



Fort Fraser Despatches: September 2012

At 10:30 on the morning of 13 September 1759, near the walls of Québec, senior Brigadier Carleton ordered the British troops to present and fire!

At this moment the French advance had swung slightly to the right and across the Sillery road where the Fraser Highlanders were faced with two French regiments - the Languedoc and the Sarre.

Captain Campbell gave the order:

Ready!... Drums, Present!... Drums, Fire!...

The 600 muskets of the Highlanders exploded into the faces of the advancing French at 25 yards.

Orders had been given to reload after each volley which would take about 15 seconds, but the Highlanders, faced by two regiments at such close range, could not restrain themselves - muskets were dropped, broadswords were drawn and a wild Highland assault was made on the carnage which faced them!

So began the short but bloody Battle of the Plains of Abraham for the 78th Highland Regiment (Fraser's) as recorded in Col. Ralph Harper's 1995 edition "*The Fraser Highlanders*" (available from QM stores)

The entire story will be told in the mess on 15 September at our Commemorative Mess Dinner.



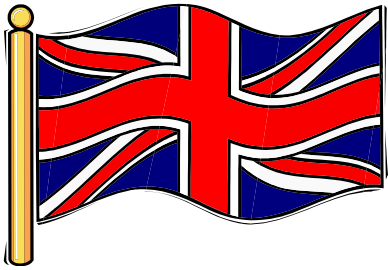
and as a result of the Battle...

Five days after the battle, 18 September 1759, the Articles of Surrender were agreed and signed.

In the evening a detachment of artillerymen entered Québec by the St. Louis Gate followed by the Louisbourg Grenadiers.

A detachment of sailors, landed from the fleet, occupied the Lower Town.

The French garrison commander De Ramezay handed over the keys of the town to General Townshend and his staff as the formal gesture of surrender.



The "Great Union" was hauled to the masthead and the guns of the fleet thundered a victory salute.

But there was more fighting to come.....

at Québec in April 1760

at Montréal in September 1760

at St. John's in July 1762





Musketry 101:

The 18th century musket was essentially a large smoothbore shotgun. After loading from the muzzle with loose black-powder and a round lead bullet from a cylindrical, paper wrapped cartridge, the musket was fired by the flintlock action above the trigger. A rotating cock holding a piece of flint snapped forward to strike a pivoting L-shaped frizzen or "steel." That action created sparks that ignited a small portion of priming powder in a projecting flashpan sending flame through the barrel's touchhole to reach the main charge. Obviously, it would not perform in the rain and depended upon a sharpened flint and properly hardened steel frizzen for reliability. The real problem, however, was the black powder quality. Following each firing, roughly 55 percent would remain as a black sludge that built up inside the barrel clogging the touchhole and coating the lock. To cope with this fouling residue, the average ball was four to six hundredths of an inch smaller than bore size. Upon ignition, the undersized ball bounced and skidded up the barrel and proceeded in a direction determined by its last contact with the bore. Beyond 60 yards, the ball would lose its reliability to hit a man-sized target.

These limitations determined 18th century battle tactics, which employed long lines of men trained for speed of loading rather than accuracy. They

were expected to average four rounds per minute. The soldiers typically pointed their arms and fired in controlled volleys at enemy troops positioned 50 to 60 yards away. The typical battle was decided by a disciplined bayonet charge ending in a hand-to-hand melee.



To meet these combat conditions, the new British Brown Bess standard musket was designed to deliver a large bullet at low velocity. It employed a sturdy stock for use as a club in close fighting and had an overall length that combined with a long, socket bayonet to create a spear or pike for impacting an enemy's line. It was also designed to be durable and to withstand the rigors of years of active campaigning. The Brown Bess was to successfully fulfill all of these demands for many years.

the Brown Bess pattern:



Britain's military long arms during the 18th century were officially considered in two groups: Land Service and Sea Service. We are concerned with the former. The unofficial term, "Brown Bess," has various claims for its origin, but a mention in the April 2-9, 1771 issue of the Connecticut Courant verifies the name's acceptance in America preceding the Revolutionary War.

The basic Brown Bess musket mounted a round, smoothbore, .75-caliber barrel on a walnut "heart wood" stock held by a vertical screw through the breech plug tang plus lateral cross-pins that pierced tenons brazed to its underside. The upper stock terminated 4" below the muzzle to permit attaching a bayonet. A rectangular top stud behind the muzzle secured the bayonet after sliding through slots in the socket and also functioned as an aiming guide. There was no rear sight.

Its butt included a round wrist extending back to a handrail form beneath the comb. The ramrod, in turn, slid into the bottom stock channel and was retained by four pipes. Just below the bottom pipe was a stock swell intended as a forward "hand hold." All of the attached accessories (or "furniture") were of cast brass. The two-screw lock had a rounded base plate that mounted a swansneck cock. Two swivels for a shoulder sling were also included. Its weight totaled 10 to 11 lbs.



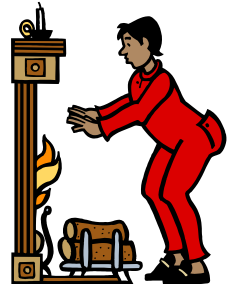
Like the soldiers who fired them, traditional British arms designs were known for their consistency. These fundamental features would persist until the late years of the 18th century despite an interim reduction in length and a gradual simplification of the lock and furniture. Official control and proofing sources for the King's arms were the Board of Ordnance at the Tower of London and the less disciplined Dublin Castle armory supplying troops in the "Irish Establishment." During wartime, supplementary contracts were often made with continental European manufacturers. Similar muskets approximating this design were also ordered directly from private contractors in England by some British regimental colonels, local militias, private trade organizations and various American colonies.

(from "The American Rifleman Magazine" 2001)



those quirky Highlanders:

It is reliably reported by Sgt. James Thompson of the 78th that during the winter of 1759 - 60 a partially rebuilt house in Quebec was used to house several of the 78th Highlanders. "...we had a stove, to-be-sure, but our Highlanders, who knew no better, would not suffer the stove door to be closed, as they thought that if they could not actually see the fire, it was impossible that they could *feel* it! ..."



more recently...

loyal members of the Guard marched as colour party with the Irish Pipes & Drums at the ceremony kicking off the BC Kidney Foundation's fundraising walk on 26 August.



a new "season" at Fort Fraser:

September signals an end to summer and the beginning of the Fall/Winter season; back to school with new pencils and books, back to work with renewed vigour (?), and a renewed ambition to improve the way we get things done in all aspects of our lives.

Fort Fraser has been around for more than 30 years, sometimes booming, sometimes not, but always providing enjoyment - truly an entity worth working to improve and grow.

At this date we number some 25 members, many of us into our third decade! Institutions, like people, get "creaky" as time passes, and injections of greater participation, new blood and more youthful vision are essential for growth.

A rut forms when things are often repeated, and being in a rut is never a good thing; we must all exercise our membership responsibility to participate whenever and however we can - in committees, working to support and improve the Display Unit, introducing prospective members, and speaking out with ideas and suggestions.

We are fortunate to have a Command Group that combines youth and experience (not to say age!) and possesses a wisdom which comes of collaboration.

Currently the CG is conducting an extensive and comprehensive review of the state of all things - the Mess, the Guard, systems and procedures, duties and responsibilities.

Expect change and improvement, and do **participate** to make it all work!

