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### NAVAL OPERATIONS

OF THE  
WAR OF 1812-14.

#### CHAPTER VIII.

During the whole of this contest the most common rules of the science of war appear to have been systematically disregarded by both parties—the operations on the seaboard were desultory and without any fixed object except that of doing the greatest possible amount of mischief without considering what its bearings would be on the issue at stake. In Canada at the commencement of the war a system of aggressive defence was inaugurated by Sir Isaac Brock and frustrated by the imbecility of Sir George Prevost. The Naval Commander-in-chief Sir James L. Yeo was a headstrong egotistical blockhead whose impatience of control and rancorous hatred of his associate compromised the honor of his country and brought disgrace on the service which had the misfortune to claim such a fellow.

In 1812 the whole of Upper Canada with the exception of the Niagara frontier was a comparative wilderness; from Amherstburg on Lake Erie to Burlington Bay a few scattered settlements broke the monotony of the primeval forest; a village at York, now Toronto, and another at Newark, now Queenston, were the only representatives of the large cities, towns and villages which cover that magnificent tract of Lake shore. Kingston was well fortified, but between it and Montreal no village or town worthy of note existed; the means of communication being by oxen overland in winter and by the St. Lawrence and Lakes in summer.

As a question of strategy it was evident that the command of the Lakes decided the occupation at least of Upper Canada, and hence it was a primary object with the Americans to obtain the ascendancy thereon. At the commencement of the war Ontario was the only Lake on which the British had any vessels, these consisted of the Royal George, a sloop of 340 tons, mounting 20 guns, a brig of 14 guns, and three smaller vessels mounting 16 or 12 guns each, the whole were com-

manded by a Provincial officer named Earle. The force of the Americans on this lake consisted of one brig, the Oneida of 16 guns, the principal port was Sackett's Harbour. On the 15th July, 1812, Commodore Earle with the squadron under his command appeared off Sackett's Harbour with the intention of taking or destroying the Oneida, but the fire of two or three guns mounted on a point of land near the harbour's mouth were sufficient to deter this valiant commander from attempting with five vessels what the Royal George alone well manned and handled could easily have accomplished. Encouraged by this cowardly behavior the commander of the American brig fitted out a captured British merchant schooner with one long 32 pounder and two sixes, manning her with 30 seamen and a company of rifles, sent her to Ogdensburg to protect several vessels therein building for warlike purposes, and on her way down, the Julia, as she was called, encountered and beat off without losing a man the Maria of 14 and Gloucester of 18 guns, both British brigs.

The regular troops for the defence of Canada consisted of some 4,500 men, chiefly fencible and veteran or invalid troops; the British Commander in chief was Lieutenant General Sir George Prevost, a vacillating puzzle-headed man capable of discharging his duty under orders but unable to originate or carry out any independent movement, consequently Earle was a man after his own heart and was neither censured nor removed though glaringly incompetent to the discharge of his duties.

About this time the British 20 gun ship Tartarus, Captain S. Pasco, arrived at Quebec and that officer offered to lay up his ship, proceed to Kingston, supercede Earle, and sweep the American flotilla from the Lakes; but this was a measure wholly beyond Sir G. Prevost's comprehension or capacity and it was declined, instead thereof he tried to hire sailors at Quebec for the Lake service at half the price then paid to the crews of merchant vessels.

In the month of October Commodore Isaac Chauncey arrived at Sackett's Harbour as Commander-in-chief of the American squad-

ron, bringing with him a number of officers and some 500 prime sailors from the seaboard—he was enabled by the 6th of November to place on the Lake with the Oneida six fine schooners mounting altogether 48 guns including several long 24 and 32 pounders, many of the guns being mounted on pivot or traversing carriages. On the 26th November he launched the Madison, a fine ship of 600 tons, pierced to carry 24 guns on a flush deck, on which he hoisted his broad pendant—with this force he chased the Royal George into Kingston, cannonaded that town and batteries. Soon afterwards Sir George Prevost ordered two ships of war to be built to mount 24 guns each, one at Kingston the other at York (now Toronto), an unprotected village on the Lake.

On Lake Erie the Americans possessed one armed vessel, the Adams, a brig mounting six 6-pounders. The British Colonial Authorities by hiring or purchasing some merchant vessels and arming them had assembled a force consisting of one ship of 280 tons, the Queen Charlotte mounting 16 light carronades, a brig of 10 guns, a schooner of 12 guns, and three smaller vessels mounting between them seven guns; these vessels were manned by 108 Canadians and 160 soldiers. On the 16th July, at the surrender of Detroit the Adams fell into the hands of the British, was named the Detroit, manned with a small Canadian crew and sent down the Lake as a cruiser. Early in October the American Government sent Lieut. J. D. Elliott and between 50 and 60 petty officers and seamen to superintend the construction of some schooners at Black Rock. On the 9th Lieut. Elliott with the whole of his seamen and some 50 soldiers boarded the Detroit while becalmed and having the Caledonia in her company, the former they were obliged to burn to save her from recapture by a detachment from Fort Erie, but the latter and her valuable cargo was carried safe to Blackrock.

On the 25th April, 1813, having received a re-inforcement of seamen Commodore Chauncey sailed from Sackett's Harbour with his fleet now augmented to 10 vessels; by the diplomatic cleverness of Sir George Pre-