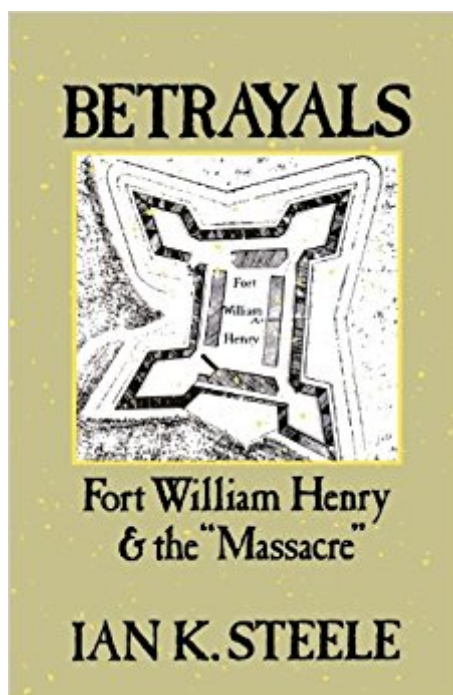


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# Betrays: Fort William Henry And The Massacre



## Synopsis

On the morning of August 9, 1757, British and colonial officers defending the besieged Fort William Henry surrendered to French forces, accepting the generous "parole of honor" offered by General Montcalm. As the column of British and colonials marched with their families and servants to Fort Edward some miles south, they were set upon by the Indian allies of the French. The resulting "massacre," thought to be one of the bloodiest days of the French and Indian War, became forever ingrained in American myth by James Fenimore Cooper's classic novel *The Last of the Mohicans*. In *Betrayals*, historian Ian K. Steele gives us the true story behind Cooper's famous book, bringing to life men such as British commander of Fort William Henry George Monro, English General Webb, his French counterpart Montcalm, and the wild frontier world of Natty Bumppo. The Battle of Lake George and the building of the fort marked the return of European military involvement in intercolonial wars, producing an explosive mixture of the contending martial values of Indians, colonials, and European regulars. The Americans and British who were attacked after surrendering, as well as French officers and their Indian allies (the latter enraged by the small amount of English booty allowed them by the French), all felt deeply betrayed. Contemporary accounts of the victims--whose identities Steele has carefully reconstructed from newly discovered sources--helped to create a powerful, racist American folk memory that still resonates today. Survivors included men and women who were adopted into Indian tribes, sold to Canadians in a well-established white servant trade, or jailed in Canada or France as prisoners of war. Explaining the motives for the most notorious massacre of the colonial period, Steele offers a gripping tale of a fledgling America, one which places the tragic events of the Seven Years' War in a fresh historical context. Anyone interested in the fact behind the fiction will find it fascinating reading.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"[A] detailed and elegant history....Steele is an historian who takes great pains to discover, assemble, and present historical data; he is also a fine stylist. He writes in a straightforward way that captivates the reader by its deceptive simplicity."--The Canadian review of American Studies"Extremely well documented from research on both sides of the Atlantic...Steele treats Europeans and American Indians fairly and is unafraid of presenting either side's warts and blemishes....This study, as with any good history, is multidimensional and thought provoking in its most positive sense. It is a superbly crafted, well-researched study of mid-eighteenth century North American military culture."--American Historical Review"Until now no one has written a careful, full-length study of a military engagement from a multicultural perspective. Ian K. Steele's *Betrayals* attempts to clarify the circumstances that made alliances between Indians and Europeans fragile and unpredictable....In many ways, the author succeeds admirably in his aims....Valuable reading for anyone interested in intercultural alliances in warfare; Steele has broken new ground with this book."--American Indian Quarterly"A model case study of meticulous research....This well-written microcosm study opens a wide window on the times and is less military than cultural history. So it can be highly recommended for a variety of experts, average readers, and students alike."--Canadian Journal of History"An interesting reinterpretation of the events surrounding the fall of Fort William Henry. Steele's history of the fort provides an excellent case study of diplomacy and warfare on the northern colonial frontier."--William and Mary Quarterly"An intriguing account of the intricacies of one relatively small episode which had a profound impact on both the outcome of the French-English war in North America and on the actions and attitudes of American generations later.... Short, detailed, and finely textured....Fascinating and well written....Well worth the read."--International History Review"Definitive....In comprehensiveness, humanity, and sophistication, not other effort to deal with the French and Indian War compares with this brief, eloquent book. It deserves the widest possible readership."--Fred Anderson, *Journal of American History*"Provides the most comprehensive discussion available in print of the warfare along the Lake Champlain-Lake George waterway. Highly recommended for a broad spectrum of readers."--Choice"A thoughtful, thoroughly researched and very well written book which deserves a wide readership."--Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research"*Betrayals* is a compelling

narrative of special interest to readers of early Canadian, American, military, and Amer-Indian history."--Loyalist Gazette

Ian K. Steele is Professor of History at the University of Western Ontario. He has written widely on early North American history and his books include *Politics of Colonial Policy* and the award-winning *The English Atlantic, 1675-1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community*, both published by Oxford.

Despite the Liberal revisionist description of this book I found it to be an honest scholarly investigation into this event in history which has become one of the darker legends of colonial American history. Clearly not the work of some Amerindian apologist bent on denying or trivializing what happened, this book tries to provide the reader with an honest and unbiased source of what happened. Provides a good source of background on the war and the treatment of captives, including the French Colonial slave trade of American captives. The author makes a sincere effort to determine what actually happened. A good book for those interested in this period.

Excellent book. Well written and well sourced. Plenty of firsthand narrative and quotes. Interesting and full of details and facts that keep the story going.

Accounts of the siege and fall of Fort William Henry (3-9 August 1757) vary dramatically depending on the source (or movie), but all agree English/Colonial forces were attacked a day after their surrender to Montcalm with the 'honors of war.' The causes, responsibility, and number of victims have been widely disputed ever since. This work convincingly reconstructs the actual event from sources drawn from colonial to modern times (all presented). It describes the frontier (from Kalm's 1749 travels), the struggle for dominion, the combatants, and the victims' fate (with a tabulation of killed and missing). It is a lucid, balanced account that sets the record straight and raises larger questions. Each party was betrayed: English/Colonials by the attack, each other, and the absence of Iroquois allies; the French by unreliable native allies (especially those from the pays d'en haut) and Canadians; Canadians by French neophytes in North American warfare; and the perpetrators (Indians allies of the French) by European terms that foreclosed their expectations. It was an event that exposed radically disjointed cultures. One of the Indian perpetrators best explained himself to Sulpician Abbé François Picquet in Montreal en route west after refusing Governor Pierre de Rigaud de Vaudreuil de Cavagnail's attempts to redeem his captive: "I make war

for plunder, scalps, and prisoners. You are satisfied with a fort, and you let your enemy and mine live. I do not want to keep such bad meat for tomorrow. When I kill it, it can no longer attack me." The native world had no conception of the 'honors of war' or chivalry (save silent days of torture of a captive before inevitable death). A few minor items missing in the text/footnotes:-The Ohio Land Company (formed by George Washington's elder brother Lawrence, Lt-Gov Dinwiddie, and others, employing George Washington as a surveyor) which stood to directly profit from the acquisition of western Pennsylvania - claimed by France;-The 'assassination' of Joseph Coulon de Villiers de Jumonville and ten other Frenchmen after they surrendered to George Washington by Tanaghrisson and his Mingo tribesmen 28 May 1754 at Jumonville's Glen PA (a formative event for war, similarly disputed in subsequent accounts);-Louis Coulon de Villiers's (Jumonville's elder brother) victory at Fort Necessity 3 July 1754 is mentioned, but without any acknowledgment of Villiers's award of 'honors of war' to George Washington and Washington's immediate renunciation of them on regaining safety in Virginia (he returned with Braddock the following year and narrowly escaped death at Monongahela 9 July 1755);-The Battle of Carillon 8 July 1758, Montcalm's last victory, in which (deserted by most native allies) his force of 4,200 defeated Maj-General James Abercromby's 17,600 men (including 400 Mohawks) attack. Those points aside (they have more to do with context rather than content), this is an excellent work that is highly recommended.

the battle was a good one but I read some that had much more detail, I didn't know about the guns exploding, that was a first and they did a real good aftermath of the whole fort with things I did not know

The title of this perceptive book tells the gist of Professor Steele's investigation into the siege and subsequent murder or kidnapping of prisoners after the British garrison surrendered to Montcalm in 1757. In essence, the English prisoners were betrayed by the French by letting their Indian allies seek scalps, prisoners and plunder after being given parole to march to a British force on the Hudson. On a larger scale, the French betrayed the Indians by not allowing them to take what Indians assumed were rightfully theirs as a part of 18th century warfare: prisoners to replace tribal members killed in combat, plunder of European materials, and scalps. Steele asserts that the losses suffered by the British garrison were smaller than previously claimed (including a number of men who were forced to travel home with Indians from the Great Lakes) and that the incident was not the bloodbath of popular legend. The men taken to the Lakes kept turning up for years afterward. Many of the scalps taken were from the corpses in the fort's cemetery-the Indians who took these scalps

therefore brought smallpox back home with them and might have inadvertently destroyed whole tribes. Steele tries to count the men killed during the "massacre" and I think he is successful in his enumeration. He does not overlook the wounded who were murdered in their beds, the man boiled and eaten by his captors, and the soldiers knocked out of line and killed because they resisted being plundered. I agree that Montcalm was not complicit in directing the massacre, but set up the conditions that caused it to happen. The Massacre lives on in popular imagination, but so does the Boston Massacre, certainly one of the most non-massacres in American history. On a personal note, my 7th generation great-grandfather Bernardus Bratt commanded the New York troops at Fort William Henry in the summer of 1756 and came out as a company commander in Sir William Johnson's regiment after the 1757 massacre. Well-written and well-documented modern accounts of the French and Indian War are few and far between. Steele's book should remain the final word for some time to come.

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