

**The Contest for the Command of Lake Ontario
in 1812 and 1813**

by

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The Contest for the Command of Lake Ontario in 1812 and 1813.

By BRIGADIER-GENERAL E. A. CRUIKSHANK, LL.D., F.R.S.C.

(Read May Meeting, 1916)

A small British naval force had been maintained on the lakes ever since the cession of Canada in 1763. This was known as the Provincial Marine or the "King's ships" and was administered by the Quarter-master-General's Department. It was organized in two divisions, one on Lake Ontario with a dockyard and depot at Kingston and the other for the service of the upper lakes with its depot at Amherstburg. A master-builder was employed at each of these stations with a certain number of shipwrights and other workmen for the construction, repair, and maintenance of these vessels after the close of navigation. As green oak timber had been invariably used in building them it was found that they became unserviceable in about eight years. An experiment had been tried to prevent rot by filling the space beneath the sheathing with salt which was pronounced fairly successful but was not generally adopted owing to the trifling expense it would cause. In time of peace the King's ships were usually employed in the transport of troops and public stores but occasionally carried civilian passengers and private merchandise. They were consequently manned by crews barely sufficient to navigate them. The nature of their service made it desirable that they should be of moderate size and light draught to enable them to cross the bars at the mouths of small rivers and approach landings in shallow water. Efficient seamen were not easily engaged, particularly since the beginning of the war with France, as the pay was low and the service monotonous with few opportunities for recreation while in port. Most of them were French Canadian *royageurs* who seldom remained more than one season. Nor were the officers of a class to inspire much confidence. Captain Steel, the senior officer on Lake Ontario was seventy-five years of age and naturally anxious to retire. Lieut. Hugh Earle, next in rank, had married a

natural daughter of Sir William Johnson, which gave him a powerful family influence. He was considered an experienced and capable pilot and sailing-master. His appointment to succeed to the command was approved without question. Several of the subordinate officers were confidentially reported as inefficient and totally unfit for their duties.

Four vessels were in commission at the opening of navigation in the spring of 1812. One of these, the *Duke of Kent*, was so rotten as to be unfit for repair, and was only used as quarters at Kingston for seamen during the winter. The *Royal George* was quite new and considerably larger than any other vessel then afloat on the lakes, but her great draught of water was regarded as a serious defect for general service. Her armament was formidable consisting of twenty thirty-two pounder carronades. The brig, *Earl of Moira*, needed much repair and it had been proposed to lengthen her for the purpose of increasing her armament but this was eventually effected by respacing her ports so as to mount an additional gun on each broadside. She was entirely armed with eighteen pounder carronades. The schooner, *Duke of Gloucester*, had been considered the most useful vessel on the lake in time of peace, but was condemned as beyond repair. The construction of a schooner at York to replace her had just been authorized. It was proposed to arm her with ten twelve pounder carronades.

The removal of the dockyard and naval depot from Kingston to York had also been practically decided upon as a measure of safety and expedience. The main objections to its retention at Kingston were forcibly stated by Captain Alexander Gray, lately appointed an Assistant Quartermaster General.

"The impolicy of keeping the greater part of our means of defence for the Upper Province at a frontier post as defenceless and exposed as Kingston must be obvious. Here we have not only our marine establishment, (which entails the necessity of keeping the ordnance, ammunition, and stores of various sorts for the equipment of the vessels) but there is likewise the dockyard and depot of arms for the service of the militia, &c., and all within a day's march of a neighbour who would not let so favourable an opportunity of striking a blow escape him, should war be the result. A loss of this nature at the commencement of the war would be irretrievable and at once decide the fate of the province as the communication with the Lower Province would in all probability be cut off, so that we would have no opportunity of replacing the military stores, if we even possessed the means. And the destruction of shipping would leave the whole of our frontier bordering on Lake Ontario totally defenceless. At present the garrison of Kingston does not exceed 100 men of the Veteran Battalion

and many of these are totally unfit for active service. And the nature of the ground is so peculiarly circumstanced that the garrison and dockyard are separated from each other by the strait which forms the harbour of Kingston. The high ground from which alone the dockyard can be defended is also separated from it by the inlet called Navy Bay. Thus the garrison occupies one situation, the dockyard another, and the ground commanding it remains unoccupied."¹

As York was the seat of government and the headquarters of the commanding officer, the removal of the naval station would facilitate supervision. The harbour was larger, naturally more secure from surprise, and could be more easily fortified. Timber for ship building could be readily obtained from the neighbouring forests. The main disadvantage was the great distance from Montreal, the advanced base of supply and this fact ultimately prevailed over all other considerations and kept the naval station at Kingston throughout the war.

When the declaration of war became known, some batteries for the defence of the harbour were hastily constructed and armed with any guns which happened to be at hand. These fortifications were gradually strengthened and their armament increased. Semaphore telegraph stations were established for communication, and furnaces built for heating shot. A considerable force of militia was assembled from the adjacent country and kept in service until relieved by regular troops from Montreal.

The merchant shipping on the lake consisted of about thirty small sloops and schooners. Only about one third of these flew the British flag, the largest being the *Governor Simcoe*, a schooner of 130 tons. The remainder varied in size from twenty to ninety tons.

Sackett's Harbour had been selected as the American naval base. The roadstead there was commodious, safe and easily fortified. All kinds of timber were abundant in the vicinity. The town was small but the country near by was well settled. The brig *Oneida*, of 250 tons, and armed with sixteen twenty-four pounder carronades, was the only ship of war maintained by the United States government with the exception of several small craft employed as revenue cutters. She was a dull sailer of very light draught. An energetic effort had been made just before the opening of navigation to augment her crew, recruiting officers having even been sent into Canada for that purpose. Early in June, her commander, Captain Woolsey, began a vigorous campaign against smuggling and other alleged infractions of the customs and navigation laws. Three British schooners, the

¹ Report, March 9, 1812.

Lord Nelson, *Ontario*, and *Niagara*, were seized by him and carried into port as prizes on various pretexts. The *Lord Nelson* was duly condemned and sold, but after the lapse of a century, her capture was admitted to be illegal and compensation granted. It seems probable that this method of depriving a prospective enemy of his means of transportation was deliberately adopted in anticipation of the impending declaration of war.

When war was declared not less than thirteen American merchant craft were lying at ports in the St. Lawrence receiving or discharging cargoes. While among the Thousand Islands, attempting to return to lake ports, two of these were captured by British row boats from Kingston, sent out to intercept them and the others turned back and sought shelter under the guns of a battery at Ogdensburg. Had the *Royal George* and *Maira* been properly manned and well commanded all of these might easily have been taken or destroyed. There, however, they remained unharmed, until the conclusion of an armistice permitted their removal to Sackett's Harbour or Oswego, when they were purchased by the government and converted into gunboats or transports of a very useful type.

In the beginning of July the new schooner, *Prince Regent*, was added to the provincial marine and two weak companies of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, many of whom had been fishermen and boatmen, were detailed for service afloat, nominally as marines, but in reality to assist in working the vessels. Until the end of October Earle had undisputed command of the lake. Troops, prisoners and stores of all kinds were transported from post to post with entire freedom and security and military operations were greatly facilitated thereby.

On July 19 the *Royal George*, accompanied by several smaller vessels, while on their way from Niagara to Kingston made a demonstration against Sackett's Harbour which caused much alarm. A revenue cutter was captured in sight of the port and sent in with a demand for the surrender of the *Oncida* and her prizes. The *Oncida* then attempted to escape but finding that impossible ran back into the harbour and anchored in a position to command the entrance with one broadside while the remaining guns were landed and placed in position on the high bank where a battery had already been constructed and armed with a single long thirty-two pounder. This gun as a matter of course far out-ranged any guns carried by the British squadron. As the *Royal George* approached her guns opened a slow, irregular and ill-aimed fire which had no effect although it was continued for two hours. No official account was given of this affair by Earle or any of his subordinates and there is no reason to believe that

he contemplated a serious attack or that his ships suffered any loss or damage.

Towards the end of the month two small schooners which had been armed and despatched by Woolsey to protect the vessels detained at Ogdensburg encountered the *Moira* and *Gloucester* ascending the river near Brockville. They succeeded in repelling a very feeble attack and reached Ogdensburg in safety, much to the disgust of the commandant at Prescott.

Earle attempted no other offensive operation until the sixth of October when the boats of the *Royal George* entered the mouth of the Genesee and brought off two small schooners and some sails and cordage from a warehouse on shore. Several other vessels lay at the upper landing three miles up the river but no attempt was made to take them. The lack of energy and decision shown by officers of the provincial marine convinced friends and foes alike of their incapacity. Whatever merits Earle may have possessed as a seaman he had demonstrated beyond any doubt his incompetence to command a squadron. On the other hand Woolsey showed no inclination to venture out upon the lake but devoted all his attention to fortification of his base and the conversion of merchant craft into gunboats. As the schooners he had purchased were unprovided with bulwarks they were armed with heavy long guns to enable them to engage at a safe distance beyond range of the carronades of the British ships. In September he laid down the keel of a ship-rigged corvette considerably larger than the *Royal George*. This vessel was designed in the first instance to carry twenty-six thirty-two pounder carronades and was named the *Madison* in honour of the President. By that time the Secretary of the Navy had become convinced of the supreme importance of securing the command of the lakes and Captain Isaac Chauncey, the superintendent of the navy-yard at New York, was appointed as commandant of the naval forces to be employed as it was considered that a practical knowledge of ship-building was quite as essential as nautical skill. Chauncey was believed to possess both these qualifications and was known to be a careful and prudent officer. His instructions were dated August 31 but he did not arrive at Sackett's Harbour to take over the command until October 6. Before leaving New York he had sent forward one hundred and forty shipwrights, one hundred and seventy seamen, mainly volunteers, and more than one hundred cannon, generally of large calibre, with large quantities of round and grape shot, ammunition, small arms, gun-carriages and other necessary stores. Most of the carriages had been made and the shot cast since the date of his appointment.¹

¹ Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, New York, Sept. 26, 1812.

He was accompanied from Albany to Sackett's Harbour by the zealous and energetic governor of the State who displayed his anxiety to assist him in every way. They were much delayed by bad roads as the autumn rains had already set in. The *Oneida* was quite ready for service but the gunboats were not yet fully armed. Woolsey was sent away to Oswego to purchase several more schooners. One hundred seamen then on the road from Albany were ordered to that port to bring them on as soon as they were ready. "The mail comes to this place but once a week, Chauncey wrote soon after his arrival, "and the deputy-postmaster is an ignorant cobbler, who suffers the letters to be examined by any person who chooses to go into his shop, consequently letters to public officers may be purloined by spies or other ill-disposed persons without difficulty."¹

The movement of men, guns and stores had been greatly delayed by bad roads and low water in the Mohawk River and Wood Creek. Growing impatient at this loss of time, Chauncey went to Oswego but returned immediately as none of the guns or stores had yet arrived.²

On the evening of November 2 a strange sail was reported looking into Henderson's Harbour seven miles distant. As an unarmed transport was then expected from Oswego loaded with guns and stores of value Chauncey became alarmed for her safety and ran out in the *Oneida* in the hope of intercepting this hostile ship. The night was very dark with occasional squalls of rain. At daybreak he was within five miles of Kingston and when the morning mist cleared away the *Royal George* and two schooners were seen riding at anchor about the same distance to windward. Chauncey then stood southward until in sight of Oswego when he ran back to port along his own shore and was much relieved to find that his transports had safely arrived.

By this time he had obtained information which satisfied him that his squadron would be much superior in men and guns to any force he was likely to meet. Accordingly on November 8, he sailed again with the *Oneida* and six schooners, mounting in all forty guns and carrying 430 men. His first object was to intercept any vessels that might be returning from the head of the lake. If successful in this, he would then make a dash at Kingston which he hoped to take by surprise. Steering for the False Ducks he soon came in sight of the *Royal George* and chased her into the Bay of Quinte but lost sight of her in the darkness. During the chase a merchant schooner was seen lying at a wharf at Ernestown where she was burned by a schooner detached for that purpose. On the morning of the 9th the *Royal George* was again discovered in the channel heading for Kingston. As the wind blew

¹ Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Sackett's Harbour, Oct. 6, and Oct. 8.

² Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Oct. 21.

directly into the harbour he followed her in with his whole force under a lively fire from the batteries on shore. The engagement lasted for two hours in the course of which a heavy gun burst on the schooner *Pert*, disabling that vessel and doing much damage. Several other vessels were considerably injured in their hulls and rigging. At sunset Chauncey withdrew his vessels very skilfully with the intention, he declared, of renewing the attack in the morning. The wind blew in heavy squalls all night from the west and when day dawned he determined to follow the advice of his pilots and regain the open lake before the weather grew worse. While beating off, the schooner *Simcoe* came in sight making for Kingston and was chased but made her escape by desperately running over a reef and gaining the harbour but sustaining such damage that she sank in shoal water. Another merchant schooner was captured in the course of the morning. Two days later one of his schooners captured a sloop near the Ducks in sight of the *Moira* which refused to engage and kept on her course for Kingston. When this was reported to Chauncey, who had by that time returned to Sackett's Harbour with the remainder of his squadron, he sailed at once in the hope of intercepting her but was driven back into port by a drifting storm of snow. His supremacy on the lake then seemed so firmly established that he embarked guns and ordnance stores for the troops at Niagara and announced that he was prepared to transport men to any part of lake and co-operate with the land forces in any enterprise they would undertake. He seriously contemplated another attack on Kingston if the weather proved favorable.¹

Nine days later he reported the successful launch of the *Madison* "a beautiful corvette-built ship," of 540 tons. "Nine weeks before," he wrote, "the timber of which she was constructed was growing in the woods."²

The most important result of his cruise was the separation of the British vessels, by which the *Prince Regent* and *Gloucester* were compelled to lay up for the winter at York and the others at Kingston.

Captain Gray reported soon after the close of navigation that "the officers of the marine seem to be destitute of all energy and spirit and are sunk into contempt in the eyes of all who know them. The want of seamen is so great that the *Royal George* has only seventeen men on board who are capable of doing their duty and the *Moira* ten." Under these circumstances it seemed scarcely possible to save these vessels from capture or destruction whenever the lake again became navigable. An officer who had lately returned from Sackett's

¹ Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Nov. 17, 1812.

² Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Nov. 25.

Harbour on parole, told him that Chauncey had openly boasted of his power to do this.¹

Gray then boldly proposed an attack upon Sackett's Harbour while the lake was frozen. As far as he could learn no sufficient precautions had been taken for its defence and the garrison did not exceed a thousand militia, wretchedly armed, sickly and discontented, in addition to a single company of regular artillery, the seamen, and shipwrights employed in the navy yard. The length of march from Kingston was forty-five miles. At Gravelly Point, fourteen miles away, the enemy had established an advanced post of two hundred militia in a log blockhouse which must first be taken. Thence for the rest of the way the road led through dense woods only broken occasionally by small clearings and isolated settlements.

"The force requisite for this service," he said, "need not be very great. I should imagine one good regiment, exclusive of what may be collected here would be sufficient. If your Excellency approves of the suggestion I have taken the liberty of submitting, the preparation may be made below and the men destined for this service provided with snowshoes and trained in the use of them. I am aware that this enterprise is not without risk; there is, however, every prospect of success as this post is very distant from succour. I believe Albany is the nearest point from whence they could be reinforced with effect, which is as far distant from Sackett's Harbour as Montreal is from hence. If the troops from the Lower Province are put in motion about the latter end of January they should reach this in good season for making the attack. They should not be more than ten days in reaching this in light marching order.

"They need not be above a month absent from Montreal. Either the King's Regiment (with its flank companies) or the flank battalion would be sufficient for this purpose. The principal thing to be apprehended would be the intelligence of our movements reaching the enemy. But if the enterprise is conducted with despatch, the blow would be struck before he could avail himself of any information he might receive. We would require three or four pieces of artillery on sleighs to destroy any blockhouse or temporary works he may in the meantime run up."²

After his arrival at York he renewed this proposal.

"The more I reflect upon that subject the more I see grounds for hope as well as fear. What I apprehend is the probability of the enemy's strengthening his post by temporary means which he has so much at his command, such as abatis and barricades of wood of which

¹ Gray to Prevost, Kingston, Dec. 3; Gray to Prevost, York, Dec. 11.

² Gray to Prevost, Kingston, Dec. 3.

he has plenty, and axemen and carpenters in abundance. I know what an active enemy may do in that way and they have an idea we may make the attempt. The only alteration I would propose in the means of attack is in some measure to the field artillery to break down any temporary defences, (for such they must be as the season will not admit of any other), which they may in the meantime erect."¹

At the same time he asked that ten or twelve guns of suitable calibre should be forwarded at once to arm the batteries constructed for the defence of Kingston and York. Four twelve and the same number of long eighteen pounders were accordingly ordered up from Montreal and Quebec. He recommended the immediate construction of a ship designed to mount thirty thirty-two pounder carronades at York and a ship of the same class as the *Royal George* at Kingston. Both of these proposals were approved but considerable delay took place as shipwrights had to be engaged and sent up from Quebec. An experienced builder was appointed superintendent of both dockyards and instructed to proceed to Kingston with 128 shipwrights and carpenters. They arrived at that port on December 28. Fifty were retained there and the remainder sent on to York. Gray's proposal for an attack upon Sackett's Harbour was reserved for further consideration as it seemed doubtful whether so many troops could be detached from the Montreal District without endangering it.

Gray then asked that four more heavy guns should be sent forward without delay "for the preservation of our marine," he wrote, "is a point upon which I feel the greatest anxiety." This request was approved and the officer in command of the Royal Artillery at Quebec was directed to forward two long eighteen pounders and two sixty-eight pounder carronades. Iron-work and naval stores for the two new vessels were at the same time despatched from Montreal.

About the middle of October Prevost had written both the Secretary for War and the Commander-in-Chief strongly urging the necessity of supplying experienced officers and seamen from the Royal Navy to man the ships of war on the lakes. After the attack on Kingston in November, 1812, he renewed this application which had been forcibly supported by Sir John Borlase Warren who had recently assumed command on the North American station. The Executive Council for Upper Canada had also presented an address in which they declared that the maintenance of naval superiority on Lake Ontario was indispensable to the preservation of that province.

Lieut. Colonel Bruyeres, the senior officer of the Royal Engineers in Canada, reported on January 19, 1813, that he had conferred with Colonel John Vincent, then commanding at Kingston "on the measures

¹ Gray to Prevost, York, Dec. 11.

necessary to be adopted for the security of the post and the marine establishment so as to retain the ascendancy on the lake. The latter is a very serious and difficult task which must require the greatest exertions and assistance from the Lower Province to arm the new ship that is now building, for unless this vessel is completely armed and manned, it will not be possible to effect a junction with the ships at York.....It is much to be regretted under present circumstances that the whole of the naval establishment has not been concentrated at this post. It would have saved much time and expense in transport, united all the workmen under one head, and insured the armament of your ships. It would then only have been necessary to have secured this post against attack until your fleet was fully prepared and equipped to proceed on the lake. The evil is now without remedy and the best must be done to concentrate and unite as soon as possible, but by no means to venture from hence until your vessels are rendered fully efficient with men and arms."

On his arrival at York about the end of the month, Bruyeres found that all naval construction had been held up owing to an unfortunate difference of opinion between Captain Gray and the superintendent of the dockyard as to the best place for carrying it out. This was only settled by a reference to Major-General Sheaffe who was then slowly recovering from a dangerous illness.

"I must candidly observe to Your Excellency," Bruyeres wrote from that place on January 28, "that I have a much more unfavourable opinion of the possibility of obtaining an ascendancy on the lake than I had when at Kingston. There are so many difficulties to be surmounted and this country is so totally deprived of resources or means within itself that the distance becomes a very serious obstacle, particularly as the armament for these new ships must entirely come from Lower Canada and ought if possible to be sent complete during the winter for the enemy are fully prepared to commence their naval operations immediately on the opening of navigation. York may undoubtedly in time of peace be made an excellent harbour and dockyard, much preferable to Kingston, but under present circumstances it is totally incompetent for the purpose and the latter must be made use of until York will be well established."

Satisfactory progress was made on the ship at Kingston, although it was found necessary to dismiss two master builders in succession and a strike was attempted by the workmen which was only terminated by the appearance of a body of troops under arms. Early in February the entire frame was set up and the whole work so well advanced that Captain Gray was recalled to Montreal. The *Moir* was repaired

and the construction begun of a schooner of the same size as the *Prince Regent* and several gunboats for service in the St. Lawrence.

At York, however, owing chiefly to the incapacity and obstinacy of the superintendent who was flatly accused of disobeying or ignoring every order he received, little was accomplished and on the 24th of March the officer in charge reported little prospect of launching the ship before the beginning of June at the earliest.

Chauncey had increased his squadron by the purchase of four more merchant schooners which were armed with heavy long guns like the others. He laid down a fast pilot-boat schooner for reconnoitering and carrying despatches. He had the full support of his government and the President wrote to General Dearborn who was in command of the land forces co-operating with him: "The command of the lakes by a superior force on the water ought to have been a fundamental part in the national policy from the moment the peace (of 1783) took place. What is now doing for the command proves what may be done."¹

About the middle of January, Chauncey received private information from Kingston which gave him considerable anxiety and he proposed an attempt to destroy the vessels lying there before they could form a junction with those wintering at York.

"My plan is," he wrote, "to prepare all my forces this winter and in the spring as soon as the ice breaks up, to take on board one thousand picked troops and proceed to Kingston, land them about three miles westward of the harbour in a bay, which I have marked on the chart herewith enclosed, leave two vessels to cover their retreat, (if such a measure should be found necessary,) proceed with the remainder of the squadron to the harbour of Kingston and attack the forts and ships, at the same time the troops would attack in the rear. With this force I have no doubt but that we should succeed in taking or destroying their ships and forts and of course preserve the ascendancy on the lake."²

Before this letter reached its destination, William Jones, an experienced shipmaster, had succeeded Paul Hamilton as Secretary of the Navy and had written to him in the strongest terms, urging activity.

"It is impossible to attach too much importance to our naval operations on the lakes," he said. "The success of the ensuing campaign will depend absolutely upon our superiority on all the Lakes."

Chauncey was instructed to build another corvette of such dimensions as he deemed proper.

¹ Madison to Dearborn, Oct. 7, 1812, Writings, Vol. II, p. 547.

² Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, January 21, 1813.

"Indeed," the Secretary added, "you are to consider the absolute superiority on all the Lakes the only limit to your authority."¹

A formal memorandum was presented to the Cabinet on the 8th of February proposing the capture of Prescott and Kingston and the ships of war lying there as the first object of the coming campaign, the capture of York and the two frigates reported to be in course of construction there, the second, and the reduction of Forts George and Erie on Niagara River as the third. This was approved eight days later.

General John Armstrong, the new Secretary of War, had some military experience, and firmly believed that he was endowed with a great genius for war, which would enable him to direct these operations from his office-chair. He warmly urged an attack upon Kingston before the ice broke up. "If the enemy be really weak at Kingston and approachable by land and ice," he wrote, "Pike, (who will be a brigadier in a day or two,) may be put in motion from Lake Champlain by the Chateauguay route in sleighs and with the two brigades cross the St. Lawrence where it may be thought best, destroy the armed ships, seize and hold Kingston until you can join him with the other corps destined for the future objects of the expedition, and if pressed by Prevost before such juncture can be effected, he may withdraw himself to Sackett's Harbour or other place of security on our side of the lake. This would be the much shorter road to the object and perhaps the safer one as the St. Lawrence is now everywhere well bridged and offers no obstruction to either attack or retreat. Such a movement will no doubt be soon known to Prevost, and cannot but disquiet him. The dilemma it presents will be serious, either he must give up his western posts or to save them he must carry himself in force and promptly to Upper Canada. In the latter case he will be embarrassed for subsistence. His convoys of provisions will be open to our attacks on a line of nearly one hundred miles and his position at Montreal much weakened. Another decided advantage will be to let us into the secret of his strength. If he be able to make strong detachments to cover or recover Kingston, and to protect his supplies and after all maintain himself at Montreal and Lake Champlain, he is stronger than I imagined or any well authenticated reports make him to be."²

The successful attack upon Ogdensburg and a report that Prevost had arrived at Kingston with a large force caused the immediate abandonment of this plan. Instead of attempting an attack on Kings-

¹ The Secretary of the Navy to Chauncey, January 26, 1813.

² The Secretary of War to General Dearborn, February 24.

ton Pike's troops were hastily transported to Sackett's Harbour in sleighs for its defence. This movement was made during extremely cold weather and many men were disabled by frost. Chauncey had then been absent at New York for more than a month. "I am satisfied that *if he had arrived as soon as I had expected him we might have made a stroke at Kingston on the ice,*" Dearborn remarked, "but his presence was necessary for having the aid of the seamen and marines."

Prevost's hurried visit to Kingston and the movement of some small reinforcements to that post from Montreal had in fact been caused by his anxiety for the safety of the dockyard and shipping.¹

Active efforts to recruit seamen at Quebec for service on the lakes had not been very successful and the few men who were engaged were not of a satisfactory class. One party of thirty-five arrived at Kingston about the end of December and another of eighteen came on a month later. So great was the scarcity of the necessary artificers that sailmakers and riggers were borrowed from the transports wintering in the river.

When Prevost's arrival at Kingston was reported to Dearborn at Albany he ordered the whole of troops quartered at Greenbush and most of those at Plattsburg to be moved as rapidly as possible in sleighs to Sackett's Harbour and started in post haste for that place himself, arriving in fifty-two hours from the time of departure.

The whole of the militia of the neighbourhood was called in, augmenting the garrison to three thousand of all ranks and arms, exclusive of seamen and marines. Confidential but incorrect reports received from Kingston represented that between six and eight thousand men had been assembled and that an attack might be expected within forty-eight hours. Ten days later twelve hundred regular infantry arrived and a feeling of security was restored. Chauncey returned on March 7 and a council of war held on the 10th, at which he was present, decided that no attack ought to be made on Kingston until the naval force could co-operate. He proposed that preparations should be made and information given out to induce a concentration of troops for its defence, when he would embark a sufficient force to take possession of York and afterwards attack Fort George. This plan was immediately approved by General Dearborn and Colonel Macomb. Chauncey was very confident of success as he had obtained reliable information that York was practically without means of defence. The sanction of the Secretary of the Navy was easily secured.

"The general arrangement you have made for the attainment of the important objects of your command promise complete success on Lake Ontario," he wrote, "and I trust those you have made at Erie,

¹ Prevost to Bathurst, February 6.

tho' less forward, will not be less certain. The naval superiority necessarily and effectually includes the military command of both shores and it is impossible to appreciate too highly the ascendancy for which we are contending with an active enemy, stimulated by motives equally strong and imperious."¹

The keel of another ship was laid down on April 8 and work pushed on so rapidly that he confidently expected she would be ready to launch about the first week in June.

"She will be a beautiful ship, nearly as large as the *Essex*," Chauncey wrote, "and I calculate to mount twenty-six long twenty-four pounders upon her for the purpose of battering the forts at Kingston."

Meanwhile Captain Gray had been instructed to return there and make every effort to concentrate the entire British naval force on Lake Ontario at that port as soon as navigation opened. He had already strongly recommended the removal of most officers of the Provincial Marine as none of them were considered fit to command a ship of war. He recommended the retention of Earle and three lieutenants as sailing-masters. With reference to the former, Gray reported: "I am ready to admit that his conduct as an officer has been much and justly censured for want of spirit and energy, both in relation to his conduct before the enemy and the discipline and interior economy of his ship. But as he is a good private character and an experienced pilot for the lake and perfectly acquainted with all the duties of a sailing-master I consider it more conducive to the good of the service to reduce him to that situation than to dismiss him at the present moment."²

He stated that one post-captain, three commanders, seven lieutenants, and 445 petty officers and seamen would be required to man the vessels on the lake in an effective manner. When the ship under construction at York and the ship and schooner at Kingston were completed and equipped the squadron would be nearly equal in force to that opposed to it.

The *Prince Regent* succeeded in sailing from York as soon as the harbour was clear of ice and arrived off Kingston on April 17. That port was still frozen up but she was able to gain the protection of the batteries on shore until the ice broke up. Gray reported, however, that an inspection showed her "to be in such a disorderly state that the want of talents or want of attention to his duty on the part of the master was apparent in every part of the vessel."³

¹ The Secretary of the Navy to Chauncey, March 27.

² Gray to Prevost, March 12, 1815.

³ Gray to the Military Secretary, April 13.

The commander of the *Moira* was soon after put under arrest by him for neglect of duty "as the outfit of that vessel has been retarded by him so much that she is not ready for sea after an outfit and repair of nearly four months."¹

The *Gloucester* had been unable to sail from York because the necessary repairs to make her seaworthy had not been made.

Chauncey on the other hand had fully completed all his preparations for the expedition against York. On the night of April 18, the ice in Sackett's Harbour broke up suddenly and within a few hours had almost disappeared. All his vessels were then ready for sea and in a letter, dated next day, he announced his intention of sailing with the first fair wind to execute his plan if no orders to the contrary were received. The letter from the Secretary approving this, did not, however, arrive until the 21st, although it was dated on April 8. Eighteen hundred soldiers were embarked on the 22nd in expectation of a favourable wind, and General Dearborn also went on board. In compliance with Dearborn's urgent request although contrary to his own judgment, Chauncey got under way next morning but before gaining the lake a fierce squall of wind, accompanied with heavy rain, struck the squadron and materially damaged some of the vessels. As not more than half the troops could find shelter below, he returned to his anchorage and began repairs.

"I am particularly anxious," he wrote, "to get the troops to the place of destination as soon as possible for crowded as they now are on board the different vessels, they as well as my own men will very soon become sickly. We have on board the *Madison* about 600 souls and many of the smaller vessels are more crowded than ourselves."²

Sailing on April 25 with a fair wind his squadron of fourteen sail, including one unarmed transport, arrived in sight of York at dawn on the 27th. A suitable anchorage for disembarking was selected about a mile southwest of the principal battery which had been constructed to command the entrance to the bay, and as near shore as seemed safe. An open space near the ruins of the French fort was indicated as the point of landing. Very clear and explicit orders were issued for this operation which began at eight o'clock and continued for two hours under cover of a steady fire from the larger vessels. As a strong breeze sprang up from eastward many of the boats were carried to leeward and thus became exposed to rifle-fire from a small body of troops hidden in the woods. When most of the troops were ashore Chauncey ordered the schooners to take up a suitable position

¹ Gray to Colonel Hallett, April 24.

² Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, April 24.

to engage the main battery. They were accordingly obliged to beat to windward under its fire, which proved a task of some difficulty. They finally gained a position within six or seven hundred yards from which they opened a steady and fairly well directed fire from two thirty-two, two twenty-four and ten long twelve-pounders. The battery was originally armed with two long twelve pounders to which had been lately added two old eighteen pounders, condemned as un-serviceable because their trunnions had been broken off. In anticipation of an attack these guns had been stocked and mounted on timbers. During the action a twelve pounder of the same description was brought up. They were served by a bombardier and twelve gunners of the Royal Artillery assisted by infantry soldiers from the regulars and militia, partially trained for that duty. This contest had lasted for about half an hour without much harm to either party when one of the gunners in the battery by careless handling of a portfire ignited the contents of a travelling magazine behind him which exploded with disastrous effect. A dozen men were instantly killed and many others dreadfully burned. Two officers who had ascended the parapet to observe the effect of their fire were thrown to the ground with great violence and stunned. The gun platform was torn up and an eighteen pounder dismounted. The ghastly spectacle of dismembered bodies and the fearful sufferings of the wounded demoralized many men who had escaped injury. The fire of the battery ceased while that of the vessels was accelerated to augment the confusion. By great exertions on the part of the remaining gunners the battery was cleared of the wreck, the magazine was replaced, and firing resumed. About an hour later three strong columns of American troops were seen advancing by as many routes which would bring them into the flank and rear of this battery, laboriously dragging with them by hand six or eight field guns which they had succeeded in landing. One gun was traversed in that direction and fired several times upon them without effect as no ammunition had been provided except round shot. All the guns were then spiked and the battery abandoned before an assault was attempted. Most of the militia had already dispersed as they had never entirely recovered from the shock of the explosion. Chauncey's squadron then entered the bay without further opposition and he lost no time in landing a considerable force of seamen and marines. The movement upon the town was much delayed by the loss of time in building bridges over several ravines and small streams to facilitate the passage of their guns. The loss and disorder caused by the unexpected explosion of the principal magazine delayed their advance still more and enabled the remnant of the British regular troops and artificers to set fire to

the buildings and dockyard and effect their retreat without effective pursuit. When the American advance guard at length entered the town they found the principal storehouse and the hull of the new ship which had been named the *Sir Isaac Brock*, so completely wrapped in flames that it was impossible to save them. An unsuccessful attempt had also been made to destroy the *Duke of Gloucester* which lay aground much out of repair. A small merchant schooner became a prize.

Late in the afternoon Chauncey accompanied Dearborn on shore and created a very favourable impression by his courtesy to a deputation of the inhabitants appointed to arrange terms of capitulation. Next morning, however, a party of seamen, who had remained in the town all night and become intoxicated, created great alarm by setting fire to the Parliament buildings and plundering shops and private dwellings.

The threat of an attack on Kingston had been successful in detaining troops and guns there which had been intended for the defence of York. The number of regular troops in garrison numbered less than five hundred of all ranks and arms, belonging to four different corps. One hundred and sixty-three were reported killed, wounded or missing, being thirty per cent. Three hundred local militia were paroled.

The expedition had achieved a considerable success not without serious loss. Of the troops employed, General Pike and seventy-eight others were killed or died of wounds and two hundred and fifty officers and men were wounded. Besides these two midshipmen and four seamen were killed and fifteen or twenty seamen wounded.

The destruction of the ship and naval stores accumulated for her completion was a great disappointment as a large gang of shipwrights had been brought from Sackett's Harbour purposely to put her in a fit state for launching. These men were immediately set to work on the *Gloucester*, which was soon got afloat and repaired sufficiently to be towed off as a prize. Twenty guns of several different calibres, most of them unserviceable, were taken, besides a considerable quantity of arms and ammunition in transit to other posts.

"The loss of stores at this place will be an irreparable loss to the enemy," Chauncey wrote confidently, "for independent of the difficulty of transportation, the articles cannot be replaced in this country. The provisions and clothing also taken and destroyed will be a serious loss to him. If we succeed in our next enterprise, (which I see no reason to doubt), we may consider the upper province as conquered."¹

¹ Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, May 7, 1813.

The wounded were embarked on two of the schooners which were ordered to return without delay to Sackett's Harbour, but were driven back to port by a heavy gale. The remainder of the squadron prepared to sail to Niagara on the morning of May 1. The wind, which until then had blown moderately from the east, increased to a violent gale accompanied by heavy rain. This continued for six days during which Chauncey remained weather-bound in the bay, his flagship riding with two anchors ahead and lower yards and topgallant masts struck. The health of the troops was soon affected, particularly on the smaller vessels where they were crowded together so closely that less than half of them could find shelter between decks and many were not only exposed to the rain but to the waves which dashed over them. On the 8th the wind dropped and he was able to cross to the Four Mile Creek, east of Fort Niagara. The soldiers were reduced to a thousand effective men and more than a hundred seamen were unfit for duty. Two schooners were at once despatched to the mouth of the Forty Mile Creek and Burlington Bay to destroy depots of stores and provisions reported there. The remainder of the squadron sailed for Sackett's Harbour after landing the troops. Arriving there on May 11, Chauncey detached four schooners to Oswego to take on board stores which had arrived from New York. During his absence one hundred and fifty fine seamen had come in from the seaboard. These men more than replaced his losses.

His next step was to send a flag of truce to Kingston, ostensibly to liberate a wounded officer on parole but actually to obtain as much information as possible about the state of the British squadron. The officer employed on this mission reported on his return that the four largest vessels were ready for service and the new ship had her lower masts in and rigging and tops overhead. He had seen an officer of the Royal Navy who asked him many questions about the new ship at Sackett's Harbour. Chauncey also obtained a Montreal newspaper published on May 1, which stated that eight officers of the Royal Navy had passed through that city on their way to Kingston a few days before. Under these circumstances he considered that it would be imprudent to leave Sackett's Harbour entirely without naval protection. Two schooners, the *Pert* and *Fair American*, were accordingly directed to proceed at once to Niagara with troops and then return and cruise off the port until they could be joined by the remainder of his squadron. On May 17, all the other vessels except the *Madison* and *Lady of the Lake* sailed for Niagara with 1,100 soldiers on board. They were favoured with a fair wind and reached their destination in thirty-six hours. Four days later, the garrison having strongly reinforced, Chauncey embarked 350 artillerymen and fol-

lowed with the two remaining ships. He had then been informed that Sir George Prevost was on the way from Montreal to Kingston. The wind was light and he did not arrive off Niagara until the 25th. The bombardment of Fort George by the batteries on the opposite side of the river began at daylight and it was subjected to a cross-fire from numerous heavy guns employing hot shot by which in a few hours every wooden building within its walls was soon wrapped in flames. The garrison was driven out and the enemy's fire was next directed on the town with destructive results.

On the following day Chauncey made a careful reconnoissance of the Canadian shore from the mouth of the river to the Four Mile Creek in his barge. During the night soundings were taken and buoys placed to mark the stations to be occupied by his vessels in protecting the landing. The British batteries were silent while this was being done as it was considered necessary to economize ammunition. As there was every indication of fair weather orders were given to land a large body of troops about a mile west of the town at daylight on May 27. Dense fog and a dead calm obliged the schooners to sweep slowly into their positions. When this was accomplished and the fog lifted the two small batteries near the lighthouse were assailed by an overwhelming fire from the heavy long guns of five of these vessels which silenced them within a quarter of an hour. Three other schooners anchored close to the shore to cover the landing and search the plain and adjoining woods with their fire. The *Madison* and *Oncida* and 124 large rowboats were employed in transporting troops. Whenever a British party appeared to oppose the landing, it became the target for a steady and well directed fire of grape and canister which inflicted severe loss and eventually compelled it to retire in disorder. The marines of the squadron landed after the third brigade of infantry was on shore. The wind had then begun to blow so hard that the situation of the ships became dangerous. A signal was made to weigh anchor and enter the river which was obeyed about noon. Chauncey reported the loss of but one man killed and two wounded. His vessels had received no damage. Their effective fire was beyond a decisive factor in this operation as it not only wrecked and made the land batteries untenable and covered the landing but actually drove the enemy from the field with severe loss.

On the following day, Captain O. H. Perry with fifty-five seamen was despatched in the schooner *Hamilton* with instructions to land at Lewiston and proceed to Black Rock and remove the vessels which had been blockaded there for several months to Erie where the squadron on that lake was to concentrate for future operations. Another officer accompanied him for the purpose of bringing down a supply

of ammunition for Chauncey's squadron. The lack of seamen was still felt to such an extent that he declared if none arrived by the time he returned to Sackett's Harbour he would be obliged to lay up his ships to man those on Lake Erie.¹

On the 20th of April the new ship at Kingston was launched and her name changed from the *Sir George Prevost* to the *Wolfe* by the special request of the Governor-General. It was then hoped that she would be fully rigged and ready for service in twenty days. Gray reported with unwonted enthusiasm that she was "as fine a vessel of her class as ever sailed under the British pendant." The other vessel which had been laid down as a schooner was found to exceed greatly the dimensions proposed. Instead of 140 tons she would measure 250 with scantling fit to carry heavy guns. He recommended in consequence that she should be rigged as a brig to enable her to take a place in the same line of battle as the rest of the squadron.² Two large gunboats were built on the advice of Colonel Pearson, the commandant at Prescott. "They are calculated for the calms so prevalent on Lake Ontario and by taking prompt advantage of such a moment, one of the boats in question could tease and cut up the largest vessel in such a way as to force it to shift its station, if not perhaps, to capture it. As during these calms our vessels of a larger description will necessarily keep in port, it is proposed to man these boats with the best seamen, (50 in each), armed with pistols, cutlasses, tomahawks, and boarding-pikes, also to put in such a boat an officer and 40 regulars. When the occasional service is at an end, the sailors to return to their vessels and the soldiers to their corps."³ A plan for the protection of the water communication between Kingston and Montreal was also approved and five gunboats were stationed at the River Raisin, Cornwall and Lachine for convoy service.

Early in March, Captains Barclay, Finnis and Pring, and six lieutenants from the ships under his command had been selected by Sir John Borlase Warren for service on the lakes in compliance with the request of the Governor General. "They are all active, zealous, young officers," he wrote, "and I doubt not, will cheerfully promote the service they are appointed to, with all the exertion in their power."⁴ Two of the lieutenants were left at Halifax to prepare gun-tackle and rigging, which they were instructed to bring on in the first frigate sailing for Quebec after the opening of navigation with a small party of gunners and petty officers. Barclay and the other officers went on

¹ Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, No. 30, May 29.

² Gray to the Military Secretary, Kingston, April 20.

³ Captain J. E. Irwin to the Military Secretary, Kingston, March 29.

⁴ Warren to Prevost, Bermuda, March 5, 1813.

at once by the difficult overland route, having to march on snow-shoes a great part of the way. Barclay arrived alone on the 20th of April having left his companions behind at Madawaska. On the 23rd he set off for Kingston to take over the command on Lake Ontario. He received instructions to make such changes among the officers and crews of the vessels as he deemed expedient and to require from other branches of the service all the assistance practicable to gain complete naval ascendancy. The Governor General had then received information that the number of seamen under orders to come out from England had been increased from two to three hundred and that they would probably sail about the end of March.¹

Barclay took up his duties with much energy. He found the *Royal George*, armed with twenty thirty-two pounder carronades and two long nine pounders, the *Moira*, carrying ten eighteen pounder carronades and four long six pounders, and the *Prince Regent* of ten twelve pounder carronades and two long sixes fully equipped and ready for sea, waiting for their crews to be completed. The *Wolfe* lay alongside the wharf taking in her masts and would be ready for her guns and crew in three weeks. These ships, he said, were as fine vessels of their class as he had ever seen. He decided to take command of the *Wolfe* himself and appointed Pring to the *Royal George* and Finnis to the *Moira*. Gray had already collected timber for a ship to replace the one destroyed at York a few days before and had made a recommendation for that purpose. "There is every reason to suppose that a vessel of this description may be built in four or five weeks," he said, "in short something must be done to recover the loss we have sustained at York, and this seems to be the only means of recovering our naval ascendancy.

"I am far from thinking the cause lost, as we have still entire the principal part of our naval force and with the addition of the *Sir George Prevost*, (*Wolfe*), and the brig on the stocks, I have every reason to believe we shall be able to cope with the enemy. It is, however, advisable to put this matter past a doubt by persevering in our exertions in the dockyard."²

On the 12th of March the number of officers and seamen under orders for service on the Canadian lakes was further increased to 448. Sir James Lucas Yeo, a young officer greatly distinguished for enterprise and daring, was selected to command. He had been promoted to be a lieutenant for merit at the age of fifteen. His capture of the frigate *Confiance* and the conquest of Cayenne were justly ranked among the most remarkable exploits of British seamen in recent years.

¹ The Military Secretary to Sheaffe, April 22.

² Gray to Sheaffe, May 4; Barclay to Sheaffe, May 5.

He had just entered his thirty-first year but his health was already considerably impaired by long period of hard service in the tropics. Next to him in rank and distinction was Captain William Howe Mulcaster of whom Earl St. Vincent had said that he "felt great pride in acknowledging as an *élève* of his own." He had served under Yeo for several years as first lieutenant and was attached to him by the closest ties of friendship and gratitude. Each of these officers had been wrecked in a terrific storm in the autumn of 1812. Most of the other officers were personally known to Yeo and had served with him in the past. The petty officers and seamen were mostly selected from among those lately employed in a flotilla of gunboats for the defence of Riga an experience which it was thought would prepare them for a Canadian winter.

Yeo's special instructions were dated a week later. "The first and paramount object for which a naval force is maintained being the defence of His Majesty's Provinces of North America," he was informed "we do hereby require you in the employment thereof to co-operate with His Excellency, the Captain-General and Governor-in-Chief of those Provinces, not undertaking any operations without the full concurrence and approbation of him or his commanders of the forces employed under him, and on all occasions conforming yourself and employing the forces under your command according to the requisitions you may from time to time receive to this effect from the said Governor or Commander of the Forces."¹

It was presumably anticipated that the venturesome disposition of the young Commodore would be kept in check by the prudence of older military officers.

The whole detachment arrived at Quebec on May 5, having made an unusually rapid passage across the Atlantic and were sent on at once. They passed through Montreal on the 11th and it is recorded that the first division of one hundred and fifty reached Prescott six weeks to a day from the date of their embarkation at Plymouth. The ascent of the river was slowly and toilsomely accomplished in heavily laden bateaux. Yeo with the first division, accompanied by the Governor-General arrived at Kingston on the 16th. The remainder of the officers and seamen came on within the next eight days.

The *H Wolfe* was not yet decked nor rigged and the whole of her armament had not arrived from below. The officers loaned by Warren had to be disposed of to make way for those specially selected by the Admiralty, as Yeo naturally wished to retain the latter with him. Barclay was accordingly appointed to command on Lake Erie

¹ Commission, March 19.

and Pring on Lake Champlain. Their subordinate officers and petty officers went with them.

An officer of the provincial marine taken at York and just released on parole, estimated that five thousand troops were then assembled at Sackett's Harbour but their objective could only be conjectured. On May 24 Prevost informed Vincent at Niagara that in ten days the squadron would be ready "to go forth to dispute the ascendancy on Lake Ontario with the enemy; a series of exertions have led to this state of forwardness in our naval preparations. I am much mistaken if Commodore Chauncey is not over-matched. Our little squadron will consist of the *Wolfe* carrying four sixty-eight lb. carronades and fourteen eighteen lb. long guns. The *Royal George*, the *Moira*, the *Regent* and *Sir Sidney Smith* are all as well manned." Two days later in a despatch to the Secretary of the Admiralty Yeo stated that the *Wolfe* was armed with twenty guns collected from the forts or brought up from Quebec. Since their arrival all hands had been busily employed in fitting her out. "The enemy's vessels," he added gloomily, "are very superior both in number and the complete way they are equipped, consisting of one ship of twenty thirty-two pounder carronades and six long twelve pounder guns, a brig with eighteen twenty-four pounders and sixteen smaller vessels, each carrying a long thirty-two pounder gun, some four and others six carronades, besides which they have also a ship of thirty and a brig of eighteen guns nearly ready for launching at Sackett's Harbour.

"They having the above advantages on the lake at present and the certainty of their being shortly reinforced by those building it will appear evident to their Lordships that the enemy, (now possessing a force which are equal if not superior), if not checked, will soon get too formidable for an attack to be made upon them which might prove advantageous. I am therefore about to proceed to sea to meet them, as the possession of Upper Canada must depend on whoever can maintain the naval superiority on Lake Ontario."

Information had been received that the American squadron had sailed from Sackett's Harbour on the 20th and landed troops near Fort Niagara on the following day and was still lying at anchor there by the latest accounts. Prevost advised Yeo to sail at once with all the vessels that were ready to reconnoitre and decide on the practicability of transporting a small reinforcement of troops to the Niagara line.

Shortly after noon on the 27th Yeo returned with information that the whole of the enemy's ships were out of the harbour and

¹ Prevost to Vincent, May 24.

² Yeo to Croker, May 26.

he strongly advocated an immediate attack upon their dockyard and naval base before their return. Prevost consented readily enough and before dark some eight hundred men from the garrison of Kingston, composed of detachments from seven different corps were embarked in gunboats and bateaux which rowed out to join the ships lying off the port. Their intention was to sail at once with the object of reaching their destination before daybreak but the wind failed and delayed their departure until morning. While still ten miles distant from Sackett's Harbour their approach was discovered by the two American armed schooners on the lookout which immediately made all sail firing alarm guns. The wind continued light and baffling. At two o'clock in the afternoon the British squadron had scarcely come any nearer. A considerable body of troops was seen near the town and a large flotilla of boats approaching the harbour from the direction of Oswego filled with men. All hope of surprising the place must be abandoned. A gunboat accompanied by a party of forty Indians in three canoes who had accompanied the expedition started off to attack these boats some of which soon ran ashore on an island. As the wind still continued to be contrary the troops who had been embarked in bateaux in readiness to land, were again brought on board the ships, and it was decided to return to Kingston. No sooner was their course altered than the wind shifted and it became as difficult to beat away from the harbour as it had been to approach it before. Then a rowboat from the island was seen approaching with a flag of truce. An American officer came on board with a proposal to surrender the party which had landed on the island and been attacked by the Indians. An escort was sent back with him and eight bateaux with one hundred and fifteen prisoners brought off. The remainder of this detachment consisting of two hundred United States dragoons evaded pursuit and reached Sackett's Harbour in safety. This unexpected and easy success was taken as a sign that no very resolute resistance was likely to be offered by the garrison and brought about another change of plan. The squadron came to anchor in the bay several miles from the port. All the boats were ordered to assemble near the *Wolfe* at midnight and land the troops before daybreak on Horse Island covered by the guns of the *Beresford*, *Sidney Smith* and gunboats. This landing was successfully carried out and the troops opposing them were expelled from the island and two field guns and several prisoners taken with small loss. The passage of the ford leading to the mainland was next forced and another field gun captured. The American schooners had run up the river out of reach and their crews joined the troops assembled for the defence of the town. This was a rather motley body of more than fifteen hundred

men composed of United States dragoons, artillery and infantry, many of them invalids, Albany volunteers, local militia, seamen and dockyardmen. Many of the militia appear to have behaved badly and were of little service. Prevost and Yeo landed and joined the troops advancing to attack the works defending the port and dockyard. The ships and brig were unable to approach within range of the batteries, which were sited on a high bluff, owing to calms and light baffling breezes. Mulcaster in command of the schooners and gunboats was unable to find a satisfactory position and his light guns had little or no effect. The woods through which the troops landed were compelled to advance were found to be obstructed by abatis felled by Colonel Macomb in the winter when an attack was expected. They were obliged to move by narrow tracks, clearing away obstacles as they slowly advanced under an effective fire. A veteran officer declared "that the musketry was heavier than anything I ever saw, except the 21st of March in Egypt."¹

Many officers and more than a third of the men were killed or wounded before they forced their way to the open ground in sight of the batteries and blockhouses defending the port on the land side. Every attempt to cross this was quickly repelled by a heavy fire of artillery and small arms. Captain Gray fell mortally wounded while closely reconnoitering this position. The effective force available for an assault had been reduced by casualties, stragglers, and men engaged in caring for the wounded, one eyewitness states to less than three hundred and another to one hundred and fifty. Those who were still in the ranks were much exhausted by hours of exposure to rain during the night in open boats, by fatigue and hunger. The enemy's force in sight seemed to have rather increased than diminished. A premature rush forward was easily checked and an order given to retreat to the landing place. This movement was accomplished without any active pursuit but many of the wounded who were unable to walk were necessarily left behind and became prisoners. Two of the captured guns were even carried off in the boats. The troops engaged lost forty-eight killed and two hundred and eleven wounded or considerably more than thirty per cent of their number. Yeo reported the loss of one seaman killed and one midshipman and four seamen wounded. The action lasted about four hours and the survivors of the landing party re-embarked at nine o'clock in the morning. Both Prevost and Yeo had exposed themselves fearlessly to a very heavy fire.

When the attacking force appeared before the works and seemed to be on the verge of success, Commodore Chauncey's brother, who

¹ McDouall to Freer, May 29.

was in charge of the navy yard, gave orders to set fire to the buildings and ships at the docks. These instructions were carried out and he retreated across the river with his men. After the retirement of the assailants he returned and made energetic efforts to quench the flames. The ship on the stocks and the prize schooner *Gloucester* were saved with little damage but the barracks and storehouses with their contents were totally destroyed. Among these were the sails and cordage for these vessels with many valuable stores including almost everything captured at York. "The loss of the canvas is a serious inconvenience," Chauncey wrote, "as the sail-makers must remain idle until I can replace it from New York." Altogether the value of buildings and stores thus destroyed was estimated at five hundred thousand dollars.¹

A head wind delayed the return of the squadron to Kingston and during the afternoon the Governor-General became so anxious that he decided to embark in a canoe with his staff and thus arrived there the same evening, twenty-four hours in advance of the ships. He then received official information of the capture of Fort George by the enemy which seemed to place the entire province in a most critical position. Much must depend on the effective action of the squadron. Yeo's first step was to recommend the immediate construction of another ship and the purchase of the schooner *Simcoe*. Prevost approved and Captain Richard O'Connor was appointed naval commissioner to prevent delays and misunderstandings which had in the past proved so injurious.

On the evening of May 30, Chauncey had received an alarming message that on the morning of the 28th the whole British squadron had been seen approaching Sackett's Harbour. Early on the following day he got under sail, stood over toward York and thence ran eastward along the north shore in the expectation, he stated, of meeting Yeo on his way up the lake with reinforcements of troops. Failing in this he passed Kingston at one o'clock on the afternoon of June 1 and arrived at Sackett's Harbour three hours later. He then first received information of the attack on that place and the damage that had been sustained.

The *Beresford*, cruising as a lookout outside Kingston, saw and reported the movement of his squadron. "I am therefore after them," Yeo wrote in haste to Lieut. Colonel Evans of the 8th, "I will thank you to send me this evening all the bread you can procure and as the

¹ Baynes to Prevost, May 30; Brenton to Freer, May 30; Captain Robert McDouall to Freer, May 29; Yeo to Croker, May 31; Brown to Tompkins, May 29 and June 1, Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Sackett's Harbour, No. 30, June 2.

squadron are very short of marines I should wish much if you could spare us a few of your fine fellows for the day of action."

Prevost, however, sedately counselled caution and learning that day that Vincent had retreated from Niagara toward Burlington Heights instructed him to take on board his ships two hundred men of the 8th as a reinforcement with a much needed supply of clothing, ammunition, and provisions and co-operate with that division. This delayed his departure from Kingston until the morning of June 3.

Next day Chauncey wrote to the Secretary of the Navy in a very serious mood: "I beg to call your attention to the situation of the naval forces on the lakes. I have under my command on this lake 14 vessels of every description, mounting 62 guns, well manned and well appointed. The enemy have seven vessels and six gunboats, mounting 106 guns, well officered and manned. If he leaves Kingston I shall meet him. The result may be doubtful but worth the trial."

Now on the afternoon of the 3rd Yeo had appeared off the harbour and lingered there for several hours apparently in the expectation that Chauncey would come out. His squadron could hardly have escaped observation. Arriving off York on the 6th he received a message stating that Vincent had been the victor in a night attack upon his pursuers at Stoney Creek, a few hours before, and stood over toward the mouth of the Niagara and thence bore along shore toward the head of the lake to locate the positions of the opposing forces on land. The appearance of his ships caused the garrisons of the forts to remain under arms all night in apprehension of an attack. Late on the afternoon of the 7th they were seen close in shore from the American camp near the mouth of the Forty Mile Creek and here too the whole force stood to arms during the night. At dawn the two schooners were within a mile of the shore. Tents were being struck in great haste and many large boats, in which the baggage had been transported, were hauled up on the beach. It was a dead calm. The *Beresford* and *Sidney Smith* were towed in closer by their boats and opened fire. Four field guns replied with round shot heated in an improvised furnace. An officer with a flag of truce was sent on shore to demand a surrender. This was of course refused. Soon after the boats on the beach were loaded and pushed off, escorted by a guard on shore. After they had rowed eastward for about three miles a breeze sprang up and the *Beresford* gave chase and rapidly overhauled them, taking or destroying twelve with a large part of their baggage. It was afterwards ascertained that their reconnoissance of the mouth of the Niagara had created so much alarm that General Dearborn sent a message recalling all his troops to Fort George.

At noon Yeo anchored off Burlington Bay and communicated with Vincent who assured him that he felt perfectly secure in that position as long as the lake remained under his control. Being informed that the enemy were breaking up their camp at the Forty Mile Creek, Yeo was requested to return there and co-operate with a small force advancing by land. Arriving off that place shortly before dark, the detachment of the 8th was landed and took possession of the deserted camp with a considerable quantity of stores. Twenty large boats, including those driven ashore in the morning, were taken or destroyed. The great advantage to be derived from prompt and effective co-operation from the squadron at this time was fully recognised and very clearly stated by Lieut. Colonel John Harvey, Vincent's chief staff officer.

"The principal objects General Vincent has had in view in making a forward movement with the greatest part of the troops to this place, (Forty Mile Creek), are to communicate and give every support and assistance in his power to Sir James Yeo and the fleet and to be at hand to take advantage of the success which we sanguinely anticipate from his approaching encounter with Commodore Chauncey, to give encouragement to the militia and yeomanry of the country, who are everywhere rising upon the fugitive Americans and making them prisoners, and withholding all supplies from them, and lastly, (and perhaps chiefly), for the purpose of sparing the resources of the country in our rear and drawing the supplies of the army as long as possible from the country in the enemy's vicinity. Our position here secure all these important objects, and so long as our fleet is triumphant, it is a secure one. Should any disaster, (which God forbid), befall that, we have no business *here* or in this part of the country. We have just been, (Gen'l Vincent and myself), on board the *Wolfe*. She is a war vessel indeed, and, Sir James Yeo says, admirably manned, as are, I understand, the rest. We have given them, however, 60 volunteers from the King's to assist and a few gunners and bombardiers for the heavy carronades. Sir James, I am happy to observe, is fully impressed with the necessity of having a *commanding* breeze before he makes his attack. In a light one or calm the enemy's flotilla of small vessels would have an incalculable advantage. There is scarce a breath of air at this moment. The moment there is wind he proposes sailing to attack. The anxiety with which we shall witness and await the result you may readily conceive."¹

On the other hand General Dearborn very justly attributed all his embarrassments to the temporary loss of the command of the lake.²

¹ Lieut. Colonel Harvey to Colonel Baynes, June 11, 1813.

² Dearborn to the Secretary of War, June 20.

Cruising eastward close into the American shore on the 13th of June, Yeo observed two merchant schooners and several bateaux approaching Fort Niagara. They were chased into Eighteen Mile Creek and captured. They were loaded with hospital supplies and other valuable stores for the American army. Prisoners taken on this occasion stated that a depot of provisions had been formed at the mouth of the Genesee River. A party of seamen was landed there and brought off several hundred barrels of flour and pork with a sloop loaded with grain. A hundred tons of pressed hay were burned. On June 19 the squadron came to anchor in Oswego bay and a landing party was embarked in boats, but observing that batteries had been constructed and armed and an armed schooner moored across the mouth of the river, this design was abandoned. Yeo then sailed westward to Great Sodus Bay where he arrived next day. Two small schooners loaded with supplies and bound for Sackett's Harbour were taken on the way. A landing was effected in the face of some opposition by a strong body of militia in which a few men were wounded on either side. Six hundred barrels of provisions were removed and the storehouses burned. After cruising between Oswego and Sackett's Harbour for a week longer in the unfulfilled expectation of intercepting boats engaged in the transportation of stores, Yeo returned to Kingston on June 28 to receive supplies and refit his squadron, having held command of the lake for twenty-five days. The moral as well as the material advantage of these operations was considerable.

Chauncey had quickly abandoned his intention of seeking an encounter, if indeed, he ever seriously entertained it. On June 10 a boat came in from Niagara with information that three days before the British squadron had been seen off the mouth of that river steering westward. At the same time he learned that General Dearborn's advanced troops had received a serious check. "Immediately upon receiving this information," he wrote, "I prepared to proceed in quest of the enemy, but upon more mature reflection I have determined to remain at this place and preserve the new ship at all hazards. My feelings upon this occasion can better be imagined than described; on the one hand I had the prospect, (if I succeeded against the enemy), of immortalising myself; on the other hand if I was beaten, the loss and disappointment to my country would be irreparable. The only question was whether I was to fight for my own aggrandisement or that of my country? If the latter there could be no question as to the course that I ought to pursue, which was to put nothing to hazard; for by remaining here four weeks I could prepare the new ship for service, and with her I should consider myself as having the complete and un-

controlled command of the lake; without her the enemy has near a fourth more guns than I have, as many men and as good, and his officers are experienced and brave. With such a disparity of force I trust you will approve of my determination of putting nothing at hazard until the new ship is fitted. I have the satisfaction of knowing that every commissioned officer on this station coincides with me in the opinion as to the propriety of remaining in port until we can fit the new ship."¹

He added that the loss of stores by fire during the attack would cause a delay of three weeks in the equipment of this ship which was launched on the 12th and named the *General Pike*. On the 14th a flag of truce came over from Kingston, ostensibly to release some wounded prisoners but inquiries made by the officer in charge led Chauncey to suspect that his true mission was to ascertain whether all his ships were in port and thus ensure the safety of transports proceeding up the lake without convoy. To verify this conjecture, the *Lady of the Lake* commanded by his brother was ordered to sail that night to the vicinity of Presqu' Isle and cruise close into the north shore to intercept any such unarmed craft that might venture out. On the 16th this vessel captured the schooner, *Lady Murray*, with a valuable cargo of hospital stores and clothing bound from Kingston to York. Prisoners taken in her said that a new brig, intended to carry twenty guns had been launched at Kingston and several large gunboats were under construction.²

A few days later he received information which he considered reliable that four thousand troops had been concentrated at Kingston, probably with the intention of making another attack upon Sackett's Harbour, and that Oswego was then being menaced by Yeo for the purpose of diverting his attention. His agent reported that boats were held in constant readiness for this expedition. The new brig would be ready for service by July 1 and six large gunboats and two galleys to carry heavy guns were being built. He instantly resolved to build another fast sailing schooner of 250 tons for which he had both materials and guns on hand. "This vessel will not be required," he remarked, "if the enemy keeps the lake until I get the *General Pike* ready, for whenever the two fleets meet upon the lake, the mastery will be decided and the conqueror left without a rival. I am only apprehensive that he may go into Kingston and wait there until all his force is ready in which case he would have the superiority."³

¹ Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, No. 38, June 11.

² Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, No. 45, June 18.

³ Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, No. 49, June 21; Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, No. 52, June 24.

To mislead his opponent he circulated a report that the *Pike* could not be made ready for service before August 1, and to confirm this, gave orders for her cables and anchors to be detained at Oswego Falls.

Late in the afternoon of July 1, Chauncey received the amazing information from a deserter from the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, who had just come in, that Sir James Yeo had crossed the lake the night before with between eight hundred and a thousand picked men in open boats and then lay concealed in the thick woods on Chaumont Bay about seven miles distant with the intention of making a surprise attack upon his ships that night. This man stated that Sir James had landed there about daybreak that morning, hauled up his boats and covered them with green boughs. He intended to head the attack on the *Madison* himself while the other vessels were to be boarded at the same time. "The plan was well arranged," Chauncey remarked, "and if it had been attempted there would have been a dreadful slaughter on both sides." He kept his whole force under arms in apprehension of attack but daylight returned without unusual incident. The squadron then got under way and ran outside in the hope of intercepting the British force while returning toward Kingston but could discover no sign of it. Going on board the *Lady of the Lake* Chauncey examined every part of Chaumont Bay without result. At sunset he returned into the harbour and anchored, taking the same precautions for the defence of his ships as the night before. Two more deserters came in during the night with information that Yeo had abandoned his design and re-embarked shortly after dark on the previous evening, informing his men that he had received positive information from the town that their presence was known and preparations were being made to cut off their retreat and this was confirmed by the appearance of two guard vessels cruising outside the harbour. He assured them that the enterprise would only be postponed for a few days as it was his full intention to return some dark and stormy night when he anticipated complete success.

Yeo's high reputation in fact rested largely on his success in conducting daring cutting-out expeditions and boarding parties. On this occasion his force consisted of no more than 450 seamen and marines of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment and 250 of the Royal Scots and 100th. As the force then assembled at Sackett's Harbour on the most reliable authority was estimated to amount to not less than four thousand soldiers and seamen, success could only be expected as the result of complete surprise. The desertion of two men of the Royal Newfoundland, which was discovered late in the afternoon, made this clearly impossible and his situation became one of

great peril. While reconnoitering in the outer harbour in his gig he observed that the ships were being manned in great haste and preparations being made to repel boarders. His decision to retreat was promptly taken and carried out with great skill. Embarking at ten o'clock and rowing hard all night his force reached Kingston next morning with a loss of five men by desertion. "I must acknowledge that the failure of Sir James's expedition is a cruel disappointment," General de Rottenburg wrote from his advanced position at Four Mile Creek near Niagara, "However, *à mauvais jeu, il faut faire bonne mine*, and I am determined to hold my ground as long as possible."¹

Chauncey's prudent decision to avoid an action and his untiring efforts to increase his force had made it evident that he intended to risk nothing until he had obtained a decided superiority in men and guns. Prevost accordingly addressed another urgent appeal for assistance to Admiral Sir John B. Warren.

"As our means of equipping and manning our navy on the Lakes bear no proportion to those of the enemy, who are increasingly employed in promoting their great object of obtaining an ascendancy upon them, I beg leave most urgently to request of you a supply of seamen without which aid, should the contest be much longer continued, we shall labor under disadvantages which no skill and valor on the part of the small band of seamen under Sir James Yeo can counterbalance. Whatever assistance you can give me on this head, will, I trust, be promptly afforded, as everything will probably depend on the operations of the next two months. A less reinforcement than 200 seamen would be of little avail, and with it I should feel confident in the means of successfully opposing the American fleet on both lakes."²

Meanwhile all effective men of the detachment of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment at Kingston were detailed for service afloat and as these were found insufficient in number for the needs of the service, a hundred were added from the 100th. For the protection of supplies ascending the St. Lawrence, Yeo organised a flotilla of nine gunboats, each armed with a single long gun or carronade, and formed into three divisions, one at Kingston, one at Prescott, and the third at Gananoqui to cruise among the Thousand Islands. Strict orders were given that no boats should ever be permitted to leave Prescott without an escort of gunboats and that whenever a division arrived at Kingston, it should return to Gananoqui to take over another convoy. Captain O'Connor the Commissioner of the Kingston dockyard, was placed in chief command. As this flotilla was propelled

¹ De Rottenburg to Prevost, July 7.

² Prevost to Warren, June 24.

by 254 oars and required crews of 285 men, only a few able seaman could be allotted to each boat, the remainder of the crew being composed of soldiers who were regularly relieved at the end of each cruise or voyage.

The necessity for such precautions was soon demonstrated. At daybreak on July 18, two large armed boats from Sackett's Harbour, duly commissioned as privateers and manned by volunteers from the regular army and militia, after lurking for nearly two days among the islands, awaiting an opportunity, surprised and captured the small gunboat *Spitfire* and a brigade of fifteen heavily loaded bateaux at Simmond's Landing, without firing a shot. The prizes were soon taken into Cranberry or Goose Creek on the American shore, which was obstructed by felled trees to prevent pursuit and a stockade hastily built for their protection. This event was reported at Kingston on the morning of the 20th when three gunboats under the command of Lieut. John Scott, R.N., were ordered to search for them. During the afternoon the position of the enemy was ascertained but as it was growing dark, it was considered advisable to defer an attack until next day. On entering the creek it was found that the boats had been taken several miles farther up and a breastwork built for their defence with logs and captured barrels of provisions and biscuit boxes. While struggling to remove the obstructions in the channel the working parties were assailed by musketry from the woods and gunfire from the sloops and stockade. The troops then effected a landing with much difficulty owing to the marshy nature of the banks of the creek and finally drove the opposing riflemen into their defensive works. These were found to be difficult of approach owing to obstacles and strongly occupied. A reinforcement of several hundred troops was reported near at hand and the landing party was withdrawn, having suffered a loss of four men killed and two officers and sixteen men wounded among whom were one midshipman and four seamen. Captain Milnes, an aide-de-camp to the Governor-General, and an officer of much promise, was mortally wounded. The American loss was reported to be small but not definitely stated. The captured gunboat and some of the bateaux were scuttled during the action and much of the captured stores damaged by wet and rough handling. A few days later the privateers with their remaining prizes made their escape into Sackett's Harbour although chased by the *Maira* and damaged to some extent by her distant gunfire.

The new brig was launched on July 20 and named the *Melville*. She could only be manned by taking the requisite number of seamen from the other vessels.

"The two squadrons will be in as great force as they can be this year," Yeo wrote, "and immediately we are both ready a general action must take place, as every military operation depends entirely on whoever can maintain the naval superiority on the lake."

"I am happy to state only one seaman has deserted to the enemy, and their conduct has generally been orderly and good; every reasonable and proper indulgence has been given them to keep them in this temper, but the encouragement that is held out by the agents of the enemy, of which there are many in this province, may, I fear, seduce them in time." He declared that it was absolutely necessary that "more grown-up young men as midshipmen and seamen should be sent out, for even a victory over the enemy would not enable us to maintain the superiority without a reinforcement being sent immediately as the enemy from their rivers have every facility and means of whatever they stand in need of in a few days."¹

Learning that Chauncey had laid down a brig, he began the construction of a ship considerably larger than the *Wolfe*.

By this time Chauncey had been strongly reinforced with an excellent class of seamen drafted from ships of war blockaded in the Atlantic ports. Early in June he was joined by Captain Sinclair with more than eighty officers and men belonging to the crew of the *Alert*. The remainder of the crew of that ship and the greater part of the crew of the *Vixen*, recently exchanged, soon followed, accompanied by a hundred marines.² On June 29, thirty-five seamen and boys arrived from New York and on July 1, ninety-four came on from Boston. "These reinforcements will make us formidable with the assistance we shall receive from the army," he wrote.³

On that day, while under apprehension of an immediate attack he arrested a man of some local influence who was suspected with good reason of acting as a spy and communicating information. "It would be very desirable to hang this traitor to his country, as he is considered respectable in the country where he lives," he declared angrily, "and I think it full time to make an example of some of our countrymen who are so base and degenerate as to betray their countrymen by becoming spies and informers of our enemy."⁴

On July 16 Captain Crane arrived with the entire crew of the frigate, *John Adams*. Five days later came forty-five seamen from New York. Chauncey was thus enabled to detach with safety two schooners to Niagara, taking one hundred and thirty seamen for service

¹ Yeo to Croker, No. 6, July 16.

² Secretary of the Navy to Chauncey, June 14.

³ Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, July 1.

⁴ Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, July 4.

with the squadron on Lake Erie. A flag of truce sent over to Kingston to gain information, reported the whole of the British squadron still in port.¹

Some rather sarcastic observation by the Secretary of the Navy upon a previous letter, now provoked a petulant retort from Chauncey that "the *title* of Commodore Yeo and the *grade* of his officers carry with them neither *charms* nor *fears*. My mentioning them at all was to show that the enemy considered the command of Lake Ontario of sufficient importance to employ officers of experience in contending for it."²

He explained that heavy and almost continuous rain during the first three weeks of July had greatly retarded his operations but that he fully expected to sail on the 20th with his entire force except the prize brig, *Duke of Gloucester*, which he had renamed the *York*, but had condemned as unserviceable, and the two schooners already at Niagara. "I shall proceed off Kingston to allow the enemy an opportunity to give battle if he thinks proper, but which I think he will decline until his new brig is ready. If he should decline coming out, I shall proceed up the lake, communicate with General Dearborn, show myself off York, and return down the lake to my station off Kingston."³ Accurate information respecting the armament of the opposing squadron had convinced him of the advantage of arming his own vessels mainly with long guns. The armament of the *Pike* was consequently increased by mounting two more long twenty-four pounders on circles, thus giving her sixteen guns of that calibre in each broadside. Under favoring conditions this ship would be superior not only to any single vessel but to any combination of hostile vessels on the lake.⁴

Chauncey sailed on July 25 and crossed over to the other side of the lake. He then stood up the lake. His latest information convinced him that the British squadron would not be ready to come out for several days. Next day he met the *Lady of the Lake* returning from Niagara and received a letter from General Boyd in command there, proposing a joint attack upon the British advanced depot of supplies at Burlington Heights which was reported to be weakly protected. That vessel was sent back at once to receive troops and guides with a message stating that the entire squadron would be employed as he desired.⁵

¹ Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, No. 61, July 10 and No. 62, July 15.

² Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, No. 63, July 17.

³ Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, No. 65, July 19.

⁴ Mahan, War of 1812, II, 49.

⁵ Boyd to the Secretary of War, July 27; Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, August 4.

On the 25th Chauncey was rejoined by the *Pert* and on the 27th by the *Lady of the Lake* with 250 soldiers commanded by Colonel Winfield Scott and several refugees to act as guides. After a consultation with that officer it was considered advisable to embark more troops and the squadron stood over to Niagara where it arrived the same evening. Several hundred soldiers were taken on board and all sail set on a direct course for Burlington Bay but owing to light breezes and calms the squadron failed to come to an anchorage off the heights until late on the afternoon of the 29th. Two parties were sent on shore who were informed by friendly inhabitants that the garrison had been strongly reinforced that day. Militia and Indians from the adjacent country were assembling in considerable numbers for the defence of the post. Colonel Battersby in command of a demi-brigade of regular troops, stationed at York had also marched to its relief as soon as the destination of the American squadron had become apparent.

Next morning all the troops and marines with some sailors were landed and the British position on the heights was closely reconnoitered with the result that it was pronounced to be too strong to be carried by an assault. The re-embarkation took place the same afternoon. In the evening Chauncey weighed anchor and at three o'clock on the afternoon of the 31st appeared off the harbour of York. The ships remained outside while the schooners entered with the aid of sweeps and landed the troops who took possession of the town without resistance. At midnight they were again embarked after removing all the stores and provisions that could be found. Having obtained information that a quantity of valuable stores had been concealed some distance up the river Don, a landing was again made and boats sent up that stream to make a search. Some bateaux were found and carried off with several hundred barrels of provisions and some un-serviceable cannon. The prisoners in the jail were liberated and the barracks, store-houses and woodyard set on fire. Battersby's force which had halted at midnight within eight miles of Burlington Heights, marched back as rapidly as the weary condition of the men would admit, but arrived several hours after the departure of the squadron which stood across the lake and cast anchor off the mouth of the Niagara on August 3. Here Chauncey remained for the next four days, landing the captured stores and making arrangements for another combined operation.

On the morning of July 31, having completed the equipment and refitting of his vessels, Yeo sailed from Kingston with a firm determination to seek a decisive action.

"As Sir James Yeo's disposition accords so fully with his instructions to burn, sink and destroy the enemy's squadron, I feel confident that a general action of a decisive nature must take place between the two fleets unless Commodore Chauncey's feelings differ widely from those of our Commodore," Prevost wrote sanguinely to de Rottenburg that day. "In the event the American squadron may seek refuge in the Niagara River, a circumstance which will bring you into communication with Sir James Yeo with whom you are cordially to co-operate in such measures for its destruction as may appear practicable, I transmit for your information a few signals Sir James Yeo wishes to have established in order to enable him to distinguish your posts on the lake shore from those occupied by the enemy."¹

He then knew that the American fleet of fourteen sail had been seen off Niagara on the 27th and off York on the 28th and 29th. Announcing the departure of Yeo's squadron, "powerfully armed completely manned, and ably commanded," in a letter to Earl Bathurst, Prevost said: "It is scarcely possible that a decisive naval action can be avoided, and I therefore humbly hope that His Royal Highness, the Prince Regent, will approve of its being courted by us, as a necessary measure for the preservation of the advanced positions of this army, which I have determined to maintain until the naval ascendancy on Lake Ontario is decided, convinced that a retrograde movement would eventually endanger the safety of a large proportion of the troops in Upper Canada and convert the heart of the Province into the seat of war."²

Yeo's squadron was then composed of two ships, the *Wolfe* and *Royal George*, two brigs, the *Metzille* and *Moira*, and two schooners, the *Beresford* and *Sir Sidney Smith*. The *Wolfe* was armed with one long twenty-four pounder on a pivot, eight long eighteen pounders, four sixty-eight pounder carronades and ten thirty-two pounder carronades. She carried a crew of one hundred and seventy-five, exclusive of commissioned officers. The *Royal George* was armed with two long eighteen pounders on pivots, two sixty-eight pounder carronades and sixteen thirty-two pounder carronades. She was manned with a crew of one hundred and fifty-five petty officers and seamen. The *Metzille* mounted two long eighteen pounders and twelve thirty-two pounder carronades and had a crew of sixty. The *Moira* carried two long nine pounders and fourteen twenty-four pounder carronades and a crew of ninety-two. The *Sidney Smith*, formerly the merchant schooner *Simcoe*, carried two long twelve pounders and ten thirty-two pounder carronades and a crew of eighty. The *Beresford*, formerly

¹ Prevost to de Rottenburg, July 31.

² Prevost to Bathurst, No. 61, August 1.

the *Prince Regent*, carried two long nine pounders, ten eighteen pounder carronades, and seventy men. In addition to these crews, two subalterns and ninety-six other ranks of the 100th Regiment and four subalterns and one hundred and twenty-six other ranks of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment to act as marines, were distributed on board in the following proportions, one officer and forty-eight other ranks of the 100th on the *Wolfe* and the same number on the *Royal George*; of the Royal Newfoundland, one officer and thirty-eight others on the *Melville*, one officer and thirty-four others on the *Maira*, one officer and twenty-two others on the *Sidney Smith*, and one officer and twenty-seven others on the *Beresford*. Just before sailing additional detachments of two sergeants and sixteen men of the Royal Scots and nine men of the 8th were taken on board the two ships.

The armament of the enemy's two ships and the brig had been accurately ascertained but there was considerable uncertainty as to that of the schooners which was liable to change from time to time. The addition of two guns on circles to the *Pike* was made just before sailing and came as a surprise. In calm weather and at long range Chauncey would have an enormous advantage. In long guns the American squadron was four times as strong as his own, while in carronades, his was twice as strong as his enemy. The *Pike* alone at a single broadside threw as much metal as all the American schooners and all her guns were long, entirely outranging those of the British ships. With a fair wind and a windward position she might be able to meet and beat his entire squadron. Under such circumstances the schooners were formidable adversaries, whereas in a gale or at close quarters they were nearly useless. All Yeo's vessels, except the *Sidney Smith*, were built for war and capable of acting together. They constituted a fairly good manoeuvring squadron. Chauncey's vessels manoeuvred badly as the duller sailers impeded the others, for they frequently had to be taken in tow to enable them to keep up. Yeo believed that success could only be attained by coming swiftly to close quarters when the smashing effect of his heavy carronades ought to be irresistible. The number of marines was consequently increased to enable him to carry any disabled vessels by boarding.

Calm weather varied by light breezes continued for almost a week and prevented him from reaching the head of the lake until August 6. He learned that the American squadron was still at anchor off Niagara. During the night he stood over in that direction in the hope of surprising and running close alongside the enemy at daybreak. Dawn came upon him while still ten miles distant and his approach was

discovered. Chauncey immediately got under sail and came within about four miles when he fired a broadside which fell much short and returned to his former anchorage.

Boyd had planned a joint attack upon the blockading force in the execution of which it was intended to embark a brigade of infantry on board the fleet that day and land it in rear of the British position near the mouth of the Twelve Mile Creek. This was necessarily abandoned. During the night Chauncey kept all hands at quarter and beat to windward in the hope of gaining the weather gage. After midnight a terrific squall struck his squadron and overset two of his largest schooners, the *Hamilton* of ten guns and the *Scourge* of nine, which were literally carried down by the weight of their own armament. Cries of distress were heard but the loss of these vessels was not confirmed until morning. Out of their combined crews, exceeding a hundred of all ranks, only sixteen were saved. Chauncey loosely declared that this accident gave his opponent a decided superiority, omitting to take into consideration the great concentration of force in the *Pike*. After daylight he edged away, as he explained in his official letter, to take advantage of the land breeze which usually sprang up in the course of the afternoon. During a calm his schooners swept out within distant range and opened fire with their long guns. At two o'clock a favouring breeze began to blow which enabled the British squadron to approach them quickly and they had considerable difficulty in hauling off to their anchorage just outside the bar at the mouth of the Niagara where they lay all night. One hundred and fifty additional regular soldiers were taken on and distributed among the larger vessels to assist in boarding or repelling boarders, increasing the total complement to about twelve hundred of all ranks. The *Lady of the Lake* was detached to Sackett's Harbour to bring up a further reinforcement of seamen and marines expected to arrive from the seaboard. It blew very hard during the night but Yeo still kept the lake. The *Royal George* had sprung a serious leak by which a large part of her powder was rendered worthless and now the *Melville* reported a leak. He still continued extremely sanguine of final success.

"The *Pike* is a very fine large ship," he wrote, "but appears to be very unwieldy and unmanageable, and from the manner she is worked, should judge she is not complete with seamen. The *Madison* is about the size of the *Wolfe*, sails well and is managed better than the *Pike*. The *Oneida* is small and sails bad, and the schooners, though formidable in a calm, are very contemptible otherwise, as they have not the least shelter for their men.

"My hope is that they may remain out at night when we may be able to close with them before they see us, and from their numbers they may be much dispersed.

"Procrastination is to us a great evil, as I never witnessed such enthusiasm as there is in every ship in the squadron. Your Excellency may rest assured that no opportunity shall be lost of bringing them to action"¹

For the next twenty-four hours the wind continued light and changeable. On the evening of the 10th the British squadron was becalmed off Twelve Mile Creek when Chauncey bore down toward it with a fine fresh breeze from the east. At sunset a breeze came off the land which suddenly gave Yeo the wind and he instantly made for his enemy, who then stood away with as much sail as his schooners could carry for the purpose of keeping up with his ships. He had formed his squadron in two lines abreast with his light schooners to windward and the heavy ones with the square-rigged vessels to leeward, each being a cable's length behind that in the lead. Those in the weather line were directed to open fire as soon as their shot would take effect and when the enemy came too close to bear away and pass through the intervals of the other line and again form line to leeward of it. This was an ingenious plan to entrap a heedless adversary and bring him under the formidable battery of Chauncey's flagship. At eleven o'clock firing began at long range but the American squadron was moving with such speed that more than an hour elapsed before the *Wolfe* succeeded in overhauling the windward line of schooners. All of them obeyed orders, bore up and passed to leeward except the *Julia* and *Grozier* which were in the lead. These two hauled their wind and shot ahead to windward. Chauncey reported that he "filled the maintopsail and edged away two points to lead the enemy down, not only to engage him with more advantage but to lead him from the *Julia* and *Grozier*." Yeo said that "on coming up with the *Madison* and *Pike* they put before the wind and made sail, firing their stern-chase guns." This is corroborated by a private letter from an officer of the *Madison*, published in a contemporary newspaper. "Every gun was pointed, every match ready in hand," he wrote, "and the red British ensign plainly to be descried by the light of the moon, when to our utter astonishment, the Commodore wore and stood south-east."

When this occurred, all the other vessels of the British squadron were from two to three miles astern of the *Wolfe*, which easily cut off and compelled the two schooners still remaining to windward to haul down their colours after sustaining some damage to masts and rigging from her fire. Yeo then concluded that it would be inadvisable to

¹ Yeo to Prevost, off York, August 9, 11.30 a.m.

² Letter in the United States Gazette of Philadelphia, Sept. 6, 1813.

pursue the remainder as his flagship was plainly the only ship that had the least chance of overtaking the enemy's vessels.

Next morning Chauncey ordered two of his dullest sailing schooners to anchor off Niagara under the protection of the batteries while the rest of his squadron ran into Genesee Bay and finding that the gale still continued, returned to Sackett's Harbour where he took in provisions for five weeks. On his way down the lake, he met the *Lady of the Lake*, coming to rejoin him with fifty marines.

"From what I have been able to discover of the movements of the enemy," he wrote, disconsolately, "he has no intention of engaging except when he can get decidedly the advantage of wind and weather, and as his vessels in squadron sail better than our squadron, he can always avoid unless I can gain the wind and have sufficient wind to bring him to action before dark. His object is evidently to harass me by night attacks by which means he thinks to cut off our small dull-sailing schooners in detail. Fortune has evidently favored him thus far. I hope it will be my turn next, and although inferior in point of force, I feel very confident of success."¹

On the other hand Yeo wrote almost at the same time:

"I feel confident that by watching every proper opportunity, we should get the better of him, but as long as he is determined to sacrifice everything to his own safety, I shall never in this narrow water be able to bring the two ships to action, as I have no vessel that sails sufficiently well to second me.

"This conduct he cannot persevere in long for his own honor as the loss of all his schooners, (which, I think, I must ever have in my power), will be an indelible disgrace, and I am at a loss to know how he will account to his government for it.

"It concerns me much to find that I have such a wary opponent as it harasses me beyond my strength. I am very unwell and I believe that nothing but the nature of the service keeps me up."²

Yet he had gained a real although unimportant advantage in a moral as well as in a material sense. To take two vessels from a superior fleet with his flagship alone, was, as Admiral Mahan remarks, a fine feat of seamanship. He had also discovered beyond doubt that prudence was his adversary's predominant quality. This is incontestably proven by Chauncey's instructions to Perry, written barely a month before. "The first object will be to destroy or cripple the enemy's fleet;" he wrote, "but in all attempts upon the fleet

¹ Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, August 13.

² Yeo to Prevost, August 11, 1813.

you ought to use great caution, for the loss of a single vessel may decide the fate of the campaign."¹

Chauncey took the lake again on August 14 and two days later came in sight of the British squadron lying at anchor near the Bucks. Yeo immediately got under way and having a good wind, bore down to engage. Chauncey again wisely resolved to avoid an action under unfavourable conditions and made off under press of sail. On the 18th, the British squadron was seen apparently on its way to Kingston, and after sustaining considerable damage in a heavy gale, he returned to port on the following day.

In the meantime Yeo had run into Toronto Bay where he repaired and manned his prizes and then sailed for Kingston to take in supplies for an extended cruise. On arriving there one of his first measures was to send a flag of truce to Sackett's Harbour to gain information. By this means he learned that the whole of the enemy's squadron was then in port and he conjectured that it was not likely to come out until the new brig was ready. "I feel much disappointed at not being successful in bringing Chauncey to a general engagement," he wrote, "I agree most fully with Your Excellency that until the enemy's naval force can be reduced, the ships cannot with prudence or safety co-operate with the land forces to any extent.....The commander of the *Lady of the Lake*, told our officer it was policy their not engaging us."²

The new vessel at Sackett's Harbour was launched on August 18, and named the *Sylph*. Although designed as a brig she was rigged as a schooner. Great efforts were made to complete and equip her with the utmost speed, as Chauncey believed that he would then have a considerable superiority. From her design she was expected to sail very fast and more than counterbalance his losses. This vessel was afloat in twenty-one working days after her keel was laid. Although designed to carry twenty-four guns, she was temporarily armed with four long thirty-two pounders mounted on circles between masts and eight long six pounders in broadside. It was expected that fire from these heavy long guns might dismast some of the enemy's vessels and thus render them helpless in a general action. Another similar vessel, Chauncey declared, would enable him to dispense with all his dull-sailing schooners, which in a high wind had proved of little service on the open lake. He had then received the disquieting information that the construction of three new corvettes had been contracted for at Kingston under the conditions that one should be launched every forty days reckoning from the 3rd of August. Two

¹ Chauncey to Perry, July 14.

² Yeo to Prevost, August 22; Baynes to Prevost, August 19.

flags of truce were sent over in rapid succession to obtain information and the last of these reported that the whole of the British squadron had left port.

Yeo had sailed on the 23rd for Burlington Bay with guns and a small party of seamen whose services were urgently needed on Lake Erie taking under convoy several small transports loaded with supplies for the troops in the western part of the province. A combined attack on the American positions near the mouth of the Niagara had been contemplated but delayed to await the arrival of siege guns and howitzers. These had been shipped from Montreal but were delayed by a report that several small hostile craft were lurking among the Thousand Islands. The commandant at Prescott was in consequence ordered to make a thorough search for them.

"I wrote to Lt. Colonel Pearson by express informing him that in a memorandum of instruction you had left with me on your departure." Colonel Baynes reported to the Governor-General who had gone to Niagara to supervise this important operation, "that the utmost vigilance and exertion should be preserved to secure the communication between Prescott and Kingston from insult and interruption; that it appeared to me an object of the first importance that these pirates should be dislodged with as little delay as possible and their intended depredations by that means counteracted, that a force could not be spared from this place for that service as the armed sloop and only gunboat fit for service were on the point of sailing to convoy two small vessels with stores to the head of the lake, which could not be delayed as their cargoes were much wanted above and the only remaining gunboat was under repair but would be ready Tuesday evening and that all the disposable force of this garrison was held in readiness for an ulterior movement which could not be interfered with. I therefore recommended his availing himself of the detachment of the 100th Regt. under Major Taylor and of the seamen of H.M.S. *Dover* with all the Indians he could collect as well as militia volunteers and such further reinforcement from the garrison of Prescott as he might deem necessary to complete a detachment with his five gunboats capable of rooting out and destroying this nest of robbers; that so favorable an occurrence as the junction of the 190th and the seamen could not again be speedily looked for; that it was necessary these reinforcements, particularly the seamen, should be sent forward with the least possible delay; that nevertheless, I felt confident Your Excellency would approve of their detention for a short period, if thereby so important an object as the destruction or capture of the enemy's flotilla could be achieved."¹

¹ Baynes to Prevost, Kingston, August 16.

Pearson spent three days in making a thorough examination of the creeks and islands but was unable to discover any traces of an enemy. On the other hand his expedition caused at least a delay of a week in forwarding artillery and reinforcements.¹

A reconnoissance in force of the American entrenched camp at Fort George convinced Prevost that it would be unwise to attempt an assault without the aid of heavy guns and it was deemed advisable to postpone any attack until the contest for the command of the lake had been decided.

"To procrastinate the decision of naval superiority on the lake seems to be the policy which governs the conduct of the naval and military commanders of the United States forces in this quarter, Prevost wrote, "but, unless they mean by it ultimately to sacrifice their army at Fort George, exposed as it will be in the absence of their squadron, to a joint operation against it by our land and naval strength, an action on the lake, must, I think, ere long be unavoidable, as it was determined when Sir James last sailed to force the enemy to one tho' under the guns of their forts."²

The American commanders held very similar views. "Chauncey will go out, he says, to-morrow or next day to seek Sir James," Wilkinson said in an official letter, "I see the necessity of settling the point of naval superiority before we commit ourselves and therefore the decision cannot be had too soon. . . . I fear Yeo will avoid a contest to spin out the campaign and gain time for reinforcements and the organisation of the militia, but if he will not come out we must blockade him."³

The British squadron failed to get clear of the Ducks until August 25 and did not reach Burlington Bay until the 27th. The guns and seamen for Lake Erie were landed there and Yeo sailed immediately for the mouth of the Twelve Mile Creek where a much needed supply of stores for the Centre Division was put on shore. He continued to cruise in that part of the lake and on the last day of the month captured a schooner and several bateaux loaded with supplies for Fort Niagara. Returning thence to the head of the lake and taking the empty transports under convoy, he arrived off York on the morning of the 4th September when the American squadron was seen in the direction of Niagara. Crossing the lake in the course of the afternoon nine vessels were observed to enter the river and join three already there. Two Irishmen who had recently deserted from the garrison of Fort George were sent on board his flagship when it came to anchor off

¹ Pearson to Baynes, Gananoqui, August 22.

² Prevost to Bathurst, St. Davids, Niagara Frontier, No. 88, August 25.

³ Wilkinson to the Secretary of War, Sackett's Harbour, August 26.

Twelve Mile Creek to give him the latest information. These men were responsible for a false report, which seems to have been current in their camp, that Chauncey had been placed under arrest and superseded in his command by Commodore Hull.

"The deserters say they are beating up for volunteers," Yeo wrote, "I have no objection to their taking every man at Fort George, the more the better. I have very little doubt that a new commander will produce new measures, and that as soon as he comes, we shall have a general action, which, as I consider it the first and great object, I shall remain in this quarter, (as long as my provisions last), to watch their motions and give countenance to the Centre Division."¹

After his arrival Chauncey increased the armament of the *Sylph* by exchanging some of her light guns for others of larger calibre and took on board about two hundred soldiers as marines. His presence in the river placed the blockading force in a position of much peril and uncertainty.

"Sir James will continue here," de Rottenburg informed Prevost, "and it will rest with Your Excellency, should the enemy not be inclined to come out, whether he is to remain for the protection of the army under my command or proceed to Kingston for the purpose of escorting supplies. This manoeuvre of the enemy places me in a dilemma, for should the fleet leave me, I cannot possibly hold this position long while so powerful a fleet is in the river which may at any time come out and act in my rear."²

Early on the morning of September 7, the British squadron was lying close into the mouth of the river when a fresh breeze sprang up from the southward giving Chauncey the opportunity for which he had been waiting so patiently. He got under way at once but Yeo then made sail northward intending to avoid an action and draw his adversary into the lake when a sudden change of wind might give him the weather gage and enable him to come quickly to close quarters. For the next four days the opposing squadrons continued to manoeuvre for most of the time within sight of the forts and investing force and usually from four to eight miles apart, endeavouring to gain or keep the weather gage, without firing a shot. They were constantly watched by thousands of anxious eyes as the fate of both armies seemed then to depend on the result of an action which was thought to be inevitable. The prevalence of light winds and calms gave Chauncey a decided advantage which was, however, counterbalanced by the necessity of taking his dull-sailing schooners in tow

¹ Harvey to Yeo, Sept. 4; depositions of William Quin and Francis Brown; Yeo to Prevost, Sept. 5.

² De Rottenburg to Prevost, Four Mile Creek, Sept. 6.

by the square-rigged vessels to enable them to keep together. Early on the morning of the 9th, the British squadron returned to the mouth of the river and captured a small schooner under the fire of the batteries. None of the American vessels were then in sight but the whole squadron soon re-appeared and both lay becalmed off Four Mile Creek until evening. At twilight on the 10th a breeze rose and they disappeared from view in the darkness, going down the lake under press of sail. About noon the next day off the mouth of the Genesee River Chauncey succeeded in approaching within effective range of his long guns and opened fire carefully maintaining his distance.

"On the 11th instant, the enemy's fleet having a partial air succeeded in getting within range of their 24 pdrs." Yeo wrote, "and from their having the wind of us and the dull sailing of the *Moira*, I found it impossible to bring him to close action, and we remained in this mortifying situation five hours, having only six guns in all the squadron that would reach the enemy, (not a carronade was fired). When a breeze sprung up I came under these islands as the enemy could not keep the weather gage but be obliged to give us an opportunity of closing with him. This he most carefully avoids, and nothing I have been able to do as yet can induce him to come down. They are now to windward of the islands and I am watching any opportunity that may offer of bringing them to action.

"I cannot but consider (it) as fortunate that the squadron have not received any material damage, which must have been considerable, had the enemy acted with the least spirit and taken advantage of the superiority of position they possessed."¹

He reported the loss of Midshipman Ellery and three seamen killed and seven seamen wounded.

Chauncey's official letter naturally put a different aspect on this engagement.

"Off Genesee River," he said, "we carried a breeze with us while he lay becalmed to within about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of him when he took the breeze and we had a running fight of three and a half hours, but by his superior sailing he escaped me and ran into Amherst Bay yesterday morning. . . . I was much disappointed that Sir James refused to fight me, as he was so much superior in point of force, both in guns and men, having upwards of twenty guns more than we have and heaves a greater weight of shot. I think his object is to gain time to add to his force and play a sure game, or as the boisterous season is approaching, he may wish to defer an action until he meets on the Lake when it is blowing heavy and to leeward of him, when my small

¹ Yeo to Prevost, H.M.S. *H Wolfe*, off the False Ducks, Sept. 14; Yeo to Warren, Sept. 12.

vessels would be of no service and he might succeed in cutting some of them off."¹

Yeo has been censured somewhat inconsiderately by a recent writer for not having substituted some of his long guns for carronades and thus remedied the disparity of force to some extent. Had this been practicable and expedient it is scarcely probable that so experienced a seaman would have failed to resort to such an obvious device.

As Amherst Bay was little known to his pilots and reported to be full of shoals, Chauncey prudently declined to enter it but remained in observation until informed that Yeo had gone off to Kingston by another channel when a heavy gale forced him to take shelter in his own port. The sound of the prolonged cannonade in Genesee Bay had been heard distinctly at Sackett's Harbour where the Secretary of War had arrived several days before for the purpose of supervising the concentration of troops there for a movement upon Kingston and ultimately Montreal. "The battle on the lake," he wrote, "shall we have one? If Yeo fights and is beaten all will be well. If he does not fight the result may also be favorable."²

Immediately on his arrival in port Chauncey was directed to sail to Niagara and protect the troops coming from that quarter in their passage down the lake. He carried with him a letter to Wilkinson in which the Secretary of War said: "Are 8,000 men competent to seize and hold a point on the St. Lawrence, which shall have the effect of severing Sir George's line of communication? If a point be so seized will not, must not, Prevost press on to dislodge it with his whole force? He must, and what then? Kingston and the fleet and the new ship are abandoned. Other three thousand may pass the lake and demolish him."³

Sailing on the 18th, Chauncey discovered the British squadron near the False Ducks next day but proceeded up the lake without paying any attention to it, in the hope of drawing it in pursuit. Head winds prevented him from arriving off Niagara before the 24th.

Prevost had become much alarmed at the critical position in which both the Right and Centre Divisions of troops in Upper Canada had been placed by the temporary ascendancy obtained on Lakes Erie and Ontario by the enemy.

"It is evidently the policy of the American commanders to protract the final decision of the naval superiority from an expectation of depriving me of the means of forwarding those supplies which are requisite to the troops in advance to enable them to maintain their

¹ Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Sept. 13.

² Armstrong to Wilkinson, Sackett's Harbour, Sept. 6.

³ Armstrong to Wilkinson, Brownsville, Sept. 15.

present position, which, it is well known, the state of the country will only allow to be transported to them by water."¹

He urged Yeo in the strongest terms to despatch seamen to Lake Erie and forward supplies to York and Burlington.

Finding that his prize schooners from their dull-sailing were only an encumbrance whenever the enemy had the weather gage, Yeo sent them into Kingston to have their heavy guns transferred to the *Beresford* and remained outside the harbour for several days waiting for a favourable wind. "This unusual calm weather cannot last many days at this advanced season of the year," he wrote, "All our pilots declare that they never remember such extraordinary continuation of calms."² He assured the Governor-General that the squadron would be ready to perform any service deemed necessary for the transportation of men and stores but asked that such a request should be put into writing as without a written communication on the subject he did not feel justified in losing sight of the enemy's squadron.

He was furnished in consequence with written instructions in which Prevost remarked:

"The Centre Division of the Upper Canada Army is placed in a situation very critical and one novel in the system of war, that of investing a force vastly superior in numbers within a strongly entrenched position. It was adopted and has been maintained from a confident expectation that with the squadron under your command a combined attack ere this could have been effected on the enemy at Fort George with every prospect of success. To the local disadvantage of the position occupied by our army has been added disease and desertion to a degree calling for an immediate remedy. You are therefore required to proceed with the fleet under your command with the least possible delay to the head of the lake, affording sufficient convoy to the small vessels containing those stores and supplies of which the army is in the most pressing want. Upon your arrival near the headquarters of the Centre Division you will consult with Major-General de Rottenburg, who will unite in his person the civil and military commands in Upper Canada upon my withdrawing from the Province, upon the eligibility of a combined attack for the purpose of dislodging the enemy from Fort George by a rapid forward movement of the army, bringing up in battery at the same time the heavy ordnance, mortars, and howitzers now embarked. This attack must be supported by the countenance of your squadron and the fire of such vessels as are armed with a description of ordnance favourable to it. Should this attempt appear to you to be attended with too great

¹ Prevost to Yeo, Sept. 14.

² Yeo to Prevost, Mouth of the Bay of Cante, Sept. 15.

hazard to the squadron under the possible circumstances of the enemy appearing on the lake, you will in that case distinctly state your sentiments to Major-General de Rottenburg, who will immediately upon your ascertaining your inability to assist him, take measures for evacuating the position he now occupies, in the execution of which movement you will give his army every support and assistance consistent with the safety of your vessels, and having performed this service, you will pursue such measures as will appear most probable to ensure the acquisition of the naval ascendancy."¹

Yeo sailed the same day, keeping close to the north shore to avoid discovery while his vessels were encumbered with siege guns and bulky stores. He landed these at Burlington without mishap on the 25th and ran into Toronto Bay next day. There he was discovered by the *Lady of the Lake* sent over from Niagara to reconnoitre. The American squadron got under way immediately on her return but did not succeed in getting clear of the river until late in the evening and during the night the vessels became much dispersed. After they reassembled in the morning, the *Pike*, *Madison*, and *Sylph* each took a large schooner in tow and the entire fleet, of eleven sail, steered toward York. When they came in sight Yeo made sail and stood out of the bay. The wind blew strong from the south-east giving Chauncey the weather gage. He bore down to engage in a long extended line under press of sail. At noon when the opposing ships were nearly within distant range, Yeo's six vessels tacked in succession with the evident intention of closing with the centre of the hostile line and cutting off the schooners in rear. As soon as the *Wolfe* which led this movement came abeam the *Pike*, the American vessels were in succession and firing began, the *Wolfe* engaging the *Pike* with the schooner *Isis* which she had in tow and the schooner *Governor Tompkins* until the *Royal George* came to her support. The *Governor Tompkins* soon lost her foremast and fell astern. The *Madison* and *Sylph* failed to come up as neither of them saw fit to drop the schooners they had in tow. At the end of twenty minutes, the *Wolfe* had lost her main and mizzen top-masts and main yard. Being thus deprived of all her after sail, there was no other alternative than to keep before the wind which was fair for Burlington Bay and the protection of the batteries on the heights. All sail was made at once on her foremast in the effort to get away. As she ran to leeward the *Royal George* luffed up across her stern, "delivering her broad-sides in a manner to extort exclamations of delight from the American fleet."² The *Pike* immediately hauled off and took up a distance out of cannonade range

¹ Prevost to Yeo, Kingston, Sept. 19.

² Cooper, History of the Navy of the United States of America, II, 433.

where her long twenty-four pounders would be effective. Every gun that would bear was turned upon the *Royal George*. The entire British squadron made for the shelter of Burlington Heights where Yeo hoped to resume the action on more favourable terms if pursued closely. Considerable time was lost in picking up the schooners which had been cast loose but Chauncey eventually kept up the chase until three o'clock when his ship was within six miles of the head of the lake. A strong wind was then blowing from the east making a rough sea accompanied with every sign of a storm.

"I considered that if I chased the enemy to his anchorage at the head of the lake, I should be obliged to anchor also, and although we might succeed in driving him ashore, the probability was that we might go ashore also," Chauncey wrote, "he, amongst his friends, and we, amongst our enemies, and after the gale abated, if he could succeed in getting off one or two vessels out of the two fleets, it would give him as completely the command of the lake as if he had twenty vessels. Moreover, he was covered at his anchorage by part of his army and several small batteries thrown up for the purpose. Therefore, if we could have rode out the gale we would have been cut up by their shot from the shore. Under all these circumstances and taking into view the consequences resulting from the loss of our superiority on the lake at this time I, without hesitation, relinquished the opportunity of acquiring individual reputation at the expense of my country.¹

In this running fight lasting three hours, which became known in the British squadron by the name of the *Burlington Races*, the *Pike* had received considerable damage, having her maintopgallant mast shot away, her fore and main masts badly wounded, rigging and sails much cut up. Several round shot penetrated her hull between wind and water and the holes could not be plugged from the outside owing to the high sea then running. Twenty-seven of her crew were killed or wounded, the majority by the bursting of a gun which tore up her forecastle. Several other guns cracked at the muzzle and could not be used without danger. The *Madison* received some round shot in her sides but had not a man hurt. The *Governor Tompkins* lost her foremast and the *Oncida* had her maintopmast badly wounded.

On the other hand Yeo reported:

"I have deeply to lament the loss of our masts, otherwise in a quarter of an hour we should have brought them to close action, but I can assure you, Sir, that the great advantage the enemy have over us from their long twenty-four pounders almost precludes the

¹ Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Oct. 1.

possibility of success, unless we can force them to close action, which they have ever avoided with the most studied circumspection."¹

Five men were killed and thirteen wounded on his squadron which, with the exception of the *Wolfe*, had suffered little injury. A battery was hastily constructed and armed for its protection. Immediate steps were taken to refit the flagship. During the night the gale grew more violent and next morning eight of the American vessels were seen off York lighthouse struggling to make the mouth of the Niagara near which they came to anchor that night.

Next day Chauncey landed to confer with General Wilkinson. The naval engagement had been watched by many eager eyes from the heights of Lewiston and Queenston as well as from the ramparts of the forts. The masts of the *Wolfe* were plainly seen to fall overboard and the *Royal George* was observed to bear down to her assistance and fire three broadsides in quick succession. The firing was heard to continue for some time after both squadrons had passed out of sight leaving the spectators in a state of anxious suspense.

Wilkinson wrote the next day:

"The issue must therefore have been decisive, because the breeze freshened without any change in its direction, and the narrowness of the lake made it impossible for the vanquished party to escape by any manoeuvre.

"I have no doubt the victory is ours, but am apprehensive it must have cost us dear, since the batteries of the enemy were superior to those of our squadron, and the British commander is an officer not only of desperate resolution but of great naval skill."²

The movement of the bulk of his force from Niagara to Sackett's Harbour began in open boats on the morning of September 28 but the strength of the gale forced them to return. When the wind fell, another start was made on the 1st of October and most of the boats succeeded in reaching Eighteen Mile Creek.

In a memorandum addressed to Chauncey that day, Wilkinson said:

"The main body of the division of the army at this point has sailed to join that at Sackett's Harbour at the head of the St. Lawrence with the design to reduce Kingston and Prescott and to proceed against Montreal.

"The main body of the enemy's force is in this vicinity, at the head of the lake, and in York, leaving Kingston very weak.

"The enemy's squadron, beaten and forced to the head of the lake, is not in a position to attempt the regaining of Kingston harbor while the American squadron keeps an eye upon it.

¹ Yeo to Prevost, Sept. 29.

² Wilkinson to the Secretary of War, Fort George, Sept. 29.

"Under these circumstances will it be for the interests of the service that the American squadron should accompany the flotilla with the troops or shall it watch the British squadron, effect its destruction and prevent the sudden transport of the division of the enemy by a rapid movement by water to reinforce Kingston?"

"It strikes me that in the first case, the enemy, being apprised of our intentions, which cannot be concealed, may, with the aid of their squadron, reach Kingston before our troops are embodied and organized for the attack, and thus the reduction of the place may be spun out to the consumption of the season, and of course the main design must fail.

"In the second case while the American squadron blocks up that of the enemy at the head of the lake, the flotilla will enjoy a free sea and the British by being cut off from transport by water will be thrown back a month in their arrival at Kingston, long before which period the place must be taken and our army landed on Montreal island, no act of God intervening to thwart our intentions."¹

In reply, Chauncey contented himself by remarking:

"The reasons you assign in your memorandum why the American squadron should remain in this vicinity in preference to accompanying the flotilla down the lake are so conclusive and correspond so exactly with my own ideas and wishes upon the subject that I have no others to offer. I will barely observe that my best exertions shall be used to keep the enemy in check in this part of the lake or effect his destruction, yet with my utmost exertions and greatest vigilance, he may, (when favoured by a strong westerly wind), slip past me in the night and get eighteen or twenty hours the start of me down the lake before I can discover his movement. If that should be the case I shall lose no time in following with so much celerity as to prevent his interrupting you in your operation against Kingston."²

Wilkinson's intentions were, however, partially disclosed to de Rottenburg by statements of deserters as early as September 28 and he sent off a message in post haste to warn the commandant at Kingston of the impending attack. "My ulterior movements must now depend on the issue of this action," he said. "I am prepared to meet disaster with fortitude and assure Your Excellency that any retrograde movement I may be compelled to make shall be done deliberately and without precipitation."³

Two days later he had received further information from other deserters that all the enemy's troops of the line, except a single regi-

¹ Memorandum from Wilkinson for Chauncey, Fort George, Oct. 1.

² Chauncey to Wilkinson, off Niagara, Oct. 1.

³ De Rottenburg to Prevost, Four Mile Creek, Sept. 28.

ment were under orders to proceed to Sackett's Harbour for the purpose of attacking Kingston. Two flank companies of de Watteville's regiment which had just arrived at York were in consequence ordered to return to Kingston and arrangements made for removing many of his sick and wounded to the same place by the transports. An officer who came in from Burlington that day reported that all damage to the squadron had been repaired. "The enemy's squadron had the wind all yesterday and to-day but never presumed to molest our fleet," he wrote. "What this can mean I am at a loss to account for, except that it blew very hard and they were afraid of coming on a lee shore. The American squadron is now off our coast here, apparently endeavoring to get into the River Niagara. The *Madison* seems to have lost her maintop gallant mast and one of the schooners her topmasts. I trust we shall see Sir James to-morrow, as there is every appearance of the wind changing in his favor."¹

On October 2, he knew that the movement of troops toward Sackett's Harbour was well under way and he decided to despatch a strong detachment of three battalions to Kingston in bateaux at once and go there himself to take command. "I had a communication with Sir James yesterday," he wrote. "The damages sustained by his squadron have all been repaired and he is now fully determined, for the sake of saving Kingston, to perish with his whole fleet or destroy that of the enemy."²

The opposing squadrons came in sight again that morning off Niagara but as Chauncey succeeded in getting the wind, Yeo stood away toward Burlington. At sundown he was off the Twenty Mile Creek and came to anchor for the night as the breeze was light and variable. Next day the wind rose and blew in gusts from the south and south-west and Yeo ran toward the head of the lake, increasing his distance until sunset. The night was very dark with occasional squalls of rain and he shaped his course for Kingston, passing his adversary quite unseen, and arriving there on the 6th.

The morning of the 4th was hazy and Chauncey continued working up toward Burlington Bay. The *Lady of the Lake* was sent in advance to reconnoitre and late in the evening reported that none of the enemy's squadron were to be discovered at the head of the lake. All sail was then made in the direction of the Ducks for the protection of the boats transporting troops toward Sackett's Harbour. The wind blowing steadily from the north-west, increased to a gale, and a speedy run was made. In the afternoon of the 5th, seven sail of schooners and sloops were discovered near the False Ducks. The

¹ De Rottenburg to Prevost, Four Mile Creek, Sept. 30.

² De Rottenburg to Prevost, Four Mile Creek, Oct. 3.

Pike, *Sylph*, and *Lady of the Lake*, cast off the schooners they had in tow and gave chase to these vessels which were the transports from York with two companies of de Watteville's regiment and many sick and wounded on board. The sloop, *Betsy*, sailing badly, was set on fire by her crew and abandoned. At sunset when off the Ducks, the schooners *Hamilton*, (formerly the *Growler*), *Confiance*, (formerly the *Julia*), and the sloop *Mary Ann* were overtaken by the *Pike* and surrendered. The sloop *Drummond* was taken soon after by the *Sylph*. The sloop *Lady Gore* ran in to the Ducks where she was captured next morning. Only the sloop *Enterprise* succeeded in making her escape into Kingston with thirty grenadiers on board.¹ Chauncey anchored with his prizes in Sackett's Harbour on the 6th. Lieut. Colonel Drummond with the troops from Niagara arrived at Kingston on the 8th, making that place tolerably secure. Wilkinson had arrived at Sackett's Harbour on the 4th and immediately "remonstrated freely and warmly" with the Secretary of War against making an attack upon Kingston. Subsequently he presented his objections in writing, the principal one being that "the chief object of the campaign, the capture of Montreal, will be utterly defeated and our own army subjected to great difficulties, losses and perils."

The Secretary firmly overruled him saying: "The only safe decision, therefore, is that if the British fleet shall not escape Commodore Chauncey and get into Kingston Harbour, if the garrison of that place be not largely reinforced, and if the weather be such as will allow us to navigate the lake securely, Kingston shall be our first object, otherwise we shall go directly to Montreal."²

On the 9th, Wilkinson informed Chauncey that he intended moving against Kingston next day and asked his co-operation which was readily promised. He then asked him to state whether he could agree to keep Yeo in check so as to ensure a safe landing for troops above or below Kingston and in the event that project was abandoned whether he could guarantee a safe passage for them down the St. Lawrence as far as his ships could go.³

Yeo had anchored his squadron in Collin's Bay for the double purpose of opposing a landing above Kingston, should that be attempted and having his ships in readiness to descend the channel if that became necessary. Lieut. Charles Anthony, an officer of much experience, who had served as first lieutenant in the flagship of Sir Richard Strachan, was appointed to command the flotilla of gunboats in the

¹ Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Oct. 6 and 8; Major-General Darroch to Prevost, Kingston, Oct. 6.

² Memorandum dated Sackett's Harbour, Oct. 5.

³ Wilkinson to Chauncey, Oct. 9; Chauncey to Wilkinson, Oct. 9.

St. Lawrence, which was now considered a post of great importance. On October 11, one of these gunboats, commanded by Lieut. Lamont of the Royal Scots, having indiscreetly effected a landing at Gravelly Point, was surprised and taken by a party of riflemen lying in ambush.¹

The Governor-General had already sanctioned the construction of a corvette to carry twenty-eight guns and a brig to carry twenty. In consequence of Yeo's urgent recommendation the brig was altered to a ship of the same dimensions as the other, for he declared that any number of brigs would not be of the least service when opposed to ships armed with heavy guns. Casualties had then reduced the number of seamen who had accompanied him from England to three hundred and ten effectives. Five officers and fifty seamen from the troop ship *Dover* and about an equal number of volunteers from transports lying in the river at Quebec had since joined him. The volunteers had been recently ordered to return to their ships. To replace them, four officers and one hundred and ten men, drafted from the Marlborough, were sent on from Halifax by Admiral Griffith in the sloop *Indian*, which was laid up at Quebec and a detachment from her crew also despatched to Kingston, making in all a party of six officers and 145 seamen. On inspection Yeo was greatly disappointed. "There are Americans who have been taken this war, a number of old, infirm men and boys," he wrote, "and in short as improper a set of men for the service they were selected for as could have been pitched upon. I have therefore been under the necessity of taking out of the ships our good men for the gunboats and replacing them with this rabble."²

To demonstrate his inferiority to his opponent he submitted a comparative statement of the force of the squadrons on Lake Ontario, showing that he had six vessels, armed with nineteen long guns, throwing 330 pounds of shot, and seventy-two carronades, throwing 2,312 pounds of shot, and manned by 688 seamen to oppose eleven vessels, armed with sixty-one long guns, throwing 1,337 pounds of shot, and fifty carronades, throwing 1,124 pounds of shot and manned by 1,360 men.³

A recent letter from the Governor-General having indicated some disposition to censure his conduct, evoked a modest remonstrance from Yeo to which Prevost replied:

"I cannot too strongly impress upon you that it is necessary for the salvation of Upper Canada that a hearty and cordial co-operation should exist on all occasions between the army and navy.

¹ Memorandum by Lamont, Oct. 11.

² Yeo to Prevost, Oct. 11.

³ Memorandum, Oct. 8.

"It has been my constant study since my arrival to cultivate a good and perfect understanding between the two services in order that the honor and advantage of our country might be promoted by their joint exertions. Your appeal therefore appears to be unnecessary and I have no desire to censure your conduct. My only complaint is that you do not view as I could wish you to do the consequences of leaving in critical positions our troops exposed to the joint operations of the American fleet and army, thereby exposing them to disgrace and a precipitate retreat. To prevent a measure of that nature which might greatly affect the honor of our arms and the safety of our country, something should be hazarded and the consequences which would result to the army from the want of your support should equally weigh with you with that which might follow from any attempt to prevent the joint co-operation of the enemy's land and sea forces."¹

Four days later Prevost wrote to him:

"The precautionary measures which you appear to have taken in conjunction with Major-General Darroch for the security of Kingston will, I think, prove sufficient to deter the enemy from attacking that place at the present moment, but as the large force now collected at Sackett's Harbour cannot be kept a day inactive whilst so short a period remains for carrying on offensive operations, it is possible General Wilkinson may look to more vulnerable points and attempt forcing his way to Montreal by the St. Lawrence while General Hampton penetrates into Lower Canada by the Chateauguay River, or else attempt carrying Prescott by a *coup-de-main*. In short any movement the enemy may attempt in the narrow waters will afford you a good opportunity of using your vessels and gunboats to the greatest advantage and enable you to defeat and distress either of these operations beyond measure. I am glad to find you will have established a good lookout on the enemy's motions in Sackett's Harbour and I hope you are well prepared to avail yourself of any favorable opportunity which may offer for the destruction of the small craft and bateaux they may have collected."²

Before these instructions were received, General de Rottenburg had arrived at Kingston and assumed command. He directed Yeo to proceed at once to the head of the lake to assist the Centre Division in its retreat, sending the schooner *Vincent* and all the gunboats to the eastern end of Wolfe Island to oppose the passage of the American flotilla into the St. Lawrence. The squadron accordingly sailed at daylight on October 15 with a fair wind which, however, changed before the harbour was cleared and obliged it to return. A flag of

¹ Prevost to Yeo, Montreal, Oct. 6.

² Prevost to Yeo, Montreal, Oct. 12.

truce came back the same day from Sackett's Harbour with information that that port was thronged with bateaux and other small craft and the American seamen said that Kingston would certainly be their next point of attack. The officer in charge reported that a new brig had been added to the American squadron which he had seen with her topmasts up and apparently ready for sea. This intelligence induced Yeo to station his ships for the defence of Kingston while he detached all the smaller vessels under Mulcaster to join the gunboats off Wolfe Island.

Chauncey got under way on October 16, with instructions to bring down another body of troops from the mouth of the Genesee. Before he cleared the harbour these orders were cancelled and he was required to protect the movement of troops from Sackett's Harbour to Grenadier Island for which purpose he took up a station off the Ducks. There he remained for ten days occasionally cruising to and from Grenadier Island, keeping a close watch upon both channels leading into Kingston and running in so close at times as to obtain a view of the port and alarm the garrison. The weather during this time was very stormy and his ships were several times driven from their anchorage. Many of boats transporting troops and stores were driven ashore or wrecked. Heavy rain fell daily frequently turning to snow. "This weather is of itself almost sufficient to defeat the enemy," Captain O'Connor wrote from Kingston on October 27.

Chauncey's movements were wholly successful and mystifying the British commanders. On October 17, Yeo wrote from Kingston to the Governor-General:

"I perceive your anxiety that every effort should be made by the squadron to stop and defeat the enemy's flotilla in going down the St. Lawrence. I have, therefore, (as the only alternative left to accomplish that object), ordered such parts of the squadron as can act in the river down to the east end of Long or Wolfe Island until all the gunboats can be collected from Prescott as that narrow channel properly blockaded will in my opinion leave the navigation as safe as the gunboats with the convoy, that is for a few days until we can be assured of the enemy's real intentions, for if they go down the river it will be necessary to have all the gunboats collected and ready to follow them. I have consulted every pilot as to the practicability of the two ships being of any use in the narrow waters and they all agree that they can go down the river to Prescott with a fair wind but that there is not room to manoeuvre or work them in the narrow channel. I therefore do not like to risk them unless the enemy's squadron go down, in which case they are all ready to follow or to do their utmost

in repelling the enemy in an attack on this place. It is with the utmost reluctance I divide the squadron, and nothing but Your Excellency's pointed instructions on that head could have induced me to do it as I have a strong presentiment that Kingston is the place they will attack, particularly if they hear we have divided our force or they will take advantage of it and go up to York. These being my sentiments I request Your Excellency will explicitly make known to me your opinion as to the disposition I have made that any other arrangements may be made without delay."¹

Prevost's reply restored his full liberty of action.

"I by no means intended to prevent the free exercise of your own judgment in making such a disposition of the squadron as under all circumstances you might, on consultation with Gen'l de Rottenburg, think most advisable. I am therefore perfectly satisfied with the reasons you have given for keeping the fleet together and have the fullest confidence in your making that further disposition of it as will best promote the object, I trust, we all have in view, a successful resistance to every attempt of the enemy."²

In conclusion he expressed strong doubts whether the enemy actually intended to make an attack upon either Kingston or Montreal.

Between the 18th and 25th of October the whole of the American troops destined to take part in the expedition were concentrated upon Grenadier Island where they were organized into brigades and divisions. On the 25th General Wilkinson arrived and the movement by detachments began at French Creek, nearly opposite the proposed point of landing below Kingston, which had been selected for the final rendezvous. This was reported next day by de Rottenburg to Prevost who wrote cheerfully in reply:

"I almost covet the opportunity you are likely to have of displaying your talents. By good example and personal encouragement you will obtain from every one a zealous discharge of their respective duties I hope our squadron will deal death and destruction throughout their armada as it approaches Kingston and the gunboat division prove unsparing to those who are to attempt Gananoqui."³

On November 1, Captain Mulcaster with the brigs *Melville* and *Moira* and four gunboats, joined the schooners *Sir Sidney Smith* and *Beresford* which had been cruising for some days near the lower ends of Wolfe Island. Snow was falling so thickly that it was scarcely possible to see any distance until late in the forenoon. When a move-

¹ Yeo to Prevost, H. M. S. *Wolfe* at Kingston, Oct. 17.

² Prevost to Yeo, Montreal, Oct. 21.

³ Prevost to de Rottenburg, Oct. 29. (In cypher).

ment at length became practicable, Mulcaster made sail for French Creek. A detachment of riflemen posted on a high bluff near the mouth of the creek was driven off and fire opened upon the camp which was briskly returned by some field guns. This action was continued until it grew so dark that the American position, which was to some extent sheltered by thick woods, could no longer be distinctly seen. The vessels then drew off for the night having received several round shot in their sides, none of which did any material damage. During the night the wind rose and prevented the gunboats from renewing the attack as had been contemplated. At break of day the brigs and schooners again ran in when it was found that a battery armed with three long eighteen pounders and a furnace for heating shot had been constructed. Several hot shot struck them and they soon discontinued the fight, having lost one seaman killed and an officer and four seamen wounded. The American commander reported a loss of only ten men killed and wounded. One small schooner was driven ashore.¹

On October 29, Chauncey had visited Wilkinson on Grenadier Island and learned with great surprise and discontent that he had abandoned all intention of co-operating in an attack upon Kingston if, indeed, he had ever seriously entertained it.

"I was much disappointed and mortified to find that the General had taken his determination to descend the St. Lawrence and attack Montreal in preference to Kingston; disappointed because in all consultations upon this subject for the last four weeks, Kingston was fixed upon as the point to be first attacked, and when I parted with the Secretary of War on the 16th, I understood that it was his decided opinion that Kingston should be first reduced; mortified to find that the navy had been used as a mere attendant upon the army for the purpose of transport and protection, and when it could no longer be used for those purposes and the season too far advanced to cruise on the lake with safety, it is left to protect itself in the best manner it can without the possibility of participating in any enterprise against the enemy this season.....It exposes the fleet and stores to certain and total destruction the ensuing winter; for if the enemy collects the whole of his force from the different points of the upper province at Kingston, he will have, from the best information, between four and five thousand regular soldiers; with this force he can, (after the first of January), cross on the ice to Sackett's Harbour in one day, burn the fleet and town, and return to Kingston without difficulty; in fact, I should not be astonished if Sir James should take

¹ Mulcaster to Yeo, Nov. 2; Major-General Jacob Brown to Colonel Dennis, French Creek, Nov. 2.

advantage of a westerly wind while I am down the St. Lawrence and run over to the harbour and burn it, which he certainly can do if he knows its defenceless condition; for to the best of my knowledge there are no troops left there except sick and invalids, nor is there more than three guns mounted."¹

Still he declared that he was willing to give the troops every assistance in the way of transport and protection, and that he would escort the flotilla down the river until beyond all danger from molestation by the British squadron but stated explicitly that he deemed it unsafe to remain in the St. Lawrence after the first week in November on account of ice.

His squadron entered the river on November 2 and on the following day anchored off the lower end of Wolfe Island in the northern channel. The British squadron soon made its appearance and anchored in the southern channel near Sir John's Island about five miles distant. The sound of its bells could be distinctly heard and the guard boats fired at one another several times during the night. The passage between was too shallow to allow them to cross without danger of running aground and they remained watching each other. Wilkinson arrived with his rear guard at French Creek but he was too ill to exercise any personal command. Next day he informed Chauncey of his decision to begin the descent of the river on the 5th with the intention of running past the batteries at Prescott during the night; if that proved impracticable he would land and assault them. This operation might occupy several days and he asked protection until it was accomplished. Chauncey replied that he was in a position to watch both channels but did not consider it safe to detach any portion of his squadron as he was in hourly expectation of being attacked.

"I will remain in my present station until you pass Prescott," he added, "but am anxious for that event to take place at as early a day as possible, as the fleet cannot move out of this river except with a fair wind. It is to be apprehended that after a few days a spell of westwardly winds will set in which may detain us until the ice makes, which would endanger the safety of the fleet and probably lead to its destruction."²

At the same time he had some fears for the security of transports left without protection at Grenadier Island and thought it possible that troops with artillery might be landed from Kingston upon Carleton Island, which would render his return into the lake extremely difficult. He soon after changed his anchorage to the vicinity of that island, where he remained until the evening of the 9th. He then took

¹ Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, No. 101, off Stony Island, Oct. 30.

² Chauncey to Wilkinson, Nov. 4.

up a station off Gravelly Point which he kept until the appearance of the sky induced him to run for shelter to Sackett's Harbour, where he arrived on the morning of the 11th, barely in time to escape a heavy gale from the west accompanied by snow.¹

Urgent orders were then received from the Secretary of War directing him to supply transportation for a brigade of infantry from Niagara to Sackett's Harbour for the protection of that port, which had been nearly denuded of its garrison and was presumed to be in some danger of attack. Sailing thence with a fair wind he arrived off Niagara on the evening of the 14th and sent all his squadron except his flagship into the river to facilitate the embarkation of troops and stores. This was accomplished before night on the 16th and the whole got away on the return voyage. The wind soon increased to a gale blowing strong from the east with heavy rain and snow. The squadron was dispersed and driven toward the head of the lake. Most of the schooners made for the mouth of the river again. One got in safely, another carried away her rudder in crossing the bar, a third was driven ashore and some of her crew perished. Others were tossed about at the mercy of the waves and fired guns of distress all night. The *Julia* succeeded in coming to anchor close to the entrance of Burlington Bay where she succeeded in riding out the storm. Large fires were kept burning near the forts for the guidance of the pilots. The *Madison* and *Oneida* ran for shelter toward Toronto Bay but to their surprise found the entrance strongly fortified and beat back to the mouth of the Niagara where they arrived on the morning of the 20th. Several seamen had been swept overboard and lost but the vessels sustained little injury. At midnight the wind suddenly changed to westward and the *Pike* and *Sylph* ran at once for Sackett's Harbour arriving there on the evening of the 30th. Next day the *Oneida* and four of the schooners which had taken refuge in the Niagara came in.

"The troops and seamen suffered extremely," Chauncey wrote, "as they were wet from the commencement of the gale until their arrival here. The water was so deep on the berth deck that we were obliged to scuttle it to let the water off, yet the men arrived in better health than could have been expected."²

The smaller vessels were immediately laid up and arrangements made for quartering the seamen on shore. The army had then gone into winter quarters and all expectations of an advance upon Montreal apparently abandoned.

¹ Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Nov. 11.

² John F. Bacon to Governor Tompkins, Fort George, Nov. 21; Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Sackett's Harbour, Nov. 21.

"It will become absolutely necessary," Chauncey wrote, "to increase our naval force upon this lake, so as to be ready to meet the enemy upon equal terms in the spring. I have positive information from Kingston, from a person who left there Sunday last, that the enemy have two vessels with all their ribs up and in a state for planking. One of these vessels is said to be 150 feet keel; the other about 123. They have the materials for a third in a state of preparation. Situated as our army is at present they cannot prevent the enemy from sending from Montreal to Kingston all the ordnance and stores that will be required to fit these vessels for service and no doubt they will profit by the opportunity."¹

Yeo took advantage of Chauncey's departure from his station off Wolfe Island to send all his gunboats under Captain Mulcaster, escorting a division of bateaux with a body of picked troops from Kingston, in pursuit of the American flotilla descending the St. Lawrence. These gunboats rendered effective service by menacing and harassing the rear guard of the expedition. Two American schooners were scuttled and abandoned by their crews to avoid capture. Parties of troops were landed at Ogdensburg and Hamilton who brought off two heavy guns and quantities of provisions and stores left behind at those places. During the action at Chrysler's Farm the gunboats protected and supported the right flank of Colonel Morrison's force with their fire. Mulcaster afterwards descended the river to Coteau du Lac and opened communication with the division of gunboats stationed in Lake St. Francis. He continued to observe the American position on Salmon River until winter set in.

The construction of two frigates and several gunboats at Kingston was carried on with great activity by Yeo and O'Connor during the two last months of the year. Early in December Yeo despatched Scott, his first lieutenant, by the toilsome overland route to Halifax to inform Sir John Warren of his exact situation.

"The two new ships are in a very forward state," Yeo said, "and I am almost certain of having a force in the spring, sufficiently strong to meet the enemy with effect and decision. I need not point out to you, Sir, the great advantages that are to be hoped for by this squadron being on the lake three weeks or a month before the enemy. This, I think, is certain if I receive a reinforcement of seamen by the beginning of April and not otherwise, and I know of no other possible means of obtaining them but by their marching to Quebec. Lieut. Scott is well qualified to conduct, having travelled that road before.

¹Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Nov. 25.

"I trust whatever men are sent from Halifax may be selected for this particular service for I have not the power of keeping up that strict discipline and subordination which I could do on the Atlantic. I, therefore, must depend much on the good disposition of the seamen. The *Marlboro's* have been guilty of every extravagance and given more trouble than all the establishment put together. There were also several blacks and American citizens among them, the latter of which I, of course, immediately discharged.

"From the unavoidable exposure of the service in the gunboats at this season of the year, we have a great number sick, (nearly eighty), I therefore am certain, (to ensure success), we shall require 200 or 250 additional seamen."¹

He had then received reliable information that sixty-eight shipwrights had recently been added to the navy yard at Sackett's Harbour to be employed in the construction of two forty-four gun frigates and that Chauncey had gone to Washington to confer with the Secretary of the Navy on his future operations.

Calgary, May 2, 1906.

¹Yeo to Warren, Kingston, Dec. 6, 1813.