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**From Isle aux Noix to Chateauguay. A Study
of the Military Operations on the Frontier
of Lower Canada in 1812 and 1813**

By

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BY COLONEL E. A. CRUIKSHANK.

(Read May 28th 1913)

1812

"After the war one ought to write not only the history of what has happened, but the history of what was intended, the narrative would then be instructive."—Von der Goltz.

In an advisory letter to the Secretary of War for the United States, dated the 2nd of January, 1812, General Armstrong had pointed out most forcibly that the fortress of Quebec must necessarily be the ultimate objective of an invading army, seeking to accomplish the conquest of Canada. The means for the execution of such an enterprise were evidently not then available. But the occupation of the island of Montreal, which, by its situation, commanded the navigation of the St. Lawrence and Ottawa, must certainly cause the abandonment or surrender of all the military posts above the cutting them off from their common basis of supply. He accordingly proposed that an advance upon it should be made rapidly and boldly by a sufficient force from the vicinity of Albany while demonstrations with large bodies of militia should be simultaneously undertaken on the Niagara river, from Sackett's Harbour and from Vermont along the right bank of the Sorel river, to prevent the concentration of troops from other garrisons for its defence.

This plan was approved and orders were given for the organisation of a force of eight thousand men of which Major General Dearborn was directed to take command. For such a service it was not unreasonably presumed that his experience in a former campaign of invasion would be exceptionally valuable. Governor Tompkins of New York gave the most energetic support from the first. Early in April, six hundred militia were ordered by him to march to the Niagara, six hundred more to the mouth of Black River and two hundred and fifty to Oswego.

In transmitting to Sir George Prevost early information of the orders for the movement of these troops, Mr. Augustus Foster, the British envoy at Washington, expressed the opinion that the Government of the United States hoped that something might occur to provoke a collision with the British garrisons on the frontier and thus begin hos-

ilities without the actual declaration of war. The Governor General took care in consequence to warn the commanding officers of all posts to take all possible precautions to prevent a conflict.* Yet at the same time he responded in another manner by authorising Major C. M. de Salaberry to proceed with the enlistment of a battalion of four hundred *voltigeurs*.†

Early in May there came a laconic warning from Thomas Barclay, the British Consul General in New York, that war was inevitable and would be declared in July at the latest.‡ Under this stimulus recruiting was carried on with much vigour and success in both provinces. Within a month five hundred men were enlisted for the Glengarry Light Infantry and nearly as many for the Canadian Fencibles and Voltigeurs. Measures were taken to repair and strengthen the frontier forts which had been neglected for years. The castle of Chambly was reported as being incapable of defence against artillery from the nature of its construction and the works at St. Jean and Isle aux Noix were literally in ruins. St. Jean, indeed, was no longer considered a post of much importance as it could be turned with little difficulty by the new roads leading from the United States to Montreal. Chambly would only be useful as an advanced depot for stores and a rendezvous for the local militia. Sorel, therefore, was the most important position to be held on the right bank of the St. Lawrence with respect to the concentration of the militia and as a dockyard and base for the gunboats assigned for the protection of navigation in the vicinity. Montreal had become the commercial capital of Canada and its defenceless condition would naturally invite attack. Its ancient walls had been demolished and its future security must depend on the successful defence of a line of resistance extending from La Prairie to Chambly and the equipment of a sufficient flotilla to command the navigation of the St. Lawrence and Richelieu. The militia of the neighbouring country numbered some twelve thousand. They were, however, badly armed and equipped and totally undisciplined with the exception of six hundred, recently assembled for three months' training at La Prairie.

Hardly more encouraging was the state of the war vessels on the lakes, composing the Provincial Marine. The rotten hulk of the *Royal Edward* was the sole remnant of a once powerful naval establishment on Lake Champlain. It was reported as being of no service except to furnish an excuse for pensioning an old seaman as its caretaker. The vessels in commission on Lakes Erie and Ontario had been employed in the transportation of troops and government stores under the super-

*Prevost to Lord Liverpool, No. 40, April 20, 1812.

†Prevost to Liverpool, Apr. 20, 1812; Prevost to Brock, Apr. 30,

‡Barclay to Prevost, May 5.

intendent of officers of the Quartermaster General's Department residing at Amherstburg and Kingston, where the dockyards for their care were located. Recent efforts of the American Government to increase their naval force on these waters had led to the construction of the *Royal George* at Kingston and the *Queen Charlotte* at Amherstburg. Both these vessels were designed to carry an armament of heavy carronades but it was remarked that they drew too much water to be serviceable everywhere. Three other vessels, the *Earl of Moira* and *Duke of Gloucester* on Lake Ontario and the *General Hunter* on Lake Erie had been in service less than ten years but had been built of green oak timber and already required such extensive repairs that the construction of two large schooners to replace them had been authorised.

The dockyard at Kingston being particularly exposed to attack and difficult to defend without extensive fortifications, orders had been given to build the schooner *Prince Regent* at York and ultimately to remove the dockyard to that place.*

The number of seamen enrolled was barely sufficient to navigate the vessels in commission in time of peace.

Lieut. Colonel Pye, the Deputy Quartermaster General, had lately resigned and Captain Andrew Gray of the Nova Scotia Fencibles, an able and energetic young officer, was temporarily appointed to succeed him.†

Two-thirds of the merchant vessels on Lake Ontario, numbering some twenty sloops and schooners of less than one hundred tons burden each, sailed under the American flag.

The importance of fortifying Kingston and establishing a strong post on the St. Lawrence, midway to Montreal, to maintain the communication and protect the navigation of that river above the rapids was apparent. The improvement of the land route was almost equally desirable and a new road was accordingly cut through the woods from the Longue Sault to Coteau du Lac, shortening the distance to be travelled by some miles.

Owing to the lack of trained gunners, it was found necessary to order a number of active, intelligent men from the battalion companies of regular infantry in each garrison to be attached to the Royal Artillery for instruction in management of both garrison and field guns.‡

Mr. Foster continued to furnish confidential information respecting the probable course of future events at Washington and the state of public opinion in United States generally. On June 2, he wrote that the debate in congress had reached a crisis and it seemed likely that the war

*Lt. Col. Pye to Prevost, 7th Dec., 1811; Captain A. Gray to Brock, 24 Feb., 1812.

†Prevost to Brock, 7 January, 1812.

‡Prevost to Brock, 12 March, 1812; Gray to Baynes, 29 March, 1812; G.O. 31 March, 1812.

party would succeed in obtaining a majority in the House of Representatives where the advocates of peace were sometimes unable to obtain a hearing. He believed that the members of the Executive Government were still sincerely averse to hostilities but added that, if they failed to concur in a declaration of war, they would certainly lose the support of a majority of the southern and western members of Congress and could expect to gain none from the Federalists.

"It is not in human nature, at least not in ordinary human nature," he said; "to be willing to give up power, even when the terms of holding it cannot be reconciled to the dictates of conscience, and therefore the administration, finding that the sole chance of keeping their seats is in going to war with us, will probably side with the majority. They have delayed the measure as long as they could, but are now endeavoring to exasperate by dwelling upon the grievance of impressment, a grievance which, it is well known, might be settled if they would give adequate security that our seamen would not be received into their mercantile and naval service, but while they have thousands of them employed in either and take every measure to seduce them from their allegiance, Great Britain cannot in justice to herself, cease to endeavor to recover such of them as she can lay her hands on, altho' the practice unfortunately leads to mistakes by which we occasionally may lay hold of American citizens whom, however, we never fail to restore when the error is ascertained."

He had been informed that some members of the Committee on Foreign Relations were in favour of a declaration that when war was once begun, it should not be terminated until the conquest of Canada was accomplished and that the conquered territory should never be restored. Yet he still hoped that the good sense of the Senate would avert hostilities.*

In a letter in cypher he informed Prevost that one Nathaniel Cogswell of Newburyport in Massachusetts, was then on his way to Quebec to reveal to him the particulars of a plot for the promotion of an insurrection in Upper Canada, in which he had been employed under authority from the government of the United States since 1806 and had engaged one hundred subordinate agents. He said that his motive in making this disclosure was a desire for revenge as he had been refused an appointment as a brigadier general in the American army.†

A week later Foster wrote that an act declaring war had actually been passed in the House of Representatives but there was a majority of two against it in the Senate ‡

*Foster to Prevost, June 2, 1812.

†Foster to Prevost in cypher, undated.

‡Foster to Prevost, June 9, 1812.

Cogswell proceeded as far as Odelltown on his way to Quebec, whence he wrote giving some rather vague details of the plan by which "the independence of Canada" was to have been effected by the introduction of "three or four thousand hardy men, ready to engage in any desperate undertaking" disguised as lumbermen, who would be afterwards secretly supplied with the necessary arms and ammunition. It was intended that he should play the same part in this enterprise that Governor Matthews had lately done with such marked success in East Florida. The plot had originated with ex-President Jefferson, who had hoped to put it into execution during the latter part of his administration.

"No money or means were to have been spared and the regular steps approximating towards its intended accomplishment had advanced infinitely beyond what the Government of Canada can have any idea of. but his successor, Mr. Madison, who perhaps by nature is not calculated for bold undertakings, and has not, like Mr. Jefferson, been educated in the school of revolution and rebellion, permitted a relaxation of the undertaking by withholding the pecuniary supplies necessary for carrying out the service."*

Before any reply from the Governor General could possibly be received, the declaration of war became known and Cogswell hastily returned to the United States.

The wealthy and enterprising merchants of Montreal, who were the principals in the Northwest and Southwest Fur Companies, were so vitally interested that they had made extraordinary efforts to procure the earliest intelligence of the action taken by Congress. In this they were so successful that a special messenger conveying this information was despatched from the city of New York on June 20, and arrived in Montreal on the evening of the 23rd. No time was lost in forwarding this important news to the Governor General, who received it at Quebec on June 25, on his return from an inspection of the militia at Three Rivers. At the same time the partners in the Northwest Fur Company made an offer to transport a small detachment of regular troops to reinforce the garrison of St. Joseph's island in a brigade of canoes that they were preparing to despatch by way of the Ottawa river to Sault Ste. Marie.†

"This is an event we have ever deemed impossible," they remarked, "and can be accounted for on no principle short of French bribery or actual insanity."‡

Another express was despatched from Albany on the morning of June 21 by Mr. McTavish with the same intelligence to Lieut. Colonel

*Cogswell to Prevost, June 22, 1812.

†Forsyth, Richardson & Co. and McTavish, McGillivray & Co. to H. W. Ryland, June 24, 1812; Prevost to Lord Liverpool, June 25; Baynes to Brock, June 25.

Thomas Clark, their agent at Queenston, U.C., to whom it was delivered on the 25th. The messenger was arrested at Canandaigua on his way back and made an incriminating statement in consequence of which McTavish and others were summoned to appear before the Recorder of Albany. On examination, McTavish declared that so far as he knew the letters from New York which he had forwarded contained information solely of a commercial character and he was in consequence released on bail.

In the beginning of June the officers employed in the enforcement of the new militia act met with some resistance at Berthier, and in the parish of St. Benoit near St. Eustache. At Berthier several persons were promptly arrested and immediately professed regret, stating that their disorderly conduct was due to ignorance of the law and their belief in a report that they would be compelled to join the regular army. Others for whose apprehension warrants were issued, soon surrendered and were released on bail. At St. Benoit the situation seemed so serious that Lieut. Colonel Dumont reported rather hastily that the inhabitants were in a state of rebellion, and it would be necessary to detail a body of regulars to arrest the ringleaders. However the high constable who was sent to take three of them, returned with one prisoner, and reported that the two others had taken refuge in the woods with a number of their friends, who were well armed and they had declared that they would not be taken alive. Justice Panet and the Solicitor General both gave written opinions that it was essential for the preservation of order and support of the law that these men and those aiding them should be arrested and brought to trial. Two bailiffs were despatched from Montreal, who succeeded in capturing the offenders and all resistance to the draft in that quarter ceased.*

A similar and much more alarming demonstration of discontent occurred on the island of Montreal. On the last day of June, Major Phillippe Leprohon with a detachment of twenty-two men marched from Lachine to the parish of Pointe Claire to apprehend a number of men from the local division of militia, who had either refused to join or had deserted from the battalion into which they had been drafted. Four of these delinquents were discovered and arrested, but a large body of sympathizers immediately assembled and rescued one of them, threatening at the same time to march upon Lachine and bring off all the men from that division who had already reported there. Next day a body of three or four hundred men, of whom about eighty carried some kind of firearms and the remainder were armed

*Justice P. L. Panet to E. B. Brenton; 9 June, 1812; Samuel Sewell to Brenton, 8 and 11 June, 1812.

with pitchforks or clubs, appeared in the vicinity of Lachine and refused to disperse unless their friends in the militia were allowed to return to their homes. A message for assistance had been despatched to Montreal as soon as they made their appearance and the light company of the 49th Regiment and a detachment of Royal Artillery with two field guns under the command of Major Plenderleath was ordered to march to the scene of the disturbance, accompanied by Thomas McCord, police magistrate for the city. On arriving at Lachine the magistrate addressed the rioters and bade them disperse. They replied that they had been told that the new militia act had not yet received the sanction of the Governor in Council and consequently was not legally in force, but also declared with loud shouts of *vive le roi* that they were prepared to defend the country whenever their services were properly required. They were evidently in a state of such extreme excitement that further argument was considered useless. The riot act was read to the magistrate who then formally required them to disperse. As they did not comply a round shot was discharged over their heads from one of the field guns. Some shots were fired in reply by the mob and a section of the light company was ordered to fire a volley at such an elevation as to do them no harm. They replied with a harmless discharge from their weapons. The troops were then directed to commence an effective fire, which resulted in the hasty dispersal of the crowd, although some of them sought shelter in the adjacent thickets, from which they continued an intermittent fire for some time. It was then growing dark and pursuit was deemed inadvisable. Three prisoners were taken, one man was found dead on the field and another was dangerously wounded.*

On the following day four hundred and fifty men of the Montreal militia marched to Pointe Claire and St. Laurent where they arrested twenty-four suspected persons. Many others came into the city within a few hours and surrendered begging humbly . . . mercy.

All American citizens residing in Quebec had been notified by the police that they must leave the city by the first day of July and depart from the district by the third. On June 30, this period was extended by proclamation for fourteen days. Two other proclamations were published the same day, one placing an embargo upon all the shipping in the port and the other calling an extraordinary session of the legislature upon the 16th of July.

Alarming accounts of widespread dissatisfaction among the militia caused the Governor General to make a hasty journey to Montreal where he arrived on the third of July. He then received a belated letter from Mr. Foster dated at Washington on June 19, enclosing

*Christie, History of Lower Canada. Vol. II, pp. 17-19; Montreal Gazette. 1812.

a copy of the Act of Congress declaring war, and stating that a form of proclamation had been approved by the House of Representatives, advising the Canadians to remain neutral and promising them protection in the rights and privileges they already enjoyed.*

Next day nearly two hundred of the inhabitants of Pointe Clairo who had been concerned in the recent disturbances came in to acknowledge their guilt and ask for pardon. Only two of them could be identified as having taken an active part. They were placed in confinement and the remainder were permitted to return home after they had voluntarily declared their readiness to report for military duty when ever required.†

The town militia of Quebec and Montreal, numbering about 3,000 men at each place, were organized and promptly volunteered to perform garrison duty to relieve the regular troops required for the occupation of the frontier posts and first line of defence. The Champ de Mars at Montreal was thronged every morning at five o'clock, and every evening after six, with small squads of militiamen of all classes diligently engaged in drill. Instead of showing any degree of alarm or depression, it was remarked that the whole population seemed inclined to put aside their private business and devote their time to preparations for defence ‡

A proclamation for the declaration of martial law was drafted and laid before the Executive Council for approval with a recommendation that all aliens should be required to take an oath of allegiance or leave the province at once.

The want of money had become so urgent that Sir John Sherbrooke was instructed to collect all the specie that could be obtained in exchange for Government Bills at Halifax and forward at least ten thousand pounds to Quebec.§ The supply of hard cash in Canada was evidently insufficient to carry on the public business and it would be absolutely necessary to resort to a paper substitute. This fact alone made it expedient to convene the Legislature at an early date.¶

A letter from the commandant at Kingston announced that hostilities had begun in that quarter. On June 26 a party of New York militia had landed on Carleton Island and captured the lookout party stationed there, composed of a corporal and two men of the Royal Veteran Battalion who had not yet been informed of the declaration of war.¶ On learning this he had despatched sixty men of the Frontenac

*E. B. Brenton to the Chief Justice, July 4, 1812.

†Brenton to the Chief Justice, July 4; Baynes to Brock, July 4.

‡Letters of Veritas, pp. 8 and 26.

§Prevost to Sherbrooke, June 25, 1812.

¶Brenton to the Chief Justice, July 4.

¶Prevost to Liverpool, July 5.

militia under the command of Lieut. Patrick Smith, an experienced mariner, to bring in several small merchant vessels reported on the way up the river. While among the islands on the night of June 28-9, Smith fell in with two American schooners, the *Island Packet* and *Sophia*, which he promptly captured and burnt. The vessels he had been sent to protect soon after came in sight and were safely brought into Kingston.*

Some slight defensive works which had been constructed for the defence of the harbour were hastily armed with guns of small calibre after which only one light field gun remained available. The militia of the vicinity turned out with alacrity to the number of six hundred for garrison service and displayed a strong desire to learn the proper performance of their duties. Twelve hundred muskets were distributed in the region extending westward from Glengarry to Hastings. Four troops of militia cavalry were stationed in pairs at regular intervals along the road from Montreal to York to carry despatches and maintain the communication. As senior officer in the district Colonel Richard Cartwright assumed command of the militia assembled at Kingston. He reported that they could be relied on to furnish escorts for convoys by land or water and suggested that redoubts and blockhouses should be built at suitable places along the route to assure their safety.

Eleven American schooners had taken refuge at Ogdensburg where batteries were being constructed and militia assembled for their protection. Their capture or destruction would immediately ensure the command of Lake Ontario, but this enterprise could not be attempted without the assistance of a small body of regulars and Cartwright recommended that at the same time an active and experienced regular officer of rank superior to any militia officer in the district should be appointed to take command.†

Colonel Robert Lethbridge, an inspecting field officer in the Montreal district, was accordingly selected but carefully instructed to undertake no offensive operations unless they were calculated "to strengthen a defensive attitude." The safety of Kingston was naturally designated as his principal object although the protection of the general line of communication was considered as of scarcely less importance. If unable to maintain his position he was instructed to destroy or remove all stores and supplies which might be useful to the enemy, assemble all loyal and well disposed inhabitants and retire upon York or Montreal, or keep the field as circumstances might direct.‡

*Major Donald Macpherson to the Military Secretary, July 5; New York Evening Post, 1812.

†Hon. R. Cartwright to Prevost, July 5.

‡Baynes to Brock, July 8; Baynes to Lethbridge, July 10; Prevost to Brock, July 11.

"I consider it prudent, "Prevost said," to avoid any measure which can have a tendency to unite the people of the American states. While disunion prevails among them, their attempts upon these provinces will be feeble. It is therefore our duty carefully to avoid committing any act which may even by construction tend to unite the eastern and southern States unless by its perpetration, we are to derive a considerable and important advantage. But the Government of the United States, resting on public opinion for all its measures, is liable to sudden and violent changes. It becomes an essential part of our duty to watch the effect of parties on its measures and to adapt ours to the impulse given by those possessed of influence over the public mind in America."*

This conviction was strengthened no doubt by a report from Sir John Sherbrooke that as the inhabitants of Eastport in Maine had displayed a strong inclination to continue amicable relations with the province of Nova Scotia, he had considered it expedient to issue a public notice of approval in conjunction with Admiral Griffith, hoping "by this measure to avoid that species of predatory war which would be particularly injurious to these provinces. Indeed I am led to believe that a considerable spirit of conciliation towards the subjects of Great Britain, if not of resistance to the measures of their own government, is inclined to show itself in the northern and eastern States, and the Admiral informs me that in one of their ports the inhabitants have entered into a resolution that if any person shall fit out a privateer for the annoyance of the British, they will instantly burn it."†

But he was obliged to add that the military chest at Halifax was so nearly empty that it would be impossible to remit any money to Quebec.

The Committee of the Executive Council, to whom the proposal of making an immediate and unconditional declaration of martial law, had been referred, reported that as it appeared that no sufficient hostile force had yet been assembled to excite fears of an invasion of Lower Canada and the resistance to the enforcement of the militia act had terminated in such a way as to remove any serious apprehension in that respect, they considered such a measure be inexpedient and impolitic except in the event of actual invasion or insurrection.‡

The Governor General prudently concurred in this opinion and declared that since the dispersion of the unlawful assemblage at Lachine, not the least symptom of disaffection had been observed anywhere.⁴

*Prevost to Brock, July 12; Prevost to Liverpool, July 15.

†Sherbrooke to Prevost, July 6.

‡Report of the Committee of the Executive Council at Montreal, July 7.

⁴ Brenton to the Chief Justice, July 7.

Regulations were then promulgated by which all American citizens who refused to take the oath of allegiance and bear arms were required to leave the country.

The exportation to the United States of arms, ammunition, military stores, saddlery, blankets, certain enumerated articles, used in the manufacture of military clothing, and bullion or specie of any description exceeding fifty dollars for reasonable travelling expenses, was prohibited in a proclamation by which the exportation of all other articles was expressly sanctioned on the condition that it was carried on by the road leading through La Prairie and St. Jean to Odelltown.*

Five other well travelled roads from the United States entered the district of Montreal. The best of these, coming from the east side of Lake Champlain and passing round Mississquoi Bay, followed the Valley of the Richelieu to St. Jean and went on to Laprairie. Another, also beginning in the State of Vermont, ran through the township of Sutton to St. Armand and Mississquoi Bay where it joined the first. A third from the east side of lake Magog, passed through Stanstead to Gibraltar point and St. Armand. A fourth led from Gibraltar Point to the Yamaska and a fifth ran to Three Rivers along the St. Francis river from its forks in the Township of Ascot. All of these became channels for smuggling.†

An advanced line of defence extending from Laprairie on the St. Lawrence to St. Jean on the Richelieu was occupied for the protection of Montreal. A battalion of embodied militia was stationed at Laprairie and another at St. Jean while the flank companies of four regular regiments with six light field guns were quartered at Blairfindie or the Halfway House where there was a fine commanding position which could be easily be made very strong by earth works and abatis as the adjacent country was swampy and covered with impenetrable thickets of cedar and hemlock. From this point roads diverged to Laprairie, Chambly, St. Jean and Odelltown and it naturally became the headquarters of the advanced force. The third battalion of embodied militia occupied the villages of Longueuil and Boucherville. The 100th Regiment was posted at Sorel with a detachment at Yamaska. The whole number of troops distributed along this line slightly exceeded 2,500 of all ranks and arms.‡

Considerable supplies of ordnance and military stores were steadily forwarded from Montreal to Upper Canada guarded by very weak escorts without the least molestation during the month of July, but as a transport which had sailed from Bermuda bound for Quebec, with a

*Regulation, July 10.

†Report of Captain P. Hughes, R.E., Dec. 16. 1808.

‡Baynes to Brock, July 10.

cargo of six thousand stand of arms, for the militia of the lower province, failed to arrive, Prevost was in consequence compelled to draw upon the ordnance depot at Halifax to supply deficiencies and much delay occurred in completing their equipment.*

Before leaving Halifax on his return to England, Mr. Foster wrote that a bill which had passed the house of Representatives for the purpose of promoting an insurrection in Canada had been defeated in the Senate and he had good reason to believe that no serious attempt would be made to invade the lower province for some time to come. He again emphasised the advantage that would be derived from abstaining from any invasion of the United States which might afford its government a plea for making a strong appeal for the support of the militia from the Eastern States.†

About the same time it was announced that the inhabitants of the frontier townships in Vermont and Lower Canada had voluntarily entered into a mutual agreement to abstain from molesting one another.‡

After completing his arrangements for the defence of Montreal, the Governor General returned to open the special session of the legislature. In his speech he briefly referred to the declaration of war by the United States and declared that he relied upon the spirit of His Majesty's subjects, their well known attachment to, and zeal for, the religion of their ancestors, their loyalty to their Sovereign, and their ardent love for the true interests of their country; and that he should depend implicitly under Divine Providence, upon their best exertions, aided by the courage and loyalty of the militia and by the valour, skill and discipline of the regular troops for repelling all hostile attacks. The necessary maintenance of the militia and other expenses connected with the approaching campaign would cause considerable expenditure and he must rely upon their wisdom and public spirit for the provision of all supplies required by the emergency. He expressed his satisfaction at the appearance and discipline of the battalions of embodied militia he had recently inspected and believed they would contribute materially to the successful defence of the province.

As usual the reply of the Assembly echoed in a general way the sonorous sentences of the speech from the throne.

"Your Excellency may place full confidence," it declared, "in the spirit of His Majesty's subjects throughout the province; their attachment and zeal for the religion of their forefathers, their loyalty to their Sovereign and their ardent love for the true interests of their country,

*Prevost to Sherbrooke, July 18.

†Foster to Prevost, July 18 and 20.

‡Baynes to Brock, July 10.

are such strong inducements that no threats of the enemy will intimidate them, nor they will be deluded by any insidious efforts they may make.

"Froud of the confidence Your Excellency is pleased to place in the exertions of His Majesty's Canadian subjects and in the courage and loyalty of the militia, we confidently promise to ourselves a happy and fortunate result to any hostile attempt that may be made on this colony, whilst that courage and loyalty have the aid and support of the tried valour, skill and discipline of His Majesty's regular forces."

No time was lost in presenting to the House two private and confidential messages; one of which requested their consideration to the urgent necessity of vesting the Governor General with extraordinary powers to suppress any attempt to excite disorder or insubordination and for the summary punishment of all offences tending to disturb the public peace. He frankly stated that he hoped the legislature would have less hesitation in sanctioning this proposal from the knowledge that he could at any time by virtue of his commission exercise the power of declaring martial law in its fullest extent, and that it must be evident to the members that by his action in requesting them to authorise the exercise of this power in a limited degree, he could have no other object than to ensure the welfare of the province with the least detriment to the interests of the inhabitants. His second message stated the want of specie to meet the demands of the military situation and the absolute of procuring money to the amount required by government bills of exchange. It was accompanied by a report from the Executive Council recommending an issue of paper money, to be designated Army Bills, to the amount of £250,000.

The Assembly showed their aversion to the Governor General's proposal to legalize a modified declaration of martial law by quietly ignoring his message on that subject but endeavoured to make amends by unexpected readiness and liberality in the enactment of a law to facilitate the circulation of the Army Bills. The interest for five years upon Army Bills to the amount proposed was made a charge upon the Provincial Treasury together with an additional annual sum of £2,500 to pay the expenses of an office. Bills of the face value of twenty-five, fifty, one hundred and four hundred dollars each were made payable in Government bills of exchange on demand at a rate of exchange to be fixed every fifteen days or in cash at the expiration of five years with interest at six per cent. until paid. They were declared a legal tender to stay arrest and execution upon the person and property of a debtor and made receivable in payment of all public dues. All contracts in which any distinction should be made between Army Bills and cash were declared void. It was made a felony without benefit of clergy to forge them. Interest at six per cent. per annum was payable

at the office of the Receiver General whenever they were presented in the form of bills of exchange. A limited issue of four dollar bills payable in cash on demand was likewise authorised but as this would require the retention in the military chest of a sum in hard cash nearly equal to the amount in circulation, no considerable number were put out.*

This act received the assent of the Governor General on the first day of August, after which he quickly prorogued the legislature with a warm acknowledgment of their liberality. Their action in this respect had undoubtedly relieved him of much anxiety, as he was at that moment unable to obtain sufficient money to pay for the subsistence of the troops during the preceding month, yet he still entertained doubts whether "the deep-rooted prejudices of the Canadians against a paper money" based on their unfortunate experience in the last days of French rule, could be overcome. The clergy, however, came to his assistance and readily undertook to promote the circulation of these bills.†

As General Brock was then known to be labouring under great difficulties through want of money to pay his militia and meet other urgent demands, he was informed that a certain proportion of this issue of paper money would be placed at his disposal, although it was clear that it could not be made a legal tender in Upper Canada without the concurrence of the provincial legislature.‡

During the session the military situation in the Montreal district remained substantially unchanged. The Americans were reported to be forming depots of supplies near the frontier and building boats on Lake Champlain, but no considerable body of troops had been assembled. The most circumstantial information as to their preparations was received from Baron de Diemar, formerly an officer in the Loyal American Regiment, who arrived in Montreal from Burlington, Vt., about the middle of July. He reported that he had offered his services to General Brock for the purpose of gaining intelligence, and had set out from Fort Erie on June 26 three days before the declaration of war became known. At Canandaigua he had been arrested on suspicion and had in consequence destroyed a letter of introduction to the commanding officer at Montreal, but was released on declaring himself a Frenchman. After visiting Utica and Ogdensburg, where he noted the number of troops, he went to Albany, and was again arrested. Making his escape by filing the bar from the window of his prison he made his way to Whitehall to Vergennes

*Prevost to Brock, July 28.

†Baynes to Brock, August 1; Prevost to Liverpool, July 30.

‡Commissary General Robinson to Prevost, July 30; Prevost to Brock, July 28; Prevost to Brock, August 12.

and Burlington in Vermont. His estimate of the troops at those places agreed in the main with information secured from other sources, and he reported a general disposition among the inhabitants of both states to refuse to take any part in the war except in case of invasion.*

On August 3, a light canoe arrived at Montreal from Lake Superior by way of the Ottawa river with some officers of the Northwest Fur Company, bearing the welcome and scarcely credible news of the surrender of Mackinac in an official despatch from Captain Roberts with a report that the American troops had been three times repulsed in attempts to cross the River Canard.†

Two days before this, information of the repeal of the obnoxious Orders in Council forwarded in all haste by Mr. Foster from Halifax, had reached Prevost at Quebec, and he immediately directed the Adjutant General to go to the headquarters of General Dearborn to propose a general cessation of hostilities until the decision of his government in this greatly altered situation could be definitely ascertained. Colonel Baynes actually arrived in Albany on the evening of the 8th, his journey from Quebec having occupied only five days, including a detention of some hours at Burlington by direction of the commanding officer, who seemed reluctant to allow him to pass. Dearborn received him most politely and declared that he entirely agreed with the amicable sentiments contained in Prevost's letter and greatly regretted that his instructions would not permit him to conclude an armistice at once, but said he would have no hesitation to give orders to his subordinate officers on the frontiers of New York and Vermont to confine their operations strictly to measures of defence and in the event of his action being disapproved he would immediately notify the Governor and all officers in his command would be instructed to abstain from hostilities until the expiration of four days of twenty-four hours each from the time that notice was given by the party denouncing the agreement. To this proposal Baynes readily assented. Dearborn then observed that although General Hull was nominally under his command, he was actually acting under special instructions from the War Department; but he was willing to write to him recommending a similar course, if at all compatible with his orders. Letters were at once despatched by Baynes to the officers commanding at Kingston, Niagara and Amherstburg by the same messengers who carried Dearborn's orders to the American officers on the frontier, directing them to remain strictly on the defensive on receiving an assurance of a similar intention on the part of the enemy, but warning them at the same time to be vigilant and prepared for any emergency

*Deposition of Baron de Diemar; De Rottenburg to Prevost, July 14.

†Vincent to Baynes, August 4.

Dearborn added that considerable reinforcements with artillery and stores were then on their way to the military posts on the frontier and he could not undertake to delay them or alter their destination to which Baynes promptly replied that similar detachments were on the way from Montreal to Upper Canada, and proposed that all such bodies of troops and convoys should be unmolested by the forces mutually instructed to remain on the defensive. Dearborn agreed to this, but objected to a written agreement as this would have the appearance of a convention which he had no authority to enter into. He believed that he had already exceeded his powers, but in so doing he was actuated by an sincere desire to promote the welfare of both nations. He was willing on trust to the honour and good faith of the Governor General who could rely that his verbal understanding would be faithfully carried out by him. Letters to this effect were accordingly addressed both to Baynes and Prevost, that to the latter concluding with this sentence:—

“No other nations are so deeply interested in a friendly intercourse with each other as Great Britain and the United States, and I most sincerely hope that the time is not far distant when they will embrace as friends.”*

In private conversation Dearborn strongly condemned the employment of Indians in the war, intimating that it originated with the British, and that the Americans were blameless in that respect. Baynes instantly retorted that he had in his office intercepted letters from General Hull which proved beyond doubt that he had not only entered into engagements with Indian tribes to assist him, but had employed agents to win over those who were supposed to be attached to Great Britain, and remarked that the necessity of employing such auxiliaries was unquestionably lamentable, yet, as the disposition of those people would inevitably induce them to take an active part on one side or the other, it became a question of mere expediency to make sure that they did not assist the enemy.

On parting General Dearborn assured his visitor that no event of his life would give him greater pleasure than the act of resigning his commission as the result of an honourable settlement of all national disputes and the evident frankness and sincerity of his manner made a strong impression.

Both in going and returning Baynes had made excellent use of his opportunities for observation and otherwise gaining information, and he was able to report that, judging from the actual state of the American forces in the vicinity of the frontier, there could be no im-

*Baynes to Prevost, August 12; Dearborn to Prevost, August 8; Dearborn to Baynes, August 8; Baynes to Brock, August 8.

mediate intention of invading Lower Canada. He ascertained beyond doubt that there were only four hundred militia at Plattsburg, less than three hundred regulars at Burlington, and about double that number at Albany, chiefly recruits. Having obtained permission with some difficulty to return by way of Swanton, he observed that a brigade of Vermont militia, numbering barely four hundred men, had assembled there. In cavalry and artillery there was a marked deficiency. Recruiting for the regular army was not making much progress. The most efficient troops had marched to the Niagara frontier and to all appearances there was not a single officer or other instructor attached to the militia who was capable of teaching them the rudiments of drill. He had met but one officer who seemed to possess any degree of military knowledge or talent. Although, apparently, in excellent health, General Dearborn did not impress him as having "the energy of mind or activity of body" requisite for his command.

The arrival of the 103rd and some recruits for other corps had already made it practicable to despatch a small reinforcement to Upper Canada. On August 8, Major Ormsby with three companies of the 49th Regiment left Lachine with a brigade of boats conveying a considerable supply of artillery and military stores with £5,000 in hard cash. On the day after his return to Montreal Baynes informed Brock that further reinforcements of the best quality would be sent at an early date as it was most important, "if we are likely to arrange matters with the States that the balance of military events should be unequivocally in our favour.* Two days afterwards Major Heathcote set off with another company of the 49th, one hundred and twenty men of the Royal Newfoundland and fifty picked men from the 10th Veteran Battalion in charge of a second brigade of boats with more stores and camp equipage for five hundred men. Ormsby was instructed to be in readiness to leave Kingston for Niagara as soon as Heathcote arrived there, with the four companies of the 49th. Major General Sheaffe was detailed for staff duty in Upper Canada and Colonel Vincent with the remainder of the 49th was placed under orders to proceed to Kingston as soon as a sufficient number of boats for the movement could be collected at Lachine.†

On August 11, Prevost had again returned to Montreal. Despatches announcing the surrender of Mackinac and the successful

*Baynes to Prevost, August 13 with enclosed report; Baynes to Brock, August 13; Baynes to Brock, August 16.

†Prevost to Brock, July 31; Prevost to Lethbridge, August 8; Prevost to Brock, August, 12.

result of outpost affairs near Amherstburg had been delivered to him on the road. Baynes had not yet returned from Albany, but the copy of a newspaper containing an account of the repeal of the Orders in Council was immediately sent on to Brock with instructions to have handbills with this news printed and distributed, remarking:—“although I much doubt whether this step on the part of our Government will have any effect on that of the United States, the circulation of a paper evincing their conciliatory disposition may tend to increase and strengthen the divisions which subsist among the people upon the subject of war.”*

Baynes arrived next day and Prevost was naturally well satisfied with the result of his mission as he thereby gained time for strengthening his defences and forwarding troops and supplies to Upper Canada. Still Dearborn's conciliatory attitude did not induce him to entertain any extravagant hopes of a speedy termination of the war. Letters were received a few days later from Anthony St. John Baker, the British charge d'affaires in Washington, forwarded by a flag of truce through the lines at Odelltown, reporting that he had been instructed by Mr. Foster to communicate the repeal of the Orders in Council to the American Government and at the same time state that in the event of an agreement to suspend hostilities Admiral Sawyer and Sir John Sherbrooke would postpone judicial proceedings respecting all maritime captures brought into Halifax. Mr. Monroe had replied that his government had the strongest desire not only to terminate hostilities, but to conclude a permanent peace and had already authorised Jonathan Russell, the Minister of the United States, who was still supposed to be in London, to enter into an armistice with that object, but added that the present proposal for a suspension of arms could not be agreed to as it did not appear to be reducible to any practicable form to which the President could give his assent until the result of the overture made through Mr. Russell could be learned and that no decision would be made until then. It is probable that favourable reports of the invasion of Canada by General Hull were expected which might materially improve their position in negotiating.†

Instructions were given to fortify Isle aux Noix as an advanced post and three hundred men from the 1st and 3rd Battalions of Embodied Militia volunteered for this service with the utmost cheerfulness. Sherbrooke forwarded \$50,000 in silver taken in American prizes and a thousand stand of arms from the depot at Halifax: which came to hand very opportunely.‡

*Prevost to Brock, August 12.

†Anthony St. John Baker to Prevost, August 10 and 14.

‡Sherbrooke to Prevost, August 24.

The militia of the Eastern District in Upper Canada continued to show much zeal in the performance of their duties on the frontier and voluntarily built a large blockhouse on a commanding point in the township of Osnabrock, twelve miles above Cornwall, as a general rallying post on the line of communication.

On August 25, the troops stationed in the vicinity of Blairfindie, consisting of a division of field artillery, the battalion of flank companies of regulars, the Canadian Voltigeurs and three battalions of Embodied Militia were reviewed by the Governor-General who expressed much satisfaction at their appearance.*

Late on the evening of August 30, a formal notification from General Dearborn, dated four days before, was received at Montreal, stating his intention to terminate the armistice on the fourth day after delivery as the President had not received any information from London which would justify its continuance.†

Meanwhile the fortifications on Isle aux Noix had made satisfactory progress and three gunboats had been brought up from the St. Lawrence to assist in their defence. A corps of voyageurs had been organized for service on the line of communication, chiefly composed of *engagés* of the Northwest Fur Company, officered by agents and factors, under the command of Lieut. Colonel William McGillivray, the senior partner. Lieut. Colonel Deschambault undertook the organization of a company of Guides. The Iroquois of the Sault St. Louis and St. Regis, generally known as the Seven Nations of Canada, offered their services, which were accepted, and their warriors were ordered to join the cordon of troops on the right bank of the St. Lawrence, thrown forward for the defence of Montreal. Instructions were given to General de Rottenburg, that they should not be allowed to enter the territory of the United States under any circumstances, nor employed offensively unless the province was actually invaded. One hundred and twenty of their warriors under the supervision of Captain G. Lamotte and Interpreters Chenier, de Lorimier and Vassal arrived at St. Philippe on September 16, and were at once attached to the corps of Voltigeurs under Major de Salaberry, who was directed to employ them as piquets and patrols in front and on the flanks of the abatis by which his position was protected.‡

The roads leading to the frontier were obstructed and the bridges destroyed. While de Salaberry's command was thus engaged, it was learned that the enemy's advanced troops were equally busy in taking

*Quebec Mercury.

†Baynes to Brock, August 31.

‡De Rottenburg to Prevost, Sept. 7; Prevost to de Rottenburg, Sept. 9; de Rottenburg to Prevost, Sept. 16; Prevost to de Rottenburg, Sept. 11.

the same precautions on their own side of the boundary, to resist an invasion.*

Reports from secret agents within the American line showed that the concentration of a considerable force was being effected in the vicinity of Plattsburg. This force continued to increase until the end of September when it was estimated at six thousand regulars and volunteers under the command of Brigadier General Bloomfield. Strong advanced posts had been established at Champlain and Chateaugay Four Corners, close to the frontier. Three thousand recruits of the regular army had assembled at the camp of instruction at Greenbush near Albany, where General Dearborn had his headquarters.

The beginning of October was marked by a prolonged period of cold and stormy weather which finally compelled de Rottenburg to place his troops in cantonments equally well designed for rapid concentration in case of a sudden inroad. His force had by that time been augmented to 2,500 regulars and 3,000 militia.†

A letter from Brock reporting that a small force from Amherstburg had been detached to support the Indians who were besieging Fort Wayne, had excited grave doubts as to its expediency.

"Having received information that the revocation of the Orders in Council, the conciliatory disposition shown by His Majesty's Government towards the United States, and the knowledge of the pacific advances made, have produced the best effect upon public opinion so as to render the war extremely unpopular," Prevost wrote in reply, "I should consider it extremely unfortunate if any temptation or provocation should induce you to abandon those defensive operations suited to the present state of the contest, and which, it has become both prudent and politic to persevere in observing.

"I can derive no satisfaction from any result that may attend Captain Muir's movement against Fort Wayne, however favourable to our arms, as it does not accord with my instructions to you, founded on those I have received from the King's Ministers and is not calculated upon the present military resources of this command."‡

His anxiety was at the same time materially increased by information of a general failure of crops throughout the province of Lower Canada which compelled him to act upon the advice of the Executive and proclaim a strict embargo upon the exportation of grain, flour and salt meat.⁴

*Major de Salaberry to his mother, Sept. 10 and 17.

†Prevost to the Duke of York, Oct. 17.

‡Prevost to Brock, Sept. 30.

⁴Brenton to the Chief Justice, Sept. 29.

The energetic efforts of Governor Tompkins of the State of New York to organise and equip the militia of the region bordering on Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence from Oswego to St. Regis were most ably seconded by Brigadier Jacob Brown, the officer commanding that military district. Born in Pennsylvania and educated as a Quaker, Brown had published some clever articles on current events in a newspaper, while employed in teaching school in the city of New York, which attracted the attention of Alexander Hamilton who made him his private secretary during the brief war with France in 1798. Removing soon after with his father to the new settlements near the frontier, they acquired a large tract of land and founded the village of Brownsville some thirty miles from Sackett's Harbour. During the embargo it was more than suspected that he was extensively engaged in the profitable business of smuggling merchandise from Canada in which he gained an intimate knowledge of men and places on both sides of the line which proved of inestimable service to him afterwards. Ambitious, shrewd and energetic, he devoted himself to the duties of his military command with remarkable zeal.*

Oswego, Sackett's Harbour, Cape Vincent, Ogdensburg and Hamilton were designated as points to be strongly occupied. The population of the district exceeded thirty thousand but it was widely scattered and the militia generally were reluctant to serve. All the companies mustered were much below their authorised strength, while several had less than half their complement. The destruction of two small American merchant vessels by their captors in the Thousand Islands spread an extraordinary panic and many families deserted their homes to remove inland. Brown successfully counteracted this movement by travelling from place to place and warning those who were preparing to leave that they must not expect to return as the conquest of Canada was a certainty and their desertion would be remembered and sternly punished. Within two weeks after the declaration of war became known, he had succeeded in assembling two thousand men of whom one half were marched to Ogdensburg with instructions to protect the vessels lying there to the last extremity. They were fairly well supplied with small arms and had three small field guns but possessed scarcely a semblance of training or discipline.†

Woolsey who commanded U. S. brig *Oncida*, prudently remained in port at Sackett's Harbour, where he busied himself with the construction of batteries and the conversion of two merchant schooners into gunboats. On July 19, a British squadron of four sail, including

*Hildreth. History of the United States, Vol. VI, p. 555.

†Tompkins to Brown, June 23, 30, July 7 and 12; Brown to Tompkins, June 25, 26, 29, July 2, 3, 7, 10 and 12.

the new schooner, *Prince Regent*, appeared off the harbour. The crew of a captured boat was sent ashore with a message demanding the surrender of all the shipping lying there, which was refused. A few shots were exchanged at long range with the batteries, apparently without damage on either side, and Earle stood away for the head of the lake, having barely sufficient men to navigate his vessels. He had probably accomplished all he expected by creating a general alarm. Three thousand militia were called out and were so much delighted with the result of the cannonade that the most extravagant reports were put into circulation.*

Still the British ships were able to transport supplies without fear of molestation from Kingston to York and Niagara and this alone was an immense advantage. During the operations which ended in the surrender of Detroit, two of them were stationed at Niagara to assist that flank of the line while the other three went down the lake to protect the movement of troops and stores from Montreal. The *Earl of Moira* and *Duke of Gloucester* descended the river as far as Prescott to enable convoys of bateaux to pass the batteries opposite. Their appearance provoked another panic and the crews of vessels lying at Ogdensburg made preparations for scuttling them. General Van Rensselaer, who had just arrived there on his way to take command at Niagara, called for 120 volunteers from the militia to make a night attack on Prescott but only succeeded in getting half that number, and the project was abandoned.†

A week later the two gunboats fitted out by Woolsey at Sackett's Harbour, sailed down the river and met the British vessels ascending it near Morristown. As the wind was blowing down stream the latter were obliged to hug the Canadian bank and could not beat to windward. Shots were exchanged at long range until dark. The gunboats slipped by in the night and reached Ogdensburg where they took shelter under the batteries. The British vessels were no doubt weakly manned but had they been commanded by competent and energetic officers something of importance might have been accomplished at this time. ‡

All the lake craft blockaded at Ogdensburg were set at liberty by the armistice and promptly removed to Sackett's Harbour to be armed and equipped for war. Ten or twelve slip-keel boats were also fitted out to carry light guns for service in shallow waters.

*John Lovett to Joseph Alexander, Ogdensburg, July 29. "Have seen letters from Sackett's giving a dreadful account of attack there—all froth—barely a few long shots."

†Van Rensselaer to Tompkins, July 23.

‡Brown to Tompkins, August 4; Prevost to Leithbridge, August 11.

Both parties exerted themselves to the utmost during the suspension of hostilities to move troops and stores towards Niagara. In this respect the British still possessed a decided advantage in being able to use sailing vessels while their adversaries were mainly restricted to bateaux and row boats of little burden. The activity with which reinforcements and supplies were being forwarded to Upper Canada greatly impressed General Brown who had excellent opportunities for observation and estimated that at least six hundred boats, averaging five tons each, had passed up the St. Lawrence since the war began.*

On the afternoon of the day the armistice was terminated, the *Royal George* chased some small craft into the mouth of the Genesee, thereby causing considerable alarm. On the 2nd of October her boats actually entered that river and brought out as prizes the schooner *Lady Murray* and a row boat employed as a revenue cutter. A brigade of bateaux loaded with supplies for Fort Niagara, narrowly escaped. During the rest of the season the navigation, all the British armed vessels were actively employed in transporting troops, stores and prisoners of war up and down the lake.

Early in September, the garrison of Sackett's Harbour had been reinforced by a detachment of 150 men from the newly organised 1st United States Rifles, commanded by Captain Benjamin Forsyth, a particularly ambitious and energetic officer, who soon after his arrival planned a blow at the British line of communication between Montreal and Kingston. Gananoqui was selected as the most vulnerable point of attack. Forsyth marched by night to Cape Vincent where he embarked in row boats early on the morning of Sept. 21 and landed shortly after daybreak two miles above the village, which was occupied by a single weak company of the 2nd Regiment of Leeds Militia. Two officers and a dozen men were absent with or without leave. Before reaching the place two dragoons were encountered on their way to Kingston with despatches. One of them was taken but the other escaped and alarmed an outpost which turned out promptly enough and began firing. After a brief skirmish in which four men of the outpost were wounded and Forsyth had one man killed and another wounded, the remainder of the garrison retired across the creek and the bridge was destroyed by the invaders. A storehouse or temporary barracks was burnt and Forsyth reported the capture of twelve prisoners, four of whom were sick in hospital, and the destruction of forty muskets. When this affair became known at Kingston, Lieut. Colonel Robert Nichol, Quartermaster General of militia for Upper Canada, who happened to be there on his way to Montreal, volunteered to lead a force to cut off the retreat of the raiders. In this he was

*Brown to Tompkins, Sept. 17; The War, 1812.

unsuccessful but landed on Burton's Point where he discovered an unfinished blockhouse, which was destroyed with a number of boats.*

The garrison of Ogdensburg also displayed unwonted activity and on the morning of Sept. 16, nearly succeeded in surprising a brigade of thirty-three bateaux loaded with valuable ordnance stores, escorted by 140 men of the 49th and Royal Newfoundland Regiments under Major Heathcote, which was slowly toiling up the river. During the previous night a gunboat and two large Durham boats, descended the river for about ten miles and landed a strong party on a thickly wooded island where they captured the only male inhabitant, a French Canadian named Toussaint, in whose house three men were posted as a guard to prevent the family from giving the alarm, while the remainder concealed themselves among the thickets commanding the channel known as the Upper Narrows, through which the convoy must pass. Soon after daybreak the leading boats came in sight and the guard went to the window to watch their approach. Taking advantage of their negligence, Toussaint stoic quietly out of the house and ran to his canoe. He was observed and fired at but paddled rapidly down stream, shouting and making signals. The flotilla took the alarm and put into a bay below where the boats were moored and part of the escort landed. A messenger was despatched to Prescott and others were sent in various direction to call out the militia. The American gunboat came out from its place of concealment behind the island and began firing round shot at the boats, one of which carried off the head of a soldier of the Newfoundland Regiment. After this cannonade had continued for an hour, two row boats filled with men were seen crossing from the island apparently with the intention of landing troops on the point called Presqu'isle. Thirty men of the escort and a party of militia commanded by Cornet George Ault of the Leeds Dragoons were sent to oppose them and began such an effective fire from the cover of the woods that both boats hastily recrossed the channel, one disappearing behind the island while the other ran ashore on the side within view and was deserted by its crew some of whom were apparently shot in leaving it and seen to fall into the water. Soon after this it drifted down stream and was taken by the British party below. Two dead bodies, nine rifles and some knapsacks were found on board. A flank company of the 1st Grenville Regiment of militia arrived and small parties were attracted from other quarters by the sound of the firing. A field gun was brought down from Prescott and about five o'clock in the afternoon, a British gunboat was seen on its way down the river. The American gunboat then ran behind the island and took off the men

*Brown to Tompkins, Sept. 21; General R. Dodge to Tompkins, Sept. 23; Christie, Military Operations; Albany Argus; York Gazette, 1812.

on shore. Heathcote sent the captured boat to bring off Toussaint's family and made his way through the Narrows under a distant fire from the enemy. He had lost one man killed and another wounded while one or two of the militia were slightly hurt. The Americans admitted a loss of one man killed and five wounded on board their gunboat but were silent with respect to the loss of their other party which was believed to be considerable. Toussaint's wife, probably not a very reliable authority, stated that she had counted twenty men either killed or wounded, on the island alone.*

In compliance with repeated requisitions from General Dearborn, Tompkins had called out two thousand additional militia for service at Sackett's Harbour and one thousand to assemble at Plattsburg. Brown was superseded in command of his district by Major General Richard Dodge, who detailed him with three hundred men including the whole of Forsyth's riflemen, and two field guns to reinforce and take command of the troops at Ogdensburg. Two gunboats were also placed at his disposal to interrupt the communication by water.†

Meanwhile a redoubt of considerable magnitude, which subsequently received the name of Fort Wellington, had been constructed at Prescott and garrisoned with two companies of regular infantry, a detachment of artillery and some local militia. A division of gunboats manned by men of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment and the corps of *royageurs*, was assigned for the protection of navigation of the St. Lawrence between Lachine and Kingston.

The repeated attacks upon the line of communication and the arrival of a considerable reinforcement at Ogdensburg, had the effect of deciding Colonel Lethbridge to make a vigorous effort to drive the enemy from that post and at least diminish their only means of annoyance by depriving them of their most convenient base of operations. With this object he assembled 750 men at Prescott, chiefly militia from the adjacent counties of Leeds and Grenville. Early on the morning of October 4, the greater part of this force was embarked in twenty-five bateaux and attempted to cross the river under cover of the fire of two gunboats and some guns on shore. When these boats were in mid-stream, they came under an effective fire of the American artillery mounted in a redoubt and a log breastwork, which speedily threw them into much confusion and compelled them to make a hasty retreat. Two regulars and one militiaman were killed in the boats and a gun burst on shore by which Captain Hamilton Walker and eight

*Heathcote to Vincent, Oct. 3; P. Finan, *Voyage to Quebec*, pp. 207-222; Christie, *Military Operations*, p. 79; Nile's *Weekly Register*, III, p. 80; Hough, *History of St. Lawrence County, N.Y.*, p. 624.

†Dearborn to Tompkins, August 21; Dodge to Tompkins, Sept. 23.

men were injured. Twelve hundred men were assembled under arms in Ogdensburg to resist this attack. They seem to have sustained no loss. The poor judgment displayed by Colonel Lethbridge on this occasion, following close upon other mistakes, led to his speedy relief by Lieut. Colonel Pearson.*

Late in September an American post was established at the French Mills, near the mouth of Salmon River and occupied by a small battalion of New York Volunteers, commanded by Major Guilford Dudley Young. Efforts were made about the same time by William Gray, an Indian interpreter in the service of the United States to gain over the St. Regis Indians in consequence of which Colonel Louis, who had held a commission in the Continental army in the Revolution, with two other chiefs and several warriors, actually joined the American forces at Plattsburg.

To counteract the influence of Gray and watch the movements of the enemy in this quarter, one company from the corps of *Voyageurs*, commanded by Captain John Macdonnell, and consisting of three officers and forty-seven men was directed to occupy the Indian village at St. Regis close to the frontier, with instructions to repel any predatory incursion, inspire confidence in the inhabitants and ensure their good conduct and fidelity. Macdonnell was carefully directed to abstain from offensive action and from giving any provocation to the enemy but as agents and spies were reported to have been intriguing with the Indians for some time with the object of seducing them from their allegiance he was directed to arrest any suspicious persons found within the province.†

All the warriors residing in the Canadian village, except three, had already joined the British forces at St. Philippe, but a number of those known as American Indians still remained at their homes on the other side of the boundary. Macdonnell arrived at St. Regis on October 16 and within a few days was warned that an attack on his command was contemplated and advised to occupy a position on an island in the river, where he would be tolerably safe. This he refused to do as it was contrary to his instructions. Before dawn on the morning of the 23rd, his post was so quietly surrounded by four companies of the force stationed at Salmon River commanded by Major Young and guided by Gray, that the first intimation of their approach was given by a volley fired through the windows of the building occupied as headquarters, the interior of which was brightly illuminated by a fire of pine logs blazing on the hearth. Lieut. Joseph Rototte,

*Prevost to Brock, Oct. 16; Christie, *Mil. Oper.* 50; Niles's *Weekly Register*, III. p. 126; *The War*, I. 76; Hough, *Hist. St. Lawrence Co.*, 625.

†Baynes to Macdonnell, Oct. 16.

Sergeant McGillivray and six men were killed, and Lieut. William Hall and several privates were wounded before they could seize their arms. Not a shot was fired in reply. The two surviving officers and thirty-seven men with the Indian agent, M. Louvigny de Montigny, were made prisoners. A flag belonging to the agent, was carried off as a trophy and falsely described in the officials report as a stand of colours.*

These trifling successes were as usual considerably exaggerated by the American newspapers and had an inspiring influence on their troops along the whole frontier.

Having deliberately decided to reject the proposals for an armistice, the American cabinet at the same time determined to undertake the most energetic measures to obtain command of Lakes Ontario and Champlain. On the last day of August the Secretary of the Navy addressed a letter to Captain Isaac Chauncey, directing him "to assume command of the naval forces on Lakes Erie and Ontario, and to use every exertion to obtain control of them this fall."* As Chauncey had been in charge of the navy yard at New York for the preceding four years he had a perfect knowledge of the resources of the main depot from which he would be obliged to draw his supplies. He was then forty years of age, in robust health, a practical seaman of much experience, and particularly well versed in the art of ship building. He was vested with great authority and instructed "to use all the means which he might judge essential to accomplish the wishes of the government." The crew of the frigate *John Adams*, which had been condemned as unfit for service, was placed under his command, and he was authorized to enlist volunteers both at New York and Boston.†

Nearly a month later, Lieut. Thomas Macdonough was appointed to the command of the naval force on Lake Champlain, and Chauncey was directed to supply him with seamen. As a midshipman, Macdonough had proved his worth in the Tripolitan war, and had been in charge of the navy yard at Portland for some time.

Chauncey entered upon the execution of his orders with much zeal and activity. Within three weeks he was able to report that he had despatched to Lake Ontario, 140 ship carpenters, 700 seamen and marines, and more than one hundred pieces of cannon, chiefly of large calibre, besides a great quantity of naval stores. Unfortunately for him, these facts were also announced with commendable accuracy in the principal newspapers.‡

*Young to Bloomfield, Oct. 24; Jacques Viger, *Prise de St. Regis*, *Recherches Historiques*, V. 141; Christie, *Mil. Oper.* 53.

†Hamilton to Chauncey, August 31.

‡Chauncey to Hamilton, Sept. 26; Niles's Weekly Register, V. 127 and 142-3.

On October 6, Chauncey arrived at Sackett's Harbour accompanied by the zealous governor of the State who never lost an opportunity of rendering assistance. The *Oneida* was completely ready for service and five of the purchased schooners were in a condition to receive their armament when it arrived. An officer was at once despatched to Oswego to buy four more lying there, and as the autumn rains had already made the roads nearly impassable, the seamen in charge of the guns and stores coming from New York were directed to alter their route to that port by way of Lake Oneida and its outlet. These schooners were all stoutly built craft ranging in size from seventy to one hundred tons, and although unprovided with bulwarks, were well adapted to carry one or two long heavy guns, mounted on circles, to which, American naval officers of that day were so partial. The construction of a large corvette and two large gunboats was well advanced.

Macdonough arrived at Plattsburg on October 13, but decided to establish his naval base at Whitehall, where it would be less subject to espionage or attack, and stores from the seaboard could be delivered more conveniently. There he began fitting out two small sloops which he armed with seven guns each and named the *Eagle* and *Grouler*, and two row galleys each carrying a long twelve pounder. The men Chauncey had been required to send him, failed to arrive, but after some delay he was joined by four officers and twenty-two seamen from New York. He was accordingly compelled to complete his crews with soldiers and landsmen. The sloop *President* had already been armed with eight guns and manned by an indifferent crew under instructions from the War Department, and her commander, an officer of the quartermaster general's department, refused to obey Macdonough's orders, in which course he was sustained by General Dearborn. He was consequently deprived of control of the largest and best equipped vessel on the lake, which he complained "was placed in the hands of those who knew not what to do with her." Three other sloops were fitted out as transports.*

Fairly accurate reports of these preparations soon reached Prevost. On October 17, he wrote urgent letters both to the Duke of York and the Secretary of War, in which he referred to the recent attempts of the enemy to interrupt his communications with Upper Canada and the "uncommon exertions" they were making to obtain a superiority of force on Lakes Erie and Ontario, the command of which had been of so great an advantage to him, and his inability to provide the vessels of the Provincial Marine with competent officers and adequate crews. He had indeed detailed the Royal Newfoundland Regiment for service on the lakes and the Quartermaster General had

*Macdonough to the Secretary of the Navy. Oct. 14 and 16, and Dec. 20.

succeeded in enlisting a few sailors of inferior quality at Quebec, but he was obliged to state that "the officers are in general deficient in experience and particularly in that energetic spirit which distinguishes British seamen. In consequence it will be highly necessary in the event of the continuance of the war with America that tried officers of the rank of lieutenants and trusty men from the navy should be appropriated for that service and sent to me as early as possible next spring."*

When definite information of the declaration of war was received in London, the Admiralty with little delay decided to consolidate the all ships of war on the Halifax, Jamaica and Leeward Islands stations into a single command to secure unity of action and Admiral Sir John Borlase Warren was selected for this most important appointment. He was nearly sixty years of age and besides having had a distinguished service at sea, had represented his country with credit on a special mission to the court of St. Petersburg and was believed to possess considerable talents as a diplomat. His secret instructions were dated on August 6; he sailed a week later but did not arrive at Halifax until September 20. Before leaving England he wrote a letter to Prevost which he entrusted for delivery to Lieut. Colonel Cecil Bisschopp, who had accompanied him to Russia, and was then on his way to Canada to fill a staff appointment. In this letter Warren intimated that he might be able to supply officers and seamen for service on the lakes. Prevost received it on October 19. Next day he replied.

"So sensible have I been of the importance of maintaining our naval superiority on the lakes that I have made repeated representations on the subject to H.M. Ministers. So anxious is the Gov't of the U. States of the necessity of acquiring the command of those sheets of water that uncommon exertions are making both on Lake Erie and Lake Ontario to obtain an object so essential to their future measures against Upper Canada. Do you consider yourself authorized to afford me the aid you suggest? If you do, I will most readily receive it, and doubt not its enabling me to preserve a superiority which might otherwise decline."†

Warren had been instructed to propose that the Government of the United States in consequence of the revocation of the Orders in Council which they had so long urged, should now recall their declaration of war and agree to an armistice and a peaceful settlement of all points in dispute. In case this proposal was accepted, he was authorised to stop all hostilities and give an assurance on behalf of his government that the same action would be taken in all parts of the world.

*Prevost to Bathurst, Oct. 17; Prevost to the Duke of York, Oct. 17.

†Warren to Prevost, Portsmouth, August 11; Prevost to Warren, Oct. 20.

If this was rejected and "a desire should manifest itself in any considerable part of the American Union, especially in those States bordering upon His Majesty's North American dominions to return to their relations of peace and amity with this country," he was directed to encourage it, and if overtures were made to him for a cessation of hostilities with that part of the United States alone, he was authorized to agree to it and enter into an arrangement for the renewal of commercial intercourse with the States concerned.*

A flag of truce was accordingly despatched to New York with a proposal for a suspension of hostilities to be succeeded by negotiations for a treaty of peace. But as the terms proposed included a recall of letters of marque and the withdrawal of American troops from British territory, Warren was obliged to admit that he expected the answer would certainly be in the negative. "It is really extraordinary," he remarked, "that our friends at home in consequence of Mr. Foster's representations and others will so long not have believed that the war was actually going on." He advised Prevost to repair and occupy Fort Cumberland in Nova Scotia, and added that he had detached two sail of the line to accompany a convoy with some troops into the St. Lawrence.†

Ten days later he wrote that he had despatched a sloop or war with 100 men of the 100th Regiment with instructions to land them at Bic or as high up the river as the ship could venture at that advanced season "from a perfect conviction of your having occasion for all the troops you can muster." He intended to leave a senior officer with a strong detachment of frigates and several sloops and schooners in the Bay of Fundy for the defence of the coast and would sail for Bermuda on November 20 to assemble there all the ships of the line in his command.‡

Monroe's reply to his proposal, although dated at Washington on October 27, was not delivered to Warren at Halifax until November 13. The President, Monroe wrote, was anxious to restore peace, and had at the very moment war was declared, instructed his representative in London, to make proposals with that object. But the abandonment of the practice of impressment from American ships was an indispensable condition. If that were agreed to, he would undertake that in future British seamen would be excluded from the naval and merchant service of the United States. In any event impressment from American vessels must be discontinued during the proposed armistice. "It cannot be presumed, while the parties are engaged in a negotiation to

*Castlereagh to the Lords of the Admiralty, August 6 and 12.

†Warren to Prevost, Oct. 10.

‡Warren to Prevost, Oct. 20.

adjust amicably this important difference, that the United States would admit the right or acquiesce in the practice of the opposite party, or that Great Britain would be unwilling to restrain her cruisers from a practice that would have the strongest tendency to defeat the negotiations." Warren considered that this answer precluded any further discussion as it "refused an armistice prior to entering into the several points set forth in their declaration of war, unless I was to acquiesce in their opinions relative to the material objects upon which their complaints are grounded." *

By the same ship he received a copy of the President's message to Congress which he remarked "breathes sentiments of the most inveterate kind and of active warfare and more particularly stating his intentions of obtaining a *naval superiority on the lakes*, having already employed people for that purpose. Can you not, "he wrote to Prevost," under these circumstances from the *absolute necessity* of the case, take upon you to direct a ship of 38 guns, one of 20 and two of 18 in addition to your present force? They might be completed by your Montreal and Quebec carpenters and ready by the spring. I will state in the strongest terms in my power that unless the *superiority upon the lakes* is preserved the Indian force will be destroyed and your means of defence circumscribed for Lower Canada and that I earnestly hope, trust and require that the Government will give immediate orders for the purpose and for sending a post captain and 3 or 4 masters and commanders with 4 or 500 *seamen* to be conveyed to Quebec in the spring together with cannonades and sails for the ships to be placed under your command." He suggested that troops and stores might be forwarded overland from New Brunswick to Quebec during the winter, but made no reference to a loan of officers and seamen from his fleet. He added that he had represented to the Admiralty the absolute necessity of being permitted to undertake some enterprise against the southern seaboard of the United States with troops and ships from Bermuda, as a diversion in Prevost's favour. When this letter arrived at Quebec the winter had set in with much severity and it seemed most improbable that any further invasion would be attempted before spring.†

When the armistice terminated Dearborn received instructions to resume his preparations for an advance upon Montreal in which Chauncey was designed to co-operate by gaining command of Lake Ontario and threatening Kingston. One of his first measures was to secure accurate and circumstantial information of the numbers and distribution of the troops likely to be opposed to him. The officer employed for this purpose was more than usually successful sanguinely and reported

*Warren to Prevost, Nov. 14.

†Warren to Prevost, Nov. 16.

besides that he felt certain that a force of three thousand regulars and six thousand militia ought to take Montreal with little difficulty in a few days after advancing from Plattsburg. Dearborn was so much elated by this information that he began to talk most confidently of making this conquest before winter set in. Requisitions for the number of militia considered necessary were passed to the Governors of New York and Vermont and the movement of regulars from Greenbush to Plattsburg began. But the militia as usual were extremely slow in assembling and their numbers were much below what had been required. Efforts were then made to enlist a body of Indians and a call was addressed to the Six Nations residing in the State of New York. In reply the wily chiefs expressed their surprise and disappointment that after having been repeatedly advised to remain neutral, that they were now invited to take up arms, yet they were willing to comply, but it was necessary that they should be distinctly informed what was required of them, otherwise "they were afraid that some of their young men might disperse among distant tribes and become hostile."*

By the beginning of October nearly eight thousand men had been assembled in the vicinity of Plattsburg with a considerable train of artillery. Five sloops had been purchased or hired as transports and 150 bateaux constructed to assist in the movement of troops and baggage. Bad weather then delayed the contemplated advance for several weeks and indeed rendered it well nigh impracticable.†

As at that season of the year the Richelieu river and the road following its course seemed to be the only possible routes for an invading force of any considerable magnitude, the military post that had been established on Isle aux Noix constituted a serious obstacle in its path. The island was low and flat and not more than fifteen hundred yards by four hundred in extreme width. The channel between the island and the right bank of the river had been obstructed by a sliding boom securely anchored. The other narrower channel had been closed by chevaux de frise. The fortifications consisted of an ir-

*Memo. from Colonel Thorne, dated August, 1812: "There are 300 militia and 60 regulars at St. John; 800 regulars at the Halfway House between Laprairie and St. John, of the 49th and 100th Regiments; 16 pieces of artillery and 400 militia at Laprairie; about 50 at L'Acadie and 20 at Odelltown, 2½ miles from the line as a guard. Part of the 103rd, say 300 or 400 arrived Aug. 6 at Laprairie; the 1st Royals have just landed at Quebec, very sickly, 300 strong only. There are three small gunboats at Laprairie just brought from Quebec and thirty others at Quebec and they are hauling three up the rapids at Chambly for use on Lake Champlain. There are 460 Glengaries and 200 voltigeurs and militia and a few regulars at Chambly. On Aug. 5, 400 regulars passed Montreal on their way to Upper Canada."

Speech of deputies in Council at Onondaga, Signed by Canastote and fifteen other chiefs.

†Albany Argus. 1812.

regular earthwork on the west side of the island, a tolerably strong redoubt on its east side, and south of these, a third redoubt, whose guns were placed to enfilade the main channel of the river as far as the first bend at Mill Point. The banks in the vicinity were low and swampy, and had been cleared of trees and brush within effective artillery range. The garrison was composed of three hundred men, half of them being regulars of the 8th Regiment, commanded by Major Cotton. Two small gunboats were stationed at the island to assist in the defence.*

On either side of the road leading along the river, the country for several miles was densely wooded and so nearly impenetrable that deserters, who had attempted to make their escape through it, had generally failed and been captured. The inhabitants in general were strongly prejudiced against the Americans whom they commonly referred to as "les sacrés Bastonais," and their clergy to a man were actively loyal.†

After all preparations for the advance were practically complete, it was decided to delay it for a few days longer until the armed vessels could be made ready to co-operate in an attack on Isle aux Noix. As a consequence the naval demonstration on Lake Ontario, which had been intended to be simultaneous, actually began two weeks earlier. At noon on November 2, a strange sail was reported in Henderson's Harbour, seven miles distant from Sackett's, and Chauncey not unnaturally became apprehensive for the safety of his guns and stores, which were due to arrive from Oswego by water that day. At dark he ran out in the *Oneida* in the hope of being able to intercept the hostile vessel on her return to Kingston. The night turned rainy and became extremely dark with occasional squalls. When day broke, the *Oneida* was six miles from Kingston and the *Royal George* accompanied by two schooners was discovered lying at anchor five miles to windward. Chauncey remained in sight of these vessels for four hours without attracting their notice and then stood southward in the direction of Oswego, returning along the coast on the 4th to his port, where he was joined within the next two days by four schooners bringing an indispensable supply of ordnance and naval stores.‡

Surmising that the three British vessels seen off Kingston were bound for Niagara with troops, he made all possible haste to take the lake again with the *Oneida* and six of his largest schooners armed

*Baynes to Brock, Sept. 10; Nicholas, Hist. of Royal Marines.

†Gray, Letters from Canada; Letter in the *Aurora* of Philadelphia, dated Plattsburg, Oct. 11.

‡Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Nov. 4 and 6.

with forty guns of different calibres and manned by 430 seamen and marines exclusive of officers, with the intention of awaiting their return off the False Ducks, a small group of islands near the Canadian coast. Although he decidedly overestimated the strength of the force likely to be opposed to him, he entertained little doubt of success in any encounter with it, after which, he contemplated an attack on Kingston.*

Sailing from Sackett's Harbour on the 8th, the *Royal George* was seen alone on the following afternoon and chased into the Bay of Quinte. Alternate squalls and calms favoured her escape and she was eventually lost to view when night fell. The *Hamilton* was detached to burn the schooner *Two Brothers* lying at Fairfield's shipyard at Ernestown. Next morning the *Royal George* was again desisted entering the narrow channel leading to Kingston and the chase was resumed.

The appearance of a squadron of hostile vessels in the Bay of Quinte had been reported during the night to Colonel John Vincent of the 49th Regiment, who had assumed command of the garrison about two months before. Since his arrival several batteries had been constructed for the protection of the port on which some twenty guns were mounted, the largest being nine pounders. The garrison was composed of sixteen men of the Royal Artillery with two field guns under command of a lieutenant; two companies of the 49th, numbering about 100 of all ranks; two companies of the 10th Royal Veteran Battalion, 104 of all ranks, and about four hundred militia, including some boys under twelve years of age and several old men who had borne arms during the American Revolution. The whole force was placed under arms and the batteries were manned before daybreak as reports of formidable naval preparations at Sackett's Harbour had already been received.

After escorting the *Maira* and *Simcoe* some distance up the lake, the *Royal George* had remained out until she fell in with the American squadron. Her commander, Captain Hugh Earle, was indeed an experienced navigator, having served in the Provincial Marine since 1792, but evidently lacked the professional knowledge and skill to handle his ship in action. His crew consisted of less than twenty seamen of all classes and sixty men of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, nominally serving as marines but assisting to work the vessel when occasion required. Recognising the impossibility of contending with success against a force manifestly so superior, Earle lost no time in seeking protection in his port. The ship was moored between the two principal

*Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Nov. 6.

batteries and detachments of troops supported by the field guns were detailed to occupy the most likely places for landing.*

Some hours were prudently occupied by Chauncey in making a personal reconnaissance. At two o'clock in the afternoon, the *Oneida* set her topgallant sails, and the whole squadron led by four schooners armed with the heaviest long guns, steered directly for the harbour's mouth. A gunboat lying in Collins's Bay and a fieldpiece on Everett's Point fired at them without any apparent effect as they swept past. At three o'clock the batteries on either side of the entrance began firing on the leading schooner which went through untouched, followed in quick succession by three other schooners and the brig and at a much greater interval by the two remaining schooners. Ten minutes later a gun burst on the *Pert* at its third discharge, wounding her commander, a midshipman, and three seamen. This accident put her out of action for the rest of the day, and in going about, the wounded officer was knocked overboard and drowned. The signal "engage closer" was made from the flagship and several of the squadron came within easy range of the *Royal George* and protecting batteries, upon which they opened fire simultaneously with much vigour. At four o'clock the *Royal George* slipped her moorings and was hauled in close to the wharf. Firing continued until sunset when the American vessels hauled off in succession and beat out of the harbour to an anchorage under Four Mile Point where they remained over night. The *Royal George* lost one man killed, a thirty-two pound shot lodged in her hull and her rigging was much cut up. The *Oneida* had one seaman killed; three others wounded and one gun dismounted; the *Hamilton* had a gun disabled; the *Julia* had one man wounded; a round shot passed through the magazine of the *Grouler* without causing any explosion. All of these vessels suffered some injury to their spars and rigging.†

No damage of any consequence was done to the batteries on shore as the fire of the assailants was chiefly directed against the *Royal George* in the hope of destroying her. During the action 230 militia came in from the adjoining country whom Vincent was unable to arm.‡

As the American squadron worked its way out of the port, the little schooner *Mary Hall*, from Niagara, ran into its midst and was taken. The wind blew hard in squalls all night and Chauncey's chief pilot anxiously warned him to seek safety at a greater distance from shore. At daybreak he made sail and beat out into the lake. Some

*Sheaffe to Prevost, Nov. 8; Vincent to Sheaffe, Nov. 11.

†Vincent to Sheaffe, Nov. 11; Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Nov. 13; letter from an American officer in the *Statesman* of New York, Nov. 23; letter in the *Quebec Mercury*, Dec. 8. Finan, *Voyage to Quebec*, pp. 235-241.

‡Vincent to Sheaffe, Nov. 11.

hours later a sail was seen which proved to be the *Simcoe* returning from Niagara. She was immediately chased by three of the schooners, who succeeded in coming within effective range and pelted her with round shot. She escaped by running over a reef into the harbour whither her pursuers dared not follow. A lucky shot then pierced her hull between wind and water and she sank within a few yards of shore where she was easily raised.

The gale continued to increase in violence and forced Chauncey to return to port on the night of the 12th. He began at once to take in guns and stores for the army on the Niagara, feeling confident that he could sail to any part of the lake without fear of molestation. Next day the *Governor Tompkins* came in with another prize, the merchant schooner *Elizabeth*, and information that she had sighted the *Moira* near the Ducks. Chauncey weighed anchor in the midst of a blinding snow storm and stood away for Kingston once more in the hope of intercepting her, and actually sighted her just as she was entering that harbour. He was driven back to port by another gale but as soon as the wind fell, sent out four of his schooners with instructions to cruise off the Ducks in the track of vessels passing between Kingston and York, and having repaired the *Pert* and armed two more schooners declared his readiness to transport troops or stores to any part of the lake. He professed to be perfectly satisfied with the results of his cruises although they certainly fell far short of his original expectations. Still he had inflicted considerable damage and given a great scare to the garrison of Kingston.*

Vincent became so anxious to gain information of his movements that he resorted to the transparent expedient of sending over a flag of truce to ask for the release of Captain Brock, paymaster of the 49th and brother of the deceased General, who had been captured in one of the prizes. This was granted but Brock was merely able to confirm the report "previously received through several channels of the activity of the enemy in preparing the most formidable means of establishing superiority on the lakes."

Chauncey sailed again on November 19, apparently in the hope of falling in with the *Prince Regent* which had been busily employed for several weeks in conveying troops and stores between York and Niagara. He was driven back to port by a storm which dismasted the *Grouler*.†

On November 26 his new corvette, the *Madison*, was successfully launched. He boasted with pardonable pride that this vessel had

*Chauncey to Tompkins, Nov. 15; Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Nov. 17; Sheaffe to Prevost, Nov. 23.

†Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Nov. 26.

been built in the remarkably short period of forty-five days out of green timber freshly cut in the neighboring woods.*

The fact that he had gained command of the lake, even for a few weeks, was sufficient to excite the most serious apprehensions for the future in Upper Canada where there was already a considerable scarcity of such necessary articles as flour and salt. The Executive Council of the province met at York on November 17 and unanimously adopted an address to General Sheaffe, stating their fears and expressing the opinion that it was absolutely necessary for the defence and preservation of the country to regain the naval superiority. Sheaffe assured them that every effort would be made that his local resources would afford and informed Prevost that "it would require exertions of the most energetic kind to contend with the enemy for the ascendancy on the lakes." †

The attack on Kingston became known to Prevost at Quebec on November 14. Captain Gray was at once ordered to proceed to that post in charge of a brigade of boats laden with artillery stores, accompanied by an escort composed of one company of the Glengarry Light Infantry and small detachments, not exceeding altogether one hundred of all ranks, as a meagre reinforcement for the garrison. Two other companies of the Glengarry corps, which had been under orders to march to Upper Canada for some time, were unavoidably detained at Montreal owing to the very threatening attitude of the American forces on the Champlain frontier. ‡

Gray was directed to relieve Lieut. Colonel Myers in charge of the Provincial Marine in Upper Canada and begin the construction of two ships at once.

Prevost took advantage of this event to reiterate and emphasize his demand for officers and men from the Royal Navy in a letter to the Secretary of War, whom he informed that he had already given orders for building two vessels during the winter for service on Lake Ontario, at the same time quoting that part of the President's message referring to the efforts he was making to gain command of the lakes. It was next to impossible to find a military officer qualified to superintend the construction of ships of war and to direct naval operations with success and he recommended that the Provincial Marine should be converted into a naval establishment controlled by the Navy Board and supplied with properly qualified officers. "Until this measure is adopted," he concluded, "I fear no exertions which I can make will render that part of the force under my command

*Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Nov. 26; Gray to Prevost, Dec. 3.

†Sheaffe to Prevost, Nov. 23; Sheaffe to the Executive Council, Nov. 24.

‡Prevost to Sheaffe, Nov. 15; Prevost to Bathurst, Nov. 21.

as efficient as it ought to be or essential for aiding in the defence of Upper Canada."*

When first organized the Embodied Militia had been brought together by battalions in camps of instruction at Pointe Levi, Pointe aux Trembles, Berthier and Laprairie. In July the 8th Battalion from Pointe aux Trembles and the 3rd from Berthier were advanced to Laprairie and St. Jean to strengthen the advanced line of defence for the protection of Montreal. The term of ninety days for which they had been originally embodied would expire on August 15. When the armistice was announced many men belonging to all of these battalions openly declared their intention of returning to their homes on that day as they presumed there would be no further need for their services. As soon as this disposition became known to Prevost he took measures to inform them that in the event of invasion or insurrection, the law authorized him to retain them for one year, and if peace was not yet assured, they would be required to remain embodied. Many copies of the act were accordingly distributed among them and as a precaution a considerable body of regulars were moved into the vicinity of their quarters. No inclination to disband was apparent among those stationed at either St. Jean or Laprairie, but on the evening of August 14, Lt. Colonel Taschereau, commanding the 4th Battalion at Pointe Levi, made a demand for the support of a body of regular troops next morning, in case of disorder. The flank companies of the Royal Scots and a detachment of Royal Artillery with a field gun crossed the river during the night. At daybreak the battalion was paraded without arms, and information was obtained that one of their number and a habitant had been advising them to disperse, saying that there was no American war, and that it was all a device of the government to get them to become soldiers. These men were at once arrested.†

The abrupt termination of the armistice was followed by repeated manifestations of a good spirit among all classes of the militia. Late in September Prevost made a careful inspection of the advanced positions. An order to be on the alert being sent to Major Voyer, commanding the 1st Battalion of Embodied Militia, and delivered to him at midnight, was misinterpreted to mean that the enemy were approaching. His battalion was instantly placed under arms with the greatest alacrity and the light companies pushed forward several miles before the mistake was discovered. Going a few days later to inspect the Sedentary Militia of the district at Chateauguay, where he expected to find not more than 1,500 men assembled, the Governor

*Prevost to Bathurst, Nov. 21.

A. W. Cochran to Rev'd Dr. Cochran, August 17.

was agreeably surprised to find nearly twice that number and to learn that the habitants had received in the most hospitable manner a company of the 5th Regiment, which had been billeted among them and desired that it should be allowed to remain. In some localities the militia had refused to accept the arms provided for them, but in others they were cheerfully taking lessons in drill after their day's work was done.*

A flag of truce arrived from General Dearborn with a proposal for an exchange of prisoners of war and a considerable sum of money for the subsistence of the American officers and men already sent to Quebec. The officer with the money was allowed to visit Quebec and Prevost took advantage of the opportunity thus presented to despatch Captain Robert McDouall, one of his aides, to Plattsburg, ostensibly with a reply, but really in the expectation that he would thus be able to secure definite and reliable information as to the strength and probable movements of the force being collected there. McDouall had actually advanced fourteen miles into the enemy's territory when he was peremptorily detained and marched back under guard to the advanced post at Champlain. He then obtained permission to write a letter to General Bloomfield explaining his mission, but while waiting for an answer he was kept under guard with an officer detailed to eat, drink and sleep in the same room. Bloomfield replied that he must return to Canada at once. This evidence of extraordinary vigilance combined with reports of unusual activity at Plattsburg, decided the Governor to remain at Montreal instead of returning to Quebec as he had intended.†

Secret agents for the purpose of gaining information had been engaged on both sides of the frontier. One of these, named McLean, had indeed been arrested at Champlain, early in July, and committed for trial. His apprehension, however, did not deter others from supplying information. During the first week of October, a spy arrived in Montreal who reported that he had been in the American camp for the past three weeks actually living with their men. He brought with him several newspapers of recent date, and furnished circumstantial estimates of the strength and composition of their forces, based on personal observation.‡

Towards the end of the month, the weather became fine and a report was received that the enemy had determined on an immediate

*Major C. M. de Salaberry to Lt. Col. Louis de Salaberry; A. W. Cochran to Rev'd Dr. Cochran, Oct. 10.

†A. W. Cochran to Rev'd Dr. Cochran, Oct. 10

‡General de Rottenburg to Prevost, July 14; A. W. Cochran to Rev'd Dr. Cochran, Oct. 10.

attack. Prevost visited the advanced posts once more and assured Major de Salaberry that he was perfectly satisfied with his arrangements and that he might act according to his own judgment in case of an attack.*

On the 1st of November, de Salisbury received a letter from a secret agent residing within the American lines that an offensive movement would be commenced next day on three separate routes. This information was probably based on the fact that they had established advanced posts at Champlain, Chateauguay Four Corners and French Mills. The letter was forwarded to headquarters and de Salaberry lost no time in calling out five hundred men of the local Sedentary Militia which increased his force to about 1200 including two hundred Indians. The remainder of the Voltigeurs, with two companies of the 1st Battalion of Embodied Militia and the chasseurs of L'Acadie, St. Philippe and St. Pierre were moved forward to support the outposts of the Odelltown road. The 2nd Battalion was advanced from Laprairie to St. Philippe. Going forward in person to examine the road where it crossed the river Lacolle for the purpose of completing its obstruction, accompanied by a working party and a small escort of chasseurs and Indians, de Salaberry encountered a flag of truce borne by two American officers who informed him that they had a despatch from General Dearborn for Sir George Prevost. Suspecting that their real object was to reconnoitre the road and the state of his defences, he resolutely refused to allow them to proceed.†

Dearborn had in fact determined to make a vigorous demonstration against Montreal probably in the hope of preventing the movement of reinforcements to Upper Canada and thus assisting indirectly in the operations being undertaken against that province, for it seems hardly credible that he could have expected to accomplish more at that advanced season. On November 10, he removed his headquarters to Plattsburg and took command of the force rather pompously styled the Army of the North. A general order was published announcing the retirement of General Bloomfield on account of ill health and intimating an intention of taking the offensive. A spy estimated his force at 4,512 regulars, of whom five hundred were cavalry, and 4,000 militia, of whom 2,400 had definitely declared that they would not cross the line. Three sloops of war, two gunboats and upwards of one hundred boats had been assembled in the mouth of the river Chazy, which afforded a safe anchorage in close proximity to the frontier. On November 16, the advance began, but a march of only five miles was

*Major C. M. de Salaberry to Lt. Col. Louis de Salaberry, Oct. 26.

†Prevost to Major de Salaberry, Nov. 1; Major C. M. de Salaberry to Lt. Col. Louis de Salaberry, Nov. 13.

accomplished that day and Dearborn encamped at Rouse's Point. A report that ten thousand men were advancing by the Odelltown road reached de Salaberry at St. Philippe next morning. The outposts on the Lacolle river were strongly reinforced. Troops from Laprairie were moved forward to L'Acadie, St. Philippe and St. Pierre. The Montreal brigade composed of two companies of the Royal Scouts, seven of the 8th or King's Regiment, five of the Glengarry Light Infantry, four of the Montreal Volunteer Militia, the Fifth Battalion of Embodied militia, Platt's troop of volunteer cavalry and a brigade of light artillery under the command of Colonel Baynes crossed to Laprairie and the town guard was taken over by the 1st Battalion of Montreal militia.

For three days Dearborn's force remained inactive. If his scouts crossed the frontier during that time they must have evaded observation. On the morning of November 20, Captain William McKay of the corps of *royageurs*, who was officer of the day at Lacolie, went forward as usual shortly before daybreak to visit the outlying piquet on the edge of the woods near Odelltown. This piquet consisted of twenty-four men of the 1st Battalion of Embodied Militia and fifteen Indians under Captain Bernard Panet. As McKay approached its post, he distinctly heard a body of men fording the stream and voices of others moving about in the woods and cocking their muskets. He hastened forward to give the alarm. The piquet had barely time to turn out when a volley was discharged at such close range that it set fire to the roof of the guard hut but did no further injury. The men of the piquet fired a few shots in reply and then made their escape so quickly and quietly in the darkness that it was unobserved by their assailants who had already fallen into considerable confusion.

The American troops detailed to surprise the British outposts on this occasion was divided into two separate and independent columns, one composed of the regiments of regular infantry commanded by Colonels Pike and Clark, who were considered their ablest officers, and a troop of cavalry, numbering in all about six hundred and fifty men; the other consisting of three hundred volunteers and militia, selected with great care and including a considerable part of the battalion lately engaged in the successful raid on St. Regis. Having advanced by different roads they came into collision, each column mistaking the other for the enemy in the dark. They kept up a brisk fire until daylight when the mistake was discovered. Meanwhile the guard-house had been entirely destroyed by the flames and the inmates, if they had not perished in it, as Pike at first surmised, had utterly vanished. The men of both columns were greatly fatigued by their night march and dispirited by its outcome. Pike accordingly deter-

mined to return to the camp and the retreat was accomplished in such haste that five wounded men were left behind in the woods where they were found and made prisoners by the Indians. Their total loss was unofficially reported to amount to two killed, thirteen wounded and five missing. Some forty deaths from disease contracted on the expedition were subsequently added to the account. Several deserters came into the British advanced posts within a few days and gave the usual exaggerated accounts of the affair in which they represented that more than fifty men had been killed or wounded.*

At best Dearborn could scarcely have expected to accomplish more than the surprise of an unimportant outpost but the actual result was most disastrous to the morale of his troops already much weakened by sickness and unpleasant weather. Three thousand militia had been induced to advance as far as Rouse's Point but two-thirds of them had positively refused to enter Canada. One company had actually accompanied Pike's force to the boundary and then declined to go further.†

The movement from Plattsburg had been made in sufficient strength to indicate that a serious invasion was contemplated, and on November 22, Prevost published a general order warning the whole of the militia of the province to be in readiness for active service. Colonel John Murray was directed to advance on the Odelltown road with a company of the 8th and 300 men of Cuthbert's battalion of militia. Lieut. Colonel Deschambault crossed the river from Lachine to Caughnawaga with the battalions from Pointe Claire, Riviere du Chene, Vaudreuil and Longue Point and marched to L'Acadie. The sight of several hundreds of prisoners belonging to the regular army of the United States, taken at Detroit at Queenston, passing down the St. Lawrence on their way to Quebec had done much to reanimate the confidence of the people and the sedentary militia assembled with unmistakable alacrity and good will. The opportune arrival of a transport from England with a large supply of muskets and accoutrements furnished the means of arming and equipping many of them who were quartered in the villages near Montreal. Prevost was no doubt fully justified in declaring that "the whole population manifests the most cheering spirit of loyalty and the most animated determination to oppose with all their might the entrance of the American army into Canada." ‡

*Prevost to Bathurst, Nov. 21; Prevost to the Duke of York, Nov. 30; Christie, *History of Canada*, Vol. II, pp. 52-3; Whiting, *Life of Pike*; *Canadian Courant*, 1812; *Quebec Mercury*, 1812.

†Ingersoll, *History of the War*, I, p. 121.

‡Prevost to de Salaberry, Nov. 21; Prevost to Bathurst, Nov. 21; Prevost to Sheaffe, Nov. 23; Prevost to the Duke of York, Nov. 30.

Cold and stormy weather had again set in and on November 22, Dearborn began his retreat with the avowed intention of placing his troops in winter quarters at Plattsburg, Burlington and Greenbush. This fact was definitely reported to Prevost on November 26 and he immediately disbanded the sedentary militia by a highly complimentary general order. On the following day the greater portion of the troops were again withdrawn into cantonments. Major de Salaberry was deservedly praised for his capable conduct while in command of the outposts and was soon after granted a step in rank.*

Finding that the American forces had been massed on the extreme right of their line, Prevost had determined some days before the attack upon Odelltown, to create a diversion by a counterstroke on the post at French Mills on their left, which was a standing menace to the navigation of the St. Lawrence as well as a source of serious alarm to the Indians of St. Regis. Captain Gray was accordingly instructed to attempt to take it by surprise while on his way to Kingston in charge of a brigade of boats. Gray was accompanied by two senior officers, Major Macdonell of the Glengarry Light Infantry and Major Clerl. of the 49th, whose presence seems to have caused him some embarrassment. On November 22, the convoy arrived at Glengarry House and orders were sent to Lieut. Colonels McMillan and McLean, commanding the 1st Glengarry and 1st Stormont Militia to march to that place with all the men they could collect. As the flank companies of his regiment were in garrison at Prescott, McLean was obliged to call upon the militia residing in the neighbourhood of Cornwall, yet in two hours more than 250 had assembled. He was materially assisted by the energetic exertions and great influence of Reverend Alexander Macdonell, their parish priest. At 11 p.m. the troops were embarked and two hours later landed below St. Regis whence a road led to the enemy's position. McLean was detached with his men to occupy St. Regis village and prevent its inhabitants from giving the alarm. The remainder of the force, numbering 150 of all ranks, preceded by Roxborough's company of the Glengarry Light Infantry, under Major Macdonell, at a distance of sixty paces, as an advance guard began its march through the woods towards the mouth of Salmon river where the enemy had built a blockhouse, which they had named Fort Invincible, in honour of a company of volunteers, who had rather boastfully assumed the title of the Troy Invincibles. The main body was entirely composed of Glengarry militia under Lieut. Colonel McMillan. Thirty Indians commanded by Captain Anderson brought up the rear. Before reaching the village of French Mills the column was compelled to pass two bridges. After crossing the first, the advanced guard was fired upon

*General Orders, Nov. 26 and 27.

by a sentry who was promptly shot down as he attempted to escape. When half way across the second bridge another sentry fired at them and was also shot. Several shots were fired from houses and an inhabitant who was detected while deliberately taking aim through a window, was killed in the act. After a few minutes delay, they were informed by a resident that the garrison, consisting of one company of the Troy Volunteers, had been warned of their approach by Indian scouts, and had shut themselves up in the blockhouse, which was not yet roofed in. It was quickly surrounded and three officers and forty-one men surrendered as prisoners of war. Three bateaux and fifty-seven stand of arms were taken. In defiance of the strictest orders the Indians managed to break open and plunder several houses, one of them being owned by the man who had acted as guide and carried a summons to the blockhouse. Gray at once proffered compensation which was paid two months later to the amount of several hundred dollars, being in all probability much in excess of the real loss. The captured bateaux were sunk, the arms broken up and the expedition recrossed the river without loss.*

After his arrival at Plattsburg, Dearborn discharged the whole of his militia, whose numbers had already considerably decreased through desertion. Three regiments of regular infantry under Colonel Pike were quartered at Plattsburg; three others commanded by Brigadier General Chandler were stationed at Burlington, while the cavalry and artillery were withdrawn to Greenbush. Although it was afterwards acknowledged that his movement to the frontier and beyond had been solely intended as a demonstration and was so interpreted by his opponent, his confident tone and the strength of his force had aroused extravagant expectations among his countrymen. The editor of the *Aurora*, of Philadelphia, Colonel Duane, one of the most influential and presumably best informed of the journalists supporting the administration, had remarked, so late as November 23:—

“The army must have entered the enemy’s country about the 20th, and three days will have brought the troops to conflict unless the British make war like the Russians. The gallantry and fidelity of the militia, Green Mountain Boys and brave New Yorkers, will save them from the reproach hitherto cast upon the boasted bulwark of the republic by the brutality and cowardice displayed by idle spectators at Queenston, and put to shame the treachery and faithlessness of neighbors in Massachusetts.”

Dearborn’s apparently inexplicable retreat without even fairly coming to blows evoked the most caustic criticism from friends as well

*Gray to Baynes, Nov. 23; Prevost to Bathurst, Nov. 26; Prevost to the Duke of York, Nov. 30; York (U.C.) Gazette, 1812.

as opponents of the government. A rumour soon became current that he had written a letter, which had not been published from motives of policy, stating his opinion that it would be imprudent to attempt to take Montreal with an army of less than thirty thousand men, and that he would rather resign his command than undertake it.*

During the autumn his troops had suffered considerably from an epidemic of measles which affected nearly one-third of the regulars encamped at Plattsburg and Champlain. One regiment, originally nine hundred strong, had been reduced to less than two hundred fit for duty by neglect of proper sanitary measures. At one time three hundred and forty men of this unfortunate corps were in the hospital and a large number reported sick in quarters. To preserve the health of the remainder Dearborn attached them to a better disciplined regiment. The weather during December became extremely cold and an epidemic of typhus fever accompanied by pneumonia raged at all three stations. Two hundred deaths occurred among sixteen hundred soldiers quartered at Burlington. The disease then spread among the inhabitants of the town of whom seventy-three died within a month. On December 10, more than one-third of the three regular regiments stationed at Plattsburg were reported unfit for duty. The mortality at that post and at Greenbush was proportionately as great as at Burlington, making the total number of deaths about five hundred or practically fifteen per cent of the entire force.†

Yet great as the ravages of disease actually were, they were much exaggerated by current reports and numerous bitter complaints of neglect and ill treatment found their way into the Federalist newspapers.

*Edward Doyle to Lieut. Colonel Neil McLean, Nov. 29

†Mann, *Medical Sketches of the War*, pp. 10, 39, 45 and 199.

NOTE.—Plattsburg, December 10, 1812.

6th U.S. Infantry, fit for duty,	203,	sick,	138.
15th " " " "	330,	" "	235.
16th. " " " "	216,	" "	120.
	—	—	—
	839		493