

## FORT BULL

Prior to the Erie Canal (1825), control of the vital Oneida Carrying Place (portage) at the site of present Rome, meant domination of the only low level, east-west water route between the St. Lawrence River and Northern Georgia. The local portage, about two miles long, combined eastward-flowing Mohawk River with westward Wood Creek.

To guard this strategic place, the English, in the French and Indian Wars, built five forts at The Carry---Craven and Williams on the Mohawk, Bull and Fort Rickey at Wood Creek (Erie Canal Village) and Newport midway between. After the French destroyed Fort Bull in 1756, the British razed the other three works and retreated down the Mohawk Valley to German Flatts (Herkimer), the vital passageway being undefended. Later the British returned and built Fort Stanwix, a large permanent fortification to replace the four earlier forts. (Fort Stanwix has been rebuilt (1976) and stands on its original site in downtown Rome).

Fort Bull, a star-shaped fort made of heavy pickets, 15 to 18 feet long, upright in the ground, guarded the lower landing place on Wood Creek, where cargoes were loaded on boats after being hauled by land over The Carry, for passage to Oswego and Lake Ontario.

Fort Bull fell to a French and Indian detachment on March 27, 1756, in one of the most brilliant raids in American military history. Commanded by Lt. Gaspard DeLery, a regular engineer officer, the expedition came from Montreal up the St. Lawrence River to La Presentation (Ogdensburg) and then by way of the Black River Valley and the Rome-Boonville Gorge to the Oneida Carry.

Here in less than four hours, the French captured Fort Bull and its garrison. Those that survived were taken back to Canada as prisoners.

DeLery's force consisted of 15 officers, two cadets, 76 regulars and 166 Canadian militia, plus 103 Indians, a total of 362. While his men reduced the fort, his Indians blocked the road over the Carry, turning back a relief party from Fort Williams.

His losses were reported as one soldier and one Indian killed, five men wounded.

In addition to the British killed at Fort Bull, DeLery's Indians killed several of the advancing relief party, the number never confirmed.

While at Wood Creek the French destroyed an excess amount of powder and other war material, much of it thrown into the Creek alongside many sunken batteaux, some loaded and ready to leave for Oswego.

It is reported that while soldiers were searching for loot, an Indian wandered into a powder magazine carrying a torch, blowing up much of the fort and injuring at least two of the French.

DeLery returned to Montreal, taking his prisoners along, some dying on the way.

The British General Webb, in command of the upper Mohawk Valley, ordered Fort Bull replaced by a new work, called Fort Wood Creek. Before it could be completed, the French captured Oswego (where they did not stay) and Webb ordered Fort Wood Creek and the other forts at The Carry to be destroyed, retreating to German Flatts, (Herkimer). For this he was soon replaced and a new and much larger fortification ordered built at The Carry---Ft. Stanwix.

The earthworks now seen in the rear of Erie Canal Village are the best preserved of all the untouched French and Indian War forts. No visit to the Erie Canal Village should be complete without standing on the sacred soil of Fort Bull. (For further information, read Gilbert Hagerty's "Massacre at Fort Bull".)