



The Volunteer Review

AND MILITARY AND NAVAL GAZETTE.

A Journal Devoted to the Interests of the Military and Naval Forces of the Dominion of Canada

VOL. IV.

OTTAWA, CANADA, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 1870.

No. 36.

THE FENIAN RAID OF 1866.

BY MAJOR GEORGE T. DENISON, JR.

[CONTINUED.]

THE EXPEDITION ON THE TUG "ROBB."

In a former chapter it will be remembered that we stated that Colonel Peacock, in forming his plan of campaign, decided, as a portion of it, to send a vessel round from Port Colborne to Fort Erie, to patrol the river and prevent, if possible, reinforcements coming over, or the Fenians from escaping. It will also be remembered that Lieutenant-Colonel Dennis, in carrying out his orders, telegraphed for the tug "Robb," from Dunville, which came down under Captain L. McCallum, who also brought with him a portion of his company, the Dunnville Naval Brigade, and that on his arrival the Welland Canal Field Battery, under command of Captain R. S. King, of Port Robinson (being armed with Enfield Rifles) were placed upon it, and that Lieutenant-Colonel Dennis and Captain Akers proceeded to the Niagara River to patrol between Fort Erie and Black Creek.

On passing down the river they saw the enemy's camp at Frenchman's Creek, which had been evacuated by the Fenians about nine p. m. the previous evening; they moved down as far as Black Creek, carefully examining the shore, but seeing no signs of any armed force. They went ashore there and were informed the enemy had moved from their camp during the night. After getting all the information possible from the inhabitants they went back to Fort Erie, in order to keep their appointment with Lieutenant-Colonel Booker at eight, in accordance with the plan which, as before stated, had been agreed upon between them before starting. As Lieutenant-Colonel Booker and his command did not appear, Lieutenant-Colonel Dennis and Captain Akers came to the conclusion that Colonel Peacock had disapproved of their plan, and that Lieutenant-Colonel Booker was carrying out the original arrangement.

Colonel Dennis then landed the artillery company, and desired Captain Akers, with one half of it, to proceed inland about a mile and a half or two miles, and to patrol down one of the side roads which lead to the river in the direction of Black Creek; and ordered Captain King to patrol the river road in the same direction, with the other half of his command. These two parties, consisting of about twenty-five men in each, picked up a few stragglers, and took over some prisoners which had been captured by the citizens, and, meeting at some distance from

Fort Erie, the whole company marched on by the river road towards Chippawa.

After landing the artillery, Colonel Dennis went on with the tug to Black Creek, which is about eight miles from Fort Erie; in consequence of the swiftness of the current he reached that place while the force with Captains King and Akers were yet five or six miles from it. Between Fort Erie and Black Creek there is no dock at which the "Robb" could have put in to have embarked the artillery, consequently that corps for some two or three hours, were blundering about inside (as we may say) the Fenian lines, and part of that time divided, without any opportunity of support if attacked, and without the slightest chance of escape in case of defeat. It was the merest accident that the fate which befel this command in the afternoon of the same day did not overtake them at any moment on this march. What was to be gained by sending them on shore, and especially by dividing them, cannot readily be imagined. The few prisoners that were captured, mere stragglers as they were, were certainly not worth the risk of disaster that was undergone in taking them, especially when it is considered that the object for which the vessel was sent was to prevent the escape of the whole force, and to secure its ultimate surrender.

Colonel Dennis, on arriving at Black Creek the second time, communicated with the rear end of Colonel Peacock's column, which, as we have seen, marched up the river road as far as that place, and then turned inland towards New Germany.

He did not see Colonel Peacock, however, as that officer was riding at the head of the advanced guard, and was by that time some distance in the interior.

Colonel Dennis, on his returning to Fort Erie, met Captains King and Arthurs, and the force with them, about two miles from Black Creek. They were embarked by means of small boats and all the prisoners were taken on board and placed below; this occupied some little time. The tug then proceeded up the river as far as the village of Fort Erie, where she was moored to the dock, and a portion of the artillery landed, and some more prisoners which had been taken by the citizens of the place were taken over and placed on board. After staying there for some time, Colonel Dennis and Captain Akers decided to leave the Welland Canal Field Battery at Fort Erie in charge of the prisoners, and to go round with the tug to Port Colborne for information and further orders. Captain King remonstrated against this, and especially against leaving the prisoners with him, for fear of their being rescued; Dr. Kempson

also advised them not to leave them. It was decided, however, to billet the artillery in the village, and arrangements were being made to carry them out, when parties began to arrive from the interior with the news that the Fenians were coming in full force from the west, and that a battle had been fought on Ridge road.

Lieutenant-Colonel Dennis and Captain Akers, did not seem to lay much stress on this information, for Captain Akers took a buggy and went off in the direction of the railway telegraph office up the river to see if telegraphic communication had been reopened between Fort Erie and Port Colborne. Before he could get back the Fenians had cut him off from his force, and he made for Port Colborne by way of the lake shore. Colonel Dennis, after repeated solicitations from Captain King, allowed the men to embark on board the tug. They were scarcely on board when he came over from a house, which he had been being as a sort of headquarters, and ordered them all on shore again, except a small portion of the Naval Company.

The force landed consisted of about fifty-two artillery and eighteen of the Naval corps. He led them to the road running along the front of the village, between it and the dock, and marched them up towards the railway station. A body of Fenians were by this time coming down the road. The Volunteers were drawn up in line to meet them, but, almost immediately, a very large force appeared along the top of the hill (which runs parallel to the river at a distance of about 300 yards) they were then moving northwards as if to surround them. The firing began at once, and after a volley or two Captain King, seeing they were outnumbered ten to one, ordered them to break and get under cover, and fight independently, as they were thoroughly exposed in the position in which they were placed. At this time Lieutenant-Colonel Dennis, seeing he would soon be cut off, ran down the river for about a quarter of a mile with two artillery men, and took refuge in Mr. Thomas' house; the three concealed themselves—the artillerymen were captured, but Colonel Dennis escaped, and disguising himself, made his way through the enemy's lines, and joined Colonel Peacock in the night.

The remainder under Captain King getting cover behind a pile of cordwood, and behind houses and fences kept up a heavy fire, keeping the Fenians at bay for some fifteen or twenty minutes. About twenty five or thirty who had taken refuge in the house of Mr. George Lewis, the postmaster, fought desperately for some time longer, firing out of the house with the greatest