

Martin Balthazar dit St. Martin (1737-1797) Part 1 — A Perilous Crossing

by Dr. Jim Paul

My name is Martin Balthazar dit St. Martin. My friends call me St. Martin. I was 18 years old when I was called to serve in the armed forces of King Louis XV. In May, 1755, I left my father and mother, Jean and Marguerite, in the parish of St. Maurice in the city of Metz in the far southeastern province of Lorraine, France and I joined the Regiment of Languedoc.

Two fleets of 25 ships sailed for Quebec, Canada from Brest, France on May 3, 1755. I was on board the Actif with 359 other soldiers in the Regiment of Languedoc. There were 21 officers on board our ship which had 22 guns under the command of Captain Caumon. The weather was good, but we noticed right away that we were being followed by a British frigate. Two days out, the winds calmed giving the British ship time to get closer and thoroughly inspect our fleets. Our commanders did not find this troubling because open hostilities between Great Britain and France had not commenced at this time. On May 7, the British frigate was still tailing us but fleet commander Macnemara in his ship Formidable and its 80 guns, chased it off.

On May 8, our two fleets separated as planned. Captain Macnemara's nine-ship fleet returned to France since it was only an escort. The remaining 16 ships, under the command of Captain de la Motte, crossed the Atlantic and reached the Grand Banks of Newfoundland on May 25. The captain signaled the fleet to stop just east of the Grand Banks. It was now time to open the orders of the king to see what the ships' various destinations were. Representatives from every ship came on board Captain de la Motte's ship Entreprenant with its 74 guns where the orders were held. While the soldiers and sailors looked out over the water and saw many icebergs and birds through the fog, Captain de la Motte read the orders which stated that six ships would continue with the battalions of Artois and Bourgogne to Louisburg in Acadia. The rest of the fleet, including my ship Actif, would continue to Quebec. A strong wind came upon the ship during the meeting, and several men were almost lost in trying to return to their own ships.

For the next month, fog and icebergs were daily threats to our welfare. By May 31, the fog was so dense that the fleet had separated entirely. On June 3, now realizing that the fleet might never be totally rejoined, the individual captains opened their packets written for just such a case. In these packets, they found their orders to travel to Cape Rosiers where two frigates, the Fidelle and the Diane, carried pilots who would board our ships to navigate them through the channel of the St. Lawrence.

On June 4, another danger appeared. Captain de la Motte on the Entreprenant saw 10 ships in the channel. Figuring this was the rest of the separated fleet, he steered toward them. After getting closer however, he realized that they were British ships. Luckily, the fog returned and the Entreprenant was able to escape. Later that same day, my ship and two others came upon the enemy ships. Worried, but it seemed overly so (our two countries were, after all, still at peace), our Captain de Hocquart, commander of the Alcide, drew broadsides with the leadership of the British fleet, the Dunkirk, which was commanded by Captain Richard Howe. Hocquart called out to Howe asking "Are we at war, or at peace?"

Howe replied "At peace, at peace". A brief discussion then followed, when suddenly a cannon of the Dunkirk fired into the broadsides of the Alcide. The British Royal Navy ships then opened fire on all three of our ships. The Alcide being better armed than the other two French ships, returned fire and fought bravely for five hours. However, after sustaining much damage, it surrendered along with the Lys. My ship, the Actif, was able to escape into the fog. The rest of the fleet, still navigating through the fog, was unaware of the capture of our two ships.

I later learned that most of our fleet was able to meet the pilots at Cape de Rosiers. By June 18, the fleet learned that the British had actually 14 ships patrolling the entrance of the St. Lawrence.

On June 23, seven ships in our fleet arrived at Quebec. My ship, still separated from the rest of the fleet, fortunately made it to Quebec three days later. We then told the news of the fate of the Alcide and the Lys.

While I was stationed at The Citadel, a formidable fortress in Quebec, the war with Great Britain escalated in the colonies. In May, 1754, a year before my arrival in Quebec, a 21-year-old Virginia militia Lieutenant Colonel by the name of George Washington, had been forced into retreat from The Forks region where the Alleghany and Monongahela Rivers join to form the Ohio River. From Jumonville Glen, he retreated to Fort Necessity where he eventually lost 30 men to our French and Indian forces on July 3, 1754. About a year later, this George Washington, seeking a British officer commission, became an aide to British Major General Edward Braddock. As they were about to mount an attack on our Fort Duquesne at The Forks on July 9, 1755, our forces ambushed them causing 500 deaths out of the 1,400 attacking British forces. During the retreat, Washington escorted the wounded Braddock off the battlefield.

The Great War for Empire had begun. It would also be called the French and Indian War and when it was over in 1763: the Seven Years War. In the New World, the British wanted our large colony of New France which extended from Newfoundland to New Orleans. Where we stand and sit here today was once an important part of our New France colony.

—From a presentation by Dr. Paul at the Spirits of Theatiki event, French Canadian Heritage Museum at the Stone Barn in Kankakee, Aug. 23, 2014. Martin Balthazar dit St. Martin is the ancestor of virtually all Balthazar/Balthazor families in the U.S. including descendants of Francois Balthazor from Le Petit Canada near Davis Creek. Many thanks to Dave King's extensive research on this part of our local history.

*The Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society is dedicated to
preserving and promoting local history.*

*Monthly meetings are held at 7 p.m. on the first Thursday of each month,
March to December. Museum hours are 1 to 4 p.m. on the first and third
Sundays of each month, March to December or by appointment.*

*Visit bourbonnaishistory.org, [facebook.com/bourbonnaishistory](https://www.facebook.com/bourbonnaishistory)
or call 1-815-933-6452.*

Safety first



Photo courtesy of Arbor Grove

Bourbonnais police officers Jason Szuba and Iggy Czako joined Mark Argyelan and Amy O'Sullivan from HomeStar Bank to address the residents of Arbor Grove subdivision about personal safety and identity theft. Arbor Grove neighbors were provided information on various types of scams, both via the phone and those who try to solicit services door-to-door. Officers Scuba and Czako gave several examples of how perpetrators work and reminded everyone not to give any personal information over the phone. Arbor Grove residents thanked the village, mayor Paul Schore, police chief Jim Phelps, officers Scuba and Czako, Argyelan and O'Sullivan for the time and effort in helping residents to be better stewards of their own safety.

— Rt. 50 shared use path —



Herald photo by Laura McElroy

Work continues on a new shared use path in the village of Bradley on Rt. 50 from the entrance of Northfield Square Mall to Armour Rd. The project is funded by the Illinois Department of Transportation and the village of Bradley.

Workshop location changed

Bunge Oils employees and retirees are invited to a free Retirement and Layoff Planning Workshop designed to provide information and analysis regarding the retirement or changing jobs planning process. Light refreshments will be served. The workshop will run from 2 to 8 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 24, 2015 (no

appointment necessary) at the Quality Inn & Suites, 800 N. Kinzie Ave., Bradley. (Note the change in location.)

The workshop will be presented by Douglas A. Wheeler, LUTCF, First Community Insurance & Annuity Center. For more information, call Louann Lucas, 1-815-937-5533.

The Herald -----

COPY DEADLINE

----- Monday, 9:00 a.m.