

## ***Charles-Michel d'Irumberry de Salaberry, Canadian-born French British Soldier (1778-1829)***



Charles-Michel d'Irumberry de Salaberry was a French British Army and Canadian militia officer who is known for his role in the War of 1812. Born in the Province of Quebec De Salaberry felt the call to arms early in life, volunteering to enlist in the British military at 14 years old. Two years later, in 1794 he became an ensign (now considered Second Lieutenant).

De Salaberry served admirably in British colonies such as St. Domingo, Guadaloupe, and Martinique before his first posting to Lower Canada. He did not stay in Canada for long on his first posting, and was sent to the West Indies in 1797, when he was 19 years old. In 1799, at 21 years old, de Salaberry was promoted to Captain, and by 25 years old he received command of a company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion in the 60<sup>th</sup> Foot. Three years later, in 1806, de Salaberry was transferred to the 5<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 60<sup>th</sup> Foot, which was commanded by Francis de Rottenburg, considered a revolutionary in light infantry and rifle tactics. Evidently de Salaberry earned the trust of de Rottenburg, because he was entrusted with recruiting new soldiers between 1806 and 1807.

Having earned the confidence and trust of Francis de Rottenburg throughout his time in the West Indies, de Rottenburg requested to bring de Salaberry with him to serve as his aide when he was posted to Lower Canada in 1810, when he was 32 years old.

In Canada, de Salaberry is perhaps best known for proposing, raising, training, and commanding Quebec's provincial military corps, the Canadian Voltigeurs. In 1811, de Salaberry became a major and in 1812, when war with the United States seemed both inevitable and imminent, he proposed the formation of the Voltigeurs and set about using his recruiting talents to find good soldiers. He began recruiting in April 1812 and by the autumn de Salaberry was commanding the Voltigeurs as they went to the frontier of Lower Canada to lead efforts in defending the border. From November 1812 to the Fall of 1813, de Salaberry successfully repelled several American attacks at the Canadian border.

In the fall of 1813, the Americans launched a major offensive against Montreal, which would prove to be a defining event in de Salaberry's career. He was stationed with the Voltigeurs on the Canadian side of the Châteauguay River when the Americans sent a 3700-man division to invade Canada from the American side of the river, just south of the border between Quebec and New York State. De Salaberry's Voltigeurs were outmatched, with a ragtag mixture of 1800 regular soldiers, provincial troops, and untrained & untested militia soldiers, the majority of whom were Quebecois along with a contingent of First Nations warriors. However, de Salaberry's advantage was being familiar with the area he was defending, and he was successfully able to use his familiarity with the terrain to ambush the Americans as they attempted to cross the border into Canada. It did not take long for the Americans to retreat, and de Salaberry's prowess was responsible for thwarting a major American offensive in the War of 1812.

He did not see any other action in the War of 1812 and relinquished command of the Voltigeurs two years later, in 1814. He left the army a year later and settled near Chambly, Quebec, where he became a wealthy businessman and landowner. He received an Army Gold Medal for the battle at Châteauguay and was made a companion of the Order of the Bath. Following his retirement from the military de Salaberry became a folk hero in French Canada for rescuing Montreal from an uncertain fate. In 1818 he made a foray into politics, becoming a legislative councillor for Lower Canada.

Without question, de Salaberry's legacy is hinged upon creating Quebec's provincial military force, the Canadian Voltigeurs, and for his efforts in repelling American forces seeking to conquer Montreal in the War of 1812.