



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, AUGUST 29, 1870.

No. 35.

THE FENIAN RAID OF 1866.

BY MAJOR GEORGE T. DENISON, JR.

[CONTINUED.]

THE BATTLE OF RIDGEWAY.

We have already seen that Capt. Akers, acting upon the information received from the Customs officer as to the position of the Fenians, had decided that the best route from Port Colborne to Stevensville, was by rail to Ridgeway and from there to Stevensville by the road. The information was, that the Fenians were encamped at Frenchman's Creek at 6 p.m. But that was no proof where they would be at 7 a.m. next morning. Hereafter, in describing the Fenian line of march, it will be shewn that they were on the march to Ridgeway on Lieutenant-Colonel Booker's arrival there.

Lieutenant-Colonel Booker was, on this eventful morning, for the first time in his life, in command of a Brigade. He was an old Volunteer officer, although still young in years. He had served in the Hamilton Field Battery for some time before the Volunteer force of 1855 was organised, and from that time to the present has been an enthusiastic and zealous officer. He was appointed commandant of the active force in Hamilton in 1857, and a few years ago, while still holding that position, he organized the 13th Battalion of Volunteers in Hamilton. He always had the reputation of being a good officer, and was the first to obtain a first class certificate from the Board for examining Volunteer Officers. During his whole military career he had never commanded a Brigade of Infantry, even at a review, and was sent to the front merely as commanding his regiment, the 13th, and not in any other capacity. Chance threw him into the position of a Brigadier General on the morning of a battle, without any staff, without any mounted orderlies, without artillery, or cavalry, and without a mounted officer in the field but himself. Such was the position in which he found himself when forming up his command at the village of Ridgeway, after taking them off the cars.

Finding that he could not procure vehicles to carry on his stores, he sent them back to Port Colborne in the train, left the great coats of the men at the station, and set off by the Ridge Road in the direction of Stevensville.

The Queen's Own, being the senior corps, took the lead, being under the command of Major Gillmor, an excellent officer, brave, active, and energetic, one in whom the men

had the utmost confidence, and one with whom they were all accustomed to serve.

No. 5 company of the Queen's Own, (Captain Edwards) being supplied with Spencer Rifles, were sent in advance as the advance guard; after the Queen's Own marched the York Rifles, then the 13th Battalion, and lastly the Caledonia Rifles, under the command of Captain Jackson, forming the rear guard.

The force had proceeded in this way for about two miles when just before they had arrived to where the garrison road intersects the Ridge road the advance party signalled that the enemy were in sight. No. 5 company immediately extended from the centre and No. 1 moved up and extended on their left and No. 2 on the right; No. 3 forming the centre support and Nos. 4 and 6 the left and right supports; after moving on in this way for some distance No. 7 company was sent out as a flanking party to the left, supported by No. 8 the Trinity College company. The force was in this position on arriving at the garrison road. Before proceeding further with the movements it will be desirable to describe the nature of the ground and the position of the Fenians.

The Ridge road runs from Ridgeway in a direction northerly and easterly, following the course of the Lime Ridge from which the road takes its name; this ridge is about thirty or forty feet in height, and in some places steep, in others of a very gradual ascent; at the point where the battle was fought the ridge is about half a mile wide, of a very gradual rise, the road running along the ridge about half-way up. The garrison road running from the west towards Fort Erie, ascends the ridge, crossing the ridge road almost at right angles, about half a mile or perhaps a little farther there runs a road parallel with the garrison road which also leads to Fort Erie. It will thus be seen that in moving along the ridge road from Ridgeway that the ground rises gradually for about a quarter of a mile on the right, and slopes downwards for about the same distance on the left; on both sides there are cultivated fields; on the right extending as far as the top of the ridge where the summit is covered with woods; on the left for half a mile, at which distance the view is shut out with a large hardwood bush. At the north-west corner of the garrison road is a tavern called "The Smugglers' Home," and on the south east corner of the next cross road there stands a brick farm house with an orchard around it, and a large orchard along the opposite side of the cross road to the right of the ridge road.

It should also be mentioned that these fields on both sides are much cut up with

orchards, and that a large number of beautiful shade trees are scattered about. These trees and the peculiar conformation of the ground renders it exceedingly difficult to get an extended view in any direction over the scene of the fight.

The Fenian position was as follows: their main body, the reserves, were posted nearly a quarter of a mile to the north of the further cross road, to the north of the brick house beyond the orchard; their position being behind a rail fence thickly grown up with shrubbery, which almost hides it, some second growth shade trees being also thickly scattered along; their first line was posted along the south side of the road above the garrison road, where they had erected a barricade along the southerly fence with the assistance of the rails taken from the fence on the north side; this was done by laying the rails slanting outwards leaning against the top rail; this barricade was erected very hurriedly, not having taken them more than ten minutes to complete it. Their advanced skirmishers were posted along the rail fences about half way down to the garrison road, with a few files in the woods on the upper side of the ridge.

After moving on in the order before mentioned as far as the garrison road, a few of Trinity College company moved down as far as the woods on the left, and the company was afterwards in skirmishing order on the extreme left for the remainder of the fight. Nos. 1, 2, and 6, and Nos. 3, 4, and 6, who afterwards relieved them, moved on in the most gallant manner, driving the enemy's skirmishers before them, pushing on from fence to fence. In this advance Ensign McEachren fell, mortally wounded. As soon as they had crossed the garrison road a short distance, Colonel Booker again directed the Highland Company, Captain Gardner, to form a flanking party to the right, and to scour the woods on the top of the ridge. This service was performed by this company with great spirit, the Highlanders driving the Fenians before them in such haste that they left their company rolls and papers of various kinds behind them on the ground. The Highlanders penetrated across a wheat field at least as far as the road along which the Fenian first line was posted; while there is very little doubt that the University company on their left had even crossed it, and had advanced as far as a wood on the left of the Fenian line. The Trinity College company on the left, and the University and Highland company on the right were not relieved during the fight.

About the time these flank companies were sent off, or perhaps a little before,