

Invisible Admiral: Phillip Durell at the Siege of Quebec, 1759

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Cet article examine le rôle du contre-amiral Philip Durell et de son escadron pendant le siège britannique du Québec en 1759. Après avoir manqué d'atteindre le fleuve Saint Laurent en temps util pour intercepter les bateaux d'approvisionnement français et après son succès en pilotant son escadron jusqu'aux amonts du fleuve à Québec, Durell a pris la commande des plus grands vaisseaux de guerre dans la flotte britannique et a mouillé à l'extrémité du sud de l'Île d'Orléans. Là, éloigné de l'action principale de la campagne, l'escadron de Durell a exécuté un rôle de soutien essentiel. Son escadron a guidé les transports portant des approvisionnements d'Amérique britannique à travers les risques de navigation du Saint Laurent, a mené et a soutenu des opérations mineures en aval de l'île, a envoyé des détachements en amont pour rejoindre la campagne amphibie, a réapprovisionné les vaisseaux de guerre du corps principal de la flotte, et a gardé contre toute intervention par les forces navales françaises.

Rear-Admiral Phillip Durell never saw Quebec, but he did everything he could to bring about its fall. His story is a story of the battle behind the battle, performing tasks that needed to be done to support the sailors and soldiers who captured Canada's colonial capital, tasks that were as necessary as they were unspectacular.

When the British sailed for Quebec in 1759, Durell was out in front. Although contrary winds and ice in the Gulf of St. Lawrence prevented him from blockading Canada before supply ships arrived from France, Durell led the way across the Gulf and up the St. Lawrence River. After that, he disappears from most histories of the siege. While Vice-Admiral Charles Saunders and Major-General James Wolfe besieged Quebec, Durell spent the entire campaign downriver below the Île d'Orléans.

But he still kept busy. During the campaign, Britain's American possessions played a role similar to that of Britain itself at the time of the allied invasion of Europe in 1944, by providing a nearby land base for a great amphibious expedition. On 10 March, Saunders had written to the governors of the colonies of Massachusetts Bay and New

York. He informed them that “the fleet and part of the army in North America will proceed early up the River St. Lawrence to Quebec.”

Saunders had two requests for these officials. First, he asked them to encourage American merchants to send shipments of provisions to the British forces, which “stand in need of frequent supplies of all kinds of refreshments.” Second, with the fleet “in great want of seamen,” Saunders asked for American sailors willing to volunteer to serve in the campaign and return home in the fall.¹ The governors complied; over the summer of 1759 a steady stream of ships sailed from New York and New England carrying provisions and reinforcements.

All of these ships—together with convoys from Britain—would have to reach the British fleet and army by sailing up the St. Lawrence. Their presence made the lower reaches of that river into a busy nautical highway. On Thursday 12 July, for example, HMS *Scarborough* (20 guns)² was sailing upstream beyond the Île-aux-Oeufs, where a previous British invasion had come to grief in 1711. Escorting a convoy of eight transports and one schooner from Boston to Quebec, *Scarborough* encountered HMS *Lizard* (28) sailing downstream escorting a snow and sloop from Quebec to Louisbourg. Looking across the river, John Hawdwick, master of HMS *Scarborough*, counted a total of twenty-nine British vessels in sight.³ Durell’s primary task during the campaign would be to keep this traffic flowing, maintaining the link between the Quebec expedition and the outside world.

To fully appreciate the challenges Durell faced and overcame, there’s something to be said for beginning at the end, after the campaign, after the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, after the capitulation of Quebec, when Durell sailed away from Canada and headed for home.

So what happened to Durell on the way home? He started off from the north end of the Île d’Orléans on 25 September with six ships of the line, four bomb vessels and fireships, and a convoy of transports.

The first twenty-four hours passed uneventfully. Then on the twenty-sixth, the weather turned rough. In his journal, Durell spoke of “strong gales with thunder, lightning, and rain.” At Cap Brulé, six nautical miles below the Île d’Orléans, *Neptune*

¹ “Copy of a letter to James Delancey Esq^r. Lieuten^t Governor of New York, and to Thomas Pownall Esq^r. Governor of Massachusetts Bay—from Vice Admiral Saunders, dated 10 March 1759,” enclosed in Saunders to Pitt, 10 March 1759, LAC, MG 11, Great Britain, Public Record Office, Colonial Office Papers, CO 5, Original Correspondence, Secretary of State, America and West Indies, vol. 51, f. 27, reel B-2113.

² To give a general idea of the size of the vessels in Durell’s squadron, when the name of a warship appears for the first time, it is followed by the number of the guns mounted on the ship in parentheses.

³ Master’s Log, HMS *Scarborough*, entry of 12 July 1759, LAC, MG 12, Great Britain, Public Record Office, Admiralty Papers, ADM 52, Master’s Logs, vol. 1022, f. 36, reel C-12889.

(90) ran aground. The fleet anchored; Durell sent an armada of ships' boats, fireships, and bomb vessels to help her out. Racing to the rescue, *Strombolo* (8) slammed into Durell's flagship, *Princess Amelia* (80), and smashed one of the yards. Two hours later, the tide turned and *Neptune* floated off the rocks.⁴

High winds blowing the wrong way held the squadron in place until 9 October, when they set sail once again. By the tenth, Durell's ships had reached the North Channel between the Île aux Coudres and the mainland. James Cook, master of HMS *Pembroke* (60) and future Pacific navigator, called this "passage the most dangerous part of the whole river." He warned that "the greatest danger is going down which should not be attempted upon the first of the ebb without a commanding breeze of wind."⁵

James Cook knew what he was talking about. "When," wrote Durell, "we came abreast the reef of Coudre it fell calm and the ebb threw us into the whirlpool." (The "Whirlpool" was Baie Saint-Paul, noted for its strong currents and numerous shoals.⁶)

Royal William (80) and *Captain* (64) ran aground. As the rest of the squadron anchored, anchor cables snapped on *Neptune* and *Terrible* (74). A flotilla of small boats carried new anchors and cables to *Terrible*; *Neptune*'s crew brought their ship back under control themselves.⁷ On the eleventh, Durell's sailors managed to get *Royal William* and *Captain* off the beach.

Then the tide struck again. "The Princess Amelia and Dublin longboats," wrote Durell, "being left by the Royal William on the stream anchor by the cable, were by the

4 Phillip Durell, "R. Adm. Durell's Journal, From 6 July 1758 to 16 Novr 1759," entries of 24, 26, and 27 September 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, Admiral's Journals, vol. 3, f. 248v, reel B-19.

5 James Cook, "Directions for sailing from the Harbour of Louisbrough to Quebec: Describing the Coast, Capes, Headlands, Islands, Bays, Roads, and Harbours. Together with an account of the Rocks, Sands, Depths of Water, Anchoring Places, Watering Places, Bearings and Distances from place to place by the Mariners Compass; the Latitude & Longitude of places, setting and flowing of the Tides and the Variation of the Compass. By James Cook Master of His Majestys Ship Northumberland," c. 1759-1762, Hydrographic Department, Ministry of Defence, Taunton, Somerset, England, LAC, MG 40-L1, Hydrographic Department, James Cook, reel A-423.

6 "The tide, both ebb and flood, set into *St. Paul's Bay*, which is shoal and rocky some distance off (from whence the French have given it the name of the Whirlpool)." See "Directions for sailing up the River St. Lawrence," in *Sailing directions for the first part of the North American Pilot containing the Gulf and River. St. Lawrence, the whole island of Newfoundland, including the Straits of Belle-Isle, and the coast of Labrador giving a particular account of the bays, harbours, rocks, land-marks, depths of water, latitudes, bearings, and distance from place to place; the setting and flowing of the tides, etc. Founded on actual surveys taken by Capt. James Cook, Michael Lane, and other officers and surveyors that have been employed by the Admiralty, and in the King's Service. Published by permission of the Right Honourable Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, a new edition* (London: Robert Laurie and James Whittle, 1794), 120.

7 Durell, "Journal," entry of 10 October 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 249v, reel B-19.

rapidity of the tide sunk, and one man belonging to the Dublin was lost.” The *Triton* hospital ship lost her anchor and began to drift; *Northumberland* (70) came to her assistance.⁸

On the twelfth, *Strombolo* grounded on the east end of the Île aux Coudres. Durell sent every boat in the squadron to bring her off.⁹ Two days later, wrote the admiral, “At 11 the Pembroke parted from both anchors, but brought up to the eastward of Coudre and made the signal of distress.”¹⁰ On the fifteenth, a day of high winds and heavy rain, several transports lost their anchors and began to drift towards the Île aux Coudres. Durell doesn’t say what happened, but presumably the navy intervened.¹¹

The high winds continued until 18 October. At 5:00 a.m. that morning, Durell made the signal to weigh anchor and the squadron finally escaped from the Île aux Coudres.¹² By the nineteenth, the squadron was off the Île du Bic and out of danger. Durell never saw the Île aux Coudres again, and probably didn’t care.¹³

The events of 25 September-19 October are worth examining in some detail, not to make Durell and the navy look inept, but to dramatize what they were up against. For eighteenth-century sailors, the lower St. Lawrence was a dangerous place where bad things happened. Most of the activities of Durell’s squadron involved day-to-day operations on the river, but these routine operations all occurred in an extremely hostile environment. For British ships below Quebec in 1759, the first priority wasn’t fighting the French, it was staying afloat.

Phillip Durell came to the St. Lawrence River with considerable North American experience. Beginning in 1721, he spent the first five years of his naval career serving off Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and New England. He took part in both sieges of Louisbourg, as a post captain in 1745 and a commodore in 1758. At the end of the 1758 campaign he was promoted rear-admiral. In European waters, Durell had participated in a British victory over a French squadron off Spain in 1747 and the failed attempt to relieve the British garrison of Minorca in 1756.¹⁴ In 1759, he joined the expedition to Quebec.

⁸ Durell, “Journal,” entry of 11 October 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 249v, reel B-19.

⁹ Durell, “Journal,” entry of 12 October 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 249v, reel B-19.

¹⁰ Durell, “Journal,” entry of 14 October 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 250, reel B-19.

¹¹ Durell, “Journal,” entry of 15 October 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 250, reel B-19.

¹² Durell, “Journal,” entry of 18 October 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 250, reel B-19.

¹³ Durell, “Journal,” entry of 19 October 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 250, reel B-19.

¹⁴ W.A.B. Douglas, “Philip Durell,” in Frances G. Halpenny, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. III, 1741 to 1770 (Toronto, 1974), 208-210

More important, as far as the history of the 1759 campaign is concerned, he kept a detailed journal which has survived. Although practically silent regarding the siege, it contains a great deal of material on what was happening along British lines of communication, an aspect of the campaign that would otherwise have passed almost unrecorded.

Charles Saunders divided the British naval force into three divisions. Saunders himself ran the naval side of the campaign from an anchorage at Quebec, where he spent the summer with the main body of the fleet. Rear-Admiral Charles Holmes took charge of amphibious operations above the city, including the landing at the Anse au Foulon before the Battle of the Plains of Abraham. Durell managed the lower St. Lawrence from the Île d'Orléans to the gulf. Neither rear-admiral held an independent command; both received regular orders from Saunders.

Unable to control four hundred nautical miles of river from any one site, Durell posted ships at four key points along the St. Lawrence—Anticosti Island, the Île du Bic, the Île aux Coudres, and between the Île d'Orléans and Île Madame. The ships at each location changed in the course of the campaign. Those named here were on station in the first week of September.¹⁵

While writing to encourage American merchants to send provisions and sailors to Quebec, Saunders had assured colonial governors that “some frigates will always be cruising at the mouth of the river, from whom they [ships from New England and New York] will receive all the protection and intelligence that may be needful for them.”¹⁶ To provide these services, Durell had the *Lizard* frigate on patrol between Anticosti Island and the Gaspé Peninsula.¹⁷

The picket ship was also in a position to provide advance warning of French naval intervention. This wasn't very likely, but it wasn't impossible either. James Wolfe believed that the French might send a fleet to defend Quebec. “If,” he warned on 19 May, “the French, collect a sufficient [naval] force, they are sure to find us in the River St. Lawrence ... and may fight if they choose ... If their Mediterranean squadron gets out, I conclude we shall see them.”¹⁸ Many Canadians thought so too. On 27 May, Durell's squadron captured a ship from Quebec carrying letters indicating “that Mons^r. Conflans [Admiral Hubert de Brienne, Count de Conflans] was expected with 20 sail of the line

¹⁵ “Disposition of the ships under the command of Vice Admiral Saunders in North America, 5th September, 1759,” LAC, MG 11, CO 5, vol. 51, ff. 42-42v, reel B-2113.

¹⁶ “Copy of a letter to James Delancey Esq^r. Lieuten^t Governor of New York, and to Thomas Pownall Esq^r. Governor of Massachusetts Bay—from Vice Admiral Saunders, dated 10 March 1759,” enclosed in Saunders to Pitt, 10 March 1759, LAC, MG 11, CO 5, vol. 51, f. 27, reel B-2113.

¹⁷ Durell, “Journal,” entry of 9 July 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 237, reel B-19.

¹⁸ Wolfe to Walter Wolfe, 19 May 1759, Beckles Wilson, *The Life and Letters of James Wolfe* (London, 1909), 429.

from Brest.”¹⁹

Up to the Île du Bic, charts and sailing directions prepared by James Cook and Captain Samuel Holland of the Royal American Regiment provided sufficient information to allow ships’ captains to travel up and down the river in reasonable safety. Above that island, the river became much more dangerous and ships needed pilots. Durell accordingly kept two vessels, the *Hind* (20) frigate and *Ethan* transport, at the Île du Bic.

Hind passed on orders to new arrivals and served as a depot for river pilots. Ships and convoys heading upstream picked up pilots at Bic; those going downstream dropped them off.²⁰ *Ethan* resupplied any passing vessel that was short of provisions.²¹

From the end of May until mid-July, Durell himself remained at the Île aux Coudres. This gave him a central location from which to direct operations as the British fleet sailed upstream and kept a powerful naval force in an area where ships in the channel were threatened with “insult from the Indians and Canadians on the opposite shore.”²²

To help contain the Canadians, Durell garrisoned the island. In May, he landed a detachment of soldiers who remained in place until 24 June. When the troops moved upriver, Durell replaced them with armed sailors and fifty marines from *Princess Amelia*, *Vanguard* (70), *Captain*, and *Stirling Castle* (64).²³ The sailors occupied the eastern end of the island. The marines took post at the west end, where they built redoubts “to hinder any of the enemy from landing.”²⁴

When the bulk of the fleet and transports had arrived safely at Quebec, Saunders ordered Durell upstream in mid-July. Durell set sail with most of his squadron, leaving two ships of the line, *Prince Frederick* (64) and *Bedford* (64), and a few smaller vessels at the Île aux Coudres to assist ships in distress and guard the channel.

On 20 July, Durell reached his final station on the St. Lawrence. “At ½ past noon I made the signal and anchored with the best bower in 9 fathom water, sand and small stones between the islands of Orleans and Madame and made the signal to moor.”²⁵

At both the Île aux Coudres and off the Île d’Orléans, Durell and his squadron

¹⁹ Durell, “Journal,” entry of 27 May 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 231, reel B-19.

²⁰ Durell, “Journal,” entry of 13 August 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 242v, reel B-19.

²¹ “During my stay in the River St. Lawrence,” wrote Saunders, “I stationed the *Eltham* (one of the victuallers that came out with the *Echo*) at the Isle of Bic, under the protection of the *Hind*, to supply any of the cruizers that might be in want of provisions.” Saunders to Pitt, 24 November 1759, LAC, MG 11, CO 5, vol. 51, f. 58, reel B-2113. See also Durell, “Journal,” entry of Friday 19 October 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, ff. 250-250v, reel B-19.

²² Durell, “Journal,” entry of 9 July 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, ff. 237-237v, reel B-19.

²³ Durell, “Journal,” entry of 24 June 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 235, reel B-19.

²⁴ Durell, “Journal,” entry of 9 July 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 237v, reel B-19.

²⁵ Durell, “Journal,” entry of 20 July 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 239v, reel B-19.

fulfilled two sets of responsibilities, the first with regard to the river, with second with regard to the French. Among his most important responsibilities was managing the fleet's limited supply of experienced pilots.

Success at Quebec meant projecting power for hundreds of nautical miles up the St. Lawrence through French territory, not the easiest thing to do, if you didn't know your way around. When the British sailed for Quebec in 1759, they had Cook's and Holland's charts, based on captured French maps, but no first hand knowledge. The only people who did were French sailors and pilots.

Before the campaign began, the Royal Navy had secured the services of seventeen pilots that had been captured at Louisbourg or in British raids on coastal communities on the Gaspé peninsula.²⁶ Others came from prisons in Britain. But with almost two hundred warships and transports heading for Quebec, the British needed more.

In the St. Lawrence River, Durell ordered his captains to try to recruit pilots from among any French prisoners that they took. Most prisoners received two thirds of a full naval ration. Durell authorized the captains to offer potential pilots a full ration and clothing from naval stores as an incentive, but never mentions anyone who actually accepted.²⁷

He nonetheless persisted until the last days of the campaign. Durell issued his final order regarding recruiting pilots on 6 September when he instructed Captain Fowke of HMS *Fowey* (20) "to victual at whole allowance, and supply with slops [clothing], all such French prisoners that he may have on board, whom he thinks may be of Service to His Majesty, and will undertake to be Pilots in this River."²⁸

All of the pilots serving with the British fleet had been randomly selected by being taken prisoner. So it's not surprising that, as Commodore Alexander Colville of HMS *Northumberland* observed after the campaign, "their merits are very unequal as pilots, because some have more skill than others; and some, I am persuaded, can be of very little use."²⁹

The very best pilot on the river with the British was Théodose-Matthieu Denys de Vitré. Born in Quebec, Vitré had been commanding ships for eleven years when he was captured in 1757 while sailing to Bordeaux. He remained a prisoner until 1759 when the British started looking for St. Lawrence River pilots and made him an offer he

²⁶ Durell to the Admiralty, 5 November 1758, Charles Herbert Little, ed., *Despatches of Rear-Admiral Philip Durell, 1758-1759 and Rear-Admiral Lord Colville, 1759-1761* (Halifax, 1958), 5.

²⁷ N.A.M. Rodger *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (Annapolis, 1986), 72, 93, 64-65.

²⁸ Durell, "Journal," entry of 6 September 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 246, reel B-19.

²⁹ Colville to the Admiralty, 22 December 1759, Little, ed., *Despatches of Rear-Admiral Philip Durell ... and Rear-Admiral Lord Colville*, 13.

couldn't—or at least didn't—refuse.³⁰

Assigned to Durell, Vitré spent the summer of 1759 serving as a walking database of information on safe channels and hazards to navigation. The following account by William Hunter, a master's mate aboard Durell's flagship, provides some indication of just how little the British knew about the river in the first days of the campaign and a quick sketch of Durell and Vitré in action.

Admiral Durell did not allow me to remain idle. Observing several canoes and a large launch on the beach, he ordered three boats to be manned and armed, to destroy them; which I did accordingly; but, on returning to the beach, found them, to our surprise, all high and dry. The water had fallen six feet in the course of an hour!

Our situation now became extremely perilous; and as we could only launch one boat at a time, and were much exposed to an attack from the woods...

Our companions on board the Princess Amelia had been informed of this danger, by Mons. de Vitney [Vitré], the Pilot; who coming on deck, and hearing the service we had been sent on, declared that we should run the utmost risk of being cut off. The Admiral now made the signal to return...

It was now a difficult, and most arduous task, with such a tide running, to reach our respective ships: I therefore particularly cautioned the officers in the other two boats ... to go on board the first ship they could reach:—they missed every ship, and being carried down with the whole ebb tide, could not return until the morning. Our boat had better success; we were fortunate enough to get on board and relieve the Admiral from his anxiety.³¹

When he wasn't advising Durell, Vitré guided individual ships and convoys past the hazards of the St. Lawrence. "Captain Douglas of the Rodney armed vessel," wrote Durell on 20 July, "to receive on board Monsieur de Vitrée the French Pilot, and proceed with him to the Isle of Coudre."³²

Among all the pilots of the campaign, Vitré stood out. He was the only one Durell referred to by name. Everyone else was just a "French pilot."³³ The French singled out Vitré as well. When Durell's ships first appeared in the vicinity of Quebec, Louis-Joseph de Montcalm, commander of the army that defended the city, ignored every other

³⁰ James S. Pritchard, "Théodose-Matthieu Denys de Vitré," Frances G. Halpenny, ed., *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. IV, 1771-1899 (Toronto, 1979), 209-210; "Journal des campagnes de M^r le M^{rs} de Montcalm mis en ordre par M. Le M^qs de Lévis," LAC, MG 18-K8, Fonds Chevalier de Lévis, vol. 1, f. 535, reel C-363

³¹ William Hunter, "Biographical Memoirs of Lieutenant William Hunter, of Greenwich Hospital: an intimate friend of the poet Falconer," *Naval Chronicle* vol. 13 (January-July, 1805): 19-20.

³² Durell, "Journal," entry of 20 July 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 240, reel B-19.

³³ Durell, "Journal," entry of 13 August 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 242v, reel B-19.

Canadian serving with the British and noted that “Le S^r Vitré est leur pilote.”³⁴ After the war, the British gave him a pension of £250 per year. Augustin Raby, the only other pilot who received a pension, received just 91 pounds five shillings a year, so evidently Vitré did a very good job.³⁵

According to Saunders, the remaining pilots were “paid as other extra pilots are, for the time of their service.”³⁶ Whether they actually received this money remains uncertain. The only recorded payments to pilots other than Vitré and Raby occurred on 19 December 1759. On that day, Commodore Colville, then in temporary command of the Royal Navy in North America, paid out fifteen pounds for living expenses at Halifax to nineteen pilots who had agreed to continue to serve with the British.³⁷

With knowledgeable pilots in short supply, Durell devoted considerable effort to moving them from ship to ship as necessary. This could involve coordinating the activities of three or four vessels scattered along the lower St. Lawrence. On 13 August, Durell wrote that “Captain Schonberg of His Majesty’s Ship Diana being in want of a pilot to carry him down the river I have ordered him a French pilot from His Majesty’s Ship Northumberland, whom he is to deliver to His Majesty’s Ship Hind at the Bic, that he may be returned the first opportunity.”³⁸

Durell’s sailors did more than just rely on French pilots. Wherever they went, they sounded, charted, and reported. Much of the responsibility for this work fell upon the masters of Durell’s ships. James Cook is the best known of these nautical surveyors, but he wasn’t the only one.

When Durell first arrived and sent ships upstream past the Île aux Coudres, he had the captains of his leading vessels send back regular reports on the state of the river. On Sunday 10 June, he noted that “this day I read a letter from Captain Gordon of His Majesty’s Ship Devonshire—dated below the Traverse, who informs me that the road he is in, is large and commodious, and will contain a great number of ships, and that the tides there are not half so strong as they are here.”³⁹

Even after the fleet reached Quebec, Durell kept trying to learn more about the river. On Friday 10 August, he wrote: “This day I sent the Masters of His Majesty’s ships Terrible and Princess Amelia, and Neptune to sound and survey the passage from the

³⁴ “Journal des campagnes de M^r le M^{rs} de Montcalm,” LAC, MG 18-K8, vol. 1, f. 535, reel C-363.

³⁵ James S. Pritchard, “Augustin Raby,” *DCB*, IV: 650.

³⁶ Saunders to Cleveland, 5 January 1760, Charles Herbert Little, ed., *Despatches of Vice-Admiral Charles Saunders, 1759-1760: the naval side of the capture of Quebec* (Halifax, 1958), 29.

³⁷ Colville to the Admiralty, 22 December 1759, Little, ed., *Despatches of Rear-Admiral Philip Durell ... and Rear-Admiral Lord Colville*, 13.

³⁸ Durell, “Journal,” entry of 13 August 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 242v, reel B-19.

³⁹ Durell, “Journal,” entry of 10 June 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 233, reel B-19.

westward of Isle Madame to Camarasca on the south shore.”⁴⁰

Durell also took steps to make the river safer by marking channels. Other people used buoys, Durell liked boats. The two most difficult stretches of river were at the Île aux Coudres and the Traverse. On 24 June, Durell “ordered a boat to be moored on the shoals to the westward of Coudre, and a White Jack hoisted, as it [would] be more visible than a boat alone.”⁴¹ On 18 July, he wrote that “I have sent Monsieur du Vitré, the French pilot, with a Lieutenant from the Princess Amelia, on board the Rodney Cutter, with orders to proceed up the River, and lay some small vessels on the Traverse to be a guide to the Ships in passing thro’.”⁴²

Wherever possible, Durell provided merchant ships with a naval escort. This was a necessary precaution in a campaign where, in the words of James Wolfe, “the enemy is able to fight us upon the water wherever we are out of the reach of the cannon of the fleet.”⁴³ On 3 September, he mentioned that he had ordered “The *Echo* to take under her convoy the *Etham* Victualler, and see her safe to the Bic.”⁴⁴

Durell couldn’t assign a warship to guard every merchantman. But his squadron represented an enormous reserve of navigational talent and skilled sailors, always prepared to go into action when a British ship got into trouble.

Some days, it was enough to send a pilot, as he did on 2 September. “At 5 AM observed a sloop and schooner a shore on the Ledge of Rocks off Cape Brulée. I sent a boat with a pilot to assist them. At 8 AM they arrived with cattle and I immediately sent them to Admiral Saunders.”⁴⁵

Alternatively, if British ships were in serious difficulty, providing assistance might mean a major operation. On 6 September, Durell “made the signal for all boats manned & armed which, with the prize sloop I have sent to assist 2 vessels that are on shore on the rocks of Cape Brulée.”⁴⁶

Thursday 9 August was a particularly busy day in this regard. “At 11 AM,” wrote Durell, “sailed hence His Majesty’s Ship Scarborough, who ran aground after she had

40 Durell, “Journal,” entry of 10 August 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 242, reel B-19.

41 Durell, “Journal,” entry of 23 June 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 234v, reel B-19. “At 8 the first division of transports appear’d, when (that no time should be lost) I order’d a boat to be moor’d to the westward of the shoals of Coudre, as a buoy for the ships to avoid them.”

42 Durell, “Journal,” entry of 18 July 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 239v, reel B-19.

43 Wolfe to Holderness, 9 September 1759, Wilson, *James Wolfe*, 474.

44 Durell, “Journal,” entry of 3 September 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 245v, reel B-19.

45 Durell, “Journal,” entry of 2 September 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 245, reel B-19.

46 Durell, “Journal,” entry of 6 September 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 246, reel B-19.

past the Traverse on the ledges of Burnt Cape, on which I made the signal for all boats manned and armed to go to her assistance, who got her off without any considerable damage.” That afternoon “some vessels coming up the river attempted to pass between the Island and the North Main, on which I sent a boat with an officer to set them in the right channel, which is between Orleans and the south shore.”⁴⁷

From time to time, providing assistance meant confronting the French as well as the hazards of the river. On 24 June he recorded that “At 9 a sloop and schooner to the westward, being parted from their anchors, and driving down with the ebb tide, made the signal of distress, upon which I made the signal for all boats manned and armed to go to their assistance. On their drawing near the easternmost point of St. Paul’s Bay, the enemy fired small arms at them which they returned.”⁴⁸

Along with making navigation safer, Durell acted as a sort of traffic manager for British shipping. Between June and September, nothing sailed on the lower St. Lawrence without permission from Durell or one of his captains. Sometimes Durell issued these orders on his own, at other times because someone like Saunders or Wolfe asked him to, but he was the person to see when you wanted a ship to move up or down the river. “Captain Gordon of His Majesty’s Ship Devonshire having desired me to send him some small vessels I have ordered Captain Hamilton of His Majesty’s Sloop Porcupine to take under his convoy the two schooners and sloops.”⁴⁹

It’s important to note that Durell gave the orders, but ships and boats only moved when the river cooperated. The tides on the St. Lawrence were and are very strong, and Durell’s ships moved with these tides or not at all. James Wolfe spoke forcefully about the limits this placed on seaborne operations. “We have seven hours, and sometimes,—above the town after rain,—near eight hours of the most violent ebb tide that can be imagined, which loses us an infinite deal of time in every operation on the water.”⁵⁰

Sometimes this just meant that things didn’t happen right away. “His Majesty’s Ships Alcide & Sutherland both which I have ordered to proceed up agreeable to General Wolf’s request, but the tide being too far spent they could not effect my order that day.”⁵¹

On other occasions, Durell’s orders specified at what point in the tidal cycle a vessel should move. “I have given orders to the Captains of His Majesty’s Ships here to send their boats to the eastward, towards the latter end of the ebb.”⁵²

Only one ship travelled on the lower St. Lawrence without Durell’s consent. Jean Barré was a sixty-six year old militia officer and merchant ship captain from Gaspé. In

47 Durell, “Journal,” entry of 9 August 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 242, reel B-19.

48 Durell, “Journal,” entry of, 24 June 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 235, reel B-19.

49 Durell, “Journal,” entry of 13 June 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, ff. 233-233v, reel B-19.

50 Wolfe to Holderness, 9 September 1759, Wilson, *James Wolfe*, 474.

51 Durell, “Journal,” entry of 23 June 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 234v, reel B-19.

52 Durell, “Journal,” entry of 24 June, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 235, reel B-19.

May, the governor general of New France ordered him to sail to France with despatches. Heading downstream, Barré caught sight of Durell's ships. He returned to Quebec to raise the alarm, then set off for a second time. According to a note in Barré's personnel file, "as much by courage as by skill, he passed through the enemy fleet, and arrived safely at Bordeaux."⁵³

When they weren't maintaining the lower St. Lawrence as a British line of communications, Durell's sailors turned to tasks linked more directly to the conduct of military operations against the French.

For a start, Durell sent reinforcements to Saunders. The Quebec expedition was a classic amphibious campaign. The army couldn't go anywhere without the navy, the navy couldn't accomplish anything without the army. Moving the army around required more carrying capacity than ship's boats could provide. Saunders accordingly brought along 134 of the dedicated landing craft known as flat bottom boats.⁵⁴

Each of these boats, which could carry forty to sixty soldiers and float in two feet of water, had a crew of sixteen or eighteen. Saunders consequently needed about 2300 sailors and lieutenants to row and command them.⁵⁵

The day after he arrived off the Île d'Orléans Durell sent 1200 sailors and officers upriver to join Saunders, armed with muskets and cutlasses. He thus provided crews for about half the landing craft, thereby making a quiet but necessary contribution to British amphibious mobility.⁵⁶

Durell's squadron also became involved in supporting land operations, mostly by providing transport for amphibious raiding parties. Captain John Knox of the 43rd Foot described the landing of a party of American rangers who had travelled to the Île aux Coudres in a flotilla of "small trading sloops" escorted by HM Sloop *Zephyr* (12).

The next morning, at day-break, they got into their boats, and rowed to Paul's Bay; when they came within reach of the shore, they were saluted with a shower of musketry, by which one man was killed, and eight were wounded; among the latter was a

⁵³ Unsigned mémoire, 2 October 1774, LAC, MG 2, Fonds de la Marine, C7, Dossiers individuels, vol. 17, "Barré, Jean," reel F-660.

⁵⁴ Richard Harding, "Sailors and Gentleman of Parade: Some professional and technical problems concerning the conduct of combined operations in the eighteenth century," *The Historical Journal* vol. 32, no. 1 (1989): 43-44; David Syrett, "The methodology of British amphibious operations during the Seven Years' and American Wars," *The Mariner's Mirror* vol. 58, no. 3 (August, 1972): 272-273.

⁵⁵ Harding, "Sailors and Gentleman of Parade," 43-44; Syrett, "The methodology of British amphibious operations," 272-273.

⁵⁶ Durell, "Journal," entry of 20 July 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 239v, reel B-19. See also Master's Log, HMS *Princess Amelia*, entry of 20 July 1759, LAC, MG12, ADM52, vol. 775, f. 7, reel C-12888.

midshipman (dangerously) and two sailors; before the villagers could load again, the boats were grounded, and the troops instantly pushed on shore, charged, and routed the wretched inhabitants.

The soldiers and sailors then proceeded to loot the community, carrying off twenty cattle, forty sheep and hogs, and a great many chickens, along with books, clothing, and other household goods.⁵⁷

In the last weeks of the campaign, Durell's forces played a larger role in ground operations. Even before he reached Quebec, Wolfe had declared that if he thought that his campaign might fail, he would "destroy the Harvest, Houses, & Cattle, both above & below, to send off as many Canadians as possible to Europe, & to leave famine and desolation behind me."⁵⁸ Following an unsuccessful assault on the French entrenchments near the Montmorency River, Wolfe unleashed his troops upon the Canadian countryside. Carried in Saunders's ships and boats, redcoats and rangers swarmed the shores of the St. Lawrence, burning everything in their path.

Beginning on 3 September, Durell took a hand in this destruction when he sent five warships to escort a flotilla of schooners carrying 1600 light infantry and rangers, along with about two hundred sailors detached for service ashore. The ships and sailors had orders "to act in conjuncture with Major [George] Scott ... in destroying the buildings and harvest of the enemy on the south shore."⁵⁹

As the operation began, Scott split his force into two columns. The first, accompanied by the *Echo* (28), *Eurus* (20) and *Trent* (28) frigates and *Baltimore* (14) bomb vessel and under his direct command, would burn every farm between Kamouraska and Saint-Ignace. The second, commanded by American ranger Joseph Goreham and escorted by HM Sloop *Zephyr*, would ravage the countryside between the Rivière du Sud and Point Lévis.⁶⁰

When the time came to depart, the soldiers and sailors of the expedition gave the only indication we have of their opinion of Durell. As the master of HMS *Trent* looked

⁵⁷ John Knox, *An Historical Journal of the Campaigns in North America for the years 1757, 1758, 1759, and 1760: containing the most remarkable occurrences of that period, particularly the sieges of Quebec, &c. &c., the orders of the admirals and general officers, Descriptions of the countries where the author has served, with their posts and garrisons, their climes, soil, produce; and a regular diary of the weather, as also several manifesto's, a mandate of the late Bishop of Canada, the French orders and dispositions for the defence of the colony, &c. &c. &c.* vol. II (London, 1769), 26-27.

⁵⁸ Wolfe to Amherst, 6 March 1759, LAC, MG 13, War Office Papers, WO 34, Amherst Papers, vol. 46b, f. 293, reel B-2662.

⁵⁹ Durell, "Journal," entries of 3, 7, and 8 September 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, ff. 245v, 246, 246-246v, reel B-19

⁶⁰ Master's Log, HMS *Zephyr*, entry 7 September 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 52, vol. 1117, f. 19, reel C-12890; George Scott, "Report of a tour to the South Shore of the River St. Lawrence," entry of 6 September 1759, LAC, MG 18-M, Northcliffe Collection, Series I: Monckton Papers, vol. XXI, reel C-366.

on, they “saluted Admiral Durell with 3 cheers.”⁶¹

David Perry, a ranger in Scott’s column, provides a concise account of the operation. “All the rangers, and one company of Light-Infantry of the British, were ordered to go aboard vessels, and to sail down the river as far as it was settled, then to land and march back towards the City, burning and destroying, in our course, all their buildings, killing all their cattle, sheep and horses, and laying waste the country far and near.”⁶²

Durell furthermore played a significant role in facilitating the British bombardment of Quebec. When Wolfe threatened to devastate the Canadian countryside, he took time to think of Canada’s urban landscape as well. “If ... we find, that Quebec is not likely to fall into our hands ... I propose to set the Town on fire with Shells.”⁶³

Almost as soon as he arrived at Quebec, Wolfe set up batteries on Pointe aux Pères, opposite the city. This meant moving heavy guns around, a task much easier to perform with draft animals than people. Saunders’s ships had carried forty-two draft horses and eighty oxen from Boston to haul supplies and artillery.⁶⁴ When the British needed more horses and couldn’t find them in the Quebec area, they turned to Durell

So on 2 July, Durell, still at the Île aux Coudres, ordered his captains to send “an officer with a number of landmen on shore, to catch all the horses they can find fit for His Majesty’s Service.”⁶⁵ By 4:00 p.m. the next day, several shiploads of horses were on their way upriver and Durell had done his part to contribute to a bombardment that made Quebec into a wilderness of smoking rubble.⁶⁶

Paradoxically and without any hint of irony, Durell also did his best to protect Canadian private property and ensure that his sailors only burned and destroyed in the line of duty. “Some of the boats crews having set several houses on fire on the Island,” he wrote at the Île aux Coudres, “I have given particular orders to the captains of His Majesty’s ships here not to suffer any boat to go on shore without a lieutenant to prevent

⁶¹ Master’s Log, HMS *Trent*, entry of 7 September 1759, LAC, MG12, ADM52, vol. 1073, f. 41, reel C-12890.

⁶² David Perry, *Recollections of an old soldier : the life of a soldier of the French and Revolutionary wars, containing many extraordinary occurrences relating to his own private history, and an account of some interesting events in the history of the times in which he lived, nowhere else recorded* (Windsor, Vermont: Republican & Yeoman Printing Office, 1822; Cottonport, Louisiana: Polyanthos Press, 1971), 26.

⁶³ Wolfe to Amherst, 6 March 1759, LAC, MG 13, WO 34, vol. 46b, f. 293, reel B-2662.

⁶⁴ List prepared by Captain Matthew Leslie, Assistant Quartermaster General, c. 24 October 1759, LAC MG 18-M, Northcliffe Collection, Series 1: Monckton Papers, vol. XXXII, Quebec 1759, XV, reel C-366.

⁶⁵ Durell, “Journal,” entry of 2 July 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 236v, reel B-19.

⁶⁶ Durell, “Journal,” entry of 3 July 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 236, reel B-19.

the like irregular proceedings for the future.”⁶⁷ Durell issued several orders to this effect; his sailors continued looting and burning regardless.

With the British forces in the Quebec area taking prisoners on a regular basis, it fell to Durell to organize a floating prison camp.

This worked out very well, since Durell commanded some of the largest ships in the fleet and had sent twelve hundred sailors upriver to Saunders, leaving plenty of vacant accommodation. A typical entry in his journal reads: “Admiral Saunders having sent down 33 French Prisoners I have ordered them to be distributed on board His Majesty’s Ships Northumberland, Terrible, Royal William, Orford, and Somerset.”⁶⁸

When typhus broke out among his involuntary French guests, Durell established a prisoner of war hospital. “Some of the French prisoners on board His Majesty’s Ships here falling sick, I have this day wrote to Vice Admiral Saunders for his directs to make one of the empty catts here an Hospital ship for the reception of all such, as it may be the means of spreading a malignant fever.”⁶⁹

The British were just as vulnerable to illness as the French. When members of the expedition started coming down with scurvy, Durell improvised a micro-brewery. He sent the purser of HMS *Devonshire* (70) ashore to start making spruce beer and ordered every ship of the line to contribute a kettle.⁷⁰ The purser set up shop on Île Madame, at a location the British called “ye Brewing Place,” and set to work.⁷¹

For the benefit of those among his readers who were unfamiliar with this beverage, John Knox included a recipe for spruce beer in his history of the campaign. Break off the tips of the branches of hemlock spruce (or Canadian Hemlock) trees, pound the needles, boil for twenty-four hours, stirring frequently, then pour this mixture through a strainer to remove the needles. He added that “I tasted some of this infusion, (I could not tell what to compare it to) it was a very strong bitter.”⁷²

Following the Battle of the Plains of Abraham and capitulation of Quebec, Durell took charge of organizing the repatriation of the garrison to France. He put the prisoners aboard four transports on 22 September and sent them down the St. Lawrence,

⁶⁷ Durell, “Journal,” entry of 3 July 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 236, reel B-19.

⁶⁸ Durell, “Journal,” entry of 30 July 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 241, reel B-19.

⁶⁹ Durell, “Journal,” entry of 25 July 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 240v, reel B-19.

⁷⁰ Durell, “Journal,” entry of 29 July 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 241, reel B-19.

⁷¹ Master’s Log, HMS *Devonshire*, entry of 31 July 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 52, vol. 570, reel C-12888.

⁷² Knox, *Historical Journal*, vol. II: 283.

escorted by HMS *Eurus*.⁷³ Their journey proceeded without incident, until contrary winds trapped the convoy at the Île aux Coudres for three weeks. As provisions ran low, Durell resupplied the transports and donated a hogshead of wine for the officers.⁷⁴ When the wind changed, the convoy set sail once again and arrived safely in France on 13 November.

Two days after the departure of the garrison, Durell sent 146 French prisoners of war from the Battle of the Plains of Abraham aboard *Terrible*, *Captain*, *Royal William*, *Centurion*, *Princess Amelia*, and *Neptune*. Unlike the French garrison, these captives would spend the rest of the war in captivity in British prisons.⁷⁵

Before he sailed away at the end of the campaign, Durell made one more effort to support the army. To help provision the British garrison of Quebec, he put the crews of his ships of the line on short rations and had the resulting surplus loaded aboard transports to send to the city. Along with provisions, the transports carried almost every cannonball and cask of powder from Durell's ships of the line and twenty twelve- and twenty-four pounder cannon from HMS *Captain* and *Neptune*.⁷⁶

Nautical operations at the siege of Quebec in 1759 did not just take place in the area of operations of the army, between Montmorency and Deschambault, centered on Quebec. They involved ships all the way down the St. Lawrence River, in the Gulf, and on the Atlantic sailing to and from Britain, New York, and Massachusetts, along with New England merchants buying cargos and loading them aboard ships in Boston and American sailors volunteering to serve with the Royal Navy. This made the St. Lawrence River more than just an invasion route. It was a maritime highway, with traffic moving back and forth all summer.

Managing traffic on this highway was Durrell's primary responsibility during the summer of 1759. Compared to Saunders and Wolfe, who wrote themselves into history by capturing Quebec, Durrell's role in the campaign may have been obscure, but it was also indispensable.

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⁷³ Durell, "Journal," entry of 23 September 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 248, reel B-19.

⁷⁴ Durell, "Journal," entries of 19 and 20 October 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, ff. 250-250v, reel B-19.

⁷⁵ Durell, "Journal," entry of, 24 September, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 248, reel B-19.

⁷⁶ Durell, "Journal," entry of 22 September 1759, LAC, MG 12, ADM 50, vol. 3, f. 247v, reel B-19.