



Historical sources for the 1730 battle at the Grand Village of the Natchez

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ABSTRACT

The French siege that took place at the Grand Village of the Natchez in 1730 was an important battle that resulted in the expulsion of the Natchez people from their homeland. Here I describe the ten detailed narratives of this battle and the three contemporaneous maps of the battlefield that have survived. I also consider the relationships of the various authors to the events they chronicled. The narratives are largely consistent with each other, although their structures vary according to each author's perspective and sources of information. The maps provide the spatial context for understanding the narratives, as well as crucial information on how the French and Native combatants were deployed. This review lays the groundwork for the two articles that follow in this issue: a translation of the Delaye narrative (Sayre 2026) and an archaeological investigation of the battlefield (Boudreaux et al. 2026).

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The French-Natchez war of 1729–1731 was a pivotal episode in the history of French Louisiana (Giraud 1991:388–429). It began in November 1729 with a surprise attack by the Natchez Indians on the French colony in their midst, where, in a matter of hours, some 250 settlers were killed and a similar number – mostly women, children, and enslaved Africans – were taken hostage. Two months later, in late January and February 1730, an army of French troops and settlers, together with their Choctaw and *petite nations* allies, laid siege to the Natchez, who had built two forts at the Grand Village. The French ultimately retrieved the captives, but the Natchez escaped, with most moving across the Mississippi River into the Ouachita River drainage. There, in January 1731, another combined French and Indian force laid siege to them again (Green 1936; Steponaitis and Prickett 2014), this time capturing many Natchez who were eventually sold into slavery on Ste. Domingue. But again, the bulk of the Natchez people escaped. Some likely returned to the Natchez district and lived there while hiding from the French (Frank 1975). Others began a long diaspora, during which they first lived among the Chickasaws and later among the Cherokees, the Creeks, and the Catawbas (Lieb 2008; Smyth 2016; Swanton 1911:247–257). After this war, the French fort at Natchez was rebuilt and garrisoned, but the French colony never recovered. And the Natchez people never returned to their homeland.

My goal here is to review the historical records pertaining to the war's second major battle, the one that

took place at the Grand Village in 1730. I start by discussing the many narratives of the battle, comparing the episodes they describe and considering each author's proximity to the events that took place. I then turn to the contemporaneous French maps, which shed light on the layout of the battlefield as well as the broader landscape in which these narratives unfolded.

In reviewing these documents, I also hope to lay the groundwork for better understanding the two articles that follow. The first, by Gordon Sayre, is an English translation of Delaye's account of the 1730 siege and the events that led up to it – the most detailed first-person narrative that has survived. And the second, by Edmond Boudreaux and colleagues, looks archaeologically at the battlefield itself, using remote sensing and excavations to reveal the mounds that the French occupied and used in various ways during their attack on the Native forts.

The narratives

Multiple narrative accounts of this battle have survived, which, broadly speaking, fall into three groups (Table 1, with references therein). Some are firsthand accounts, written by officers who participated in the battle. Others are secondhand accounts, written soon after the battle by people who clearly had detailed information on the events that had transpired. And the last group comprises narratives that were penned decades later by authors who had access to some of these earlier sources

Table 1. Narrative accounts of the 1730 siege.

Category: Author	Date	Original Manuscript	Published Versions
<i>Firsthand accounts:</i>			
Jean-Baptiste Delaye	Jun 1, 1730	Archives nationales d'outre-mer, 4 DFC 38	Sayre 2026, this issue
Pierre Baron	Apr 10, 1730	[current location unknown]	Gayarré (1846:1:253–258); Claiborne (1880:46–47)
François Louis de Merveilleux	–	Bibliothèque de Reims, Ms 1451:113–127	De Ville (2003)
<i>Secondhand accounts:</i>			
Maturin Le Petit	Jul 12, 1730	Archives nationales d'outre-mer, 4 DFC 40	Le Petit (1731, 1737, 1781, 1866, 1874–1876, 1900)
Bernard Diron d'Artaguiette	Mar 20, 1730	Archives nationales d'outre-mer, COL C 13A 12:371–375v	Gayarré (1846:1:258–261); Rowland and Sanders (1927:76–81)
Anonymous	–	Newberry Library, Ayer MS 293, vol. 4:386–393	–
<i>Secondhand accounts, delayed:</i>			
Pierre F. X. de Charlevoix	1744	–	Charlevoix (1744, 1872)
J. F. B. Dumont de Montigny	1747	Newberry Library, Ayer MS 257	Zecher et al. (2008); Sayre and Zecher (2012)
J. F. B. Dumont de Montigny	1753	–	Dumont de Montigny (1753, 1853)
Antoine S. Le Page du Pratz	1758	–	Le Page du Pratz (1758, 2010)

and likely also knew many of the people who had witnessed the events being described.

All the narratives agree on what took place and the general order of events (Table 2). They differ, however, in which events are mentioned and how the events are described, reflecting the authors' sources of information and points of view. Indeed, a close comparison of these accounts reveals some interesting patterns in narrative structure, that is, the selection of events and sequence of presentation. As detailed below, these patterns suggest that some accounts were derived from others or that different authors relied on common sources that have since been lost.

The firsthand accounts that survive were written by three men with very different backgrounds – a scientist, a soldier, and a settler. The scientist was Pierre Baron, a well-connected Frenchman who was sent to Louisiana in the service of the king (Giraud 1991:244–255, 412–413). He thought of himself as an astronomer and a mathematician, but in the colony he became a self-appointed jack-of-all-trades instead. One historian aptly described Baron as “a man of inquiring mind, steeped in knowledge of the natural sciences and ready to take on many tasks – to improvise the roles of architect, engineer, or soldier without actually possessing any definite qualifications at all” (Giraud 1991:245). Baron volunteered to accompany the French expeditionary force to Natchez and apparently served in the battle as an engineer.¹ His account is spare but particularly important because it was accompanied by a map of the battlefield that will be described presently.

The soldier was François Louis de Merveilleux, a Swiss mercenary who arrived in the colony as an officer in the Karrer Regiment, served a stint as the commander at Fort Rosalie in Natchez, and led troops during the 1730 battle (Giraud 1991:231–232, 394–395). The manuscript attributed to him survives in the

library at Reims. It is undated, but it reads like a contemporaneous account given its specificity with dates and events. Even though the manuscript is unsigned, it can be linked to Merveilleux with internal evidence, given that the text identifies its author as a “Swiss officer of the Karrer Regiment” and a former commandant of the Natchez fort (De Ville 2003).

The settler was Jean-Baptiste Delaye, who at the time of the battle lived on the Mézières Concession at Pointe Coupée (Giraud 1991:178–179, 409–414). He mustered a militia of his fellow settlers in the weeks leading up to the battle and led them during the hostilities. Delaye played a pivotal role in the siege and left by far the most detailed account of the events, replete with opinions and commentary. He wrote this report some three months after the battle had ended and sent it to Paris, where it survived and has now been translated by Gordon Sayre in the article that follows this one (Sayre 2026).

With regard to the contemporaneous secondhand narratives, the closest in time to the events in question was written by Bernard Diron d'Artaguiette, inspector general of the troops in Louisiana and commandant of the fort at Mobile (Giraud 1991:352–353, 363–364). He recounted the progress of the battle day by day, in a letter to the minister of the navy in Paris, dated only a month and a half after the events described. Where he got this information is unclear, but one likely source was his younger brother Pierre, who fought in the battle as an officer and, by all accounts, distinguished himself in combat.

A similarly detailed account was penned by Maturin Le Petit, a French Jesuit priest, in a letter to his superior dated five months after the battle. Again, his source is unclear, but the level of detail suggests his information came from someone who witnessed the events firsthand.

Table 2. Narrative structure and the chronology of events in accounts of the 1730 siege.*

Event	Firsthand Accounts			Secondhand Accounts			Secondhand Accounts, Delayed ^a			
	Delays 1730	Baron 1730	Merveilleux n.d.	Le Petit 1730	Diron 1730	Anonymous ca. 1730	Charlevoix 1744	Dumont 1747	Dumont 1753	Du Pratz 1758
Tioux visit Tunicas	–	–	Dec 9	–	Dec 9	Dec 9	Dec 9	–	–	–
Merveilleux arrives at Tunicas	–	–	Dec 10	–	Dec 10	Dec 10	Dec 10	–	–	–
Delays arrives at Tunicas	Dec 17	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Loubois arrives at Tunicas	–	–	Dec 18	–	Dec 18	Dec 18	Dec 18	1	1	1
Father Doutreleau arrives	Jan 4	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Mesplet group departs Tunicas	Jan 19	–	Jan 6	–	Jan 16	Jan 16	Dec 16 ^b	2a	2a	2a
Mesplet group arrives at Natchez	–	–	–	Jan 24	–	Jan 23	–	2b	2b	2b
Mesplet group survivor returns	Jan 25	–	–	Jan 25	Jan 25	[noted]	–	2c	2c	2c
Mesplet burned	[noted]	–	–	–	–	Jan 25	–	2d	2d	2d
Natchez question French woman	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	3	3
Choctaws attack the Natchez	Jan 28	–	Jan 28	Jan 27	Jan 27	Jan 18 ^b	Jan 27	4a	4a	4a
Choctaws camp at St. Catherine	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	4b	4b	4b
French army departs from Tunicas	Feb 3	Feb 2	–	–	Feb 2	Feb 2	Feb 2	–	–	–
Delays departs from wait privier	Feb 7	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
French army arrives at Natchez	–	Feb 8	Feb 8	Feb 8	Feb 8	Feb 8	Feb 8	5a	5	5a
Delays arrives at Natchez	Feb 9	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Army camps at St. Catherine	Feb 10	Feb 8	–	–	–	–	–	5b	–	5b
Choctaw-Natchez parlay	Feb 11	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Failed abduction of Natchez chief	[noted]	Feb 9	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Natchez skirmish, silver retrieved	[noted]	Feb 12	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Cannons brought to Fort Valeur	[noted]	–	Feb 12	–	Feb 12	Feb 12	Feb 12	–	–	–
Parley with Natchez	[noted]	Feb 13	–	–	Feb 13	Feb 13	–	–	–	–
Fort bombardment without success	–	Feb 14	–	–	Feb 14	Feb 14	Feb 13	–	–	–
Interpreter drops flag, retrieved	Feb 15	–	Feb 14	–	Feb 15	Feb 15	Feb 15	[6]	9a ^c	9a ^c
Frenchwomen escape, babies killed	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	9b ^c	9b ^c
Natchez sortie at temple	–	Feb 14	–	–	Feb 15	Feb 15	Feb 15	–	–	–
Parley with Natchez	–	[noted]	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Delays fires grapeshot at night	Feb 16	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Native women flee Natchez fort	Feb 17	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Sap opened at night	Feb 17	Feb 19	–	–	Feb 19	Feb 19	Feb 19	–	6	6
Aborted French sortie 1 (Fort Farine) ^d	Feb 19	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Cannon fire continues	–	–	–	–	Feb 21	Feb 21	Feb 21	–	–	–
Natchez storm the sap	Feb 22	Feb 22	–	–	Feb 22	Feb 22	Feb 22	–	7	7
Aborted French sortie 2 (Brinville) ^d	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	8	8	8
Aborted French sortie 3 (Fort Farine) ^d	–	–	–	–	Feb 23	Feb 23	Feb 23	–	–	–
Cannon brought closer in trench	–	Feb 23	–	–	Feb 24	Feb 24	Feb 24	[10]	10	10
Mme Desnoyer returned	–	–	–	–	Feb 24	Feb 24	Feb 24	11a	11	–
Fort Farine raises flag	Feb 24	Feb 23	Feb 25	–	Feb 25	Feb 24	Feb 25	11b	–	11
Choctaw chief speaks to Natchez	–	–	Feb 25	–	Feb 25	Feb 24	Feb 25	–	–	–
Natchez release captives	Feb 25	–	–	–	Feb 25	[noted]	Feb 25	12	12	12
French withdraw to Miss. River	Feb 25	Feb 24	–	Feb 25	Feb 26	Feb 26	Feb 25	–	15 ^c	15 ^c
Du Parc asks Natchez for cannon	–	–	Feb 27	–	–	Feb 27	–	–	–	–
Loubois receives gifts from Natchez	–	–	Feb 29 ^e	–	–	Feb 28	–	13a	–	–
Natchez escape at night	–	–	Feb 29 ^e	–	Feb 28	Feb 29 ^e	Feb 28	13b	13	13
Natchez depart from Apple Island	–	–	Feb 29 ^e	–	–	Feb 29 ^e	–	–	–	–
French negotiate with Choctaws	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	14	14	14

*Note: Except as otherwise indicated, the events in each narrative appear in the order shown in the left column, from top to bottom. The dates given in each narrative are entered in the respective column. A dash indicates that the event was not mentioned. The entry "[noted]" indicates the event was mentioned, but without a date.

^aIn the absence of explicit dates, numbers indicate the order of events in the narrative structure.

^bErroneous date (inconsistent with other accounts).

^cEvent out of order, compared to first-hand accounts.

^dThese three aborted sorties, although related differently in each account, may represent the same event.

^eThe date as given in the narrative; apparently leap years did not exist in 1730.

Another manuscript in this category is currently held by the Newberry Library. It is anonymous and undated but part of a book that, based on the date imprinted on its cover, was bound in 1732. Although not identical to Diron's account, it has exactly the same narrative structure and shares many passages verbatim. While the direction of the copying (i.e., who copied from whom) is impossible to determine, there can be little doubt that the two documents are related.

Finally, there are several histories and memoirs that were written many years after the war ended. Perhaps the best known of these is Pierre de Charlevoix's description of the battle in his *Histoire et Description Générale de la Nouvelle France* (1744). In both content and narrative structure, Charlevoix's account closely parallels Diron's letter and the anonymous Newberry manuscript. Either Charlevoix had access to one of these documents or all shared a common source.

Two more accounts of the battle were produced by Jean-François-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny, a colonist and soldier who wrote about his experiences in *Louisiane* long after they had occurred. He served as an officer in the French garrison at Natchez during the late 1720s, so he knew the place and its people well. But he left the post early in 1729, several months before the surprise attack that destroyed it. His manuscript was written in 1747, and a printed version appeared in 1753. The two narratives are similar, but not identical. Dumont's tellings also differ from those written soon after the battle in that they lack specific dates, and the order of some events in the narrative appears to be reversed – not surprising, given the amount of time that had passed. Even so, his versions are generally consistent with the earlier ones and include details that Dumont must have gleaned from French captives who witnessed events the French army could not have seen.

The last narrative was published by Antoine Le Page du Pratz in 1758. Like Dumont, he was a colonist who had lived in Natchez and had left before the war began, in his case to live in New Orleans. His recounting of the battle shares many characteristics with Dumont's published version – so many, in fact, that it is likely derivative, at least in part (Sayre 2002:386–388).

The story of the battle, based on these sources, has been told by a number of later historians and need not be repeated in full here (Balvay 2008; Barnett 2007:109–119; Claiborne 1880:45–48; Gayarré 1854:424–436; Giraud 1991:409–415; Havard 2024; Milne 2015:189–197; Swanton 1911:235–242). Suffice it to say that the battle began with the arrival of several hundred Choctaw warriors around January 28, which caused the Natchez to retreat to their forts. A week or so later, in early February, the French arrived along with their Tunica and Houma allies. Once it became clear that the Natchez would not easily be dislodged from their forts, the French occupied the plaza, set up their headquarters in the temple on Mound C, established firing positions on and around Mound E, and began digging a sap toward the nearer fort, the one called “*Fort de Valeur*.” As the sap lengthened, the cannons were brought closer to the fort's walls and became more of a threat. At that point, the Natchez “raised a flag” and parleyed with the French. They agreed to give up their captives if the French withdrew their cannon to the Mississippi River. On or around February 25, the French decamped and the captives were handed over to the Choctaws, from whom the French ultimately had to purchase their release. A few nights later, the Natchez withdrew from the Grand Village under cover of darkness and crossed the Mississippi to get

away from their attackers. The French, meanwhile, quickly built a “provisional fort” along the Mississippi next to the old stockade, Fort Rosalie, that had been destroyed the previous November, and the main army withdrew to the settlements downriver, leaving only a small garrison behind.

Maps of the Grand Village

Our spatial understanding of the 1730 battle rests on three early-eighteenth-century French maps of the Grand Village, which not only show the locations of some additional mounds (beyond the three still visible today) but also indicate where a number of fortifications and firing positions connected with the 1730 battle might be found (Brown and Steponaitis 2017). Here I provide a brief overview of these maps, along with some new information about one of these maps, which has come to light since the original study was published.

The earliest of these maps is a manuscript entitled *Carte des environs du Fort Rosalie aux Natchez* that now resides at the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris (Figure 1).² It is a very large map, 1 × 1.8 m in size, that shows the entire French colony at Natchez as it appeared in 1723. Based on a measured survey by Ignace-François Broutin, the noted French cartographer and engineer, the map is so accurate that it can easily be superimposed on a modern topographic quadrangle of the same area today. The Grand Village comprises only a small part of the overall map, yet it is drawn to scale and with sufficient detail to show the locations of six mounds and their associated buildings. Mound A is shown with four buildings on top. Mound B is shown with two summit buildings and labeled “*cabanne du grand chef*” (cabin of the great chief). Mound C, with a single building, is called “*temple neuf*” (new temple). Mound D, also with a single building, is named the “*vieux temple*” (old temple). Mounds E and F, while clearly present, are unlabeled and have no associated buildings. All in all, Broutin's map gives the clearest and most accurate view of the site's layout during the mid-1720s, just a few years before the last Natchez war broke out.

The second manuscript map, *Plans des deux forts des Natchez assiégés au mois de février 1730 Par les Français Tchactas Tonicas Colapissas et Oumas*, is also held at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (Figure 2).³ Measuring only 30 × 31 cm at the neat lines, it is much smaller than Broutin's map. The manuscript is unsigned, and as the title implies, it depicts the Grand Village during the French siege in February 1730. It shows only the four mounds (B – E) that were involved in the battle; the



Figure 1. Detail from Broutin's 1723 map, oriented with north at the top and with the modern mound designations (A–F) added. Inset at upper left shows the full map with area of detail outlined, north at lower left. (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des cartes et plans, Ge DD 2987-8834B.).

other two (A, F) were outside the area depicted. According to the inscription in its cartouche, the map “was surveyed on site by estimation” rather than by detailed measurement – not surprising, given that it was made during the course of a battle. Even so, the layout of the four mounds it includes is plausible and consistent with Broutin's earlier map. The map also has a scale, clearly measured and denoted in *toises* (fathoms), which implies some degree of confidence in the distances. Mounds C and D are shown with single buildings on top – marked “*temple des Natchez*” (Natchez temple) and “*vieux temple abandonné*” (old abandoned temple), respectively – matching quite well Broutin's designations in 1723. Mound E, as in the earlier map, has no building on top, but its summit does show a parapet thrown up by the French, undoubtedly to protect a firing position described as a “*batterie de 2 pièces*” (battery of two cannons) that was placed there. Mound B, earlier described by Broutin as supporting the cabin of the Great Sun, is both unlabeled and devoid of

buildings. Perhaps the chief's cabin had been dismantled by this time, but it also seems possible that these details were omitted because the mound played no role in the battle. Also noteworthy are the two forts constructed by the Natchez in anticipation of a French attack. *Fort de la Farine* is shown on high ground across the creek from the French positions, while *Fort de Valeur* is on lower ground on the same side of the creek. Each fort was named after a Natchez town, presumably the one that built and garrisoned it. (*Valeur* was an alternative name that the French used for the Grand Village; see Brown and Steponaitis 2017:203.) A sap, or siege trench, is shown leading from Mound E toward *Fort de Valeur*. This sap played a prominent role in the battle, and it was one of the features for which we searched archaeologically (Boudreaux et al. 2026, this issue).

In a previous article I called this manuscript the “anonymous map” (Brown and Steponaitis 2017). We now know, however, that it was drawn by Pierre

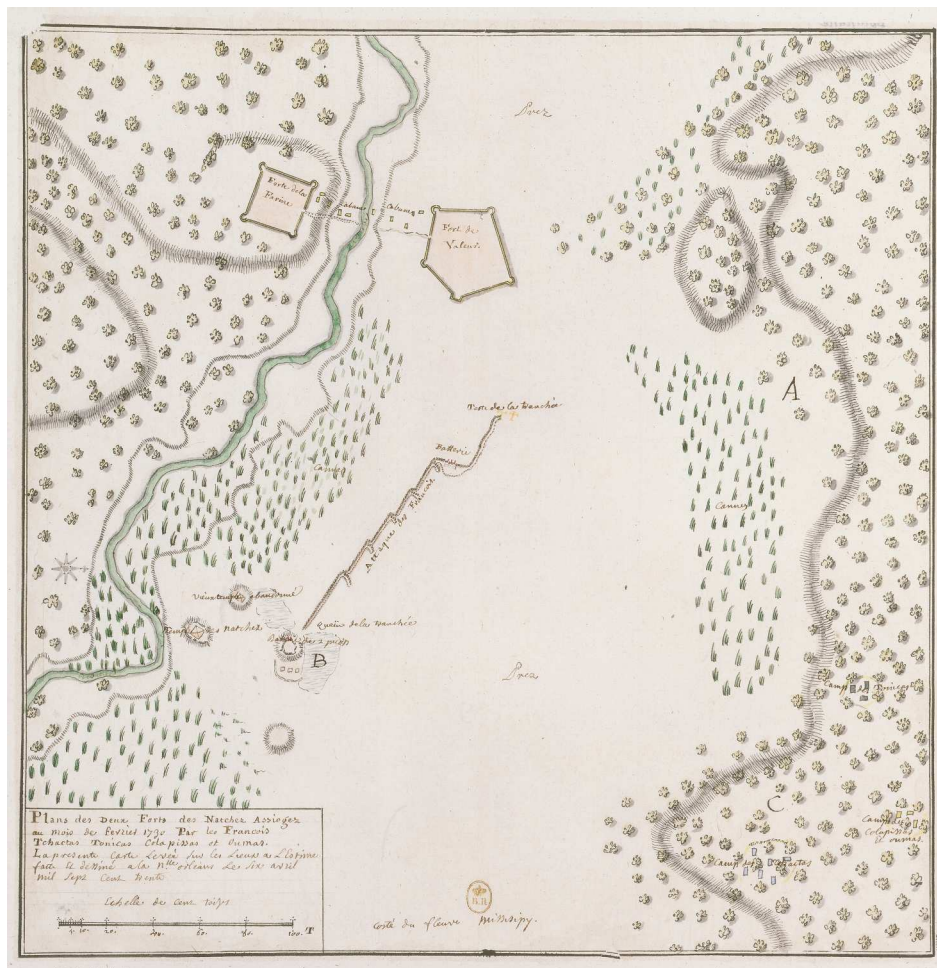


Figure 2. Baron's 1730 map of the French siege at Natchez, oriented with north to the right, showing four mounds along with the French and Indian fortifications. Four mounds are visible in the lower left quadrant. Their modern designations, clockwise from the one at bottom, are B, C, D, and E. Note that the "B" written next to the last mound in this sequence is in Baron's hand and not the modern designation. As explained in his narrative, it marks the two shaded areas near Mounds D and E where French soldiers regrouped after a skirmish that took place at "A" on the map's far right. Two Indian forts, called "Fort de la Farine" (left) and "Fort de Valeur" (right) are visible at the top. The French attacked the forts from positions on and around the mounds. A long siege trench, or sap, dug by the French extends from the base of Mound E toward *Fort de Valeur*. The scale bar in the map's cartouche represents 100 *toises*, each *toise* being about 1.95 m or 6.6 ft in length – roughly equivalent to an English fathom. (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Estampes, Vd 21 [3] Fol.).

Baron, the French scientist whose narrative was described earlier in this article. The evidence of his authorship lies in the letter that accompanied his narrative, dated April 10, 1730, and addressed to "the Minister," presumably the minister of the navy, Jean Frédéric Phélypeaux (Gayarré 1846:I:253–258). The letter states that it transmits "a map that I have drawn" along with a chronicle of the siege at the Grand Village. There can be little doubt that the *Plans des deux forts des Natchez* is the map he sent, as the chronicle refers specifically to places marked alphabetically on the map, ones that are not explained on the map itself. Thus, Baron identifies "A" as the place where a skirmish occurred in which the Choctaws fired prematurely at the Natchez (on the ninth

of February according to Baron, and on the twelfth according to Delaye), and "B" as the place (marked on the map by shaded areas near Mounds D and E) to which the French troops moved after this skirmish. The handwriting on the map also matches that in holograph letters signed by Baron that are preserved in the French archives.

The third map, called *Plan de la guerre des Natchez*, was recently acquired by The Historic New Orleans Collection, bound into a manuscript book by Marc-Antoine Caillot called *Relation du Voyage de la Louisiane ou Nouvelle France fait par Sr. Caillot en l'Année 1730*, (Figure 3).⁴ It generally resembles Baron's map, but it differs in a few details. The same mounds and fortifications are shown, in the same relative positions, but they

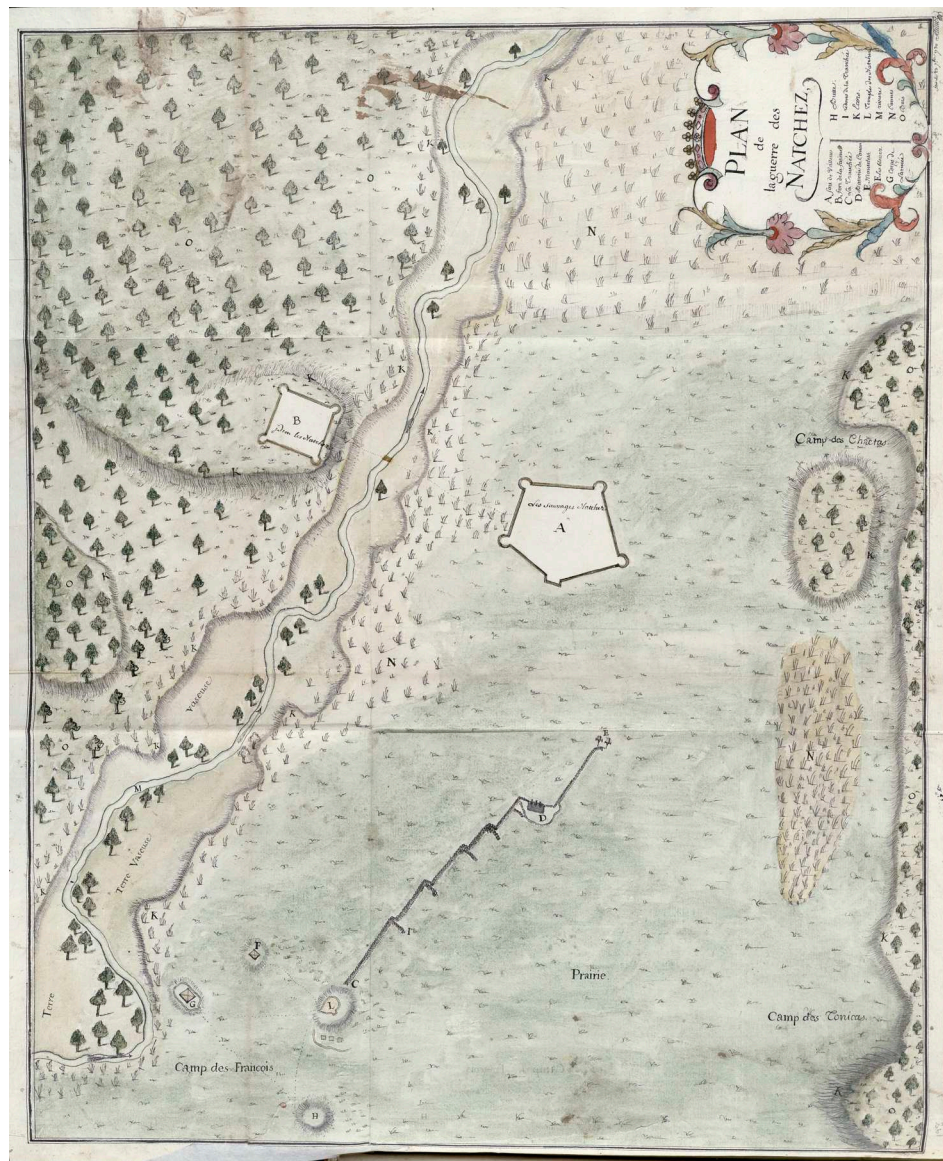


Figure 3. Caillot's 1730 map of the French siege at Natchez, oriented with north to the right, showing the same features as in Baron's map (see Figure 2). The modern mound designations, clockwise from the one at bottom, are B, C, D, and E. (The Historic New Orleans Collection, MSS 596.).

are differently labeled. While Baron identified the mounds and buildings according to their Native uses, Caillot employed labels that described their use during the battle. Thus, for example, Mound C was called “*Temple des Natchez*” by Baron but “*Corps de Garde*” by Caillot, referring to its use as the French headquarters. Similarly, while Baron called the building on Mound D “*vieux temple abandonné*,” Caillot called it “*les blessez*” (the wounded), presumably a reference to its use as a field hospital. Caillot places the “*Camp des Francois*” (French camp) – a feature not shown at all by Baron – in the plaza between Mounds B and C. Also, Caillot positions the “*Camp des Chactas*” (Choctaw camp) differently than Baron, placing it

farther to the west and much closer to the Natchez forts, a position that seems less plausible.

Caillot served as a clerk for the Company of the Indies in New Orleans, and we have no reason to believe that he participated in the siege or ever visited the Natchez colony (Greenwald 2013:xxviii–xxix). Thus, his map must have been copied from an original to which he had access in the company's offices and was perhaps supplemented by the recollections of others who were at the battle. A comparison of his map with Baron's in terms of coverage and scale is instructive. While the two battlefield maps overlap in the area they cover, the overlap is not complete. Each contains some areas not depicted in the other. The upshot is

that both maps were probably copied from a larger original, one likely made by Broutin and now lost (Brown and Steponaitis 2017:202). It is also worth noting that Caillot's map is drawn at a different scale than Baron's, about 35% larger, and that the relative positions of the forts and mounds, while generally similar, do not match exactly when the maps are resized to the same scale. All of this suggests that Caillot's map was a free-hand drawing, not a direct tracing or measured copy. This may also explain why Caillot's map, unlike Baron's, lacks a scale bar. For all these reasons, and knowing that Baron was present at the battle and acting as an engineer (even if not formally trained as one), I regard Baron's map as likely being the more reliable one in representing distances.⁵

The broader landscape in 1730

Figure 4 illustrates a portion of the Lower Mississippi Valley as it appeared at the time of the battle. This reconstruction is largely based on a detailed manuscript map called *Carte particulière du cours du fleuve Mississippi ou St. Louis à la Louisiane, depuis la Nouvelle Orléans jusqu'aux Natchez*.⁶ Drawn by Ignace-François Broutin in August 1731, not long after the battle took place, it shows the course of the Mississippi River at the time, as well as the locations of all the important Indian and French settlements on its banks. For present purposes, I have plotted only the settlements that played a role in the events surrounding the battle, that is, places mentioned in the French narratives. A brief description of each follows:

- *Grand Village*: The political capital of the Natchez nation, where the Indians built the two forts to which the French laid siege. It was situated on St. Catherine Creek, a tributary of the Mississippi River, about a league inland from the river (Ford 1936:59–64; Neitzel 1965).
- *Fort Rosalie*: The main French stockade at Natchez that was built in 1716 and destroyed by the Indians in the attack that started the war in November 1729. It was located on a high bluff overlooking the Mississippi River. The French army landed here before the 1730 battle and returned to this area after the siege ended. The provisional fort built after the battle was located just south of the original fort.
- *St. Catherine Concession*: One of the large plantations established by the French in the 1720s, it was destroyed by the Natchez in the November 1729 attack. It was also located on St. Catherine Creek, upstream from the Grand Village. It was here that

the French army camped immediately before laying siege to the Indian forts.

- *Tioux Village*: The Tioux were a Native group who lived among the Natchez in the 1720s but spoke a different language, one similar to that of the Tunicas. In 1727, for reasons unknown, they moved away from the Natchez and settled on the east bank of the Mississippi, downstream from their former home and much closer to the Tunica village. It should be noted that this village does not appear on Broutin's map, suggesting that the Tioux had moved again by 1731. Its location is taken from an anonymous French map drawn around 1728 (Brain 1988:Figure 30), now housed at the French naval archives.⁷
- *Tunica Village*: The Tunicas were stalwart allies of the French, and it was here that the French army gathered in December 1729 and stayed through most of January 1730, before heading upriver to attack the Natchez. This village was located at the southern end of an important portage, called "the Portage of the Cross," a shortcut for canoes across the neck of a massive double bend in the Mississippi River where the Red River entered from the west. While encamped here, the French built a fortification that appears on Broutin's 1731 map.⁸
- *Pointe Coupée Settlements*: This cluster of French communities was located along both sides of the Mississippi River north of present-day Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The settlements were initially associated with the Saint Reyne and Mézières Concessions, but they continued even after these enterprises failed (Giraud 1991:178–180; Mann 2008; Wells and McCarthy 2014:21–25). Delaye recruited his militia for the Natchez campaign from among the settlers who lived here.
- *Mézières Concession*: This French plantation, started in 1722, was located on a high bluff overlooking the east bank of the Mississippi River at the downstream end of the Pointe Coupée settlements. Jean-Baptiste Delaye lived here during the 1729–1731 Natchez war. By this time, the concession had failed, but Delaye was trying to revive it (Giraud 1991:178–180). This place was commonly called "Ecores Blancs" (White Bluffs) or simply "Ecores" (The Bluffs) by its residents (Wells and McCarthy 2014:21–25). Delaye preferred the latter.

* * *

With the foregoing discussion of the narratives, the battlefield maps, and the broader landscape as background, the reader can now turn to the two complementary studies in the pages that follow. The first, by

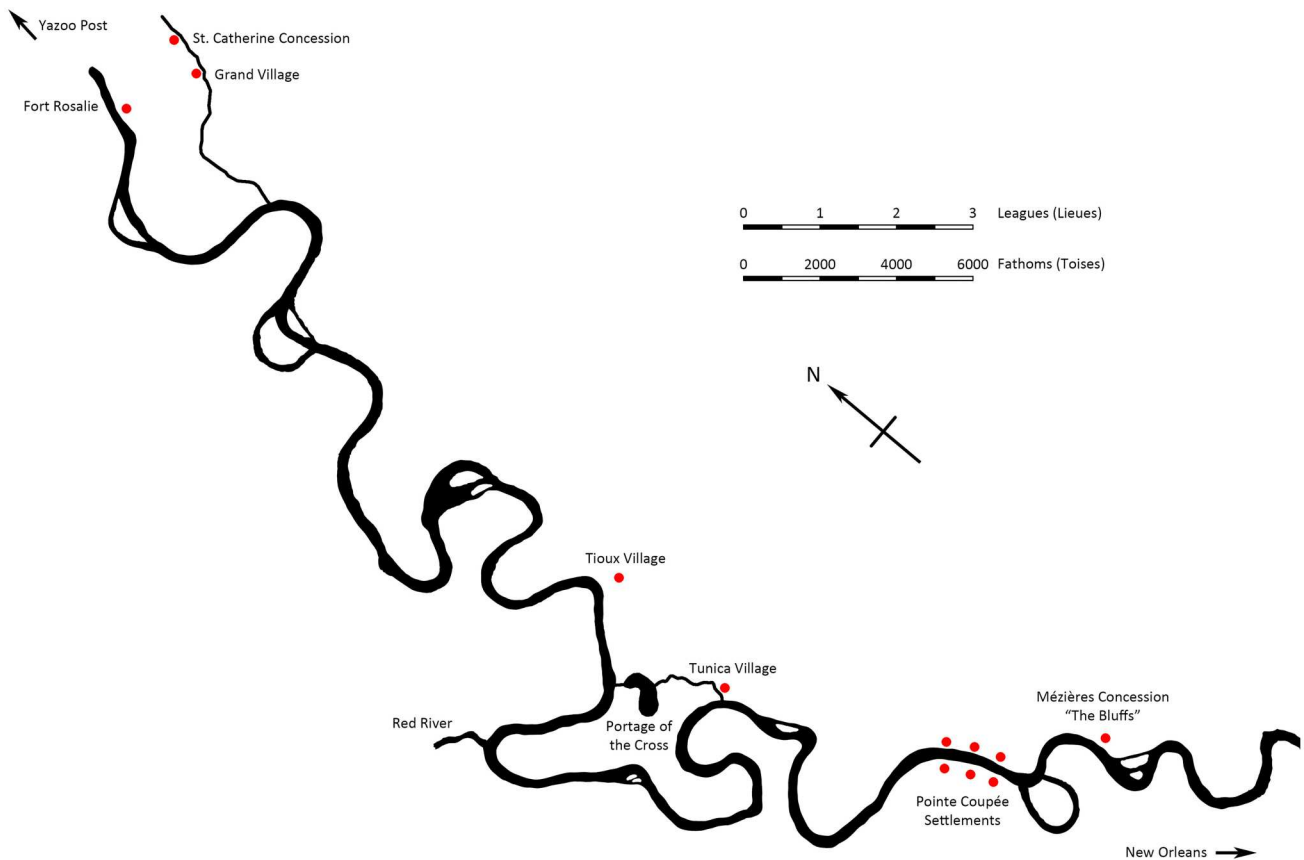


Figure 4. The Lower Mississippi Valley from Pointe Coupée to Natchez as it appeared in 1730. The course of the Mississippi River, the scale, and most settlement locations are traced directly from Broutin’s 1731 *Carte particulière du cours du fleuve Missisipy* (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des cartes et plans, Ge C 5015). The placement of the Tioux village is based on an anonymous map, circa 1728, at the French naval archives in Vincennes (Service historique de la Défense, département Marine, Cartes et plans, recueil 69, no. 11). The league (*lieue de Paris*) in which the scale is denoted represents a distance of 3.9 km or 2.4 miles in modern units. Each league consisted of 2,000 fathoms (*toises*).

Gordon Sayre, is an English translation of Delaye’s account of the 1730 siege and the events that led up to it – the most detailed first-person narrative that has survived. And the second, by Edmond Boudreaux and colleagues, looks archaeologically at the battlefield itself and describes how remote sensing and excavations were used to find the two “missing” mounds that the French employed in their attack on the Native forts.

Notes

1. Baron to Maurepas, 22 December 1731. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, COL C13 A 12:412-418v. I am grateful to Gordon Sayre for translating this letter. A digital image is available at <https://recherche-nom.culture.gouv.fr/ark:/61561/664420.2269352/daogrp/1/403?id=403>.
2. Ignace-François Broutin, 1723, *Carte des environs du Fort Rosalie aux Natchez*. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des cartes et plans, Ge DD 2987-8834B. A digital image is available at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b530530625>.
3. Pierre Baron, 1730, *Plans des deux forts des Natchez assiégés au mois de février 1730 Par les Français Tchactas Tonicas Colapissas et Oumas*. La présente carte levée sur les lieux à l’Estime[,] faite et dessinée a la N.lle Orleans Le six avril mil sept cent trente. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Estampes, Vd 21 [3] Fol. A digital image is available at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b78835725>.
4. Marc-Antoine Caillot, 1730, *Plan de la guerre des Natchez*. Bound into a manuscript memoir titled *Relation du Voyage de la Louisianne ou Nouvelle France fait par Sr. Caillot en l’Annee 1730*. The Historic New Orleans Collection, MSS 596. A digital image is available at https://s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/thnocimg/2005.0011_natchezplan_web.jpg.
5. It should be noted that Baron’s map was copied (in reduced form) and incorporated into a number of other manuscript maps of this period, including three showing the route of the French army in Perier’s 1731 campaign against the Natchez (Steponaitis and Prickett 2014:Figures 1–3) and a manuscript map attributed to Jean-Baptiste d’Anville (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des cartes et plans, Ge D 10643). The 1730 forts are incorrectly oriented

on the latter map, with the north arrow reversed. A nineteenth-century tracing of Baron's map is also housed at the Musée de la civilisation in Québec (fonds d'archives du Séminaire de Québec, Cartes et plans, L-38).

6. Ignace-François Broutin, 1731, *Carte particulière du cours du fleuve Missisipy ou St. Louis à la Lousiane, depuis la Nouvelle Orléans jusqu'aux Natchez*. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des cartes et plans, Ge C 5015. A digital image is available at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b532122066>.
7. Anonymous, circa 1728, *Cours du fleuve Saint-Louis depuis le Natchez jusqu'à La Balise*. Service historique de la Défense, département Marine, Cartes et plans, recueil 69, no. 11. Brain suggests, with appropriate caution, that this map was drawn by Alexandre de Batz in 1732 (1988:38–39). He correctly points out that the map deviates from De Batz's careful style, perhaps because it was "a crude sketch." Yet there are good reasons to believe that the map was drawn before 1732, probably by someone else. It portrays the French colony at Natchez as being intact, like it was prior to the November 1729 attack. That makes a later date unlikely. The timing of the Tioux's move to this location is provided by Broutin's 1731 map (see Note 6). It shows the location of the former Tioux village at Natchez with the note "abandonnés en 1727."
8. In his masterful study of Tunica history and archaeology, Brain (1988:34–38) argues that the Tunica moved to this location at the southern end of the Portage of the Cross only after June 1731. Formerly, they had lived at the northern end. While there can be no disputing that this move took place, Broutin provides evidence that it actually happened earlier, likely in 1726. His 1731 map (see Note 6) describes one village at the northern end as "abandonné en 1725" and another as "abandonné en 1726." The village at the southern end, the one still active when the map was drawn, shows the French fortification right beside it with the note, "Retranchements faits pendant la guerre de 1729" (entrenchments made during the war of 1729). Thus, there can be no doubt that this was the Tunica village to which the 1730 battle narratives refer.

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