



# The Volunteer Review

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### THE INVASION OF CANADA IN 1874.

WRITTEN IN 1900 BY A RETIRED MILITIAMAN.

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How our fellows cheered when they saw the guns taken, in spite of the efforts to limber up; the infantry covering them having been too much interested in the fight across the river to notice the advance of our men, and flying without firing a shot. This seemed regularly to dishearten the enemy, and he again retired; leaving us breathing space. For the next two hours we were kept in motion, as the enemy manoeuvred from right to left; but presently their forces seemed to decrease, and we shortly found that Canada had gained a victory, and the day was ours. Not a moment was lost; the third Brigade advanced taking the right and pressing down the river road, the 2nd taking the left down the line of the Grand Trunk.

By and bye, the retreat became less orderly, and their guns less efficiently and rapidly served, and presently the retreat was changed into a rout, and both roads to Dunnville were strewn with rifles, knapsacks and accoutrements.

We pressed them very hard, till within sight of Dunnville where they sought shelter, under protection of their gunboats. Now comes one of the chiefest horrors of war, our artillery shelled the place, regardless of its occupants, although a few of our friends were left in it, and finally set it on fire. This dislodged the enemy and under cover of night, as many as could be taken on board, crowded on the gunboats; and made off, leaving the remainder scattered in the marshes between Dunville and Port Maitland, where the most of them were taken or surrendered as prisoners in the course of the next few days.

The next day, the 16th, we again marched on Port Colborne, which had been occupied the day previous by the regular Brigade from Port Robinson, thus completely surrounding and cutting off the enemy's supplies. As now detachments continued to arrive, however, they moved on the road to Fort Erie, driving these fresh arrivals before

them without firing a shot. Thus ended our first weeks warfare. Our loss had been trifling, compared with that of the enemy, and our men were so cheered by their first success that they felt themselves invincible. A lesson had however been learned by the co-operation of the enemy's gunboats at Dunnville, and a 4 gun battery was constructed on the naval reserve opposite Port Maitland.

The strategical circumstances leading to this victory were threefold: First, we had an advantageous position, and had led the enemy through a country flanked on one side by the lake, and on the other by the impenetrable swamps of Humberstone and Wainfleet, thus confining his operations to a narrow area,—second our force at St. Catharines and Port Colborne could operate on his base of communications, a fact of which he was evidently aware, from his taking shipping at Dunnville,—and third, the fatal error they had made in attacking our position obliquely, into which they were beat, with the re-entering angle in the centre. Add to this the tactical advantage gained by the march of our second Brigade beyond the Chippewa Creek, protected by the interminable swamps up to the junction with the 3rd and 4th Brigades, and the enemy's total want of cavalry, and our victory is explained. We all understood and coincided with our Generals remark that we should never fight over that ground again.

The great advantages gained for us by the natural obstacles of river, wood, and swamp, proved most conclusively the fallibility of even the best regulated military judgment. Time and again had we been assured, that the Niagara Frontier; the natural gateway for invasion was indefensible; but fortunately for us, those judgments were founded irrespective of the topography of the country, and irrespective of its hardy and loyal population. An army of invasion keeping up communications with its base must sweep before it the entire Niagara peninsula, or run the risk of flank attacks, or the interception of its communications.

To cover a width of 40 miles a large army would be required, and to keep up communications with its base at Albany secure

from a flank attack from the north side of Ontario, an enormous one would be necessary, unless the resources of the Canada, in men and munitions of war, had been previously drained by a continued warfare. To annex Canada "before breakfast" had been the humorous threat of American annexationists for years; in the effort to do so their confidence had proved their destruction.

For an army of less than 30,000 men to invade Canada from the Niagara Frontier was a madness that could only have arisen from the contempt in which we were held. And truth to tell, that contempt was partly justified by the parsimony and illiberality of the Canadian people in refusing the aid necessary to place the defence of the country in a proper position.

In past years the volunteer force, small as its quota was, was ground down and the life taken from it, by the refusal of employers to allow their employees the necessary time for drill instruction, and the ill-judged economy of the Parliament in restricting the grants for such purposes to the minimum. The change in the law had bettered these things, and the organization of the Reserve Active Force had doubled our strength; but these changes were apparently so slight, that they had not attracted attention out of the Dominion.

To return to my narrative. We now heard that the enemy had invaded us at four points beside Fort Erie. At Huntingdon and Prescott in the east, to the number of about 50,000, their objective points being Montreal and Ottawa, and at Windsor and Sarnia in the west, whence they were marching on London, our 2nd Division, retiring before them, but using every position as an obstacle to their progress. We had little rest, therefore, but on the morning of the 18th took train for Brantford, leaving the First Brigade garrisoning the line of the Welland Canal, with outposts thrown forward to the Niagara river. A regiment of the 2nd Brigade was left at Dunnville and Port Maitland to guard the mouth of the Grand River while the rest of the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Brigades, proceeded to Brantford. Here we remained for two days in camp, and our three Brigades were made into two, the