

Glossary of Terms

Some definitions have links to images.

ABATIS: Barricade of felled trees with their branches towards the attack and sharpened (primitive version of "barbed wire").

ARROW SLITS: Narrow openings in a wall through which defenders can fire arrows. (also called loopholes)

ARTILLERY: An excellent GLOSSARY for Civil War era (and other) Artillery terminologies can be found at civilwarartillery.com/main.htm (Link will open new window.)

BAILEY: The walled enclosure or the outer courtyard of a castle. (Ward, Parade)

BANQUETTE: The step of earth within the parapet, sufficiently high to enable standing defenders to fire over the crest of the parapet with ease.

BARBICAN: Outworks, especially in front of a gate. A heavily fortified gate or tower.

BARTIZAN (BARTISAN): Scottish term, projecting corner turret. A small overhanging turret on a tower's battlement.

BASTION: A projection from a fortification arranged to give a wider range of fire or to allow firing along the main walls. Usually at the intersection of two walls.

BATTER: Inclined face of a wall (Talus).

BATTERED: May be used to describe crenellations.

BATTERY: A section of guns, a named part of the main fortifications or a separate outer works position (e.g.. North Battery, Water Battery).

BATTLEMENTS: The notched top (crenellated parapet) of a defensive wall, with open spaces (crenels) for firing weapons.

BEAKED PROJECTION: see **EN BEC**.

BELVEDERE: A pavilion or raised turret.

BLOCKHOUSE: Usually a two story wood building with an overhanging second floor and rifle loops and could also have cannon ports (embrasures). Some three story versions. Some with corner projections similar to bastions. Used as a stand alone fortification with or without stockades/ palisades, or as part of a larger overall defensive system such as a corner bastion(s) for a stockaded fort.

BRATTICE: 1) A wooden tower; 2) A temporary breastwork or parapet put up during a siege (Hording) Projection to allow the defense of the base of a building.

CASEMENT: A chamber, bomb proofed vault, built within the walls of a fort.

CASTLE: A large building or group of buildings fortified with heavy walls, battlements, moats, etc. A fortified residence in feudal times. A strongly fortified stronghold.

CASTELLATED: Built with turrets and battlements like a castle.

CHENIN-DE-RONDE: A wall walk..

CHEVAUX-DE-FRISE: A barricade on land or in the water, constructed of massive timbers (cribbed, stone filled) with projecting iron tipped pikes.

CORBEL: A load bearing projection from a masonry wall for a rafter or spring of a vault.

COUNTERSCARP: The outer slope or wall of a ditch or moat in a fortification.

COVERED WAY or COVERT: A covered or protected position, usually a lowered earthen parapet on the counterscarp of an outer glacis.

CREMAILLERE: also known as an Indented Line. The cremaille was made up of a number of salients and was used as a simple entrenched fortification.

CRENEL(LE): An indentation, notch, groove, or loophole in the top of a battlement (parapet) or wall. If the opening is open on the top it is a crenel, if closed on the top (through the wall) it is an embrasure.

CRENELATE (CRENELLATION): To furnish with battlements or crenels, a crenellated structure.

CROWNWORKS: Outworks of a main fortification. A pair of demi-bastions on the flanks with a full bastion in the center. Additional small ravelins in front of the curtain walls between the bastion and demi-bastions may be included.

CUSLETT: Pickets at the bottom of a dry ditch, or trench?

CURTAIN WALL: The main enclosing wall of a castle or a fort. A section of wall between two gates, towers, or bastions.

DEMILUNE: 1) A smaller version of a Lunette; 2) A Crescent or half-moon shaped outer work to protect a fort's curtain wall or bastion.

DON JON: A great tower or keep.

DRAWBRIDGE: A bridge over a moat or ditch that can be drawn back or raised from the inner side.

DRY DITCH or DRY MOAT: A ditch that surrounds the walls of a fort or castle hindering the advance of an attacker.

EARTH(EN) WORKS: 1) A fort with main walls of earth. Sometimes later with fascines, wood, or masonry; 2) Sloped ground outside main walls of a fort to subject attackers to grazing fire from the main walls (Glacis); 3) Field Works.

EN BEC: A tower en bec is a tower that is beaked or pointed towards the field.

EMBRASURES: A small opening in a wall through which weapons may be fired. Windows and arrow or rifle loops are usually wider on the inside. Embrasures for cannons are generally wider on the outside. This angled opening allows for greater angles of fire.

ENCEITE: The fortified perimeter of a castle.

EPAULEMENT: (Retaining Wall) An elevation constructed in order to protect troops and batteries from direct fire of the enemy. Usually composed of gabions filled with earth, or sandbags. In permanent fortifications, considered to be the low stone wall constructed at the top of the rampart.

ESCARPMENT (ESCARP): Inner wall of ditch. (Scarp)

FASCINE: A bundle of sticks bound together, used to strengthen the sides of trenches or earthen work ramparts.

FIELD WORKS: Quickly constructed fortifications for defense of troops or a location, usually from whatever was available. Ideally laid out by engineers, but often when the army was advancing or retreating individual soldiers would construct pits (fox holes) or lengths of entrenchments.

FLECHE: A projecting, arrow or V-shaped outwork in a fortification. (same as a Redan)

FORT: 1) An enclosed place or fortified building for military defense, usually equipped with earthworks, guns, a garrison of troops, permanent buildings, etc.: 2) A permanent Army post, as distinguished from a temporary training camp.

FORTALICE: A small fort or defensive outwork.

FORTIFICATION: 1) Anything used in fortifying, a fort, defensive earth work, wall, etc.: 2) A fortified place or position.

FOSSE (FOSS): A ditch or moat used in a fortification.

FRAISE: A palisade or barrier consisting of an inclined or horizontal fence of wooden stakes.

GABION: Wicker baskets (woven twigs, open ended) filled with earth or stone to build, repair, or reinforce earthen works. Modern equivalents use "chicken" wire.

GABIONNADE: A parapet constructed of gabions.

GLACIS: 1) Smooth stone incline used as a defense; 2) On a fort the sloped earthwork out from the covered way to provide for grazing fire from the fort's main walls.

HANGING TURRET: Mounted on a wall but does not go to ground level, projecting above the wall. Similar to a bartizan.

HOARDING: Projecting timber on a tower or wall head to allow defense of the wall's base. Similar to Brattice work which was temporary, and machicolation which was masonry.

HORN WORK: Outworks. A pair of demi-bastions joined by a wall or curtain.

INDENTED LINE: also known as an Cremaillere. The cremaillere was made up of a number of salients and was used as a simple entrenched fortification.

KEEP: The strongest tower of a castle.

LOOPHOLES: Small embrasures for firing arrows or rifles.

LUNETTE: Created by the addition of flank walls to a small Redan to provide additional flank protection and firing positions.

MACHICOLATION: A projecting stone gallery on corbels from a tower or wall head. Similar to hoarding which was timber.

MAGAZINE: A structure to secure ammunition, a casement or separate building.

MANTLET WALL: A subsidiary defensive wall closed about a tower or other building.

MARTELLO TOWERS: Circular masonry seacoast batteries. Typically armed with one gun on top platform that had 360 degree coverage.

MERLON: The upright part of a battlement (crenellated parapet). The solid part between two embrasures or crenels.

MUTRIERES: Murder holes.

MOAT: A ditch surrounding a castle or fort with or without water. First line of defense.

PALISADE: A barrier of sharpened logs closely planted in the ground. Can be vertical or can project horizontally from earthen works (Fraise).

PARADE: Level area of interior of a fort (similar to a castle's Bailey or Ward).

PARADOS: A traverse wall or berm to prevent incoming artillery from bounding across the parade into the rear of an opposite wall.

PARAPET: Earthen or Stone Platform. Surmounting the rampart in a fortification. Usually about seven feet high to protect the defenders. Could contain a banquette slope to allow troops to fire over it.

PELE (PEEL): A tower house, like a small keep.

PENTAGONAL VAUBAN FORTRESS:

PICKETT:

PILASTER: A flat buttress or small vertical projection on a wall.

PORTCULLIS: A sliding iron grille used to block passage through a main gate.

POSTERN: A lesser, and private gateway.

PRIEST CAP:

RAMPART: Earthen works, main curtain wall. A broad embankment of earth which surrounded a fortified place. In forts or fortresses considered to be the entire top of the fortification, and contained the epaulment to protect the defenders. In many fortifications, dirt ramps were constructed from the parade to the top of the rampart for weapons and troop access.

RAVELIN: A large V-shaped outwork (usually outside the moat/ditch) that protects the gate or other weak point of a fort or castle.

REDAN: Smaller than a redoubt. A small field fortification with two walls set at a salient angle facing the enemy. The rear, or gorge, was usually open. A redan could be used to cover a camp, the front of a battlefield, advanced posts, bridges, or roads into a town. (same as a Fleche)

REDOUBT: 1) A small separate defensive work (blockhouse or earthen works); 2) Detached outworks as part of a larger defensive plan, usually square without defensive flanks. Could also be polygonal or hexagonal shapes.

RETRENCHMENT:

REVETMENT: A facing of fascines, wood, sandbags, gabions, sod, or masonry to protect a wall or bank of earth (Earthwork)(Rampart). Designed to protect the interior slopes of the parapets from erosion or other damage which could cause failure of the wall.

RIFLE LOOPS: Similar to arrow slits but for rifles.

SALIENT ANGLE: Part of a fortification defensive line called a cremaillere or indented line. The salient was an angle, or sharp point, which faced out towards the enemy and was constructed as the simplest of entrenchments.

SALLY PORT: A gate (or Postern) through which soldiers could "sally forth" to counterattack. In larger forts may be a tunnel through the walls and earthworks.

SAUCISSON: A large facine.

SCARP: Inner wall of a ditch or moat.(Escarp, Escarpment)

SPUR: Solid pointed projection at the base of a tower or wall.

STAR FORT: A fort with jagged walls, not bastions.

STOCKADE: A timber wall or defensive barrier (Palisade).

TALUS: Splayed-out base of tower or wall (Batter).

TENAILLE:

TERREPEIN: A fortification engineering term for a level space. Artillery was typically mounted in the terreplein.

TOWER: Starts at ground level and projects above the wall. Can be integral to the wall.

TRAVERSE: Parts of parapets, which crossed the breadth of the covered way, at the salient and re-entering places of arms.

TURRET: A small tower on the upper part of a castle. Often placed at an angle in the wall. Sits on top of wall, if "in" the wall and full height it is a tower, is "in" wall and only goes down part of wall it is a bartizan or hanging turret.

WARD: See alley, open space within a castle's wall.