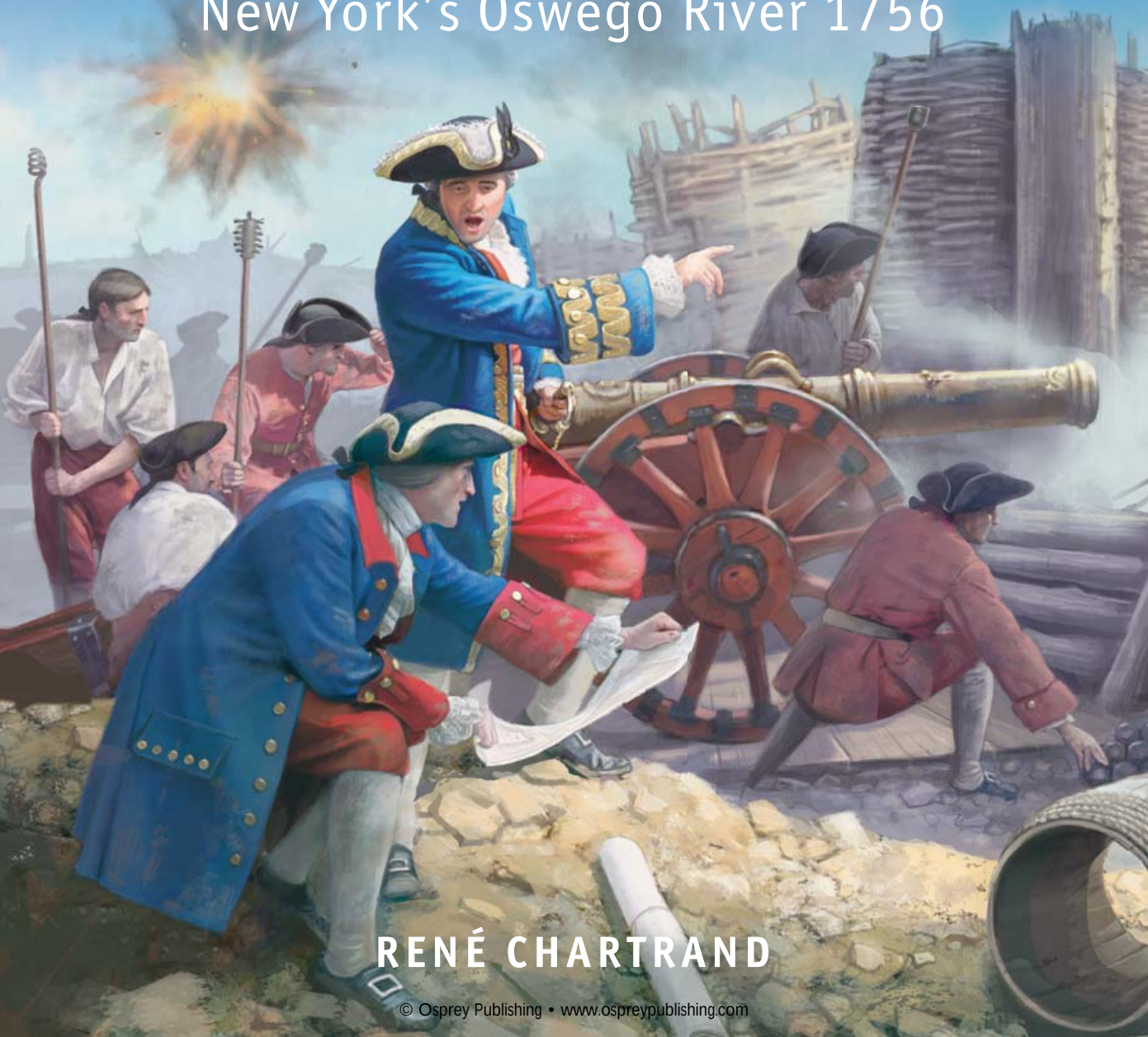


RAID

MONTCALM'S CRUSHING BLOW

French and Indian Raids along
New York's Oswego River 1756



RENÉ CHARTRAND

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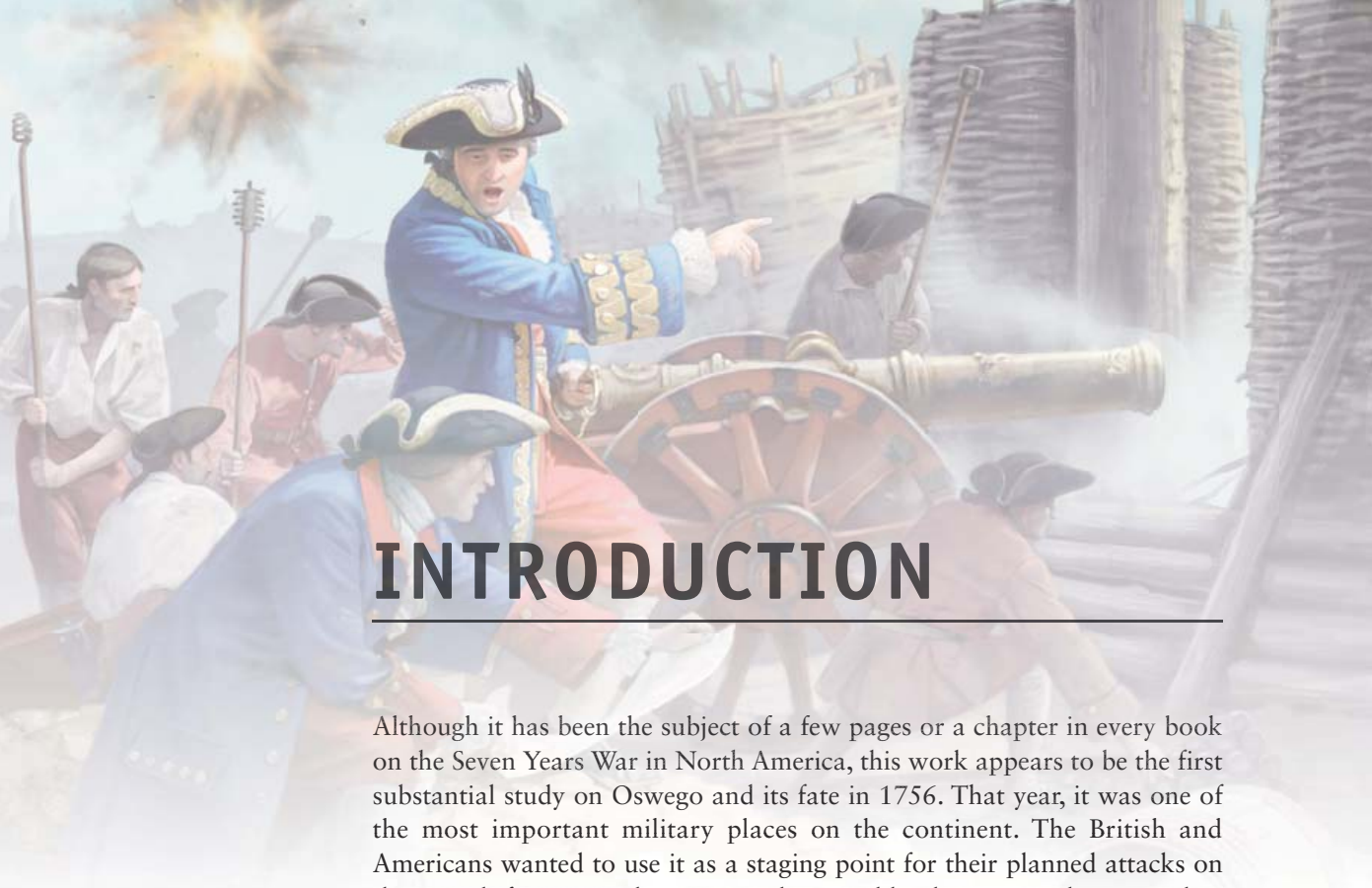
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RENÉ CHARTRAND

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INTRODUCTION

Although it has been the subject of a few pages or a chapter in every book on the Seven Years War in North America, this work appears to be the first substantial study on Oswego and its fate in 1756. That year, it was one of the most important military places on the continent. The British and Americans wanted to use it as a staging point for their planned attacks on the French forts on Lake Ontario that would culminate in their complete control of that great waterway. The French wanted to conquer Oswego to deprive the Anglo-Americans of their post on the Great Lakes. The stakes were high. If the British were successful, part of New France's fur trade was ruined and the French's influence with their allied Indian nations would be seriously reduced. If the French had the upper hand, it was the Anglo-Americans' trade and influence with the Indians that would be seriously, perhaps fatally, affected.

The defense capacity of Oswego was bolstered; from 1755, new forts were built and the garrison greatly strengthened. However, largely through the administrative ineptitude of General William Shirley, who was the British commander-in-chief in North America and governor of Massachusetts, there were serious problems sending enough supplies from Albany to Oswego. The line of communication was very long and went largely through wilderness before reaching Oswego. This was a major "Achilles heel" that had not gone unnoticed by Governor General Vaudreuil of New France. A seasoned officer born in Canada, he perceived the weakness in the link between Albany and Oswego and resolved to test it. This is why our work gives a fairly elaborate account of the raid and destruction of Fort Bull in March 1756 since it proved the weakness of that link. It also demonstrated yet again the "French and Indian" superiority in wilderness warfare.

Could a raid on a grand scale, unseen as yet in North America, be organized and take Oswego, Vaudreuil wondered? When General Montcalm arrived in Canada in June 1756, he was soon tasked with carrying out such a mission. It would involve taking over 3,000 men, including allied warriors,

over a vast expanse of wilderness traveling in a fleet of at least 200 boats called bateaux that would move discreetly in order not to be detected. This must have initially seemed unrealistic, but, after a while, even the French metropolitan officers warmed to the idea enough to give it a try. To take Oswego would really be a feat, as this was no small stockade affair. It had several forts and a train of siege artillery had to be brought along. This might have initially seemed like an impossible task, but many Canadians were employed transporting huge quantities of trade goods across part of the continent; transporting artillery and large quantities of ammunition and supplies of all sorts was possible for these men. The Oswego operation has usually been called a “campaign” but, as will be seen, it was really more of a massive raid, the likes of which had never been seen before.



Major-General Louis-Joseph de Montcalm, Marquis de Saint-Véran, but commonly called Marquis de Montcalm, c. 1755. (Officers' Mess, Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston. Author's photo)

ORIGINS

The competition for Lake Ontario

From the early 1720s, American fur traders became very interested in the Oswego area as a fine place for meeting Indians from the more westerly Iroquois nations, notably the Onondagas. By about 1724, this had taken the form of a seasonal event where traders would spend part of the summer trading with Iroquois. There was nothing permanent erected by the American traders, only temporary bark or log huts.

Nevertheless, the French soon learned and were considerably worried about these activities. In terms of trade with the First Nations, the American traders at Oswego were obviously diverting business that would normally have gone to Fort Frontenac. But it was probably the geostrategic implications that drew the greatest concern of senior officials in Quebec City. Up until then, Lake Ontario – still called Lake Frontenac on some maps – had been a French lake. Now, the ongoing activities of the American traders at Oswego each summer upset the security and dominance the French had enjoyed since the 17th century. Normally, the government of New France acted militarily against interlopers, either directly or through allied Indians, but the Oswego case was more complex. These numerous traders were British subjects and Oswego was also claimed to be within the realm and protection of Great Britain although, in practical terms, the Iroquois nation of the Onondagas was the real lord of the area, and was generally considered an ally of the Anglo-Americans. Furthermore, Britain and France were enjoying a peaceful period that no one in Versailles or London really wished to upset, so a military action and occupation of Oswego by French troops was out of the question.

Diplomacy and adopting measures to hem in the American traders at Oswego appeared as the immediate solution. The Chevalier de Longueuil was sent to meet with Onondaga leaders, but they remained vague and non-committal. The trade was no doubt much to their liking and it was

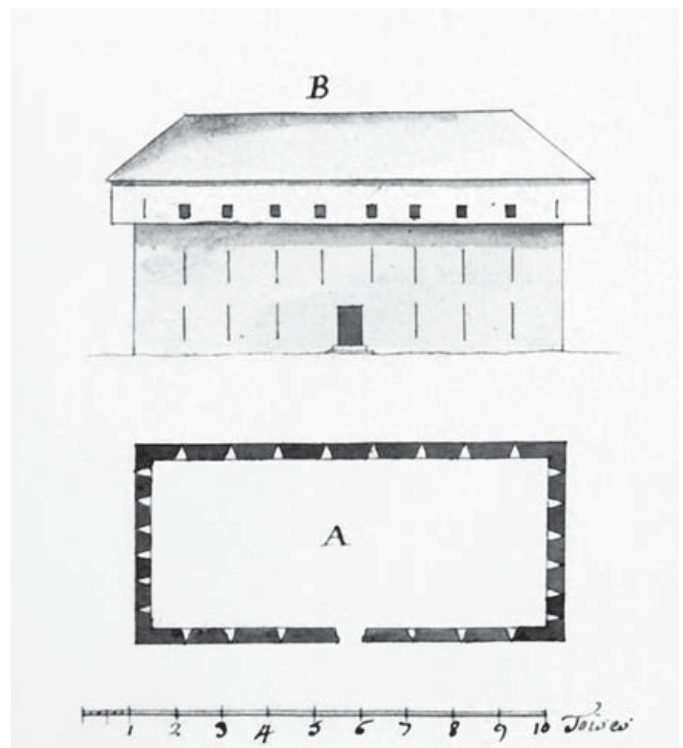
increasing. In 1724, a path was cleared by the American traders at the Oneida Carry to facilitate the flow of trade goods coming from Albany by the Mohawk River. Goods would now reach Oswego more easily. For the French, the situation was not getting any better as years passed and, by 1726, they obtained leave from the Iroquois Seneca nation to build a “House of Peace” farther west, at Niagara, to prevent the Anglo-Americans from penetrating any farther into Lake Ontario. The new French fort at Niagara had the usual stockade wall of any outpost, but what was rising inside was a large three-story-high stone “machicolated house” that would have a detachment of regular troops. This would secure the entrance into Lake Ontario from Lake Erie. With Fort Frontenac, which also had a regular garrison, guarding the lake’s eastern access into the St Lawrence River, the French controlled the way in and out of the lake, except at Oswego.

The French and British forts

New York colony governor William Burnet received news of the French fort being built at Niagara. It was clear that Oswego now had to be secured and made into a more permanent post. Britain too had to “show the flag” at Lake Ontario, as failure to do so could entail losses in trade and prestige with the Iroquois confederacy. In late 1726, Burnet obtained money from the New York legislature to “build a fort at the mouth of the Onondaga River” and, by the spring of 1727, he “sent some workmen to build a stone house of Strength at a place called Oswego...” (DRCHSNY, V). To garrison the new fort, Governor Burnet ordered one of the four independent companies posted in the province of New York to take its quarters at Oswego. This was a company of British regular troops consisting of one captain, two lieutenants and 60 enlisted men. The men were armed with muskets, bayonets and swords, and were uniformed in red coats with blue cuffs and linings. From 1730, the facings were changed from blue to green (WO 71/6).

Thus, for the first time, British regular “redcoats” appeared on the southeastern shore of Lake Ontario. Not only were the Iroquois surely impressed at this resolute show of force on the frontier, but the French also were deeply worried. The governor general of New France, the Marquis de Beauharnois, wanted to know what was being done at Oswego and, in the summer of 1727, dispatched

Redoubt built by the English at Oswego, 1727. (Detail from a map by King’s Engineer Gaspard-Joseph Chaussegros de Léry (senior). Made at Montreal on July 17, 1727 after field notes. Collection and photo: Archives Nationales (France), Outremer (Aix-en-Provence), Dépôt des Fortifications des Colonies)

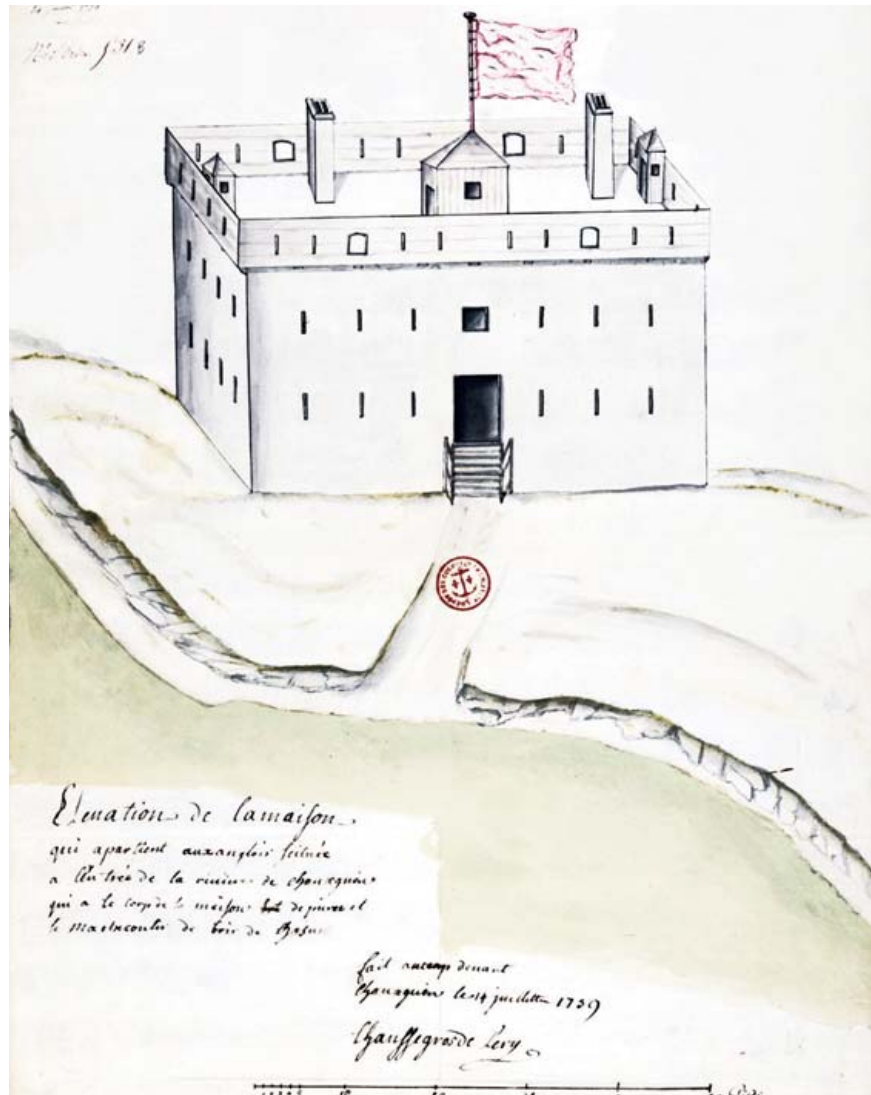


1720s

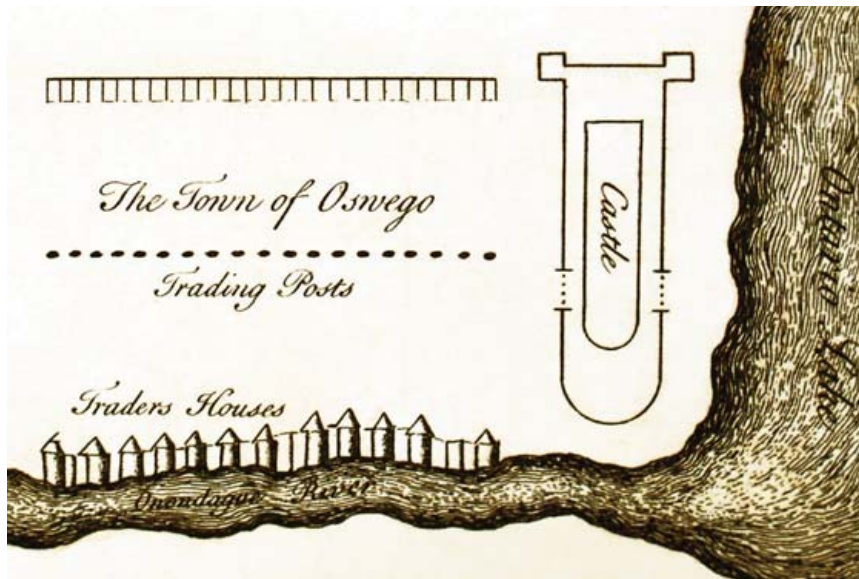
Fur trading begins
in the Oswego
area; fortifications
are built

Chief King's Engineer Gaspard-Joseph Chaussegros de Léry (1682–1756) to observe, from a safe distance, the activities of the Anglo-Americans. De Léry's maps and plans have survived and they make an outstanding record of the construction of the fortified post by the British troops.

What he saw at Oswego was the construction of a substantial structure built on a rectangular plan, three stories high and with thick stone walls (see illustration). The top story was machicolated with wood and thus was slightly wider than the lower floors. A sloped roof covered the edifice. It was reckoned by de Léry to be about ten "toises" wide (about 19.5m). There were initially no other fortifications except a semicircular earthwork surrounding the machicolated fortified house on the landward side. Nearby were huts and temporary storehouses put up by the traders that conducted business with the Indians near the fortified house during the summer. During the following years, relatively little was done to improve the fortifications.



Fort Oswego, 1739. (View by King's Engineer Gaspard-Joseph Chaussegros de Léry (senior). Collection and photo: Archives Nationales (France), Outremer (Aix-en-Provence), Dépot des Fortifications des Colonies)



Plan of Oswego in 1743. John Bartram (1699–1777), considered the “father of American botany,” visited Oswego collecting plants, but sketched this plan, which appeared in his *Observations on the Inhabitants... in his Travels* (London, 1751). It shows the “castle” now enclosed by a curtain wall, rounded towards the east and with turrets on the opposite end. North is to the right. (Fort Stanwix National Monument, National Park Service, Rome (NY). Author’s photo)

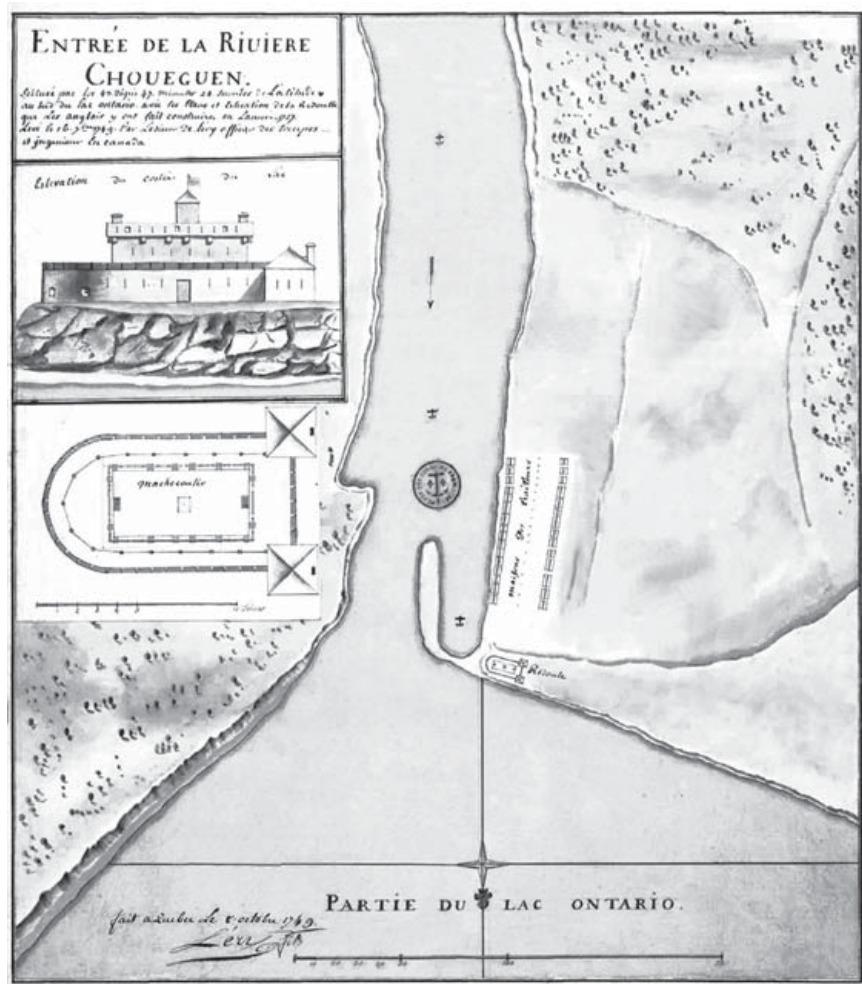
When de Léry went back to observe Oswego in 1739, the only major change recorded was that the sloped roof had been removed. The top floor was now open and had two sentry boxes, as well as a small structure covering the stairway leading to the top floor.

A decade later, in September 1749, de Léry was again spying on Oswego from a distance. This time, he recorded improvements made to strengthen the British fortified house. The British had built around it a masonry wall with two corner square turrets on the west side to cover the entrance while, on the east side, the curtain wall was rounded and featured four gun ports. It had loopholes at two levels: on the ground floor and on an upper wooden gallery that went from one corner square turret to the other. Thus the fortified house had evolved into being a sort of dungeon surrounded by a curtain wall with two turrets. There were no outer fortifications. The traders’ huts had evolved into a street with houses lining each side.

By comparison, the two forts built by the French on the shores of Lake Ontario were impressive. Fort Frontenac, built from 1673, was not formidable, but it had a substantial collection of buildings defended by a fort that had stone walls with bastions. It was also the main base for the French vessels sailing on Lake Ontario. At the other end of the lake was Fort Niagara that had its three-story “stone castle” within a fairly large wooden bastioned fort. In the summer of 1755, substantial Vauban-style earthworks were added to seal the peninsula onto which the fort had been built. Two other areas were occasionally used as anchorages and as trading spots by the French vessels and canoes. That at Toronto (now the site of the largest city in Canada) was meant to draw trade away from Oswego by Indians coming from the northwest, and must have been a success. In 1750–51, a small fort was built there and provided with a regular garrison. It was officially called Fort Rouillé, named after the contemporary minister of the French navy, but was better known as Fort Toronto. The other area was on the east end of the

lake at what was called Niaouré Bay (now Sackets Harbor, NY). Although no permanent post was established there by the French, this was a frequent gathering spot for traders and Indians. It also proved to be a popular assembly place for military expeditions in wartime.

Albany, sited on the west bank of the upper Hudson River, was the second-largest town in the colony of New York, the biggest being New York City on Manhattan Island where the Hudson flowed into the Atlantic. While New York City was already an important center for ocean-going ships engaged in international trading, Albany was more concerned with settlement, agriculture and trade with the First Nations. The towns of the Iroquois confederacy were to the north and west of Albany. Going due north on the Hudson River, one would reach Lake George and, just after that, the first outposts of New France on Lake Champlain. Since the 1730s, the French had built the imposing Fort Saint-Frédéric, which the English called Crown Point, whose main work consisted of a massive and medieval-looking tower. This fort had a permanent garrison of the gray-white-coated *compagnies franches de la marine* regular soldiers who were often assisted



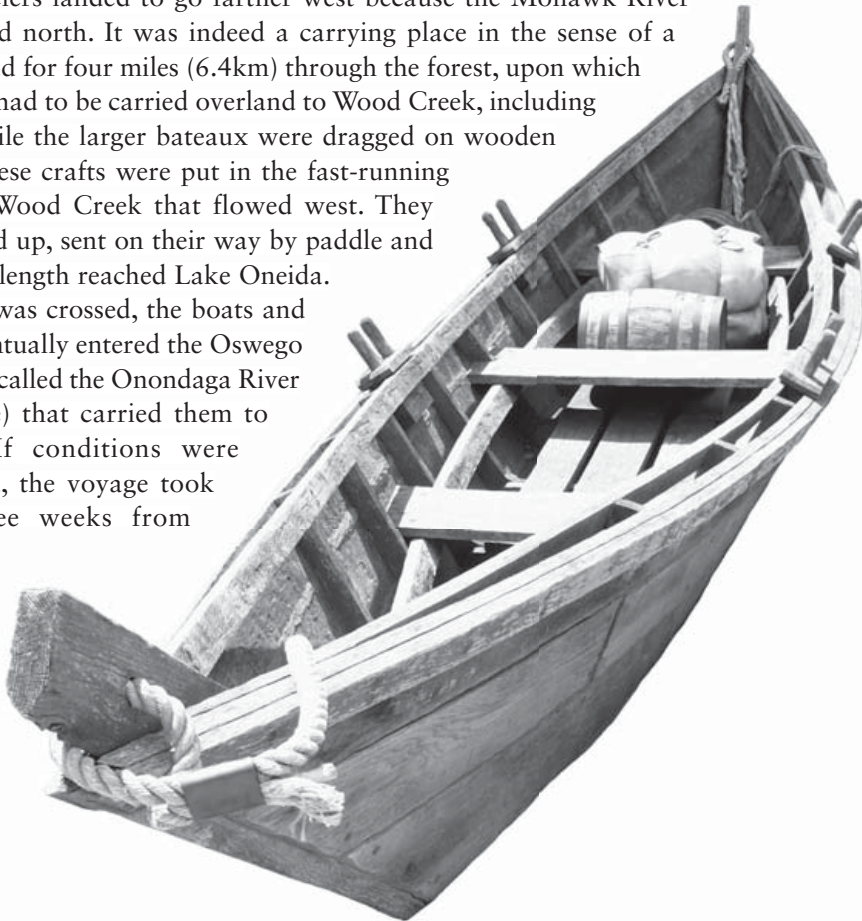
Entrance to the Oswego River, 1749. This was the general appearance of the old stone fort until the end of the August 1756 siege. (View by King's Engineer Gaspard-Joseph Chaussegros de Léry made from notes taken on September 16, 1749 and finished in Quebec City on October 8. Collection and photo: Archives Nationales (France), Outremer (Aix-en-Provence), Dépôt des Fortifications des Colonies)

by Canadian woodsmen and allied Indians. This fort was definitely an irritant for the English colonies and it was always hoped that, in wartime, an American colonial force would take it. This was not to be and, on the contrary, it was the French who strengthened their position in the fall of 1755 by occupying Ticonderoga, at the northern end of Lake George, and started construction of Fort Carillon, a large, bastioned, Vauban-style fort.

The strategic situation farther west of Albany was somewhat different. There were no French forts in that area. The nearest one was La Présentation (now Ogdensburg, NY) on the southern shore of the western arm of the St Lawrence River, and the next nearest was Fort Frontenac on the northeast end of Lake Ontario. They were both quite far from the main Anglo-American “highway” that followed the Mohawk River westward into its tributaries. There was a great deal of wilderness to be crossed by using several rivers, portages and lakes until one reached the southeast shore of Lake Ontario.

The 251-mile (404km) journey to Oswego started at Albany using the Mohawk River. From Schenectady, settlements were sparser, and travelers now ascended the river passing Fort Johnson, Fort Plain, Little Falls, two Iroquois villages and the Palatine settlement called German Flatts, whose original settlers were Protestant refugees from Europe. Thereafter, the river continued into unsettled wilderness until the Oneida Carry, also called the Great Carrying Place, was reached at about 45 miles (72km) west. Once there, travelers landed to go farther west because the Mohawk River now headed north. It was indeed a carrying place in the sense of a portage road for four miles (6.4km) through the forest, upon which everything had to be carried overland to Wood Creek, including canoes, while the larger bateaux were dragged on wooden sledges. These crafts were put in the fast-running waters of Wood Creek that flowed west. They were loaded up, sent on their way by paddle and oar, and at length reached Lake Oneida. Once that was crossed, the boats and canoes eventually entered the Oswego River (also called the Onondaga River at the time) that carried them to Oswego. If conditions were fairly good, the voyage took about three weeks from Albany.

A small bateau. It was a flat-bottom, double-ended, shallow-draft, all-purpose transport boat powered with oars and with a sail in open water. Bateaux were extensively used by the French and the Anglo-Americans on North America's rivers and lakes. They came in various sizes and could carry as much as three tons of cargo. A 1776 British plan specified a craft 30 feet four inches (9.2m) long, six and a half feet (1.9m) wide and two feet ten inches (0.8m) deep for a fairly large bateau. (Reproduction at Fort Stanwix National Monument, National Park Service, Rome (NY). Author's photo)



INITIAL STRATEGY

The outbreak of war

The Seven Years War officially started in Europe in 1756. It pitted France, Austria and Russia against Great Britain, Prussia and most of the states that then made up Germany. But in North America, and, indeed, also in India, there had been engagements between French and British troops since 1754. The following year had seen the disastrous defeat of General Edward Braddock's Anglo-American army at the Monongahela River (near present-day Pittsburgh) at the hands of a handful of French *compagnies franches de la marine* colonial soldiers, Canadian militiamen, and hundreds of their Indian allies that had turned the tide.

In Quebec City, the newly appointed governor general of New France was, for the first time, a Canadian-born nobleman, Pierre de Rigaud, Marquis de Vaudreuil. His father, a veteran of Louis XIV's King's Musketeers, had been commander of the regular troops in Canada and a well-regarded governor general of New France from 1703 until he passed away in 1725. Pierre himself had been a colonial troops officer and then governor of Louisiana before being named governor general of New France in 1755. He had a strategic eye with regard to the preservation of French Canada, which could be summed up as keeping the far more populous British colonies on



Pipe-tomahawk of French origin, middle of the 18th century. (Canadian War Museum, Ottawa. Author's photo)



Eastern woodland Indians, first half of the 18th century. From the left: warrior in summer dress, chief wearing coat, waistcoat, gorget and hat given by French officials, warrior in cold-weather dress. (Collection and photo: Directorate of History and Heritage, Department of National Defence, Ottawa)

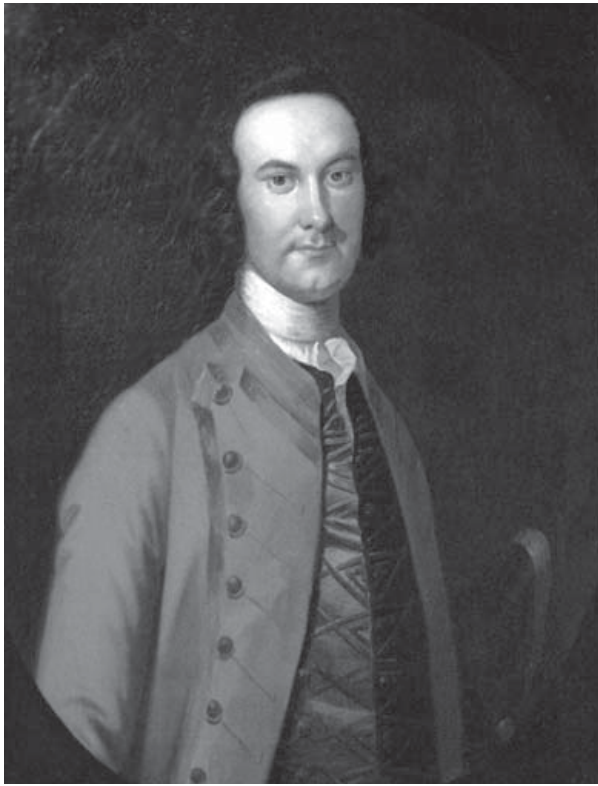
their toes by a policy of continuous raids, largely performed by New France's Indian allies. In this, he was supported by the stalwart opinions of the senior officers in Canada – Paul Marin de la Malgue, Louis Coulon de Villiers, Luc La Corne de Saint-Luc and Pierre's own brother François-Pierre Rigaud de Vaudreuil – usually known as Rigaud – all were convinced that the lurking ways and ambushes of Indian-style warfare, combined with European-style organization, leadership and discipline formed the only tactical recipe likely to succeed, as it had for the past half-century. They were, in effect, promoting and practicing what would later be known as light infantry and/or ranger tactics in British and American armies.

French reinforcements arrive

However, in late June 1755, a whole new military element appeared in Canada when four battalions of *troupes de terre* – detachments of the French metropolitan army sent overseas as reinforcements – arrived in Quebec City

1754

**First shots fired
between British
and French in North
America**



Sir William Johnson, c.1755. He was superintendent of Indian Affairs and, in 1755, an American provincial major-general. Although not a professional soldier, he nevertheless presided over two notable victories: the battle of Lake George on September 8, 1755 and the capture of Fort Niagara in July 1759. (Portrait by John Wollaston. Albany Institute of History and Art. Author's photo)

headed by their own general. The troops consisted of the 2nd battalions of the Languedoc, La Reine, Guyenne and Béarn regiments. They were under the command of Major General Jean Erdman, Baron de Dieskau.

Although now a general in the French army, Dieskau was born on February 28, 1706 in Saxony, Germany. Like many Germans at that time, he served in a German regiment of the French army, starting his career as a cadet in 1718. During his service, he was noticed by one of the greatest soldiers of 18th-century France: Marshal Maurice de Saxe, who was a fellow countryman. By 1745, Dieskau had risen to be lieutenant-colonel, with the rank of major general, in Marshal de Saxe's own experimental light troops corps, the *Volontaires de Saxe*. Dieskau actually commanded the unit, which denotes him as an officer that surely supported the new tactical concepts promoted by Marshal de Saxe. The marshal died in 1750, but Dieskau was not totally forgotten by the French

court at Versailles. Warfare in Canada, which was fast becoming the "hot spot," owing to bloody incidents with the Anglo-American neighbors, was certainly different than in Europe, and a commander familiar with light-troops tactics seemed ideal. Thus did Dieskau, now aged 49, sail for New France to assume command of the French troops in Canada. However, as events unfolded, Dieskau swiftly showed that he was unfit for the job.

The battle of Lake George

Strategically, Governor General Vaudreuil wished to put some pressure on the British on Lake Ontario. The Anglo-Americans at Oswego had long been a source of annoyance to the French Canadians, and an attack on Oswego was mooted. The battalions of Guyenne and Béarn with colonial regulars and Canadian militiamen were assembled at Fort Frontenac under Dieskau's command. However, Vaudreuil now received news of the triumph over Braddock's army at Monongahela and many of the latter's captured dispatches. From these documents, it seemed that the Anglo-Americans were gathering their forces at Lake George, south of Lake Champlain, with a view to attacking Fort Saint-Frédéric (Crown Point). As a result, the French forces in the Lake Champlain–Richelieu River areas were beefed up by La Reine and Languedoc battalions being deployed there, along with more militiamen and colonial *compagnies franches* troops. Baron Dieskau was sent from Fort Frontenac to lead the French force on the shores of Lake Champlain.



Some 3,000 American provincial troops and militiamen had indeed gathered in August 1755 on the southern shore of Lake George under the command of Major General William Johnson. General Dieskau decided to attack them. In early September, he set out with 1,500 men, confident that he would take Fort Edward and thus isolate Johnson at Lake George. But his Indian warriors refused to attack Fort Edward on the grounds that they had agreed to defend French Canada, but not “to act against the English on territory that rightfully belongs to them” (DRCHSNY, X). Dieskau’s force was too small to attempt such an attack on its own, and he thus led it towards Lake George. Meanwhile, Johnson had learned that Dieskau and his force was south of him, so he sent about a thousand men under Ephraim Williams to reinforce Fort Edward. Dieskau learned of this and set up his troops for an ambush that, had it succeeded, would probably have wiped out these American troops. On the morning of September 8, however, several Mohawks allied to the French saw Mohawk warriors joined to the Americans and fired warning shots. The element of surprise was lost and, although they suffered casualties, the Americans managed to retreat to Lake George. Feeling victorious, Dieskau now resolved to attack Johnson’s army at Lake George.

The battle of Lake George, September 8, 1755. The French metropolitan infantry formed in a European-style three-rank battle line, as ordered by Gen Dieskau, is shown at left. The American army’s camp, shown at the center and at left, is defended by men taking cover behind field fortifications. (Detail from a period contemporary print in O’Callaghan’s *Documentary History*. Author’s photo)

The Americans had not been inactive and, with the guidance of Major William Eyre, the only British regular officer present, built field fortifications with cannon emplacements around their camp. By the early afternoon, Dieskau's force reached Johnson's fortified camp. The Americans, huddled behind their field fortifications, opened up with everything they had against the approaching French troops. Dieskau made a classical European-style direct assault led by his army regulars of La Reine and Languedoc battalions to storm and break through the field fortifications. He had no artillery to soften up the field works, but appears to have felt that the American militiamen would crumble at the sight of his well-drilled European regulars. He ignored the advice of Canadian officers and did not realize how tough and redoubtable American militiamen could be when defending a position under cover.

The Americans poured a devastating and rapid fire on to the advancing column of French regulars, which now wavered. Dieskau was on the spot to encourage them when he was severely wounded near the American works. Covered behind trees, Canadian militiamen and *compagnies franches de la marine* troops tried to protect the general and the French metropolitan regulars as they withdrew using countering musket fire. Baron Dieskau was on the field, sitting wounded beneath a tree, still trying to direct his men. A Canadian militiaman was killed trying to move Dieskau out and the general had to be left wounded in the field. The Chevalier de Montreuil, on whom command now devolved, ordered a withdrawal. The French regulars had

just lost the battle of Lake George and their general, formerly a companion of Marshal de Saxe, was now prisoner of the Americans: he thus paid dearly for his tactical choices. It was not a disaster like Braddock's annihilation on the Monongahela, but it was humiliating enough for the French. The Canadians fumed since they thought Dieskau had understood nothing of their way of war in the North American wilderness. The British and Americans were elated at this unexpected success and Johnson was created a baronet by King George II.

While the repulse of the French and Canadian force had no strategic impact on the Lake George front, the capture of General Dieskau by the enemy was certainly a sobering and disagreeable surprise to everyone in French Canada. The French metropolitan troops had lost their senior commander, which was a humbling experience. For his part, Governor General Vaudreuil assumed the

William Shirley, 1750. Already governor of Massachusetts, Shirley was also temporary commander-in-chief of the British forces in North America from late July 1755 to August 1756. He was also colonel of the 50th Regiment of Foot. Portrait by Thomas Hudson. National Portrait Gallery Washington. (Photo: AgnosticPreachersKid/CC-PD-Mark)



full strategic direction of the forces in Canada and his opinion that raid warfare was the only viable option was reinforced. Indeed, he already mooted several raid operations for the future. These would encourage the morale of his troops in Canada and keep the enemy on the defensive.

Johnson's victory at Lake George did not really change much in terms of the military situation of the Anglo-American colonies at the end of 1755. Monongahela had been a full-blown disaster worsened by the constant harassment of frontier communities by warriors allied to the French. The one dubious "success" had been the capture of the French forts Beauséjour and Gaspereau on the borders of Nova Scotia by greatly superior British and American provincial forces. To secure Nova Scotia totally, Governor Charles Lawrence decreed the deportation of its Acadian population, the descendants of the French families that had settled the present Annapolis Valley and, since the territory had been ceded to Britain in 1713, had adopted a neutral stance. This was not enough in the minds of the authorities in Halifax and, from the summer of 1755, in an outstanding example of what is today called "ethnic cleansing," troops rounded up an estimated 11,500 people, burned and looted their property, packed them on board creaky ships – sometimes separating the men from the women and children – and deported them to the various American colonies. This human tragedy brought by British and American arms upon defenseless families would eventually become world famous thanks to the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's 1847 *Evangeline, A Tale of Acadia*. These deportations ensured that much of Nova Scotia became and remained a very insecure area to any Anglo-American venturing outside its fortified areas. The reason was, of course, that numbers of young Acadians had escaped into the nearby forests and formed guerrilla-like groups bent on revenge. The story of these remarkable raiders is still largely unknown, but their activities mobilized large contingents of British troops until the end of the Seven Years War. Thus, the Nova Scotia border was rendered even more insecure.

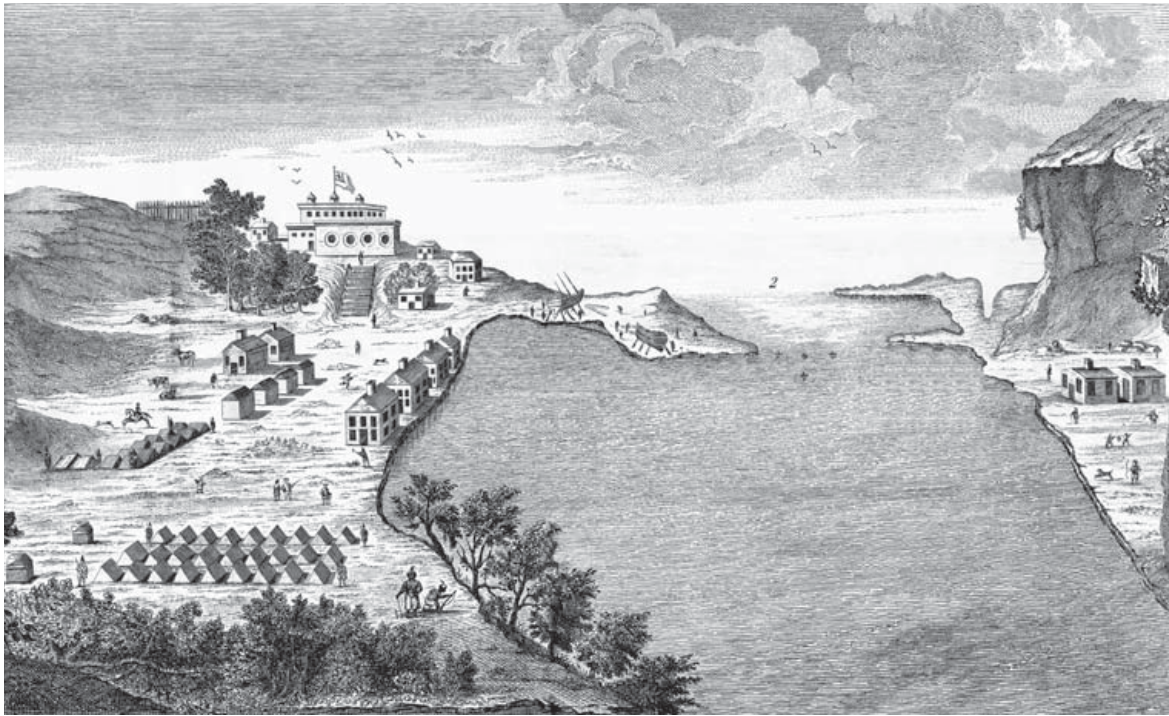
SEPTEMBER 8,
1755

**Battle of Lake
George**

The strategic importance of Oswego

The one "quiet" area of the British colonies was Oswego. There, the Anglo-Americans had managed to hold on quite well, and the place had not been an outstanding target of war parties from French Canada. Governor General Vaudreuil and Major General William Shirley both looked at Oswego with hopeful strategic eyes. To Vaudreuil, its destruction would rid Lake Ontario of any Anglo-American presence and influence, put the enemy on the defensive, and comfort New France's Indian allies. To Shirley, who commanded the forces in the northern area, Oswego could be the base from which his forces could capture the French forts Niagara and Frontenac, which would make Lake Ontario British. Niagara would be his first target.

With the British flag over Oswego, Shirley knew it had to be substantially reinforced. Its tiny regular garrison, the somewhat decrepit New York Independent Company, needed to be replaced by a much larger force. It also needed to be the base of a powerful fleet that could subdue the French ships on the lake. In terms of fortifications, its defensive capacities needed to be greatly expanded.



"The South View of Oswego on Lake Ontario," 1755. Its caption reads: "General Shirley in 1755 strengthened and enlarged this fort and erected two others, one westward 170 [feet] square with a rampart of earth and stone, another on the opposite side of the basin, 470 yards [0.4km] distant for the old fort, this which is called East Fort, is built of logs and the wall is surrounded by a ditch, the projection of the rocks renders the channel at the entrance of the Onondaga River very narrow, and our vessels are generally warped from the lake into the basin." (Contemporary print after William Smith in O'Callaghan's *Documentary History*. Author's photo)

From the summer of 1755, the post of Oswego consisted of three entities. The older fortified masonry redoubt built on the west shore of the Oswego River since the 1720s was generally called "Fort" Oswego from that time. It now was a castle-like structure consisting of the initial redoubt that had been encircled by a masonry wall with two square turrets. This medieval-like affair was now surrounded by a large outer horn work consisting of an earth-and-log enclosure that featured a bastion and a ravelin along its western curtain wall. Artillery, mostly facing west, was installed along the curtain walls. This area was where most of the troops would be posted. South of this fort was the traders' village, but it had no protection other than a small redoubt farther south.

Fort George was the new square stockade redoubt, without bastions but with small buildings along its inside walls, built on a bluff farther west of Fort Oswego. It was not formidable.

Fort Ontario was the new earth-and-log work built on the height east of the Oswego River, which was an excellent site that commanded the immediate area. This was the most potent and substantial fortification built. Its plan was a "star" fort. It was initially seen as six-pointed by French engineer Descombes during his late July 1756 reconnaissance of Oswego, but British engineer Patrick Mackellar and later French plans agree on an eight-point star, four of the points being smaller.

In May 1756, shortly after Mackellar had arrived at Oswego, he found serious "defects in the three forts." The only three guns in old Fort Oswego should "not be fired for fear of bringing down the wall, which is already cracked in three places from top to bottom," and the fort's horn work with

its ravelin was “badly laid out.” Moving on to Fort Ontario, he was pleased to see that it was “stockaded with good timber and the joints squared” but went on to comment that

the plan is bad, its outer defects are as follows: the barracks for the men and the officers are mostly built up against the stockade which loses so much of the fire, the gate is placed in an angle and flanked on neither side, which must be the case in a star [fort] as all the angles are dead; there is no banquet[te], [no] galleries carried round the top where the buildings do not interfere.

On the whole, he felt the site was well chosen and the fort had “good command and renders the work capable of a tolerable defense against small arms” (MA). As for Fort George, he projected a horn work to strengthen it, but it was never completed.

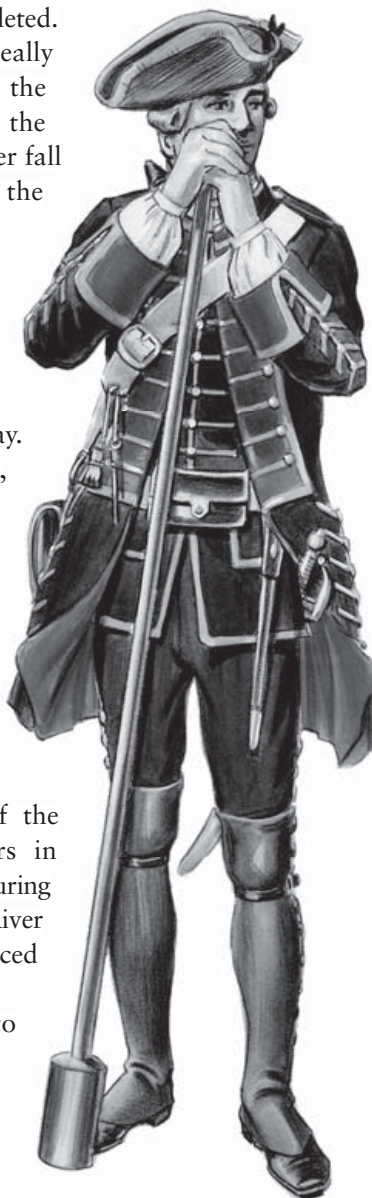
From all this, it was clear that the only really important work was Fort Ontario. It was the largest of the forts and also it dominated the finest site at Oswego. However, should it ever fall to French raiders, old Fort Oswego and the traders’ town would be under its guns.

The garrison

Oswego’s forts needed a strong garrison. In the summer of 1755, General Shirley had greatly increased the number of troops there as well as along the Mohawk–Oneida waterway. Two new regiments were assigned to this area, Shirley’s 50th Foot and Sir William Pepperrell’s 51st Foot. Each had an official strength of 1,000 “rank and file,” although the actual numbers of men in their ranks were substantially lower. The regiments had been authorized to be recruited in North America on October 7, 1754, and were put on the British establishment from December 24, which meant that they were numbered infantry regiments and part of the standing regular army. Recruiting centers in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania were active during 1755 and recruits were sent up the Mohawk River and to Oswego, where a cadre of experienced NCOs and officers would train them.

The New Jersey Regiment, also sent to Oswego, was raised from 1755 by the province of New Jersey, and is still recalled as one of the best American provincial units serving in the North American campaigns

A gunner of the Royal Artillery, c.1752–60. A small detachment was at Oswego and served gallantly during the French attack. The uniform was dark blue with red facings and, since about 1751, ornamented with yellow lace. The gunners had white gaiters with black buttons for dress and black gaiters for ordinary duties (WO 51/179 and WO 55/640). Officers’ uniforms were the same colors, but of better quality, with gold lace and black boots. (Watercolor by Derek FitzJames. Print after portrait. Fort Beauséjour National Historic Site, Parks Canada. Author’s photo)



THE "NEW JERSEY BLUES" 1755–56

The New Jersey Provincial Regiment was one of the main Anglo-American units posted at Oswego and along the Mohawk River during 1756. While part of the unit was captured at Oswego and again at Fort William-Henry the following year, it was not heavily engaged when General Abercomby's army was defeated by Montcalm's at Ticonderoga in July 1758. In 1759, it was part of General Amherst's army that occupied Ticonderoga and Crown Point. The regiment gave good service in 1760 garrisoning Oswego and taking part in the final campaign within Amherst's army that culminated in the surrender of Montreal on September 8. It was posted at Oswego in the following years, except for a 222-man detachment that took part in the British capture of Havana (Cuba) in 1762, and was disbanded in 1764.

The regimental uniform was dark blue, hence the regiment's nickname of "Jersey Blues," a tradition that went back to the troops raised by New Jersey during the Austrian Succession War of the 1740s. It had red facings. From 1755, each soldier was issued with "one good striped blanket, a good lapel[led] coat, made of half thicks or other coarse cloth, a felt hat, two check shirts," a pair of deerskin breeches, a pair of shoes and a pair of stockings. Three years later, the dark blue coat was described as being styled "after the Highland manner, lapelled and cuffed with red," which meant that it had a short skirt and no turnbacks. However, as seen above, the previous legislation simply mentioned "coat," and that style had long tails that were probably turned back, showing the lining, which was most likely red. The coats were plain and had no laced buttonholes or lace edgings. The felt hat was a tricorne, and the men's buttons are generally believed to have been of brass and their hat lace yellow, since that color was specified in 1758. There is no record of gaiters being issued before 1758; the stockings were described as gray at a parade in New York that year. Waistcoats are not mentioned, but they were usually made from older

coats in the British army. This was probably the case with American provincial troops, and in 1756 the waistcoats were probably red, made from the lining of the coat, although dark blue is also possible.

Each soldier was to be issued "a good firelock," but in 1755–56 these proved actually to have been quite unsatisfactory. Colonel Peter Schuyler complained that the arms were "so extremely bad, as to be hardly fit for service. They appear to me to be Dutch arms, and the worst sort, the locks daily breaking in the common exercise, and many of the hammers not steeled. As to the cartridge boxes, they are almost all useless, being slightly covered; they drop from the belts in marching." Other weapons were "a good sword, cutlass or bayonet, and a cartouch box, and a hatchet." The armament eventually appears to have been a musket with bayonet, a hanger (or short sword) and a hatchet. The Dutch muskets generally resembled British army muskets, being almost as long at 61.2 inches (155.5cm) but with a slightly larger caliber at .81 (20.5mm). They had brass furnishings and their bayonets were 16 inches (40.6cm) long. The men's hangers were probably steel-hilted. (Acts... of New Jersey, April 22 and June 2, 1755, April 4, 1758; *New York Mercury*, June 12, 1758; CO 5/46)

Officers had better-quality uniforms with scarlet cloth for coat facings and waistcoat, dark blue breeches, white stockings with shoes or boots, gilt buttons, a gold-laced hat, gold cord at the right shoulder, gilt gorget, and a crimson sash over the right shoulder. It seems that officers edged their waistcoats with gold lace, but their coats were plain with no lace. Officers were armed with swords and spontoons by regulation. Many, especially company officers, were armed with "fusils," a good-quality and lighter-weight version of the standard musket, since they were shorter at about 55 inches (139cm) overall length and had a smaller caliber at .69 (17.5mm).

of the Seven Years War. Its creator and first colonel was Peter Schuyler, "an officer of known experience" who had commanded the 1746–47 New Jersey provincial troops and who was now appointed to command the new regiment. It had an establishment of 500 men divided into five companies. The regiment usually served on active duty from May to November. The regimental uniform was dark blue (hence the regiment's nickname of "Jersey Blues,") with red facings. Like the other troops, it was badly armed.



UNIFORMS AND EQUIPMENT

Both Shirley's and Pepperrell's regiments had the same uniform, red with red facings trimmed with "white [metal] buttons and L," the L presumably meaning lace since British infantry uniforms had to be "lapelled on the breast and fully looped" with this (*System of Camp Discipline* 1757; WO 7/25). In July 1755, Sergeant James Gray of the 51st was pleased with his "two Holland shirts, found me by the King, and two pairs of shoes and two pairs of worsted stockings; a good silver-laced hat (the lace I could sell for four dollars); and my clothes is as fine scarlet broadcloth as ever did you see... and one day in every week we must have our hair or wigs powdered" (quoted in Parkman). Officers wore scarlet instead of red and would have had silver buttons and lace. Weapons were ordered from the Tower of London, but the muskets delivered to the troops "were not the King's Pattern" but 1,000 with "single Bridle Locks, Nose bands & Wood Ram[ro]ds" and 1,000 "Dutch with Nosebands & Wood Rammers" with bayonets. Sergeants and grenadiers had "Swords with Scabbards" that had brass hilts, while privates and drummers had them with "Iron hilts." Cartridge boxes with 12 holes completed the equipment. The quality of the muskets was poor, since locks were reported as "wore out and the Hammers soft" in spite of repeated repairs, "particularly

Officer and men of Shirley's 50th and Pepperrell's 51st regiments, c.1755–56. Both regiments garrisoned Oswego and small forts on the Oneida–Mohawk waterways to the east. From left to right: two soldiers of a haying party, a sergeant, an officer and a grenadier. The uniform of both regiments was similar and described in the 1757 edition of *A System of Camp Discipline* as red with red facings and white



Sir William Pepperrell's [51st] Regiment being old Dutch arms." The cartridge box holes were so small they could not receive cartridges, nor was there "substance of the Wood to widen them sufficiently, the leather scanty and bad likewise" (MA; CO 5/46 and 212).

lace and buttons. There being no presently known contemporary illustrations of these regiments, the style of the uniform shown is taken from David Morier's rendering of a grenadier of the 33rd Foot, the only other regiment that had red facings at that time. (Plate by Eric Manders. By kind permission of the artist and the Company of Military Historians. Author's photo)

After Shirley left Oswego in September 1755, senior command devolved to Lieutenant-Colonel James Francis Mercer. This Scot, born in 1703, had come to North America and had been adjutant from 1739 to 1742 in Spotswood's (later Gooch's) American Regiment, survived its destruction from West Indian fevers, and had gone on to serve in Flanders between 1744 and 1745 as a

captain in the 8th Regiment of Foot before becoming major and later lieutenant-colonel in Sir William Pepperrell's 66th Foot garrisoning Louisbourg, Nova Scotia from September 1745 until the regiment was disbanded in May 1749. He then went on half-pay, but Pepperrell obviously approved of his abilities as a regimental commander and chose Mercer to be lieutenant-colonel of the new 51st Foot Regiment from September 24, 1754. The officer second in command at Oswego was Lieutenant-Colonel John Littlehales, born in England during 1702, who entered the army as an ensign in the 10th Foot (then posted in Ireland) in 1723, took half-pay as a lieutenant in 1738, came back into the infantry as a captain in Shirley's 65th Foot from September 1745 to garrison Louisbourg, at which time he rose to major, and served until the regiment was disbanded in May 1749. After a period on half-pay, he was appointed major in Shirley's 50th Foot in September 1754 and promoted its lieutenant-colonel on October 25, 1755. Both Mercer and Littlehales had obviously known each other for many years and seemed to have worked as well as could be expected in the difficult circumstances facing the garrison at Oswego, which was isolated, often unpaid, lacking sufficient rations and other supplies. Although both men had long service records in the army, only Mercer had been in action previously, and both had mainly served in European-style garrisons, such as at Louisbourg, when posted in America. Their familiarity with the wilderness and its ways of war was thus minimal, just as it was to the soldiers they commanded.

DE LÉRY'S RAID ON FORT BULL

Opposite:

Lieutenant Gaspard-Joseph Chaussegros de Léry (1721–97), c.1750s. He was the son of King's Engineer Gaspard Chaussegros de Léry (1682–1756) and, after taking Fort Bull, went on to further distinguished service until the surrender of the French army in 1760. He came back to Canada after the war, and was eventually appointed to the British governor's legislative council as his shrewd advice was much sought on Canadian affairs. He is shown wearing a crimson coat with gold embroidery, which was not a uniform. The medal of the knightly Order of St Louis would have been added after January 1759. His son François-Joseph (1754–1824), born in Quebec City, had an outstanding career in the French army, becoming chief engineer of Napoleon's troops, so that De Léry is engraved on the "Arc de Triomphe" in Paris. (Print after portrait. Fort Beauséjour National Historic Site, Parks Canada. Author's photo)

The plan

In the early winter, plans were being made at the residence of Governor General Vaudreuil at Montreal. Like his predecessors, Vaudreuil would spend his winters in Montreal, which became the political and military headquarters of French Canada until the spring, when he would move with his suite to his official "château Saint-Louis" that dominated the city of Quebec on top of Cape Diamond (the château unfortunately vanished in 1834 following an accidental fire and its site is now occupied by the landmark Chateau Frontenac Hotel.) There, the governor general would greet the ships, officials and dispatches arriving from France and bid farewell to those returning to Europe with news and official dispatches to Versailles from Canada. In wartime however, the military headquarters would remain in Montreal nearly all year round because of its outstanding strategic location. It was the hub of the intricate waterways that reached all the Great Lakes, and connected with the Mississippi River beyond and past Lake Champlain to the south. As a result, most of the troops were posted in the Montreal area, with detachments of *compagnies franches de la marine* that might be posted as far as the great prairies west of Lake Superior. As commander-in-chief, the governor general tended often to be in Montreal where most of his officers were. So it was during the winter of 1755–56.

Vaudreuil certainly faced a potentially difficult situation. True, the frontier troops, Canadian militiamen and allied warriors had triumphed at Monongahela in July 1755, but the general that had been sent from France with four metropolitan army battalions had been defeated and captured by American militiamen at Lake George in September. For all their confidence about the superiority of European tactics, the metropolitan troops had been

repulsed in their first engagements, and this certainly convinced the Canadian officers of the *compagnies franches de la marine* that their time-proven tactics or raid warfare were the only methods that would keep the British and Americans on the defensive.

Scouts had reported that Oswego was being reinforced, and this could mean only that the Anglo-Americans would try to cut New France in two by taking control of Lake Ontario in 1756. They would likely also assemble a strong force south of Lake George, NY, and might even attempt to take Fort Saint-Frédéric (Crown Point to Americans) on the southern tip of Lake Champlain. But before being able to do that, they would have also to take the new Fort Carillon being built at Ticonderoga, on the northern end of Lake George. This was no small stockade fort nor a large stone tower to impress aboriginals, but a Vauban-style bastioned fort with earth-filled bastions, curtain walls, and ravelins that would be reveted with stone. It was guarded by a substantial garrison.

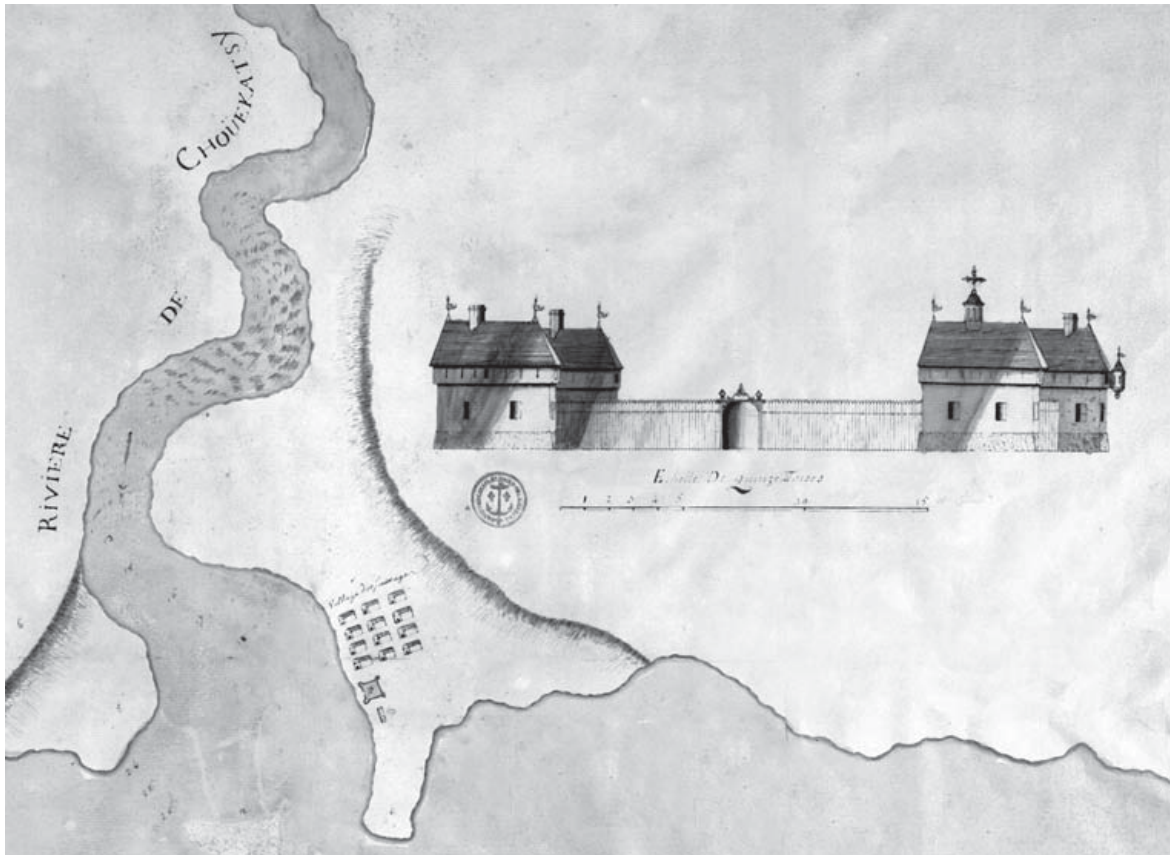
With intelligence that two British regular regiments were in the Oswego and its tributary lakes and rivers area, it seemed to Vaudreuil that Oswego would become the assembly point for more troops to form a sizable Anglo-American force by the early summer of 1756. Looking at a map, Oswego had a major problem; its line of communication went largely through wilderness for nearly 200 miles east to Albany. The weakest point of this line was the Oneida Carry, where supplies had to be portaged from the Mohawk River to Wood Creek. By striking there, Vaudreuil and his officers correctly assessed that they would cut off the supply route and, when it was restored, could keep a large number of Anglo-American troops in the area on alert to abate fears of French and Indian attacks. More troops standing guard at Albany and along the Mohawk River meant fewer troops available elsewhere to invade Canada.

The command of the expedition was entrusted to Lieutenant Gaspard-Joseph Chaussegros de Léry (1721–97). His commission was that of an officer in the *compagnies franches de la marine*, but his appointment as assistant king's engineer gave him the further status of an officer in the select group of engineers that were part of the establishment of the Ministry of the Navy and the Colonies, distinct from those employed by the metropolitan army. Not only was 32-year-old de Léry a qualified engineer, he was the son of the chief king's engineer in Canada, Gaspard-Joseph Chaussegros de Léry (1682–1756); the two are often confused since they both had the same name and were both engineers. The son was a military officer familiar with wilderness campaigns. He

WINTER
1755/56

French begin
planning for an
attack on Oswego
area





Fort La Présentation, 1752. It was sited at the confluence of the St Lawrence and the "Choëkatsy" (better known as the Oswegatchie) River and built in 1751. A large Indian village was next to the fort. The post itself was founded in 1749 as a fortified and garrisoned religious mission for the area's Indians. It served as a forward base for de Léry's raid on Fort Bull in March 1756. It is now the site of Ogdensburg, NY. The north is at the bottom. (Plan by Paul La Brosse. Library and Archives Canada, C16239)

had traveled widely in the center of the continent, had made remarkable surveys, and had built many structures from Quebec City to Detroit. Obviously bright and of sound judgment, he was appreciated by senior officers.

By February 25, 1756, the raiding party was assembled at Lachine, just west of Montreal. This was the place where loaded bateaux heading westward were put in the waters of the icy and swift-flowing St Lawrence River. The officers all belonged to the *compagnies franches* and, besides de Léry, consisted of two lieutenants, six first ensigns, eight second ensigns and four officer cadets. There were 80 NCOs and soldiers: ten from La Reine Regiment, 17 from Guyenne, 24 from Béarn, and 29 from the *compagnies franches*. The 166 Canadian militiamen were seasoned woodsmen. In all, the force was composed of 263 officers, soldiers and militiamen.

The cold was "excessive" as the party set out due west on the river, joined at Cedars by about a hundred allied Iroquois and Abenakis warriors. After a difficult winter journey that included dragging the bateaux on the iced-up river, the raiding force arrived at Fort La Présentation (now Ogdensburg, NY) on March 6 and 7, greeted by crowds of cheering Indians that lived there and by the fort's commandant and its mission priest, the redoubtable Father François Piquet, who encouraged his First Nations' converts to raid the enemy. In that sense, Fort La Présentation was ideally sited, and it served as the raiding party's forward base. For the next few days, it was a resting

station in order to regroup and to plan the next phase. In spite of Father Piquet's encouragements and their outward enthusiasm for the raid, the Indians at La Présentation were very cautious. Only 38 warriors at La Présentation joined the raiding force. For de Léry and his men, what lay south of La Présentation was largely unknown territory: he depended on two Oneida warriors who would guide the raiding party down the frozen Oswegatchie River that flowed south and over trails still covered with snow. If all went well, in about 11 days, they would reach the Oneida Carry near the Mohawk River and the Anglo-American forts that guarded it.

While it was largely unknown territory to the French, Canadians and allied warriors from New France, it was even more of an alien area to Americans, so there was never any concern that an Anglo-American force that would intercept them. Nor would Oneida warriors in their villages in that area likely become aware of their presence until they actually arrived near the shores of the Mohawk River or Wood Creek. However, many Indians at La Présentation were worried, since some Onondaga warriors had said the Anglo-Americans knew that de Léry was coming to raid them, which considerably perturbed the warriors at La Présentation that de Léry had hoped would join the raiding party. The rumor was certainly false with regard to specific information about de Léry's raiding force, although it was certain that the British officers in Albany were also receiving information regarding possible French and Indian raids. De Léry had hoped for better, but was not at all discouraged. On the contrary, he felt he was losing time with the endless conferences trying to cajole La Présentation warriors to join the raid, and decided to move on.

Trekking through the wilderness

On March 12, de Léry's raiding force set out from La Présentation. There were a few small changes to the numbers of officers, cadets and soldiers of the force. According to his journal, it consisted of:

Compagnies franches de la marine: 16 officers

Compagnies franches de la marine: 2 cadets

La Reine Regiment: 10 soldiers

Guyenne Regiment: 17 soldiers

Béarn Regiment: 22 soldiers

Compagnies franches de la marine: 27 soldiers

Total of regulars: 94 officers and other ranks

Canadian militia: 166 militiamen

Iroquois of the Lac des Deux Montagnes: 33 warriors

Iroquois of the Saut Saint-Louis: 18 warriors

Iroquois of La Présentation: 38 warriors

Iroquois of Saint-Régis: 3 warriors

Abénaquis of the Lake: 3 warriors

Népissings of the Lake: 11 warriors

Total Indian warriors: 106

RAIDERS' WINTER DRESS

In Canada, extremely cold temperatures occur from December to March, with strong winds sweeping down from the Polar regions. In the days of New France, a soldier or a militiaman out in the wilderness on an expedition could rapidly suffer serious frostbite or even die from exposure to cold, especially during the night. To combat such a harsh environment, the Canadians had soon devised effective clothing to keep them warm and comfortable. It was a mixture of traditional French sailor's and North American Indian winter clothing.

Starting from the shirt and breeches, they wore a short jacket, with a waistcoat over it. The legs were covered by cloth *mitasses*, often lined with soft leather and tied below the knees with garters. The feet were protected by thick socks (called *nippes*) and winter moccasins, larger than summer ones, or even *bottes sauvages* (savage-style boots), which were high, boot-shaped, leather moccasins. Snowshoes made of wood and hardened sinews were fastened to the moccasins and allowed for marching over deep snow. The hands were covered by mitts of wool or leather. The warm winter *capot*, longer than the summer *capot* and made of thick cloth, was worn and fastened with a wool sash at the waist, which gave it a certain elegance. There was no uniform color for these garments: brown, gray and blue were common for *capots* and sashes might be red, green, black or brown. They wore a wool neck scarf and finally a wool cap

(known then as now as a *tuque* to anyone in French Canada), which might be occasionally trimmed with fur. A *tapabord* – a sort of leather and fur cap with a visor and ear covering flaps – might be worn instead of the *tuque*. The man dressed in this winter clothing would put on snowshoes to travel easily over snow, and pull a toboggan to carry a bearskin, food and ammunition. The musket carried by soldiers was the 1743 Marine model that was similar to the army's 1728 model. Militiamen might have preferred the lighter hunting musket made at Tulle; it did not always have a bayonet lug and a knife might be inserted in its barrel as a "plug bayonet." The musket would be put into its protective cloth cover sleeve when traveling. A tomahawk and up to three knives completed the armament. Officers were dressed and armed the same as their men, but also had a gilt gorget for identification. They might also have a sword, but that seems unlikely on this raid.

Thus would a soldier of the "Lace Wars," with his tricorn and high heels, be transformed into a redoubtable winter warrior. Thanks to this adaptation of clothing, equipment and armament, soldiers could travel great distances through the woods in the middle of winter, suddenly strike the enemy, and vanish just as quickly. There was nothing like them anywhere else except for ski troops in Finland and Norway.

The grand total for the force came to 366, including de Léry. This also encompassed two non-combatants: a surgeon and a chaplain. There were also three translators in the force who were most likely members of the *compagnies franches de la marine* that were proficient in the Iroquois languages. Indeed, as part of their training, young officer-cadets of this corps could be required to spend time living in aboriginal communities to learn their languages, ways, and cultures. It was one of the factors that made the French in Canada closer to the Indian nations.

It was not an easy trek as the raiding party followed the Oswegatchie River south, either on its shore or on its ice, coming to the end of the waterway on March 18 at present-day Evans Mills. The weather had been warm since the expedition had set out from La Présentation, but now turned to thunderstorms and cold rain. They had to go on through wilderness trails across hills in truly miserable weather, carrying and dragging everything necessary for their subsistence. Survival in the North American wilderness, especially in winter, was (and remains) an unforgiving challenge. The snow

FEBRUARY 25,
1756

Fort Bull raiding
party assembles
near Montreal



was still deep, although as spring was coming it slowly melted. On March 20, the men crossed the Black River nearly up to their waists in icy water, and this was followed by rain and hail driven by cold winds; food was being consumed at a much higher rate. It continued to snow as the raiders marched south, but two days later the weather warmed up again. By March 25, they were on the south shore of the present Lake Delta, less than a day's march from the British forts and the Mohawk River. They had traveled about 170 miles (273km) from La Présentation through the wilderness and were so far undetected. The food had nearly all run out, and one of the few horses brought to carry supplies was sacrificed for rations. The scouts looked for British soldiers' tracks or footsteps in the snow, but found no trace of any.

Two scouting detachments were sent ahead a bit farther, and that led by the Chevalier Trevette de L'Espervanche ran into six Oneida warriors, two of them chiefs. This news was immediately relayed to de Léry, who hurried to meet them at the head of 50 men. Were they scouting for the English or was this a coincidental meeting? Perhaps neither, since these Oneidas seemed ambivalent about what they would do if the French came, especially as de Léry was emphatically saying that "Onontio" (Governor General Vaudreuil) and the French in Canada wished peace with all the Iroquois nations. From the Oneidas' perspective, it may have been wiser at that point to remain vague and neutral. Here were the French with their allied Indians, and the Oneidas knew the Anglo-Americans could never put up a decent fight in the wilderness like these men, most of whom were seasoned in bush warfare. De Léry was asking that they and their other warriors join him to attack one of the two British forts, a difficult bargain since the Anglo-Americans were near and the French were far from the Oneidas. The day was ending, and the war party and the six Oneidas all settled down to spend the night on the spot and talk with the French officers. One of the chiefs, named Tarvisn, mentioned that an Indian from La Présentation had warned Captain William Williams of Shirley's 50th at the fort that bore his name that a French and Indian war party was coming.

Captain Williams commanded one of the two forts that had been built at the Oneida Carry the previous year. His own Fort Williams was to the east, where the Mohawk River turned north. It was built on a square plan, with small protruding half bastions at the corners to provide covering fire on each side. The "carry" or portage road went through the woods for $2\frac{3}{4}$ miles (4.4km) until it reached Wood Creek, where the other fort had been built. Although also called Wood Creek Fort, it was best known as Fort Bull, a star-shaped structure named after the officer of Shirley's 50th Foot Regiment who was its commandant. They were not formidable fortresses, but rather formed a cluster of lodgings and storehouses surrounded by a stockade about 15 to 18 feet high in the old French measurements, according to their scouts, which would come to about 16 to 19 English feet high (about 4.8 to 5.7m). Large quantities of supplies of all sorts intended for the garrison at Oswego were conveyed there at the Oneida Carry. For de Léry, it was crucial to know which of the two forts had the greatest quantities of supplies and the most ammunition. Chief Tarvisn answered that it was Fort Bull; most supplies were

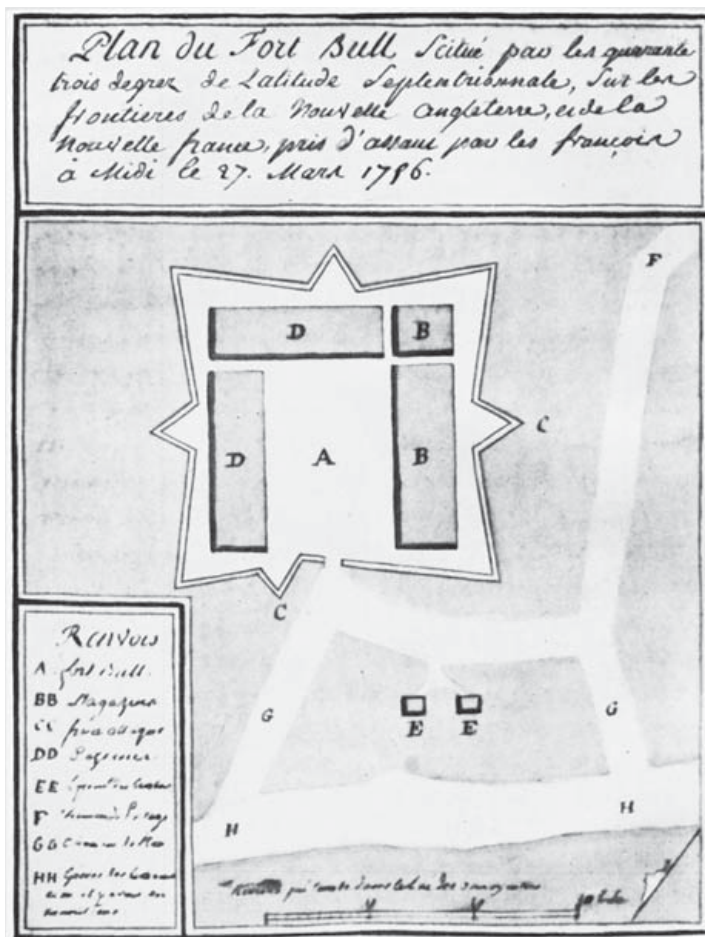
there waiting to be loaded onto boats that would head to Oswego as soon as the weather became milder. Although always suspicious of warriors' reports since they often enlarged on what they had seen, it all made good sense to the French commander. Fort Bull would be the raiders' target.

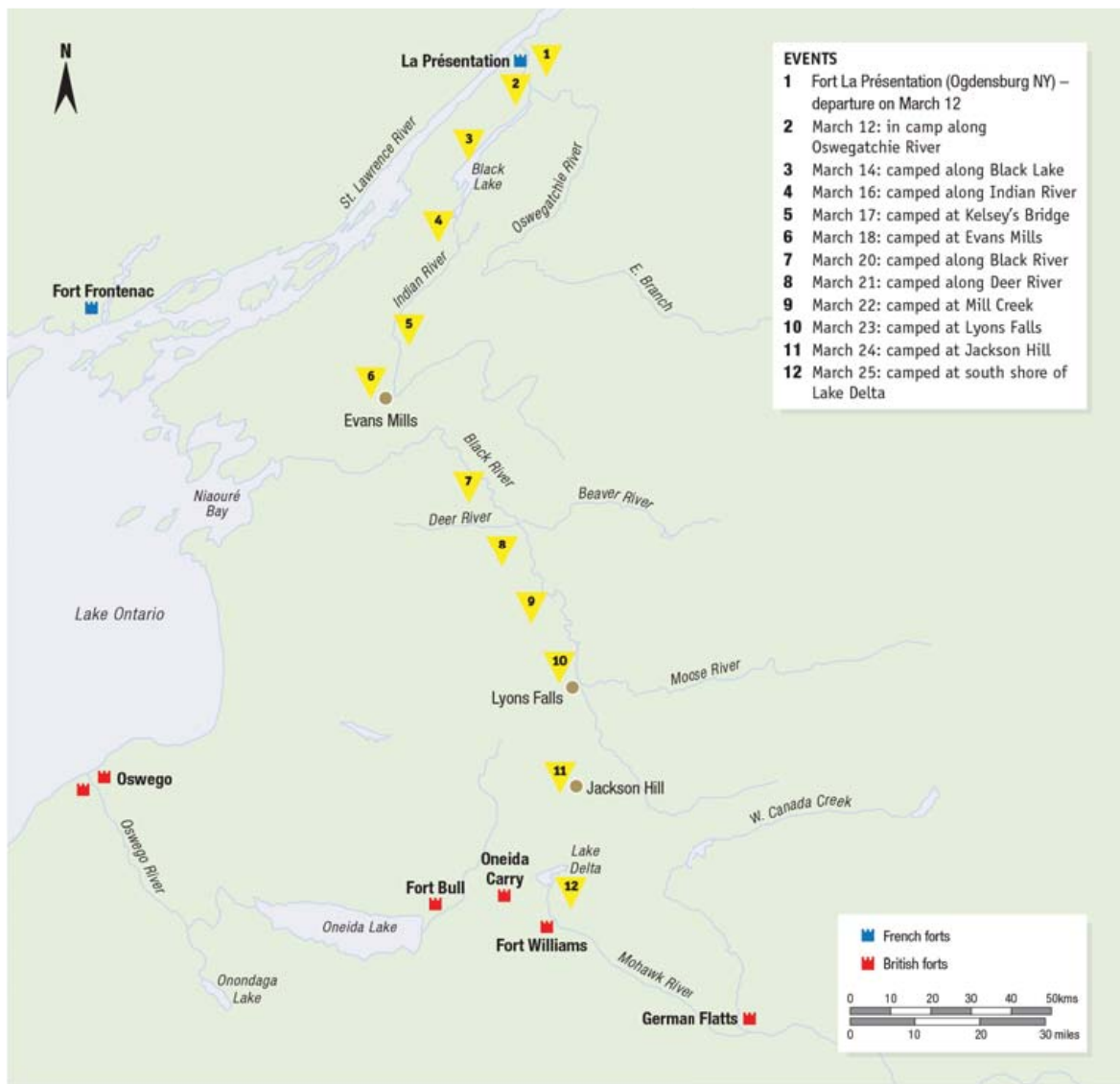
The approach

On the morning of March 26, all moved south cautiously along the Mohawk River. At one point, near the present Ridge Mills, the six Oneida warriors crossed the river and headed east. Would they warn the Anglo-Americans? No one could tell, but to retain them by force or kill them would have had disastrous consequences for the war party, as the vengeful Oneidas would surely ambush and wipe it out deep in the wilderness on its return voyage to Canada. De Léry commented that he had no choice but to let them go. The wet snow that fell that afternoon had now turned to a cold rain. Nevertheless, as the French and Indian raiders approached, two Canadian *Compagnies franches de la Marine* officers well versed in wilderness warfare, Jean-Baptiste Testard de Montigny and Robineau de Porneuf, were sent ahead with scouting parties to reconnoiter the forts discreetly. De Montigny crept up to Fort Bull and noted its general orientation and where its gate was; Porneuf reported that there were tents next to Fort Williams, indicating there were more troops there than at Fort Bull.

De Léry meanwhile was preparing for the attack, which would be as soon as possible since he was unsure if the six Oneida warriors had warned the British fort's garrisons. It was a worry that seemed to come true when he saw Chief Tarvisn suddenly appear out of the woods and come towards him. The chief immediately signaled not to be alarmed; neither he nor his Oneida companions had been detected by the Anglo-Americans. However, after the French attack, it was likely that they would have to pursue the raiders since they were neighbors of the Americans, but this would be done in a very lax manner. A grateful de Léry gave Tarvisn two belts of wampum and promised him brandy, but only after the attack, for fear he would get drunk, become noisy, and ruin the surprise factor.

Fort Bull, 1756. A: Fort Bull; B: storehouses; C: points of the attack; D: barracks; E: guard huts; F: portage road; G: river road; H: bateau landing with the Mohawk River below. (Print of a "Plan du Fort Bull... pris d'assaut par les français à Midi le 27 Mars 1756" by de Léry in RAPQ. Author's photo)





The path through the wilderness to Fort Bull, March 1756. The attack on and destruction of the fort occurred on 27 March. Léry and his men returned, arriving at Niaouré Bayon on April 3, where they were met by bateaux sent from Fort Frontenac. Note that modern place names are given.

Fort Bull, which de Léry and his men were about to attack, was little more than a stockade without artillery that enclosed four buildings. By now the French and Indian war party had run out of food, so everyone was hungry and eager to take the fort if only to eat some captured supplies. On March 27 at 4:30 in the morning, the French and Indian party rose and went towards Fort Bull. A light snow had fallen during the night and the air was brisk. At about nine in the morning, the war party's forward scouts took two Anglo-Americans prisoner some distance outside the fort. From these undoubtedly somewhat terrified men, de Léry learned that the fort's garrison was in the process of loading supplies into 16 bateaux to leave for Oswego that afternoon. No one at the Oneida Carry expected a major French attack. They further said there were about 70 soldiers at Fort Bull. They did not have any artillery, but did have plenty of hand grenades. The war party moved on

the portage road between forts Williams and Bull and, at about ten in the morning, some of the hungry Indians intercepted a convoy of sleds laden with supplies, going towards Fort Bull led by 11 drivers. They desperately wanted to eat something and took ten drivers prisoner, but the eleventh driver was a sturdy African-American who managed to leap onto a horse and gallop away towards Fort Williams. It appears that no shots were fired, so the forts were not immediately alarmed, but Fort Williams would soon be on the alert when the escaping African-American teamster galloped through its gate. Furthermore, de Léry learned from these new prisoners that about a hundred soldiers had just arrived at Fort Williams and camped near it, which agreed with the reports from Lieutenant Porneuf's scout. They would surely be mustered and march towards Fort Bull to find out what was going on.

A further complication came with the allied Indians' sudden reluctance to attack the fort, fearing that its garrison might be warned. They now had food, had not lost any warriors, and were never pleased at storming fortifications, which was not their own way of combat. Ever the diplomat, even at this critical time, de Léry said that he did not wish warriors to die needlessly, but called on their sense of honor and bravery at least to guard the prisoners and the portage road between the forts while he attacked the fort with the French and Canadians. He passed some brandy around for encouragement and also called on any warrior to join him; about 30 showed interest and moved on with de Léry. His French and Canadian force had the same strength as it had when it left La Présentation

Storming Fort Bull

Fort Bull had to be attacked immediately, de Léry reckoned, and hurried towards it. At about half a mile (0.8km) from it, the raiders set down their packs, fixed bayonets, and, kneeling in the snow, took blessing and absolution from the chaplain. De Léry "exhorted" his men not to fire a shot until inside the fort, since he hoped the gate would be open and that his men would run into it surprising the garrison. He asked the warriors not to make their loud and horrendous war cries as they ran and attacked, but as the fort came into view, the excited Indians let out their war cries against his orders. Alarmed, most of the British soldiers outside the fort ran inside. When de Léry and his men reached the fort, its gate was shut, while most of his warriors chased a few soldiers into the woods. The gate turned out to be very sturdy and could not be brought down quickly with axes or tomahawks. Some of Léry's men managed to take over the gun ports and shoot into the fort, while others hacked at the solid gate. This went on for over an hour.

**MARCH 27,
1756**

French storm Fort Bull

Lieutenant Jean-Baptiste-Philippe Testard de Montigny (1724–86), c.1750. He was a veteran of wilderness expeditions and the officer second in command for the raid on Fort Bull in March 1756. This old print, after a vanished portrait, shows him in armor, as was the fashion in French military portraits at the time, although hardly any Canadian officer had ever seen such a thing, let alone owned one. (Private collection. Author's photo)



At last, the gate gave way. De Léry and his men rushed into Fort Bull shouting “Vive le roi!”: they were met by the British defenders’ musketry fire and grenades. Luckily for the attackers, this had almost no effect. Seeing this, de Léry’s men did not hesitate a split second and charged with bayonets and tomahawks at their enemies. Lieutenant Bull, who was at the front of the defenders, was immediately killed as the French and Canadians charged in. The British soldiers behind him were rapidly overwhelmed. De Léry reported that he “would not moderate the ardor of the soldiers and the Canadians. They killed whoever they came upon,” and rushed to every corner of the fort, shooting and striking at anything they saw that moved. Some British soldiers still outside the buildings managed to escape into the barracks, where they put up fierce resistance. They were occasionally called again to surrender by the French, but to no avail. De Léry and some of his men meanwhile took possession of the fort’s powder magazine, and he at once ordered an estimated 260 powder barrels thrown into the Mohawk River. The action inside the fort had thus evolved into two separate operations; part of the French and Canadian troops kept what remained of the British soldiers at bay in the barracks by musketry fire, the rest hurried to destroy as many powder barrels as possible.

However, fire now erupted in one of the fort’s buildings. According to La Pause, one of the six warriors that charged in with the French and Canadians killed a woman who was said to be the fort commandant’s wife, threw her body into a fire and then dragged it out of the flames. In doing so, her skirt, which was burning, “set fire to the house.” The conflagration soon reached the powder magazine. Alarmed, de Léry saw there was no time to lose; he ordered all his men to get out of the fort as fast as possible, “fearing the effect of gunpowder.” They had run only 770 feet (235m) out of the fort when the powder magazine blew up in three powerful explosions “at about a second from one to the other.” The force of the explosions was so great, de Léry wrote, that the “whole detachment was thrown on the ground.”

In an instant, the fort, its buildings, and the unfortunate people within were utterly destroyed by the powerful explosions. De Léry and his men were awed at the destruction’s extent where, less than a minute before, Fort Bull had stood. Soon thereafter, an Indian came running up to de Léry telling him that an Anglo-American relief force was coming. But de Léry was in no hurry to leave, and gave orders to go into the ruins of the fort and throw into the river all the mortar bombs, grenades and supplies that had survived the explosions. The immense amount of supplies destroyed or looted included many barrels of salted pork, biscuits, butter, chocolate “and other supplies,” as well as great quantities of clothing. There must have been also a large quantity of alcoholic spirits in the storehouse’s cellars because the flames coming out of them had a blue hue. The 16 bateaux on the river’s shore were also hacked to pieces.

The Fort Bull raid has regrettably been the subject of an apparently endless stream of erroneous statements. Sometime from the middle of 1756, Mr de Charly, an ensign in the *compagnies franches* who had taken part in the Fort Bull expedition, left an account of the event to the

Marquis de Montcalm, who does not seem to have paid any attention to it, but appended it to his own journal. The part concerning the assault of March 27 is barely a half paragraph, which mentions that

we marched to Fort Bull where the enemy might have a hundred men. The Indians refused to march to it. The French soldiers cut down the palisade, broke down the gate with axe blows, in spite of the shooting and grenades hurled [at them]. The usual lack of precautions by Canadian [militiamen] caused a fire at the powder magazine and burned all the supplies; the garrison was cut down, except for three or four prisoners. We had three men killed and seven wounded.

From this account, it is obvious that de Charly was on the spot. A clue to why this was related so vaguely and erroneously was that he defined his role as “major” and was assisted by a “garçon major.” This was not a real major (a rank higher than de Léry, who commanded the expedition), but almost certainly in the sense of a surgeon-major with an assistant surgeon. In the French forces, the medical staff was often called “major” and “garçon major.” Thus de Charly acted as a medical officer with young Trevette de l’Espervanche, an officer-cadet “who filled the function of garçon major,” and they would have acted as non-combatants farther away, waiting to receive the men who were wounded in the assault. They were at Fort Bull, but obviously did not take part in the action, as the confused account shows.

Meanwhile, as announced to de Léry after Fort Bull’s destruction, a relief party had emerged from Fort Williams, from where distant shooting could be heard and, eventually, explosions coming from the area where Fort Bull

Assault on Fort Bull, March 27, 1756 (overleaf)

When de Léry and his men, so far undetected, decided to rush into Fort Bull, he asked the 30 warriors not to shout their loud and horrendous war cries as they ran in order to have the maximum chance of a surprise attack. They all moved on and the fort came into view, but, at about 900 feet (275m) away, the excited warriors lost control and loudly uttered their war cries. This alarmed the distant British soldiers as well as de Léry, “which obliged me to run up to take the fort’s gate. But it was closed and the enemy defending [itself by] rapid musketry fire and by hurling many grenades. I posted part of my detachment to hack at the gate with axes.” De Léry instructed his other men to take over the fort’s gun ports. They soon managed to pour withering musket fire on the redcoats inside the fort. “Only six Indians remained with me, the rest ran into the wood in pursuit of six Englishmen” who had not been able to get back into the fort before the attack.

They were now faced with a major hurdle. That very solid gate would have to be rammed down. “The fort’s gate being stronger than I thought, it could only be collapsed by [striking it piece by] piece,” de Léry now realized. His men were somewhat taken aback, but he stirred their martial spirit again by yelling “Vive le roi!” (God save the king). He then called on “the English to surrender” and that he would “protect their lives,” but there was no answer from within. In his account, de Léry saluted Lieutenant Bull’s defense, carried out “with all the possible bravery and intrepidity that I have always

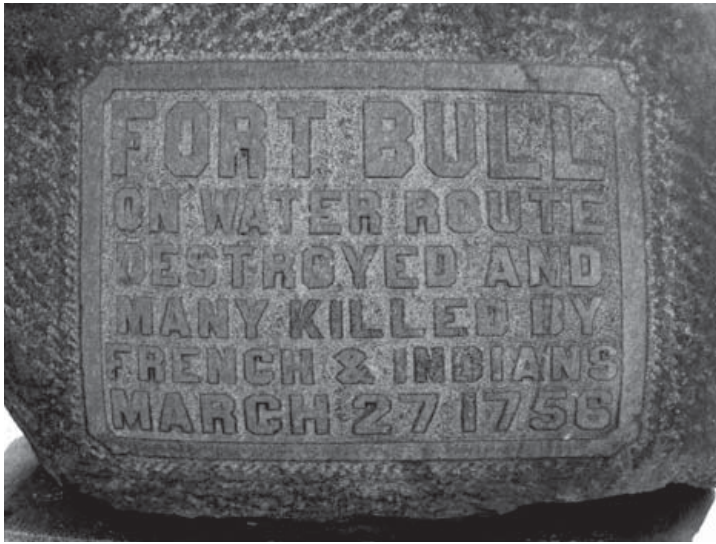
remarked of English officers.” Indeed, the garrison’s musket fire became even more intense “and more obstinate.” The shooting went on for “over an hour,” according to de Léry, while some men hacked at the gate.

According to an account reported by the Chevalier de La Pause, the axes were essentially tomahawks that could do little against what was obviously a very solid gate. Therefore, some of the men transformed a log into a battering ram and pounded on the gate. Although he was not present, La Pause, a major in the Languedoc Regiment, was also on the staff of the army battalions in Canada, so that he would have later received debriefing reports of the action from certain participants. De Léry, for his part, mentions that the gate was to be demolished “à coup de haches” (by axe blows), so heavier axes than tomahawks must also have been at work. A likely scenario would be that axes were used and that a log was finally used to pound the gate open. At last, the gate gave way. De Léry and his men rushed into Fort Bull shouting “Vive le roi!”

Assuming a “ram” was used, this would have been simply a log found in the area that would have been manhandled by several men. Others might have been hacking with axes or tomahawks at it. Lieutenant de Léry was no doubt leading the operation. The men would have been dressed in their winter dress, described in another of this book’s plates, and armed with muskets, bayonets and tomahawks.







Plaque dedicated to Fort Bull set on a stone placed in the middle of the remnants of Fort Wood Creek, which is adjacent to Erie Canal Village situated west of Rome, NY. The site of Fort Bull is in a wooded wetlands area not accessible to the public east of this plaque. (Author's photo)

stood. It turned out to be a small group led by Captain Williams – only a dozen men if one believes Philadelphia blacksmith Robert Eastburn's account, but it must have been closer to two dozen or more. It was not a sortie so much as a timid scouting party to find out what was going on at Fort Bull. It will be recalled that a small party of Indians was in pursuit, on foot, of the African-American teamster that galloped towards Fort Williams, where he arrived safely, if totally terrified. His pursuers had stopped at about a quarter-mile (400m) from the fort.

Williams' small group of men appeared on the trail; an Indian fired and one of the Anglo-Americans went down. Eastburn, who was farther back, ran into the woods to take cover and hid behind a large pine tree. He was closer to the warriors than he anticipated, spotted two, and in a single shot brought down one and wounded the other. He then got somewhat lost in the woods. Other warriors tracked his running footsteps in the light snow covering the ground, and captured him. Meanwhile, more shooting occurred as the Anglo-Americans were ambushed; the warriors later told de Léry they had slain 17 men, but he felt 13 killed was the right number. Captain Williams and what was left of his group hurried back to the fort. The next day, de Léry left for Canada.

The aftermath

According to de Léry's report, the British lost 51 men killed in the fort – nearly all probably died when it exploded – and six others slain by the Indians as they fled into the woods. Adding the 13 men killed from Fort William and the 35 made prisoners, de Léry estimated the total British loss at 105 killed and taken prisoner. No wounded were mentioned.

The French and Indian force had only one soldier of the *compagnies franches* and one Indian from La Présentation killed in action, and another Indian of the Sault Saint Louis killed by falling debris when the fort exploded. A soldier of La Reine Regiment, two Canadian militiamen and two Iroquois from Lac des Deux Montagnes were wounded. A soldier from the Guyenne Regiment had also been wounded from falling debris from the fort. In all, the raiding force suffered a trifling three killed and six wounded.

De Léry and his men now hurried back to Canada. More Anglo-American troops were bound to come up, and his scouts mentioned they had heard gunshots near the Mohawk River. Another reason to hurry back was that the French and Indians had found relatively few foodstuffs to bring back with them, much of these having apparently been destroyed in the fort's

MASSACRE AT FORT BULL?

In his 1772 *History of the Late War*, Thomas Mante mentions that Montcalm (who had not yet arrived in Canada) had "detached a party to attack Fort Bull... [and] the whole garrison except two were scalped." It must be understood that when Europeans, Anglo-Americans in particular, experienced defeat at the hand of warriors of the First Nations, it was no longer a purely military battle, but instead became branded a "massacre" where unspeakably horrid deeds were committed by barbaric savages. Not only did this provide an excuse of sorts for defeat, but it also made wonderful propaganda to mobilize the outraged and encourage bloody revenge.

This sort of account is questionable in the case of Fort Bull, as the six warriors present would have been very busy indeed if they were to scalp and massacre the whole garrison before the fort blew up. Sir William Johnson (who was knighted after the battle of Lake George) did however later report to William Shirley that he had "found within the fort twenty-three soldiers,

two women, & one Battoe Man, some burned almost to ashes, others most inhumanly butchered & all scalped... I imagine the whole number killed & missing is 62, thirty of which I found and buried."

The part about bodies being "most inhumanly butchered & all scalped" should not have surprised Johnson, the British superintendent of Indians, who lived amongst the redoubtable Iroquois and would know the more questionable aspects of their rituals, so he most probably reported it for its potential propaganda value, knowing full well that warriors allied to the British had similar practices. Nearly all were almost surely victims of the explosion. The corpses would have been found by warriors coming on the site after the fighting. It was regrettable but certainly not unusual for them to vent their vengeful feelings in such a fashion. However, old habits persisted, and as late as the 1970s one could read a book called *Massacre at Fort Bull*, an unfortunate title for actually quite a good study.

explosion. Thus, as they made their way back by the same trail they had come down, they eventually ran out of rations and it was decided to head for Niaouré Bay (now Sackets Harbor, NY) on the upper eastern shore of Lake Ontario. They arrived there on April 3 and, at the end of the afternoon, they were met by nine bateaux that had been sent there with supplies and rations in anticipation that the raiders would need them. De Léry then went ahead immediately in a bateau to report the destruction of Fort Bull. On April 10 he arrived in Montreal and made his report to Governor General



Plan showing some of the fortifications built by General Webb's Anglo-American troops at the Oneida Carry in the summer of 1756. The new "Pentagon Fort" was constructed next to the existing Fort William (built in November 1755), and General Webb's Cantonment was also known as Fort Rickey. Not shown are Fort Newport and Fort Wood Creek farther west. All were abandoned and destroyed in late August 1756. The orientation is upside down, north pointing to the bottom. Fort Stanwix National Monument, National Park Service, Rome, NY. (Author's photo)

Vaudreuil, who, obviously very pleased, told him of his approval of his conduct and leadership "in executing his orders." It was surely not a coincidence that de Léry was promoted to captain the following year.

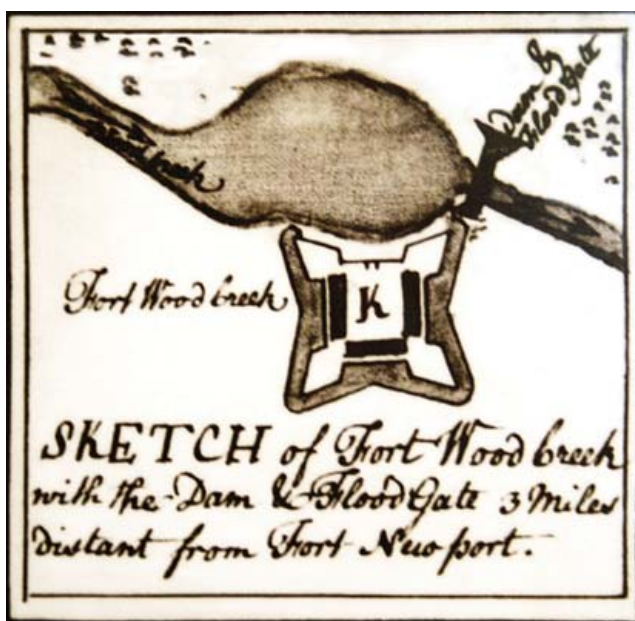
The Anglo-Americans meanwhile had to cope with the fact that their supply line was cut off and the Oneida Carry area had to be secured. On May 2, Major Charles Craven arrived with a detachment of his own regiment, Pepperrell's 51st, accompanied by detachments from Shirley's 50th and the New Jersey Regiment to reinforce the garrison of Fort Williams and build new forts.

For Vaudreuil, the success of the raid was very satisfying. He had proven that the supply route between Albany and Oswego could be severed almost at will by daring and well-led raiding forces, in the purest spirit of the Canadians' wilderness tactics, emerging from forests where only they and the aboriginal warriors dared to tread. His next strategic objective was Oswego. Indian and Canadian small war parties soon hovered around it, and typically, as on May 13, would suddenly strike at the small encampment of Anglo-American soldiers and "Battoemen about forty yards [36.5m] distance from the Town." They would then vanish, after on this occasion taking away two men and killing four, as related by engineer Patrick Mackellar. A major foray was made by Captain François Coulon de Villiers, leading 600 colonial regulars, volunteer militiamen and warriors. On June 5, this force reached Niaouré Bay, where the troops built a stockade fort as a temporary base to store supplies securely and then went on to reconnoitre the immediate vicinity of Oswego. Eleven days later, de Villiers's men exchanged fire for an hour and a half with the huddled garrison, which did not dare come out. The river was also being watched; on July 3, de Villier's men had a sharp engagement with a bateau convoy, taking several boats and about 40 men. The Anglo-Americans tried to console themselves with their

versions of the skirmishes of Captain John Bradstreet's "battoemen" that were said to have routed up to 660 "French and Indians" in early July. While this was rather optimistic, Bradstreet did come through with more much-needed supplies.

Naval superiority on Lake Ontario was critical for the defense or attack of Oswego. Captain Housman Broadly, detached from the Royal Navy, was in command of the Oswego fleet, but his freshwater experience was wanting and he did not manage to scare away the French lake fleet sailing out of Fort Frontenac. On June 27, the French fleet under colonial Captain Laforce met and defeated its opponent, took a schooner armed with four guns and chased the others into Oswego's harbor.

Plan of Fort Wood Creek, started in April 1756 west of the destroyed Fort Bull, but abandoned and destroyed by General Webb's Anglo-American troops in late August of the same year. The orientation is upside down, the north pointing to the bottom. Fort Stanwix National Monument, National Park Service, Rome (NY). (Author's photo)



THE PLAN

Montcalm's arrival in Canada

The next phase of the 1756 saga of Oswego started in France, when on January 31 Louis-Joseph, Marquis de Montcalm received an offer from the Count d'Argenson, minister of war responsible for the French metropolitan army, to assume the command of the troops in Canada, which had been left vacant since the capture of Baron Dieskau. The king granted him a commission of major-general (called *maréchal de camp* in the French army). Born on February 28, 1712 at the château of Candiac near Nîmes, he was from the old nobility of Provence and as early as nine years old was commissioned as an ensign in the Hainault Infantry Regiment. He had served in the Rhineland during the Polish Succession War (1732–35), was on the staff during the 1741 expedition that captured Prague, where he was wounded, became colonel of the Auxerrois Regiment in 1743, and then led it in Italy during the Austrian Succession War. A very brave officer, he won the Saint-Louis cross in 1744, was wounded and captured by the Austrians at Piacenza in June 1746, and was exchanged and promoted to brigadier general in 1747.

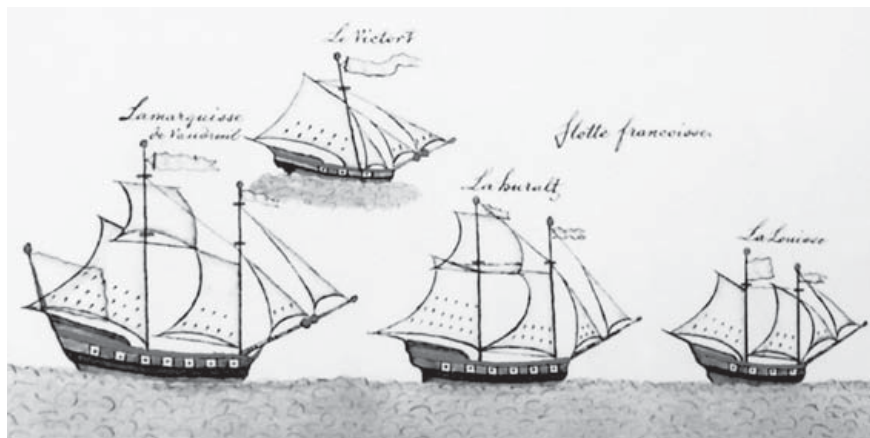
Following the peace of 1748, his Auxerrois Regiment was incorporated into the Flandres Regiment in February 1749. Montcalm rightly sought compensation and a month later, he was commissioned to command a new heavy cavalry regiment to bear his name: Montcalm's Regiment. There were no appointments to senior command in sight and in 1752 he applied for a retirement pension, having had 31 years of service during which he had participated in 11 campaigns and sustained five wounds. His request was granted in 1753 with a modest pension, and he kept the colonelcy of his cavalry regiment: a pleasant but modest way of life for a field officer in the prime of life. In late 1755 and early 1756, no experienced general on the active list wanted to go to Canada. The war minister's choice narrowed down to a few likely retired general officers, and it seems only Montcalm, a mere brigadier but still relatively young at 45, was keen on the idea.

Montcalm of course accepted. It meant good pay and allowances and triple the pension when he came back to France, with a generous arrangement for his wife should he die instead. For his part, the Marquis d'Argenson had in Montcalm an experienced veteran of many campaigns, known as a brave and competent officer who had also showed skill as a brigadier. On the other hand, like Dieskau, Montcalm had never held a post of high command, a sure indication of the total lack of interest in Canada among senior French generals. A good senior commander had to be a tactful negotiator, careful to hold divergent views under control. D'Argenson must have hoped that Montcalm would now develop these qualities.

On March 11, King Louis XV signed Montcalm's commission as a major-general. His second in command would be François-Gaston Chevalier de Lévis as brigadier, Colonel François-Charles de Bourlamarque as his chief of staff, Lieutenant-Colonel de Montreuil, detached from the Piémont Regiment, as the assistant chief of staff, Captain Louis-Antoine de Bougainville from Apchon's Dragoon Regiment as his senior aide-de-camp, Captain de La Rochebeaucour from Montcalm's Cavalry Regiment as second aide-de-camp and Sergeant Marcel from the Flandres Regiment for his third aide-de-camp. Two metropolitan army engineers, Descombles and Desandrouin, were also detached to Canada. However, the most important news was that the new commander-in-chief and his staff were accompanied by the second infantry battalions of the La Sarre and Royal-Roussillon metropolitan army regiments, each of 12 companies of fusiliers and one company of grenadiers. Both were long-standing and renowned units with impressive service records, since 1651 for La Sarre and 1655 for Royal-Roussillon. It thus appeared that Versailles was committed to the defense of French Canada.

The French squadron that sailed from Brest on April 3, 1756 consisted of the ships of the line *Héros*, *Léopard* and *Illustre* with the frigates *Licorne*, *Sauvage* and *Sireenne*. Strong winds separated some, but all had a good crossing, reaching the St Lawrence Gulf in early May. What must have Montcalm thought as he was on the deck of his ship, gazing at the mighty St Lawrence River, its distant shores at first hardly visible and then gradually coming closer? No such river existed in Europe, not even the great Danube

The French fleet of Lake Ontario, 1756. It was built and based at Fort Frontenac and included the *Marquise de Vaudreuil*, armed with 16 cannons and eight swivel guns (at left), the *Huron* with 12 cannons and six swivel guns, and two smaller vessels. (Detail from a contemporary map. Library Archives Canada, NMC 6333)





that he had seen many years earlier during the Prague campaign. Nature must have seemed overwhelming at first, but, here and there, a small village would appear near the shore – Kamouraska, Isle-aux-Coudres, and others – as the river, still mighty, became narrower. There were more villages now, and one day, as the ship sailed by Isle d’Orléans, there it was due west: Quebec City. Here was a formidable natural fortress dominated by Cape Diamond, with the city built on its upper and lower levels. The distances were so enormous, France so far away, and New France so huge, with much of it hardly explored.

Waging warfare in such a country would obviously be unlike anything seen in Europe. What was known about battling in the North American wilderness was that the skulking way of war was the key to vanquishing any enemy. Raids, surprise attacks, using the forest as cover, and moving swiftly were all elements of battle success, as had been shown at the Monongahela in July 1755, where General Braddock had been slain with many of his men as they attempted to form battle lines against unseen foes firing at them. Montcalm’s predecessor, General Dieskau, had insisted on deploying his army regulars like in Europe against well-covered American militiamen at Lake George, which resulted in a tactical fiasco and his own capture. Montcalm, who certainly thought of the fate of Braddock and Dieskau, simply had to do better for his own sake as much as that of his troops.

Most of the fleet gradually docked in Quebec City during the second week of May 1756. La Sarre mustered 515 enlisted men, Royal-Roussillon 519. Each had about 40 officers. The two battalions that arrived in Canada were not unscathed. Some 280 unfortunate officers and men that had come on the *Léopard* were very ill on arrival at Quebec. Commissary-General André Doreil noted that they formed nearly all of the 300 military patients at the hospital. Some sort of plague had broken out on the ship, and this caused considerable anxiety concerning the possible spread of an epidemic in the city. On the death of two grenadiers, Doreil ordered an autopsy of the bodies attended by all the medical officers in order to identify the illness. Whatever it was, the quick action of the medical staff administering “good treatment with infinite care” had a telling effect. The number of sick in the hospital had declined to 113 by June 20, and the 21 mortalities since the landing were considered a low figure. Thus, it could be said that the French army was in relative good health, thanks in large part to efficient medical services.

The Anglo-American fleet of Lake Ontario, 1756. Built and based at Oswego during 1755–56, these vessels were captured (and renamed) or destroyed by the French in July and August 1756. (Detail from a contemporary map. Library Archives Canada, NMC 6333)

APRIL 1756

Montcalm arrives in Canada

On May 1, 1756, Montcalm stayed a few days in Quebec City then headed for Montreal where on May 26 he met Governor General Vaudreuil. Historians agree that these two personalities did not really take to each other, and as time passed their relations worsened. However, this was just the beginning, and Montcalm now realized that Vaudreuil had already made all the strategic decisions for the ensuing season. The metropolitan battalions of La Reine and Languedoc were at Ticonderoga, that of Béarn at Fort Niagara and Guyenne at Fort Frontenac. Strong detachments of *compagnies franches* and militiamen had also been sent to those points and others as far as the Ohio River. He had met with the chiefs of many Indian nations, and bands of their warriors lurked in the American borderlands. All this was within his dual powers as French Canada's diplomatic chief (in terms of relations with the Indian nations) and his military rank of lieutenant-general, which outranked Montcalm. However, the new general from France did not feel inferior when it came to military matters, especially as his superior in France was the minister of war, whereas the minister of the navy was Vaudreuil's superior.

For now, both Montcalm and Vaudreuil had to determine the point from which the enemy forces would attempt to advance on French Canada. They

La Reine and Languedoc regiments, 1755–57. The battalions sent to Canada in 1755 were issued uniforms that were markedly different from their regimental dress in France. For instance, the 2nd Battalion of the La Reine regiment had red facings including its waistcoats in Canada, although their waistcoats were blue in France for its 1st Battalion. Languedoc's 2nd Battalion had blue cuffs and waistcoats in Canada, the same as its 1st Battalion in France, except that the latter also had a blue collar. Collars are not mentioned on the uniforms of the battalions sent to Canada in 1755. From 1757, the uniforms were as in France. From left, a grenadier of Guyenne, a soldier of Béarn relaxing in camp, and a corporal of the same regiment. (Watercolor by Eugène Lelièvre. Collection and photo: National Historic Sites, Parks Canada)





Fusiliers of the La Reine and Languedoc regiments, 1755–57. (Watercolor by Eugène Lelièvre. Collection and photo: National Historic Sites, Parks Canada)

decided the enemy would most likely come from Lake George or from Oswego, and this was confirmed by the intelligence they were receiving. Thus the newly arrived Royal-Roussillon battalion was sent to reinforce Ticonderoga, while La Sarre went to Fort Frontenac. The question was now where to attack the Anglo-Americans. Up to 5,000 Anglo-Americans were said to be gathering at Lake George, while there might be about 1,700 at Oswego. Vaudreuil had long wanted to move against Oswego, and it seemed like the best target because of its great distance from Albany as well as its relatively weak garrison. “Toward mid-June,” wrote Montcalm in his journal, “it clearly appeared from the report of the Indians sent out as scouts; from the depositions of several prisoners; from the vast preparations made at Albany and Fort Lydius [Edward], that the English had offensive intentions in the direction of the [upper] Point of Lake Saint-Sacrement [Ticonderoga]. Upon this intelligence, Montcalm “proposed a diversion towards Lake Ontario for the purpose of attracting a portion of the enemy’s forces” there, and consequently relieving the pressure on Ticonderoga. In effect, he agreed with Vaudreuil that an attack on Oswego should be attempted.

Such a raid in the vast wilderness of North America demanded a logistical effort unknown in European campaigns, where many supplies could be

Montcalm's Crushing Blow

Grenadier of the La Sarre Regiment, 1757. In May 1756, the 2nd battalion of this regiment arrived in Canada with Montcalm, and took part in the Oswego expedition during August. Its uniform during the 1750s was gray-white with dark blue collar and cuffs, a red waistcoat, brass buttons and yellow hat lace. Grenadiers carried sabers, and their cartridge pouch was larger to accommodate hand grenades. (Watercolor by Eugène Lelièvre after a manuscript of 1757. Collection and photo: National Historic Sites, Parks Canada)



obtained locally for an advancing force. In North America, as had been proven yet again by the Fort Bull raid, everything had to be assembled and transported over great distances by various types of watercraft. It seemed that it might be already “too late in the season” for Montcalm to attempt an expedition on Oswego because of the “endless difficulty” of gathering supplies and moving them “across a country having no other roads, but rivers, filled with falls and rapids, and lakes rendered frequently impassable to bateaux in consequence of the violence of the waves.” Yet because of the extensive involvement in the fur trade that reached into the heart of the continent and was Canada’s economic lifeblood, the French commanders had a great advantage. Many Canadians were familiar with transporting great quantities of goods over half a continent, either part-time or full-time

as the legendary men called “voyageurs” who were renowned for their strength, endurance, bravery, and good humor. It was possible to mobilize a great many of these men – they were, like all males fit to bear arms in New France, militiamen – to ensure the logistical aspects. Vaudreuil knew all this, but Montcalm was unsure.

The person that convinced him was Sieur François Bigot, Intendant of Canada, [who] arrived at this conjuncture at Montreal [and] took upon himself the collection of munitions of war of all sorts, and of provisions.” He also organized the “despatch of convoys and their continuous supply.” In the government of New France, the intendant was the second most powerful post, and his responsibilities included military finances and logistics. Now all three leaders were in accord about attacking Oswego.

To fool the Anglo-Americans, Montcalm went with Lévis and part of the general staff to Ticonderoga to lure their spies into thinking he was preparing some operation in that area, but then on July 16 he discreetly hurried back, leaving Lévis in command there, and, after short stops in Montreal and La Présentation, took command of the troops gathering at Fort Frontenac on July 29. Six days earlier, an Indian prisoner had told Lt Col Mercer at Oswego that Montcalm had arrived in Canada with two additional battalions, and that he was expected to arrive at Fort Frontenac, where many troops and militiamen in high spirits were gathering.

Oswego's garrison

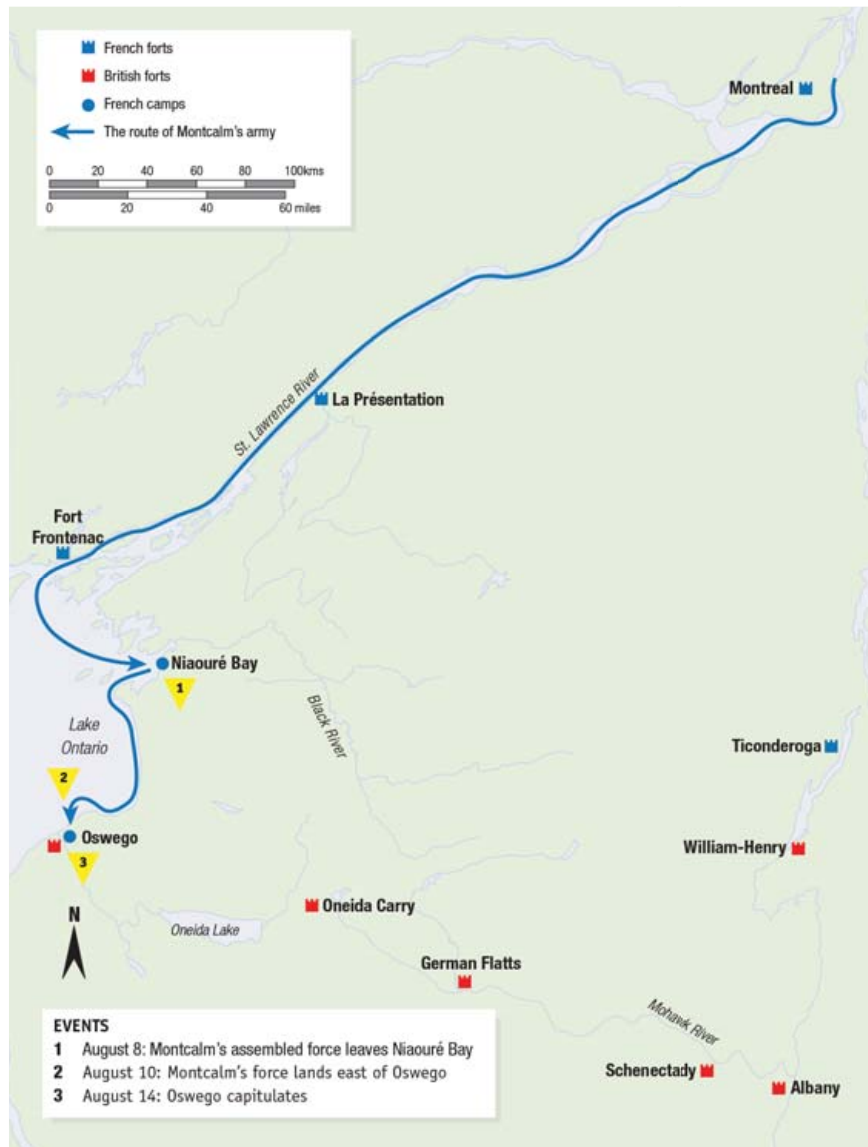
The situation was different for the British garrison at Oswego. The troops had spent a miserable year. Captain John Vicars relates how dismal the situation had been there since his arrival with Shirley's 50th Foot in August 1755. The garrison soon became “short of provisions,” and in spite of appeals for more supplies by Lt Col Mercer, not enough were sent, to the point that councils of war deliberated “whether we should abandon the place on account of the want of provisions.” This extreme solution, which was practically synonymous with abandoning Oswego to the French, was not carried out. However, the troops there paid a dear price. Vicars stated



Irish soldier with Montcalm's army, 1756–57. In February 1756, Vaudreuil mentioned that Irish soldiers had deserted from the garrison of Fort Oswego. When attacked in August, a report to Colonel Mercer made by French army deserters mentioned a small group of men in Montcalm's army that were “cloathed in Red faced with Green” and were mistakenly thought to belong “to the Irish Brigade” (DHSNY, II). These red-coated soldiers were actually Irish Catholics that had deserted to the French. More switched sides after Oswego's surrender, and an Irish company was formed in June 1757. It was posted in Quebec City until September 1757 when it was transferred to France to be incorporated in France's Irish regiments in Europe; it was feared they would be hanged if recaptured in Canada by the British. As red was the color worn by the Irish Brigades in the French and Spanish armies, it was eminently suitable for this group of Irish soldiers. Adding green facings made it even more Irish. In all probability, this was the former British uniform, most likely adapted to French army styles without lace or lapels. (Watercolor by Derek FitzJames. Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library, Providence, USA. Author's photo)

Montcalm's Crushing Blow

General Montcalm's army's route to Oswego. Various elements left Montreal in July to go to Niaouré Bay, where detachments from elsewhere had also assembled.



that his company originally had 50 men, but by May 1756 “39 of them dead [of sickness] and one taken prisoner. I think each of the 8 companies [of Shirley’s Regiment] at [Fort] Oswego lost above 30 men” apparently owing to “bad barracks and want of beds, which threw the men in to scurveys, and the water which gave them fluxes.” Indeed, there were no real barracks in the fort for the soldiers, and what passed for a barrack building “was made of green boards, they all split and the snow drove in constantly on the men, the rest lived in bark huts and lay on the ground all winter.”

Thus some 240 men of Shirley’s 50th Foot were lost owing to callous neglect; the failure to provide them with proper quarters and sufficient food in this isolated station during the winter. Pepperrell’s 51st Foot “lost fewer men than the 50th at [Fort] Oswego,” according to Capt Vicars, because the

barracks in Fort Ontario where it was posted “were better than those at [Fort] Oswego.” This is hardly a positive statement about the state of the garrison at Oswego. Furthermore, no pay was given between October 1755 and the end of June of 1756, so that the men had no money to buy anything from traders or Indians. Thus, some men deserted, and those that were caught later related at their court martial that they had absconded because “they neither received their pay nor sufficient provisions [so] they went away to prevent their starving.” In May and June, however, more supplies and many recruits for the 50th and 51st arrived, which suddenly made “the garrison pretty healthy.” A “great quantity of goods” was now at Oswego, and “chocolate, tea, sugar, coffee, shirts, shoes, and stockings” were distributed. Barracks were now built in the older post, but they were “so near the stockade [that] they could make no defense” (MA).

Shirley’s 50th Foot was posted in the older works, generally simply called Fort Oswego, while Pepperrell’s 51st Foot was standing guard in the new and unfinished Fort Ontario. According to “An Account of the Strength... at Oswego” (MA), the garrison in early August 1756 stood at:

50th Shirley’s: 27 officers, 29 sergeants, 481 corporals, drummers and privates. Total 50th: 537

51st Pepperrell’s: 22 officers, 28 sergeants, 390 corporals, drummers and privates. Total 51st: 440

New Jersey Regiment: 7 officers, 10 sergeants, 123 corporals, drummers and privates.

Total New Jersey Regiment: 140

Royal Artillery: 2 officers and 16 privates. Total: Royal Artillery: 18

Grand total: 1,135 (including 58 officers)

These figures vary significantly from the number of prisoners of war reported by the French (see below), which lists more officers and men for the 50th (550), 51st (462), and especially the New Jersey Regiment (175). This gives a grand total of 1,187 officers and enlisted men, not counting the casualties and desertions that occurred during the siege. Obviously, some outlying detachments were called in after this computation. The French counted a total of 1,742 prisoners of war when naval personnel, laborers, non-combatants and casualties were added.



Colonel Peter Schuyler of the New Jersey Regiment, c.1755. Schuyler (1710–62) was one of the most experienced American officers, having previously commanded the New Jersey provincial troops mobilized in 1746–47. In 1755, he was again appointed to command the New Jersey provincial regiment – nicknamed the “New Jersey Blues” because of its dark blue uniform – and came to Oswego in 1756 with part of his unit, the rest of it being posted in small forts at the Oneida Carry and along the Mohawk River. Schuyler is said to have been opposed to surrendering Oswego, but the great majority of officers decided to capitulate. From August 1756 to October 1757, he remained in French custody at Quebec City and was released on parole by Governor General Vaudreuil until an exchange finally released him on September 1758. He reassumed command of his regiment and served with it as part of General Jeffery Amherst’s army from 1759 up to the surrender of Montreal in September 1760. This colored sketch, by Frederick P. Todd after an original portrait in the collections of the New Jersey Historical Society, shows Schuyler wearing his regiment’s dark blue uniform faced with scarlet and trimmed with gold buttons, the waistcoat being edged with gold lace. (Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library, Providence, USA. Author’s photo)

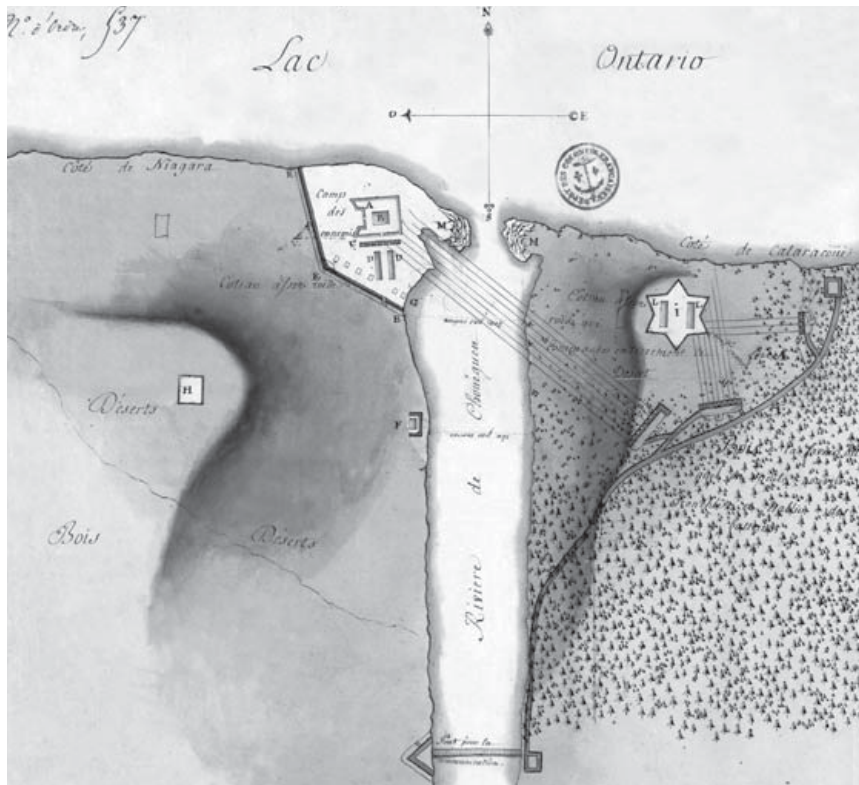
MONTCALM'S RAID ON OSWEGO

Montcalm's forces move

On July 25, the French army's senior engineer, Descombles, went lurking discreetly near "the forts and approaches" at Oswego with Captain de Villiers. This scouting trip was very thorough, and Descombles presented the results of his findings to General Montcalm four days later with suggestions on where to build the trenches and artillery batteries to have the best chances of subduing the British forts. He was obviously a very professional, active and thorough engineer.

It looked good to Montcalm. The army's rendezvous point was fixed at Niaouré Bay, and in early August troops arrived there on board ships and bateaux from Fort Frontenac and other places, and joined François-Pierre Rigaud de Vaudreuil's Canadian militiamen already there; he was the governor general's brother and also a veteran colonial officer. By August 8, everything was ready, and a fleet of at least 200 bateaux with over 3,000 men and all the arms and supplies on board sailed south, edging discreetly around Lake Ontario's coast. As it came closer to its objective, the fleet moved only at night, and otherwise the bateaux would be hidden in coves, out of view of the lake. Two days later, Montcalm's force was within a mile and a half (2.4km) east of Oswego, and landed there; indeed, some officers felt it was too close for comfort. Incredibly, the Anglo-American garrison did not know of its arrival, a remarkable feat of discretion for such a large force.

On August 11, the engineers Descombles and Desandrouin were ordered to reconnoiter "at day-break, Fort Ontario, the place to be attacked, and [chart] the roads necessary to be cut across the woods to reach the rear of the traverse," Desandrouin wrote in a letter of August 28. It was very hot already, and Descombles took off his dark blue uniform coat so that he simply wore his scarlet waistcoat:



Plan of a reconnaissance by French army engineer Descombles at Oswego, July 25, 1756. A: old fort of Oswego; B: old stone house in the middle of the fort; C: earthwork with 18 cannons; D: merchants' houses; E: camp; F: trenches; G: outer guardhouse; H: boat landing; I: new stockade fort without a ditch; L: Fort Ontario; M: barracks in Fort Ontario; N: low reefs at the river's entrance. Descombles also proposed sites (in brown) for trenches, siege batteries, and a bridge over the Onondaga River. (Collection and photo: Archives Nationales (France), Outremer (Aix-en-Provence), Dépôt des Fortifications des Colonies)

For an escort, we were furnished with the grenadier company of La Sarre, several Canadian officers, and some twenty trusty Indians, as guides and flankers to the right and left, to discover scouting parties from the [Oswego] garrison, which we had to fear. We advanced across stumps of trees, to within 80 toises [512ft, 156m] of the place; I was to the left, within twenty paces of Mr Descombles, having left the grenadiers within a gun-shot in the rear. He had completed his reconnaissance before me and, as he was returning between three colonial officers, a Nipissing Indian, who happened to be eight or ten paces behind, mistook him, in the twilight, for an English officer; his first intention was to take him prisoner, but as he saw him accompanied by others, he discharged a gun, loaded with a ball and a handful of buckshot at him, which prostrated him. The sentries of the fort, supposing themselves fired at, discharged their pieces at us, so that I thought a patrol had discovered Mr. Descombles, and I retired immediately for fear of being surprised (DRCHNY, X).

Decombles had a tragic end, as Desandrouin related in another dispatch giving more details:

I heard Mr [Luc de Lacorne, sieur] de Saint-Luc shouting that our unfortunate engineer was fatally wounded. I ran towards him to assist him if possible. I found him lying on the ground and dying, from a gunshot wound consisting of a bullet and a handful of large buckshot fired by Indian named Hotchig. This unfortunate man had taken him for an English scout. He saw him pass a tree trunk holding his cane in front of him. He [Hotchig] thought it was a musket; he heard or saw someone that accompanied him

AUGUST 10,
1756

Montcalm's force
lands near Oswego

[Decombles], and did not hesitate to shoot... I was shattered by this account and the state of my poor comrade... and had him carried right away to his tent where he passed away half an hour later, in spite of the surgeon's care (Gabriel).

Poor Descombles had been mistaken for a British officer, no doubt because he had set out in his scarlet waistcoat.

Losing his chief engineer when about to attack Oswego was certainly bad news for Montcalm. It is said that he even wondered if the attempt to take Oswego should be canceled, but he soon resolved to go ahead. Desandrouin would become chief engineer, but he would need another engineer to assist him, and there was no other available. However, engineering interested a number of the better-educated infantry officers at that time, and it was well known that Captain Pierre Pouchot of the Béarn Regiment was quite proficient. General Montcalm appointed him to be the new assistant engineer.

In Oswego, the Anglo-Americans were alarmed by the shooting, and sent out a small party in a canoe to find out what was going on. It soon saw many French bateaux drawn up on shore and hurriedly paddled back to Oswego, announcing that there was obviously a large French force nearby. Mercer immediately sent out several ships to bombard and destroy the bateaux, but the French had already built a shore battery containing four 12-pdr cannons. At about noon, Montcalm reported, three English vessels "shot at us without success" and were answered by the French shore battery "that forced them to sail further away and go back to their port" after receiving "a few of our cannonballs," noted Desandrouin. Meanwhile, some 400 men spent the day opening a road from the landing site to the outskirts of Fort Ontario, while many more men were kept busy making a large amount of fascines and gabions in preparation for the siege. Fort Ontario itself was invested and surrounded by numerous small parties of Canadians and Indians led by Rigaud.

Beginning the siege

On August 12, boats out of Oswego tried again to bombard the French army's landing site. The French shore battery had been reinforced by several more cannons installed during the night that kept them at a respectable distance, "and they since have not dared to show themselves except when far away," noted Montcalm. The guns of Fort Ontario also opened fire and continued to shoot until nightfall, but with no effect. Musket fire from the fort was returned by Rigaud's militiamen and warriors, and provided cover

Fort Ontario as seen from the east. This view of the present fort gives a good sense of what the French and Indian opponents could see in 1756 as they arrived from the east. Naturally, the buildings within would have been much lower and the Oswego skyline would not have existed. (Author's photo)



MONTCALM'S STRENGTH AT OSWEGO

According to La Pause's account (in RAPQ), who acted as Montcalm's chief of staff, the French army arriving at Oswego consisted of the following troops:

La Sarre: 416 NCOs and privates, 27 officers, total: 443

Guyenne: 441 NCOs and privates, 29 officers, total: 470

Béarn: 381 NCOs and privates, 29 officers, total: 410

Artillery and militia: 1,042 NCOs and privates, 4 officers, total: 1,046.

De Léry specifies that 137 men of this group were regular infantrymen of the *compagnies franches de la marine* and regular artillerymen of the *Canonniers-Bombardiers*, which La Pause numbers at 34 gunners with one officer. Thus, some 909 Canadian militiamen formed the balance of this group.

Volunteers of de Villiers: 340 NCOs and privates, 15 officers, total: 355

Volunteers of de Montigny: 62 NCOs and privates, 1 officer, total: 63

Indians: 250

Total: 3,037 (including 105 officers)

The artillery was to be served by 34 regular gunners and over 500 militiamen (part of the artillery and militia group listed above). The ordnance brought consisted of:

4 brass 12-pdr cannons

2 brass 6-pdr cannons

2 brass 2-pdr cannons

4 iron 12-pdr cannons

6 iron 8-pdr cannons

4 iron 6-pdr cannons

2 brass 8-pdr howitzers

1 iron 6-inch mortar

8 iron grenade mortars

Of this ordnance, the brass cannons and howitzers are surprising, as nearly all artillery pieces in Canada were iron naval guns until the Seven Years War. The 12-pdr brass cannons were British and had been captured at Monongahela, as probably were the other brass pieces, especially as howitzers were uncommon in the French forces.

A detachment of 438 men, including 308 sick or non-combatants, were left at the camp at Niaouré Bay. There were also one hundred officers' servants with the army. If one adds general and staff officers, the French force approaching Oswego numbered at least 3,140 men.

for the hundreds of men starting on field works to the east. That morning, allied warriors intercepted dispatches to Albany signed by Mercer and Littlehales asking for assistance as soon as possible, since Montcalm's army was investing Oswego. The French spent the rest of the day finishing the road, making field fortifications, and bringing up the heavy artillery. It was also decided to start a parallel trench east of Fort Ontario in the evening. Its orientation was contested by the young engineer Desandrouin because he felt it would not offer enough cover, but he was overruled by Colonel Bourlamarque, who was in charge of the immediate siege operations. Pouchot agreed with Bourlamarque, so the work went ahead with Desandrouin following the instructions "to the letter," although he noted that an enemy vessel could enfilade the trench. At any rate the work went

AUGUST 13,
1756

Fort Ontario falls
to the French

on, and the laborers were helped by beautiful moonlight, noted Desandrouin. Montcalm was on the spot "visiting all the posts and the workers" and encouraging them until three in the morning, and then went to his camp to order that a siege battery should now be built and ready as soon as possible.

Thus, at dawn on August 13, the Fort Ontario garrison, which had not fired its guns during the night, now saw the extent of its opponent's remarkably rapid progress. The trenches were approaching and there was a great deal of activity in their lines. The fort's guns and muskets opened fire, but again with little effect. The French siege battery was being built to contain six guns, but was not ready. It was very well sited, being elevated so that the guns of Fort Ontario could not fire into it. They tried with ricochet fire and mortar bombs, but to no avail. The French were well protected by their field works insofar as fire from the fort was concerned, and Rigaud's men were nearby within musket range but invisible, forcing the fort's defenders to take cover too. Soon, Montcalm's men would have cannons installed in this elevated battery that would make the fort and its garrison very vulnerable. Apprised of this, Mercer agreed to evacuate Fort Ontario; the work would soon be defenseless and its defenders uselessly exposed. From two in the afternoon, the Anglo-Americans kept up "an infernal fire" with cannonballs, mortar bombs and musket balls shot "from both forts" simultaneously, so that "neither warriors or Frenchmen dared to show their noses," commented Desandrouin, but at 4.00pm the guns and mortars in Fort Ontario became suddenly silent. At first, the French suspected a trick, thinking that the defenders might have stopped so their opponents would come out, rush to assault the fort, and be cut down. After a couple of hours, doubts grew about what was really going on, and a warrior volunteered to have a look. He sneaked up to the base of the rampart, listened, and then, in full view of the men in the French trenches, rapidly climbed into the fort. He emerged on the parapet to find the fort empty.

Taking Fort Ontario

The grenadier company of the Guyenne Regiment was immediately sent in and took possession of Fort Ontario. Before leaving, the garrison had spiked its eight cannons and four mortars, and thrown its remaining black powder in the well. But it had left in a hurry, abandoning three sick men and all the baggage in the fort. The French army was nearly overwhelmed with joy at this news, but for Montcalm and his officers there was no time to lose. One hundred men were at once tasked with building a road from the parallel trench into the fort, which was finished in less than three hours.

The abandonment of Fort Ontario certainly indicated that the garrison was somewhat in shock since the arrival of the French troops and their allied warriors. Oswego's garrison had been much neglected in its winter of privation, and although supplies and money had at last arrived, morale was rather low. This included a number of the officers who seem to have felt marooned in a place far from "civilization," as they saw it. Now that the "French & Indians" surrounded Oswego, the perspective of fighting them and, for many, of falling into the hands of "barbaric" warriors was horrific.



View from Fort Ontario looking east. The French and Indians, having landed farther east, appeared at about where the trees are in the distance. They proceeded to build a battery and invest the fort. (Author's photo)

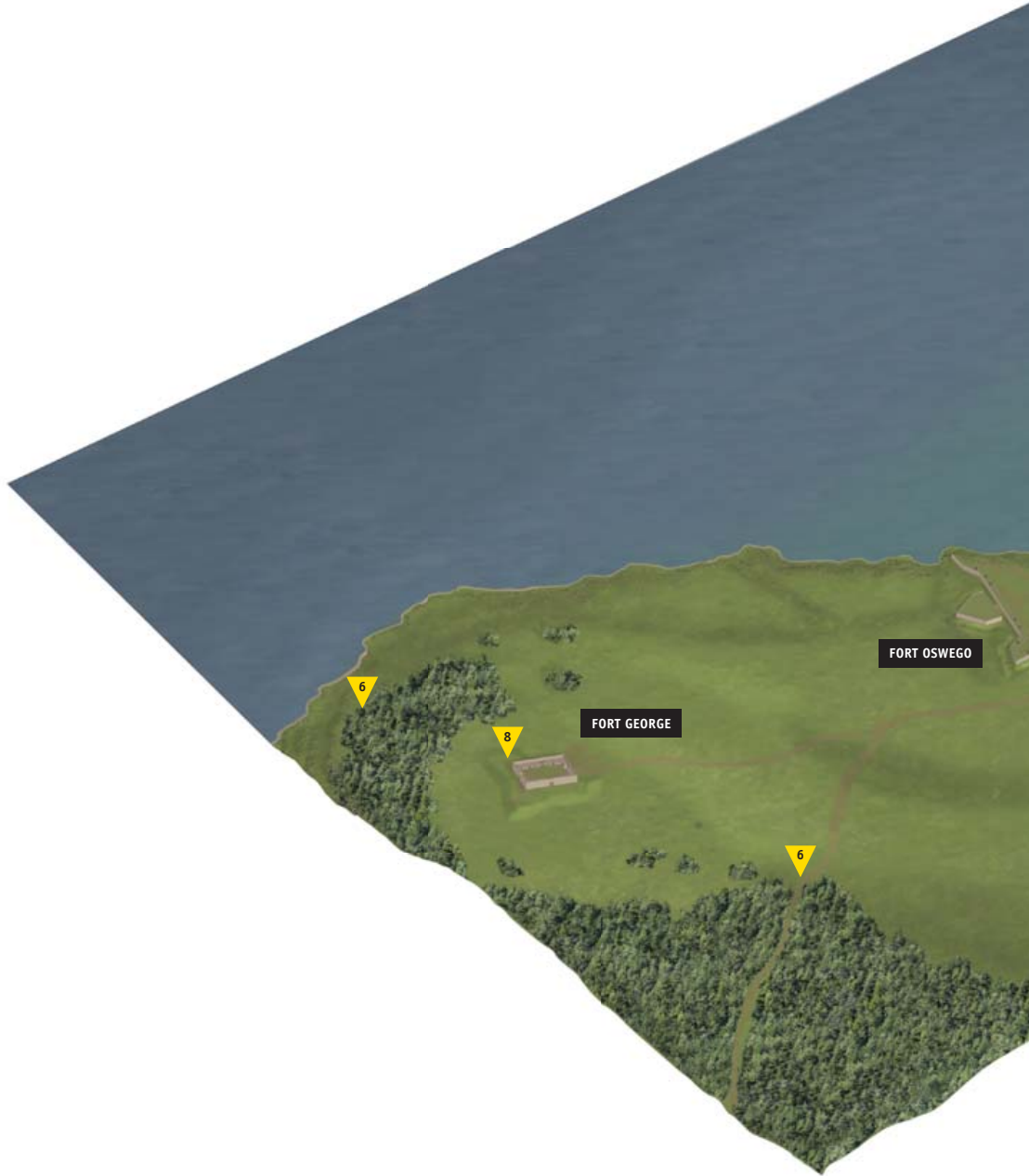
All knew that there was practically no chance that a relief force would arrive in less than a month, which dampened many a redcoat's spirit. Mercer seems to have had no illusions about his precarious position. Sooner or later, the French siege trenches would reach Fort Ontario, they would have batteries to pound the place and enough men to storm a breach in its walls. Instead of being the citadel of Oswego, Fort Ontario was isolated, and, it seemed, doomed. Its commanding officer's suggestion of evacuating was approved by Mercer, and, as seen above, the garrison managed to slip out "and land on the Oswego side without any annoyance from the enemy and I believe without being discovered," Mackellar wrote.

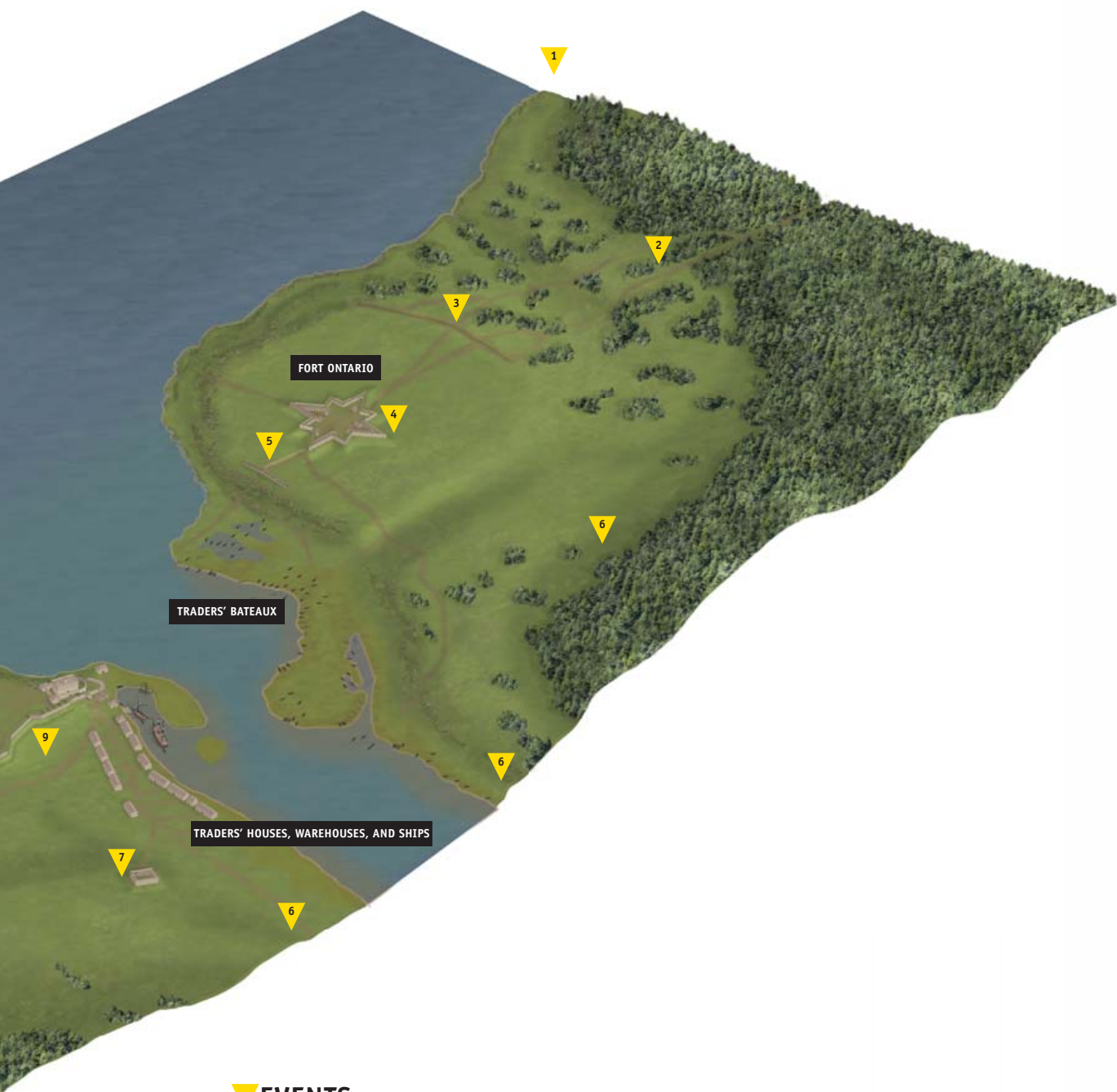
The next siege

The next step for Montcalm was to build a battery that would bombard Fort Oswego just across the river. It would be a "barbette" battery, which meant that the guns would be fired over the top of its wall instead of through embrasures: this left the gunners more exposed to enemy fire, but their cannons gained a wider field of fire. Captain François Le Mercier, commandant of the Canonniers-Bombardiers, Desandrouin, Pouchot and 200 men went to work on a battery large enough for 20 pieces of artillery. It was sited in front of Fort Ontario's western side, and the dry ditch below the curtain wall provided a handy covered road into it. Most would be cannons, but mortars were also to be installed "so as to batter Fort Oswego, the road from that fort to Fort George, and [shoot into] the entrenched camp [outside of Fort Oswego] in its rear," hoped Montcalm. He wished it built during that night, a Herculean task, and most of his army became laborers hauling guns and constructing the battery. Desandrouin reported that the Anglo-Americans fired a few cannon shots and a dozen mortar bombs during the night with no effect, although visibility was much enhanced by the full moon. Montcalm was on the spot, which greatly encouraged the

TAKING THE OSWEGO FORTS

AUGUST 1756





▼EVENTS

- 1 French land near Oswego, early August
- 2 French road towards Fort Ontario is built, August 11–12
- 3 French trench and battery overlooking Fort Ontario is built, August 12–13
- 4 Fort Ontario is evacuated, afternoon of August 13
- 5 French battery overlooking Fort Oswego is built, night of August 13/14
- 6 A force of Canadians and warriors surrounds Oswego completely on morning of August 14; the battalion of the Régiment de Béarn joins them
- 7 Small redoubt to the south is evacuated, during the morning of August 14
- 8 Fort George is evacuated, during the morning of August 14
- 9 Fort Oswego surrenders



many men working, so that the access trench and the battery was being armed with nine cannons by early dawn on August 14. Work was also starting on another battery position for mortars and howitzers.

For Mercer, the situation was critical, but he was not about to give up. The morale of his troops was low to the point that, in one case mentioned by Mackellar involving fatigues, the officers could not convince their men to work, and finally “thought it an improper time to make use of severe [punitive] measures, so that there was no more work done” on the night of August 13. There had fortunately been “a battery or blind of pork casks” installed earlier in the evening on both sides of the old blockhouse of Fort Oswego “to cover the gunners” from French artillery fire. Now that the French possessed Fort Ontario, the British knew that Montcalm would take advantage of its position to enfilade the works on the other side of the Oswego River. Perhaps some of the infantrymen of the 50th and 51st had lost heart, but others were determined to put up a fight. This included the small detachment of Royal Artillery gunners with the infantrymen that assisted them to man the guns. They had performed very well in Fort Ontario the day before and were again ready to pepper the French with everything they had. To do this, they had two cannons and a mortar on the north side of the blockhouse and a cannon and two mortars, one behind the other, on the south side.

“At day break in the morning,” wrote Mackellar, “we discovered a battery en barbette erected along the edge of the cliff in the front of Fort Ontario,

which we then began to fire upon." Worse, the French battery commanded "all the inside" of the Anglo-American works

excepting a little space that was covered with the blockhouse towards the town. We fired with four mortars and six guns, three of which (standing upon the north flank and curtain of the horn work) were reversed upon the platforms, one from the Indian council house, and two from the battery of pork casks on the north side, which last two were the only guns that had any cover.

Although they had nine guns in the battery, the French gunners opened up at first with only three cannons. Bougainville noted that the French new battery "was very late in firing, and then only with a few pieces." Finally all nine guns were in action, but the British gunners proved to be very resilient and brave men who knew their craft.

The French battery was at equal or slightly lower height than the guns in Oswego, and the British rapid fire soon had a telling effect as casualties rose amongst the French in their battery. At about seven or eight in the morning, the sun was hidden by clouds and a violent thunderstorm drenched everyone – one of those sudden and short rainstorms typical of northeast summers. This was especially annoying in the French battery because, in a hurry to gain time, Captain Le Mercier had decided not to install a wooden platform. Now the packed earth was turning to mud so that at each shot the cannons would sink in, rendering their shots too high or too low. Then ammunition started to be in short supply, so the French fire slackened. Not so in the British batteries, and the Royal Artillery gunners knocked a French gun off its carriage. The British gunners had their problems too, however. The bad carriages of three of their guns collapsed when fired and had to be replaced "in the midst of the enemy's fire" while a 7-inch mortar burst. It was also realized that the powder magazine "which was only covered with plank and turf" was not quite bomb proof. Desandrouin, who was near the French battery, felt that the British guns had the upper hand.

Early in the morning, Montcalm had ordered all of Rigaud's and Villiers's corps of Canadians, militiamen, and Indian warriors – about a thousand men – to go

Opposite:

A cannon manned by the *Canoniers-Bombardiers*, the regular colonial artillerymen of New France, c.1755–60. In the foreground are two officers; behind them is a sergeant, recognizable by the double silver cuff lace. As for the gunners, most of them have taken off their coats for ease of movement; at left, a senior gunner helps to sort cannonballs. All wear the regulation dark blue uniform with red facings, trimmed with white metal buttons, and "false" or real silver hat lace, depending on rank. The artillery piece is a naval model mounted on a garrison carriage, the most common ordnance in New France. However, field carriages may have been used at Oswego. (Watercolor by Eugène Lelièvre. Collection and photo: National Historic Sites, Parks Canada)



Pierre-François de Rigaud, Marquis de Vaudreuil-Cavagnal, Governor General of New France, c.1755. (Print after portrait. Author's photo)





Lieutenant-Colonel Mercer hit by a French cannonball, August 14, 1756 (previous pages)

On Saturday August 14, at about nine in the morning, a cannon shot from the French battery across the river killed Lieutenant-Colonel James Mercer, Oswego's commander, who was also the soul of its resistance. For General Montcalm and his troops, it was one of those "lucky" shots that hastened the surrender of Oswego. Most of the garrison's morale was low even before Mercer was hit; an hour after his death, the place capitulated.

The French battery had been built in record time during the night of August 13–14 and it commanded much of old Fort Oswego. In the early morning, an artillery duel started between this new French battery and the Anglo-American artillery positions at Oswego. After the withdrawal from Fort Ontario, the Anglo-Americans built several artillery gun positions facing east as fast and as best as they could, hastily trying to protect them with items such as pork barrels piled three high and three deep and probably some fascines filled with earth. The British gunners, assisted by some infantrymen, put up a very stubborn fight, as the French soon noted.

Colonel Mercer's end came in a split second. A French cannonball, by most accounts, severed his head from his body, or possibly cut

him in two. Our plate shows the instant the shot hit him, but refrains from showing the gory spectacle to be seen a second later. He probably wore his officer's uniform as lieutenant-colonel of Pepperell's 51st Foot, which was all scarlet including facings, most likely with silver lace and buttons for officers. The Royal Artillery gunners would have worn their blue uniform faced with red and trimmed with yellow buttons and lace. They might have laid their coats aside and served their guns wearing their dark blue waistcoats, also trimmed with yellow buttons and lace, but several paintings depicting their comrades serving cannons elsewhere show them wearing their coats, even in Havana six years later. The British at Oswego probably used their best guns, those made of brass, for their cannonades against the French, as well as good iron cannons. Of the carriages little seems to be said, except for their "badness," and they might have been the garrison type or the field type with two large wheels, or both. Even the color that the carriage's wood was painted is uncertain. We favor gray, which is usually seen in paintings, but one can occasionally also see a dull red. Gray was seemingly the predominant color. Ironwork on the carriage was black.

south and cross the river to cut off Oswego completely in case its garrison might try a sortie to evacuate the place. The Béarn battalion was also joining them to secure the Oswego River in case a sortie to the south was attempted. At about 8.00am Anglo-Americans saw large numbers of Canadians and warriors on the west side, a nasty surprise for the modest garrison of the outlying, small, and unfinished Fort George. Although the British did not initially fully realize it, this move effectively sealed off Oswego. Montcalm had outflanked his opponent and he now mooted an assault from the south. It was obvious that the British troops in outlying Fort George were doomed, and they were ordered to withdraw into Oswego.

Meanwhile, although at a disadvantage in their artillery duel, the *Canonniers-Bombardiers* kept up a brisk fire on the British gun positions. Those colonial gunners too did not lack in courage and stamina. Then, at about nine in the morning, a "lucky" shot sealed the fate of Oswego: Lieutenant-Colonel Mercer, who was with the British gunners, was killed instantly by a cannonball that either severed his head or cut him in two. It was a disaster for Anglo-American morale, such as it was, because Mercer was a true fighter and one of the "unsung heroes" of the British forces during that conflict. According to Desandrouin, one of Mercer's staff officers told him after the surrender that the British commander had decided to organize an all-out sortie shortly before he was struck. This, of course, will never be known for sure since that brave commandant perished, but it is certainly in keeping with his character and conduct at Oswego.

Surrender

Anglo-American command devolved to 53-year-old Lieutenant-Colonel Littlehales, whose best years were obviously behind him. Military historian

George Stanley felt he was “an officer of little strength of will and of no great courage,” and he now called the senior officers to a council of war to consider options. Although he did not yet know it, this was exactly what Montcalm hoped for, and he had even considered a truce to discuss terms before Mercer fell. The gathered Anglo-American officers first considered that a glorious defense would be “of little purpose,” which gives an idea of their fighting mood. The notable exception was Colonel Schuyler of the New Jersey Regiment, who felt resistance should go on. However, the appearance of swarms of Canadians and Indians to the south and west now fully registered with most officers, while the engineer Mackellar conceded the place would likely fall “in a short time” to a French assault. There were naturally fears that the Indian warriors would then go on a scalping and bloody rampage, which sent shivers down the spine of many in Oswego that day. This discussion occurred even as Royal Artillery gunners were keeping up a pretty good defense on the east side. Nevertheless, Schuyler and those wishing to go on fighting were overruled, and the council of war opted to wait no longer before surrendering.



At about ten in the morning, the white flag was hoisted over Oswego and two officers came out to negotiate terms for a capitulation, “a step,” noted Montcalm, “that we had not dared to expect so soon.” All firing ceased. Montcalm sent Bougainville to tell the Anglo-Americans that “the garrison should render themselves prisoners of war and that the French troops should forthwith take possession” of Oswego. Officers were allowed to retain their personal baggage. The “Honors of War” do not appear to have been discussed, so the regiments would have had to surrender their colors and weapons. Littlehales agreed and signed the capitulation. Montcalm named Colonel Bourlamarque as commandant of Oswego; he took possession of the place with two companies of grenadiers and detachments of fusiliers from the metropolitan battalions, who relieved the sentries of the 50th, 51st and New Jersey regiments.

British casualties were estimated as comprising Lieutenant-Colonel Mercer, artillery lieutenant Hind and about 150 soldiers or sailors killed, with one major and about 30 soldiers, sailors and laborers wounded. On the fatalities, Montcalm and several other French officers noted with regret and sometimes disgust that many men had met their end while trying to escape Oswego after they heard of its surrender, and “who fell into the hands” of the allied warriors waiting to collect scalps and booty. Naturally, learning of this, Americans branded the whole operation as a “massacre” since Indians were involved, which made great propaganda and camouflaged the non-appearance of their own allied warriors in the struggle as well as the crushing defeat suffered by British and American troops.

Louis-Antoine de Bougainville (1729–1811) was Montcalm's first aide-de-camp at Oswego and in later campaigns in Canada. A brilliant scientist, he went into the navy and circumnavigated the globe between 1766 and 1769, becoming renowned for his explorations of the South Pacific and his description of Tahiti. He saw action during the American War of Independence and later became a prominent and lauded member of France's scientific community. (Print after a c.1775 portrait. Private collection. Author's photo)

French casualties were trifling according to Montcalm: “only about thirty men killed or wounded.” Officers: Desandrouin, killed; Colonel Bourlamarque and Captain de Palmarolle slightly wounded; a gunner, two metropolitan soldiers, one Canadian militiaman and one warrior killed; the rest not dangerously wounded. (As per Montcalm's *Journal*; *Etat général de ce qui a été pris à Chouagen... August 1756*, AG, A1, 3417; de Léry, “Journal du Sièg du Fort de Chouéguen” and La Pause in RAPQ.)

The prisoners were escorted into Fort Ontario to protect them from the warriors who now poured into Oswego wishing to pay themselves with booty, scalps and revenge on the redcoats. According to La Pause, they broke into warehouses where they found some rum and strangled a few patients in the hospital, and their looting encouraged some French soldiers and some Canadian militiamen to do the same. It must be recalled here that Canadian militiamen, like Indian warriors, did not receive pay, so booty was the only benefit of their conscription beyond equipment and rations. They were brought to order, but the warriors were more difficult to check and many

SURRENDERED ARMS, COLORS, AND PRISONERS

Arms and colors

7 brass cannons of 19, 14 and 12 pounds

48 iron cannons of 9, 6, 5, 4, 3 and 2 pounds

1 brass mortar of 9.4 inches

13 iron mortars of 6, 4 and 3 inches

5 iron howitzers of 6 and 3 inches

2 brass swivel guns

45 iron swivel guns

(...)

730 muskets [another 1,070 muskets were taken by Canadian militiamen and warriors as per AG, A1, 3417]

(...)

2 colors of Pepperrell's [51st] Regiment

2 colors of Shirley's [50th] Regiment

1 color of the New Jersey Regiment

British and American prisoners:

Shirley's 50th Foot: 1 lieutenant-colonel, 5 captains, 13 lieutenants, 7 ensigns, 1 chaplain, 1 surgeon, 4 volunteers, 30 sergeants, 15 drummers, 472 privates: 549 officers and enlisted men, plus 32 servants, 30 women, 4 officers' wives, 1 commissary, 1 secretary: 618

Pepperrell's 51st Foot: 5 captains, 11 lieutenants, 5 ensigns, 1 chaplain, 1 surgeon, 1 quartermaster, 1 volunteer, 28 sergeants, 13 drummers, 376 privates: 442 officers and enlisted men, plus 35 women, 23 servants: 500

New Jersey Regiment: 1 colonel, 3 captains, 2 lieutenants, 4 ensigns, 1 surgeon, 1 assistant surgeon, 11 sergeants, 6 drummers, 145 privates: 174 officers and enlisted men, plus 5 women, 9 servants: 188

Engineers: 1 chief engineer, 1 second engineer and 2 servants: 4

Artillery: 1 captain, 15 bombardiers and gunners, 3 women and 1 servant: 20

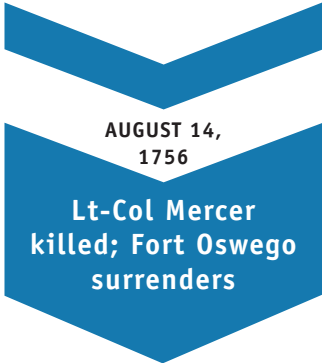
Ship's crews: 2 captains, 4 lieutenants, 1 surgeon, 89 sailors, 4 women and 6 servants: 106

Amongst the other non-combatants were 138 carpenters and laborers, 11 merchants and 3 merchant's wives, 1 storekeeper and 1 clerk for a total of 154.

The French counted a total of 1,590 prisoners of war.

looted the officers' personal effects. Bourlamarque brought more troops into Oswego, posted sentries at the arms and rations magazines, but much of the others were looted before the warriors understood they had better leave. Other French troops and militiamen were ordered to go back into their encampments and a strong guard was posted to protect the prisoners gathered in Fort Ontario. "During the night," La Pause recalled, "the warriors being drunk were skulking around [Fort Ontario] so as to kidnap a few prisoners to kill [them]. They seemed like starved wolves making horrible yells and shouts." Montcalm commented on his warriors as "this species of animal I look upon as mad dogs."

Many prisoners were transported away from Oswego the next day, and the rest in ensuing days, always under protection. The warriors meanwhile headed back to their villages. On August 16, the French troops started on the demolition of the forts, and this continued until August 21 when the great white standard of France was lowered and the French army bade farewell to Oswego. With Oswego destroyed and the Anglo-American fleet taken, Lake Ontario was totally secure, and Vaudreuil was free to transfer troops to reinforce Crown Point and Ticonderoga.



**AUGUST 14,
1756**

**Lt-Col Mercer
killed; Fort Oswego
surrenders**

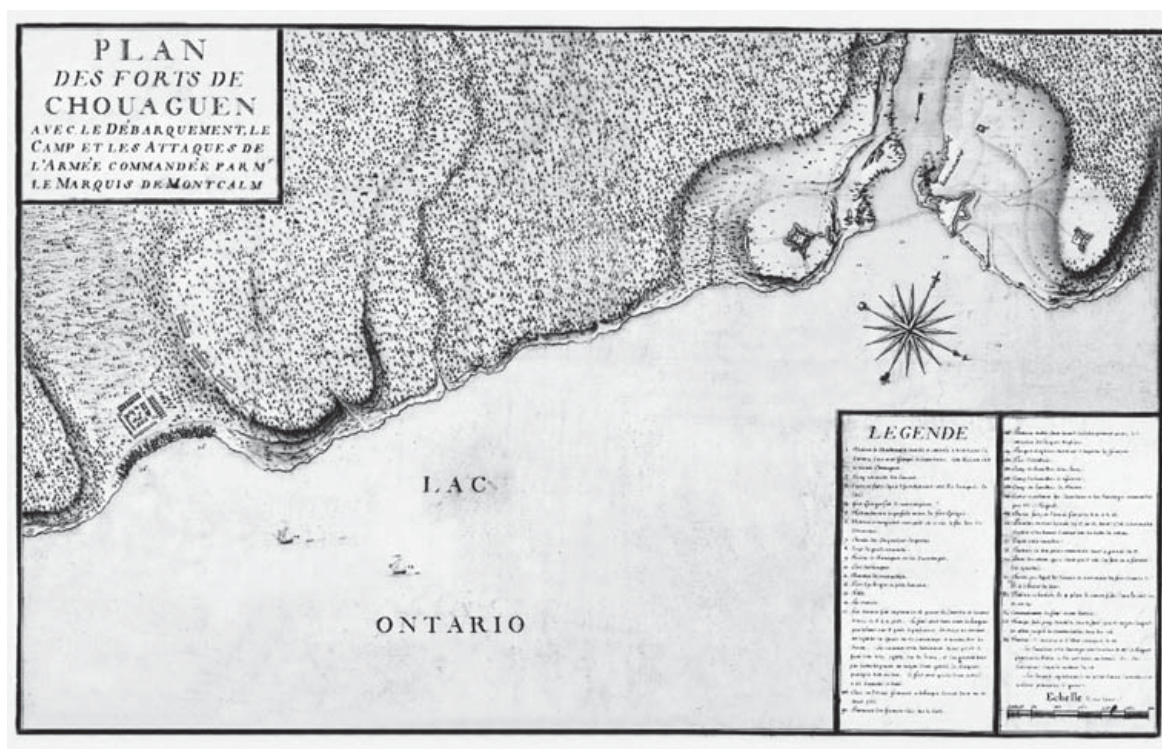
ANALYSIS

The loss of Oswego was a crushing blow to British and American conquest plans. Their only base on Lake Ontario was lost with its whole garrison and the Mohawk River valley was suddenly menaced. The Anglo-American stance turned from offensive to defensive for the rest of the year.

It was also an extraordinary operation, unlike any other up until then: a really large-sized raid featuring battalions of regular troops and artillery. A fleet of at least 200 bateaux had carefully avoided detection and the arrival of Montcalm's army was a total surprise, the hallmark of North American wilderness warfare. The siege part of the operation was, on the other hand, very European, with trenches and batteries having artillery duels. Within three days, Oswego fell. It could not have lasted much longer, even if Mercer had lived. Combining Indian raid tactics with European organization had been done since the 1680s in Canada, but the originality of the Oswego operation was to mobilize a really large force including many metropolitan soldiers, bringing a train of artillery and attacking a really large target. Considering he had just landed in Canada, Montcalm conducted it brilliantly. It was the first time it had been done, and both sides would retain the lesson.

The Anglo-American forces huddled in Oswego were woefully ill-trained to face past masters of raid warfare and even the French metropolitan regulars. The morale of the British garrison, especially the 50th and 51st regiments, was quite low according to most accounts. The infantrymen nevertheless did what they could, and one notes that the New Jersey Regiment seems to have been equal to or better than the British regulars of the 50th and 51st regiments. Lieutenant-Colonel Mercer was the heart of the defense, and his loss immediately exposed the desire to surrender already held by most of the garrison. From the defenders' perspective, the Royal Artillery gunners were clearly the most stubborn defenders of Oswego. It was said that the senior-ranking artillerymen were very upset at the capitulation.

General Montcalm revealed himself as a real leader amongst his soldiers, since he was with them directing their efforts night and day, and they



admired and respected him as a good soldier. He had a good tactical eye, moved swiftly as seen in the investment of Oswego, and tried not to expose his men needlessly. Unlike his opponents, he had been extensively involved in earlier campaigns in Europe, and this experience was put to good use at Oswego and elsewhere in the future. Montcalm is also remembered for his vindictive character and his short temper, but he was also a charismatic military leader of men, a quality given to only a few generals. He understood the comradeship of army camps and its positive effect on morale. Compared with the Anglo-Americans, the fighting spirit of his army was very good and full of optimism. He kept his ability to sustain morale, the hallmark of any great general, against all odds to his dying day three years later.

As to the immediate impact of the operation, Sir William Johnson wrote that "Oswego in our hands fortified & secured by us, & our having a navigation on Lake Ontario, was not only a curb to the power of the French that way, but esteemed by the 6 Nations, whenever they joined our arms, as a secure cover to them & their Habitations against the resentment of the French," and its loss removed a "barrier" for French and Indian raids deep into the Mohawk River valley (DHSNY, II). It was thus a resounding success for the French.

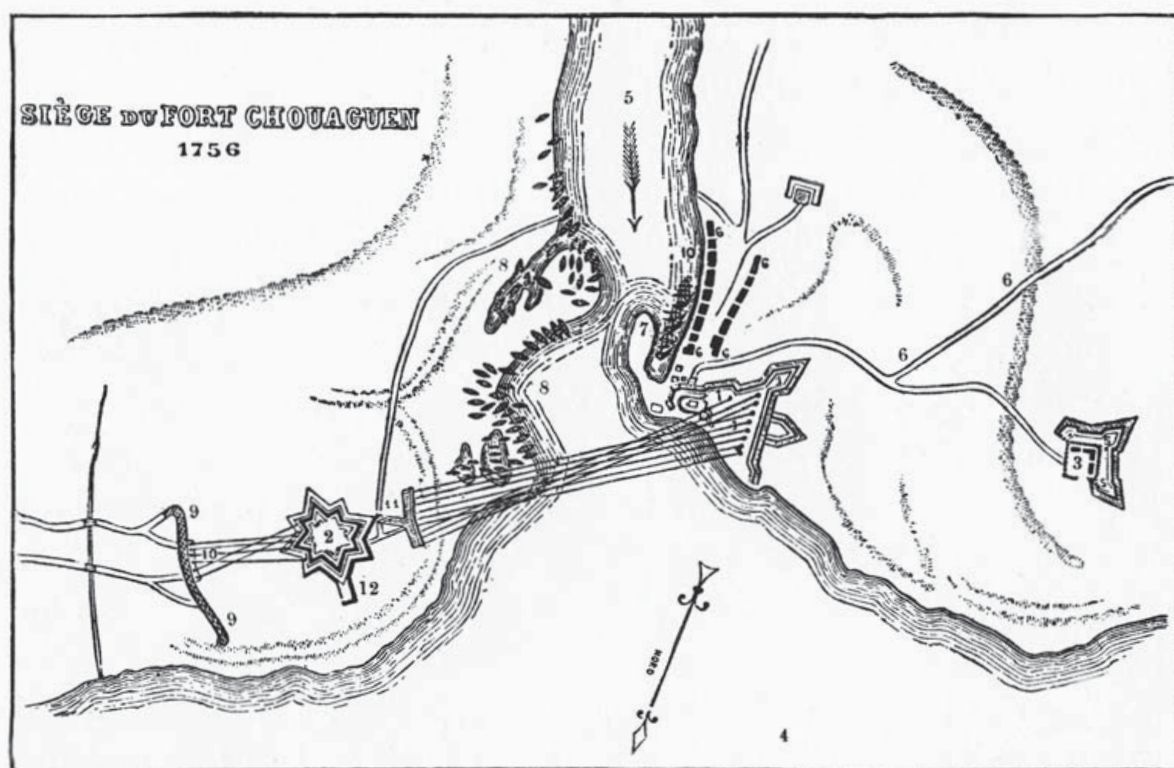
Meanwhile, Lieutenant-General John Campbell, Earl of Loudoun, had been appointed commander-in-chief of the British forces in America to replace the fallen General Braddock. He landed at New York on July 23, 1756 and arrived on July 28 in Albany to assume command. Loudoun, a professional soldier who had campaigned in Scotland between 1745 and

Plan of the forts of Oswego showing the landing, the camp, and the attacks of the army commanded by the Marquis of Montcalm, August 1756. This plan shows the French army's progress from its landing on August 10 to after its capture of Fort Ontario on August 12. The road through the woods built by the French troops is faintly indicated. (Library and Archives Canada, NMC12805)

1746 as adjutant-general, was not impressed with General Shirley's military efforts during his tenure as interim commander-in-chief, and relations between the two men quickly deteriorated. Loudoun now learned that Major-General James Abercromby, named second in command in North America, had ordered Major-General Daniel Webb with a hundred men of the 44th Regiment of Foot to reinforce Oswego with supplies following Lieutenant-Colonel John Bradstreet's report on the place. Both Abercromby and Webb had arrived in New York only during June and were just taking stock of the situation, which was less than enviable, owing in part to Shirley's ineptitude in dealing with the regular army's administration, most notably logistics. Webb was a 53-year-old experienced officer who had joined the 1st Foot Guards in 1720, gone on to serve in the 8th Dragoons from 1732 to 1755, and was made major-general in North America the following year. He had campaigned in Flanders during the 1740s, participating in such battles as Dettingen and Fontenoy. Webb's orders from Abercromby included the building of a new, larger and more respectable fort at Oswego itself, as well as another fort at Oswego Falls 12 miles (19.3km) up the river so that the place would be covered in case of an attack from the south. He was also to instill more discipline into the 50th and 51st regiments, have a large brigantine built, and inspect the forts up the Mohawk River.

This was easier said than done, especially as the British army had many logistics problems, so that it took some time for Webb and his men to gather enough supplies and leave Albany. On August 7, Webb's party was still seeking some provisions at Schenectady. On August 17, Webb and his men reached German Flatts and there learned that Oswego had been attacked. The next day, a soldier of the 50th arrived somewhat in shock from Oswego with dreadful news: it had capitulated four days earlier. He had barely escaped Indians, who killed anyone trying to escape. Oswego's fall was immediately relayed to Loudon in Albany, but it would take up to a week for Webb to receive the commander-in-chief's instructions on what to do next. There was the possibility that the French would use the bateaux captured at Oswego to ascend the waterways as far as Wood Creek at the Oneida Carry.

While this was not in Montcalm's plans, it was perfectly reasonable for the British to consider its possibility, as the French had earlier destroyed Fort Bull and now held Oswego. Therefore, Webb found that his party going to Oswego suddenly had become the first line of defense the Anglo-Americans had between Montcalm's troops and Albany. He therefore decided to advance immediately as far as the Oneida Carry to reinforce the garrisons of the small forts there, and arrived on August 20. The same day, Loudoun learned of Oswego's fall; he at once cancelled the planned Anglo-American advance on Ticonderoga. Meanwhile, Webb found about 300 men detached from the 50th and 51st with 150 men of the New Jersey Regiment at the Oneida Carry under the command of Major Charles Craven, 51st Foot. They garrisoned Fort Williams, a new Fort Wood Creek near where Fort Bull had been, as well as the new Fort Newport, and were also finishing Fort Craven. Webb had a fortified camp built to lodge his men near Fort Williams,



and now proceeded to have logs put on the portage trail to slow down any French and Indian raiders. Webb had about 400 regulars to face what appeared to be a much larger force. The bateauxmen, the men of the New Jersey Regiment, some 250 militiamen that Sir William Johnson had promised him if needed, and parties of allied Oneida warriors might double this number, but it was a rather sketchy and probably unreliable force with which to face Montcalm's numerous victorious troops, especially as many of them were regarded as past masters in wilderness warfare. Webb therefore made a questionable, but quite logical decision, to abandon the Oneida Carry and destroy its forts. On August 31, the retreat was ordered by Webb, the forts were destroyed, and the area evacuated the next day, a decision that has since been sometimes vehemently condemned by American historians.

But what was Webb to do? To move towards Oswego was suicidal, especially since there was no reliable information except accounts from terrified men whose wild tales nevertheless had to be considered. To remain at the Oneida Carry was an option, but what if it were attacked, even by just a portion of Montcalm's men? Considering that only about 250 French and Canadians had laid waste to Fort Bull in April, what could, say, a thousand such men do if they attacked this isolated area? With the fall of Oswego, the Oneida Carry had become irrelevant until a strong British and American force could move again towards Oswego. Thus Webb, who had no way of knowing what Montcalm would do, decided to withdraw his troops closer to Albany. His decision was not condoned by Loudoun, who, at the end of

Detail of the French plan of the forts of Oswego, July 1756. The location numbers are: 1: Fort Oswego; 2: Fort Ontario; 3: Fort George; 4: Lake Ontario; 5: Oswego River; 6: road of the Five Nations; 7: harbor for large boats; 8: canoe or small boat landings; 9: parallel trench started on the night of August 12–13; 10: battery of six cannons started on August 13; 11: battery of nine cannons constructed during the night of August 13–14; 12: mortar and howitzer battery started on August 14. (Private collection. Author's photo)

August, had ordered 250 men of the 42nd Highland Regiment with 50 men of Roger's Rangers to join him, but neither did the commander-in-chief appear to be especially upset at the abandonment of the Oneida Carry. Later in September, American rangers went and stayed there as a forward scouting force that could warn of any French and Indian advance. What they intercepted instead were six British deserters, two of whom were later hanged.

By early October, the season for major military operations was ending, and British apprehensions about a French move towards Albany had all but vanished. Loudoun reported to the Duke of Cumberland, commander-in-chief of the British army, that on "the Mohawk River, I have left some small posts; and am fortifying Herkemer's House, in place of building a fort" that nevertheless was known as Fort Herkimer (MA). In effect, the British and American first line of defense was now at German Flatts. On the whole, 1756 had been a bad year for the British forces, whose invasion plans had been halted to a standstill on every front while the army at Oswego had been destroyed and the Anglo-Americans expelled from their sole presence on Lake Ontario.

There was much rejoicing in Canada, including songs composed such as "J'irons à Chouagen" (I am going to Oswego) that expressed good humor. However, no one felt wildly optimistic, because it was well known that the Anglo-American colonies were far more populous than New France and thus had greater resources. To keep them on the defensive was the key, although how it was to be done would cause feuds between Vaudreuil and Montcalm. However, they both glanced with optimism at raiding the British and Americans again at a place such as Fort William-Henry, their assembly point south of Lake George.

AFTERMATH

Following the fall of Oswego, its garrison was conveyed under protection from the Indians to Quebec City and sent on to Europe to be exchanged for an equal number of French prisoners of war. The 50th and 51st had been thus almost annihilated and were ordered to be disbanded from December 1756. Lord Loudon was ordered to incorporate their detachments remaining in North America into other infantry regiments. Lieutenant-Colonel Littlehales was put on half-pay when the 50th was disbanded, and went to England where he died in October 1761. In the case of the New Jersey Regiment, the province of New Jersey raised it again.

In the following months and years, since the forts at Oswego were destroyed by Montcalm's army, the British and Americans could anticipate that the French and Indians might come back and even attempt a foray towards Albany. Raids on communities closer to Albany were possible, but do not seem to have been seriously considered. Thus, in the case of the Mohawk River, the best solution until a sizable Anglo-American force could reoccupy Oswego was to build forts to halt or delay a hostile force. However, this was not immediately done. Much of the area was barren of any British or American control, and small groups of French-allied warriors occasionally harassed the outskirts of American communities.

In the event, the war was mainly fought elsewhere during 1757. Montcalm struck again, this time at Fort William-Henry, ruining invasion plans again. A French naval squadron had also prevented an assault on Louisbourg, and nothing had occurred to dislodge the French and Indians in the Ohio. Lord Loudoun, who had a fine strategic eye, had prepared a master plan for the invasion of French Canada, but was recalled to England, while the new prime minister, William Pitt, transferred the main thrust of Britain's war effort to North America. Major-General Webb was recalled to be quartermaster-general of the British army deployed in Germany in 1758, while Lord Loudoun went on to command the British army that largely chased the Spanish out of Portugal in 1762. All of this suggests that the



Charles de Plantavit de La Pause (1721–1804) came to Canada in 1755 with the Languedoc Regiment, in which he served many years as an officer. Especially appreciated for his staff work, he was often employed as chief of staff to generals Montcalm and Lévis, and this was the case for the Oswego expedition. Back in France in 1760, he was awarded the St Louis cross, promoted onto the staff, and eventually rose to the rank of major-general. (Portrait of c.1780 in a private collection. Photo by Louis Merllié)

British government was not overly dissatisfied by their performance in North America.

Nevertheless, the British and Americans had a rude surprise in November 1757 when a large French and Indian force struck at German Flatts. Fort Herkimer (spelt in various ways including Fort Kouari by the French) was on the south shore of the Mohawk River, while the village of German Flatts was on the opposite side and had about 60 houses guarded by five small forts. When Captain François Picoté de Bellestre, leading a war party of about 300 men consisting mostly of allied warriors, arrived in the area, he chose to ignore Fort Herkimer and attack the village in a lightning early-morning raid. The five little forts surrendered after some fighting in which about 40 militiamen and inhabitants were killed, often scalped, the place looted and burned to the ground. The warriors carried off everything they could, including “nearly 150 men, women and children, among whom is the Mayor of the Village, the Surgeon and some militia officers” (DRCHSNY, X), while the French and Indians had no fatalities.

Montcalm noted with sadness in his journal that “nothing had escaped the furor” of the warriors on these “German families that seemed to have wished a sort of neutrality.” In the event, Fort Herkimer and its garrison – said to have been up to 350 men – had proven useless against a major raiding force.

To prevent such raids, Fort Stanwix, a major work, was built at the Mohawk River end of the Oneida Carry. It would serve not only as the sentinel guarding the way to Albany, but also as the staging area for British and American troops to advance towards Lake Ontario. Although Montcalm triumphed again, repulsing the greatly superior Anglo-American army at Ticonderoga in July 1758, France was hardly sending any ships or troops to New France, while tens of thousands of British regular soldiers arrived in the American colonies as well as strong squadrons of the Royal Navy. The Americans had also raised many provincial troops and put their militias on a warlike footing, so that the pressure on the French forces in North America became overwhelming. Thus Louisbourg and the Ohio fell that year. More interesting for the Oswego area was a daring raid by Lieutenant-Colonel Bradstreet, leading 3,000 men, who briefly occupied and ravaged Fort Frontenac in August 1758. The Anglo-Americans were back in Lake Ontario.

In May 1759, the British and American forces under Brigadier-General John Prideaux were moving to Lake Ontario by the Mohawk–Oneida waterways, building forts such as that at Brewerton along the way. They arrived at Oswego meeting no opposition, left 1,200 men there, and went on to take Fort Niagara on July 26. The men at Oswego proceeded to build a large new Fort Ontario with five bastions on the site of that destroyed in

1756. The new fort could mount up to 46 guns and had a ditch. Lacorne de Saint-Luc and Father Piquet led a French and Indian raiding party from La Présentation to Oswego's outskirts in early July, but found the place too strong and withdrew after several attacks. In September, Quebec City capitulated shortly after Montcalm and his opponent, James Wolfe, fell at the battle of the Plains of Abraham. The following year, three Anglo-American armies converged on Montreal. One of these gathered some 10,000 men under Lieutenant-General Sir Jeffery Amherst at Oswego in July before moving on to Montreal, which surrendered on September 8, 1760, ending the war in North America.

1758

A new fort, Fort Stanwix, is built at Oswego

The sites today

Of the three forts at Oswego, the oldest, Fort Oswego, built from 1727, was destroyed by Montcalm's army 29 years later. After the destruction of Fort Oswego, its site was used for shore batteries at the time of the American War of Independence and the War of 1812. The batteries were thereafter abandoned and the area had been totally built over with commercial and industrial businesses by the 1850s. The fort's site is said to have been at West First Street and Lake Street. It must be borne in mind that the waterfront and its immediate area has been thoroughly defaced, dug up, and filled in by industrial plants for over a century and a half. The small redoubt farther west called Fort George, built in 1755, was also destroyed a year later, and is said to have been on the site of the present Montcalm Park in a residential area farther west.

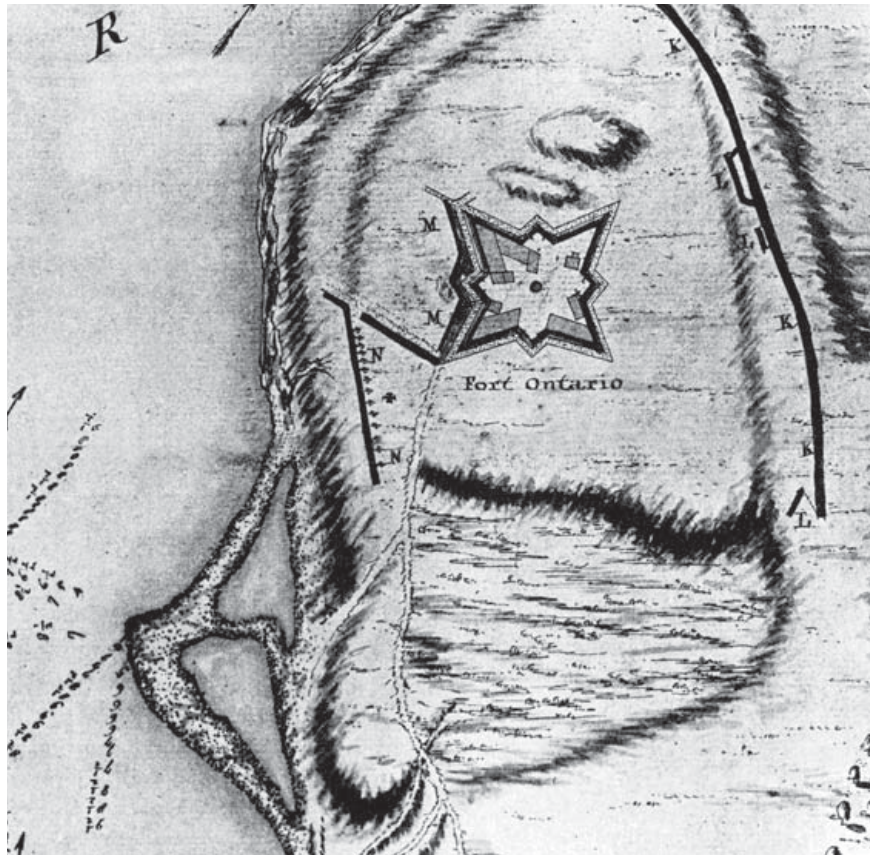
The present Fort Ontario State Historic Site is the visible evocation of Oswego's military importance during the 18th and part of the 19th centuries. Rebuilt from 1759, it remained a British outpost until 1796 when its garrison

Fort Ontario at Oswego, 1756. Detail from the plan of Oswego by Royal Engineer Patrick Mackellar. "K: Parallel begun by the French in the Evening [of August 13]. L: [French] Batterys against Fort Ontario. M: Approaches made the 13th in the Night. N: Battery en Barbette made the 13th at Night." In this last, 14 cannons and a mortar are shown. (Print after original plan. Private collection. Author's photo)

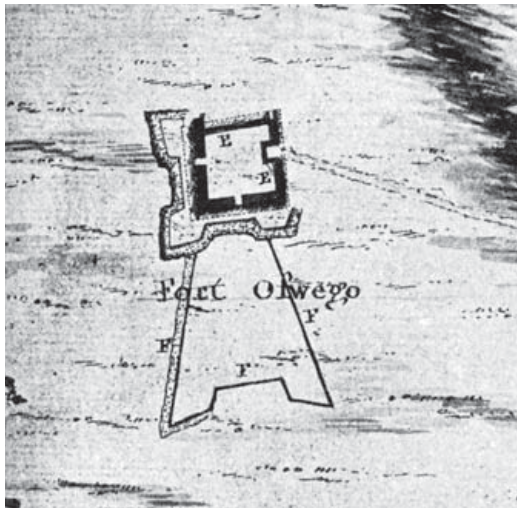


Montcalm's Crushing Blow

Fort Oswego, 1756. Detail from the plan of Oswego by Royal Engineer Patrick Mackellar. "A: Block House. B: Traders' Houses. D: Bake House. H: Carpenters Houses. I: Smith's Shop. G: Batteries of Pork Casks made the 13th [August] in the Evening. P: Dock." The hospital and "Bolting House" ("D," not shown) are farther below the traders' houses. (Print after original plan. Private collection. Author's photo)

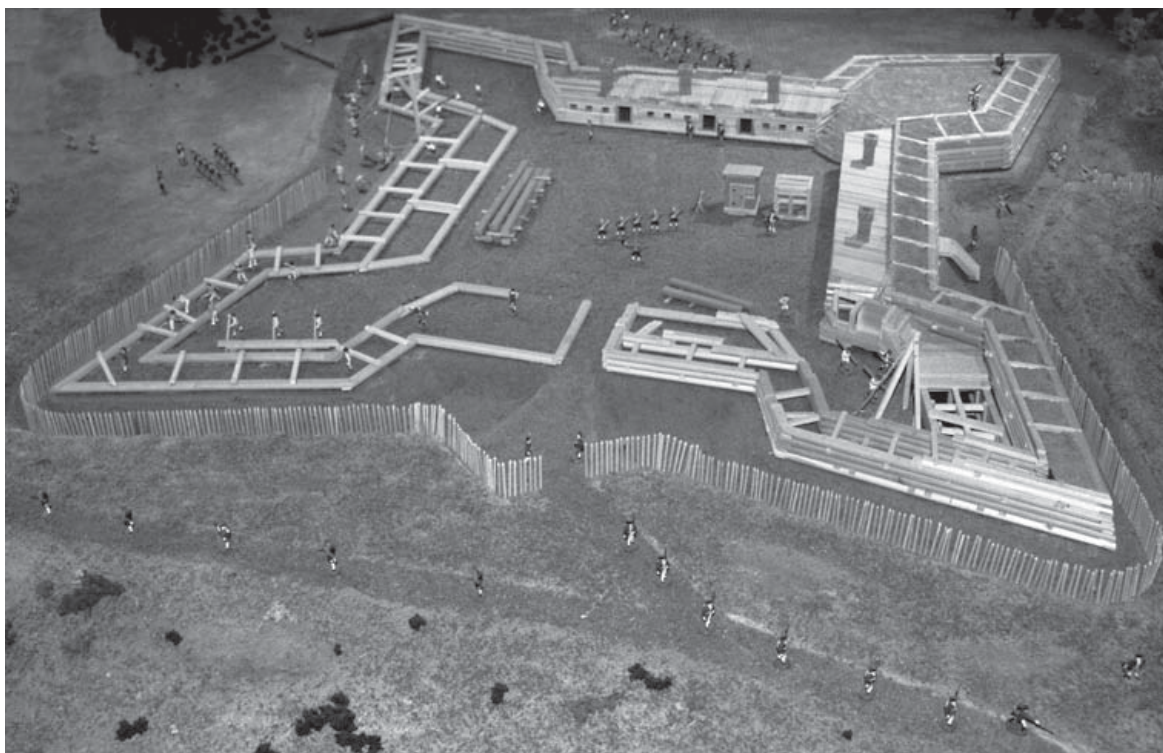


Fort George at Oswego, 1756. Detail from the plan of Oswego by Royal Engineer Patrick Mackellar. "E: Ditch within... F: Retrenchment of Do [ditto] Fort laid out on the 14th [August] in the Morning." (Print after original plan. Private collection. Author's photo)



of redcoats finally evacuated Oswego following Jay's Treaty, which settled outstanding issues regarding the frontier borders of the new American republic. The site remained abandoned after its destruction by the British and Canadian forces in 1814, but it was rebuilt as an artillery redoubt in 1839 because of rising diplomatic tensions between Great Britain and the

United States. Detachments of the regular army henceforth stood on guard. Tensions between the United States and Great Britain reached a height during the American Civil War and, in 1863, the fort was considerably strengthened and its curtain walls faced with masonry. It eventually was the home base of the 2nd Brigade of the US Army's 1st Infantry Division until June 1940, when the fort was deactivated. It was transformed into a camp for nearly a thousand German Jewish refugees during World War II. After the war, the fort became a historic site administered by New York State. It is open to visitors in the summer, seemingly thanks in good part to dedicated volunteers, and is certainly the highlight of any visit to Oswego, which has otherwise little to offer because its waterfront at the



river's entrance has been largely overrun by industries and plants. Fort Ontario and its grounds form the only haven containing a remarkable historical landmark in a setting of natural beauty in that city.

As seen above, Fort Bull blew up in 1756 and its exact location, in a wooded, wilderness area, remains something of a mystery. The remnants of Fort Wood Creek nearby consist of an outline of its earthworks, which are in constant danger of erosion and wildlife overgrowth. At one time, these remains were thought to be those of Fort Bull, and a plaque set on a rock and dedicated to Fort Bull was installed there. The flowing waters of Wood Creek just south have been reduced to a trickle because its waters were incorporated into the Erie Canal built from 1817. Indeed, the site of Fort Wood Creek is just south of Erie Canal Village, a historic site off NY State road 46/49 west of Rome, NY. Those wishing for information on many aspects of the Oneida Carry area will want to examine the fine exhibits in the interpretation center of Fort Stanwix National Monument, administered by the US National Park Service. A visit to the reconstructed fort (from the 1970s) that recreates the Fort Stanwix built from 1758 using the surviving original plans is a superbly pleasant way to see what a sizable 18th-century frontier fort was really like. The structure in Oswego's Fort Ontario would have been largely similar. Fort Stanwix National Monument is situated in the center of Rome, NY, and there is no charge to visit this fine site.

Fort Stanwix under construction, 1758. Nearly two years after Montcalm's raid on Oswego, there were fears of a substantial French and Indian attack on the Albany area, especially following the destruction of German Flatts in November 1757. This sizable fort was meant to halt and repulse any large raiding force from going farther east. (Fort Stanwix National Monument, National Park Service, Rome, NY. Author's photo)

FURTHER READING AND SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

As previously noted, this massive 1756 raid on Oswego does not appear to have been the topic of a major study on its own, although it is always mentioned in every book dealing with the Seven Years War in Canada. Yet it was General Montcalm's first action on America's soil and it was brilliantly led as well as tactically innovative. But, in a sense, Oswego was overshadowed by his future victories and tragic death. His account of the battle at Oswego as contained in his journal is the most important French source, closely followed by the engineer Desandrouin and the chief of staff La Pause. The British engineer Mackellar's account (published in Pargellis) is possibly the best English source. Various other accounts, the American ones being often much exaggerated and erroneous, are in O'Callaghan's documentary histories. The selected list of published works below gives some of the main titles used in this book.

Primary source official documents can be found in the National Archives (formerly the Public Records Office) at Kew, United Kingdom, especially in the War Office 1, 34 and 71 series and Colonial Office 5. France's Archives Nationales center for overseas documents is at Aix-en-Provence, and its Colonies section has primary source documents mostly in the B, C11A and C11B series, although some pertinent data can also be found in other sections and series such as the *Dépot des Fortifications des Colonies* for maps and plans. The Service Historique des Armées at Vincennes near Paris preserves the Archives de la Guerre whose A1 series, amongst others, has many documents concerning the operations in Canada. Copies of nearly all documents are held by Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa and many



are now available online. These archives also hold vital original documents and journals. Some have been translated into English and published, notably by E. B. O’Callaghan. The Archives Nationales du Québec à Québec was, from the 1920s until the 1960s, admirable in publishing a vast amount of its documents in its yearly *Rapport de l’Archiviste de la Province de Québec*.

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Six decades later, Fort Oswego was once again the target of a raid – but this time by British and Canadian forces against those of the independent United States, on May 6, 1814. (Print after a drawing by Captain Steele. Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library, Providence, USA. Author’s photo)

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View of Oswego, 1855. The town enjoyed rapid development and expansion after the War of 1812. The site of old Fort Oswego (at right) was built over. For protection, however, Fort Ontario (at left) was rebuilt with earth and timber and armed with large coastal guns from 1839. (Collection and photo: Library of Congress, Washington)

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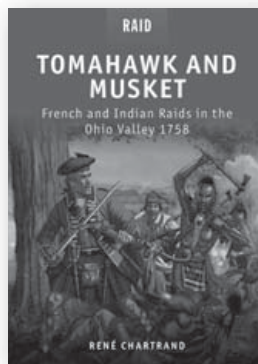
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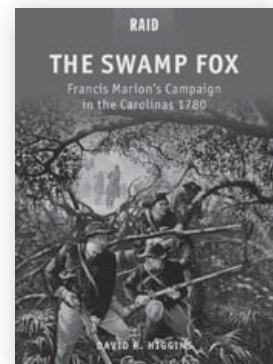
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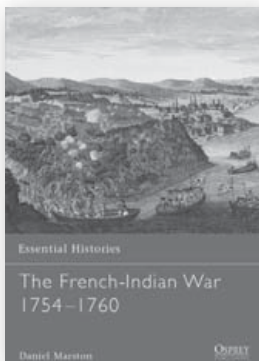


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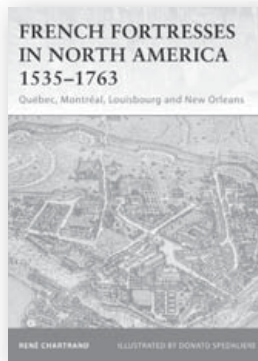


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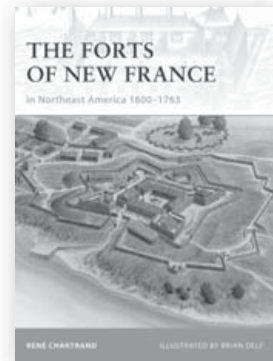
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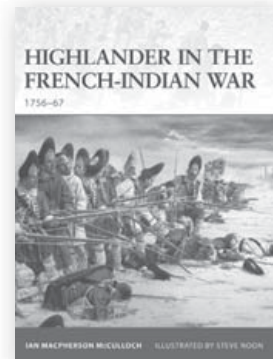
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MEASURES

Please note that the French foot is *not the same length* as the English foot. The French 12 inches is longer and is equivalent to 12.789 inch, English measure. The official French measures from 1668 to 1840 were:

2 miles make 1 lieue = 3.898km
1,000 toises make 1 mile = 1.949km (English = 1.61km)
3 toise make 1 perche = 5.847m
6 feet make 1 toise = 1.949m (English fathom = 1.83m)
12 inches make 1 foot = 32,484cm (English = 30.48cm)
12 lines make 1 inch = 2.707cm (English = 2.54cm)
12 points make the line = 2.256mm
1 point = 0.188mm

Source: Lester A. Rose, *Archeological Metrology: English, French, American and Canadian Systems of Weights and Measures for North American Historical Archeology*, Parks Canada, Ottawa, (1983), p. 77.

ABBREVIATIONS

In this text, the following abbreviations refer to the source of the document quoted:

AG: Archives de la Guerre, Service Historique des Armées, Vincennes
CO: Colonial Office, The National Archives, Kew
DHSNY: *The Documentary History of the State of New York*
DRCHSNY: *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*
MA: *Military Affairs in North America 1748–1765*
RAPQ: *Rapport de l'Archiviste de la Province de Québec*
WO: War Office, The National Archives, Kew