

RED SNOW ON GRAND PRÉ

This enterprise of the French, if not well authenticated,
would now be deemed incredible.

(Haliburton)

ARCHIBALD MACMECHAN

I

The Forced March

THE last two campaigns had gone ill for France in Acadie and Isle Royale. With the spring of '45, a fleet of Bastonnais appeared suddenly before Louisbourg, which the French engineers had fortified according to the best principles of Vauban, and which had cost the King a million livres. It was the outlying bastion of New France, and thought to be as impregnable as Quebec. Yet it fell before the Bastonnais. The untrained New England militia, fishermen, plowboys and mechanics, with a merchant for their general, avoided the well placed batteries guarding the harbor and landed miles to the westward at Gabarus Bay. By sheer man-power they dragged their cannon to the hills overlooking the town and, in ignorant disdain of all the rules of war, forced M. Duchambon within forty-nine days to lower his flag. The world rang with the fame of the Bastonnais and their incredible exploit.

France prepared a deadly counterstroke. Next year a strong fleet gathered at Brest to retake Louisbourg, crush Annapolis Royal, punish Boston, ravage the Atlantic seaboard, and carry fire and sword to the English islands in the West Indies. The Duke d'Anville commanded this armada of sixty-five ships with over three thousand soldiers on board. All through that summer of '46, New France awaited their coming with high hope, and New England, with apprehension or dismay. But the months passed—June, July, August—without word, good or bad, of the great French fleet. Then, on September 10th, ninety days after sailing from Brest, the flagship *Northumberland*, with the Duke on board, reached Chebucto Bay, the appointed rendezvous. Here he met death, as did d'Estournelle, his second in command. The sick were taken out of the crowded, pestilential ships and camped under canvas on the shores of the Basin; but more than a thousand Frenchmen left their bones there. Within a month thirty ships had gathered in the Bay, though two were floating hospitals. In October, they sailed to overwhelm Annapolis Royal and winter at

St. Croix, to strike at least one blow for the honour of France; but storms defeated them, and drove them back across the Atlantic.

In '45, Marin had invested Annapolis Royal and, again, the next year, Ramezay threatened it with his force of Indians and Canadian militia from Quebec. He knew d'Anville was on the way, and, until late in the autumn, he kept the field expecting the arrival of the French armada. When Jonquiére wrote him from sea that the enterprise was abandoned and that the ships were returning to France, there was nothing for him to do but to fall back, first on his base at Grand Pré, and then on Beaubassin, over against the marshes of Tantrammar and the Elysian Fields.

There the disappointed French settled down to the dull routine of winter-quarters, but on January 8, 1747, they had exciting news. One of the Arsenault had snow-shoed from Grand Pré to tell the commandant that a force of the hated Bastonnais had fallen on the settlement. Over North Mountain they had come in an eight days' march from the Bay shore. They were quartered in the houses of the *habitants*. Plainly, their intention was to prevent the French from using Grand Pré again as a base of operations against Annapolis Royal, and it was probable that they would use it as their own base from which to attack Beaubassin in the spring. They had come prepared with two block-houses in frame, and several cannon; but the block-houses were not set up, nor the cannon mounted. The transports from which the English had disembarked followed them round Cape Split, and were laid up near Vieux Logis under a guard.

DeRamezay held a council of his officers at once, with Arsenault present, no doubt, to be questioned by the eager soldiers. The discussion was not long; all were of one mind. They decided to strike, and strike at once. In spite of the *habitants'* repeated warnings that the French would surely come, the English would not believe in any such madness, not even when the Acadians forsook their houses in order not to be confounded with the enemy, when Ramezay made his onfall. The French could not attack by water; they had no transports; to attack by land meant a march of 200 miles over impassable trails in the dead of winter. The thing could not be done. So the English reasoned. They were over confident; they were guilty of *hubris*, hated by the gods. They believed themselves secure from all attack; therefore Ramezay decided to attack. The essence of strategy is surprise.

A fortnight was needed for preparation. Dog-sledges had to be made to carry rations and reserves of powder and ball. Three hundred pairs of snow-shoes had to be found, or made. Sixty

Indians who should have been at Beaubassin had to be hunted up. By noon of the 23rd, the little force was ready to start.

Ramezay had injured his knee-cap and could not march. The command therefore fell to Nicolas Antoine Coulen de Villiers, a grandson of the famous Madeleine de Verchères. At the age of thirteen, he was serving at St. Joseph des Illinois under his father, the commandant of the post. In 1733 he had taken an active part in the campaign against the Sacs. With ten Frenchmen and fifty Indians he had cut off the retreat of the Foxes at the passage of Petit Cascalin. This was destined to be his last campaign. It was not he, but his brother who fought George Washington all day in the rain, and compelled him to surrender at Fort Necessity.

His major was Daniel Hyacinthe Marie Liénard de Beaujeu. The family is old in Dauphiné, and takes its name from a hill town in the Beaujolais region, famous for its wines. Beaujeu was the diarist of this expedition, carrying with him writing materials and a time-piece. He writes good, lively French; the slips in spelling are due, no doubt, to numbed fingers, as he made his entries at the end of each day's march by the camp-fire's uncertain light. This was his first important service. He was to die a soldier's death, cheering on his men to the attack on Braddock's red-coats at the fords of the Monongahela.

Second in command is Chevalier Louis François Chapt de La Corne, already a famous partizan leader. His destiny was to fight through this war and the next, to gain more fame, to survive his wounds, only to perish in the combers of Aspy Bay, when the cartel *Auguste* drove on shore.

Another able and active officer is Charles Deschamps de Boishébert. He had been governor at Niagara and Louisbourg. He was to command the reserves at the siege of Quebec, and he shared in the victory of Montmorency. His destiny was to see the inside of the Bastille, with Intendant Bigot; but he was acquitted of the charge against him.

The noblesse of New France is well represented in these officers filing out of huts of Beaubassin on their snow-shoes. Bearers of proud old names like Repentigny, Lignery, Le Mercier, Langi, de la Colombière are in that long black line. There is a de Gaspé, whose descendant is to write *Les Anciens Canadiens*; there is a Lotbinière, who was to study military engineering in France for three years, build Fort Carillon, and become a marquis under Louis XVI. There are men of humbler birth like Marin and Mercure; but all are eager for service, from the Chevalier of St. Louis to the *cadet a l'aiguillette*. They are hardy men, eighteen in all, most with

experience in war. Provisions are scanty, and give out before the expedition is half way to its destination. Father Germain, of the Society of Jesus, is with them as their almoner, and Surgeon Jus, to attend to casualties. There is a white French flag sown with *fleur-de lys*, which is in the care of the ensigns. The rank and file are Canadians of the Marine Troops sent down by water from Quebec to Acadie the previous June. In the line are twelve sailors from Montségur's vessel led by his son, and sixty Indians in their war-paint. Their enterprise is as perilous as ever three hundred daring men engaged in.

The column strikes north on the well worn Trail along the ridge to reach Baie Verte. Thence it follows the shore eastward for three leagues as far as *Cap elu*, and camps for the night. There is no word of tents or blankets. Zédore Gould, an Acadian volunteer, told long afterwards, how great hollows were scooped in the snow amidst the white-laden spruces, and huge fires lighted, round which numbed and tired men snatched fitful slumber.

On the 24th, eager Coulon intended to make a long march; but the Indians carried their loads on their backs instead of dragging them on sledges like the French, and they could not keep up with the white men. Several of the soldiers had their feet and faces frozen in the *poudrerie*, the fine icy snow driven by the freezing wind. Progress was slow. A halt was made for the Indians to improvise wicker-work sledges, or toboggans.

On the 25th, the column waited for an hour after dawn before resuming its march, in order to avoid the intense cold about day-break. This was an exhausting day. Over the frozen salt marshes the men found it easier to carry their packs than to haul them on the sledges. But they made Ramsheg bay, where they cut a trail through the woods for a league, thus saving three leagues round a point of land. As they were about to camp, two Acadians came up with letters from P. P. Maillard and Girard. Their information was both bad and good. The Bastonnais had been reinforced by a hundred men, bringing up their strength to three hundred, but they had not built their block-houses. They were quartered in the long straggling village which ran for a mile and a half between the hill and the marsh. The *habitants* had presented a petition to Colonel Noble showing that they could not provide the invaders with firewood; even their fences had been burnt. At Ramsheg, Coulon pressed seven or eight men who came with a will.

Next day they reached the bay of Tatamagouche, but some of their sledges were broken on the rough trail through the forest. Here were recruited several Indians ready to follow their hero

Coulon, on the war-path. It was late when the column made camp.

On the 27th, the sun was an hour above the horizon before the long line of armed men started again. At nine o'clock, they reached the village of Tatamagouche, where they halted for an hour in order to allow recruits from Cap Jeanne to make up their packs. From this point, the column turned at a sharp angle to the south, and followed a line as the crow flies straight across country. They followed the bed of French River up and up to the height of land. From ten till five, they pressed on without a halt, and would have gone farther, if Coulon at the head of his men had not met Père Girard, curé of Cobequid, plodding up the trail on his way to visit sick parishioners at Tatamagouche. Bacouel was the name of their meeting-place, a seven hours' march from Tatamagouche. Coulon tried to make the priest promise to rejoin his force at Cobequid within two days; but Père Girard was hard to persuade. He was not willing to help the French, because he was afraid of offending the English government, a good enough reason for a man of peace.

He brought uncomfortable news about the enemy strength. The Bastonnais numbered 450 men; some said 500, which was nearer the exact figure. The French officers tried to keep this disquieting intelligence from their men, but that was impossible. When the news spread to the rank and file, they were not in the least dismayed. They shouted that the more English there were at Grand Pré the more they would kill, in spite of their own inferior numbers. They were in good heart and fighting fain.

On January 30th, Marin and de Villemonde were sent on to Cobequid with a small party to block all roads by which news of their coming could reach their unsuspecting foes. Half an hour later the main body followed, and the same day they reached Nijaganiche, which is the first village of Cobequid. The French were marching hard, on short rations, and now their provisions were exhausted. Thanks, however, to the exertions of Father Maillard, who had been warned in advance by Ramezay, they were replenished at this village, and here they spent the last day of January, 1747, in resting and refreshing themselves (*rejouir*) as much as they could, but still making ready for the morrow.

On February 1st, the column set out from the snowy roofs of Nijaganiche, probably the present Belmont, but Coulon remained behind to consult the *habitants* about the road before him. The problem was of transport. If a sufficiency of canoes were available, his whole force could be ferried across the mouth of the

Shubenacadie, thus saving a detour of at least twenty leagues over horrible roads. If the river were not practicable, the only alternative was to follow it up along the banks to where it was frozen over. That day the French reached the village of Cobequid and the presbytère of Père Maillard, who had gathered up more rations for them.

Next morning they started long before dawn, and crossed the Bay on the ice where it is two miles across. They reached a point somewhere near Old Barns at daybreak, and followed the shore to the mouth of the Shubenacadie, a tidal river of great turbulence and danger. The north-west wind had filled it with cakes of floating ice, and more was forming in the zero weather. Ferrying 300 men across that raging water in frail canoes was too hazardous; Coulon could not afford to lose a man; already his force was too small for the task ahead of it. The long laborious detour must be faced. But Coulon was war-wise, and thought of every contingency. While the column was on its toilsome, round-about march, some ill-disposed *habitant* might take the short cut, slip across and warn the unsuspecting Bastonnais. He would be handsomely rewarded. To prevent such a move, Coulon detailed dare-devil Boishébert with ten men to cross over and "cork" (*boucher*) the trail. Obviously no one could pass such a detachment on the short cut without discovery. Only those who have seen the Shubenacadie in his winter rages can figure the risk run by Boishébert and his ten braves. The canoe was nearly swamped in the swirling waters and crushed amongst the ice-cakes, but it won through. The column watched their comrades struggle across to the farther shore in the bitter gray dawn, climb the bank and disappear. The greater part of that day was spent in rationing the provisions. Each man was issued with five pounds of beef and a loaf of bread to sustain him for a journey of twenty-five leagues.

The march on February 3rd was the worst the French had made as yet. Their path lay along the high eastern bank of the Shubenacadie, through deep snow and over countless windfalls. The head of the column made five leagues, which would bring them to the junction of the Stewiacke. There it halted, and allowed the rear-guard to close. But the snow was worn off the trail by the passage of so many men, the fallen trees with their branches were uncovered, and over these obstacles the French and Indians dragged their sledges. Many were broken. One man was taken sick and sent to the nearest village; but this was the only one who fell out in the whole march.

There was a long halt at the Stewiacke next day, in order to repair the broken sledges. Some men were even left behind until

next day to finish this work. It was noon before the column was again in motion. At the request of the Micmacs, the force went a little out of its way, in order to go near Le Loutre's mission. Marin was detached to pick up any Indians who might be found there. On this march, the column made only two leagues.

On February 5th, at seven in the morning, the invaders reached Le Loutre's mission, halted for an hour, then marched three leagues farther and made camp. Twenty men were sent ahead by the eager Coulon to tramp down a trail for the next day's march, in order to make the better speed. The column was now across the Shubenacadie, and making for the headwaters of the Kennetcook.

Early next morning the column was on the move. At first they made rapid progress over the two leagues of track beaten down the night before; but then the roads became so frightful (*affreuses*) that their Indian guide "lost them" for part of the day. They camped in a very beautiful country, Beaujeu notes, which promised a good march for the morrow.

On February 7th, the expedition reached a point somewhere near the source of the Kennetcook. Here Marin was detached, in order to find out where Boishébert was waiting, according to his orders, and if he had any further information about the enemy. The evening halt found the French almost foodless. The journey had taken so much longer than they expected. At seven o'clock that same evening, Boishébert came up and reported to his chief that no one had passed him, and that he had recruited sixteen Indians, for whom he had obtained arms from the *habitants*.

Next day, the column broke camp with the first light and reached the point ahead, whence Boishébert had doubled back to make his report the night before. A picket was sent forward to "invest" the first houses of the next village. The information received was cheering, even if it proved afterwards to be incorrect. The English were quiet, "not expecting us." How with sixty men was supposed to be at Piziquid. Coulon was all for pushing on at once, in order not to miss so good a chance (*avanture*) of cutting off so small a force, but could only come within four leagues of Piziquid. Here the *habitants* furnished the famishing three hundred with provisions right gladly. The Acadians welcomed the Canadians as their deliverers from the exactions of the foreign garrison; the "exactions", by the way, were handsomely paid for when peace came; but the *habitants* could not be sure.

The ninth of February was bitter cold, with a blinding storm of light snow, the *poudrerie*. In spite of the blizzard, the column covered four leagues or ten miles, and reached the river L'Assomption, a tributary of the Piziquid. Coulon's intention was to reach

Grand Pré that night; but the men were fatigued with the toilsome march, and there were still seven leagues to cover. There was no hurry now. How was definitely not at Piziquid with his sixty men. The fearful weather had kept them snow-bound in their quarters; but a small detachment of twenty-five had started for Annapolis Royal, under the orders of Major Philipps and Goreham of Goreham's Rangers. These officers had come up to arrange for the billeting and to transact the necessary business. The Bastonnais would pay for what they used. At Piziquid, for the first time since leaving Beaubassin, the French slept under a roof, having first taken the precaution to place guards on all the roads.

They did not resume their march until noon next day; the storm was as fierce as ever; they could hardly see their way before them. When they reached a little un-named river, they were halted, reviewed and organized in ten sections for the attack. Coulon, their general, had the strongest party of at least fifty men; Beaujeu was his major and Lignery his adjutant, with ensigns Mercier and Lery. Luckless young Lusignan was attached as cadet. His house was founded by the fairy lady Melusine, and his ancestors had borne rule in Jerusalem and Malta.

The second strongest party, of forty men, was commanded by Chevalier de La Corne. Seven companies, of twenty-five each, were led by Langi, de la Colombière, Repentigny, Boishébert, Gaspé, Marin, and Bailleul. The last two were composed of Indians. The smallest section was Lotbinière's, of twenty-one men. The number stands at 304, officers and men.

After this redistribution, the Canadians resumed their march in the new order, company by company, but slowly, so as not to arrive too soon. They reached the Gaspereau, within striking distance of the unsuspecting foe, and halted for an hour waiting for night to fall. This was the worst hour in the whole long march of seventeen days. Beaujeu writes that they would have frozen, all standing, if they had not kept in constant motion. Then darkness fell, and the column moved on to the huts of Gaspereau.

Half a league away the English, except the sentries, were asleep in twenty-four different houses strung along a mile and a half of road. Not only were they superior to the French in numbers, but they were hardy fighting men of Massachusetts, such as had proved their courage at Louisbourg two years before. They formed only part of a far stronger expeditionary force, which had partly miscarried. The importance of Nova Scotia as New England's outpost was well understood by that master mind Shirley, and, after the repeated menaces to the one strong point in the province, he organized, at Mascarene's solicitations, a force of a

thousand men to guarantee its security from further invasion. Less than half that force reached its destination. It set out in the stormy season, the autumn of '46. The Rhode Island contingent was hardly started, when it was wrecked on Martha's Vineyard. Capt. Seth Perkins with his company from Cape Neddick was cast away on Mount Desert. The New Hampshire transport was intercepted by a French armed vessel, and ran back to Portsmouth.

One resolute leader persisted in his course, and that was Colonel Arthur Noble with his 470 officers and men. His transports reached the Bay of Fundy, and when the furious tides, the floating ice and the November storms made further progress too slow and hazardous, he disembarked near Cape Split, at a point called French Cross. After a toilsome march of eight days over North Mountain, through deep snow, without snow-shoes, he reached Grand Pré and went into winter-quarters. His transports also persisted, and two laden with arms, supplies and munitions of war were drawn up near *Vieux Logis*, the old fort, and carefully guarded.

Colonel Arthur Noble was no ordinary man. He was born in Ulster, and exemplified the traits of the Black North. He was thrifty. Coming out to Boston in 1720 with his two brothers, James and Francis, he had settled in what is now Maine, where he traded prosperously in hides and furs. He was no needy adventurer, but a man of substance; he was married and had two children. He was prudent. Before going to the wars, he had made his will, for there was £8,000 of personalty to devise. In the inventory was "a silver-hilted sword—broken." To bequeath a broken sword was an ill omen, had the fey man considered of it. He was an Ulster Presbyterian, active in church affairs. The minister was his friend, and the chaplain of his regiment. In the great expedition against Louisbourg he held the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in the Second Massachusetts, Waldo's, Regiment. In the siege he had greatly distinguished himself, and had led a night attack on the Island batteries with skill and resolution. Ulster blood is fighting blood. He remained with his command all through the dreadful, sickly winter of '45-'46, until properly relieved by two regular regiments from Gibraltar. Now, when there was further need of vigorous action against the foe, Arthur Noble was not the man to hang back and take his ease at home. He raised a company of a hundred men from his own neighborhood, and embarked on his last campaign. His brother Francis went with him as ensign. In death they were not divided.

(To be Continued.)