



*Major-General Sir Isaac Brock,
the hero of Upper Canada.*

MAJOR GENERAL SIR ISAAC BROCK (1769-1812)

Major General Sir Isaac Brock can be considered to be one of Canada's first heroes. He was a brilliant commander who inspired the admiration and loyalty of his troops through his courage, integrity and intelligence. Although he died early in the War of 1812, he rallied Canada's soldiers and left them with the conviction that they could overcome the American invasion.

Isaac Brock was born on October 6, 1769, in St. Peter's Port on the Island of Guernsey in the English Channel. He was the eleventh of fourteen children born to John and Elizabeth Delisle Brock. In 1785, at the age of fifteen, he purchased a commission and entered the military as an ensign of the 8th regiment. He quickly climbed up the ranks through a combination of promotions and purchased commissions. In 1797, Brock became the senior Lieutenant Colonel in the 49th regiment. Brock was assigned to garrison duty in Quebec in 1802 and commanded in Quebec from 1804-1810, at which point he was transferred to Upper Canada. By the beginning of the War of 1812, Brock had become Commander-in-Chief of His Majesty's Forces in Upper Canada, and achieved the rank of Major General. Brock's responsibilities included both the civil and military administration of the province, and he was widely admired for his skillful leadership, steadiness and charisma. In the summer of 1812, Brock lived at Government House between Fort George and Newark (Niagara-on-the-Lake). His aides-de-camp at Newark were Captain John Glegg of the 49th regiment, and Lieutenant Colonel John Macdonell of the Upper Canada Militia.

The United States declared war on Great Britain on June 18, 1812 and prepared to invade British North America. Believing that "offence was the best defence," Brock took Fort Detroit on August 16, a victory which rallied the Canadian troops and for which he was knighted. However, Brock erred in his anticipation of the next move of the American forces. Assuming that the Americans would attack at Fort George, Brock positioned 1,500 men at the Fort, leaving only a few militia and two companies from the 49th regiment, totalling about 300 men, to defend Queenston.

At 3 a.m. on October 13, thirteen boats carrying American soldiers, led by General Stephen Van Rensselaer, crossed the Niagara River from Lewiston to Queenston. At Fort George, Brock was awakened by the sound of gunfire. Although still believing that the real attack would occur at Fort George, Brock decided to ride to Queenston to survey the situation. Realizing that this was a full attack, Brock ordered reinforcements midway through his ride. Upon arrival in Queenston, he found that a small group of American soldiers, led by Captain Wool, had taken the Heights and a redan battery of cannons, and as such had a considerable strategic advantage over the British. Brock understood the importance of securing the Heights before American reinforcements arrived, and led 200 men in an attempt to regain them. As they were climbing, however, Brock was fatally shot in the heart by an American soldier concealed in the foliage. His body was carried to a home in the nearby village of Queenston to hide it from the enemy. Brock's soldiers renewed their attack to avenge the death of their commander, ultimately resulting in a British victory at Queenston Heights.

Major General Sir Isaac Brock was buried with a 21-gun salute on October 16, 1812, at Fort George, along with his aide-de-camp Lt. Col. John Macdonell who had also fallen during

the battle at Queenston Heights. Their funeral was attended by thousands of people -- soldiers, militia, Indians and civilians alike. Even the American forces mourned the loss of their valiant foe and a salute of their own could be heard during the funeral ceremonies. Indeed, even though Fort George fell into American hands in May, 1813, the graves of Brock and Macdonell were left undisturbed.

On July 20, 1813, the British Parliament passed a bill to sponsor a suitable memorial to Sir Isaac Brock. This monument is located in St. Paul's Cathedral, London, and depicts Brock, dead, lying in the arms of a British soldier while a native warrior looks on with respect. In March of 1814, the legislature for the province of Upper Canada passed a motion to commemorate Brock by erecting a monument on Queenston Heights. A design for a circular tower of cut stone, 50 feet x 16 feet with a winding staircase inside was, however, not chosen until February 1824. On October 13, 1824, Brock and Macdonell were disinterred, transported from Fort George to Queenston, and reburied with military honours at the site of the monument in the presence of over 8,000 people. By mid-1827, the monument was generally finished, although it seems that it was never completed according to the approved design. Nevertheless, it was the grandest monument in British North America, standing 135 feet tall. A square base 20 feet square and 20 feet tall had been constructed over the tomb of Brock and Macdonell, over which rose a Tuscan style column, topped with a pedestal and a simple ornament. In the interior of the monument there was a spiral staircase which led to an observation deck. On the 17th of April, 1840, a 4:00 a.m. explosion severely damaged the monument, destroying the staircase, cracking the column and shattering the summit. Although it was never proven, the explosion was attributed to Benjamin Lett, an Irish Canadian. Lett held strong anti-British views and had been a follower of William Lyon Mackenzie in the 1837 rebellion against Upper Canada. At a meeting held on July 30, a decision was made to build a new monument designed by William Thomas.

In preparation for the building of the new monument, Brock and Macdonell were again disinterred and temporarily buried on the Hamilton Estate in Queenston, likely on July 11, 1853. On October 13, 1853, Brock and Macdonell received their fourth and final burial, attended by 12,000 to 15,000 people, at the site of the new monument, and its cornerstone was cemented into place. The memorial was completed in 1856, but was not officially inaugurated until October 13, 1859. This new monument contained a 250-step spiral staircase, and stood 185 feet tall. Upon a 38 foot tall pedestal, a ten foot diameter fluted column of the "Roman Composite Order" rose to a height of 95 feet. At its summit was an ornately sculptured viewing platform and enclosed observation deck. Topping the entire structure was a statue of Sir Isaac Brock standing 16 feet tall. In 1860, construction began on a marker placed on the spot where Brock had fallen. This final memorial was dedicated by the Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VII) on September 19, 1860, during his visit to Upper Canada.

References to Sir Isaac Brock can be found throughout the Niagara Region. There is the memorial itself, a street named in his honour, the third floor of the Greater Niagara General Hospital, and of course, Brock University in St. Catharines, all intended to honour the man who had laid down his life for Canada, and in the process had become its first true hero.

Brock's Second Monument

