Indian War would largely see the end of Native Americans’ roles as respected adversaries or allies to be included in diplomacy and warfare, and precipitate the decline of Native and European-American relations to the level of outright racial hatred. Finally, Britain’s explosive levels of post-war debt led directly to a series of wildly unpopular colonial taxes which would set the stage for the American Revolution less than 15 years later.

The prelude to the French and Indian War begins, fittingly, with the signing of a treaty between representatives of New France (Canada) and one of the most powerful Native American nations – the Iroquois Confederation. Pressed by the French to the North and West and the British to the East, the Iroquois shrewdly, and secretly, signed separate treaties with both sides. Subsequently known as the Grand Settlement of 1701, the Iroquois swore to the French to remain neutral in any military conflict between the empires, while simultaneously ceding a number of territories to the British in a reaffirmation of the longstanding “Covenant Chain” which held the Iroquois bound in friendship to the British. The Iroquois would profit heavily by playing both sides against one another until the 1750s.

As part of the Iroquois' arrangement with the French, the latter agreed to acknowledge the former's claim to the Ohio Country so long as the British were kept out. France's control of the Ohio Country rested upon its trading partnerships with the Native tribes occupying the region, including the Delaware, Shawnee, and Mingo, all of whom fell under the authority of the Iroquois. As Fred Anderson notes, “Britain's cheap, high-quality trade goods would become a magnet drawing away the native peoples who now traded with the French at Detroit and other posts.”[[1]](#footnote-1) This in turn would lead to the dissolution of France's network of alliances with Native tribes throughout the interior of the continent which allowed the empire to enforce its territorial claims against the British.

France's fears were well founded, as British colonial traders gradually began seeping into the Ohio Country. The most prominent of these traders was the Pennsylvanian George Croghan, who took the brazen step of establishing a permanent trading post nearby the Miami village of Pickawillany with the permission and support of the Miami chieftain Memeskia, also referred to as “Old Briton” for his support of the British. Anderson notes that Pickawillany subsequently became “...a great emporium, an immense magnet for Indian groups that had formerly traded at Detroit”[[2]](#footnote-2)

The inroads made by Croghan and other Pennsylvanian traders naturally drew the attention of others. The ambitious Ohio Company of Virginia had coveted lands in the trans-Appalachian west for years. Then, in 1744 one of the company's chief shareholders was appointed to represent Virginia at a conference with the Iroquois Confederacy in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. There, the Iroquois offered to cede all of their remaining territorial claims within the limits of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia in exchange for a recognition of Iroquois sovereignty over numerous southern tribes and unhindered travel through Virginia in order to raid these peoples, including the Cherokee and Catawbas of South Carolina.[[3]](#footnote-3) The Iroquois, believing that they were only ceding all land up to the Shenandoah Valley, did not realize that Virginia's royal charter of 1609 stipulated that the colony's territory extended all the way to the Pacific.

With Iroquois land cessions in hand and believing the trans-Appalachian territory to be well within their dominion, the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1745 granted the Ohio Company 300 square miles of land at the Forks of the Ohio River where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers fed into the Ohio, on the sole condition that the company settle 200 families in the area. The outbreak of the War of Austrian Succession (King George's War in North America) in 1744 prevented the company from advancing. However, with the return to peace in 1748, they resumed their operations. The Ohio Company secured a strong ally and guardian of their interests in 1751 when they presented the new lieutenant governor of Virginia, Robert Dinwiddie, with a share in the company.

In June of the following year, Dinwiddie levied his influence to call a treaty council at Logstown. There, representatives of the Ohio Company offered one thousand pounds worth of diplomatic gifts to Tanaghrisson, the Iroquois representative for and semi-overseer of the Ohio Indians, in exchange for permission to construct a trading post along the Forks of the Ohio. Realizing that the French would likely retaliate against the presence of the Pennsylvania traders who had already been in the Ohio Country for several years, and desperately needing the resources offered by the Virginians in order to defend Iroquois interests against such an inevitability, Tanaghrisson accepted.

Tanaghrisson's fear came to pass sooner than he realized. Just days after the conclusion of the Logstown conference, a French-sanctioned expedition composed of more than 200 Ojibwa and Ottawa warriors led by Charles-Michel Mouet de Langlade appeared at Pickawillany and razed both the settlement and George Croghan's trading post, taking five of the six colonial traders captive. Both the sixth captive trader and the pro-British Miami chief Memeskia (Old Briton) were killed, boiled, and ritually cannibalized by the Canadian Indians in order to illustrate to other tribes the consequences of abandoning the French alliance.

The remainder of the Pennsylvanian traders within the Ohio Country quickly evacuated, and the Miami, realizing that they could not count on the Pennsylvanians to provide them with weapons and ammunition to resist future raids, rejoined the French fold and abandoned Pickawillany. With the Pennsylvanians handily ousted, the French at first believed their territory had been successfully defended from the British. The French were under the impression that the intruding traders from both Pennsylvania and Virginia were two sides of a coordinated British effort to gain a foothold in the Ohio Country, and with the Pennsylvanians turning tail the Virginians would soon follow. In fact, the two groups were vicious competitors, and with the Pennsylvanians out of the picture the Virginians moved swiftly to fill the gap. With permission wrought from Tanaghrisson at the Treaty of Lancaster, the Ohio Company of Virginia, undaunted by the French show of force, forged recklessly ahead with their plans to establish a settlement near the Forks. The fortified storehouse of Red Stone Fort which was subsequently erected at the confluence of Red Stone Creek and the Monongahela River sparked outrage among the leadership of New France, who believed the time had now come to assert French control over the Ohio Country in a much more tangible way.

Assuming the office of Canadian governor-general on July 1, 1752, Michel-Ange Duquesne de Menneville concluded that if raids on British-aligned Ohio tribes were insufficient to deter the encroaching colonists, then a more aggressive and blatant display of French authority would be necessary. The marquis Duquesne thus moved swiftly to establish four forts throughout the Ohio Country – Fort Presque Isle, Fort de la Rivière au Boeuf, Fort Machault, and the most brazen message to the British, Fort Duquesne at the Forks of the Ohio. The forts' construction took two years, and by 1754 the powder keg was ready to explode.

To Lt. Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia, the construction of several French forts throughout the Ohio Country appeared to be nothing less than a blatant attempt to prevent Virginians from expanding into territory which, they believed, belonged rightfully to the British Crown, making it moreover an encroachment upon British lands. More pressingly to Dinwiddie, this wall of French hostility would prevent the Ohio Company, in which he held stock, from carrying out its objective to settle colonists along the Forks. Yet with his hands tied by politics and an uncooperative House of Burgesses, Dinwiddie could only dispatch an emissary to the forts with orders to demand their evacuation in the King's name. The officer he chose for this mission was 21 year old Major George Washington.

Major Washington departed on November 1, 1753. On his expedition he visited Fort Machault and Fort Le Boeuf, at the latter of which he met with the French regional commander, demanding that the French evacuate their forts. The French commander politely declined, and sent Washington on his way. The young Major made careful note of the French fortifications and entrenchments at these forts, and gave a full report of his observations to Lt. Governor Dinwiddie upon returning in January, 1754. Alarmed by the French progress on three forts, and even more so by Washington's report that the French were preparing to begin construction on a fourth fort at the Forks of the Ohio, Dinwiddie reached the conclusion that the only way to keep the French away from the Ohio would be to beat them to the Forks. Accordingly, the Lt. Governor secured ₤10,000[[4]](#footnote-4) to recruit 200 soldiers and construct a fort at the Forks.

Now the most knowledgable explorer of the Ohio Country, George Washington was promoted to Lt. Colonel of the brigade and instructed to rendezvous with the group of 40 builders who had already been sent ahead to begin construction on Fort Prince George. Washington was to connect with the commanding officer of the Virginia Regiment, Colonel Joshua Frye, as well as a brigade of British redcoat soldiers from South Carolina, at Wills Creek Fort. However, on April 22, mere days after arriving at the fort, Washington was visited by the commander of the carpenters sent ahead to construct the fort at the Forks. He told of a large French force which had appeared suddenly and forced the carpenters to surrender the partially built fort. With no time to wait for reinforcements, Washington and his troops left Wills Creek to rendezvous with Tanaghrisson and his warriors who promised to lead Washington to the French party. What followed is generally considered the opening act of the French and Indian War.

The colonists and Native warriors took the small French band of 35 men entirely unaware. By the time the French commander, Ensign Joseph Coulon de Villiers de Jumonville, called for a ceasefire the French had suffered fourteen casualties to the Virginians' one. Upon interrogation, Jumonville revealed that his party were diplomatic envoys sent from the newly completed Fort Duquesne at the Forks to demand Washington and his men withdraw from French lands or face the consequences. Then came the spark which ignited the war. Tanaghrisson stepped forward and split Jumonville's skull while his message was being translated. With this act, Tanaghrisson hoped to seal a lasting covenant with the British against the French, as he himself had been driven from power by the pro-French tribes of the Ohio Country – the Delawares and Shawnees.

In the five weeks that followed, Washington's troops were joined by the promised 200 Virginia militiamen and the regiment of British redcoats from South Carolina. He was also informed that Colonel Frye had died after falling from his horse, and Washington was now to assume command of the entire force. However, the young Colonel soon discovered that a large force composed of 600 French regular troops and Canadian militiamen, as well as 100 Indian warriors from the Great Lakes, was converging on his location. Washington's men retreated to the hastily constructed Fort Necessity, but were surrounded by the much larger French force on July 3, 1754. After a day of fighting, the French commander, Captain Louis Coulon de Villiers, brother of the murdered Ensign Jumonville, offered Washington's men an honorable surrender and be allowed to withdraw if he would sign a capitulation agreement. Washington signed the agreement, not realizing that it contained a written confession to the killing of Ensign Jumonville – an act which, due to Jumonville's status as a diplomatic envoy, constituted a declaration of war against France.

Though they now had all the justification necessary to declare open war against Britain, the French opted against rash action. The British on the other hand, fearing swift French retaliation for the death of Ensign Jumonville, began mobilizing for war. With the backing of Prince William Augustus, the Duke of Cumberland, Parliament appointed Major General Edward Braddock to be Commander in Chief of British forces in North America, and dispatched him to the colonies along with two regiments of British regular troops. Two additional regiments were ordered to be raised by the colonies themselves and placed under the command of Governor William Shirley of Massachusetts. Braddock's regiments were to force the French from the Forks of the Ohio and then move on to dislodge them from Forts Machault, Le Boeuf, and Presque Isle. Meanwhile, Governor Shirley's colonial regiments were to assault Fort Niagara on Lake Ontario.

Now, France reacted. In retaliation to Britain's aggressive move, France sent 78 regular infantry companies totaling approximately 3,000 troops to Canada.[[5]](#footnote-5) In the British colonies, Braddock, who had been given broad authority over the colonial leaders, ordered each colony to appropriate soldiers and supplies for his expedition over the objections of the indignant governors. Braddock intended to follow the trails cut by Washington's earlier expedition to the French forts, and accordingly appointed Washington to be his personal aide. Before setting out, a delegation of Ohio Indians, now entirely disillusioned with the French and seeking a new ally in restoring their independence in the region, came to Braddock with a gesture of good will and an offer of military aid provided Braddock would assure them that they would be allowed their autonomy following the expulsion of the French from the Ohio Country. Foolishly, Braddock spurned the “savages” as he saw them, believing the well trained armies of Britain were more than a match for the French and their Native allies.

With preparations complete, Braddock's army set out for the Forks on May 29, 1755. Braddock's impatience with the slow progress of the march caused him to split the army into two divisions – a “flying column” of approximately 1,200 hand picked men would charge ahead under Braddock's command, while the remainder of the expedition, carrying most of the supplies and heavy artillery, would follow behind, improving the rough trails for future use as they went. The subsequent engagement would showcase just how ignorant the British were toward the realities of warfare in the wild, forested lands of North America.

Braddock's flying column collided with a French force of 900 men – 146 Canadian militiamen, 108 French marines, and 637 northern Indian warriors, sent from Fort Duquesne to gauge the strength of the approaching expedition. The French detachment, much more accustomed to wilderness warfare, immediately dispersed into the trees and began picking off the redcoats. By the time the British soldiers turned to retreat, over 500 redcoats lay dead, 450 more were wounded, 60 of the 86 officers had been killed, and Braddock himself had been mortally wounded. By contrast, only 23 of the French and Indians had been killed, with only 16 wounded.[[6]](#footnote-6) It was one of the most stunning defeats Britain had ever, or would ever experience.

George Washington, miraculously unscathed, assumed command of the remaining troops and led them swiftly backward to rendezvous with the slower half of the expedition and Colonel Thomas Dunbar, who had been left in command. Panicking, Dunbar ordered the artillery and munitions destroyed, and marched the army to Philadelphia. Meanwhile, Washington and the companies of Virginia militiamen which had joined the expedition returned to Fort Cumberland, where they were reorganized by Governor Dinwiddie into the Virginia Regiment, with Washington in command. For the next 3 years Washington's troops would attempt to defend over 300 miles of frontier settlements along the Shenandoah Valley from Indian raiders, who, using the roads Braddock's expedition had improved, would rain destruction upon frontier settlements in Virginia and Pennsylvania.

The remaining British campaigns of 1755, directed at Fort Niagara on Lake Ontario, Fort Saint Frédéric on Lake Champlain, and Forts Beauséjour and Gaspereau in Nova Scotia, avoided becoming major disasters as Braddock's had, but two of the three expeditions were halted in their tracks. Governor William Shirley himself personally led the campaign to Niagara, while William Johnson led the campaign to Fort Saint Frédéric, and Major General John Winslow led the campaign to Nova Scotia. Governor Shirley's expedition planned to stop and supply at Fort Oswego before marching on Niagara. However, due to a combination of huge troop desertions, lack of an adequate supply route to Oswego, and a bitter winter, Shirley's regiments were forced to remain at Oswego, and the march against Niagara never materialized.

William Johnson's march to Fort Saint Frédéric was halted by an ambush prepared by the baron de Dieskau, then the commander in chief of French forces. The British retreated and fortified a position, which Dieskau drove his forces toward, only to see them cut down in huge numbers. Though Dieskau himself was taken prisoner following the battle, his forces retreated and built Fort Carillon at the foot of Lake George. William Johnson's men likewise established Fort William Henry. The fighting between the two forts would go on for nearly two years in a perpetual stalemate with neither side able to advance beyond the opposing fort.

Finally, the one successful British campaign of 1755 was the taking of Forts Beauséjour and Gaspereau in Nova Scotia. Though Nova Scotia was then under British authority, the native Acadian populations were French-speaking Catholics who remained neutral to both sides. Governor Shirley believed that the remaining French forts in the region would offer the Acadians an outlet to overthrow the ruling British officials, and decided the forts must be removed. An expedition led by Major General John Winslow brought about the fall of the forts, and an attempt to force the Acadians to swear allegiance to the British Crown. When they did not, there followed the first of several campaigns of ethnic cleansing in Nova Scotia, as the British forcibly removed thousands of Acadians from their homes and either shipped them across the Atlantic or sent them to the French-controlled Louisiana territory. Anderson states that nearly seven thousand Acadians had been forcibly removed by the end of 1755.[[7]](#footnote-7)

1756 began almost as disastrously for the British when the new commander of French forces in the field, Louis-Joseph de Montcalm, personally oversaw the capture and destruction of Fort Oswego. With Braddock's death, William Shirley had become the commander in chief of British forces in North America. Yet his military inexperience was fully on display for the Dukes of Cumberland and Newcastle and their subordinates in England, who moved early in 1756 to have the governor replaced by John Campbell, the Earl of Loudoun and his second in command, Major General James Abercromby. Lord Loudoun arrived in North America on July 23, and like Braddock before him, proceeded to spend a great deal of time angrily lecturing the colonial governments about their duty while they stubbornly resisted his demands for troops and supplies.

In May of 1756 the French, having gradually convinced Austria to abandon their age-old alliance with Britain, launched an attack on British holdings in Europe – the first shots fired outside North America. The British would officially declare war on France on May 18, 1756, spreading the French and Indian War across the entire world in what would later be known as the Seven Years War – the first true world war in history.

Though the situation appeared grim for the British in the early months of 1756, the events of that year would lay the foundation for a turning point in the conflict. Though the marquis de Montcalm's forces appeared unbeatable at first, divisions within the French command structure would ultimately lead to the undoing of their effective military strategies. Montcalm was a quintessentially professional European soldier. His superior, the marquis de Vaudreuil, Governor-General of New France, was a native of Canada and much more accustomed to the guerrilla warfare tactics necessitated by the heavily forested North American wilderness. For the first several years of the war, France's forces had benefited mightily from employing Native warriors as raiders and irregular troops to harass British supply lines, settlements, and convoys – a strategy championed by Vaudreuil but disdained by Montcalm, who preferred traditional, professional European militarism.

Vaudreuil understood the motivations of the Natives. Montcalm did not. Though Montcalm employed their warriors, he refused to allow them to take prisoners and spoils from defeated foes – a traditional aspect of Native warfare, and a practice repugnant to the professional European soldier. The undoing of the French alliance with a number of Native tribes was set in motion following Montcalm's nearly flawless capture of Fort William Henry in August, 1756. In keeping with European military doctrine, the British garrison surrendered on the condition that they would be allowed to depart safely and honorably. The Native warriors who had accompanied Montcalm's army however were outraged by this, as they had anticipated the taking of plunder and captives – a traditional aspect of Indian warfare. Following Montcalm's refusal to allow this, the Natives withdrew and launched a surprise assault on the columns of surrendered British troops who were making their way from the fort under Montcalm's guarantee of safe passage. As many as 185 soldiers and fort workers were massacred and scalped within minutes, while over 500 more were taken captive.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Though Vaudreuil and Montcalm were able to ransom most of the prisoners from the Indians, the “Massacre of William Henry” as the British called it had several important outcomes. First, it permanently damaged Montcalm's reputation, as the belief that he had personally ordered the slaughter spread throughout the British colonies. From then on, no French troops would be offered honorable terms of surrender for the remainder of the war. Second, it shattered France's strong alliances with a number of Native tribes. The warriors left William Henry and spread word that should their warriors fight for the French, they would be denied their rightful spoils of victory. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, it sparked a wave of outraged anti-Indian sentiment throughout the American colonies, and precipitated the decline of Anglo-Indian relations to the level of broad racial animosity. From then on, tribal affiliation mattered little to the Americans. Indians were Indians, and that was the end of it.

Nevertheless, the war dragged on. With the withdrawal of Native warriors from the French ranks, Vaudreuil's offensive strategy, which until then had proved exceptionally effective, was now in ruins. Without Indian scouts, Montcalm was unable to continue his press into British territory, and was forced to pull back to Canada. This would prove to be the turning point of the war, as the French in North America were overwhelmingly outnumbered by the British and their American colonists. By abandoning the assault and retreating into a more defensive position, the French not only allowed the British precious time to regroup, but also shifted the advantage to the British who were now free to use their heavy numerical advantage to lay siege to New France.

Though the turning of the tide was underway, it would take another year and a number of other factors for it to materialize fully. 1757 proved to be another down year for the British, as none of Lord Loudoun's campaigns proved successful. Loudoun, as he had done from the beginning, took his anger out on the colonial governors and legislators who stubbornly resisted cooperating with his demands. Then, on March 10, 1758 news arrived which rocked the colonies. The Duke of Cumberland had been dismissed as Britain's preeminent military leader. Into this vacuum stepped the powerful partnership of the Duke of Newcastle and Lord William Pitt. Newcastle was selected Prime Minister, and Pitt was appointed Secretary of State. Under this arrangement, Lord Pitt assumed control of the entire worldwide war effort, and Newcastle saw to the financing and supplying of the military. Lord Pitt immediately set about implementing a new system which effectively revolutionized the British war effort.

In North America, Pitt's plans led to a number of dramatic changes. First, Lord Loudoun was dismissed as Commander in Chief and replaced by his second in command, Major General James Abercromby. Second, colonial officers would no longer be considered subordinate to British regular army officers of lower rank. This had been one of the most hated policies among the colonists and contributed to the widespread lack of cooperation which persisted during the earlier years of the war. Previously, a colonial general would be considered subordinate to a British lieutenant. Now, under Pitt's directive, colonial officers would only be subordinate to British officers of equal or higher rank. Finally, where previously colonial soldiers were required to purchase their own gear, the British government would now pay for the equipment of every American soldier recruited to the war effort, as well as reimburse the colonies for other accrued expenses.

The overwhelmingly positive colonial reaction was further bolstered by the fact that Abercromby, as new Commander and Chief, would have significantly less authority than either Loudoun or Braddock, returning a greater degree of autonomy to the colonial governments. Moreover, Lord Pitt himself would assume responsibility for planning the military campaigns. The colonists made a powerful show of support. Whereas Lord Loudoun had demanded the colonies raise 7,000 provincial troops and been denied, within weeks of Pitt's ascension the colonies voted to raise 23,000 provincial troops.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Yet despite the rapid turnaround of the British outlook and morale in North America, the first campaign of 1758 proved to be a shocking disaster fit to rival Braddock's expedition. Newly promoted Commander in Chief James Abercromby, seeking to reclaim ground lost following the capture and destruction of Fort William Henry in 1756, marched an enormous force of over 13,000 redcoats and American provincial troops to Lake George with the intention of overwhelming the Marquis de Montcalm's garrison of 3,600 at Fort Carillon. With the French holding a high position in the hills above the fort, Abercromby ordered a frontal assault. The result was utter chaos. The French cut a swath through the advancing British troops, leaving over 550 dead and 1,300 wounded. The French suffered only 337 casualties. The following morning the British retreated to their boats and rowed frantically back across Lake George. In a single night a garrison of 3,600 French soldiers had defeated the largest British army ever assembled in North America.

Yet this victory proved to be the exception to the rule of 1758, and a largely inconsequential triumph. Despite Abercromby's humiliating defeat, the remainder of Britain's campaigns in 1758 were markedly more successful, and paved the way for the ultimate downfall of New France. On July 26, the critical fortress of Louisbourg in Nova Scotia fell to an Anglo-American expedition led by Lt. General Jeffery Amherst after a six week siege. Exactly a month later, the equally vital Fort Frontenac on the Saint Lawrence River fell to Colonel Jean-Baptiste Bradstreet. Fort Frontenac represented the depot from which the French supplied all of their forts throughout the interior of the continent, while Louisbourg was the gateway to the Saint Lawrence, and by extension, to Montreal and Quebec. The fall of these two fortresses not only destroyed the French supply line, but laid bare the heart of New France to British naval assault from two directions.

The final campaign of 1758 dispelled any doubts about the inevitability of Britain's victory. Moreover, it signified the symbolic end of the war as the British claimed the ultimate prize which had sparked the worldwide conflict to begin with – Fort Duquesne and the Forks of the Ohio. For several years Fort Duquesne had been the staging point from which the French-allied Western Indians, including Delawares, Shawnees, and Mingos, had launched vicious raids upon the frontier settlements of Virginia and Pennsylvania with devastating effect. However, by 1758 the fort's supplies of trade goods with which to buy Indian support were dwindling. Moreover, the Ohio Indians were well aware of the weakening French position in the face of the resurgent British.

When the savvy Major General John Forbes, leader of the upcoming Duquesne expedition, called upon the Ohio Indians to discuss peace terms they were ready to deal. Following the conclusion of a sizable four day peace conference including representatives from the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, each of the Ohio tribes, the governors of Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and several other groups and smaller tribes, the Treaty of Easton was signed on October 25. In exchange for recognition of Indian sovereignty in areas of the Ohio Country, a promise that the British would not settle white colonists west of the Alleghenies, and the establishment of trade relations, the Iroquois Confederacy, the Delawares, and the remainder of the Ohio Indians formerly abandoned any association with the French and promised not to intervene in the British assault on the Forks of the Ohio. It was the final undoing of France's hold on her North American territories south of Canada.

Given that the defense of Fort Duquesne had largely been left in the hands of France's well compensated Indian allies, the loss of these defenders-by-proxy to General Forbes' peace treaty meant that the fort was all but defenseless in the face of the encroaching British force. With a garrison of only 300 troops, Captain François-Marie le Marchand de Lignery, commander of the French forces at the Forks, decided to level Fort Duquesne and retreat with the remaining supplies and munitions to the more heavily defended Fort Machault rather than allow them to fall into British hands. Thus, without firing a shot, General Forbes claimed the Forks of the Ohio for Great Britain.

1759 began at a dizzying pace, and by year's end would be remembered as Britain's most triumphant period of the war. So universal was Britain's success throughout every theater of the war in every corner of the world that 1759 came to be known as the “Annus Mirabilis” – the Miracle Year. In North America, the Miracle Year began with yet another change in leadership. In light of his catastrophic defeat at the gates of Fort Carillon, James Abercromby was swiftly removed from command and recalled to England. Lieutenant General Jeffery Amherst, lionized by the successful siege and capture of Louisbourg, was appointed the new Commander in Chief in his stead.

Amherst quickly began to carry out the plans envisioned by Lord Pitt. The plans for 1759 called for a three-pronged assault on the remainder of the French forts barring access to the heart of Canada, followed by a broad push upriver into Quebec and Montreal. General Amherst was to take approximately 11,000 troops to capture Forts Carillon and Saint Frédéric before taking Forts Île-aux-Noix, Saint-Jean, and Chambly en route to Montreal. Meanwhile, General James Wolfe who had served under Amherst during the Siege of Louisbourg, was to sail up the Saint Lawrence and lay siege to Quebec. Finally, Brigadier General John Prideaux and 5,000 men, along with however many Iroquois warriors could be mustered, were to both rebuild Fort Oswego and launch an assault on Fort Niagara on Lake Ontario before descending on Montreal from the west while General Amherst approached from the south.

Here can be seen just how vital the influence of the Iroquois was to both sides in the war. Having controlled the flow of information between Britain and France for decades, the Iroquois had often remained in the latter's favor by passing along information revealing imminent British attacks. In the wake of the Treaty of Easton however, the flow of information to the French was cut off, entirely without their knowledge. Thus the commander of Fort Niagara, Captain Pierre Pouchout, was taken completely unaware on July 10 when General Prideaux, 2,400 British and American soldiers, and 900 Iroquois warriors laid siege to his fort.

On July 23, a detachment of French reinforcements arrived. Led by Captain Lignery, the former commander of Fort Duquesne, the reinforcements totaled roughly1,600 French regulars, Canadian militiamen and French-allied Indians. The British forces, now under the command of Sir William Johnson following Prideaux's death days earlier, retreated to a hastily constructed barricade, but not before dispatching a group of Iroquois diplomats to convince Lignery's Indian allies to remove themselves from the upcoming battle. Johnson's ploy proved successful. When Lignery's forces appeared the following morning, there was not an Indian warrior among them. His forces had been cut roughly in half by this retreat, and the ensuing French charge on Johnson's forces was torn to shreds by British rifles and Iroquois warriors. Captain Pouchout surrendered the fort two days afterward. While Johnson failed to press forward to Montreal, the fall of Fort Niagara nevertheless spelled the ultimate end of France's hopes of reinvading the Ohio Country, as the forward French forts were now entirely cut off from their principle supply line. The war was now at Canada's doorstep, and General Wolfe's campaign took it into the heart of Canada.

On June 28, Wolfe and 22,000 men landed just below Quebec, where the Marquis de Montcalm had assumed control of the defenses with a force of 15,000. Though Wolfe's army outnumbered Montcalm's, only around 8,500 were well trained redcoats capable of carrying out siege action.[[10]](#footnote-10) The remainder were American provincial troops with little training or experience. As Anderson notes, “The normal calculus of success in eighteenth-century siege warfare...called for the besieging force to outnumber the defenders by no less than two to one.”[[11]](#footnote-11) With the numbers effectively reversed – Wolfe with just 8,500 capable siege troops to Montcalm's 15,000 defenders – the British general believed that the only path to victory was to draw Montcalm from his shell and force him to engage the British on open ground, where the vastly more disciplined and well trained British troops, backed by over 13,000 provincials, could decisively prevail.

Montcalm was also aware of this, and refused to budge. What followed was one of the most destructive campaigns of brutality which has ever taken place in North America. Wolfe began by shelling the city of Quebec itself, hoping to terrify the civilians into a riot which might force Montcalm to act. When that failed, Wolfe dispatched raiding parties to terrorize surrounding farmsteads and villages – burning and looting everything from barns to churches. Civilians were at times massacred, while by the end of the monthlong raiding campaign, approximately 1,400 farmhouses had been burned to the ground.[[12]](#footnote-12) Yet this too failed to bring Montcalm from the city.

After two consecutive months of unfettered brutality, Wolfe conceived an elaborate ploy. First sending a group of ships downriver as if in preparation for a separate landing, he then took a force six battalions upriver to a rocky cove with nearly no French resistance, due to Montcalm's belief that the terrain would make it impossible for a landing force to overcome. Yet landing under cover of darkness on September 13, Wolfe's forces quickly overwhelmed the token French resistance and began marching toward Quebec upon a plateau known as the Plains of Abraham.

At first believing the landing a diversionary ploy, Montcalm rode out from Quebec himself with about 4,500 men to survey. Yet when he saw the sizable British force heading toward the city, the Marquis realized that Quebec would be unable to withstand a siege from above while being shelled from below. With reinforcements at least 3 hours away, Montcalm decided that he had no option but to act swiftly. After having endured months of grueling sie now finally forced to give General Wolfe exactly what he had been seeking – open combat.

The battle proceeded nearly exactly as Wolfe predicted. Montcalm's troops, comprising a mix of regulars and Canadian militiamen, began their offensive in lopsided fashion. While the professional French regulars marched line by line, reloaded their weapons in unison, and followed orders to the letter, the loosely trained Canadians broke ranks, dropped out of line to reload, and even resorted to charging wildly forward into the fray. By contrast, Wolfe's redcoats proved to be the absolute model of European military professionalism, never once breaking rank or losing composure. The result was an outright slaughter. The French lines were shredded by British muskets and after a mere 15 minutes the fighting had become a full on British rout of the retreating French.

Despite the French retreat, the two armies suffered roughly equal casualties. Most significantly, each side suffered the loss of its commanding officer. General Wolfe, whose health had been failing rapidly, welcomed a warrior's death, and was afterward revered throughout North America and England as the greatest hero of the North American war. Meanwhile, the iron-willed Marquis de Montcalm, perhaps the most outsized figure of the war, suffered through agonizing pain from grapeshot wounds to his stomach and leg until early the following morning, steadfastly refusing to relinquish his command while he still breathed. Following his death, Governor Vaudreuil assumed command of the remaining French forces and ordered the retreat, leaving only a token force to hold Quebec for as long as possible. On September 18, Quebec surrendered. The British now controlled the Saint Lawrence from both ends. Montreal, the last bastion of French resistance, was surrounded on all sides.

Compared to previous campaigns of the war, the conquest of Montreal was both considerably less complex and less bloody. General Amherst believed that an overwhelming show of force would suffice to force a final French capitulation, and accordingly ordered a three-sided approach to the island city. A small fleet of warships carrying roughly 3,000 regular troops would travel down the Saint Lawrence from Quebec. Meanwhile, an expedition beginning at Crown Point (formerly Fort Saint Frédéric) would travel up the Lake Champlain-Richelieu River corridor with around 3,500 soldiers. Finally, a third expedition under Amherst's personal command would depart from Oswego with approximately 11,000 men and approach Montreal along the Saint Lawrence from the south, surrounding the city from all three water routes.

Amherst's forces were unexpectedly delayed by a tiny force of 300 French regulars along with provincial militia occupying Fort Lévis, Pointe au Baril, and the surrounding islands en route to Montreal. The valiant detachment managed to hold Amherst's 11,000 men for over a week and managed to sink two British warships and cripple a third before ultimately being slaughtered almost to the man. Amherst's forces rendezvoused with the other expeditions in the first days of September. Surrounded on all sides with dwindling supplies and no hope of reinforcements from France, Governor Vaudreuil surrendered Montreal to General Amherst on September 8, 1760. After 6 years of fighting, the French and Indian War was now over.

While the North American theater closed, the broader conflict of the Seven Years War would continue for another two years before drawing to an end. In that time, Spain, uneasy with the prospect of potential British supremacy throughout the world, joined the conflict in support of the French after having remained neutral for the majority of the war. This proved to be a colossal miscalculation as the Spanish, unlike the fully mobilized British military, had comparatively little wartime infrastructure in place and were largely unprepared to enter such a fiercely contested conflict. As a result British troops, hardened by several years of constant warfare, cut an easy swath through Spanish forces throughout the Caribbean, treating the campaigns almost as minor diversions while storming through the French sugar colonies. By the time the dust had settled the British had claimed both the Philippines and the invaluable island of Cuba from the Spanish.

On February 10, 1763 the Treaty of Paris was officially ratified, drawing the long war to a close. The British returned many of their captured territories to France and Spain, including nearly all of the respective Caribbean islands. In exchange, Britain claimed Canada and all French territories east of the Mississippi River. Moreover, while France retained broad control of India, Britain claimed sovereignty over a number of its regions. In exchange for Cuba and the Philippines, Britain claimed Florida from Spain. With the exception of the Louisiana territory west of the Mississippi, Britain was now the sole European power in North America, controlling all territory from Canada to Florida. Yet growing tensions with various powerful Indian nations in the post-war years threatened to cost the now world-spanning power its hard fought gains.

1. Anderson, Fred, *The War That Made America: A Short History of the French and Indian War* (New York, NY: Viking, 2005) 20 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Anderson 23 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Anderson 29 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Anderson 43 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Anderson 61 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Anderson 71 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Anderson 84 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Anderson 112 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Anderson 124 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Anderson 197 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Anderson 197 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Anderson 198 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)