

## II.

## COLONEL GEORGE MONRO AND THE DEFENCE OF FORT WILLIAM HENRY, 1757. BY JOHN A. INGLIS, F.S.A. SCOT.

Readers of Fenimore Cooper's romance, *The Last of the Mohicans*, will remember the central incident of the story—the attack on Fort William Henry by Montcalm, the surrender of Colonel Monro's garrison after a five days' defence, and their subsequent massacre by the Indians. Cooper's account of these events is in its main outlines true to history, but his portrait of Colonel Monro is an effort of imagination; and as I have been able to identify him, it may be of interest to record all that is known of the Scottish soldier, who is associated with one of the best-known incidents in American history.

The identification arose from the discovery of a document in the Register House, Edinburgh—a simple receipt for a payment of money dated in 1729, and signed by "Alexander Monro of Auchinbowie and Captain George Monro of Brigadier Otway's Regiment of Foot, his brother-german."<sup>1</sup> It is known that Otway's Regiment, the 35th Foot, now the Royal Sussex, formed the nucleus of the garrison at Fort William Henry, and Captain Monro's record of service in the manuscript Army List for 1752<sup>2</sup> shows that he is the Colonel Monro who was given the command of the regiment in 1750.

Fenimore Cooper has risked a good many details about him. He has provided him with two daughters, half-sisters; he even gives a name to his second wife,—Alice Graham, "daughter of a neighbouring laird"; the other wife is said to have been a half-caste, whom he married while on service in the West Indies. Not one of these statements has any foundation; all that is accurate is that he was a Scotsman and that his name was Monro, but even that is wrongly spelt.

George Monro was the younger son of another Colonel George Monro and Margaret Bruce his wife. The father was a soldier of some distinction. He was one of the original captains in the Cameronian Regiment (26th Foot), which was raised in March 1689 from among the followers of the Covenanter, Richard Cameron. In August they were sent to garrison Dunkeld in anticipation of a descent upon the Lowlands by Claverhouse, and on the twenty-first of that month they were attacked by 5000 Highlanders under Colonel Cannon, and had to withstand furious assaults for four or five hours. In the first hour the Colonel of the Cameronians was killed and the Major wounded, so the

<sup>1</sup> *Register of Deeds* (Dalrymple), 18th May 1740.

<sup>2</sup> Public Record Office, London.

command fell to Captain Monro, who at length beat off the enemy, but not till his men had almost exhausted their powder, while for bullets they had to use lead stripped off the roofs of the houses and melted in little holes in the ground.<sup>1</sup> George Monro was promoted to be Major, and soon afterwards was put in command of an independent Company of Foot in Perthshire.<sup>2</sup> On 15th December 1691, just before the massacre of Glencoe, he was ordered to bring fifty men to Fort William,<sup>3</sup> but there is no evidence that he took part in the massacre. He was present at the siege of Namur in 1695 as Major in Sir Charles Graham's Foot,<sup>4</sup> and retired a few months later;<sup>5</sup> but by 1716 he had been for some further service promoted to the rank of Colonel.<sup>6</sup>

He had married in June 1693 Margaret, second daughter of Robert Bruce of Auchinbowie,<sup>7</sup> a property lying about four miles south of Stirling. She had no brothers, and on her father's death her elder sister, Janet, succeeded to the property; but Janet's husband, Captain William Bruce, had the misfortune in 1699 to kill another gentleman in a drunken brawl. He fled from justice, leaving his wife to cope with the debts on the property, which proved too much for her. Accordingly, in February 1702 she sold it to her brother-in-law, Major Monro,<sup>8</sup> who thus became Laird of Auchinbowie.

George Monro and Margaret Bruce had two sons—Alexander, who afterwards succeeded to the property, and George, the subject of the present paper—and one daughter, Margaret, born in March 1707. The dates of the sons' births cannot be discovered, but to judge by his standing in the army George was probably born about the year 1700, when his parents were living in Ireland, at Clonfin, in County Longford.<sup>9</sup>

His whole military career was spent with Otway's Regiment, his commissions being dated as follows:—Lieutenant, 9th August 1718; Captain, 27th September 1727; Major, 18th August 1747; Lieut.-Colonel, 4th January 1750. The regiment was quartered in Ireland all this time, and saw no active service until early in 1756, when, on the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, they were ordered to England to be embodied on a war footing, and were then sent to Nova Scotia under General Hopson to take part in the campaign against the French Canadians. At the end of March 1757 they were ordered to occupy Fort William Henry, at the south end of Lake George, about fifty miles due north of

<sup>1</sup> A. Crichton, *Life of Colonel Blackadder*, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> *Papers Illustrative of the Highlands* (Maitland Club), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> *State Papers (Domestic)*, 1691-92, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> *The Scots Brigade in Holland* (Scottish History Society), i. 575.

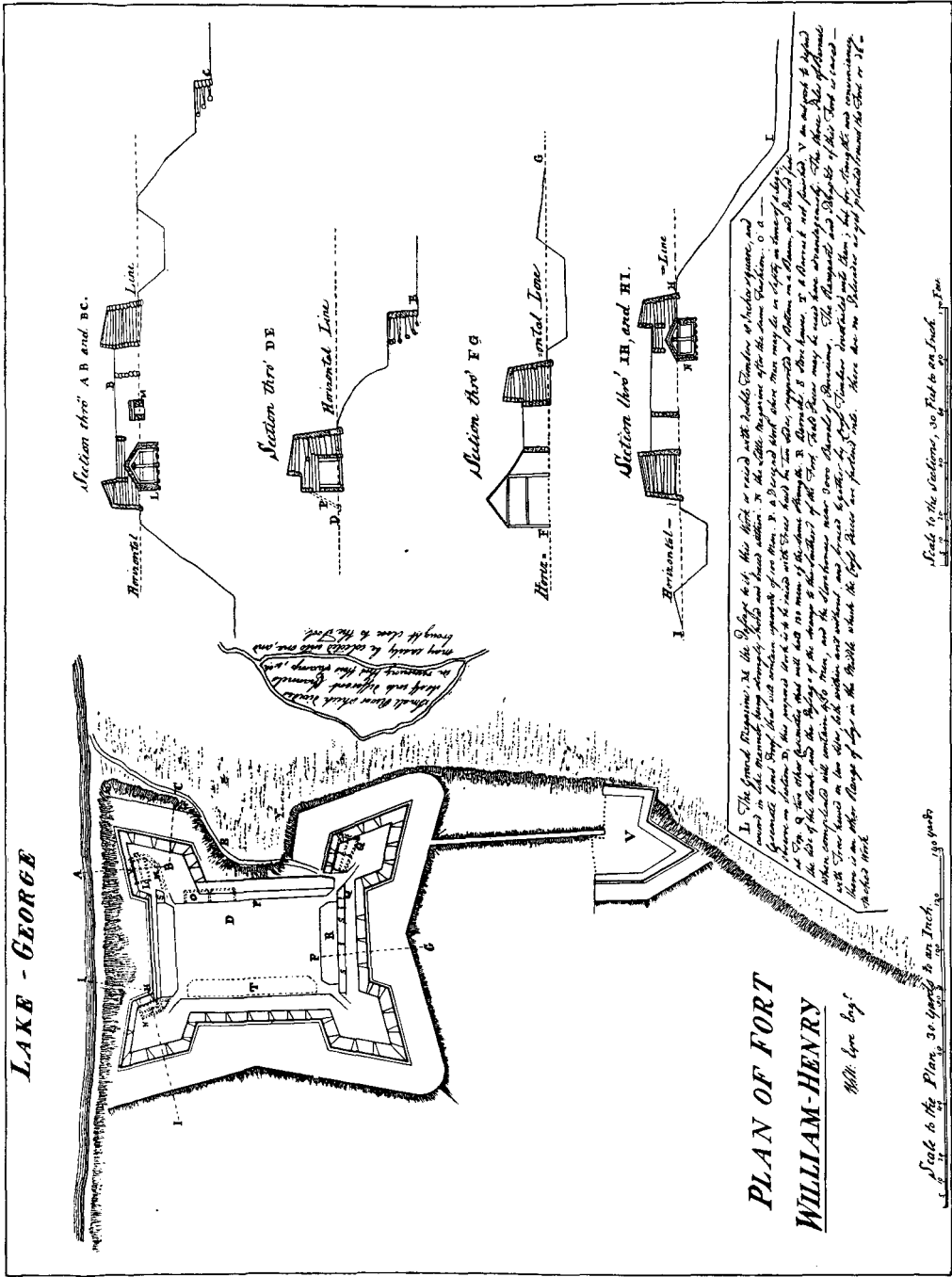
<sup>5</sup> *Carstairs State Papers*, p. 266.

<sup>6</sup> *General Register of Sasines*, vol. cx. fol. 56.

<sup>7</sup> Marriage Contract recorded *Register of Deeds* (Durie), 12th February 1697.

<sup>8</sup> *Register of Deeds* (Mackenzie), 27th February 1702.

<sup>9</sup> *Register of Deeds* (Mackenzie), 23rd June 1701.



In the second Magazine, at the right, is raised with walls, Timber in back, stone, and covered in like manner, being strongly built and having within it the whole Magazine after the same fashion, O a...  
 Section thro' A B and BC, this bastion is raised with walls, Timber in back, stone, and covered in like manner, being strongly built and having within it the whole Magazine after the same fashion, O a...  
 Section thro' DE, this bastion is raised with walls, Timber in back, stone, and covered in like manner, being strongly built and having within it the whole Magazine after the same fashion, O a...  
 Section thro' FG, this bastion is raised with walls, Timber in back, stone, and covered in like manner, being strongly built and having within it the whole Magazine after the same fashion, O a...  
 Section thro' IH, and HI, this bastion is raised with walls, Timber in back, stone, and covered in like manner, being strongly built and having within it the whole Magazine after the same fashion, O a...

Scale to the Plan, 30 yards to an Inch.  
 Scale to the Sections, 50 Feet to an Inch.  
 With Care Copy

Albany, in what is now the State of New York. The fort was a structure of crossed logs filled with earth, and had been built in 1755 in accordance with plans drawn by Captain William Eyre<sup>1</sup> of the 44th Foot, who was afterwards in command there from November 1756 till Colonel Monro and his regiment arrived. The position itself was strong: on the north was the lake, on the east a marsh, and on the south and west were ditches with *chevaux-de-frise*.

For the first three months Colonel Monro's garrison had time to strengthen the defences, but early in July it became known that Montcalm had collected a large force of Canadian troops and Indians at Ticonderoga near the north end of the lake, and that an attack was imminent. General Daniel Webb, who lay at Fort Edward, fourteen miles to the south, visited Fort William Henry from the 25th to the 29th of July, and on his return sent a detachment of 200 regulars under Lieutenant-Colonel Young and 800 Massachusetts men under Colonel Frye, bringing up the strength of the garrison under Colonel Monro's command to 2200 men. There were also women and children in the fort. The artillery consisted of seventeen cannon of various sizes, besides some mortars and swivels.

The evidence relating to the siege and the massacre, from both British and French sources, has been diligently collected and skilfully handled by Francis Parkman in his work *Montcalm and Wolfe*,<sup>2</sup> and I can only summarise his account and add a few facts.

At nine o'clock in the morning of 3rd August, Monro sent a note to Webb to say that the French were in sight on the lake, and at six o'clock the same evening he reported that firing had begun, and added: "I believe you will think it proper to send a reinforcement as soon as possible." He wrote twice on the following day to ask for help, but Webb sent none, and he had to conduct the defence as best he could.

Montcalm's force amounted to 6000 whites and 1600 Indians; about two-thirds of them arrived by boats, the remainder, including the Indians, marched along the side of the lake. They brought thirty-one cannon and fifteen mortars and howitzers.

Having reconnoitred the ground, Montcalm sent the Indians round to the south side of the fort to intercept any help that might come from Fort Edward, and then he proceeded to disembark his guns at Artillery Cove on the west shore.<sup>3</sup> Before opening fire he sent a letter to Monro summoning him to surrender, pointing out that at present the savages were under control but that he could not guarantee their future behaviour, and that a defence would only delay the capture of the place

<sup>1</sup> British Museum, Maps, cxxi. (108) 3.

<sup>3</sup> British Museum, Maps, k 118, a 22.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. i. pp. 492-514; vol. ii. pp. 428-431.

a few days, as he had made dispositions to render relief impossible. Monro replied that he and his soldiers would defend themselves to the last.

During the night of 4th August and the whole of the 5th the French were busy digging trenches. At sunrise on the 6th the battery on the



left, consisting of eight heavy cannon and a mortar, opened fire, and the following morning the battery on the right with eleven more pieces was ready.

General Webb, a man of no spirit, had written to Monro that he did not "think it prudent to attempt a junction or to assist you till reinforced by the militia of the colonies,"<sup>1</sup> and recommended that if the

<sup>1</sup> Scots Magazine, 1757, p. 540.

militia did not arrive soon, Monro should make the best terms he could. The letter fell into the hands of Montcalm, who kept it for several days and then sent it under a flag of truce to Monro. The aide-de-camp, Bougainville, who carried the letter, has left a journal in which he records that Monro "returned many thanks for the courtesy of our nation and protested his joy at having to do with so generous an enemy. This was his answer to the Marquis de Montcalm."

Meantime the French sappers had been working their way to the south-west corner of the lake, and having filled up the ravine with logs and fascines they continued their sap up the slope beyond and opened a trench in the garden not 250 yards from the fort. The position of the garrison was thus rendered desperate. More than 300 men had been killed or wounded; smallpox had broken out; all their heavy cannon and two of the mortars had burst and others had been put out of action by the enemy; they had made two sorties without success; the walls were already breached and an assault was imminent. They continued the defence briskly through the night of the 8th, during which the inside of the fort was set on fire by the enemy's shells, but in the morning, after a council of officers, Colonel Young was sent out to ask for terms, and a capitulation was arranged on the footing that the British troops should march out with the honours of war and be escorted to Fort Edward by 300 French regulars, upon an undertaking that they should not serve again for eighteen months. Article IX. was as follows:<sup>1</sup> "The Marquis de Montcalm, being willing to show Colonel Monro and the garrison under his command marks of his esteem on account of their honourable defence, gives them one piece of cannon, a six-pounder."

The garrison, with the women and children, at once evacuated the fort and moved to the entrenched camp, leaving such of the sick and wounded as could not be moved. Montcalm had taken the precaution of getting the assent of the Indian chiefs to the terms of surrender, but no sooner had the British troops left the fort than the Indians climbed through the embrasures in search of rum and plunder. They butchered the sick, but finding little to loot they went off to the camp. The French guards could not or would not keep them out, and they swarmed through the camp plundering where they could and terrifying the women and children. Montcalm worked hard to bring them back to discipline, and by nine o'clock at night order was restored. But worse was to follow.

In their haste to be gone the British assembled at daybreak (10th August) before the French escort arrived. They had muskets but no ammunition, and many of them had no bayonets. Seventeen wounded men were left unprotected in the huts, and at five o'clock in the morning

<sup>1</sup> *Scots Magazine*, 1757, p. 542.

the Indians dragged them out and tomahawked and scalped them in the sight of several French and Canadian officers.<sup>1</sup> This was the beginning of the massacre, which is described by Colonel Frye in his diary as follows:—<sup>2</sup>

“Wednesday, August 10th.—Early this morning we were ordered to prepare for our march, but found the Indians in a worse temper (if possible) than last night, every one having a tomahawk, hatchett, or some other instrument of death, and Constantly plundering from the officers their arms &ca.: this Col<sup>o</sup>. Monro Complained of, as a breach of the Articles of Capitulation, but to no effect; the French officers however told us that if we would give up the baggage of the officers and men to the Indians they thought it would make them easy, which at last Col<sup>o</sup>. Monro Consented to; but this was no sooner done than they began to take the Officers’ Hatts, Swords, Guns & Cloaths, stripping them all to their Shirts, and on some officers left no shirt at all. While this was doing they killed and scalp’d all the sick and wounded before our faces, and then took out from our troops all the Indians and negroes and Carried them off; one of the former they burnt alive afterwards.

“At last with great difficulty the troops gott from the Retrenchment, but they were no sooner out then the savages fell upon the rear, killing & scalping, which Occasioned an order for a halt, which at last was done in great Confusion, but as soon as those in the front knew what was doing in the rear they again pressed forward, and thus the Confusion continued & encreased till we came to the Advanc’d guard of the French, the savages still carrying away Officers, privates, Women and Children, some of which later they kill’d & scalpt in the road. This horrid scene of blood and slaughter obliged our officers to apply to the Officers of the French Guard for protection, which they refus’d & told them they must take to the woods and shift for themselves, which many did, and in all probability many perish’t in the woods: many got into Fort Edward that day and others daily Continued coming in, but vastly fatigued with their former hardships added to this last, which threw several of them into Deliriums.”

Colonel Frye relates his own experiences in a letter written on 16th August to Thomas Hubbard, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts;<sup>3</sup> “I was strip’d myself of my Arms & Cloathing, that I had nothing left but Briches Stockings Shoes & Shirt: the Indians round me with their Tomehawks Spears, &c., threatening Death I flew to the Officers of the French Guards for Protection but they would afford me none, therefore was Oblig’d to fly and was in the woods till

<sup>1</sup> Affidavit of Dr Miles Whitworth, Public Record Office.

<sup>2</sup> Public Record Office.

<sup>3</sup> Public Record Office.

the 12th, in the Morning of which I arriv'd at Fort Edward almost Famished."

Many of the fugitives returned for refuge to the fort, whither Monro himself had gone to demand protection for them, and in the course of the day Montcalm and his officers recovered more than 400 prisoners from the clutches of the Indians. They were kept at the entrenched camp till the 15th, when they were sent under escort to Fort Edward, and by degrees other stragglers came in. Montcalm had a guilty conscience over the whole affair, and wrote a letter in his own justification to the British Commander-in-Chief, Lord Loudoun, blaming the British soldiers for having allowed the Indians to broach their casks of rum.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps they did allow this, but unarmed as they were they had no power to refuse; and, moreover, Montcalm had had ample warning the previous night that just such an outbreak was likely to occur, and he ought to have taken precautions to prevent it.

Webb in his dispatch to Lord Loudoun wrote:<sup>2</sup> "I must do Lieutenant-Colonel Monro and the rest of the regular troops who were concerned in this siege the justice to say they behaved extremely well, and wish it were in my power to alledge as much in favour of the provincials."

Monro reached Albany about 17th August, and as the British authorities declared the capitulation void on account of the massacre, he was free to serve again; but the strain had broken his health, and on 3rd November he died very suddenly, and next day was "decently buried" in St Peter's Church.<sup>3</sup> A footnote by the editor of Luke Grindlay's *Diary of 1757*<sup>4</sup> says he was stricken with apoplexy in the street. The authorities at home acquitted him of blame for the loss of Fort William Henry, for in January 1758, before his death was known in London, he was gazetted full Colonel.

In February 1756, just before his regiment left Ireland, he made a will<sup>5</sup> bequeathing all his property to three reputed children—two boys and a girl; so Cora and Alice, the two daughters who figure so largely in *The Last of the Mohicans*, must be consigned to the realm of fiction.

<sup>1</sup> *Scots Magazine*, 1757, p. 600.

<sup>2</sup> Public Record Office—War Office, Series 1 (North America), vol. i.

<sup>3</sup> *Diary of the Rev. John Ogilvie*, Episcopal Minister at Albany.

<sup>4</sup> Published by the Acorn Club of Hartford, Connecticut, in 1907. For the references as to Monro's death and burial I am indebted to the Hon. James Austin Holden, State Historian of the State of New York. See *Proceedings of the New York State Historical Association*, vol. xiii. pp. 389 *seq.*

<sup>5</sup> Prerogative Court, Dublin, 1759.