



# Through a Howling Wilderness: Benedict Arnold's March to Quebec, 1775

*Thomas A. Desjardin*

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In September 1775, eleven hundred soldiers boarded ships in Newburyport, bound for the Maine wilderness. They were American colonists who had volunteered for a secret mission to paddle and march nearly two hundred miles through some of the wildest country in the colonies and seize the fortress city of Quebec, the last British stronghold in Canada.

The march, under the command of Colonel Benedict Arnold, proved to be a tragic journey. Before they reached the outskirts of Quebec, hundreds died from hypothermia, drowning, small pox, lightning strikes, exposure, and starvation. The survivors ate dogs, shoes, clothing, leather, cartridge boxes, shaving soap, and lip salve. Their trek toward Quebec was nearly twice the length shown on their maps. In the midst of the journey, the most unlikely of events befell them: a hurricane. The rains fell in such torrents that their boats floated off or sunk, taking their meager provisions along, and then it began to snow. The men woke up frozen in their tattered clothing. One third of the force deserted, returning to Massachusetts. Of those remaining, more than four hundred were killed, wounded, or taken prisoner.

Finally, in the midst of a raging blizzard, those remaining attacked Quebec. In the assault, their wet muskets failed to fire. Undaunted, they overtook the first of two barricades and pressed on toward the other, nearly taking Canada from the British. Demonstrating Benedict Arnold's prowess as a military strategist, the attack on Quebec accomplished another goal for the colonial army: It forced the British to commit thousands of troops to Canada, subsequently weakening the British hand against George Washington.

A great military history about the early days of the American Revolution, *Through a Howling Wilderness* is also a timeless adventure narrative that tells of heroic acts, men pitted against nature's fury, and a fledgling nation's fight against a tyrannical oppressor.

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