

ACCOUNT OF WAR OF 1812

PAC MG40-0-1B

THE WAR IN CANADA 1812-1814

...But fortunately for the British, the Americans in the first months of the war when the provinces were comparatively unprotected, did not act on a systematic plan nor had they acquired or rather reacquired those qualities of a partisan that so admirably adapted them in the revolution to surprise our posts in sudden ... attacks which distracted and divided our forces and enabled them to cut us off in detail ... Brigadier General Hull found himself at the head of about 2,300 men including a few cavalry with whom he had instructions to invade Canada and strike a decided blow by the capture of Fort Amherstburg. That promised an easy conquest. The situation on the banks of the river Detroit at its entrance into Lake Erie was by no means good and had originally [been] constructed on too large a scale - from neglect the ditches were nearly filled up and to complete the whole, the force which Col. St. George commanded 300 [?] firelocks including militia was very inadequate to man the works About five miles from Amherstburg and near thirteen from Sandwich there is a large swamp covered in long grass six feet high and for the most part about a mile into the interior. Through the centre of this swamp runs the little river 'Canard', which though an inconsiderable body of water is broad and deep at its mouth and unfordable almost to its source owing to the flatness of the course it pursues. A mile from its mouth, the only road communicating between Sandwich and Amherstburg leads over a narrow bridge and causeway scarcely twenty feet broad which terminates at the side of Amherstburg in a thick wood ... In this situation so favoured by nature it was wisely determined by Col. St. George to present a vigorous resistance to the advance of the enemy. With a few field

pieces he constructed a battery on the firm ground at the extremity of the causeway which completely raked it as well as the bridge - he established a picquet on the bridge which also had two guns while the Indians placed themselves in ambush in the long grass on each side of the causeway ... Many were the daring attempts made by the enemy on our little position which were as gallantly resisted At daylight on the morning of the 16th the British troops covered by the fire of two small vessels landed at "Spring Wells" three miles below Detroit and marched up to assault that position while the Indians filled the woods on the left flank and about the fort. The enemy's lines stretched from the river and the battery across the road (which two twenty-four pounders in the right face of the battery commanded for more than half a mile) to the high ground in rear of the town, on which the fort is situated. The latter was well furnished with cannon and, as well as the town, was crowded with men. The British troops filed into a ravine about 700 yards from the fort and every disposition was made for an immediate assault but at this moment a white flag displayed by the enemy arrested the advance and a capitulation, was, after some discussion, agreed to by which the town, fort, etc. were surrendered to the British army. A British guard took possession of the gate, and before noon the garrison marched out and grounded their arms ... This valuable acquisition was effected without loss on our part and was the result of that daring, enterprising spirit so imminently [sic] possessed by General Brock which ensured success in almost every undertaking, even the most hazardous, from that unbounded confidence with which he inspired every individual under his command.

Queenston

...In a short time the British troops from Fort George with Major General Sheaffe came up and being joined by those from Chippewa (forming in the whole 5 companies 41st Reg't, 2 of Militia and 250 Indians) were enabled to renew the action a third time with a better prospect of success. General Sheaffe left a small force with two

pieces at the entrance of the village to prevent its occupation ... A terrible slaughter ensued. The Indians were furious. Their warwhoops so intimidated the Americans who expected no quarter that in despair [sic] some leaped the precipice and were to be seen for some time after suspended halfway down in the branches of the trees where the savages had shot them from the brow ...

Early in January he collected at this post about 3,000 men and as inclement as is an American winter in that latitude ... he commenced operations by dispatching B. Gen'l Winchester with 1,200 Kentuckians who took possession of Frenchtown on the 18th January after a slight skirmish with the British Indians and Militia. Our picquet fell back 12 miles to the Indian settlement of Brownstown. This partial advantage appears to have elated the American commander and to have induced him through a vain confidence to neglect the most common precautions ... On the 20th the garrison of Detroit joined that of Amherstburg at Brownstown consisting of 230 of the 41st Reg't and 70 Newfoundland, 200 militia and 600 Indians. Owing to the depth of snow on their route the troops halted for a few hours on the night of the 21st at Swan Creek ... continued their march and arrived a little before day break on the 22 January in the vicinity of the enemy's position which occupied the village and the woods to its left and in front was the cleared fields of the settlement. They were completely surprised. Neither picquet or vedette or sentry was in advance. The first shout of alarm was lost in the Indian warwhoop and peals of British musketry ... They sprang to their arms abandoned the camp and fled for refuge to the houses and behind the picketing and fences adjoining where the Guards and picquets had already taken post and kept up a fire of steady aim on the British while troops who were drawn up on the open plain and maintained the unequal contest with heavy losses for nearly two hours with determined bravery. Two thirds of the Indians had penetrated the woods on the right and were engaged with the enemy's left flank but as the Kentuckians are excellent marksmen and

accustomed to bush fighting they could make no impression till 200 mounted Indians who had made a detour of a few miles to cut off the retreat appeared in rear of the Americans and completely surrounded them, the British troops moved to the left when finding the picketing and fences no longer a protection a general panic seized them and they gave way in all direction ... The fierce glare of the flames, the crashing of the roofs, the shrieking of the dying wretches enveloped in fire and the savage triumphant yelling of these monsters in human shape presented so dreadful a scene as to beggar the most florid description.

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...The American prisoners were placed in a small enclosure that had formerly (in the Revolutionary War) been a British fort and which was so small as to barely contain them around this was placed a guard half regulars and militia strong enough to prevent escape but certainly inadequate to protect their charge. This fort the Indians could not fail to perceive and some of them determined to further gratify that insatiable revenge which at the conclusion of the action their white allies had successfully exerted themselves to restrain. With that view a number of them assembled outside the sentries and when matters were ripe for executing their design a bloodthirsty villain called "Split-Nose" a petty chief of the Chippewa .. entered the circle unperceived and tomahawked the first man within his reach ... the Guards now discovering their attention flew to the main entrance and, with a good deal of difficulty forced them back. Foiled so far in their attempt the whole mass of savages became furious. They next had recourse to a more certain but less _____? mode than forcing the

guard - they deliberately levelled their rifles at the poor wretches, cooped up in so narrow a compass like sheep in a fold, that at every shot some unfortunate being writhed in the agonies of death - the firing gave the alarm to the officers and troops in camp who hastened up and stopped the further effusion of blood by driving the Indians to a distance. At the close of this tragic scene nearly one hundred victims were found immolated to the cold blooded vengeance of these two legged tigers - and a British soldier (Paddy Kassill) of the 41st had fallen a sacrifice to his humanity. This horrible occurrence like that at the River Raisin caused a strong sensation in the States. Nor were their complaints of the supineness of the British General entirely without foundation - he certainly did not take precautions for the protection of his unfortunate prisoners that under the circumstances a brave and humane man ought to have done, and particularly as from experience on a former occasion he was well aware of what might be expected from the Indians should an opportunity occur - Some allowance however, may be made for General P his men that day had been much harrassed and had suffered severely in the action and not supposing so diabolical an attempt would be made in open day, it is probable he deferred the arrangement he may have intended until night when his troops would have been sufficiently refreshed.

....after a fortnight seige of Fort Meigs during which nothing of moment occurred, the Indians became dissatisfied with the General ... hoping fortune would be more precipitous in another quarter, the British Chieftain broke up his camp ... and steered his course for the fort of Lower Sandusky ... before this place he sat down on the 31st July and found that report had made it less formidable than it really was. A little rising ground nearly encircled in the form of a horse shoe by a deep ravine opening towards the river (which ran within 150 yards) was enclosed by a square picketing about 60 yards each face double ditched and flanked by four blockhouses and garrisoned by 150 Rifleman, mostly Kentuckians in command of Major Croghan ... The

assailants did not outnumber 300 exclusive of a few Indians (the others apprehensive of venturing so far from our lines with Fort Meigs in their rear, had returned to Amherstburg...

... Till the evening of the 2nd August two six pounders and a howitzer had played incessantly but ineffectually on the fort, as the green pickets received little injury from their shot and were easily replaced in case of need, when Gen'l P took the resolution of attempting it by storm - Two columns of 150 each were placed at the disposal of Lt. Col. Short and Warburton, and about half past five o'clock advanced at an orderly double quick from the skirts of the Wood to opposite sides of the fort exposed to a heavy and well executed fire. The _____ soon crossed the ravine and in idea they had already vaulted over the picketing and got possession of the fort but when suddenly arrested by a deep ditch for the first time presenting itself - so unexpected an obstruction created a momentary panic, when Col. Short with more gallantry than discretion rushed forward and leapt into the ditch - it is seldom a British soldier will refrain from emulating a daring action though ever so desperate - numbers, following his example precipitated themselves into this fatal trench without reflecting that without ladders their utmost efforts could not reach the foot of the picketing and that encumbered as they were it was nearly impossible to clamber up the slippery sides granting they might attempt it unmolested, instead of having a numerous and determined enemy to dispute the ascent. At this critical moment the muzzle of a six pounder was unmasked at the porthole of the blockhouse that flanked the ditch, scarcely thirty yards to the left, from which a single discharge killed or desperately wounded almost all that had descended. The survivors of the left column on this tremendous blow took refuge in the ravine close by, part of which was not commanded by the enemy's works. Co. Warburton during the advance of the right Column had, from the detour he was obliged to

make, a better opportunity of observing the depth of the ditch, and at once seeing the madness of an attempt at escalade, halted in the ravine and dispatched a message to General Proctor appraising him of the circumstances and desiring directions for his guidance. The latter desired he would keep his position till the darkness of the night, which was just closing, would enable him to bring off his men without exposing them to certain loss from the enemy's fire ... the Indians kept at a respectful distance, but with one single exception, but had we been successful and they been permitted it is probable the after entertainment would have been less profuse though less failing to the partakers. The number of killed and wounded on the part of the British was remarkably severe for so short a contest and so small a force - 3 officers (two of whom Lt. Col. Short and Lt. Gordon 41st Reg't) were among the killed and 95 men were returned hors de combat while that of the enemy's as we later discovered did not exceed Ten. In the course of the night the British troops embarked their Guns etc. and descending the river unmolested entered Sandusky bay at sunrise next morning a distance of 18 miles.

...

At the beginning of Sept. the Ship Detroit was completely rigged and to arm her the fort was dismantled of all its guns to the number of 19, comprising six different calibres. About this period also, Capt. Perry appeared off Amherstburg and stood in so close to reconnoitre as to create fears of a premature attack on our vessels - to prevent a reoccurrence of this bravado the blockhouse and battery newly constructed at Heartly's point three miles down the lake, were reoccupied and, with another blockhouse and two 24 pounders on the Isle of Bois Blanc at the entrance of the Harbour, effectually attained that object.

...

A little before twelve Capt. Barclay in the Detroit of nineteen Guns supported by the Chippewa a schooner of one Gun commenced the action by laying himself along side the Lawrence of twenty guns bearing Capt.

Perry's flag and Capt. Finnes of the Queen Charlotte of seventeen Guns with the Lady Provost (Lt. Buchan) of thirteen Schooner Hunter of ten and sloop Little Belt of 3 Guns engaged the Niagara (Capt. Elliott) of twenty Guns and Seven schooners each mounting from one to four long heavy cannon.

During nearly three hours did either fleet support the honour of its flag with the most unflinching bravery ... about half past two oclock Capt. Perry finding the Lawrence unmanageable and almost all her crew either killed or wounded formed the bold design of passing astern to the Niagara though both vessels were exposed to a tremendous shower of Grape and Canister. The Lieutenant of the Lawrence discovering the commodore had gained his object unhurt ended his hopeless contest by striking his Colours to the Detroit but that vessel was in a condition little better than her opponent Capt. Barclay by a grape shot carrying away part of his shoulder had lost the use of his remaining arm and was incapable of keeping the deck his first Lieut. was killed and half the crew killed or wounded all his masts severely injured, the yard and shrouds gone or useless and his boats so much damaged they could not take possession of the Lawrence nor from the same cause could the Queen Charlotte effect her capture on board the latter vessel Captain Finnis lost his head by a round shot soon after the commencement of the action. The first Lt. severely wounded and carried below and a great proportion of the men were also hors de combat and the smaller vessels had not sustained their share of the engagement without participating in its losses. On his reaching the Niagara Capt. Perry dispatched Capt. Elliot to direct the movements of the Schooners most of which by his orders concentrated their fire on the two British ships.

The carnage on board these ill fated vessels now became truly dreadful almost all the guns on their leaboard sides were dismantled or otherwise injured and to expose the Starboard to the enemy they endeavoured, but the rigging was unequal to that task and they drew

aboard each other. The only prospect that had offered to enable them to continue the fight thus being extinct, they were compelled to surrender and all the other vessels soon followed their example after a well fought action of upwards of three hours and a half [mentions a bear being on board one of the vessels commanded by the British! Probably the Detroit.]

...

On the 13 Sept. General Proctor called a Council of War at Sandwich where he resided consisting of the heads of departments but owing it is said to private pique, Lt. Col. Warburton second in Command was not summoned. The result of their deliberations showed itself next morning in the demolition of the defences and public buildings of the fort excepting the barracks in which the troops were quartered and in the embarkation in Schooners and Gunboats of the few remaining ordnance etc. previous to a retreat as given out to Chatham ... These measures ... created a wonderful ferment among the Indians who contrary to every species of policy had not been appraised by Gen'l P. of his object in retrograding.

The chieftains according to their custom demanded a "talk" and on the 18th Tecumseth as representative of the whole, delivered by his interpreter an energetic speech full of invective against the British Commander for breach of faith and declaring they would not stir a step till the enemy had landed. Two days after was appointed by General Proctor to return an answer and in that time the interpreters and Indian directors used every argument to induce them to comply with his views. Savages as they are, the sacrifices of the Indians were certainly great and their situation and prospects in consequence warranted almost any language of complaint ... Yet notwithstanding so many powerful obstacles, Col. Elliot of the Indian Department and his agents had so well discharged their trust by the morning of the 20th that they agreed to proceed to the Thames under a promise that Chatham would be fortified and the combined forces there await the attack of

the enemy so that when General Proctor renewed to them his assurances of disputing at Chatham the further advance of the enemy and ... they acquired in his motives and confidence and unanimity were a great measure restored.

....The knowledge of his movements and those of the American fleet preparing to act in concert, having reached Genl. Proctor he at length seriously set himself about evacuating Amherstburg. The remaining public buildings of which - and the blockhouses and batteries of Bois Blanc and Heartly's point were destroyed the morning of the 23 and the troops marched that evening 18 miles to Sandwich. About two o'clock of the 27 arrived at Headquarters a Cavalry piquet, that had been posted below Amherstburg gave notice of the enemys approaching the shore in vessels and boats, amounting to upward of a hundred and at five o'clock as the British troops were leaving Sandwich a vidett informed Genl. Proctor of their having landed and pushed their advantage five miles to the River Canard through a private channel he also learned that their mounted rifleman had reached a parallel situation on the opposite side of the river on their way to Detroit and a little after sunset the horizon was brilliantly illuminated by the ascending flames of the public buildings of that place, the garrison of which then in full retreat ...

Remarks on Board the Schooner Nancy Transport at anchor in the river Miami in the
Month of July 1813

Saturday 24 July.

First part of this day very warm and clear weather; at about 1 pm Major Chambers of the 41st and Doctor Ogilvie passed by from Amherstburg for Headquarters. Latter part . . . at daylight our troops crossed the river and took up a position opposite the old Fort Miamis and about 2 miles below Fort Meigs

Sunday 25 July

For part of this day sent the men for wood. I go up to Headquarters and from within gunshot of the American Fort, several boats passed by some from Amherstburg and one from the River Raisin - nothing of importance is done by our troops this day. A surmise of an intended expedition being sent to lower Sandusky. In the afternoon I returned on board; received a six pounder limber on board and sent some ball cartridge up with some flints, light airs of wind at South and very warm

Monday 26 July

Fore part of this day very warm light breezes of wind at SW and clear weather . . . latter part, heavy thunder, sharp lightening and heavy showers of rain, wind varied from the westward. Moored again with the kedgè athwart the river. A sharp firing is distinctly heard in the direction of the American Fort, since heard of its being a skirmish between the Indians and the Americans. A mail was taken by the Indians from some Americans, they effected their escape by throwing the mail away and running to the Fort. At about 9 am a boat passed downwards the men singing in English, at a loss to know who they are. Sending up to the commissary to enquire who says it is a boat coming down for provisions. At about twelve o'clock they return again upwards having overshot the vessels and inform us of 30 boats being at Swan Creek, on her going down she was several times hailed but no answer was returned, in consequence of which I order that in future any boat or craft after being three times hailed and ^{no} answer given to fire on the vessel

Thursday 27 July

For part of this day wind SW cloudy, hazy weather, at noon a squall from westward. . . . Received a waggon on board also some ammunition. Group to headquarters, rumours of an expedition to Sandusky, latter part of the afternoon numbers of Indians going off. A council is held by several other Indian Chiefs and our Gentlemen. Wind at SW cloudy and cool weather. Much dissatisfaction prevails among the Indians from no attempt being made to take Fort Meigs.

Wednesday 28 July

For part of this day partial showers of rain, wind SW. Go up to Camp, - prepared to come off. At 1 pm I return on board. The river is covered with Indians' canoes going off. Get under wigh and run for the river's mouth. Came too for about hours, it is determined to go to Sandusky few Indians follow. The whole of the 41st and artillery are distributed among the boats and vessels. At 7 pm hove up and sail for Turtle Island the Chippawa and Ellen in company.

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