

# ↳ FORT GEORGE ADVICE ↳

*The Newsletter of the Lake George Battlefield Park (Fort George) Alliance*

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## The Entrenched Camp of 1757 in the Battlefield Park ↳

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The “entrenched camp” refers to the site of the 1757 encampment of provincial (American colonial) and British troops located on the high ground on the east side of the present-day Battlefield Park. The area of the 1757 encampment was not new to the English troops, being part of the site of the 1755 and 1756 camps.

With the majority of provincial and British troops destined for a campaign against the French stronghold of Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island during the late spring/early summer of 1757, Fort William Henry became vulnerable to a French attack. (French intentions regarding Fort William Henry were clear. A French force of 1,600 men had attempted to destroy the fort during a March 1757 raid.) By the end of July 1757 Major General Louis-Joseph de Montcalm had assembled an army of 8,021 men, consisting of French regulars, Canadian militia, and Native Americans at Fort Carillon (later Ticonderoga) for an assault on Fort William Henry.

On July 25, 1757, British officers recommended moving an existing camp, located on the west side of Fort William Henry, to “the Rocky Eminence on the S.E. where a redoubt should be raised” and some cannons mounted.<sup>1</sup> The fortification of this higher ground was necessary to prevent the French from mounting artillery on the site that could fire shells inside Fort William Henry. A British officer described the new entrenchment as “a Breast Work of Logs,” while a French observer recalled that the camp ap-

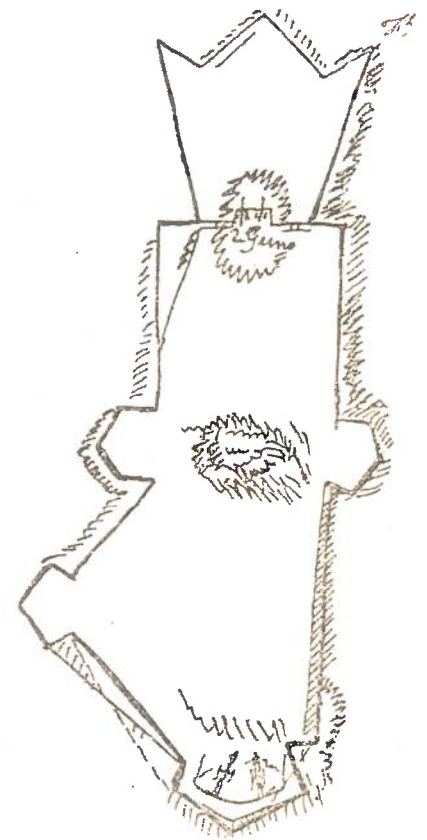
peared to be “a fortified rock faced with palisades [logs] secured by heaps of stones.”<sup>2</sup> The retrenched camp, designed by British engineer Major James Montresor, followed the sinuosity of the hillside, incorporating the existing rock formations. (In early March 1758, Montresor received official word from England that he had been promoted to lieutenant colonel and director of engineers.)

When Montcalm’s army appeared before the garrison at Fort William Henry on August 3, 1757, only 2,372 British and provincial troops were stationed at the lake. The majority of the soldiers were actually deployed in the entrenched camp under the direction of Lieutenant Colonel George Monro of the 35<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot, who remained inside the camp during the entire siege. Monro had the overall command of the fort and the entrenched camp, while Captain John Ormsby, also from the 35<sup>th</sup> Regiment, was in charge of less than 500 men inside Fort William Henry.<sup>3</sup>

In preparation for the French siege, Monro and his troops were occupied at the new entrenched camp “fortif[y]ing [in] the best manner we Could with Logs and Stones,” positioning several swivel guns and six cannons: “two brass 6 pounders on a Hill near the Center of the Camp, two brass 12 pound[er]s on the West side of the Encampment, one brass 6 pounder at the Entrance of the Camp from the Lake” and another on the east side facing the swamp.<sup>4</sup> The cannons at the entrenched camp held the Indians



*Detail of French map entitled “Attaques Du Fort William-Henri,” August 7, 1757, showing (C) the “Camp retrenched of the English.” (National Archives of Canada)*



*“Plan” of the entrenched camp on July 27-28, 1757, at Lake George by James Montresor. (Collections of the **New-York Historical Society**)*

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at bay, but losses still occurred during the siege. Monro later noted the “loss of Some Men, in skirmishing with the Enemy to get Logs to complet[e] Our Breastwork.”<sup>5</sup> (The log breastwork was never fully completed.) Other losses happened when 100 men were dispatched from the entrenchment to secure the camp’s water supply. Two days after that incident, 200 provincial troops were sent out to reinforce 80 Massachusetts militiamen posted behind some nearby logs — a three-hour skirmish with Canadians and Indians resulted in more casualties. In addition, some of the troops stationed in the camp suffered injuries from French artillery shells that landed inside the entrenchment.

With a third French battery within 150 yards of Fort William Henry and the continued bursting of artillery from metal fatigue inside the fort, Monro was forced to capitulate on the morning of August 9. The surrender terms guaranteed safe passage for the British and provincial troops to Fort Edward. The Native American chiefs had acquiesced to the agreement, but the European idea of “honors of war” meant little to the warriors, who had aided their French allies in anticipation of “trophies of war.”

The entrenched camp played a prominent role in the subsequent chaos. Even during the time of the negotiations over the terms of the capitulation, Indians entered the entrenched camp and began to plunder, and again on the afternoon of August 9, warriors climbed over the breastworks and began looting, despite the presence of French guards. Montcalm intervened personally at the entrenchment to quell the disorder. The march to Fort Edward was originally scheduled to begin at midnight, according to Colonel Joseph Frye, but had to be postponed until the next morning due to evidence of a potential attack by the Indians.

At daylight on August 10, as the English parolees were preparing to depart, the “Savages ... got over the Breast

Work and began to plunder” and pulled 17 wounded men from their huts and scalped them.<sup>6</sup> The pandemonium escalated as warriors returned to their camps with booty, causing more Indians to dash to the entrenchment to gain their portion of the plunder. According to an eyewitness, the Indians began seizing “Officers Swords, Hats, Watches, Fuzees [fusils/muskets], Cloth[e]s, and Shirts, leaving [the troops] quite naked.”<sup>7</sup>

In a state of great trepidation, the first contingent of the 35<sup>th</sup> Regiment and artillerymen departed from the entrenched camp, followed by the provincial troops with the New Hampshire regiment at the rear. Their muskets were carried “clubbed” and without ammunition. No sooner had the parolees left the entrenchment when the Indians fell upon the rearmost contingent, stripping, killing, and scalping them. The scene was described as a “Shocking Spectacle,” prompting the troops and their families, as well as camp followers, to flee into the woods.<sup>8</sup> Women and children were “Killed & Scalp’d in the Road,” according to an observer, while troops at Fort Edward later recorded that children had been taken from their mothers by the Indians, who “Dash[ed] their Brains out against ye Ston[e]s.”<sup>9</sup> Soon the British troops at the front of the column became aware of the “butchery” at the rear. Thereafter, the whole line erupted in confusion. Monro and some of his officers gained protection from Montcalm; other soldiers began a frantic run to Fort Edward. Subsequently, Montcalm and his officers interceded, but unfortunately it was only after most of the attacks had ended. However, four hundred captives were rescued from the Indians, but several hundred others were taken to Canada, where most were later ransomed to French authorities. Although some writers have recently questioned the characterization of the episode as a massacre, original journals, official letters, and period newspapers called it a massacre.<sup>10</sup> Even French engineer Capt. Jean-Armand Desandrouins used the words “massacred” and

“butchery” to describe the killings by the Indians.<sup>11</sup>

The following year the entrenched camp was reestablished by forces under the command of Major General James Abercromby and a stockaded (log) fort was built at the northern end of the site. Although Abercromby’s army dismantled the camp’s structures at the end of the year to prevent French destruction, in 1759 Major General Jeffery Amherst’s army rebuilt the stockaded fort and constructed one stone bastion of Fort George. Today one can still easily visualize the borders of the historic entrenched camp in the Battlefield Park. In recent years, archaeological excavations, led by Dr. David Starbuck, have uncovered valuable evidence delineating the location of the entrenched camp and the subsequent structures built on the site.

The history of the Battlefield Park needs to be shared so future generations can appreciate the sacrifices made more than two and a half centuries ago at this important site in the struggle for control of North America. ■

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### NOTES:

1. Public Record Office, London, Colonial Office Papers 5/48, UP microfilm reel 2, frame 546.
2. James Furnis, "An Eyewitness Account by James Furnis of the Surrender of Fort William Henry, August 1757," ed. by William S. Ewing, *New York History* 42 (1961): 311; Rueben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France* (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers Company, 1900), Volume 70, 155.
3. Loudon Papers (LO), Huntington Library, San Marino, California, 4479, 6660. There are some discrepancies in the numbers reported.
4. James L. Kochan, ed., "Joseph Frye's Journal and Map of the Siege of Fort William Henry, 1757," *The Bulletin of the Fort Ticonderoga Museum* 15 (1993): 348.
5. LO 5309; Colonel Joseph Frye of the Massachusetts regiment noted losses of men from the entrenched camp on August 3, 1757. Kochan, "Frye's Journal," 348.
6. Furnis, "Eyewitness Account," 313; LO 6660.
7. "A Journal Kept during the Siege of Fort William Henry, August 1757," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 37 (1898): 150.
8. LO 6660.
9. Kochan, "Frye's Journal," 356; Jabez Fitch Jr., *The Diary of Jabez Fitch, Jr., in the French and Indian War 1757*, 3rd ed. (Fort Edward, NY: Rogers Island Historical Association, 1986), 19; Seth Metcalf, *Diary and Journal of Seth Metcalf* (Boston: The Historical Records Survey, 1939), 10.
10. Russell P. Bellico, *Empires in the Mountains: French and Indian War Campaigns and Forts in the Lake Champlain, Lake George, and Hudson River Corridor* (Fleishmanns, NY: Purple Mountain Press, 2010), 126-28.
11. Jean-Nicholas Desandrouins, *Le Maréchal De Camp Desandrouins 1729-1792*, ed. L'Abbé Gabriel (Verdun: Imprimerie Renvé-Lallemand, 1887), 109-10.

