



The Battle of Bushy Run in 2 X 4 feet.

The Battle of **Bushy Run** 1763

James H. Hillestad chronicles the confrontation for its tactical innovations and strategic outcome.

The Battle of Bushy Run was climactic: it resulted in a British victory that opened up the “west” to colonial expansion, and it was a turning point in the Indian war known as Pontiac’s Uprising.

Background

The events that brought about the battle near Bushy Run found their origins in the Seven Years War (the French and Indian War in America). After six years of conflict with the Indians and the French, the English triumphed over the French in the

Ohio River Valley at Fort Duquesne (Fort Pitt) — and went on to score victories at Fort Niagara and the key city of Quebec. Finally, in September 1760, British forces under the command of General Amherst forced the surrender of the last French stronghold at Montreal.

The colonists living east of the Allegheny Mountains now felt safe from Indian marauders and expanded their land holdings in the Ohio Country. This was in contravention of a treaty signed in the fall of 1758, which guaranteed Indian ownership

of all of the Upper Ohio River Valley.

Indian Unrest

While this aggravating encroachment was going on, the British eliminated the giving of gifts to Indian leaders, who in turn redistributed the gifts to other members of the tribe to maintain and enhance their leadership status. Also curbed was the sale of arms and ammunition to the Indians, who, by this time, had become dependent upon firearms for hunting and defense.

The Indians’ discontent burst out into the open, when it was proclaimed “the



View of the battlefield today – the dense growth of trees has been cleared out.



“Ready, Aim, Fire!”

English treat us with much disrespect and we have the greatest reason to believe by their behavior they intend to cut us off.”

This sentiment was picked up by an influential Ottawa war chief in the Detroit area named Pontiac. He and other native leaders were convinced that the English were intent upon taking their country and making slaves of them.

Attacks are Unleashed

So it was that the siege of Fort Detroit was begun in May 1763. In the next six months, the Indians led by Pontiac had seized six British forts — and these victories inspired the tribes of the Upper Ohio River Valley to take up the hatchet against the English as well.

Indian war parties attacked Fort Pitt. The officer commanding the fort, Captain Simeon Ecuyer, hurriedly sent off a dispatch rider to Colonel Henry Bouquet in Philadelphia, alerting him to the



The Indians skirt the Byerly log cabin.



Mortal Combat



The Indians are drawn into a concentrated attack.



The blue granite monument marks the site of the "flour bag fort" on Edge Hill.

dire situation.

Bouquet was Commander of British regulars and reported to Sir Jeffrey Amherst, the commander in chief for the British in North America.

The Ohio Country Indians launched raids against the remote settlements that dotted the frontier east of the Allegheny Mountains. Thousand of panic-stricken settlers fled their homes.

Though first believing that the "turmoil" was overstated, Amherst finally authorized three regiments, led by Bouquet, to go to the relief of Fort Pitt.

Remote Location

The line of supply from Philadelphia to Fort Pitt crossed nearly 350 miles of rugged mountains and dense forests. To alleviate the arduous journey, Colonel Bouquet located a series of way stations along the route. One such wilderness oasis was Bushy Run Station, situated 30 miles east of Pittsburgh. Bouquet had induced one of his sergeants, Andrew Byerly, to build and occupy the station. Byerly and his wife cleared the land, built a log cabin and outbuildings, and planted crops.

The Battle is Joined

On August 4, Bouquet pushed on for the last leg of his journey to beleaguered Fort Pitt. His exhausted expedition numbered fewer than 500 men and 350 pack-horses carrying flour on their backs. By early afternoon, the column had marched about seventeen miles and were less than a mile from Bushy Run.

Suddenly, gunfire erupted from Indian warriors, who darted back and forth through the woods. The Indians then resorted to their traditional battlefield tactic of enveloping the British in a half-moon formation (much like the tactic the Zulus

Germ Warfare

At Fort Pitt, Ecuyer met with two Delaware chiefs, who appeared before the gates of the fort under a flag of truce. After the meeting, he gave them some customary gifts, including several blankets and handkerchiefs that had been in the fort's smallpox hospital. This plan to unleash germ warfare, however, failed.



Sustaining heavy casualties, the Indian attack falters.



A surprise awaits a Black Watch Highlander.

put into place a century later at Isandlwana).

Bouquet ordered his men to fall back and set up a defensive perimeter on top of a rolling hill. He labeled the site “Edge Hill.” The flour bags were removed from the horses and piled in a circle to give some protection to the troops.

With darkness came a lull in the fighting. The next morning, the Indians surrounding Edge Hill resumed the attack.

Tables are Turned

As British casualties continued to climb, Bouquet realized his position atop the hill would soon be untenable. It was then that he formulated a plan that would turn the tide of battle at Bushy Run.

He hoped to entice the Indians to come out in the open, where his troops could deal with them. And the best way to effect this was to make them believe that his soldiers were retreating.

He ordered a withdrawal of the troops on the west side of the hill to fall back inside the circle. From there, they contin-

ued their “retreat” over the eastern brow of the hill. When they were out of sight, they fixed bayonets and maneuvered through the woods, taking positions along the flanks of the Indians.

The Indians had folded in their horse-shoe attack and were concentrated in the center. What set out to be an Indian envelopment now became a British envelopment.

The Highlanders crashed out of the woods. The stunned Indians fled in disarray, sustaining heavy casualties. The Battle of Bushy Run was over. Bouquet’s relief column went on to Fort Pitt and lifted the siege.

The Aftermath

The battle was a major victory for the British and enabled them to secure control of the Ohio River Valley.

While the conclusion of this bloody conflict brought great relief to the settlers in the region, it also sowed the seeds of discontent with British rule. The settlers felt

victimized by the British government who they felt had failed miserably in providing them with adequate protection. This discontent contributed to putting America on the road to revolution.

But that’s another story... 

The Highlanders

Much of the credit for Colonel Bouquet’s victory at Bushy Run goes to the Highland soldiers that formed the bulk of his relief expedition — of particular note was the inclusion of the fabled Black Watch. Their reputation as tenacious warriors emerged as a result of their war with the British during the Jacobite Rebellion in 1745. When they first arrived in America, in 1756, they were regarded with some sense of awe. With their plaid kilts, jaunty bonnets, and badger skin sporrans, the Scottish troops made a novel, even outlandish, spectacle. Some observers took note of the similarity between the Scottish soldier and the Woodland Indian warrior. The French labeled them “savages without pants.”

Jim Hillestad is a frequent contributor to *The Standard* and is proprietor of The Toy Soldier Museum. His museum, containing more than 35,000 figures, dozens of dioramas, and a large collection of militaria, is located in the Pocono Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania. For directions and hours, call him at 570 629-7227 or visit his website: www.the-toy-soldier.com