

## THE FENIAN RAID OF 1866.

BY MAJOR GEORGE T. DENISON, JR.

[CONTINUED.]

On Thursday evening, the 31st May, the authorities in Canada first began seriously to apprehend an immediate crossing. The Fenians gathered that night, at their various headquarters in Buffalo—many of them armed with muskets, bayonets, &c.,—and it soon became currently rumoured about the streets that a movement would probably be attempted that night. At a later hour they separated at their headquarters, apparently going home for the night. They marched off in straggling parties, by different roads, their movements being skilfully confused, until they reached Blackrock where the several columns united, and proceeded with silence and celerity to Pratt's Furnace a little below Black Rock, where some canal boats and a tug were in readiness to convey them across the river. Nine waggons heavily loaded with arms and ammunition, were also waiting for them. The whole force was carried across, carrying their stores with them, and were landed at the Lower Ferry dock—about a mile below the Village of Fort Erie—immediately in front of Mrs. Anderson's residence. They landed with loud cheers, and having distributed their arms, immediately throw out pickets in every direction.

The Fenians, shortly after landing, moved up to the village. Col. O'Neil, who was in command of the force, ordered Dr. Kempson, the reeve, to furnish rations at once for one thousand men: a meeting of the municipal council was hurriedly called and arrangements made to provide the food. Immediately after this was done, Col. O'Neil sent a force along the Grand Trunk Railway, towards Port Colborne; this force burnt Sourwine's Bridge on that road. The main body moved down to Frenchman's Creek, and encamped on Mr. Newbigging's farm, hurriedly strengthening their position by rough breastworks formed with the fence rails. Small parties were sent out in every direction, seizing horses and hurriedly organizing a force of mounted men for scouting purposes. The greater part of Friday, the 1st June, was passed by the Fenians in this way.

It was, of course, impossible for our Canadian authorities to form any accurate idea of the intentions and plans of the Fenian leaders in this section of the country. There was little doubt, however, that the first object on their part, would be the destruction of the locks on the Welland Canal. To effect this their obvious course would have been as follows:—

From the description of the general features of the country, given in a former chapter, it will be remembered that Lake Erie, the Welland River and Canal, and the Niagara River, enclose a section of country very nearly square, with a railway running from Chippewa to Fort Erie, and another from Port Colborne to the same place. Col. O'Neil would readily assume that our forces would come down upon him by one of those routes, and most probably would make use of both. His base of operations consisted of the Niagara river, between Chippewa and Fort Erie, with the possibility, in certain contingencies, of its being changed to the lake shore, between Port Colborne and Port Erie. If he marched upon Port Colborne along the Grand Trunk Railway, he was leaving himself liable to be cut off from his base by a force coming down from Chippewa along the Erie and Ontario railway.

The better plan for Col. O'Neil to have adopted, assuming that the Welland Canal was his objective point, would have been to have landed a small portion of his command at the lower ferry, who should have marched to the Village, there breakfasted, and then pushed on along the line of the Grand Trunk Railway as far as they could get in the direction of Port Colborne, burning all the bridges along the road and cutting the telegraph wires. With the main portion of his force he should have dropped down the Niagara river in his boats to Chippewa. He landed at the lower Ferry at half past three in the morning, if he had gone straight to Chippewa he would have reached there at half-past five, two hours later. After breakfasting there and burning the bridges over the Welland River, he should then have marched by the right bank of the river to Port Robinson, a distance of some eight miles, burning the Montrose bridge on his way, the only bridge on the river between Chippewa and Port Robinson. At Port Robinson he would have been in a position to destroy the locks on the Canal, and also the Welland Railway which passes through the Village.

By pursuing this course the Fenians would have thoroughly protected their right flank by the destruction of the bridges over the Welland River, that river being navigable throughout the whole distance, and being therefore perfectly unfordable. In addition to this, our forces were not prepared at the time with pontoon trains, and had no means of effecting a crossing. The left flank of the Fenians would by this plan have been protected by Lake Erie, and our forces would have been compelled to attack them from the front, between Welland and Port Colborne, they could then have easily fallen back to the river and escaped on their boats to the other side, this could all have been accomplished in one day, had they been sufficiently energetic. Fortunate indeed was it for us that they bungled and hesitated as they did. Having thus considered and discussed what the Fenians might have done, and what our authorities had to fear, I shall proceed to show in the next chapter the movements made to counteract their designs.

## THE PLAN OF CAMPAIGN.

Early on Friday morning, General Napier who commands the regular troops in Upper Canada, received information of the crossing at Fort Erie. The evening previous the Government had ordered 400 of the "Queen's Own" Rifles of Toronto to be in readiness to leave for Port Colborne at an early hour in the morning, they left on Friday morning early by the steamer City of Toronto for Port Dalhousie, and then proceeded by the Welland Railway to Port Colborne. Col. Dennis, who was in command, being ordered to occupy, and if necessary to entrench a position there, and wait for reinforcements and further orders before any attack was made on the enemy.

The greater portion of the Volunteer force of Western Canada, except the cavalry, was ordered out for active service at an early hour in the forenoon, and a proclamation issued placing them under the Imperial military authorities, arrangements were at once made for providing transport for troops, trains were held in readiness, and steamers detained for military purposes. But for some hours General Napier did not send any more troops to the Niagara frontier, as from the numerous reports of landings of Fenians in different directions, he had reason to fear that the raid on Fort Erie was a feint to draw troops from other places. About 12

o'clock on Friday, finding all was quiet elsewhere, he began to concentrate troops for the purpose of driving out the force which had landed at Fort Erie.

Col. Peacock commanding the 16th Regiment, was at once placed in command of the whole force on the Niagara frontier, and instructed to proceed to his post. A Battery of the Royal Artillery under Lieut.-Colonel Hosto, and 200 of the 47th under Major Loder were despatched about noon to Hamilton, and being joined there by Col. Peacock with 200 men of his battalion the whole proceeded by Great Western Railway to St. Catharines. Col. Peacock's instructions were that he was to make St. Catharines his base, and to act according to his own discretion, as to advancing on Gifflon or elsewhere, and to attack the enemy as soon as he could do so with force sufficient to ensure success.

At this time he had under his command, in addition to the force which accompanied him, seven companies of Volunteers stationed at St. Catharines under command of Lt. Col. Currie, the "Queen's Own" at Port Colborne, under command of Lieut.-Colonel Dennis, and the 13th Battalion Hamilton Volunteers, under Lieut. Col. Booker, at Dunnville, and he was informed he would be reinforced at St. Catharines, that evening, by eight hundred men and two troops of cavalry.

On Col. Peacock's arrival at St. Catharines he received information that 800 Fenians were marching on the Suspension Bridge, and were actually within two or three miles of Chippewa. He immediately pushed on to the Bridge leaving directions for all troops arriving at St. Catharines to follow him as soon as possible. On arriving at the bridge he heard that the enemy had not as yet reached Chippewa, and being anxious to save the bridges over the Welland River, and being well aware of the importance of Chippewa as a strategical point, he pressed on with the 400 infantry in the train, preceded by a pilot engine, ordering the battery to march by the road, there being a doubt as to whether there was platform accommodation at Chippewa to unload the guns. It was dark when Col. Peacock and his force arrived at Chippewa, and consequently he bivouacked there that night, making his headquarters at the house of J. C. Kirkpatrick, Esq., the Reeve.

Col. Peacock was at this time fairly entered on his first campaign, and during this night had to decide upon his plan of operations, and take steps to carry it into execution; and before relating any further the events of this night it will be well here to consider the circumstances under which he was placed, and the disadvantages under which he laboured.

In the first place his greatest want was a small force of Cavalry for scouting purposes in fact the frontier should have been picketed with a body of cavalry from the moment an attack became probable. Had that been done, perhaps the raid would never have taken place, and if it had the mounted men hovering about the enemy would never have lost sight of them, would have prevented them from spreading over the country, would have saved the farmers' horses and provisions, would have found out the numbers and designs of the enemy, and our authorities would have received full and accurate information of all their movements. No cavalry were on the front, however, and none were ordered out until the last moment when it was too late for them to do real service. There is no doubt whatever, that to this great want of cavalry may be