

THE STORY OF THE BATTLE OF STONY CREEK

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(AS PUBLISHED IN THE SPECTATOR, JUNE, 1873)

Hamilton, June 5th, 1889.

INTRODUCTORY.

At midnight of the 26th of May, 1813, the Americans, after a long time spent in preparation, completed their final arrangements for the attack on the town and forts at the mouth of the Niagara. The town was then called Newark or Fort George; and the structure which overlooked the extreme mouth of the river, immediately below the present town of Niagara, was known as Fort Massassauga. Covered by a dense fog the American troops embarked in vessels from Fort Niagara directly opposite Newark, early on the morning of the 27th. To cover the embarkation and attack a heavy cannonade was opened from Fort Niagara, assisted by broadsides from two schooners which had been brought across the river by means of sweeps for the purpose of quieting the two cannon that had been planted on the river bank near Fort George; by broadsides from another which appeared to the north of the lighthouse, close to the shore, so as to enfilade the battery and cross the fire of the other two schooners; and by five schooners, a frigate, and a brig which anchored off the shore to the north so as to cover the landing of the troops. Maj.-Gen. Dearborn commanded the Americans in this expedition, but did not land in person to head the attack. Brigadier-General John Vincent commanded on the side of the British. Col. Scott was appointed to lead the vanguard of the Americans, supported by several divisions of riflemen, infantry and artillery. The reserve consisted of Macomb's artillery, and marines from the squadron, and 400 seamen under Commodore Chauncey, making in all an active force of 6,000 men. To oppose this the British had about 1,000 men, composed of regulars, militia and Indians. But the disparity in numbers was not the only disadvantage the British had to contend with; the fortifications were insufficient; indeed, scarcely tenable. They were short of powder—so much so that "the guns of Fort George were compelled to remain silent while Commodore Chauncey

was sounding the shore that (previous) evening within half gunshot;" the men were exhausted from their long and severe duty in watching for the long expected invasion—strong guards had lined the river and lake banks both night and day, for an indefinite time before this, and the duty is remembered by all to have been the severest of the year; and, worse than all, the heavy fog that shrouded everything on the morning of the conflict made it impossible to discover from which quarter the attack of the enemy was to be expected. Under this unfortunate aspect Vincent disposed his men so as to protect all sides of his position. Col. Harvey was posted to the right of Fort George, his detachment extending along the river as far as what was then known as Brown's Point; Col. Myers was stationed to the left, or west side of Fort Massassauga, to repel any attack made from Lake Ontario; the General himself took command of the centre, occupying the fort and town; and a few companies were placed in the rear to prevent a surprise from the ravines inland from the river and lake. Had the Americans exhibited a little of the "strategy" to which they boastingly attributed their successes over their Southern brethren in their late civil war, they might have cut off Vincent's retreat entirely by sweeping the Queenston road, and have made the whole British army prisoners. The battle of Stony Creek would then not have been fought, and presuming that the Americans would still have held York (the former name of Toronto, then in the hands of the Americans), the whole Upper Province would have fallen into the possession of the enemy. But the incapacity of the American General saved—in this instance as in many others during the war—the Canadians from disaster and possible subjugation. The cannon had been booming long before daylight, but the enemy were not discovered until approaching daylight, when, through the stagnant mist they were seen approaching off the Four-mile