

James Gerolamy Sr and sons, James Jr and John, in the War of 1812

Prior to the outbreak of hostilities, James Sr and his sons, James Jr (16) and John (12) were recruited by Ensign William McLean and enlisted with the Glengarry Light Infantry Fencibles Regiment on 5 April 1812 at Kingston for three years. From thence, James and sons joined other recruits at the regimental training headquarters located at Trois-Rivière, Quebec where they underwent basic training. On 2 July 1812, the regiment was inspected by Sir George Prevost, reporting:

“ The Glengary (sic) Fencibles is composed of remarkably tall and stout Men, in general young, a few old Men who have been in the Army and have sons serving in the Corps, have been admitted.” ¹

An apt description of the Gerolamys. James Sr, 44 and 6.0' tall , James Jr. 16 and 6.' 1" tall and John 12. ² Shortly after, James Sr, now a corporal, and James Jr, were sent out on recruiting drives. By late summer the regiment spent several weeks of advanced training at Quebec City such as forest warfare techniques by Captain James Fitz Gibbon. Here John remained for specialist training such as learning bugle calls, critical for a regiment such as the Glengarry Light Infantry. The remainder of the regiment were stationed at Montreal where they were quartered in the Recollet barracks.

In late September, 2 companies of the regiment, along with 2 light gun boats, were dispatched to Prescott, Upper Canada. Shortly after, 22 October 1812, the 3rd company, in which James Sr, corporal and John, bugler, were members, commanded by Captain John Jenkins, were sent to Prescott. Here the 3 Gerolamys experienced their first military action. On 22 February 1813, Jenkins' company, along with a number of British regular companies and local militia, attacked the American troops stationed at Ogden- sburg, New York. The battle was relatively short, but fierce, with the Americans routed, the fort, barracks and two gunboats burned, and a large store of weapons and ammunition seized. Later, all the soldiers involved in the battle, shared prize money including James Sr and John. James Jr, a member of a different company, who just “happened” to be in the area, also joined the battle and later received a share of the prize money. As one author wrote, “The three Gerolamys ... may have made the attack a family affair.” ³

The 3rd company, along with a few members of other companies, spent the rest of the winter of 1813 at Prescott while the rest of the regiment was variously posted from Quebec City to Kingston. On 23 March 1813, Colonel Baynes ordered all of the regiment to the Niagara area. Here, the 1st company, of which James Jr was a member, along with the 5th and 9th companies were subsequently engaged in the Battle of Fort George on 27 May 1813. Sadly, the British and Canadian troops were overwhelmed by a much larger American force and eventually retreated to Beaver Dams. Apparently, the Glengarry casualties were severe and about 59 soldiers captured. James Jr. was listed as captured but a search of American lists of glengarry soldiers captured by General Dearborn's troops during the battle does not list him. According to Winston Johnston, “ ... the paymaster was unable to determine the whereabouts of those not reporting for duty...” and listed them as dead or prisoners.⁴ James Jr. showed up a few days later.

Following the battle of Fort George, the regiment was engaged in a number of other engagements such as those at Stoney Creek, Sacketts Harbour and the capture of Oswego, New York. It is not known with any certainty that all of the Gerolamys were part of these actions. But by 8 July 1814, the entire regiment was at York and the next day, minus 33 sick soldiers, were hurriedly “...pushed on to Burlington...”⁵ From here the regiment was involved in a number of engagements most notably the battle of Lundy's Lane, followed by actions at Fort Erie and Cook's Mills.

By November 1814, according to Lt. General Drummond,⁶ the regiment was worn out and thus ordered to over winter at York and Kingston. After the cessation of hostilities, James Sr and James Jr were finally discharged on 5 April 1815 at Adolphustown and John on 24 May 1815, same place. The Gerolamys had all survived the war and, as did so many other soldiers, served bravely in the defense of Upper Canada. According to their commanding officer, Francis Battersby, James Sr served as a "Brave & good soldier...",⁷ and James Jr as "...a Brave & faithful Soldier & has been frequently employed by me in several services of trust & danger while before the Enemy...".⁸ Sadly, the author has not located the discharge papers for John who, no doubt, served Upper Canada in a like manner. Several years later, Captain James Fitz Gibbon wrote of the Gerolamys' service "... I have frequently heard Lt. Colonel Battersby and their Captain (Cochrane) speak in high terms of their intelligence and bravery as soldiers; and it is within my own knowledge that they have been sent more than once to escort officers on secret service, in canoes".⁹

Footnotes:

- (1) British Military and Naval Records, RG 8, C Series, vol. 1218, p.319, Reel C-3526, image 277.
- (2) James Sr, Upper Canada Land Petitions, "J" Bundle 15/ # 17, RG1, L3, vol.258, p.17d, Reel C-2111, image 169.
James Jr, Upper Canada Land Petitions, "G" Bundle 12/# 20, RG1, L3, Vol. 206, p. 20b, Reel C-2030, image 794.
- (3) Johnson, H. Winston, *The Glengarry Light Infantry, 1812-1816:Who were they and what did do in the war?*, Charlottetown, PEI, 2011. p. 123. (For those interested in this regiment, this book is highly recommended)
- (4) *ibid*, p.230.
- (5) British Military and Naval Records, RG 8, C Series, vol.684, p.88, Reel C-3174, image 823.
- (6) Johnson, p.204.
- (7) Upper Canada Land Petitions, "J" Bundle 15, petition #17, vol. 258, p.17c, Reel C-2111, image 170.
- (8) Upper Canada Land Petitions, "G" Bundle 12/petition #20, vol.206, p.20b, Reel C- 2030, image 795.
- (9) *Ibid*, p. 20a, Reel C- 2030, image 793.

209,

York 23rd March 1819.

I do hereby certify that James
Gerstony and his two sons served in
the Grenadier Company of the ^{late} Flungary
Regiment during the late War,
and that I have frequently heard Colonel
Battersby and their Captain (Cochran)
speak in high terms of their intelligence
and bravery as soldiers; and it is
within my own knowledge that they
have been sent more than once to
escort Officers on secret service, in
Canoes.

James Fife Gibbon
Capt. late Flungary Regt.

at that Post until relieved by three Companies of the Royal Newfoundland Regt under Major Matthews

This Company is intended to form an Escort for all Government Stores and Merchandise which is collected at La Chine and destined for Upper Canada.

I have &c &c
(Signed) Noah True
Military Secretary

Quebec 17th July 1812

To the
Adjutant General
of the Forces
Horse Guards

Sir / I request you will be pleased to lay before His Royal Highness the Commander in Chief the accompanying Return and Report upon my inspection of the Glengary Light Infantry Fusiliers

I have &c &c
(Signed) George Keest
Commander of the Troop

Quebec 17th July 1812

To
Field Marshal
His Royal Highness
The Duke of York
Comd in Chief
of the Army

Sir / I have the honor to acquaint your Royal Highness that on the 2nd instant I inspected the Glengary Light Infantry Fusiliers stationed at Three Rivers

The Glengary Fusiliers is composed of remarkably tall stout Men, in general young, a few old Men who have been in the Army and have sons coming in the Corps, have been admitted.

The Battalion has been assembled under Acting Lieut Col. Matthews, who has been unremitting in his exertions to train and discipline the Corps, and to establish the necessary interior Arrangement and economy and in which he has already evinced talents and ability highly creditable to himself and beneficial to the service.

Acting Major McDonnell has been employed in the Superintendance of the Recruiting service in the

Commanding
Officer