



Sir William, Where Exactly Were Your Lines?

Battle of Lake George
September 8, 1755

by Mark Silo

Every time I'm in the Lake George Battlefield Park I look around and wonder exactly where Gen. William Johnson's battle lines were during the September 8, 1755, Battle of Lake George. When I inquire about it, the response invariably starts with an uncertain "probably..." or "we think ...". In 2022, with my volunteer work at the Park's new Visitor Interpretive Center, I got to spend a lot more time in the area, and decided that I was going to figure it out for myself: where exactly were those lines? Not for a minute did I think I was the first person to undertake this research, nor would I probably reach the most accurate conclusions. But I decided to see what I could come up with.

Johnson's 2,600-man army formed one prong of a four-pronged British offensive strategy for attacking the French in 1755. His objective was Fort St. Frederic at Crown Point on Lake Champlain, a base from which French and Indian raids had tormented New England and New York settlements for decades. With the exception of a single British army officer, his entire force consisted of American provincial troops and Mohawk allies.¹ After improving roads leading north from Albany, especially the 14-mile portage road from Fort Lyman (later renamed Fort Edward) on the Hudson River to the south end of Lac du Saint Sacrament, on August 28 Johnson and his troops reached the high ground near the lake and established a camp. He promptly renamed the lake "George" after the British sovereign.

While at the Lake George camp Johnson got word that a French and Native American army, roughly equal in size to his own, was approaching Fort Lyman. On the morning of September 8, Johnson sent a force of about 1,000 soldiers back down the portage road² to assist the fort.

¹ At the time, troop units raised by the various British colonies were generally referred to as "provincials" but, since Canadian provincials were also present, for clarity I will refer to Johnson's troops as "American," a term that actually did not become prevalent for soldiers until the Revolutionary War. Although some of these troops, including William Johnson, were not American-born, all of them, with the sole exception of Capt. William Eyre, resided in Britain's American colonies.

² Various called "Fort Edward Road," "Portage Road" or "Old Military Road," the trail used by generations of Native Americans to portage between the Hudson River and Lake George, and later improved by colonial armed forces, parallels today's Route 9 through Lake George and Queensbury. "Fort George Road" through the park is a remnant of this road between the shore of Lake George and Route 9 that remains very close to its 1755 location.

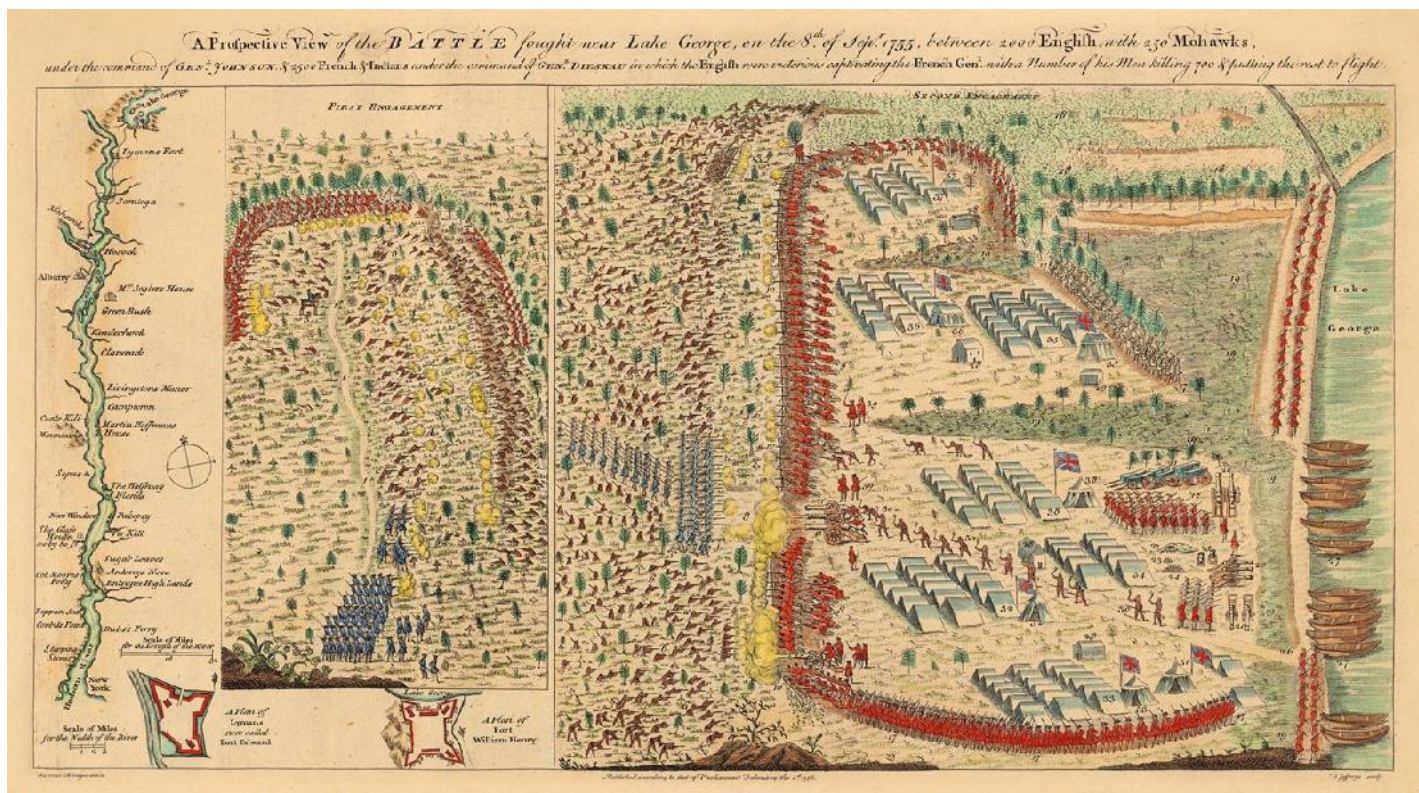


Figure 1. Samuel Blodget “Prospective View of the Battle...” London Edition

But the French learned of the American relief force and waited in ambush along the road about three miles south of Lake George. The resulting rout of the Americans, known as the “Bloody Morning Scout,” sent the survivors hurtling back toward the camp and started those in the camp into a hurried effort to establish a defensive line of breastworks. Their lines were soon assaulted by the French force, which they repulsed in a fierce battle of several hours’ duration.

The lines the men created that day were ephemeral: hurriedly built under high stress and in use only for a very short period of time. The troops in the camp had about two hours to create defenses after they heard the sound of the firing at the Bloody Morning Scout and started to see their comrades streaming back into the camp. They threw up whatever came to hand for protection. Daniel Claus, a fluent speaker of the Mohawk language whom Johnson employed as an interpreter with the expedition, recorded that the breastwork, “consisted of some trees cut down in a hurry at the front of the camp in some places not above a foot and a half high and which wagons were the principal shelter...completed a few minutes before the attack.”³ Men also dragged small boats up from the lake and incorporated them into their makeshift lines. There can be no expectation that today, 267 years later, there will be any physical remains. As a result, any review of the 1755 battlefield must rely on the written records and contemporaneous maps and drawings

Any such review must start with the familiar Samuel Blodget drawing (Figure 1). Blodget was a sutler who accompanied Johnson’s army to the new Lake George camp, selling whatever goods he had that soldiers might want to buy, such as needle and thread, extra clothes, blan-

³ “Daniel Claus’ Narrative of His Relations with Sir William Johnson and Experiences in the Lake George Fight,” (Society of the Colonial Wars in the State of New York, 1904) p. 15; found online at: <https://archive.org/details/danielclausnarra00sociuoft/page/38/mode/2up>. Claus was also Johnson’s son-in-law.

kets, or rum. Blodget observed the battle in person from the ridge of land on which Fort George was later built and afterwards interviewed a number of the men who had fought that day. Soon after the battle he made his drawing and had it engraved and published in Boston in December 1755. There is also a slightly modified edition that was engraved and published for sale in London by February 1756. Blodget supplemented his work with a substantial set of notes keyed to numbers on the drawing.⁴ The drawing and notes provide a wealth of information regarding the battle. In recognition of Blodget’s service to later historians, I sincerely hope he profited handsomely from his work.

William Johnson’s report on the battle, written in the form of a letter to the governors of the four colonies that had provided troops, also includes references as to the specific locations where fighting occurred. Others who left records of their experiences from that day provided plenty of information about what occurred, but few clues as to exactly where.

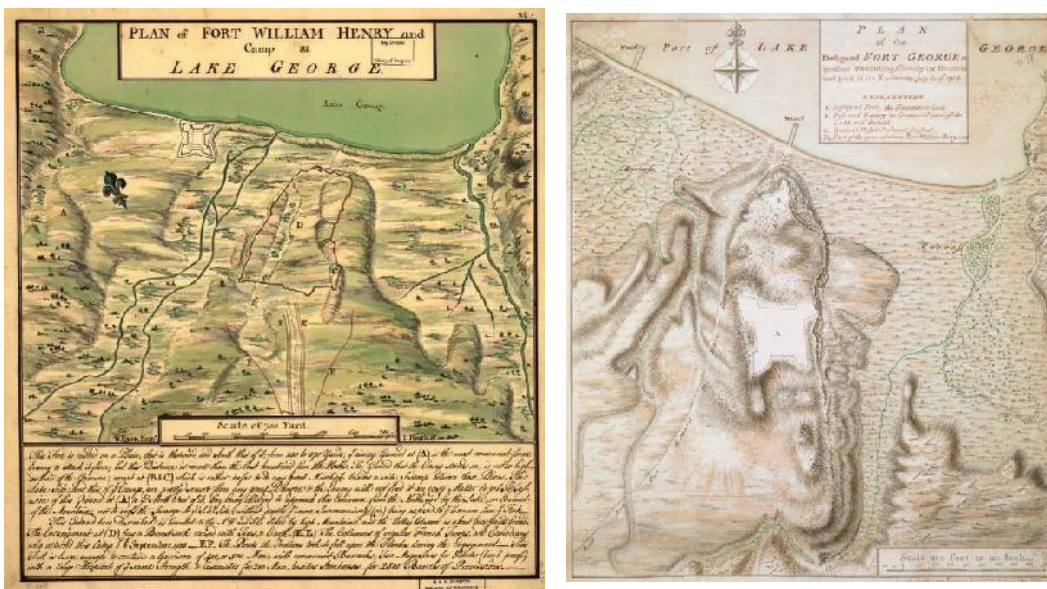


Figure 2. Eyre and Brasier Maps

We know of one other map that depicts Johnson’s battle lines, produced soon after Blodget’s map, drawn by a surveyor named Timothy Clements and engraved by Thomas Johnston in 1756. The Clements map does not provide a whole lot more information than Blodget’s work, and it may well be that it was based on Blodget’s prior drawing. In addition, there are other more detailed maps by military cartographers that provide us with fairly accurate depictions of the terrain in which the battle took place. These include William Eyre’s 1755 “Plan of Fort William Henry and Camp at Lake George,” and William Brasier’s “Plan of the Designed Ft.

⁴ A booklet was published with Blodget’s map that included the descriptive notes. The booklet may be found online at: <https://www.masshist.org/maps/Blodget/Booklet/GuideTitlePage.htm>. Hereinafter: “Blodget Booklet.”

George” from 1759 (Figure 2). Capt. Eyre was a military engineer and the only British soldier who marched with Johnson’s army.⁵

It seemed to me that the way to begin this quest was to use the available maps to try to locate the terrain features that they depict. Unlike the flimsy breastwork, terrain features may still be present and the more such points that can be found, the easier it should be to connect those dots and fill in the lines. The search involved numerous forays over several months throughout our Lake George Battlefield Park, the adjacent NYS Department of Environmental Conservation’s Lake George Battleground Campground and, to its immediate west, the Tiki Resort.

MAJOR TERRAIN FEATURES: GULLIES AND LOBES

Blodget’s drawing shows a battlefield that includes three “lobes” of high ground separated by two substantial ravines, which Blodget refers to as “gullies.” The easternmost lobe of high ground comprises parts of what we now know as the Lake George Battlefield Park or the DEC Day Use Area. By far the largest of the three lobes, it is bisected along its western edge by the colonial military road, the modern “Fort George Road.” The gully at the western edge of this lobe - Gully No. 1 - certainly appears to be the gully that runs immediately along the west side of our Visitor Interpretive Center. A quick review, however, exposes a problem with this assumption: as the gully emerges from the wooded area behind the VIC the ground actually rises to a higher point traversed by paths that lead to the Father Isaac Jogues statue. Drainages don’t run up and down, only down, so either this isn’t Blodget’s Gully No. 1 or humans have substantially modified the terrain. Perhaps, in creating the park, fill was used to create leveler paths. Sure enough, a quick search revealed an old culvert pipe that directs the drainage from Gully No. 1 under the filled-in park area.

Further doubt arose when another reconnaissance revealed additional higher ground at the base of the gully, where Blodget’s drawing shows it emptying straight into the historic morass that edged the lake. But a review of the more precise Brasier and Eyre maps shows the drainage turning sharply to the left, or west, as it approached the morass. This comports exactly with the 2022 terrain and, in fact, today there is a basin of unmowed, marshy ground that points westward and matches the 1750’s map configurations. This fully confirmed for me that Blodget’s Gully No. 1 is indeed the gully next to the VIC.

The next step in my review of the terrain was a traverse of the lobe of land west of Gully No. 1 while running a hiking app that records your walking path. This resulted in an outline that clearly resembled what is shown on the Blodget map. Mmmm, maybe I’m on to something!

Next I decided to traverse the low ground, the former swamp or “morass,” around the west and north sides of the battlefield, starting from West Brook Road (recently re-named “Elizabeth Little Boulevard”). Warren County re-created some marshland directly west of the battlefield and from the paths in this marsh/park some higher ground is evident looking toward the battlefield.

⁵ Readers will benefit by consulting high-resolution online reproductions of these referenced drawings: Brasier: Boston Public Library: <https://collections.leventhalmap.org/search/commonwealth:hx11z197r>; Eyre: Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/item/gm71000609/>; Blodget London edition: Boston Public Library: <https://collections.leventhalmap.org/search/commonwealth:q524mv34x>); Clements: https://www.battlemaps.us/products/new-york-1756-battle-of-lake-george-map-french-indian-war?_pos=2&_sid=cb6603051&_ss=r.

Blodget's map shows that the western side of Johnson's line was on high ground overlooking the marshes surrounding West Brook. Perhaps I was looking at this same high ground.

Continuing the clockwise traverse, one crosses the channelized stream that runs out of a ravine that may be Blodget's "Gully No. 2". Visible through the thick bushes is the outline of that gully as it emerges from the woods. Continuing, the base of the ridge where stands the Jogues statue is quickly reached. It seems that Father Jogues stands on the middle lobe of ground right between the two gullies. The Blodget drawing shows this area as the site of the camp of Colonel Ephraim Williams's Third Massachusetts regiment. I can't help thinking that Father Jogues may stand on the very spot where Colonel Williams spent his last night before meeting his death at the Bloody Morning Scout. For purposes of this inquiry, I will call this the "Jogues Lobe."

Approaching the Jogues statue I note that immediately to his west the land drops off into that Gully No. 2. Some obliging soul has smashed down the fence that runs at the edge of the woods there and, with minimal embarrassment and the loss of one shoelace, I was able to get over that mashed down fence. Dropping down into the gully I jumped over a little stream and trudged up the other side. Once atop the ravine I found myself at the northern edge of a squared-off lobe of high ground covered with mature pines and a blanket of pine needles. Crossing to the western edge of that high lobe reveals that it overlooks the re-created West Brook marsh (Figure 3). Moments earlier, I had stopped to talk with a man on one of the park benches and now saw him still on that bench and visible down below me, so I knew exactly where I stood. I was particularly excited by the squared-off base of this lobe of ground because the Blodget and Clements maps clearly show the western lobe of ground as having a squared off base (Figure 4). Since it abuts Gully No. 2 and overlooks the marsh with no other high ground in between, this must surely be the western line of Johnson's army. Let's call this 3rd, western lobe the "West Brook Overlook Lobe."⁶



Figure 3. View of the marsh from the western, or West Brook Overlook Lobe.



Figure 4. "Squared-off" north edge of West Brook Overlook Lobe.

⁶ GPS coordinates for this and several other key locations are provided in the "Conclusion" section.

So now I think I've located the three lobes and the two gullies. Awesome, but not without a couple of problems: First, Blodget shows Gully No. 1 terminating within the camp just inside of Johnson's front line, but I find that it extends farther south toward Route 9 than where Johnson's front line may have been. A look at the Eyre and Brasier maps clearly shows that in the 1750's this gully did extend farther to the south, just as I find in 2022. Blodget's depiction of both gullies corresponds to their steepest and deepest areas where they cut sharply down toward the historic morass, areas where, as Blodget states, "They occasioned the tents of the several regiments to be placed in the form they are here represented, however irregular or inconvenient."⁷ As the gullies extend to the south they both become shallow and flat-bottomed and would not greatly impede the placement of tents nor crossing by troops or breastworks. Also, Blodget depicts the gullies as neat geometric cones with straight edges; this does not correspond to nature either. While it provides much accurate and invaluable information, Blodget's drawing is a sketch, not a map.

Secondly, Blodget shows the western lobe, my West Brook Overlook Lobe, to be fairly wide; in fact, by my measure, it is only around 30 yards across. Again, Eyre and Brasier confirm it as a narrow strip of high ground. This furthers my suspicion that Blodget used different scales for north-south and east-west, a not-unheard-of illustrating device. Most of his sketch and notes are concerned with troop movements and dispositions and he needed more east-west space to accommodate his numerous illustrations of tents and men. In fact, Blodget uses this very device in the panel of his drawing that depicts the Hudson River: he actually includes different scale bars for north-south and east-west within that panel (Figure 5). Frustratingly, he did not include any scale bars at all in his Bloody Morning Scout and Battle of Lake George panels.



Figure 5. Detail from the Hudson River panel of Blodget's drawing showing differing east-west and north-south scale bars.

So, after a spell of agonizing over these discrepancies, I remain confident that I've indeed pinpointed the three lobes and two gullies. Great, but now the harder part: just where were the southeast and southwest corners of the American front line, the points that will help define the highest priority — the front line that faced the French attack?

⁷ Blodget Booklet, Note 19.

SOUTHEAST CORNER

Johnson's report mentions that his men, "took possession of some Eminences on our left Flank."⁸ This can be nothing other than the ridge of high ground that today includes the 1759-built Fort George at its highest point. Blodget noted that one cannon was placed "on the eminence" and his drawing shows this cannon placed at the southeast corner of the front line.⁹ The ridge stretches to the south from Fort George, descending gradually to its endpoint where the current-day park road curves around it. So somewhere along this ridge, or eminence, stood the southeast corner of the American line on September 8, 1755.

It is well understood that infantry covets the high ground. It is less well-known that the optimum high ground does not necessarily mean the very highest elevation. The so-called "military crest" is actually a point on the slope below the crest where the field of fire toward the enemy conforms to the natural slope. Thus, the American line would have been along the ridge between Fort George and the modern road. Also, at its lower end near the road, the sides of the ridge are not as steep as elsewhere, and therefore more conducive to hastily constructing a breastwork. A breastwork running straight or diagonally down a steep slope would be more exposed to enemy fire, a vulnerability that the Americans did suffer at the opposite corner of the line, as we shall see. Based on these considerations, I believe the line crossed and turned near the southern base of the ridge just above the modern road.

To continue my inquiry and enable use of additional available clues, I needed a precise southeast corner to help find the southwest corner, so I "chose" a specific waypoint on my map app to represent the southeast corner of Johnson's line. This did help to reveal the vicinity of the southwest corner, but later work resulted in some refinement regarding the exact location of the southeast corner.

EASTERN LINE

There is a plateau of varying widths between the eastern base of the Fort George Ridge and a precipitous drop-off toward the historic East Brook swamp (and current-day bike path). Today's park road is on this plateau. The Blodget drawing shows some level ground between the eastern defensive line and this drop-off, so the line was also surely located on this plateau. (This is more clearly seen on the London edition of the Blodget drawing.) In addition, the Eyre map, which depicts the modified defensive line Eyre laid out immediately after the battle, shows the line right at the eastern base of the ridge. In this area it is likely that Eyre's line duplicated Johnson's and that both the September 8 line and its successor ran between the modern park road and the base of the higher ground to its west. On Blodget's drawing it ran northerly parallel to the curving drop-off to the swamp all the way to the northern bluff overlooking Lake George where the stockaded fort was later built. Blodget also shows that Gen. Johnson's headquarters tent stood near this northeastern end of the battle line.

⁸ Hamilton, Milton W., "Battle Report: General William Johnson's Letter to the Governors, Lake George, September 9-10, 1755," p. 22, *The Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* - 1964. Hamilton's article reproduces Johnson's letter report in its entirety along with commentary.

⁹ Blodget Booklet, Note 12.

SOUTHWEST CORNER

There is much information in the records, maps, and drawings regarding the American southwest corner. Attempting to pinpoint one spot that conforms to all this information proved quite confounding. The terrain in the southwest corner area is naturally convoluted and made thornier by campground and vacation resort “improvements” of 20th Century humans. In addition, the maps that depict the terrain between the southwest corner area and the previously-pinpointed West Brook Overlook Lobe, do not entirely agree with one another.

The Blodget and Clements drawings place the southwest corner immediately east of a short third gully, with a smaller fourth lobe of high ground immediately opposite the gully. These terrain features are also seen on the Eyre and Brasier maps, enabling approximation of the point of the southwest corner on their maps and, using their scale bars and north arrows, estimation of the position of the southwest corner in relation to the southeast corner “chosen” earlier. Per Eyre it is 312 yards at a 321° bearing from southeast to southwest, and per Brasier it is 360 yards at 311°. Clements’s drawing provides a scale that, like Blodget’s, is not reliable in the east-west direction. But Clements does provide a north arrow which indicates a bearing of 302° between the two corners. Blodget provides neither scale nor north arrow, but comparing his battle line to the 310° orientation of the shore of Lake George yields a southeast-southwest bearing of 306° for the American front line.

Since this effort employed low-tech tools — ruler, calipers, t-square, angle finder — to derive measurements from not-entirely-reliable historic map prints, the results are “ballpark” at best. But they did indeed produce a ballpark location for the southwest corner when I walked a line approximately 312-360 yards long in a direction approximately 302°-321° from the southeast corner. This brought me to the vicinity of Campsite 64 in the DEC Lake George Battleground Campground. At a glance, this area seemed feasible. We also have several pieces of information that enable further evaluation of Campsite 64 as a candidate for the American southwest corner, including: proximity to the Gully No. 3 and the 4th Lobe; the ability to run a line from this “candidate” to the West Brook Overlook Lobe; the presence and proximity to “a rising spot of ground within 18 rods of our breastwork, behind which a number of Indians posted themselves and did us mischief” south of the southwest corner; and, the presence and proximity to the west of “a ridge of land, 15 rods distant from our men, behind which some hundreds of the enemy, mostly Indians, covered themselves”¹⁰ (Figure 6).

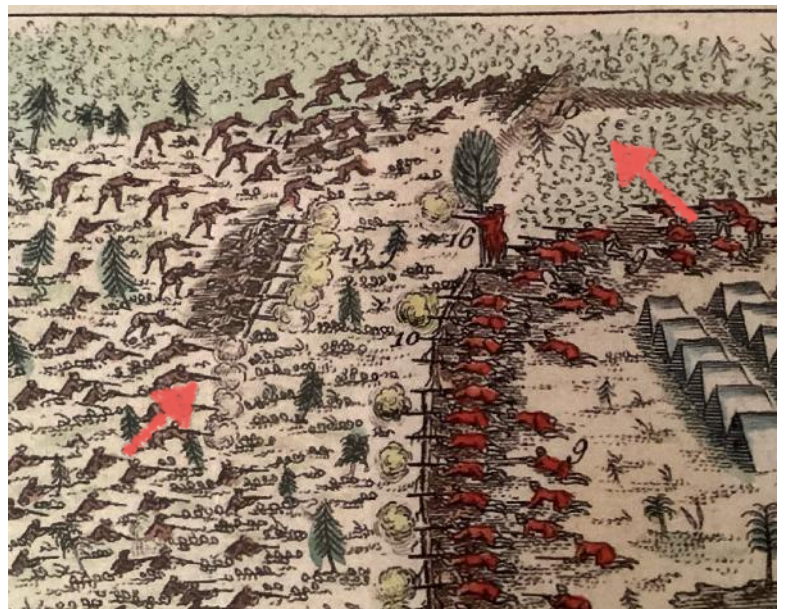


Figure 6. Detail from Blodget drawing showing the “Rising spot of ground” and “Ridge of land” which the attackers used for cover.

¹⁰ Blodget Booklet, Notes 13 and 15.

Campsite 64 sits on the upper edge of a precipice where the land drops steeply to the west toward the Tiki Resort property. The Blodget and Clements drawings and the Brasier map all make it appear that continuous high and level ground extends from the southwest corner of the line to the far (northern) edge of the West Brook Overlook Lobe. Therefore, I naturally assumed that walking northward along the upper edge of this precipice would bring me back to the Overlook. It did not. This precipice is actually the western edge of the middle, or Jogues Lobe, and it extends from the historic lakeshore morass below the Jogues statue all the way through the battlefield to the campground entry booth.

This embankment is seen quite clearly on both the Brasier and Eyre maps. The Eyre map shows a breastwork, or stockade, running along the top of this ridge line, which is actually a post-battle feature. Engineer Eyre relocated parts of Johnson's September 8 line immediately after the battle, while he was designing and directing the construction of Fort William Henry.¹¹

The presence of this embankment means that in order for the American line to proceed northerly from the southwest corner to the West Brook Overlook, it would have had to traverse this slope. None of the written accounts mentions this but several describe how this area was a weak point in the American defenses where the enemy inflicted many casualties or, in Blodget's words, "did us mischief." This situation, where the defensive line traverses down a steep bluff exposing the defenders to the attackers, would indeed have created a vulnerability. It is a situation similar to that which the Americans would have faced as their line turned to the north at its southeast corner had they run their line steeply down the east face of the Fort George Ridge. As discussed above, I believe they avoided this vulnerability by running their line across the flatter lower portion of that ridge.

There was also a way to minimize a similar vulnerability at the southwest corner of the line. Examination of the Campsite 64 vicinity reveals a side-cut in the embankment 20-30 yards south of the campsite.¹² At this location the grade moderates where it drops diagonally down the slope in the direction of the West Brook Overlook. Since the breastwork unavoidably had to cross the embankment, this side-cut would have been a favorable location. The present-day road from the campground entry booth runs up the embankment on the southern part of this side-cut. Very near where this road reaches the top of the embankment is where the American line would have turned northward and down the slope — our southwest corner.

At this location there is currently a "Refuse Recycle Center" sign, so I'll call it "RRC Corner." It indeed appears feasible as the historic southwest corner, but does it comport with all the other information we have about this point in the American line?

At the base of the embankment the terrain flattens out as it runs northerly toward the West Brook Overlook. The level ground, or natural terrace, along the base of the slope leads straight back toward the West Brook Overlook Lobe, meaning that a defensive line running along it would lead straight toward the north, quite consistent with Blodget's drawing. This location is also opposite "Gully No. 3" which is just west of the drop-off and runs to the north, as depicted

¹¹ Hartgen Archeological Associates, "Analysis of Military Campaigns Associated with Fort George and Environs," Volume 2, Resource Inventory Form 1755-1, p. 2.

¹² Distances are given in ranges since picking exact spots for features such as a ridge or gully or the "corner" on a curved line is very arbitrary.

on the Blodget and Clements drawings.¹³ So it appears that this location is feasible as the site of the southwest corner in terms of its connection to the west side of the American lines. But does it meet the tests of the “rising spot of ground” and “ridge of land?”

Directly south of RRC, just short of and parallel to Route 9, there is a sharp rise of land of about 6-8 feet, a perfect natural breastwork which, I firmly believe, must be the “rising spot of ground” that sheltered numerous French-allied Indians during the battle (Figure 7). Blodget noted that Col. Titcomb and Lt. Barron, in an attempt to counter their fire, moved a few yards beyond their breastwork, taking cover behind a log, “and here it was that they both unhappily fell.”¹⁴ This “rising spot” is 90-100 yards from RRC. Eighteen rods, the distance from the breastwork to this spot, as estimated by Blodget, equates to 99 yards — a very close correlation.



Figure 7. “Rising spot of ground...behind which a number of Indians posted themselves and did us mischief,” within the campground parallel to Route 9.

Locating an appropriate “ridge of land” west of RRC proved far more challenging. That threatening “ridge of land” would have to be the east face of the 4th Lobe, the high ground that ran parallel to the west side of the American line. It is seen clearly on the maps and was the only high terrain in that area that faced the American position and was large enough to conceal, as Blodget recorded, “some hundreds of the enemy.”¹⁵ But — despite way too much time spent prowling the area, poring over maps and accounts, and re-thinking previous conclusions — I just could not find any such ridge or lobe. Eventually it dawned on me that it might simply be gone, obliterated within the Tiki



Figure 8. Tiki parking lot sits on approximately ten feet of fill above original marsh.

¹³ Today this gully is almost entirely filled in as a result of construction of the lower portion of a driveway running from Route 9 to the rear of the Tiki Resort. See further discussion in the “Western Line” section below.

¹⁴ Blodget Booklet, Note 16.

¹⁵ Blodget Booklet, Note 15.

complex.

I had noticed that the lobe on the historic maps was similar in shape, size, and location to a large modern parking lot. The lobe measures 71-82 yards across on the Eyre and Brasier maps while the parking lot is 74 yards wide. I had noticed that the hotel building adjacent to the parking lot looks like it was cut into a hillside. I had noticed that the parking lot sits on over ten feet of fill over the marsh (Figure 8). Finally I noticed that there is a slope on the east side of the parking lot that has been terraced by large-scale modern earth-moving. And once I considered the possibility that the whole lobe had been bulldozed away, things started to fall into place.



Figure 9. Aerial photo of Tiki Resort and part of DEC campground.

A stockade fence runs along the property line between the state campground and the Tiki Resort. Along this fence Tiki has a motel-style building and access driveway, both running downhill from Route 9. Today level ground runs from the terrace below RRC, across the Tiki motel and driveway, and right to the rim of that remnant rising ground beside the parking lot. The lower portion of the driveway, passing below the motel building and turning on a leftward curve toward the parking lot, (see aerial view, Figure 9) is on fill above the original natural terrain of Gully No. 3. So the ground between the lower driveway and remnant ridge would not have been level in 1755, it would have been rising — rising to become the “ridge of land,” or eastern face of the 4th Lobe.

My conclusion is that the 4th Lobe was excavated for the construction of the hotel building and to supply material to fill in the adjacent marsh to develop the parking lot. Where the ground rises today along the east side of the parking lot, the lot and adjacent hotel building sit on ground where the 4th Lobe was removed. In the areas where the parking lot extends to the north and west of the lobe location, the



Figure 10. View looking toward Route 9 with Tiki driveway in foreground and picnic lawn in center. Slope at right and driveway drop down to parking lot. Photo taken from area of fill above historic “Gully No. 3.”

lot sits on fill material bulldozed from the lobe. This excavation also provided material to fill in Gully No. 3 and construct the driveway.

Today there is a lawn and picnic area across the Tiki driveway from the motel building. It extends north from their swimming pool then runs along the top of the rising ground at the east edge of the parking lot (Figure 10).

The troublesome “ridge of land” would have been on the since-excavated ground above this lawn.

The ridge need not have been very much higher than the present lawn as just a few feet would have put it at an elevation higher than the west side of the American breast-work. As seen on the Blodget and Clements drawings, the attackers on that ridge faced a parallel set of defenders along the American line in that area. A detail from the Clements drawing is provided in Figure 11, which also superimposes the approximate location of the modern parking lot. Blodget estimates the problematic “ridge of land” to have been 15 rods from the American line, or 83 yards. The Tiki picnic lawn runs parallel to the west side of the line at a distance of 80-90 yards, another close correlation.



Figure 11. Detail from Clements drawing showing attackers on the 4th Lobe ridge parallel to west side of American line. Red rectangle is approximate location of Tiki rear parking lot.

As a civil engineer I can confidently posit that the earth from the lobe now lies deep beneath the parking lot; as a man who treasures his nation’s history I deeply regret it. It is unfortunate indeed that this portion of the battlefield has been erased by 1950’s era development. A note on the Clements map describes it as “a hill from which the enemy did us much harm and during the engagement the enemy had great advantages they laying behind trees we had felled within gun shot of our front.”¹⁶

To summarize: the area of RRC matches well with the criteria for the southwest corner in terms of its position relative to (1) the West Brook Overlook, (2) Gully No. 3, (3) the 4th Lobe, (4) the “rising spot of ground,” and (5) the “ridge of land.” There is no other location that meets all these criteria. “RRC” is the location of the southwest corner of the American defenses.

WESTERN LINE

Blodget and Clements show the western side of the defensive line running in a straight northerly line from the spot I am calling “RRC” at its southwest corner to the spot I am calling the “West Brook Over-

¹⁶ Clements Map, Note 4.

look.” As mentioned, a terrace of flat ground runs northerly from RRC along the base of the precipice that delineates the western edge of the middle, or Jogues Lobe. For much of its length this ground is now occupied by a road servicing several campsites at Battleground Campground. The level terrace extends north beyond the paved road then bears slightly to the east before dropping steeply as it becomes “Gully No. 2” and plunges past the Jogues statue toward the historic morass.

To continue toward the West Brook Overlook, the defensive line would have continued straight where the terrace veered easterly. From this point the line runs along an edge of higher ground overlooking the marsh area to the west. But in this area the line is not ideal as a defensive position because there are some undulations in the ground between it and the marsh that would have offered concealment to attackers. As Johnson’s camp was laid out, the tents of one regiment, Col. Titcomb’s 2nd Massachusetts, were pitched along that terrace and on the West Brook Overlook Lobe, as seen on the Blodget drawing. This would have resulted in running the breastwork in this area along that vulnerable line. As a result, the enemy penetrated the “swamp on our right where, having posted themselves, they were under advantage to do us damage, and from hence it was we received most hurt.”¹⁷ So the men in this sector suffered from attackers in the swamp and on that undulating ground, as well as fire from the “ridge of land” on the 4th Lobe. Too late, but immediately after the battle Capt. Eyre, the British military engineer, called for the relocation of the western portion of the line to the top of the precipice forming the west edge of the “Jogues Lobe.”¹⁸

In this area of the battlefield the maps again show some apparent inconsistency. As noted, the Blodget, Clements, and Brasier maps make it appear that a convenient high, level strip of ground connects from the southwest RRC corner to the West Brook Overlook. While the terrace is in fact at a similar elevation to the lobe, the line between it and the Overlook traverses some lower and uneven ground that needs to be crossed to get to the lobe. This is why the Eyre map shows the lobe looking more like an “island.” The explanation for this is simply that Eyre shows more detail in his elevation shadings, similar to using differing contour intervals on a modern topographic map. The other maps are not wrong, just simplified. And as described above, it is possible to run a nearly straight line from the conjectured southwest corner at RRC to the West Brook Overlook that runs along an edge of higher ground that overlooks the marsh area to the west, just as shown on Blodget’s drawing.

Eyre is also alone among the post-battle mapmakers in that he shows “Gully No. 3” taking a turn to the west and running across the south end of the West Brook Overlook Lobe. But, again, he is correct and this is exactly what is found there today. Once past the Tiki motel building the Tiki driveway turns sharply to the left (west) and downhill into the large parking lot. Where the driveway turns west it passes a portion of Gully No. 3 that was not filled in during construction lying between the driveway and the West Brook Overlook Lobe, or island. This steep drop-off at the south end of this lobe is completely consistent with Eyre’s depiction of Gully No. 3.

¹⁷ Blodget Booklet, Note 14.

¹⁸ Hartgen Archeological Associates, “Analysis of Military Campaigns Associated with Fort George and Environs,” Volume 2, Resource Inventory Form 1755-1, p. 2.

AMERICAN FRONT LINE

Having made reasonable hypotheses as to the locations of the corner points of the American lines, we come to the real crux of the inquiry: where was the front line?

Blodget depicts the front line as arrow-straight from corner to corner, with only slight curvatures in the line as it turned to the north, something that made me quite skeptical as I began this research. The soldiers, in a rush and under stress, created the line as their defeated comrades hurried back and the enemy French approached. The land was pocked with stumps, logs, brush, boulders and uneven ground they had to work around. They laid logs “singly on the ground” which, as Blodget admitted “were hastily fell’d while our men were retreating from the former battle, and not in number sufficient to lie all of them contiguous to each other.”¹⁹ They certainly had no time to lay out neat, orderly lines, any more than they had time to don those handsome red jackets that Blodget’s drawing shows them all wearing.

But, quite to my surprise, there is indeed a generally straight line between the conjectured corner points that would have been highly advantageous, perhaps optimum, as a defensive position. The ground heading west from our southeast corner at the Fort George Ridge is relatively flat and enjoys an extended level field of fire looking south toward the approaching attackers. This continues as one heads westward across the present Fort George Road, along that 302°-321° bearing established from the historic maps. The road crossing is in the vicinity of the gravel driveway that passes the DEC maintenance sheds and enters the Battleground Campground. While construction of this driveway cut into the original terrain and lowered its elevation, there is plainly some natural higher ground just a few feet to its south. Conversely, the terrain drops more sharply downhill to its north. Staying on that higher ground adjacent to the south side of the drive would have been desirable; no infantryman would have wanted that little ridge in his direct front.

The historic line and the campground driveway cross the extension of Gully No. 1 just a couple hundred feet west of Fort George Road. On the south side of the driveway, extending along that line of higher ground, the gully is not deep and its bottom is flat, no great inhibition for a defensive line and troop movements,²⁰ while running north from the other side of the driveway the gully quickly starts to deepen. Continuing west beyond the gully, that straight line traverses an area of campsites where the favorable field of fire continues for a soldier looking south toward his attackers. However that field has grown narrower and then very restricted where Blodget’s “rising spot of ground,” only 99 yards from the breastwork, offered protection for the attackers and vulnerability for the defenders.

Finally, continuing on this straight line of higher ground, it intersects the abrupt drop-off just south of RRC. This is the precipice described earlier that is actually an extension of the west side of the Jogues Lobe that runs through the entire American position. While the just-described higher-ground line is quite straight for a great majority of the required distance, it does not connect the hypothesized corners unless there is some arc from the straight line to the corners at both ends — and Blodget’s drawing does show slight curvatures at the corners.

¹⁹ Blodget Booklet, Note 10.

²⁰ There is a mound of higher ground in the middle of the gully 20-30 yards south of the driveway, This appears to be a modern dump of refuse material as it sits in the middle of the natural gully and exhibits very different vegetation from the surrounding ground.

However, if the southeast corner was a short distance farther south than my working, or “chosen” southeast corner, that favorable straight line of higher ground would be nearly as arrow-straight as Blodget drew it and in close alignment with the compass bearing of the line as deduced from the maps. This leads to a final conclusion that the southeast corner of the September 8 line was very near the base of the Fort George Ridge, just above the modern park road.

An American front line between a southeast corner on the Fort George Ridge near its base would line up straight from a southwest corner at “RRC” at a distance of 340-360 yards and at a compass bearing of 300°-310°, again consistent with the parameters deduced from the maps. This, in my belief, is the location of the American front line on September 8, 1755.

AFTER THE BATTLE

The battle raged all afternoon with the Americans holding their flimsy lines and the French, Canadians, and allied Indians firing on them from south, east, and west. After several hours many of the Canadian provincials and Indians started to withdraw. Then, when their army’s commander, Jean Erdman, Baron Dieskau, was immobilized with a bullet wound and captured, the entire French force retreated without orders. Some Americans had not had their fill of fighting and pursued them. Meanwhile, a small force of American provincials had moved from Fort Lyman (Edward) toward the sounds of battle and skirmished with the retreating enemy. This third phase of the Battle of Lake George became known as “Bloody Pond.” For the day each side suffered around 330 casualties.²¹ At some future date the *Fort George Post* hopes to publish an article titled, “Where Exactly Was Bloody Pond?”

Soon after the September 8 battles, Johnson’s men commenced the construction of Fort William Henry under the guidance of Capt. Eyre. Johnson chose not to undertake the planned advance on Crown Point and, after raising the flag over the new fort in November, he dispersed his troops for the winter. An active military site through 1780, the fort and camp played numerous critical roles during the French and Indian and Revolutionary Wars and, as armies of various sizes utilized the area in subsequent campaigns, fortifications were built and rebuilt, expanded and contracted. The site has remained a tourist attraction ever since. In the 1890’s the State of New York began purchasing properties that subsequently became the Battle-ground Campground, the Battlefield Park, and the Million Dollar Beach. Thankfully, while Lake George grew into one of America’s foremost tourist towns, these public lands have remained relatively pristine and welcoming to activities like camping, picnicking, and running around looking for battle lines.

CONCLUSION

It does seem rather audacious to draw conclusions based on the supposition that a major land mass on the battlefield has disappeared. Attempts to verify this supposition by requesting site plans from the present Tiki Resort management and the Charles Wood Foundation (Mr. Wood was the original developer of the Tiki) have not produced results. And the Tiki project pre-dated

²¹ Russell P. Bellico, *“Empires in the Mountains,”* (Fleishmans NY: Purple Mountain Press, 2010) p. 66, 68.

modern planning and zoning regulations, so the Town of Lake George does not possess site plans. Independent confirmation of my 4th Lobe removal theory would have been welcome but, without it, I assessed possible alternatives at length and remained confident in the theory and the other conclusions and began final editing for this report.

Then, very fortuitously, former LGBPA president Lyn Hohmann brought to my attention a map that confirmed the Tiki earthwork theory. It was a mid-1950's topographic map prepared by the New York State Department of Public Works (forerunner of DOT) as part of the planning for construction of the Adirondack Northway. It covers the battlefield area using five-foot contour intervals, which illustrate the terrain elevations in significant detail, and show the "4th Lobe" clearly on the Tiki property and clearly consistent with the historic maps. But it also raised another issue that warranted an answer.

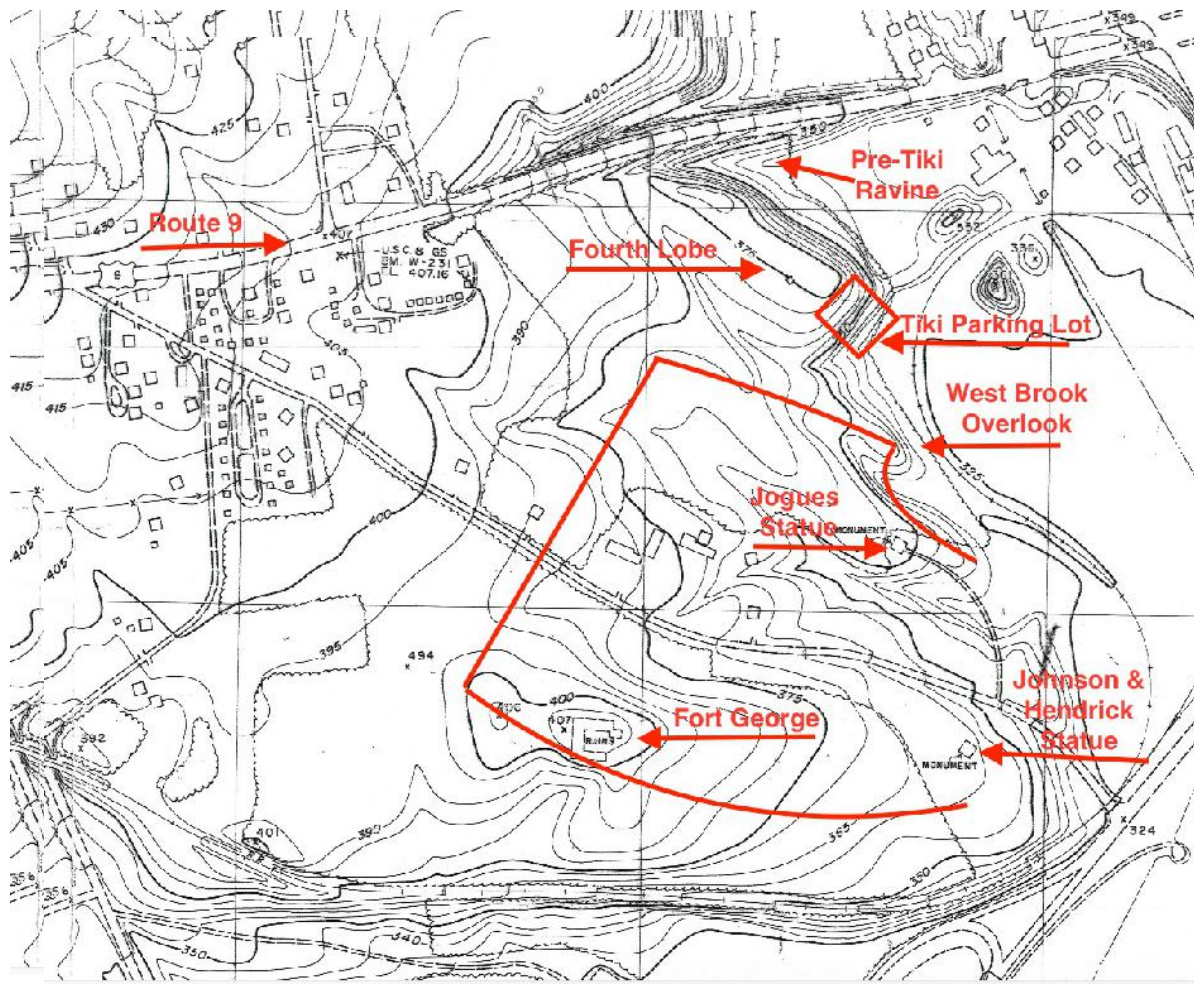


Figure 12. Detail from mid-1950's NYSDPW survey map showing some past and present battlefield landmarks. Red line traces location of American breastworks. North is to the right.

The DPW map shows that, pre-Tiki, the lobe was twenty feet higher than the present Tiki picnic lawn area! This means an immense amount of earth was removed, far more than would have been required to provide fill for their parking lot and to top up Gully No. 3 for their driveway. Thankfully, the map shows another terrain feature on the Tiki property that helps explain what

happened. In the mid-1950's there was a deep and wide ravine between Route 9 and what we now see as the Tiki property, a ravine that no longer exists. So that's where the bulk of the earth from the 4th Lobe went — used to fill in that ravine to create more developable acreage for Tiki. See Figures 12 and 13.



Figure 13. 4th Lobe as depicted by Clements (1756), Brasier (1759), NYSDPW topographic map (c. 1955), and Warren County Aerial Imagery (2022). Line across parking lot in 2022 image approximates limit of fill under parking lot, which equates to 1755 edge of 4th Lobe. Note also the correlation of 3rd Lobe on Brasier and DPW maps (red arrows). North is up in all images.

This was a very satisfying moment and definitely furthered my faith in the conclusions presented in this article. But there remain many things we cannot be 100% positive about and further

discussion is encouraged. Any and all comments, questions, suggestions, challenges, alternative propositions, etc. will be welcome. The author may be contacted at msilo89@hotmail.com.

Figure 14 presents a summary of these conclusions in map form. Unfortunately, of the dozens of existing maps consulted, none provided a suitable base map that would help interested readers to completely envision the grounds described. For example, the Google and Apple maps of the park and campground areas are full of errors and the NYSDPW map does not provide many 2023 reference points. So the base map used for Figure 14 is a cut-and-paste amalgam of the Alliance's "Battlefield Park Tour Guide" brochure, DEC's campsite map, and the Apple map of the Tiki area.

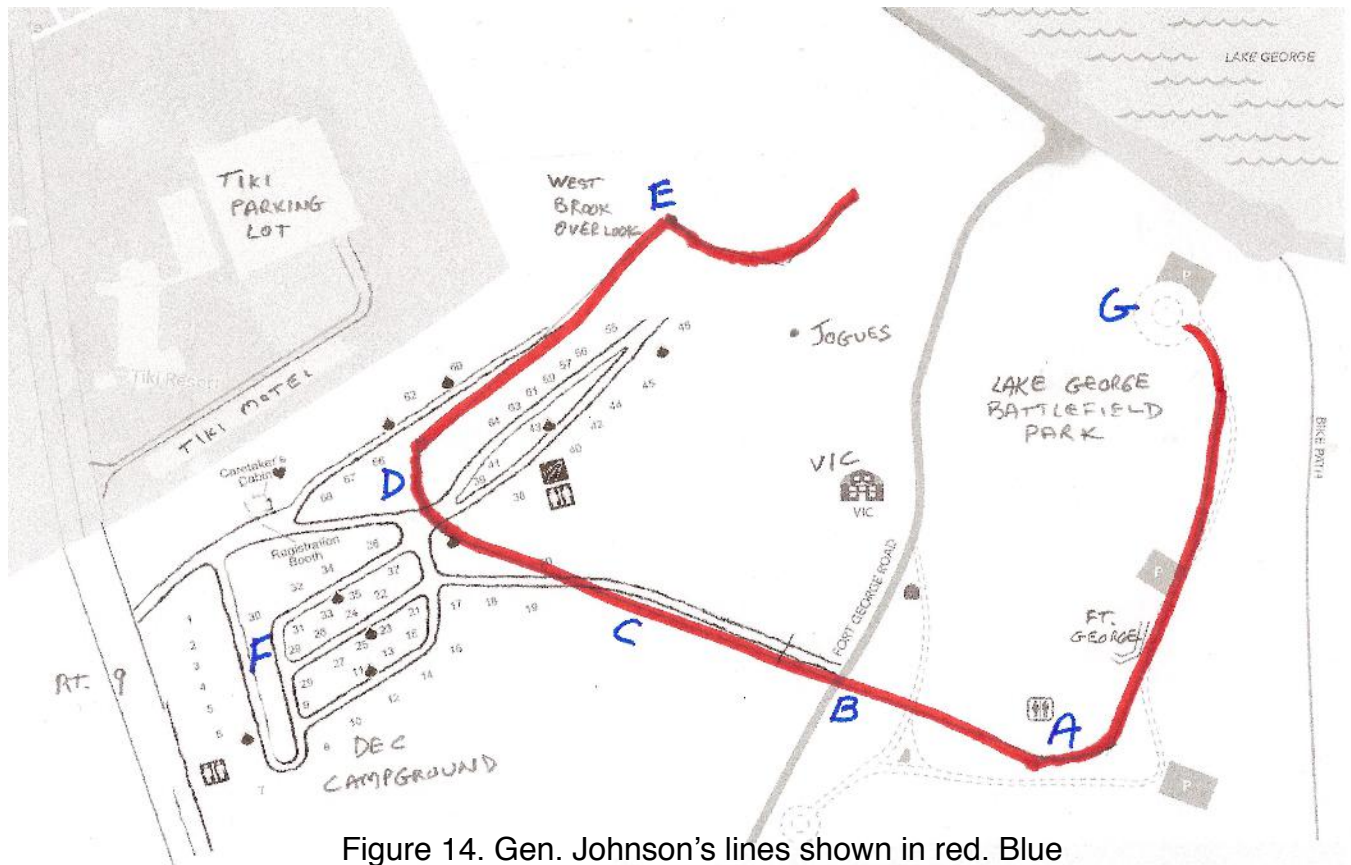


Figure 14. Gen. Johnson's lines shown in red. Blue letters correspond to GPS coordinates in text.

To enable anyone interested to find some of the key locations discussed, below are some useful GPS coordinates. The letters correspond to the blue letters in Figure 14.

- A. Southeast corner on Fort George Ridge: 43° 24' 50.37" N, 73° 42' 26.67" W
- B. Front line intersects modern Fort George Road: 43° 24' 52.23" N, 73° 42' 31.23" W
- C. Front line at west side of Gully No. 1: 43° 24' 53.56" N, 73° 42' 36.10" W
- D. Southwest (RRC) corner: 43° 24' 55.38" N, 73° 42' 39.31" W
- E. West Brook Overlook: 43° 25' 00.79" N, 73° 42' 35.28" W
- F. "Rising spot of ground": 43° 24' 53.28" N, 73° 42' 42.17" W
- G. Northeast end of line near Johnson's tent: 43° 25' 02.34" N, 73° 42' 22.93" W

Several people who know the park and its history far better than I graciously reviewed this article and offered many helpful comments. My thanks go to Lyn Karig Hohmann, Russell Bellico, Bruce Venter, and John DiNuzzo. None of these folks have yet seen enough to be able to say, "Hey, you're right. I agree," but they all helped with historical details and presentation.

Mark Silo is a native of Yonkers who relocated to the Albany area after receiving his bachelor's degree from the University of Notre Dame and his master's degree from Cornell University, both in civil engineering. He spent his professional career in transportation engineering, most recently as an Assistant Commissioner at the N.Y.S. Department of Transportation in Albany. He has served his local community as a member of the Town of Colonie Planning Board and Conservation Council, and as a board member of Friends of the New York State Military Museum, Capital District Civil War Round Table, Southern Adirondack Audubon Society, and his Church Council. He currently is a weekly volunteer at Habitat for Humanity and at the Lake George Battlefield Park Visitor Interpretive Center. Silo is an avid student of American history and is the author of "The 115th New York in the Civil War," the unit history of a local civil war regiment, published in 2007. He and his wife Kathy split their time between their home in Loudonville, their log cabin on the Schroon River in the Adirondacks, and various bucket-list locales. They have two grown children and two grandsons.