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Samuel Holland: from Gunner and Sapper To Cartographer, 1755-1762

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Illustrations from Lowensteyn Family Web Site, BritishBattles.com, and ColonialInstruments.com

Artillery Officer, 1748
The Vinkhuijzen collection of military uniforms
Netherlands, 1749-1752.

Before his appointment in 1764 as Canada's first British surveyor-general, Samuel Johannes Holland (1729-1801) served as a cadet and subaltern in the Dutch artillery from 1745 to 1755 and as an engineer in the British army from 1755 to 1762. The British hired him for service in North America following the outbreak of hostilities there in 1754, as they did other "foreign Protestant" officers, chiefly because of a shortage of qualified British military engineers. Holland's upbringing in a compact minority within the town of Deventer, combined with a flair for various branches of mathematics and a singular aptitude for learning, gained him an officer-cadetship in the artillery where, in the defence of his homeland against the French invader in 1747-48, he gave "a good account of himself ". After the war, senior officers of the Dutch engineer corps gave selected subalterns from other arms advance training in designing fortifications and field defensive works, in preparing urban plans, in land-surveying and in cartography.

Joining the British Army:

Holland, now commissioned, was among them; and when examples of his work came to the attention of the British, they were so impressed with it that they included him among the "foreign Protestants". The commissions granted to that group late in 1755 were provisional, pending a special Act of Parliament excepting them from a clause in the Act of Settlement (1701), whereby such commissions were forbidden to foreigners. To make these exceptions more palatable to patriotic Britons the commissions were tenable only in the 60th Royal American Regiment. Although good British military engineers were rare, owing in part to contempt in English society for mathematics and to a preference for the "more glamorous" cavalry and infantry, foreigners were unwelcome in the Royal Engineers, a kind of "closed shop" under the direction of the Board of Ordnance.

Consequently, they had to be introduced by the back door. H.R.H. the Duke of Cumberland, whose strategic plan had led to the capture of Fort Beausejour and to Braddock's disastrous expedition against Fort Duquesne, deliberately used the new regiment as a vehicle for recruiting engineers from continental Europe. He commissioned them as officers of the line, seconded them from their regiment to engineering duties wherever and whenever they were required and, while they were on such duties, provided them with supplementary payout out of contingencies.

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Whereas officers for the 60th Royal Americans were recruited from the European continent, the original establishment goal for Other Ranks was to be American colonists. That objective was not fully achieved. Some Americans were willing to serve in the British army, but many were content to remain in provincial units raised tor specific periods of time at provincial expense. Moreover, although it was claimed that American soldiers would have an opportunity to learn much from European engineers, colonial politicians suspected, with justification, that Britain's motive was simply to augment her engineering capacity In North America.

The "foreign Protestant" commissions having been confirmed by Act of Parliament, the first battalion of the Royal Americans, including Lieutenant Samuel Holland, sailed to New York, arriving In July 1756. The battalion moved up the Hudson River, where it was noted in September that Holland could be employed as an engineer, gunner or cartographer. By December he was listed as detached from the Royal Americans, evidently as a draftsman and cartographer to the commander in North America, Lord Loudoun. He spent the winter months of 1756 -1757 doing a "general survey" and map of the Province of New York from existing cartographic sources. In May 1757, he was promoted Captain-Lieutenant, ostensibly on the basis of seniority. Subsequently, he accompanied Loudoun to Halifax to assist in planning what proved to be an abortive attack on Louisbourg. He copied plans of Halifax fortifications, and must have been among the engineers whom Loudoun ordered "to mark out an angle of a fort, and trace out an attack on it, in order to show the troops their duty at a siege". Returning in September to New York, he was sent to the frontier country. where he was on scouting parties commanded by Lord Howe. second-in-command to Major-General James Abercromby; and when Ticonderoga was reconnoitered, Holland sketched the fort and its environs.

Louisbourg:

Loudoun having been recalled in December 1757, Holland was fortunate enough in 1758 to become part of Lord Jeffery Amherst's successful expedition against Louisbourg, not of Abercromby's failed attack on Ticonderoga (Carillon). The British naval blockade of Louisbourg harbour was effective enough that, with numerically superior forces, the besiegers could attack from several angles. The boldest and most vigorous part of the force that landed at Gabarus Bay was commanded by James Wolfe, the youngest of the brigadiers. Of several engineers whose services he requested for the works he intended to carry out, he was granted only Samuel Holland, of whom he later wrote to the Duke of Richmond:

"Hollandt the Dutch engineer has been with me the whole siege, and a brave active fellow he is, as ever I met with; he should have been killed a hundred times, his escape is [a] miricle [sic]. I promised to mention him to your Grace, because he looks upon himself [as], in some measure, under your protection, and upon my word he deserves it. I hope Lord George [Sackville] will take him into the Corps of Engineers and when there is any business to be done, he will find him the most useful man in it."

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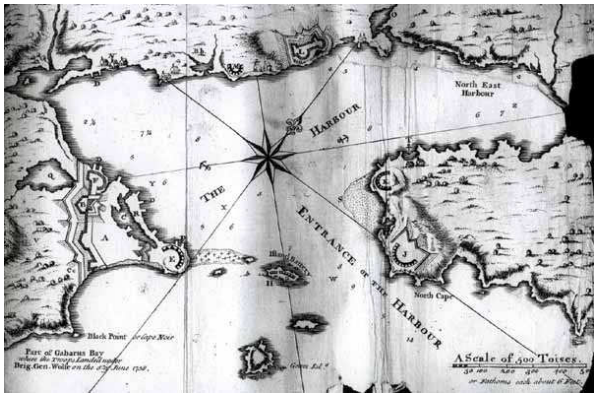
Wolfe blamed the slow progress of the siege on other engineers, who were under the direction of Colonel J.H. Bastide, a veteran of the siege of 1745, and Major Patrick Mackellar. He believed that ignorance, inexperience, poor strategy and methods unsuited to the Cape Breton terrain were their chief shortcomings.



Gabarus Bay at Louisbourg

Wolfe was able to affect a landing at l'Anse de la Coromandière (Kennington Cove) on 8 June 1758 only because three boatloads of his soldiers, avoiding extremely heavy fire, stumbled on a sandy space "no wider than the length of a ship's boat". It was invisible to the defenders because a senior officer, convinced that a landing there was impossible, had deliberately left an excellent lookout post unmanned. Before the defenders became aware of the landing and could mount an adequate counter-offensive, the first few attackers were followed by a stream of others: grenadiers, light infantry and irregulars supported by Highlanders.

Once the main force's beachhead was consolidated, Wolfe's troops swept around to the northwest of the town, where Holland directed a siege operation that Wolfe called an "affair of the spade and pickaxe". Following the elimination of the Royal Battery, supplied by sea with artillery and stores through a small cove, and aided by the defenders' abandonment of Lighthouse Point, the besiegers established a new battery there that dominated the defenders' Island Battery at the harbour's entrance. From the 19th to the 25th of June, the besiegers bombarded that key defensive work mercilessly, knocking it out of action. The 494 guns of the French warships bottled up in the harbour, previously a formidable challenge to British guns, now became less effective, largely as a result of their very limited maneuverability. The vessels themselves, except the frigate *Aréthuse* which ran the British blockade, were condemned to destruction by the governor's refusal to approve their commander's wish to attempt an escape to France.

By 11 July the besiegers, using approach trenches and a parallel, had come to within 700 yards of their objective, where they set up a battery of four 32-pounders and six 24-pounders. During the night of 20-21 July they began a second parallel and were fired upon from the covered way. By the 25th Wolfe was reporting: "Holland has opened a new boyau, has carried on about 140 or 150 yards, and is now within 50 or 60 yards of the glacis."

Louisbourg surrendered on 26 July 1758. Holland's accurate survey of the fortifications, town and environs, carried out immediately after the surrender, is embodied in a large-scale coloured plan of 1758 which shows the progress of the seven-week siege. The detail it contains reveals Holland's intimate familiarity with all the stages of the siege and the battle, including the sectors in which he himself was

not involved.

Captain Cook Connection:

During the conduct of this' survey, James Cook, then sailing master of *H.M.S. Pembroke,* asked to be instructed in the use of the plane table. Thereafter, Holland and Cook collaborated; later, in Halifax under the supervision of Captain John Simcoe, they charted together, and very accurately, Chaleur Bay, Gaspé Bay and parts of the Gulf and River St. Lawrence. Cook attributed his subsequent surveying exploits largely to the knowledge he had gained at that time from Captain Simcoe, Samuel Holland and J.F.W. DesBarres.

The Siege of Quebec:

Between September and November 1758*,* as part of preliminary operations designed to protect the line of communication for the expedition against Quebec, Holland (under the direction of General Monckton) built on the site of the former French fort at the mouth of the Saint John River, Fort Frederick "with barracks for the accommodation of the troops". He spent the winter of 1758-59 in Halifax preparing maps and charts.

Although the report of 1757 to the Board of Ordnance on the state of the defences of Quebec by Major Patrick Mackellar failed to take into account substantial renovations made in and after 1745*,* it had a persuasive basic premise;

> "An Attack by Land is the Only Method that promises Success against the High Town and in all Probability it Could hold out but a very few Days against a Sufficient Force properly Appointed"

As we know, Wolfe favoured that strategy, despite his low opinion of Mackellar's performance at Louisbourg. He postponed until September a decision as to where to affect a landing.

Our sketchy knowledge of Samuel Holland's part in the siege is based largely upon his much later recollection, which unfortunately omits specific dates for most of the events. He was promoted captain on 24 August 1759*.* He accompanied Wolfe on a reconnaissance above the city, built batteries at Point Levis, and, while attempting a feint at Sillery with 12-pounder guns, was run down by a schooner and had to escape from the enemy by swimming.

After the landing at l'Anse au Foulon on the night of 12-13 September and the scaling of the heights, Holland "laid down a meridian line" on the battlefield "and set up stone monuments on it [the line]…". Subsequently he was unable to erect a redoubt on the British left because of the rapidity of the French advance. The nature of a wound he incurred on that day, and which he later failed to mention, is unknown. An official return shows only that he was wounded "during the campaign'.

Evidently as a token of his esteem, Wolfe presented Holland with duelling pistols, "suitably inscribed", which are now in the McCord Museum at McGill University in Montréal; a watercolour of the pistols is in the Samuel Holland Collection at Holland College in Charlottetown, P.E.I.

During the autumn and winter of 1759-60, Holland prepared the outer fortifications of Quebec for an expected spring attack by the Chevalier de Levis. In the ensuing Battle of Ste. Foy (20 April 1760) he, with Lieutenants J.F.W. DesBarres and L.F. Fuzer, supported Major Patrick Mackellar, the chief engineer; and when Mackellar, Holland was selected to act in his stead. After the defeat of the British and their retreat into Quebec, and until the Royal Navy forced Levis to raise the siege, Holland and the two lieutenants were the engineers charged with defending a city with crumbling fortifications.

After the capitulation of Montréal in September 1760, General James Murray ordered fortification expedients to furnish protection against a surprise attack and a degree of resistance in a short siege. As part of that strategy, and perhaps to protect the garrison against a possible local uprising, he had Holland design a new citadel. Modern historians rate it as one of the best-documented proposals for the defence of Québec made under British rule. Providing a relatively secure fortress while making use of existing works, it correctly applied the classical principles of bastioned fortification while taking full advantage of occupying the highest points on Cape Diamond.

Neither Holland's citadel, nor a fort he designed for Point Deschambeaux, was built. The Board of Ordnance was not prepared to recommend the expenditure of funds on constructing works they had not approved, according to designs by officers who were not royal engineers, when the threat of a French raid seemed to them remote. And so, despite Wolfe's high praise, Murray's view of Holland as "an industrious, brave officer, and an intelligent Engineer" and their recommendations that he be accepted in the Royal Engineers, the proposed citadel and fort were his last contributions to fortification design. The engineer corps was closed to him.

Surveying and Cartography:

Surveying and cartography, however, were not. General Murray, in line with official policy, ordered that extensive parts of the newly acquired territory be surveyed and mapped. Until the conclusion of a peace treaty, it was thought necessary for strategic purposes; in the long term, it would be a requisite for any British settlement project. As a first step, sites of sieges and battles were recorded in cartographic form; and for internal security, Murray added a census of the *habitants,* parish by parish.

A team comprising Capt-Lt. William Spry and Lt. John Montresor (in charge because they were of the Royal Engineers!), Lt. Joseph Peach of the 47th Regiment; Capt. Samuel Holland and Lts. Louis Fuzer and Peter F. Haldimand of the 60th Regiment; Ensign Pitman and Charles Blaskowitz, was to map the valley of the St. Lawrence from the Cedars below Montréal, down river to lle aux Coudres, plus important tributaries. Holland's assignment was the area from Montréal to Ile Ste. Thérèse on the north side of the St. Lawrence; on

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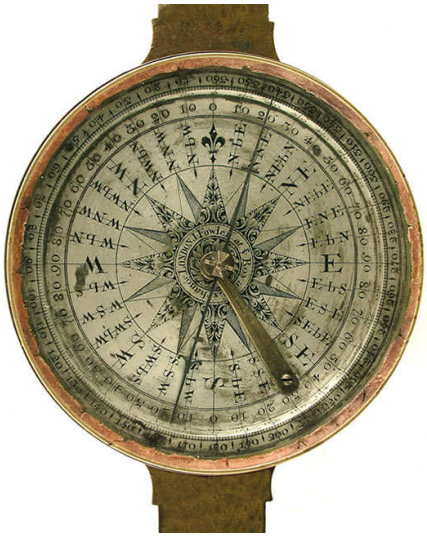
the south side from Longueuil to Bécancour, including parts of the Sorel, Yamaska, St. Francois and Nicolet Rivers; from St. Augustin to Québec; again, on the north side of the St. Lawrence, the Cap Rouge and St. Charles Rivers with the back settlements to the Montmorency River; and the town of Trois-Rivières with the St. Maurice River.



Montresor, who disgraced himself by erasing Holland's name from the final product, which has been dubbed the "Murray Map", was transferred; Murray restored Holland's name, indeed placed it first, where he thought it should be. The "Murray Map", a coloured manuscript measuring 45 by 36 feet, arranged in four divisions and scaled 2000 feet to an inch, was finished in the summer of 1762. Although the survey was, opinion of a cartographic in historian, "one of the biggest and most difficult ever undertaken by British map-makers until then, and a milestone in their rise to primacy in eighteenth century cartography", at least some of the credit must go to the mapping conducted a decade earlier in the Netherlands, where Holland had received his informal training and early experience.

The "Foreign Protestant" officers, including Holland of course, were all naturalized in 1762 by act of Parliament. This did not lead to an invitation to Holland to join the Royal Engineers. It did, however, open the door to a career as a British master surveyor and administrator. He developed a proposal for massive surveying and mapping of territories suited to exploitation by land-hungry British aristocrats and gentry and expected to be acquired by the British Crown in the peace treaty of 1763. With the backing of Murray at Quebec and the Duke of Richmond in England, he crossed the Atlantic late in 1762 to seek political support for his scheme. Within eighteen months, not only did he obtain it but was placed in charge of it. As a result, during the next thirty years, he was instrumental in developing a profession of surveyor and cartographer in British North America.

Samuel Holland's successful career bid may be attributed in part to political acumen; but only in part, for had it not been for his upbringing, his training and experience and, above all, his demonstrably superior professional ability, influential patronage would have been in short supply.

Today, Samuel Holland is commemorated by the naming of Holland College in Prince Edward Island and Holland Landing, Ontario on the shore of Lake Simcoe which was also named after Governor John Graves Simcoe under whom Samuel Holland had served on HMS Pembroke.