

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE AND NIAGARA CAMP

Youngstown. The garrison was lodged in log blockhouses, affording quarters for 220 men, besides which there was a separate building for the officers. The magazine was built of stone, with an arched roof, but was not considered bomb-proof. The whole of this fortification was greatly out of repair, and not deemed capable of much defence. Under General Brock's supervision, however, the fort was considerably strengthened and several detached earthworks were thrown up on commanding points in the vicinity. No attack upon it was attempted until the morning of October 13th, 1812, when, perceiving a column of troops on the march to oppose the passage of the river at Queenston, the garrison of Fort Niagara turned all their guns upon Fort George and the town of Niagara, with such destructive effect that in a few minutes the Courthouse and gaol with fifteen or sixteen other buildings were set on fire by shells or hot shot. While the greater part of the militia who occupied the fort in the absence of the regular garrison, were employed in fighting the flames its guns were worked with such vigor and effect by a detachment of the Lincoln Artillery under Captains Cameron and Powell, assisted by two non-commissioned officers of the 41st Regiment, that in the course of an hour the American batteries were completely silenced. It was then discovered that the roof of the magazine, which contained eight hundred barrels of powder, had been set on fire by a shell. Without an instant's hesitation Captain Vigoreux of the Royal Engineers climbed upon the burning building, and his gallant example being promptly followed by others, the metal covering was soon torn off and the flames extinguished in the timbers underneath. The government storehouse at the water-side near Navy Hall was, however, entirely consumed.

One of the largest guns mounted in Fort Niagara burst while being discharged, wrecking the platform and disabling several men. In consequence of this accident and the heavy fire directed against the place from Fort George, it was evacuated by its garrison, which did not venture to re-occupy their works for several hours after the cannonade had ceased. Next day an armistice was concluded which continued in effect until 9 p.m. on November 20th. At daybreak on the following morning Fort George and the neighboring batteries began a second bombardment of Fort Niagara, which had in the meantime been considerably strengthened, but appears to have been weakly garrisoned. The fire of its guns was irregular and ill-directed, ceasing at times for considerable intervals, while flames, apparently caused by the explosion of shells, could be seen rising

from within. One of these shells penetrated a blockhouse, dismounting the only gun in position there, while another silenced the cannon mounted on the roof of the mess-house for more than an hour. Again a gun burst in the fort with disastrous results, and by five o'clock in the afternoon the whole of its artillery was absolutely silenced. A large building close under the walls, which concealed the landing place from observation, had also been set on fire and burnt. One of the guns in the battery at Youngstown had been dismounted, and the others only fired an occasional shot at great intervals. On the Canadian side the mess-house at Navy Hall was destroyed and seventeen buildings were set on fire by hot shot in the town, while many others were much damaged. At dark the British gun ceased firing, having discharged upwards of two thousand round shot and shells, while the American batteries were supposed to have fired nearly an equal number.

With this cannonade active hostilities in this vicinity may be said to have terminated for the next six months, but on the 8th of May, 1813, the American squadron landed a brigade of infantry, which had captured York (Toronto) ten days before. Large fatigue parties were at once set at work throwing up batteries along the river and building boats, while reinforcements continued to arrive until about seven thousand regular troops, amply supplied with field artillery, were assembled; while their armed vessels, having undisputed control of the lake, were in a position to cover a landing where they pleased. To oppose this formidable force Brigadier General Vincent had only 1080 regular soldiers, with five field pieces, 350 militia and fifty Indians. As it was deemed necessary to watch a front of eleven miles, extending from Queenston to the mouth of the Four Mile Creek on Lake Ontario, this small body was subdivided into three brigades of nearly equal strength, one of which was assigned to the defence of the river and another to the lake front, while the third was held in reserve near Fort George. At that time this post was armed with five guns. Six detached batteries on its left mounted ten guns. All of these, however, were open in the rear and liable to be enfiladed or taken in reverse by vessels upon the lake. At intervals the bank of the river between Fort George and Queenston there were three other batteries, each mounting one gun, and at the latter place there were two batteries mounting three guns. All of these works required small garrisons, and Vincent's weak force was accordingly too much scattered to be quickly concentrated at any point.