

# History of Westmoreland County

## Volume 1

### Chapter 17

#### The Westmoreland Soldiers in the War of 1812.

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#### CHAPTER XVII.

#### The Westmoreland Soldiers in the War of 1812.

The war of 1812 was indeed a small affair to our nation compared with the Revolution, and consequently has never been fraught with much interest to the American people. Yet it was a war of heroic deeds, and by its successful termination we not only won the right for which we contended but added greatly to our civil and military glory among the nations of the world.

After the Revolution, though we had fairly won our freedom, yet England scarcely realized that we were one of the civil powers. For a quarter of a century the Mother Country treated us as though we were a few struggling colonies whose rights in America were conceded by them, but whose rights on the oceans were still retained by England. They accordingly assumed rights on the seas, which they did not presume to exercise when dealing with other governments. One of these unwarranted powers, which they assumed, was that of overhauling American vessels on the high seas and searching them for men who had deserted the English naval service, and in this they necessarily committed many outrages upon our ocean trade. These may not have been authorized by the English government, but it was responsible for them, and practically admitted its responsibility by defending them.

For many years our government protested most vehemently against this right of search. The people of the United States were much aroused over it. In various ways Great Britain advanced her assumed prerogative on the seas and greatly restricted our commerce. This was carried on till 1811 when, because of the growing trouble. Congress was called together a month earlier than usual. On due consideration it sustained President Madison, who had almost declared England guilty of offensive actions and preparations were made for war. On June 12 the President laid before Congress the official correspondence relative to the subject and all hope of a settlement without war was dissipated. Madison drew one of the best of his many strong papers in enumerating our grievances. Everything seemed to point to war, and accordingly, on June 18th, 1812, Congress declared war against Great Britain. Congress also took measures to increase the regular army to 35,000 men, and a much larger volunteer army of one-year enlistments was to be raised, equipped, and put in the field.

Simon Snyder was governor of Pennsylvania. He had great courage and executive ability, and had in his makeup much of the old-time Revolutionary spirit. The Pennsylvania militia was therefore organized by him at once. Our state was to furnish 14,000 militia on the one-year enlistments, beside our share of the proposed regular army of 35,000.

Again the British allied themselves with their old companions in crime, the Indians, and a large force of Indians appeared on Lake Erie opposite the town of Erie. At this the whole of Pennsylvania was aroused, expecting an invasion of the western part, at least, to follow. Accordingly the militia of that portion of the state was sent there, and took part in the now world-famous naval battle of Oliver Hazard Perry, which settled the English and Indians in that section. It will be remembered that before Perry could fight the English on water he had to cut down trees and construct a navy. The main forces who guarded these preparations were from Western Pennsylvania and they were ready to support him in any emergency, either on land or on sea.

The English had an army in the region of Baltimore, and many of our soldiers were sent there, particularly after the British army under General Ross burned the National Capitol but there was very little fighting done in that section by our troops. Still others were sent to the northwest and placed under command of General William Henry Harrison. It was in that army that our Westmoreland soldiers did most duty.

In considering this war we must always remember that we were yet at enmity with the Indians, though not here in the East as we had been during the Revolution. They had been driven west to Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan. We had soldiers from Westmoreland who fought with Harrison at the famous battle of Tippecanoe. So, also, it must be remembered that the English army was fighting us on the extreme southern border, where General Jackson defeated Pakenham at the battle of New Orleans, after peace had been declared between the two countries. So the war was raging in every direction.

General Hull was at this time governor of the Territory of Michigan, and was in command of an army of volunteers who were warring with the Northwestern Indians. When he heard that war had been declared against England he foolishly, and on his own authority, led his army across from Michigan into Canada to "invade the enemy's country." But the British immediately sent forces there who, with much more experience and skill in military matters, so encompassed the field that Hull surrendered 1,700 troops to about 700 British and 600 Indians. The surrender also included great stores of military supplies and provisions, which were sent there at great expense to support his army. This weakened our cause a great deal, for hundreds of troops became discouraged and deserted. In fact, desertions were more numerous in the war of 1812 than in any other of the five wars in which we as a nation have been engaged, and in this, too, Westmoreland county did its share.

But, on the other hand, the surrender of Hull did us good. The memory of the Revolution was then fresh in the minds of our people. Often in those days had a small, starving, poorly equipped army of American soldiers escaped from or even taken captive a larger and stronger force. But here the larger army, surrendered to the smaller and weaker one, and it aroused the people in every section of the Union. As a result we had, after Hull's surrender, more men in Western Pennsylvania and in our county wanting to enlist than could be accepted. Refreshed in his memory of the events of the war by these general remarks the reader, we trust, will better understand the Dart taken by our Westmoreland troops.

There were several companies formed here a few years before the war, when trouble was brewing and war clouds were overhanging America. The most prominent one of these companies was a rifle company in Greensburg, of which John B. Alexander was the leading spirit as well as the captain. This company was organized by authority of Thomas McKean, governor of Pennsylvania, in 1807, and was enlisted for four years. In 1811 their time had expired, and another commission was issued by Governor Simon Snyder, authorizing Alexander to raise another company. The second was largely composed of re-enlistments from the first. Alexander himself had been brought up in the military town of Carlisle, where from long before the Revolution the government had continuously kept a barracks. He had therefore from boyhood imbibed a martial spirit. In four years he had drilled his company most completely, so that when the war at last came he had ready for the field a company of thoroughly drilled men. Alexander himself was a lawyer of high standing at the Westmoreland bar. Some have thought proper to write him as the ablest lawyer who has yet practiced regularly before the Westmoreland courts. Being only about eight years at the bar before the war of 1812, his great prominence as a lawyer was achieved mostly after its close.

On June 6, 1812, in conformity with a resolution passed by the company, Alexander tendered his company of riflemen to William Eustis, Secretary of War under President Madison. In this letter he says the company consists of one captain, two lieutenants, four sergeants, two corporals, two musicians and forty-five rank and filemen. He further says they are all uniformed and equipped for service except that their rifles were of various lengths, weight and calibre, such as are in general use in the country, and suggests that uniform ones be furnished them. This letter is endorsed as "Sent copy to Sec'y, enclosed to Wm. Findley, Esq." By a letter of July 15 the company was accepted. By letter of September 5th they were notified that the frontier in Western Ohio was in such a deplorable condition, owing to General Hull's surrender, that they should hold themselves in

readiness to march there at once. On September 11 the order was sent for them to march to Cleveland, Ohio, or wherever else the northwestern army should be when they reached that locality. The destination was changed after they reached Pittsburgh, by order of William Henry Harrison. The order was as follows:

Gentlemen: You will proceed with your companies to this place immediately and remain here until you receive further orders.

To Captains Alexander and Butler  
William Henry Harrison  
Pittsburgh, PA Franklinton, Ohio

Harrison's object in this military campaign was a twofold one. First, he wanted to oppose the British army, and second to protect the frontier from Indian incursions. The immediate purpose of this move was to war against the Indians.

Pentland, a minor officer of the Pittsburgh Blues, kept a journal of their marches southwestward. From it we learn that Alexander's company, with Butler's, encamped on the night of September 10 on Grant's Hill, now in Pittsburgh. Then they marched one mile, he says, and crossed the Ohio River, where they were compelled to wait for boats till September 23, when they got off down the Ohio. They passed Beaver on the 24th, Steubenville on the 25th, and reached Wheeling on the 26th. On October 1st they passed Marietta and Gallipolis. On Sunday, October 11, Alexander's boat struck a snag and was abandoned. The companies finally landed at Cincinnati, on October 14, and camped two miles below. From there they marched through the country by Lebanon, Xenia, Yellow Springs and Springfield, and finally joined the Northwestern army at Franklinton, as directed by General Harrison.

Their first attack was directed against the Indian town on Mississinewa River, about fifteen miles above its junction with the Wabash. On the 18th of November they fought the battle of Mississinewa, and completely destroyed the town, but not many of the Indians were killed. From there Harrison ordered Alexander's company against several smaller towns among the Indians and they were promptly destroyed. Afterwards they marched to the Upper Sandusky and were joined to the command of Colonel Campbell.

In this connection we must not forget Rev. William Swan's letter to the soldiers in Alexander's command. It is unique, but doubtless expressed the feeling of that day. Rev. Swan was pastor of the Long Run Church at that time, and wrote as follows:

"Please inform the unmarried gentlemen of the company that the wives of those who are married are not alone pleased with and proud of the patriotic conduct of their husbands. The young ladies so admire the manly fortitude and patriotic spirit which they have manifested that some of them have expressed a determination to wait for husbands until they return, and that they would prefer the brave soldier for a husband, even though he should have but one eye and one arm."

The journey connected with the battle of Mississinewa was an extremely severe one. On leaving the camp at Franklinton, Ohio, General Harrison addressed the troops in a most patriotic vein, and foretold great things of them, for he said he considered them the flower of the army. It was very cold weather. The troops were warned that it was a hard march and withal a perilous venture, and were told that if any felt timid about it they should remain at camp. They crossed the partly frozen Miami River with great difficulty. At New Lexington they received the last supply of forage. Each man was furnished with one bushel of corn to be carried on his horse. There were about six hundred troops in the party, and great care was taken to instill in them a spirit of caution, for they were to penetrate a wilderness infested with Indians and were guided only by spies. In the same locality the army of the "brave but unfortunate St. Clair" had been cut to pieces by the same treacherous enemy who, in addition, were now aided by the British. The weather grew colder, and most of the streams and swamps were crossed on the ice. The snow was about six inches deep. On the night before the battle, December 17, they marched all night and in the morning attacked the Indian town of Mississinewa. Without great difficulty they drove the Indians away and destroyed their houses. After the troops under Major Alexander had returned from destroying the towns down the river, they all encamped in the snow without shelter, and the night was bitter cold. The officers feared an attack, and were determined that they would not be surprised by the enemy. But little rest was gained by

anyone, for half the forces were on guard duty all night. At three o'clock there was an alarm, and all were ready, but it proved to be false. Shortly before daylight the real attack came. It was a heavy volley from the Indians, and was accompanied as usual with terrific yells. Captain Hopkins' troops were closely pressed, and were promptly relieved by the Pittsburgh Blues under the gallant Colonel Butler. Captain Markle's company came in, and all united in a charge against the Indians and drove them away. It was then about daybreak and they returned to find the wounded and dying lying in the snow and almost overcome with cold. There were about forty-four killed and wounded, and another attack with reinforcements was momentarily expected.

The situation was appalling. They were ninety-six miles from the settlement, and the increased cold had greatly reduced their rations. They proceeded at once to bury their dead soldiers in the frozen ground. Litters were made for the twenty-seven wounded and they started for headquarters on the 18th. They fortified their camp at night with logs and brush, and kept fires burning to keep the troops from freezing. They straggled into Dayton December 24, and were given a royal welcome. They had left the town in high glee two weeks before. They had greatly weakened the enemy yet it had been at a fearful cost.

The muster roll of the company was as follows:

John B. Alexander, captain; Christian Drum, lieutenant, Peter Drum, Ensign; Richard Hardin, 1st sergeant; John Jameson, 2nd sergeant; Peter Fleeger, 3rd sergeant; Henry Hawkins, 4th sergeant; Adam Kettering, corporal; William Richards, corporal; Jacob Gossert, drummer. Privates-Samuel Singer, Leonard Miller, Henry Miller, Daniel Miller. Jacob Sickafoos, George Sickafoos, George Myers, Adam Williams, Henry Barton, Robert Thompson, Isaac Keck, John Wingart, Jacob Rupert, Frederick Stewart, Jonas Keel. Abraham Weaver, Samuel McLean, William Cassiday, James Thompson, John Rice, Edward Shelletto, John Collins. Jonas Kneemier, James Taylor. Jacob Wingart, Solomon Dehaven, George Sheeffer. Benj. Jameson, William Kernes, William Singer, John Mitchell, Daniel Rugh, John Shuey, Peter Walter, William Vandyke.

There was another company, a Cavalry organization, sent out from Westmoreland. It was raised by Captain Joseph Markle, the ancestor of the Markle family at West Newton. This company was raised largely in Sewickley Township. They left Greensburg for Pittsburgh on September 29, 1812, and from there went to Urbana, Ohio. Everywhere in the old writings Captain Markle's company of cavalry is highly spoken of for its good behavior, both in camp and when in action, and also on account of its fine appearance. It is moreover on record that General Harrison regarded it as the finest company of troops in the volunteer service of the Northwestern army. They are mentioned many times as participating in engagements under Major Ball. and are always spoken of in the highest terms.

On December 18 they were attacked by several hundred Indians, who had collected from the surrounding territory. As usual they had concealed themselves in the forest near by the camp. But the cavalry company made a charge on them, and they were soon driven from their concealed positions. In this engagement Lieutenant Daniel Martz, of the Markle cavalry, was killed. The cavalry troops and Lieutenant Waltz both received the highest praise for bravery in this action.

The American army had troops at Fort Wayne, and the object of the expedition was to drive the Indians away from that section so that they could not interfere with a free passage from the settlement to the troops. The purpose was to break up parties and drive them to Michigan so that they could not unite and surprise the troops at Fort Wayne or elsewhere. For this reason our Westmoreland troops had been sent away from the main army, and when the work was to a great extent accomplished they returned to the army. It was a very severe though brief campaign, for they suffered from cold, from hunger and from hard marching. Nearly two hundred of them had their feet frozen. The loss to the Indians was very great in men, houses and property, and they suffered still more from hunger and cold. It had been called one of the ablest managed campaigns of the war.

On January 9, 1813, Captain Alexander was put in command of the battalion composed of his own, Butler's and McRae's companies, and he was commissioned a major of infantry by President Madison.

The muster-roll of the cavalry company raised and commanded by Captain Joseph Markle, and which did splendid service, is as follows:

Joseph Markle, captain: Humphrey Fullerton, 1st lieutenant; Jacob Markle, 2nd Lieutenant: William Thompson, cornet; Jno. C. Plumer, sergeant; Samuel H. Daily, sergeant; Samuel Davis, sergeant: Samuel Miller, sergeant: Robert Skelly, corporal: Henry Breneman, corporal: James Ryan, corporal: Robert M. Griffin, corporal. James Smith, sadler; George Frigs, farrier; James Alexander, trumpeter. Privates-John Becket, John Bennett, James Brickenridge, Robert Cooper, Joseph Chambers, John Conner. Jno. C. Carpenter, Edward Cook. Daniel Flemming, Samuel Hamilton, Jacob Hessaul. Stephen Lowry, William Logue, William McClurg, Jonathan McClintock. John McClain, Nathan Magrew, William Miller, John McCommont. Isaac McCommont. Stephen Rowan, Jonathan Robeson, John Redick. James Selby, Samuel Selby, Samuel Stofiet. Joseph Byerly, James McBride, David Hall, Samuel Rodger. John Gilbert. William Newsum, Thomas Brandt, William Mitchell, Robert Thompson.

Early in the year 1813 General Harrison determined to recapture the territory in Michigan, which had been held by the English since General Hull's strange surrender. To do this he had to extend his line of forts. In furtherance of this scheme Fort Meigs was erected on the Maumee River, near where General Wayne had defeated the Indians in 1794. This fort was left in command of General Leftwich, with his own Virginia troops and two hundred and fifty Pennsylvanians. Shortly after this the enemy, began to assemble in the region of Fort Meigs, which was situated on rising ground and surrounded by timbered prairies. When the enemy began to appear General Leftwich and his Virginia troops left the fort, most likely because their time of enlistment had expired. There was as yet no concentrated army to prevent their going. The Pennsylvania troops, though their term of enlistment had also expired, determined to remain and defend it. When General Harrison learned of these movements he hastened forward with relief forces, and these raised the strength of the fort to about twelve hundred. They all worked night and day to strengthen the fort. On April 28 the British army appeared in a concentrated force. Orders were sent to General Green Clay, who was bringing on fifteen hundred Kentucky volunteers, to hasten his journey to Fort Meigs. The British and their Indian allies began at once to entrench themselves, and the American army under General Harrison were not idle by any means. On May 3rd the armies began to storm each other with cannon, but with little effect on either side. On May 4 the British were reinforced and General Harrison learned to his great joy that General Clay was approaching, coming down the river in open boats with his 1500 troops, which he hoped to land in front of Fort Meigs about four o'clock in the morning of May 5th. Harrison was not slow in strategic warfare. He sent word to Clay to land about half of his forces as he came down the river, and have them quietly gain the rear of the British fortification. At the proper time, while the enemy would naturally be giving their attention to the remainder of Clay's forces, and when Harrison from near his own fortress would be storming them, Clay's landed troops were to assault the fortress from the rear, destroy their wagons, spike their guns, and do all the damage then could, and then take their boats and pull for Fort Meigs. Clay's main forces were to come on down the river and enter the fort. Clay was delayed till about eight o'clock in the morning, and his forces were severely attacked by a band of savages as they were entering the fort, the morning of May 5, 1813. Major John B. Alexander, with his Pennsylvania troops, was ordered to protect them when they should land. The Indians increased, and Alexander's troops charged them with bayonets and forced them back about a half mile, while Clay's troops disembarked and entered the fort.

The part of Clay's forces, which had landed up the river, was under the command of Colonel Dudley, a daring officer of sufficient skill and executive ability to successfully carry out the scheme. They gained the rear of the enemy and at the proper time by a furious attack had captured their four batteries and put them to flight before they realized the situation. Their guns were spiked, their carriages cut to pieces, and the red cross of St. George was hauled down. Then Dudley, always cool-headed, ordered an immediate retreat to the boats and Fort Meigs as had been prearranged. But the soldiers were wild with joy and excitement over their unprecedented victory. In place of obeying orders they madly pursued the enemy. The English soon recovered themselves. After being routed from their fortifications they united with a band of Indians, and quietly awaited the approach of Dudley's reckless forces. They exposed a few Indians and British, who drew them into the proper locality. The batteries taken by Dudley's men had in their excitement been left lightly guarded. Dudley's men were cut off from the fortress they had taken, and the British and Indians easily overpowered the guard left there. It was a victory fairly won by brave troops, but thrown away

through a reckless disobedience. The Americans in charge of the fortifications resisted bravely when the British came back, but were nearly all killed or wounded. Fifty of them were killed and seventy wounded. About five hundred of Dudley's troops were taken prisoners and only one hundred and fifty of them escaped. These fought their way to the boats and entered Fort Meigs. Colonel Dudley, while trying to cut through the lines and gain the boats, was mortally wounded. After he fell he killed an Indian assailant and then himself expired.

Then the Indians began to murder the prisoners under the eye of the British General Proctor, who had not manhood enough to even attempt to stop it. In the midst of the slaughter came the greatest Indian warrior of his age, and, next to Pontiac, the greatest leader of the Indian race, Tecumseh, who had been engaged in another part of the battle. He stopped their bloody work at once, saving that no defenseless prisoners should be killed when he commanded.

When Dudley began his attack on the batteries, Harrison was carrying out his part of the program to the letter. Alexander's battalion had acquitted themselves so nobly in protecting Clay's landing that Harrison at once assigned them to Colonel John Miller's forces to storm the British fortifications. There were under Miller, the Pittsburgh Blues, the Peterson Rifles, and the Pennsylvania Volunteers, among whom were the Westmoreland soldiers. The part of the fortification which they meant to and did attack was the side next to the river, for in doing so they would not interfere with Dudley's command in their work at the rear. They were opposed largely by Indians under the command of Tecumseh and his brother, and there were also five companies of British troops. The American army numbered only 350, for that was all that General Harrison could spare from the fort for that part of the attack. They charged the British and Indians, numbering about 1150, routed them from their concealment, killed and wounded many of them, and drove the remainder into the woods. The attack, though against great odds, succeeded admirably; they also took forty-three prisoners.

Then the English General Proctor sent a request to have Harrison surrender, but this was indignantly refused. Proctor's army was in a bad condition. They had provisions, but no wagons. Their four cannon had been rendered useless by Dudley's men. They had also lost more men than the enemy whom they attacked and whom they hoped to annihilate. An exchange of prisoners was asked for and granted by Harrison. On May 9th the British army moved off under a heavy fire on the part of the Americans. Thus ended the siege of Fort Meigs, which had lasted about two weeks. Had Dudley's soldiers obeyed orders it would undoubtedly have resulted in one of the most brilliant victories of American arms. Even as it was, our army did most glorious work. Our loss was 131 killed and 259 wounded. General Harrison made special mention of the gallant conduct of the 350 men under Miller and Alexander.

A detachment composed of the Pittsburgh Blues, Petersburg Volunteers, and the Westmoreland soldiers, in all about one hundred and sixty men, were sent to the Lower Sandusky, where there was a stockade fort commanded by Major George Crogan, an extremely youthful but brave officer. On August 1st, 1813, the fort was surrounded by five hundred British soldiers under Proctor and about eight hundred Indians, besides a large number of Indians who were stationed outside to intercept any reinforcements to the fort. Proctor then sent a demand for surrender under a flag of truce, and warned them that they should be butchered if they compelled him to take the stockade by force. Crogan, young as he was, had plenty of the true soldier spirit, and his soldiers were mostly young and spirited like their commander. He first learned that their sentiments were all in favor of holding out as long as possible, and then sent an answer declining to surrender. To the threat, he answered that when the fort was taken there would be none left to butcher, as it would not be given up while one man was left able to fight. The firing began at night from the enemy in boats on the bay. It was soon discovered that the enemy fired on one angle of the fort alone, intending doubtless to effect an entrance there when sufficiently weakened. Crogan had only one cannon, and this he mounted in a position that it would rake the ditch surrounding the fort, should the enemy attempt to climb over the palisades. The fire was kept up all the next day, but Crogan's men put bags of sand, and even bags of flour in the angle aimed at, so as to prevent any serious damage. At four o'clock they turned all their guns on this one angle, and made the assault amid the clouds of smoke, which this heavy firing produced. Two attempts were made by three hundred and fifty British soldiers, but each time their ranks were thrown into confusion by the active firing from within. They were then led on by a brave officer, Colonel Short, and actually jumped into the ditch. The porthole was opened at once, and the six-pounder, within thirty feet of the men in the ditch, was fired. By this enfilading shot Colonel Short and over fifty of his men were cut down, though some of them were only wounded. At

the same time the rifles in the fort, perhaps one hundred and fifty of them, opened on the men in the ditch, and this soon compelled them to retire, leaving the wounded behind. By this time darkness came. The wounded begged for water, but their friends dare not venture near enough to them to supply it. Major Crogan and his men handed them water over the pickets. He also opened a hole under the pickets to the ditch, and many of the wounded crawled through it into the fort. At three o'clock in the morning Proctor and his men quietly retreated down the bay, and in their haste left a boatload of valuable supplies behind. They also left seventy stand of arms and many braces of pistols. The Americans lost one killed and seven or eight slightly wounded. The loss to the British was estimated at one hundred and fifty or more, for over fifty were left in the ditch.

Nothing can better close this brief account of Westmoreland's troops in the war of 1812 than a reprint of the order by which they were discharged from further services. It is as follows:

Headquarters, Seneca Town, Aug. 28, 1813.

(After General Orders)

The Pittsburgh Volunteers, commanded by Captain Butter, and those of Greensburg by Lieutenant Drum, of Major Alexander's battalion, having performed their services, the General hereby presents them an honorable discharge.

The General has ever considered this corps as the first in the North Western Army. Equal in point of bravery and subordination. it excelled in every other of those attainments which form complete and efficient soldiers. In battle, in camp, and on the march, their conduct has done honor to themselves and their country.

A. H. Holmes,  
Asst. Adj. General

The life and character of Major John B. Alexander has been considered in the chapter entitled the Bench and Bar of Westmoreland.

Captain Joseph Markle, generally known to our generation as General Markle, was born near West Newton, February 15, 1777. The genealogy of the Markle family, which was quite a noted one, has been considered elsewhere. A sketch of his life will be found among the prominent Westmorelanders elsewhere in these pages.

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