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"Within Ourselves..." The Development of British Light Infantry in North America During the Seven Years' War

Ian McCulloch

"...I am convinced, that till we have everything necessary, for carrying on the War here, within ourselves, Independent of Aid from this Country, we shall go on very slowly."

Lord Loudon to the Duke of Cumberland, August, 1756.

Introduction

The first British regulars to appear in North America were those accompanying a small British expedition to wrest Manhattan from the Dutch in 1664. Colonel Richard Nicolls' troops landed on Long Island 25 August 1664 at the exact site where General William Howe's troops would disembark over a century later. After a swift Dutch capitulation, Nicolls' redcoats and subsequent garrisons of British regulars would maintain a solid presence in New York for a virtually uninterrupted period of 119 years.

It has been suggested by one American historian that this factual record has been conveniently overlooked by most of his colleagues in order that "the dismal episode of Braddock's defeat" can figure prominently in history books as the first appearance of British redcoats on the North American scene. Thus "they could be made to appear as stupid brutes led by an eighteenth century Colonel Blimp while American militia simultaneously appeared as a keen and valiant yeomanry led by that paragon of all virtue and destined military hero of the fight for American liberty, George Washington."²

His accusation is a valid one, but not very surprising, as much of early American history has become firmly embedded in myth, legend and folklore. "Braddock's Defeat," "The Massacre at Fort William Henry," "The Boston Massacre" and even "George Washington's Cutting Down the Cherry Tree" have all served a variety of purposes down through the centuries. All have become part of the "usable past" and have been extensively deployed in any discussions of one of those favourite themes of North American historians -the conflict between European and colonial values and methods. Inevitably European warfare vs. North American warfare (la petite guerre) has been drawn into the mythic vortex.3 Canadian historian I.K. Steele writes that "North American pride in the ways of the New World has often led to the assumption that, in warfare as in everything else, the new men of the New World were better than the history-laden men of the Old." Braddock's defeat more than any other engagement of the Seven Years' War has, "with some misrepresentation," been used as key evidence to support this assumption of superiority. 4 Stanley Pargellis reinforces this view:

Military historians hold that Braddock's defeat taught a lesson badly needed for the time; you cannot employ parade ground tactics in the bush. To almost everyone who in one connection or another remembers Braddock, this episode stands as a conflict between Old World and New World ways, with the outcome justifying the new.⁵

However, many historians led by Pargellis, with Paul Koppermans, Ian Strachan, and Steele in close support, stress that Braddock's defeat can no longer be perceived or used as such.6 While broad generalizations about the utility of close-order formations in woods or the cunning and ruthlessness of Indian tactics or the command abilities of the young Washington may all be still true, they are not true as inferences from Braddock's defeat. The general consensus now is that Braddock's debacle was precipitated in large part by his critical neglect on the day of battle to observe the fundamental rules of war laid down in the European manuals of the day. His leadership lapse and complacency once nearing his objective meant that his soldiers were never given a chance to demonstrate that Old World methods, properly applied, might have very well won the day.7 His column from the day it launched into the North American wilderness adopted well-conceived and generally well-executed security measures as per the manuals. On the day however, these careful measures were inexplicably not ordered nor implemented by Braddock and his staff and their absence was enough to ensure the ruin of their army and give British officers a reputation for ineptitude under frontier conditions.8

This reputation is undeserved, for British regulars took especial care to prepare themselves for the American theatre, including Braddock and subsequent commanders. After Braddock's defeat no inferior guerilla force would ever overcome any substantial body of British regulars during the Seven Years' War in North America.

"BB" - Before Braddock

The first English settlers in Virginia and New England arrived with a minimum of professional military support. In 1607, the Jamestown settlers heeding Captain John Smith's advice formed "...immediately into three groups: one to erect fortifications for defence, one to serve as a guard and to plant a crop, a third to explore." They encountered hostile Indians almost immediately and, for many decades, had to rely on standing militia forces.

Ironically, this ancient British tradition of the militia, on the decline in England since Oliver

Cromwell's time, took on a new vitality in America. Each colony, as it became established, was obliged to create its own militia for protecting and extending its frontiers. Cooperation amongst the militias of the various colonies was confined to specific expeditions in which two or more colonies had a mutual interest. Organized into units by county or township, the militia rarely fought as formed units. Instead, the local unit served as a training and mobilization base from which individuals could be selected for active operations. ¹⁰

The effectiveness of the colonial militias varied from bad to very good, their prowess increasing proportionately to their proximity to the Indian frontier and the no-man's-land between New England and New France. The seventy year struggle for the North American continent commencing in 1689 consisted, in fact, of four separate wars. The first three: the War of the League of Hapsburg (1689-1697), the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1713) and, the War of the Austrian Succession (1744-1748), were fought by the colonists of both mother countries using colonial methods and military resources to hand. The French utilized their Indian allies from the outset and armed them with muskets. The American frontier militias were thus forced to assimilate the best features of Indian tactics in order to effectively counter their enemy: small-unit operations, loose formations, informal dress, swift movement, fire discipline, ambush and surprise attack. Aided by a greater population base and their own Indian allies, many American frontiersmen became adept at marksmanship, a skill which increased as more accurate weapons were developed.11

Russell Weigley, an American military historian, states, however, that "as the frontier receded, the inhabitants of older communities gradually lost their skills in shooting, forest lore, and Indian fighting. More and more the militia of long-settled communities had to rely not on frontier experience but on European military manuals to guide them in their training." Orthodoxy advanced to such an extent that at the outbreak of the Seven Year's War (The French and Indian War to the Americans), militia commanders were being advised by Colonel Washington to study war from Humphrey Bland's *Treatise on Military Discipline*, the leading



Above: Indian auxilliary with scalp, by Brigadier General George Townshend, ca.1759.

(Author's collection)

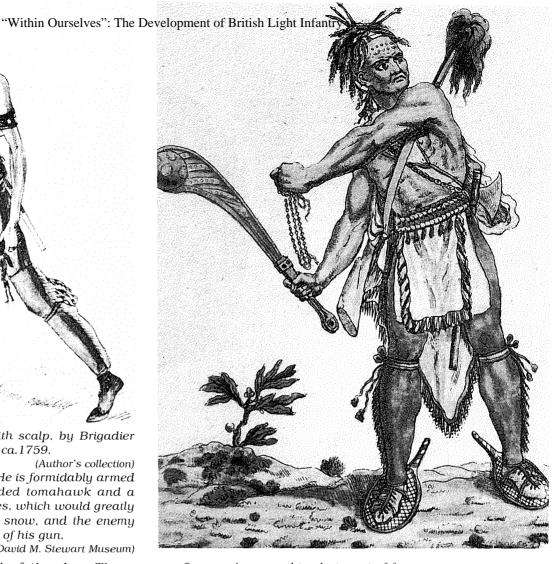
Right: An Iroquois Warrior. He is formidably armed with a ball club, iron-headed tomahawk and a flintlock. Note the snowshoes, which would greatly increase his mobility in the snow, and the enemy scalp draped over the barrel of his gun.

(David M. Stewart Museum)

English tactical manual of the day. These recommendations were no doubt based on Washington's less than charitable opinions of colonial militiamen as expressed in 1755:

Militia, you will find...never answer your expectations, no dependence is to be placed on them; they are obstinate and perverse, they are egged on by the officers, who lead them to acts of disobedience, and when they are ordered to certain posts for the security of stores, or the protection of the inhabitants, will, on a sudden, resolve to leave them, and the united vigilance of their officers can not prevent them.13

Washington was not under any illusions either of their utility in forest warfare against the French Indian auxiliaries. He wrote that "without Indians, we shall never be able to cope with those cruel foes to our country. Indians are the only match for Indians; and without these, we shall ever fight on unequal terms."14 His views on colonial militia pre-dated one British writer who wrote in 1758:



Our people are nothing but a set of farmers and planters, used only to the axe and hoe -[the Canadians] are not only well trained and disciplined, but they are used to arms from their infancy among Indians; and are reckoned equal, if not superior in that part of the world to veteran troops...These [Canadians] are troops that fight without pay - maintain themselves in woods without charges march without baggage - and support themselves without stores and magazines...15

In general, the colonial militias before Braddock were not useful unless fighting directly in defence of their own homes and families. Colonial expansion was mostly accomplished by simple appropriation and settlement - or dubious purchases and deals rather than through any coordinated military action by militias. Weigley concludes that "in general, the colonial militias were not a reliable instrument of offensive war distant from their own firesides....Militia training did not prepare them for extended campaigns, nor did militia organization befit the maintenance of long expeditions."16 Thus, a long campaign to distant fields that also involved meeting Indian tactics of stealth and ambuscade, was one for which colonial militias (except ranger units recruited exclusively from frontiersmen) were eminently unsuited and, moreover, one in which they were unwilling to participate. Governor Robert Dinwiddie, however, knew where to find men to meet the challenge. He wrote to his friend James Abercromby in England: "I am still of Opinion without force from Home, we shall hardly be able to drive the French from the Ohio; we want Military Men, and particularly Ingineers."17

Were the "Military Men," the British regulars, equal to the task? Were they capable of waging protracted campaigns in a virtual wilderness against elusive adversaries well-versed in all aspects of irregular warfare? Some perhaps were not prepared for the ruthless savagery of scalping and cannibalism encountered, but many soldiers and their officers were well inured to irregular warfare and skirmishing either from experiences in Scotland or on the battlefields of Europe.

Various scholars argue that the modified integrated infantry tactics that came to dominate European battlefields from the middle of the 1790s were primarily an organic European development extending over the previous century. These developments slowly but gradually combined the techniques of linear formations with those of irregular auxiliaries (Pandours, Croats, Rangers et al), with regular specialists in open order who were already members of the line (light companies) and with elite units such as jaegers and chasseurs. Colonial experience, they argue, tended only to reinforce existing trends already in train and not to initiate them. 18 The historical record bears this out, though it will be seen that all three developments simultaneously occurred within the British infantry in North America during the Seven Years' War.

The War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748) and the Jacobite Rebellion (1745-1746) were the training grounds for most of the British

Marshal Maurice de Saxe, one of the "Great Captains" of 18th century warfare, was a proponent of light infantry tactics.

(Print after a 1748 portrait by Quentin

de La Tour. Photo: R. Chartrand.)

officers who served in North America during the Seven Years' War. It was the former war in which irregular troops were first employed on a large scale by modern armies. ¹⁹ In 1740-1741, the young Austrian Empress, Maria Theresa, mobilized her Croatian and Hungarian military borders (or buffer zones) created to protect her empire from the Ottoman Empire. The Serb-Croat and Pandour troops thus

generated were then moved to the central front for the first time in an attempt to eject Frederick the Great's troops from Silesia. They performed invaluable service in every campaign and by 1744 Field Marshal Traun had successfully forced the Prussians out of Bohemia by constant attacks on Frederick's supply lines and by harassing his forage parties. Over 40,000 Serbo-Croatian "Grenzer" would serve in the Hapsburg armies during the War, increasing to about 88,000 during the Seven Years' War. These fierce "irregulars" were usually dispatched on independent operations against enemy outposts, supply centres and lines of communication, but some-times played a small part on the battlefield as sharpshooters posted on the flanks.20

The French army adapted to this new aspect of warfare from the outset. The Bohemian campaign brought Maurice de Saxe to the fore, a subordinate general who, based on his extensive experience with light troops in Eastern Europe and as an author of the first modern treatise to deal with the subject, raised a number of compagnies franches or "free companies" of the French Army in 1744. He eventually commanded five regiments of light troops during the campaign, each combining infantry and cavalry operating together. At Fontenoy in 1745, Saxe used his light troops on the battlefield itself, sending a screen of skirmishers against the British centre while he deployed his army. He also stationed Monsieur de Grassin's new 1200strong Regiment des Arquebusiers on his left where their deadly independent fire or feu de

The Chevalier Claude de Grassin led the most outstanding light corps during the Austrian Succession War, the Arquebusiers de Grassin which existed from 1744 to 1749.

(Print after portrait attributed to Duplessis. Photo: R. Chartrand.)

chasseur repulsed a British attempt on that flank. Major-General J.F.C. Fuller writes that "Grassin's troops were the first true light infantry of modern times, behaving splendidly at Fontenoy and deciding the battle of Mesle.²¹ Saxe also used them at Lauffeldt, against the British, who quickly gained a great deal of respect for this eighteenth century commander and studied his writings on war carefully.²²

Flanders, where British soldiers fought principally against French troops, exemplified the same type of fighting that had characterised warfare in Germany, Bohemia, Sardinia and Italy. The traditional operations and ponderous movements of armies, convoys detachments between the set-piece battles and sieges were being increasingly affected by the activities of irregulars in all theatres of operations. Professionals in all armies recognised that by the end of the 1740s, irregular light troops and regular light infantry had a role in wartime, if only to defend one's own forces against those of the enemy. The British forces in Flanders were, therefore, directly and continuously exposed to these new tactical developments as practised by ally and enemy alike.

The Jacobite Rebellion of 1745-1746 presented the British Army with some very special problems of fighting in mountainous terrain against a very agile, mobile and hardy adversary. Highland clans were well-versed in the guerilla raid, stealth and surprise and many British commanders including Wolfe and Bland were complimentary about their warlike skills and tactical acumen. Fuller goes so far as to say that the Black Watch in their first iteration were an "irregular police" who, wise in the ways of the Highlands, were the best-equipped light troops to deal with Highland raiders and

robbers.²³ By Fontenoy, however, the Black Watch were a regular heavy

infantry regiment of the line, albeit equipped with a uniform that allowed them greater mobility as well as broadswords and Highland pistols for closequarter fighting.²⁴

It was open field tactics at Falkirk and Prestonpans by the Highlanders, however, and not the irregular warfare that flared up on the periphery of the Rebellion, that defeated the conventional British infantry of the day. In early 1746, British forces found themselves engaged in constant

irregular warfare; the Chevalier de Johnstone, a Jacobite staff officer who served with the Marquis de Montcalm at Quebec, remarked that "Lord Loudon with his (Highland) corps frequently harassed and annoyed us...keeping us continually on the alert." However, Jacobite general Lord George Murray's counter moves drove Loudon's men away from their base at Inverness allowing Murray to emerge and launch a series of surprise attacks on Cumberland's outposts and supply lines. Johnstone believed that "this bold enterprise had a very good effect, and made such an impression on the English that, conceiving themselves insecure everywhere, they were obliged to redouble their service in the midst of winter."25

Many Highlanders however soon came to respect the ability of the English infantry or "red soldiers" to function in mountainous terrain and the professional behaviour of its commander. On one occasion, General Bland, author of the widely-used Treatise on Discipline, marched with a force of regular horse and foot, screened with a force of "Campbells before him" as well as "the Laird of Graunt [sic] and 100 of his followers." Surrounded by fog, Bland received word back of a possible ambush ahead. He halted his column, took up defensive positions and sent a heavily-armed detachment forward to investigate. On the "all clear," Bland went forward again assuming his previous march discipline.26

"AB" - After Braddock

British commanders after Braddock found that war in North America was essentially one of geography with such vast problems of communication and supply that their principal task of generalship was simply in moving a force of moderate size into contact with the enemy. With the French on the strategic defensive, it was the British and Americans who had to penetrate hundreds of miles into trackless and unsettled country.

American historians, John Shy and Pargellis have underlined the problems of administration and logistics throughout the War, and agree that the aptitude of a few individuals for strategy and tactics cannot be an adequate explanation of success or failure in the North American conflict. Shy observes that "the forces of nature were so nearly overwhelming that the French and Indian War had to be a war of organisation and administration. It was a siege on a grand scale."²⁷ Essential auxiliaries needed by any general aspiring to take New France by the Lake Champlain route included bateauxmen, artillery and, especially, engineers. In Pargellis'



estimation, the requirement also included "a small mobile force of trained officers and men, with enough reserves to garrison captured posts and maintain a lengthening line of communication. In brief, the British needed a small, highly trained army of experts, some of whom could only be found in the colonies."²⁸

This, then, sets the stage for the arrival of Braddock who has already been discussed and provides our starting point. Shy notes that "American conditions weighted the classic tension of warfare – boldness versus caution, surprise versus security – in favour of the cautious approach. Only bad luck could nullify the natural English superiority, and only rashness or faulty logistics could enhance the possibility of bad luck." ²⁹ Braddock had crippling supply problems, then lost his battle through a single careless act. To future commanders the message was clear: leave nothing to chance and take no risks.

Braddock's successor was John Campbell, Earl of Loudon, a Highlander officer well-versed in irregular warfare from service during the Jacobite Rebellion. Loudon's immediate task was to build a serviceable army from the remains of Braddock's regiments, garrison soldiers, provincials, and new units from Britain, as well as creating a logistical system during 1756-1757 that would form the basis of ultimate victory. With Braddock's defeat fresh in everyone's memory, Loudon was deeply concerned with how his troops would fare in "the Bush fight in which the [French] have so great an advantage by their Canadians and Indians." Loudon was of the opinion in late 1756 that "it is impossible for an Army to act in this Country without Rangers," the latter a group of experienced frontiersmen raised by William Shirley the year before for reconnaissance and patrolling duties.30 Led by Robert Rogers, the Rangers were Americans, but must not be confused with the American provincial or militia regiments. Pargellis writes:

It is an easy fashion today to imagine that every colonial was an adept in Indian warfare, or that if they could not all follow a trail with Deerslayer's

Major Robert Rogers, commander of a unit that specialized in irregular warfare and bush fighting. (Author's Collection) McCulloch: "Within Ourselves": The Development of British Light Infantry in

Private, 60th Regiment of Foot (Royal Americans), ca.1755-1763. The regimentals consisted of red coat and waistcoat, without the usual decorative lace trimmings, blue coat cuffs, lapels, turnbacks and breeches, pewter buttons, tricorn with white lace and black cockade. Buff leather accoutrements and armed with musket and bayonet. The white gaiters were for dress parades. Brown "marching" gaiters or green Indian-style leggings with red garters were otherwise used.

(Print after reconstruction by P.W. Reynolds. Photo: R. Chartrand.)

adeptness at least they knew some tricks of the woods and could take care of themselves. That is a fond delusion. Loudon would have been only too glad if it had been true, if he could have depended on colonial woodsmen to provide for his command in America what British troops could not provide – a knowledge of the region and of Indian fighting....But most of the provincial army came from long-settled communities which had never seen an Indian in war-paint...³¹

Loudon's gloomy letter crossed one from the Duke of Cumberland advising Loudon to "teach your troops to go out on Scouting Parties; for 'till Regular Officers with men that they can trust, learn to beat the woods, and to act as Irregulars, you will never gain any certain Intelligence of the Enemy." Loudon decided to use a combination of regulars and rangers. Regulars were trained to face both French regulars and irregulars (Canadians and Indians).

Of particular note is Loudon's surviving 1756 training directive to his four battalion commanders of the Royal American Regiment (60th Foot), a new regiment raised in America of which he was the first Colonel-Commandant. The Royal Americans were ordered to dress exactly like line regiments of the British army less regimental lace but to train specifically for their proposed role in forest warfare. Instructions included firing "at Marks, and in order to qualify them for the Service of the Woods, they are to be taught to load and fire, lyeing on the Ground and kneeling. They are to be taught to march in order, slow and faste in all sorts of Ground. They are frequently to pitch & fold up their Tents and to be accustomed to pack up and carry their necessities in the most commodious manner."33



Bush tactics and dress were soon put into practise. British soldiers acting as a covering party or vanguard learned to march in single file; if they fell into an ambush, the command "Tree all" was given and every man found a tree and looked out for himself. Various suggestions were made from time to time to make the regular troops better fitted for the American milieu: George Scott of the 40th (and later Amherst's and Wolfe's commander of Rangers at Louisbourg and Quebec respectively) devised plans to lighten equipment and reduce firing motions: James Prevost another Swiss-born Royal American battalion commander who shared with countrymen Henri Bouquet and Frederick Haldimand a penchant for "la petite guerre," went so far as to advocate the formation of strictly American regiments, clothed for the wilderness, armed with short, light guns, trained General Jeffery Amherst

(Author's Collection)

to swim, run and leap obstacles in obedience to the blast of the whistle, and to be accompanied by dogs for chasing the Indians.³⁴

Loudon, acting on Cumberland's advice, sent 56 volunteer gentlemen from all of his regular regiments to Robert Rogers for intensive training on all aspects of irregular warfare and "bush fighting." According to Rogers, Loudon ordered him to instruct his charges "to the utmost of my power in the ranging discipline, our methods of marching, retreating, ambushing and fighting, etc. that they might be the better qualified for any future services against the enemy we had to contend with...."35

Loudon's intentions in training regulars was to turn them into a regular "light infantry corps" according to Pargellis. Major General James Abercromby, Loudon's second-in-command and destined to succeed him a few months later, was openly supportive of the plan. He wrote that "the present Rangers...might be reduced or brought down to reasonable terms of pay if a light infantry Corps was established which I am confident would discharge all the functions of Rangers in a short time, better than those in your present pay." In December 1757, however, Loudon substituted this plan with the creation of a regiment of lightly-armed infantry, "Gage's Light Infantry" or the 80th Foot. Pargellis writes:

The importance of this move in the history of irregular warfare is very great; it was the natural and inévitable failure of the provincial rangers to fulfil the function of acting as irregular troops. Gage's regiment constituted the first definitely light-armed regiment in the British army; the firelocks issued to them were "cut shorter and the stocks dressed to make them lighter" Composed as far as possible of woodsmen, it was officered by men who [were trained in] Rogers' methods and were also trained in regular discipline. After two years experience with local devices, the British army took partly into its own hands the function deemed to be most peculiarly American.³⁸

Loudon fell from grace at the same time as Cumberland did in England and was replaced by Abercromby in the winter of 1757-1758.

William Pitt knew Abercromby to be weak and thus ensured the Commander-in-Chief was well-seconded by the dynamic and well-loved Brigadier Lord George Augustus Howe. Howe was described by Wolfe as "that great man" and "the best soldier in the British army." American historian Francis Parkman claims it was Howe that "broke through the traditions of the service and gave it new shapes

to suit the time and place." Howe studied forest warfare and joined Rogers's Rangers on several raiding parties,

sharing all their hardships and making himself one of them. The reforms he introduced were the fruits of this rough imposed schooling. British officers and men were ordered to "throw off all useless encumbrances, cut their hair close, wear leggings to protect them from briers, brown the barrels of their muskets, and carry in their knapsack 30 pounds of meal." Until his untimely death during the approach march on Ticonderoga in 1758, this veteran officer of Flanders (and de facto ground commander of troops in North America) effectively used rangers and light infantry to reconnoitre enemy positions, screen the advance of heavy columns, protect those columns while preparing for the assault, and in guarding the retreat.40

General Jeffery Amherst replaced Abercromby in autumn 1758 after the Ticonderoga debacle, and, like Loudon and Howe, he formed and used light infantry units and continued to adapt the arms and equipment of the regulars to wilderness conditions. He ordered all regular battalion commanders in the winter of 1758-1759 "to practise their men at firing at marks, whenever the weather permitted; to form a company of men from each regiment, and those to be the most active, with Proper Officers: These to be called the light infantry of the regiments they belonged to..." They were also to be "dressed agreable [sic] to the pattern given by the General, and armed with a carbine and

(McCord Musseum)

bayonet only."41 Amherst's younger brother and ADC, William Amherst, admired the active professionalism of these particular regulars and wrote in his journal that the "Light Infantry are certainly of great use & should always accompany than Army in this country, as these troops drive them out of their shelter, harass them continually& treat them in their way."42

By spring 1760, such was the high calibre of training and skill of these troops that General Amherst confidently sent his newlypromoted brother to the forefront of his force to Major-General James Wolfe command these elite troops on the advance to Montreal. The

young Amherst proudly wrote that on one forward reconnaissance-in-force "we lost our way [back] & did not reach the Camp until after dark, through swamps & the thickest wood we could meet with." He confessed to be glad of it "as it shewed the temper of the Corps, expecting to lay out all night, without any covering or anything to eat or drink. The bon volonté and cheerfulness I had before met with amongst them still subsisted, & I conceive they know no difficulties. It is a pleasure serving with such a Corps."43

Major-General James Wolfe, who served as one of Amherst's brigadiers at Louisbourg, shared his superior's belief in the utility of light infantry in North America. Wolfe was an energetic reformer in dress, tactics and training of regulars to meet the irregular warfare he knew would plague the peripheries of his siege camps around Quebec. Wolfe ordered that the ad hoc companies of light infantry, first started at Louisbourg by Amherst, remove their lace for his pending campaign against Quebec. In addition, their heavy redcoats were to be discarded in favour of their waistcoats with the sleeves of their frock coats sewn on as well as extra pockets for ball and flint. Knapsacks were to be carried higher and fastened with "a strap of web over the shoulders, as the Indians carry their pack." Cartridge boxes were to be carried hung under the left arm, powder horns issued and slung on the right, and tomahawks hung from the belt.

The Light Infantryman's large tricorn hat was to be cut down into a cap "with as much black cloth added as will come under his chin and keep him warm when he lies down."44

Wolfe's professionalism and common sense was born of experience in Germany and Flanders where he served from 1742 to 1745. In 1746 he saw action at Falkirk and Culloden and had held a small independent command in hostile territory of the southern Highlands. Returning to Flanders the following year, he was wounded at Lauffeldt and, when subsequently promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel of the

20th Foot, found himself with his regiment on garrison duties in Scotland and southern England. During that time he established himself as one of the best trainers in the contemporary British army for men and officers alike. Whereas most British regiments attached little importance to target practise, Wolfe was a firm believer in marksmanship being a decisive combat multiplier before ever setting foot in North America; in 1755, he wrote from Scotland to a friend:

We fire bullets continually, and have great need of them...Marksmen are nowhere so necessary as in a mountainous country; besides, firing balls at objects teaches the soldier to level incomparably, makes the recruit steady, and removes the foolish appréhension that seizes voung soldiers when they first load their arms with bullets. We fire first singly, then by files, 1,2,3, or more, then by ranks, then lastly by platoons; and the soldiers see the effect of their shot especially at a mark, or upon water. We shoot obliquely, and in different situations of ground, from heights downwards and contrarywise.45

Wolfe was a new breed of British army officer who had made a thorough study of his military profession, reading classical works, engineering and drill texts, Marshal Saxe and, especially, the latest French contemporary treatises on "la petite guerre." Writing in 1756 to a friend seeking expert advice and instruction for his brother Colonel Henri Bouquet

entering the army, Wolfe recommended the aspiring officer to read, amongst others, "the Comte de Turpin's book [Essai sur l'Art de la Guerre, Paris, 1754]... and a little volume entitled "Traite de la petite Guerre," that your brother should take in his pocket when he goes upon out-duty and detachments."46

Wolfe, on his return from Louisbourg, was told by Pitt that he would command the Quebec Expedition and immediately set about gathering a cadre of experienced officers for his Light Infantry Corps. He wrote to Lord Sackville:

Carden the American has a (Author's Collection) great deal of merit, but wants bread to eat. He is an excellent fellow for the woods....He is bold, circumspect and more artful than his appearance bespeaks – has experience in the method of the American war beyond anybody that I can hear of; I hope we shan't lose such a subject so particularly adapted to this sort of work.⁴⁷ regula irregularity talente.

From the time Wolfe's army landed on the lle d'Orlean and established fortified camps around Quebec, the army's movements were well-protected and screened by light infantry and rangers. Wolfe's orders to his light infantry were explicit and succinct and, as the summer progressed, the intensity of the irregular warfare increased to a point where Brigadier George Townshend wrote that it was "A Scene of Skirmishing, Cruelty and Devastation. It is War of the Worst Shape."⁴⁸

Wolfe's Light Infantry were also instrumental in assisting the main body to get up and onto the plains of Abraham to conduct the main battle. They landed first, took Vergor's Camp and the Samos battery (both guarding the Foulon Cove) in reverse then, guided the main body to the battlefield. These important duties completed, they spent the rest of the battle guarding the vulnerable rear (Bougainville's force of 2,000 men was at Cap Rouge) of Wolfe's army and actually taking post in the line on the embattled left flank where a cloud of Canadien and Indian

irregulars harassed the British army with great success. After the collapse and complete rout of the

French regulars from the field, this same group of French irregulars inflicted numerous casualties on the British line regiments who broke ranks to pursue their regular adversaries. It was only when the Light Infantry moved forward and the line regiments reformed into company-sized groups that they were finally able to clear this last menace from the battlefield."49

Thus during the Quebec campaign, we have the synthesis of the "trained" light infantryman – a disciplined,

regular soldier – proficient in all aspects of irregular warfare but capable of falling back into line during a set-piece battle. This multitalented British light infantry under Howe and Wolfe at Quebec anticipated by three decades the French light companies of the Napoleonic period, the latter described by Peter Paret as "a new all-purpose infantry, in which each soldier could fight in the line, in column, as a skirmisher, and on detached missions."⁵⁰

The last refinement and proof of the developmental progress of the British light infantry during the Seven Years' War was to occur at an obscure spot in the Pennsylvanian wilderness. At Bushy Run, a small force of regular soldiers comprising the light and grenadier companies of the Black Watch, Royal Americans and Montgomery's Highlanders under Colonel Henri Bouquet decisively routed a much larger Indian force utilizing company manoeuvre and small unit tactics. Their commander was an experienced Swiss officer, recruited from the Dutch service to be one of the four original Royal American battalion commanders. Bouquet had devoted his training abilities to "combining the qualities of a scout with the discipline of a trained soldier" in all soldiers coming under his command. During his seven years in theatre he had strived to develop his men literally as "hunters" (a direct translation of the German "Jaegers") so they would be as adept as their Indian and coureur de bois adversaries. Bouquet reminded readers in his personal account of the Bushy Run engagement and subsequent campaign that there wasn't "anything new or extraordinary in this way of fighting which seems to have been common to most Barbarians" and offered numerous examples, not only from antiquity, but from his own personal experiences in Europe, pointing to light infantry formations such as those raised by Marshal de Saxe and Frederick the Great."51 Fuller wrote that Bouquet "studied Indian warfare not to copy it...but to discover its nature so that he might devise a system of tactics whereby he could destroy it."52 Bouquet identified general maxims that could apply to all Indians and coureur de bois. First they always "...surround their enemy. The second, that they fight scattered, and never in a compact body. The third that they never stand their ground when attacked, but immediately give way, to return to the charge." It followed then:

1st. That the troops destined to engage Indians must be lightly cloathed, armed and accoutred.
2nd. That having no resistance to encounter in the attack and defence, they are not to be drawn

up in close order, which will only expose them without necessity to a greater loss.

And, lastly, that all their evolutions must be performed with great rapidity; and the men enabled by exercise to pursue the \parallel enemy

closely, when put to flight, and not give them time to rally.⁵³

Bouquet's training program gave specific attention to items such as clothing, arms, training, construction of camps and settlements, logistics and tactical manoeuvres to meet most contingencies. Under his tutelage, the company replaced the battalion as the unit of manouevre, troops learned snapshooting, to fire from the prone and kneeling positions, wheeling on the run over broken terrain, swimming, marching on snowshoes, etc. An American provincial observing Bouquet's training regimen in 1758 before the march by General Forbes on Fort Dusquesne wrote: "Every afternoon he exercises his men in the woods and bushes in the manner of his own invention, which will be of great service in an engagement with Indians."⁵⁴

It was not until Bushy Run in 1763 during Chief Pontiac's Indian uprising, however, that he got his chance. Quickly forming a disciplined defensive perimeter on the first day, Bouquet feigned a weakness in his line on the second day to lure the Indians forward. Then, utilising terrain – a gully of dead ground – Bouquet sent two light companies up to hit the massing attackers from the right flank. Completely surprised, the Indians were driven at the point of the bayonet across the frontage of two other companies waiting in ambush – who opened fire with deadly precision. The Indians were completely routed.

Bushy Run was a decisive action, in spite of the small numbers engaged, as it proved to be the turning point in putting down Pontiac's Uprising. It had a powerful dampening effect on the involved Indian tribes' fighting ardour and no further major actions or attacks were mounted during the rebellion. Bouquet's success at Bushy Run still stands in the annals of British military history as "one of the fiercest ever fought with Indians" with a codicil by Fortescue as to Bouquet's military genius stating that "had any man of less experience *in such warfare* been in command (emphasis mine), its issue might well

have been disastrous."55
Fuller, a well-read military historian, is also explicit, stating that Bouquet's tactics and manoeuvre against "a savage foe is probably the most ingenious and effective that the history of irregular warfare has to record."56
Fortescue generously gives the soldiers equal billing when he states: "the final stratagem whereby

A private of Goreham's Nova Scotia Rangers according to a French description of 1755 which mentions a short grey coat and a leather cap. Ranger and light infantry units raised in North America during the Seven Years' War were usually outfitted with caps, short coats of various colour such as brown, green and blue as well as grey, with Indian-style gaiters and moccasins.

(Reconstruction by G.A. Embleton. Courtesy, Dept. of National Defense.)

success was won reflects equal credit on the resource of the commander and the perfect steadiness of the men."⁵⁷ Bouquet modestly attributes all to his men; "I cannot sufficiently express my admiration for the cool and steady behaviour of the troops who did not fire a shot without orders, and drove the enemy from their posts with fixed bayonets. The conduct of the officers is much above my praises."⁵⁸

Conclusion

The new light infantry tactical organizations and skills acquired by the British army in North America during the French and Indian War went the way of all new innovations when peace was achieved. "As must needs be at the close of every war, the [Prime Minister's | first duty was the reduction of the army to peacetime establishment, which was effected by disbanding or dooming to disbandment all Infantry of the Line junior to the 70th Foot and all Cavalry junior to the 18th Light Dragoons."59 Thus the 80th Regiment of Light Armed Foot (Gage's Light Infantry) disappeared, though they had a year's grace when Pontiac's Uprising broke out and Amherst, desperate for troops, kept them on strength for the duration of the conflict. The 60th Foot (Royal Americans) survived and became the principal guardians of the frontier, but were broken up into small detachments garrisoning myriad, small forts "in the wilderness, hundreds of miles from any civilised settlement, illfed, ill-provided, ill-cared for in a word forgotten."60 One might add ill-exercised and illtrained.

In 1763, all the light companies in the British army were disbanded. The tactical system of Frederick the Great was still in place and still exerting its

pervasive influence. Fuller's distress as a modern military man vice historian is evident when he wrote: Military pedants in London, having grown fat on the stiff mechanical drill of Prussia, could not and would not bring themselves to believe, in spite of the late wars, that light troops were not only an aid, not only a necessity, but an integral part of all skilfully organised armies... Nevertheless, a change was taking place, for as in France, so also in England, pipe-clay, hair-grease and the clockwork manoeuvres of the drill square, though they cramped the efforts of the few able soldiers who still sought to carry on the traditions of Wolfe and Amherst, of Howe, Bouquet and Rogers, they could not completely cripple them. 61

In 1771, a company of light infantry was reintroduced to every battalion throughout the line regiments, though some had unofficially

maintained a flank company in addition to the grenadier company known as the picket or Highland company. Evaluate believes that this addition of "light companies" at this time, however, was little more than nominal "window-dressing" as most light companies were "looked on as penal settlements and were filled with the worst characters of the battalions. East

recognized in 1774, just one year before Lexington, that these "light companies" were so poorly trained and ignorant of their duties that General William Howe, on the order of King George III, was obliged to form a camp at Salisbury Plain for the instruction of seven companies of light infantry in certain manoeuvres of his own developed while commanding Wolfe's Light Infantry.⁶⁴

It was

Shy, in his excellent study of what role the British army played

Left & Opposite: Privates of a British regular army light infantry company, 1770's. Note the special dress and equipment of these men.

They wear caps instead of tricorns and coatees instead of long tailed coats, and are equipped with a powder horn.

(Sketches by P.J. de Loutherbergh. Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University, Providence, R.I. Photo: R.Chartrand.) in the coming of the American Revolution, has more than adequately pointed out that the army and its political masters in Whitehall were confused as to what their actual new role was to be in their newly acquired American empire. He asks:

> What was [Shy's emphasis] the army doing in the colonies? No one seemed to know. Defense - as is so often the case when no one is attacking - looked a little ridiculous. The plan for Indian management, not quite defense in the usual meaning of the word, was difficult to grasp....And there was always the hint of duplicity - that the British government wanted an army not to defend but to control the colonists. The hint concealed a grain of truth, but what seemed a half-hearted attempt to garrison the backcountry led Americans to suspect more was there.65

The disbandment of the light infantry organizations which were best suited to act as a potent gendarmerie on the fringes of a wild and unpredictable frontier left the typical Frederician-style heavy infantry battalions concentrated mainly in urban and well-colonised areas of the Thirteen Colonies and the former New France. Thus, an accumulated wealth of light infantry tactics and expertise specific to the North American theatre, carefully

cultivated at first by Loudon, Rogers, Howe and Amherst, then honed to a fine degree by Wolfe and Bouquet, was lost by the absence of a clearly defined role for the infantry in America. From overseas, a new peacetime political administration meant a return to orthodoxy and adherence to Frederician tactics to maintain the status quo.

This confusion of role coupled with economic restrictions are the main reasons why welltrained and effective light infantry was not readily available as it might have been in the British army at the outbreak of the American Revolution more than a decade later. During this latter conflict, the tactical successes gained by the Americans were nearly all in irregular fighting, which have been seized upon by American historians as proof of war-waging superiority. By the middle of the war. British light infantry had re-invented itself and along with light cavalry had become the equal or betters of the American

backwoodsmen and sharpshooters, Fuller writing that "during the last three years of [the war] the English had so well adapted themselves to its nature, that they were in no way inferior to their opponents"66 Despite tactical successes of the Americans in irregular warfare fought on the periphery. it was Washington's Continental Army, however, assisted by French troops and the French navy using standard European tactics and siege warfare of the day, that defeated the British army strategically in North America.

Steele is correct in noting that "North American pride in the ways of the New World has often led to the assumption that, in warfare as in everything else, the new men of the New World were better than the history laden men of the Old." Many American historians have used the defeat of Braddock and the Americans' later successes in the American Revolution "with some misrepresentation...as evidence of this superiority."67 What is very clear that the British army came and

forced its kind of war on the Northern American wilderness in the Seven Years' War and adapted very quickly to its peculiar brand of partisan warfare. The majority of its commanders were aware of, and, in certain cases, innovators and experts in irregular warfare, quickly creating ranger units, light infantry companies and battalions (with parallel improvements in dress, equipment and tactics) to effectively counter the Indians, Canadians and the French with skill and confidence.

The myth of American superiority of arms in irregular warfare and its overall contribution to the Americans' ultimate victory during the Revolution has been highly exaggerated. This "misrepresentation," as Steele has termed it, serves to partially explain why the achievements of British commanders in developing a highly effective light infantry during the Seven Years' War in North America have been ignored or given scant attention by American historians. To recognize the facts would explode the "superiority" myth.

Notes

- Dallas Irvine, "The First British Regulars in North America," Military Affairs, Vol.X, (Winter 1945), 337-353
- 2. Ibid., 345.
- 3. The "la petite guerre" or "der kleine Krieg" of eighteenth century military terminology existed alongside the regular European warfare which saw large armies manoeuvring over open terrain between cities utilizing Frederician tactics. La petite guerre or "irregular war" comprised those offensive operations conducted or carried on in the intervals of preparation and build-up between battles, "the secondary aims present in all wars by means that are small in relation to the overall effort" according to Clauswitz. These secondary aims were to be gained by patrolling, raiding, ambushes of troops and supply convoys, and the capture of prisoners, all essential activities for any army contemplating in moving through unfamiliar wilderness.
- 4. Ian K. Steele, Guerillas and Grenadiers: The Struggle for Canada, 1689-1760 (Toronto, 1974), p.132.
- 5. Stanley M. Pargellis, "Braddock's Defeat," *American Historical Review*, Vol.XLI, (1936), p.253.
- 6. Pargellis, pp.253-269; Paul E. Kopperman, *Braddock at the Monongahela* (Pittsburgh, 1977), pp.93-121; Hew Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War*, (London, 1983), p.28; and Steele, pp.85-86.
- 7. Pargellis, p.269; and Russell F. Weigley. *History of the United States Army*, (Bloomington, 1984), pp.23-24.
- 8. Braddock's orders to his men demonstrate his awareness of the danger of surprise attacks and his reliance on current European tactics to respond to the problem. Camps were heavily guarded by sentries supported by armed detachments, and, while on the march, one third of the force was employed in flanking parties. See "General Braddock's Orderly Book," in Will H. Lowdermilk, History of Cumberland, Embracing an Account of Washington's First Campaign...Together with a History of Braddock's Expedition..., (Washington, D.C.: 1878), pp.viii, lii-liii; Winthrop Sargent, The History of an Expedition against Fort Duquesne in 1755, (Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1855), p.296.; and Robert Orme, "Captain Orme's Journal," Ibid., pp.317-318, 339-340, and 348-350.
- 9. Weigley, p.4.
- 10. Each individual militiaman was expected to provide his own weapon – usually a smoothbore musket – and ammunition, clothing and food for a short expedition, much the same as British men of arms in feudal times. For really long campaigns, the colonial government would take charge, the assembly appropriating money for supplies of muskets with ammunition for those too poor to buy them, appointing supply officers and

- contractors to handle purchasing and distribution. See Weigley, pp.5-12.
- 11. In the eighteenth century. Swiss and German craftsmen on the Pennsylvania frontier developed the Pennsylvania rifle, a far more accurate firearm than any musket and a much lighter and less cumbersome weapon than any of its kind in Europe. It spread so rapidly over the frontier that it is better known as the Kentucky rifle. Its users earned so impressive a reputation for marksmanship during the Revolution, that Washington urged American soldiers to clothe themselves in the frontiersmen's buckskin costumes to play upon the British soldiers' supposed fear that all Americans were sharpshooting marksmen. See Maurice Matloff, *American Military History*, (Washington, 1985), pp.38-39 and J.F.C. Fuller, *British Light Infantry in the Eighteenth Century*, (London, 1925), pp.127-129.
- 12. Weigley, pp.9-10.
- 13. Quoted in Ibid., p.16.
- 14. George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington*, ed. by John C. Fitzpatrick, Vol.II, (Washington, 1931-44), p.302.
- 15. Quoted in Steele, p.72.
- 16. Weigley, p.12.
- 17. Governor Robert Dinwiddie to Abercromby, 15 August 1754, in *The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie, Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony of Virginia, 1751-1758*, Vol.1, (Richmond, 1883), p.286.
- 18. See Peter Paret, Yorck and the Era of Prussian Reform, 1807-1815, (Princeton, 1966), pp.36-39; Michael Howard, War in European History, (London, 1976), pp.75-78; and John Childs, Armies and Warfare in Europe, 1648-1789, (New York, 1982), pp.18-20.
- 19. For fuller details see Fuller, pp.46-49; Childs, pp.27-34; and Howard, pp.75-78.
- 20. Fuller, pp.18-20; Strachan, p.17.
- 21. I use the term "irregular" to denote light troops without extensive formal training such as Croats, Indians, coureurs de bots, etc. Light infantry I define as formally trained light troops or regulars, rather than militia or auxiliaries.
- 22. The Marechal de Saxe's *Reveries on the Art of War*, trans., Thomas R. Phillips (Harrisburg, 1944) were written in 1732 and circulated in manuscript well before they were published as a book in 1757. Saxe deals extensively with irregular infantry and cavalry tactics on pages 40-1, 48 and 50.
- 23. Fuller, p.53.
- 24. It is interesting to note that The Black Watch while participating in their first set-piece at Fontenoy, deployed troops forward of their main line, driving in Saxe's heavy screen of skirmishers. Archibald Forbes in *The Black Watch*, (London, 1896), p.25, notes that "a detachment of Highlanders acted in support of some Austrian hussars hotly pressed by French light troops who were promptly repulsed with loss, and the Highlanders were taken notice of for their spirited conduct."
- 25. James Johnstone, *A Memoir of the '45*, ed, by Brian Rawson, (London, 1958), pp.110-111.
- 26. Quoted from "Memoirs of the Rebellion in Aberdeen and Banff," in Walter Biggar Blaikie, ed. Origins of the '45 and Other Paers Relating to that Rising, Vol.11, (Scottish Historical Society Publications [1916]), p.153. Wolfe was an ardent admirer of Bland's Treatise and presented his own personal copy to one of his ensigns in the 20th Foot, William Delaune (later the Light Infantry commander of

the "Forlorn Hope" at Quebec, 1759). The latter officer wrote in the frontispiece that Wolfe "enjoin'd me particularly to study General Bland's manual and I had an opportunity to discover later what a prime favourite this Book was with him...for Bland's general principles and observations he had nothing but praise and I am convinced that these guided his own Conduct and Dispositions - more perhaps than he would acknowledge at Louisbourg and Quebec," Stanley Pargellis, who personally examined this original manual (now in The New Brunswick Museum's J.C. Webster Collection), observed that "in the chapter which deals with marching in territory where attacks are to be expected, there is frequent underlining of just such maxims as Braddock neglected." Stanley Pargellis, "Braddock's Defeat," p.264n.

- 27. John Shy, Towards Lexington: The Role of the British Army in the Coming of the American Revolution, (Princeton, 1965), p.88.
- 28. Pargellis, Military Affairs in North America 1758-1763: Selected Documents from the Cumberland Papers in Windsor Castle, (London and New York, 1936), p.XV.
- 29. Shv. p.89
- 30. Loudon to Cumberland. October 17, 1757, in Pargellis, Military Affairs, p.400; Loudon to Cumberland. 1756, quoted in Shy, p.29.
- 31. Pargellis, Lord Loudon in North America, (New Haven, 1933), p.98.
- 32. Cumberland to Loudon, 22 November-26 December, 1756, in Pargellis, *Military Affairs*, p.255-56.
- 33. Ibid., pp.292-3, 327-30, and 335-41.
- 34. Pargellis, Lord Loudon, p.300.
- 35. Robert Rogers, *Journals of Major Robert Rogers*, ed. by F.B. Hough, (Albany, 1883), p.80.
- 36. Pargellis, pp.304-5.
- 37. Quoted in Shy, Towards Lexington, pp.129-130.
- 38. It is interesting to note that the 80th was never used as a battalion but regularly detached its light companies in support of the regular brigades. It was the closest the British in North America ever came to emulating the company-sized "colonial regulars" or "Compagnies franches de la Marine" of the French that were so adept at small unit tactics and specialists in "la petite guerre." While Pargellis states it was "composed as far as possible of woodsmen" its officers were British and Loudon also permitted Gage to draft a nucleus of sergeants, corporals, and "good active healthy young men" from the other British regiments in theatre. Some rank and file were recruited in the colonies but, for the most part, were made up by drafts from Ireland. Pargellis, p.305.
- 39. James Wolfe, *The Life and Letters of James Wolfe*, ed. by Beckles Willson, (London, 1909), pp.392, 403.
- 40. Francis Parkman, *Montcalm and Wolfe*, Vol.11, (London, 1899), p.94.
- 41. Rogers, pp.111-116; J.W. Fortescue. *A History of the British Army*, Vol. II. (London, 1899-1930), pp.324-329; and Fuller, p.91.
- 42. William Amherst, *Journal of William Amherst in America* 1758-1760, ed. by J.C. Webster, (Toronto, 1931), pp.15-16.
- 43. Ibid., p.63.
- 44. John Knox, *The Siege of Quebec and the Campaigns in North America*, 1757-1760, ed. by Brian Connell, (Mississauga, 1980), pp.118-119.
- 45. Wolfe, p.255.
- 46. Ibid., pp.295-296.

- 47. Carden became a light infantry company commander in Wolfe's Light Infantry which was commanded by Viscount Howe's youngest brother, William. The younger Howe would later became Commander-in-Chief in America during the American Revolution. The middle brother, Richard Howe, would second his efforts as the senior naval officer on station. *Ibid.*, p.360.
- 48. Townshend to his wife, 6 September 1759, in A.G. Doughty and G.W. Parmalee, eds., *The Siege of Quebec and The Battle of the Plains of Abraham.*, Vol.V, (Quebec, 1901), Vol.V., p.195.
- 49. For a complete discussion of irregular and regular tactics used by the British and French armies during the battle see Ian McCulloch, "The King Must Be Obeyed," The Beaver, Vol.72 (5), (Oct/Nov 1992). For the best contemporary accounts by actual battle participants, see Knox, pp.190-200; Extracts from a Manuscript Journal...kept by Colonel Malcolm Fraser, (Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, 1868), pp.20-24; James Johnstone, A Dialogue in Hades, (Literary and Historical Society of Quebec, 1868), pp.41-44; and for the best secondary account of the battle see, C.P. Stacey, Quebec, 1759: The Siege and the Battle, (Toronto, 1959), pp.128-155.
- Peter Paret, "Colonial Experience and European Military Reform at the End of the Eighteenth Century," The Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, Vol.XXXVII, (May 1964), p.55.
- 51. Quoted in R.B. Asprey, War in the Shadows: The Guerilla in History, Vol.1, (New York, 1975), p.96.
- 52. Fuller, p.102.
- 53. Asprey, p.96.
- 54. Joseph Shippen to his Father, 15 August 1758 in G.H. Fisher, "Brigadier-General Henry Bouquet," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol.111, No.2, (1879), p.127.
- 55. Fortescue, Vol.III, p.18.
- 56. Fuller, p.110.
- 57. Fortescue, p.18.
- 58. Quoted in Lewis Butler, *The Annals of the King's Royal Rifle Corps*, Vol.1 "The Royal Americans," (London, 1913), p.164.
- 59. Fortescue, p.10.
- 60. Ibid., p.13.
- 61. Fuller, pp.112, 124.
- 62. Robin May, *The British Army in North America*, 1775-1783, (London, 1993), pp.5, 15 and 32.
- 63. Fuller, p.124.
- 64. Ibid., p.125.
- 65. Shy, Towards Lexington, pp.423-424.
- 66. Fuller, pp.127-128.
- 67. Steele, Guerillas and Grenadiers, p.132.

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