

THE

Fight in the
Beechwoods

A STUDY

IN

CANADIAN HISTORY

BY

ERNEST GRUIKSHANK,

Author of "The Battle of Lundy's Lane," "The Story of Butler's
Rangers," Etc.

SECOND EDITION==Enlarged.

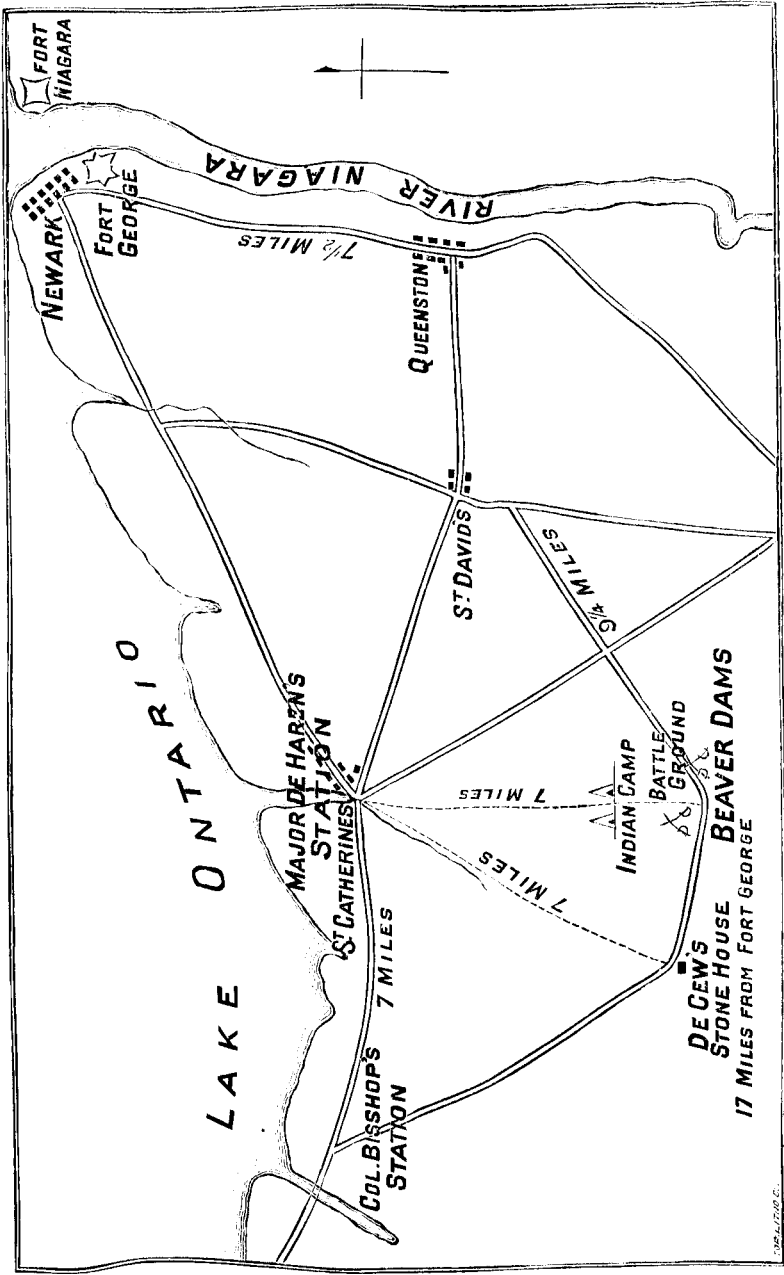
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1895.



Yours sincerely
Samuel Fitz Gibbon

DIAGRAM to show the relative positions, distances, etc., attached by the court to the proceedings in the case of Col. Boerstler.



From Niles' Weekly Register. Battle of the Beaver Dams.

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The Battle of the Beechwoods.



ANY circumstances connected with the engagement commonly known as the Battle of the Beechwoods, or Beaver Dams, combine to make it one of the most interesting episodes of recent Canadian military history. It is indissolubly linked with the memory of one of the most patriotic and courageous women of any age or country. As a rule, too, it has been merely regarded as a rather notable instance of a successful ambush accomplished by a very inferior force, and its important influence upon the subsequent conduct of the war has been overlooked.

The campaign of 1812 had resulted in the signal discomfiture of all attempts at the invasion of Canada. During the succeeding winter the Government of the United States devoted itself with great energy to the task of organizing three fresh and powerful armies, with the intention of renewing the effort in as many different quarters as soon as military operations became practicable in the spring. A force of several thousand men was already established on the shores of Lake Champlain, within fifty miles of Montreal. The principal object to be attained for the time being, by this corps, usually termed the *Army of the North*, was simply to deter the Governor-General from reinforcing his posts in Upper Canada by threatening an invasion in the Lower Province, and in this it was to a very great extent successful. Another division, designed to number ten thousand men, under Major-General Wm. Henry Harrison, afterwards President of the United States, was being concentrated in an entrenched camp near the mouth of the river Maumee on Lake Erie, with instructions to recover

Detroit and enter Canada from that direction. This force was then held in check by Colonel Henry Proctor with less than 500 men of the 41st regiment, a few companies of militia from the counties of Essex and Kent, and an uncertain and variable number of Indians. The third division, officially styled the *Army of the Centre*, was composed of troops assembled partly at Sackett's Harbor and Oswego on Lake Ontario, and partly at various posts upon the Niagara River under the general command of Major-General Henry Dearborn, a veteran of the Revolution. As far as possible it was designed to act in conjunction with their squadron which had obtained temporary control of Lake Ontario. As soon as navigation opened, a strong brigade from Sackett's Harbor made a descent upon York (Toronto), then almost unfortified and ungarrisoned, in the hope of paralyzing the British naval power on the lake by the destruction of two vessels that had wintered there and another in course of construction. By weight of overwhelming numbers they soon obtained possession of the place, but only partially accomplished their purpose as the largest of the two vessels already afloat had sailed a few days before.

Another month was occupied in concentrating the entire division on the Niagara and making elaborate preparations for transporting it into Canada. The force thus assembled between Buffalo and Fort Niagara numbered about eight thousand men, all regulars or long service volunteers, while that opposed to them, under Colonel John Vincent, was considerably less than one quarter of that number, including militia and Indians.

The artillery fire from Fort Niagara and the adjacent batteries beat down the defences on the British side of the river, and on the 27th May, almost five thousand men were disembarked from a large flotilla of boats a couple of miles west of the village of Niagara, while a British brigade of less than 600 men, that attempted to resist their landing, was almost exterminated by the broadsides of eleven ships of war, anchored within three hundred yards of the shore. Nearly at the same time another brigade of troops began to cross the river above Fort George, with the evident purpose of cutting off the retreat of the garrison. Perceiving that further resistance was useless, Vincent retired adroitly to Queenston, and thence, after destroying the batteries there, to the Beaver Dams on the Twelve Mile Creek, by the mountain road. At that place he was joined during the night by detachments from Chippawa, Fort Erie and Point Abino, and continued his retreat next morning towards Burlington Bay, where he determined to make another stand, abandoning the entire Niagara Peninsula to the enemy. The greater part of the militia was disbanded, and the Indians of the Six Nations withdrew to their villages on the Grand River, where many of them remained quiet through fear of losing their lands. On the 2nd of June, Vincent encamped

at Bazeley's on the high ground overlooking Burlington Bay. He had been joined by two companies of the 8th, and his whole division then mustered 1,807 of all ranks and arms, of whom only one hundred were militia. His men were in good health and spirits and so far from being discouraged by their recent reverses, they eagerly demanded to be led against the enemy. Three days later, two brigades of infantry and a regiment of dragoons made their appearance in pursuit, and encamped for the night at Stoney Creek, seven miles distant.

In the course of the afternoon their position was carefully reconnoitred by Colonel John Harvey, Vincent's chief of staff, and militiamen in plain clothes, acting under his instructions, passed through every part of their lines, under the pretence of selling supplies. It was ascertained that their encampment was scattered and badly arranged for defence, while their pickets and sentries were negligent in the performance of their duties. The strength of the pursuers was roughly estimated at 3,500 infantry and 250 cavalry, with at least eight field-guns. Shortly after midnight Vincent with 700 picked men of the 8th and 49th regiments, rushed the camp, slaughtered the unwary sentinels at their posts, dispersed the bewildered battalions as they attempted to form by repeated bayonet charges, and at day-break retired to his former position, carrying with him two captured field-guns, both the American Generals and upwards of a hundred other prisoners.

The Americans were so much demoralized by the blow, that they abandoned their camp immediately, leaving their dead unburied, and continued their retreat for twelve miles over wretched roads, when they encountered two regiments of infantry advancing to their support. The appearance of the British squadron upon their flank completed their discomfiture. The retreat became a flight. They abandoned their boats, camp furniture and much of their baggage. Major Thomas Evans, of the 8th regiment, with four companies of infantry and a troop of Provincial dragoons, followed swiftly on their traces, and killed or captured many stragglers. The loyal inhabitants and Indians were roused and joined with alacrity in the pursuit, which was continued until almost within cannon-shot of Fort George. General Dearborn at once dismantled and abandoned Fort Erie and drew in his outposts from Chippawa and Queenston, concentrating his entire force at Niagara, where he began to form a large entrenched camp. On the same day that this was done a small party of Lincoln militia captured a depot of arms near Queenston, and during the night took possession of the village itself.

Ascertaining that about six thousand troops were then assembled at Fort George, Vincent did not consider it prudent to attempt the

1. Vincent to Prevost, June 2; same to same, June 4. 2. Vincent to Prevost, June 6.
3. Evans to Harvey, June 10; Harvey to Baynes, June 11.

investment of their camp with a force still not exceeding a third of that number, but contented himself with sending forward detachments of light troops to watch their movements, and established his headquarters at the Forty Mile Creek (Grimsby). Yet he continued to feel so confident of the superiority of his soldiers in fighting qualities, that he assured the Governor-General that, if he could reinforce his division with one thousand men, he would undertake to drive the enemy out of the country.¹

While encamped there on the 12th June, Lieut. James FitzGibbon, the adjutant of the 49th, solicited and obtained permission to organize an independent company of fifty men to act as rangers, or scouts, in advance of the army. So many eligible volunteers from different battalions immediately desired permission to serve under his command, that he was embarrassed by their numbers in making a choice, for FitzGibbon was already one of the best-known and most popular officers in a division that included many adventurous and daring leaders. Distinguished alike for extraordinary physical strength and endurance, and an enterprising and resourceful mind, his poverty alone prevented him from obtaining high rank in his profession at a time when promotion was rarely attainable except by purchase. The son of the poor cottager on the Irish estate of the Knight of Glyn, he had enlisted at the age of fifteen in a troop of yeomanry raised by that nobleman during the rebellion of 1798. Having served for two years in this corps, he volunteered into the ranks of the 49th. He was rapidly promoted to the rank of sergeant, and participated in almost every engagement during the Duke of York's unfortunate expedition into Holland. In the first year of the present century he was drafted as a marine into Nelson's squadron, and was engaged on board the *Monarch* in the thickest of the fight at Copenhagen. While yet a non-commissioned officer his military knowledge gained him the appointment of acting-adjutant to his battalion, and his commissions were subsequently won by merit and good conduct alone. For the last ten years he had been quartered in different parts of Canada, and had become thoroughly familiarized with the habits of the people and life in the woods.²

In three days his company of rangers was fully organized, and accompanied by Cornet Amos McKenney and a few troopers of Merritt's Provincial Dragoons, he moved forward to the Ten Mile Creek, and occupied the heights overlooking the plain of Niagara. Stations established in the tops of some of the tallest trees enabled him to keep a close watch upon the movements of the main body of the Americans near Fort George, while his position at the junction of three roads leading respectively to the mouth of the creek, to Queenston and to Niagara Falls, would permit him to move rapidly forward for the purpose of cutting off their foraging parties. His men were

¹ Vincent to Prevost, June 14. ² FitzGibbon, Narrative of service; Mrs. Jameson, Winter Studies, Vol. 1, p. 94; Scadding, Toronto of Old.

carefully drilled in the art of fighting in the woods as practiced by the Indians, of which FitzGibbon had made a close study for years.¹

Although the majority, particularly of the older inhabitants of the country, were unflinching in their loyalty, it is certain that there were many persons, especially among the more recent immigrants from the United States, who were lukewarm, or even traitorously inclined. Immediately upon taking possession of Fort Erie, Colonel Preston, the American commandant, issued a proclamation to the inhabitants of the surrounding country, promising protection to those who recognized the Government of the United States, and enrolled their names, and threatening those who still remained hostile with disastrous consequences. During the last half-dozen years of the eighteenth century there had been a steady stream of immigration into this part of Canada, especially from the States of New Jersey and Pennsylvania mainly composed of Quakers, Mennonites, and adherents of other sects, whose religious tenets forbade them from bearing arms. It is not surprising, then, that a considerable number of persons, some traveling for the purpose, it is said, even from the banks of the Grand River, came into the American lines and signed paroles. The number of inhabitants thus enrolled is stated by American authorities to have exceeded five hundred, among whom, doubtless, there were many actuated chiefly by a desire to evade service in the militia.²

But there were some who were actively and aggressively disloyal, and professed their eagerness to assist the invaders in every way. Chief among these were Joseph Willcocks, editor of the only paper published at Niagara, and representative in the Provincial Assembly of the fourth riding of the County of Lincoln, and Benajah Mallory, the member for Middlesex. Willcocks was an Irishman, and had been once a member of the revolutionary society known as the United Irishmen, and Mallory was a native of the United States, but had lived for many years in Canada. Both were active and unscrupulous agitators of more than average ability and intelligence. A letter from an American officer stationed at Fort George at this time may be assumed to describe truthfully the sentiments of this faction. After narrating the circumstances connected with the landing of their army, the writer continues:—"Our friends hereabouts are greatly relieved by our presence. They have been terribly persecuted by the Scotch Myrmidons of England. Their present joy is equal to their past misery. This is a most charming country, but its uncertain destiny together with the vexations farmers endured by being dragged out in the militia, left the country in a great measure uncultivated." For the moment it was confidently assumed that British rule was forever at an end, and that the speedy conquest of all Canada must follow. Enterprising traders had already followed

¹ Merritt, Journal. ² Baltimore Whig; C. J. Ingersoll, Hist. second war.

in the track of the army, and established themselves in business. The fertility of the soil and evidences of a comparatively high state of cultivation before the war excited emotions of unconcealed surprise and delight among the invaders.¹

Finding himself in want of a body of men intimately acquainted with the country, to act as guides and scouts, a number of the disaffected were enrolled by command of General Dearborn in a separate corps for this purpose, termed the Canadian Volunteers. Willcocks and Mallory were rewarded for their treason by commissions as Lieutenant-Colonel and Major, and at their urgent solicitation it was decided to bring over a body of Indians from New York to act in conjunction with them. About the same time Cyrenius Chapin, Sheriff of the County of Niagara in the State of New York, enlisted a troop of fifty mounted volunteers "for the purpose of clearing the frontier of persons inimical to the United States," and joined the American army at Fort George, marching down from Fort Erie on the Canadian side.²

Hitherto the inhabitants of the district in possession of the invading forces had been treated with a certain degree of lenity and consideration. They were assured protection to their families and property by both Generals Dearborn and Boyd. Some of the wounded militia who had been taken prisoners were even allowed to return to their homes upon signing paroles pledging themselves not to bear arms against the United States until regularly exchanged. But a rigid search for arms was instituted and paroles exacted from all persons liable to military service. General Dearborn, soon after his landing, summoned the magistrates to appear at his headquarters, and twelve having obeyed, he authorized them to continue the exercise of their functions, and several minor offences were subsequently punished by them.³ A few days later, however, he received a despatch from the Secretary of War, instructing him, in consequence of a dispute with Sir George Prevost and Admiral Warren, respecting an exchange of prisoners, not only to remove all genuine prisoners of war, whether regulars or militia, to some secure place of confinement in the United States, but also directing that all male inhabitants of Canada, subject to the militia laws, should be regarded as prisoners of war and treated in the same manner.⁴ In pursuance of this barbarous edict, parties of soldiers were sent out to scour the country between Niagara and Fort Erie in every direction. On the 19th of June and the two following days nearly one hundred persons were arrested, chiefly at their homes, on the roads, or working in the fields, and removed to the United States, where they were closely confined.⁵ About a dozen of the prisoners held commissions in the militia, but at least fifty were non-combatants, many

¹ Baltimore Whig; National Advocate; N. Y. Evening Post. ² Buffalo Gazette; Albany Argus. ³ Revd. John Strachan, letter to Thomas Jefferson; Wm. Dickson to Can. Arch. ⁴ Secretary of War to General Dearborn, May 26. ⁵ Albany Gazette.

of them over sixty years of age, and some, mere children. Among the number were the Rev. Robert Addison, rector of Niagara, William Dickson, a barrister, and Messrs. Baldwin, Edwards, Grier, Heron, Muirhead and Symington, the principal merchants of the place. Captains George Lawe and John McEwen, and the brothers Kerr, were still helpless from wounds, received in the battle at Niagara. Captain Jacob Ball, designated as "an active and cruel commander of Indians," was seized in his house within half a mile of FitzGibbon's advanced picket at dead of night.² The men employed in this service chiefly belonged to Chapin's and Willcocks's volunteers, with whom discipline was lax, and many outrages were committed. The inhabitants were insulted, maltreated, and pillaged mercilessly.³

This line of conduct naturally exasperated and alarmed the remaining inhabitants beyond measure, and they welcomed FitzGibbon's advance with the liveliest manifestations of joy. The British troops had remained almost inactive for several days owing chiefly to their distressed condition for want of proper clothing and provisions. Capt. Fulton, aid de camp to Sir George Prevost, who visited their camp upon a confidential mission at this time, described the 49th as "*literally naked*," while the 41st were "in rags and without shoes." Both officers and men were glad to appropriate articles of clothing captured from the enemy or stripped from the bodies of the dead.⁴ Meanwhile Colonel Procter, at Detroit, who had been promised that the remaining companies of the latter regiment would be sent to his assistance, was complaining bitterly in almost daily letters of their detention, and at the same time begging that supplies should be sent him to preserve his men from actual starvation in the face of the enemy. The military chest was absolutely empty. Vincent had even been compelled to borrow five hundred guineas from Colonel Thomas Clark to enable a party of militia to purchase cattle and drive them overland to Amherstburg; for the temporary relief of the British garrisons there.⁵

The opportune arrival of Major De Haren with the two flank companies of the 104th, or New Brunswick regiment, and a body of 340 Indians from Lower Canada, and the evident good disposition of the inhabitants, encouraged Vincent to push forward a small brigade of light troops under Lieut.-Colonel Cecil Bisshop, "to feel the pulse of the enemy." He described his chief objects in thus advancing, as being to spare the resources of the country in his rear, and to draw

1. The militia officers were Alex. McDonnell, Dy-Paymaster General of Militia; John Symington, District Paymaster; Wm. Ross, Commissary; Lt.-Col. Ralph Clench, Capt. John Powell, George Lawe, John DeCoe, John McEwen; Lt.-Col. Ralph Clench, Capt. John Powell, Lieuts. Wm. Powlis, Jonathan Williams and John Bradt. Capts. Powell and Lawe were released by a raiding party of British at Burlington, Vt., the following February. 2. National Advocate. 3. Quebec Mercury, letter of Rev. John Strachan, James, Mil. Occ. 4. Fulton to Prevost, June 18; De Rottenburg to Prevost, July 14. 5. Vincent to Prevost, June 2.

as much of his supplies as possible from the district in vicinity of his adversary's lines, besides encouraging the inhabitants to rise and make prisoners of the enemy's foraging parties. Deserters from the American camp estimated General Dearborn's force at 6,000, of whom many were sick, and their fears of an attack were stated to be as strong as ever.¹ Their foraging and reconnoitring parties although usually numerous and well mounted, were constantly attacked by the militia and, as one of their officers writing home remarked, "seldom gained much in this sort of warfare, as the enemy is best acquainted with the paths, bye-roads, swamps, and the country in general."² Vincent's effective force at this time does not seem to have much exceeded two thousand of all ranks, including militia and Indians.

On the 20th June, Bisshop established his headquarters at the Twenty Mile Creek, on the heights above the present village of Jordan, and Major DeHaren with his two companies of New Brunswick men, the light company of the 8th, and the Caughnawaga Indians, took up a position in advance of the Ten Mile Creek, having his main-guard posted on the lake road, near the mouth of that stream, and a chain of outposts extending across the country, covering a front of about seven miles, with his right resting on Turney's cross-roads, near the German meeting-house, within a mile of the site of the present town of Thorold.³ Merritt's troop of Provincial dragoons patrolled the roads in front, but both men and horses were much exhausted by the severe service of the last two months.

FitzGibbon's scouts on the upland above, were kept constantly in motion, never sleeping twice in the same place. On the 20th they had a sharp skirmish with some cavalry near Niagara Falls. The next day it was reported that Chapin's troop was plundering the inhabitants between Chippawa and Fort Erie, and a farmer living near Point Abino was accused of furnishing them with information. Accompanied by Capt. Merritt, Lieut. Barnard, Cornet McKenney, Capt. Jas. Cummings, and a single dragoon, FitzGibbon immediately rode in search of the marauders. They surrounded the house of the suspected man three hours before dawn, and captured him with one of Chapin's scouts, who was sleeping there.⁴ While Merritt and the others conveyed the prisoners to a place of safety, FitzGibbon rejoined his company and advanced swiftly in the direction of Niagara Falls, in the hope of intercepting Chapin during his return to Niagara. As he entered Lundy's Lane he was informed that the latter had already been joined by 150 riflemen from Fort George. Riding forward alone to reconnoitre, he was presently recognized by Mrs. James Kerby, the wife of a loyal captain of militia, who ran out of her house in a state of great agitation, and begged him to retire at once, as a large party of the enemy had just passed up the road. But seeing a

¹ Vincent to Prevost, June 11; McDouall to Proctor, June 14. ² N.Y. Evening Post.
³ Merritt, Journal. ⁴ Merritt, Journal.

single cavalry horse standing saddled in front of a small tavern a little distance further on, and thinking it probable that only the rider was within, he yielded to the temptation to attempt his capture, and dismounting, approached the house quietly on foot. Suddenly an American infantry soldier came out and levelling his musket, demanded his surrender. Before he could fire, however, FitzGibbon had closed with him, and not wishing to raise an alarm, attempted to wrest his weapon from him and threw him to the ground by main strength. Then a rifleman made his appearance from behind the house and hurried to the assistance of his companion. FitzGibbon's great physical strength alone preserved him from death and capture at this critical moment. Thrusting his first assailant violently back upon the other, he succeeded in grasping his rifle with his disengaged hand, and held the weapons of both in such a position that neither of them could fire with effect. A little knot of inhabitants had gathered near, and the struggling and overmatched officer called upon two young men he observed among them, to come to his assistance, but although Mrs. Kerby implored them with tears to comply, their fears prevailed and they slunk away. An instant later the rifleman snatched FitzGibbon's sword from his side and had raised it to strike him, when Mrs. Defields, the innkeeper's wife, sprang forward and struck his uplifted arm with such force that the sword fell from his grasp. Then an old man named Johnson and a boy only thirteen years of age, the son of Dr. Fleming, came to the rescue, and with the assistance of the women, finally enabled FitzGibbon to disarm and tie both his antagonists securely on the back of the captured horse and ride away with them in triumph, although a party of their comrades had already made their appearance within a couple of hundred yards of the scene of this desperate struggle.

That night FitzGibbon retired to DeCew's house near the upper crossing of the Twelve Mile Creek, a substantial two-storey stone building, which had been selected as a place of deposit for stores by Vincent prior to the capture of Fort George, and was capable of a prolonged defence against any force not provided with artillery. The owner, Captain John DeCew, was among the prisoners recently deported to the United States to be held as hostages, as their captors announced, for the good behaviour of the remaining inhabitants. There, a few hours later, he was joined by a party of Caughnawaga or Iroquois Indians under Captain Dominique Ducharme. This force had been organized at Montreal by Sir John Johnson and originally consisted of 160 warriors from the Sault St. Lewis, 120 from the Lake of Two Mountains, and 60 from St. Regis village under the general command of Ducharme, assisted by Lieutenants J. B. de Lorimier, Gideon Gaucher, Louis Langlade, Evangeliste Saint Germain and Isaac LeClair. All of these officers were experienced woodsmen,

possessing the entire confidence of their followers with whose language and habits of life most of them had been familiar from childhood. In several instances their families had been associated for several generations with the Indian tribes, both in peace and in war. As a rule they had adopted the Indian costume even to the extent of plumes and war-paint, and as their faces were bronzed by years of exposure to the weather, they could scarcely be distinguished by an ordinary observer as belonging to a different race from their followers.

During the course of the next day, Ducharme went with twenty-five warriors to reconnoitre the Niagara, and advancing within sight of Fort George, surprised a party of American soldiers in a tavern, killing four and making seven prisoners. Although hotly pursued by cavalry he easily effected his escape by plunging into the woods, with the loss of but a single warrior, who lagged behind to bring off some horses. The same afternoon another party attacked a boat in the river near Queenston, killing two persons and capturing six.²

Annoyed beyond endurance by the audacity of an adversary numerically so much weaker in thus harassing his outposts, General Dearborn determined to strike a vigorous blow at Vincent's advance-guard in return. Having been informed by Chapin on the 23rd. that FitzGibbon had occupied DeCew's house with a single company of regular troops, and between sixty and a hundred Indians (a very close estimate of his actual strength), and was said to be fortifying it and collecting supplies there, he was easily persuaded to consent to an expedition for the purpose of dislodging him, and overawing the inhabitants in that quarter.* A column of 600 men was deemed amply sufficient for the performance of this service, and Colonel Charles G. Boerstler, of the 14th U. S. Infantry, or Maryland regiment, was selected for the command. This officer had already distinguished himself by gallant conduct in leading the night attack on the batteries below Fort Erie in November, 1812. During the winter his complaints of the inactivity of his superiors had been frequent and bitter. By common consent he was regarded as one of the bravest and most enterprising officers in the American army. The whole of his own regiment, one company of the 6th, another of the 23rd, a troop of the 2nd Light Dragoons, commanded by Cornet Burd, a company of light artillery, with one 6-pound and one 12-pound fieldpiece, under Captain Andrew McDowell, and Chapin's

*On the 20th June General Dearborn wrote to the Secretary of War:—"I am so reduced in health as to be incapable of any command. Brig.-Gen. Boyd is the only general officer present." General Lewis described Boyd as "a compound of ignorance, vanity and petulance, with nothing to recommend him but that species of bravery on the field which is vaporing, boisterous, stifling reflection, blinding observation, and better adapted to the bully than the soldier. Called by complaints of the imbecility of the army, Boyd, with Dearborn's approval, detached Boerstler." *Vide* H. Adam's Hist., U. S., vol. VII., p. 162.

2. Ducharme, narrative in M. Bibaud's *Bibliothèque Canadienne*, Vol. 4. 2. Ducharme; *Buffalo Gazette*.

corps of mounted infantry, were detailed for the purpose, the entire force exceeding six hundred rank and file. Ammunition and provisions were conveyed in two four-horse wagons.

The distance from the American camp at Fort George by way of Queenston, the route selected for the advance of the expedition, was estimated at rather less than eighteen miles. To Bisshop's headquarters, by way of the lake road, it was nearly as far, while De Haren's outpost at the mouth of the "Ten" was not quite ten miles away. The three principal advanced posts of the British were thus established at the angles of an equilateral triangle, each side of which was about seven miles in length. A chain of outposts stretching along its base maintained communication between De Haren on the edge of the lake, and FitzGibbon on the crest of the heights above. Bisshop's position, near the junction of two roads, would enable him to support either of these officers, when necessary, with equal facility. At the same time the American line of outposts did not extend more than two miles in advance of Fort George in any direction.

Besides the main road to Burlington, following the shore of the lake, another, sometimes known as the Black Swamp road, led almost in a direct line from Niagara to Paul Shipman's tavern at the crossing of the Twelve Mile Creek on the site of the present city of St. Catharines. From Queenston, a much frequented road wound along the base of the heights to the small village of St. David's, where it divided, one branch running north-westward to Shipman's, while the other ascended the plateau, and following the summit reached the Twelve Mile Creek near the Falls. There were besides a number of woodland paths and bye-roads, leading inland in various directions, with which the inhabitants were familiar, but these were the only routes at all practicable for the passage of artillery and heavy wagons.

While this column of troops advanced against FitzGibbon, a simultaneous movement was designed against De Haren's picket at the mouth of the "Ten," with the object of occupying his attention and preventing him from rendering any assistance to the former, but for some reason it was never executed. Boerstler's instructions directed him to advance as rapidly as possible upon FitzGibbon's post, and, if necessary, batter down the house and capture or disperse the garrison. Chapin, vain, boastful, and never very particular as to the accuracy of his statements, boldly asserted that he had penetrated into the hilly region beyond DeCew's a few days before, although it subsequently appeared that he had not approached within several miles of the place, and was in consequence selected as pilot for the expedition. But at the last moment it was discovered that a detachment of riflemen intended for this service had been already placed on guard, and could not be relieved. This oversight deprived

Boerstler of a portion of his most effective troops, and obliged him to march without them.¹

The departure of the column from camp was purposely delayed until evening to avoid observation, At the outlying picket, the main body halted, and the mounted men rode rapidly forward to Queenston to secure the inhabitants and prevent them from giving the alarm. Silence was strictly enjoined during the march, and patrols and pickets were at once thrown out on all the roads leading away from that village.²

It was commonly said that there had not been such a rainy season for a quarter of a century. Showers of greater or less magnitude had fallen nearly every day for several weeks. The roads were thoroughly saturated, and the ordinary number of horses could scarcely drag the cannon. Accordingly it was almost midnight before the remainder of the detachment arrived and halted for the night. No lights or fires were allowed, and the men lay on their arms, but notwithstanding the thoroughness of these precautions to ensure secrecy information of their approach was soon speeding towards the British outposts as swiftly as a woman's feet could carry it. Among the few remaining inhabitants of Queenston, was James Secord, a sergeant in the Lincoln Militia, and still almost helpless from wounds received in the battle of the 13th of October. Thirty-six years before, when a child only three years old, he had accompanied his mother in her flight through the wilderness from the Susquehanna Valley, with four other homeless women and many children, to escape the fury of a band of ruffians, who called themselves "Sons of Liberty." After enduring frightful hardships for nearly a month, they finally arrived at Fort Niagara almost naked and starving. Subsequently his father and several elder brothers had enlisted in Butler's Rangers, and forfeited their lands by their loyalty. The memory of the wrongs and sufferings of his family still rankled in his breast and caused him to regard the people of the United States literally as personal enemies. The parents of his wife had likewise been refugee loyalists, and she was equally warm and unfaltering in her patriotism.

The sudden arrival of so large a body of troops by night, and the unusual care taken to conceal their advance, at once led them to suspect that the blow was aimed at FitzGibbon, some of whose men had been in the village during the day, and they anxiously began to meditate means of warning him of the impending danger. Since it was clearly impossible for Secord to accomplish the necessary journey, his wife promptly determined to undertake the perilous task herself. She was a slight and delicate woman, already in her thirty-eighth year, and the mother of five children. The roads in many places were ankle-deep in mud, the country was sparsely settled and the woods were known to be haunted by bands of Indians and white

1. Armstrong, Notices; Lossing. 2. Armstrong.

marauders, who hung upon the skirts of the armies, yet she never faltered in her resolution. Leaving the house at the first flush of dawn, with a pail upon her arm, she succeeded in passing the nearest sentinel under pretence of milking a cow in the fields beyond. It was then no difficult matter to guide the animal behind a convenient thicket, and once fairly out of sight, she threw the pail aside and began her toilsome walk. Fearing that her purpose might be suspected when her prolonged absence was discovered, and a pursuit begun, she carefully avoided the main road and struck into a bye-path leading through the fields and woods. The brilliancy of the moon favored her flight. Occasionally the distant howl of a wolf smote upon her ear, and more than once a rattlesnake glided from the path and disappeared in the rank grass. But these were not unfamiliar sights and sounds to the dwellers in the woods, and she pushed bravely on without a pause till she reached the village of St. Davids.

After resting for an instant at the house of a relative, she resumed her journey, still avoiding the highway and selecting a circuitous and lonely route which led her many miles out of the way. Finally, having walked as she imagined, some nineteen miles since leaving home, she arrived at a branch of the Twelve Mile Creek shortly after sunrise, and finding it much swollen by the recent rains and the bridge removed, she was compelled to cross it upon the trunk of a fallen tree. Toiling up the steep bank beyond she stumbled into the midst of a group of sleeping Indians, who sprang hastily to their feet with piercing yells. It was with great difficulty she made her object understood by their chief, who understood but a few words of English, and some delay ensued before she was conducted to FitzGibbon, to whom she told her story, describing the composition of the column advancing against him, and estimating its strength at nearly a thousand men.¹

It being contrary to the custom of the Indians to act at night, they had withdrawn to their respective encampments and Ducharme had not more than eighty warriors with him. Scarcely had Mrs. Secord concluded her narrative, when his scouts came in shrieking the death-cry. They had encountered the advance-guard of the enemy near St. David's, and one of their number had been killed. Ducharme immediately requested permission to advance and waylay the column at a spot which had fixed his attention the day before, as being favorable for an ambush. FitzGibbon readily gave his assent, and the entire body of Indians set off at a run.²

1. Auchinleck; Coffin; Lossing; Quebec Mercury. 2. Ducharme in Bibaud's *Bibliothèque Canadienne*.

3. This account differs in some respects from Mrs. Secord's own narrative as recorded in letters printed by Auchinleck and Lossing. It should be remembered that these letters were written more than forty years after, when Mrs. Secord was above eighty years of age. From them the natural inference would be that she walked an entire day and parts of two nights. It is certain that the expedition was not authorized until late on the afternoon of the 23rd. Mrs. Secord, therefore, could not have been more than five or six hours on the road. The distance from Queenston to Decew's Falls in a direct line, is less than twelve miles.

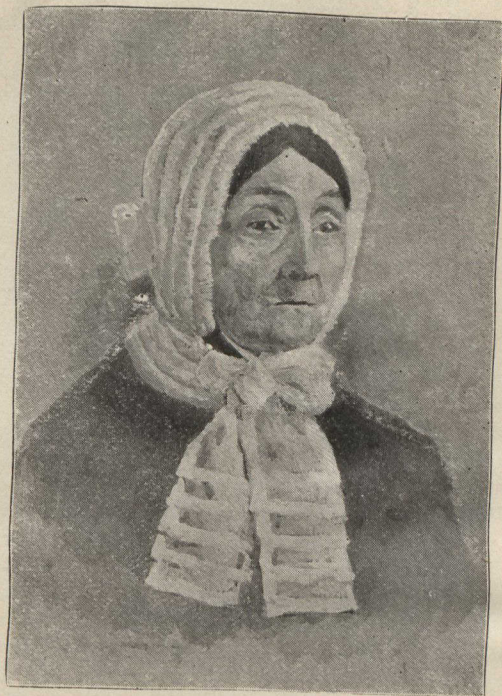
Meanwhile Boerstler had seized an inhabitant whom he forced to act as a guide, and shortly after daybreak resumed his march. As his advance-guard entered St. David's two British officers were seen riding away in the direction of the Cross-roads, now Homer village, and presently they heard alarm-guns and bugles sounding in the distance. Chapin remarked that they would probably soon hear from Fitz-Gibbon, and Boerstler replied that they would doubtless have to fight there on their return. The column continued to move forward with great caution, having a party of Chapin's mounted riflemen well in front with light infantry in extended order on either flank, followed by the 14th U. S. Infantry, the artillery and wagons, then the companies of the 6th and 23rd, while the troop of dragoons covered the rear. In this order they passed the point where the road diverged to Shipman's and ascended the heights. From time to time Indians were observed gliding stealthily through the woods, but as yet they made no attempt to molest their march.¹

From the date of the earliest exploration, much of the present township of Stamford was scantily wooded, but in its north-west angle and stretching into the adjacent township of Thorold there was a compact and extensive tract of well-timbered land, commonly known as the Beechwoods. Here the road by which Boerstler was advancing became a mere narrow wheel-track, intersected in many places by deep gullies, and closely bounded on either side by an almost continuous wall of trees and underbrush.²

Choosing a spot where one of the widest and deepest of these ravines crossed the road, Ducharme stationed his warriors, Lieutenants De Lorimier and Le Clair, with twenty-five Caughnawagas, on the right; Captain William Johnson Kerr and Lieutenant John Brant, with sixteen Mohawks, on the left, while he retained the remainder under his own command on the further slope, to check the advance of the enemy, and force them back into the hollow.

Already the heat of the sun had become intense, and many of the heavily-burdened infantry soldiers had begun to lag and droop with fatigue. Between eight and nine o'clock the advance guard, consisting of about twenty mounted riflemen, rode into the hollow and began the ascent of the opposite slope. A single volley from the thickets emptied every saddle but one, and several warriors immediately sprang forward to strip and scalp their fallen enemies. Ducharme hastily interposed and ordered them back to their coverts to await the approach of the infantry, already close at hand. The head of the column was greeted with a shower of bullets. The leading companies attempted to deploy, and the artillery and mounted men were ordered to the rear. Much disorder ensued, and, at this opportune moment, the detachments of Lorimier and Kerr began the attack on the flanks, and presently another small party appeared in the rear

1. Armstrong; Chapin's review of Armstrong. 2. Talbot, Five years in Canada.



Laura Secord.

and killed several men there. The foremost sections retired precipitately upon the main body, and finally formed in an opening in the woods on the right of the road, whither they were followed and again attacked. The artillery was then brought forward and directed to clear the thickets with canister. The first discharge passed harmlessly overhead, and the wary leader of the Indians ordered them to retire to the woods before the cannon could again be loaded. In accomplishing this, however, several of their number, having ventured too far forward, were killed or wounded in crossing an open space, and most of the Mohawks became panic-stricken and left the field.¹

Hastily concluding that he had to contend with superior numbers Boerstler despatched a mounted orderly to Fort George to announce that he had been attacked and had fallen back to a clearing, where he would wait for reinforcements. But soon observing that their fire had begun to slacken, he determined to make a vigorous effort to brush aside his assailants and continue his march. Leaving his artillery behind, protected by the dragoons and the two detached companies of infantry under Major Taylor, second in command, whose horse had been killed at the first fire, he formed the whole of his own regiment in single rank, with a company on each wing thrown back to cover the flank of his line, and led it at a quickstep into the woods on the right of the road, with the intention of driving the Indians into the fields beyond. He had almost penetrated through the woods, without encountering much opposition, when a violent attack was commenced on his right flank. Wheeling in that direction, the advance was continued for a considerable distance in the face of an incessant fire from an almost invisible enemy. Then, finding that his men were losing heavily and becoming fatigued, without gaining any substantial advantage, Boerstler threw out a line of skirmishers to hold the enemy in check, and directed a general retreat upon the artillery. The Indians pressed their advantage with exulting shouts, and finally the Americans fell back in considerable confusion into a hollow where they were partially sheltered from their fire.²

Ducharme then promptly directed Lieutenants Gaucher, Gamelin and Langlade with their respective detachments to make a circuit through the woods and gain their flank and rear. This was soon accomplished, and bullets from the overhanging thicket again began to drop with fatal effect among Boerstler's men, now quite dazed and dispirited. Although slightly wounded in the very beginning of the action, Boerstler had remained on horseback constantly encouraging his soldiers, and as he galloped along the line, affording a conspicuous mark to the enemy. Another shot then struck him in the thigh, inflicting a severe fleshwound. Captains Cummings and McChesney, and Lieutenants Marshall and Randall were disabled nearly at the

1. Ducharme; Armstrong; Chapin; Boerstler, letter to his father. 2. Armstrong,

same moment, and the fall of so many officers had naturally a most disastrous effect.¹

While the tide of battle swayed to and fro in the woods, small parties of Indians were constantly coming up and swelling the numbers of the assailants. Captain Hall, of the Provincial Cavalry, appeared upon the scene, and after surveying the conflict for a few minutes, galloped off to report to De Haren. Then, after the action had lasted almost an hour, FitzGibbon rode up, accompanied by his only subaltern, Lieutenant Winder. Observing that the Americans were already thrown upon the defensive, almost surrounded, and apparently undetermined whether to continue their advance or attempt a retreat, he sent away his companion to bring forward the remainder of his company, consisting of a single sergeant and forty-five rank and file, and remained to watch the fortunes of the fight. Finally, the three brothers Kelly, militiamen, who had been permitted to return to their homes on an adjacent farm to assist in haymaking, attracted by the sounds of strife, seized their arms and joined in the attack. Others followed until the militia present numbered about fifteen under the command of Major David Secord, a veteran of the Revolution, who lived not far distant.²

Order having been to some extent restored in their ranks, the American infantry formed behind a fence and such other cover as they could find, and opened a brisk fire in reply. Some of the boldest of their riflemen even advanced a considerable distance up the ravine and dislodged a party of Indians posted there. In accomplishing this three of their number were shot dead by a single Indian, who was, however, discovered as he attempted to escape from his lurking place and killed. The skirmish continued with great animation until the Americans had exhausted twenty-six rounds of ammunition to very little advantage, as they were rarely able to detect the form of any individual assailant even for an instant, and could merely fire at random into the surrounding woods. A dense volume of smoke settled down into the opening, and hung steadily over their heads. Meanwhile they were girdled about by a circle of fire. Every tree and rock and tuft of tall grass seemed to emit its special jet of flame.³

The company of rangers having arrived, they were posted by their commander on the high ground on the right of the road, and he then directed the greater part of the Indians to occupy the woods on both sides of the road in the rear of the Americans, with a view of retarding their retreat until other reinforcements could come up.

Noticing the glow of scarlet in front and harassed in flank and rear by an indefinite and apparently ever-increasing number of whooping Indians and militiamen, Boerstler reluctantly determined to begin

1. Lossing; Armstrong; Chapin; Ducharme. 2. Quebec Mercury; Coffin. 3. Armstrong; Chapin.

his retreat towards Queenston. With this intention, the wounded were collected and placed in the wagons, and the artillery, under protection of a company of infantry, was sent to occupy a clearing on the right of the road in lot 45 of the township of Thorold, upon the summit of the ridge. The remainder of the infantry were next retired to the same position and formed in close column. By retreating thence across a long stretch of cultivated land, it would be impossible to avoid the woods occupied by the Indians and regain the road beyond, where it passed mainly through an open country. The prospect of escape now appeared so fair that FitzGibbon determined to parley, chiefly, it is probable, with a view of detaining them. Accordingly, he approached their position with a flag of truce, and being met by Captain McDowell, he boldly informed him that they were surrounded by superior numbers, and could not possibly escape. He added that many of the Indians under his command had just arrived from the Northwest, and were of the most ferocious disposition. They had already met with severe losses, and were much exasperated, and he feared if the action was continued much longer, they would become unmanageable and begin an indiscriminate massacre. He desired to prevent unnecessary waste of life, and therefore demanded their immediate surrender. This was merely the set form of summons, which had proved so potent at Mackinac, Detroit, and other places, and McDowell frankly expressed his disbelief of the assertion that their situation was hopeless, and desired time for consideration, and both officers returned to their lines. Opportunely for the success of FitzGibbon's strategem, Capt. Hall galloped up at that moment, accompanied by several troopers of the Provincial Cavalry, and readily consented to personate Major De Haren in the event of the American commandant pressing a demand to be permitted to see the forces opposed to him.

Approaching the American position a second time, FitzGibbon was admitted into Colonel Boerstler's presence, and found him agitated and unnerved by loss of blood and the pain of his wounds. The narratives of the slaughter at the River Raisin and Fort Meigs, purposely exaggerated and invested with innumerable blood-curdling details by the newspapers of the administration, were fresh in his mind, and a judicious allusion to the difficulty experienced in restraining the Indians caused him to exclaim nervously: "For God's sake, keep the Indians from us!" FitzGibbon promptly replied that he must decide at once, for this was not a matter to be dalled with, and expressed his willingness to permit an officer to view his forces. A subaltern was detailed for the purpose, but when they reached a bend in the road, where some of the rangers were stationed, they were met by Captain Hall, in the character of De Haren, who feigned to be much enraged at the delay, and declaring that this

request on the part of the enemy was too humiliating to be endured, he ordered the American officer to return at once to his own lines.¹ He reiterated, however, FitzGibbon's demand for an immediate surrender, stating that it was then possible to protect the wounded from the Indians, which he could not engage to do if the action was renewed.

A section of FitzGibbon's company was next directed to rush across the open ground and join the Indians in rear of the enemy to impress them still further with a belief in the superiority of the British forces. This movement was rapidly executed without loss under fire of their artillery, and firing on both sides was briskly recommenced.²

The confident attitude of his assailants had convinced Colonel Boerstler that his situation was extremely critical, and he summoned a meeting of his officers to obtain their views. His men had marched almost ten miles that morning. They had been under arms for six hours, and had been fighting for the last three. The strength of the column had been considerably diminished by killed, wounded and skulkers, and those still in the ranks were much exhausted by heat and fatigue. Their supply of ammunition was greatly reduced, only three charges of canister and a few round shot remaining for each of the guns. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that most of his subordinates were inclined to take a gloomy view of their position. Having at least fifteen miles to retreat along a road bordered in many places by woods, they candidly expressed their doubts whether a quarter of their number would be able to escape. When the remainder of their cartridges were expended, the Indians, they said, would be able to shoot them down at pleasure. Boerstler acquiesced in the main with these opinions, and stating that he would assume all responsibility for the surrender, despatched Captain McDowell with instructions to obtain the best terms possible.³

It was with great difficulty that the Indians could be induced to cease firing, when it was announced that the Americans were finally prepared to surrender. Ducharme could speak but little English, and readily consented that FitzGibbon should frame the articles of capitulation, stipulating only that his followers should be allowed to divide the plunder. A brief document, consisting of but four short clauses, was then signed by Captain McDowell, by which it was agreed that Colonel Boerstler's entire command should become prisoners of war, the officers being allowed to retain their arms, horses and private baggage, and the militia and volunteers to return to their homes on parole. While the negotiations were in progress, Chapin made a resolute and perfidious attempt to escape with his command. Placing his wounded men, about fifteen in number, in the centre of his troop, he began to ride rapidly down the road. But

1. Armstrong; Quebec Mercury. 2. Ibid. 3. Armstrong; Lossing.

this movement was frustrated by the alertness of the Indians, who immediately barred the way in great numbers, and eventually not a single man escaped but the orderly, who had been despatched for assistance when the attack began. Twenty-three officers and 487 non-commissioned officers and men of the regular army and thirty militia laid down their arms.¹ About thirty of all ranks were supposed to have been killed and sixty or seventy wounded. The colors of the 14th United States Infantry, two fieldpieces, two baggage-wagons and five hundred stand of arms were the principal trophies of the victory.

Fortunately for all parties Major De Haren, who, for some time had obstinately refused to believe that any formidable movement was directed against the right flank of his position, came up with 200 men of the 8th and 104th in time to take charge of the prisoners, for, when it became known that the personal baggage of the officers was protected by the terms of capitulation, the Indians grew very indignant at what they considered a deliberate plot to deprive them of booty to which they were justly entitled, and their discontent subsequently increased to such a height that many of them abruptly returned to their villages a few weeks later.²

This signal success was obtained at the expense of a very trifling loss. FitzGibbon's company was but slightly engaged, and did not have a single man injured. At the time, seven Indians were reported to have been killed and sixteen wounded, but Ducharme subsequently estimated their entire loss at fifteen killed and twenty-five wounded.³

The consequence of the victory proved far more important than could have been reasonably anticipated at the time. The 15th United States Infantry, a company of artillery, and a detachment of riflemen had been dispatched to Boerstler's support, and had already advanced as far as Queenston, but being menaced by a small party of Indians, retired precipitately to their camps. Many were of the opinion that the army should at once retire from Canada, but a council of war, composed of the chief officers, was held, at which it was ultimately decided to remain. Every exertion was made to fortify and strengthen their position at Fort George. Thenceforward for three months, they were restricted by their fears to the ground within range of their cannon. During the first week they did not venture to send even a patrol further than a mile outside their entrenchments. The principal division of the invading army was virtually paralyzed during the season of the year most favorable for military operations, and

¹. Return of prisoners taken in action of 24th June, 1813: Light Dragoons, 1 Cornet, 1 Sergeant, 19 rank and file; Light Artillery, 1 Captain, 1 Lieutenant, 1 Sergeant, 31 rank and file; 6th Infantry, 1 Captain, 1 Lieutenant, 3 Sergeants, 54 rank and file; 14th Infantry, 1 Colonel, 3 Captains, 11 Lieutenants, 1 Surgeon; 15 Sergeants, 300 rank and file; 20th Infantry, 1 Major; 23rd Infantry, 1 Captain, 4 Sergeants, 2 Drummers, 57 rank and file. ². Coffin; Merritt's Journal; Royal Military Chronicle, 1813. ³. Quebec Mercury; Ducharme, Narrative.

remained pent up within the limits of a few acres by a force of less than half its numbers. Night after night their sentries and outposts were startled by feigned attacks, which kept the entire camp in a feverish condition of alarm, and subjected officers and men to excessive fatigue. During the hottest months of the year one-third of the division was prostrated by disease, and though the hospital was removed to Lewiston, the proportion of deaths became frightfully large. Although repeatedly reinforced, their numbers constantly diminished, and they were constrained to relinquish active operations entirely until the storms of autumn rendered them difficult and hazardous. The chief medical officer of the United States Army, then attached to Gen. Dearborn's division, was forced to make this frank admission: "When an enemy exhibits great military ability we are disposed to allow him all the credit due him, even when by artful deceptions and judicious management with a force inferior, he was enabled to apparently check our army, and compel it to place itself in a position entirely defensive."

The effect produced by Boerstler's defeat, in Washington, was quite as remarkable. Congress was sitting when information of the surrender arrived. Mr. Ingersoll, one of the leaders of the dominant party in the House of Representatives, stated that it was regarded as forming "the climax to continual tidings of mismanagement and misfortune. On the 6th of July, therefore, after a short accidental communion of regret and impatience in the lobby with the speaker, (Henry Clay), and General Ringgold, of Maryland, I was deputed a volunteer to wait on the President, and request General Dearborn's removal from a command which so far had proved so unfortunate." Consequently a despatch was framed the same day, instructing Gen. Dearborn to retire from the command "until his health should be re-established," and his immediate successor, General Boyd, was prohibited from attempting any offensive operations until their squadron regained control of the lake.

Two of the principal actors in these events, James FitzGibbon and Laura Secord, attained an extreme old age.

FitzGibbon resided in Canada for more than forty years, became assistant adjutant-general of militia, and took an active part in the suppression of the rebellion of 1837. Some years after he was nominated a Military Knight of Windsor,* where he was still living in 1867, at the age of eighty-five.

Mrs. Secord died in 1868, at the advanced age of 93, and is buried in the graveyard at Drummond Hill, on the battle-field of Lundy's Lane. It is to be hoped that not many years will be allowed to pass away ere her final resting place is marked by a fitting memorial of one of the bravest and most loyal of Canadian women.

1. Coffin, life of Gen. H. Dearborn; Mann, Medical sketches of the war.

*When founding the Order of the Garter in 1347 a chapel to St. George was built at Windsor as a chapel for the order, and King Edward III. made a foundation at the chapel for thirteen secular canons and thirteen vicars and also of twenty-six veteran knights, who were to be maintained and were to serve God continually in prayer. M. Creighton—Edward the Black Prince, p. 62.

APPENDIX

NO. I.

Mrs. Secord's narrative, cited by Mr. Auchinleck in 1853, is as follows: "It was while the Americans had possession of the frontier that I learned the plans of the American commander, and determined to put the British troops under FitzGibbon in possession of them, and, if possible, to save the British troops from capture, or perhaps total destruction. In doing so, I found I should have great difficulty in getting through the American guards, which were out ten miles in the country. Determined to persevere, however, I left early in the morning, walked nineteen miles in the month of June over a rough and difficult part of the country, when I came to a field belonging to a Mr. Decamp, in the neighborhood of the Beaver Dam. By this time daylight had left me. Here I found all the Indians encamped; by moonlight the scene was terrifying, and to those accustomed to such scenes might be considered grand. Upon advancing to the Indians, they all arose, and with some yells, said "Woman," which made me tremble. I cannot express the awful feeling it gave me; but I did not lose my presence of mind. I was determined to persevere. I went up to one of the chiefs, made him understand that I had great news for Capt. FitzGibbon, and that he must let me pass his camp, or that he and his party would be all taken. The chief at first objected to let me pass, but finally consented, after some hesitation, to go with me and accompany me to FitzGibbon's station, which was at the Beaver Dam, when I had an interview with him. I then told him what I had come for, and what I had heard—that the Americans intended an attack upon the troops under his command, and would, from their superior numbers, capture them all. Benefitting by this information, Capt. FitzGibbon formed his plans accordingly, and captured about five hundred American infantry, about fifty dragoons, and a fieldpiece or two was taken from the enemy. I returned home next day exhausted and fatigued. I am now advanced in years, and when I look back I wonder how I could have gone through so much fatigue with the fortitude to accomplish it."

NO. II.

CERTIFICATE OF LIEUT. FITZGIBBON.

"I do hereby certify that Mrs. Secord, the wife of James Secord, Esq., of Chippawa, did, in the month of June, 1813, walk from her house, in the village of St. David's, to Decamp's house, in Thorold, a circuitous route of about twelve miles, partly through the woods, to acquaint me that the enemy intended to attempt by surprise to capture a detachment of the 49th regiment, then under my command, she having obtained such knowledge from good authority, as the

event proved. Mrs. Secord was a person of slight and delicate frame, and made the effort in weather excessively warm, and I dreaded at the time that she must suffer in health in consequence of fatigue and anxiety, she having been exposed to danger from the enemy, through whose line of communication she had to pass. The attempt was made on my detachment by the enemy, and his detachment, consisting of 500 men, with a field piece and fifty dragoons, were captured in consequence. I write this certificate in a moment of much hurry and from memory, and it is therefore thus brief.

“(Sig’d)

JAMES FITZGIBBON.

“Formerly Lieutenant in 49th Regiment.”

NO. III.

Mr. Lossing in his Field-book of the war of 1812, quotes on page 621, the following extract of a letter from Mrs. Secord:

“After going to St. Davids, and the recovery of Mr. Secord, we returned again to Queenston, when my courage again was much tried. It was there I gained the secret plan laid to capture Captain Fitz-Gibbon and his party. I was determined, if possible, to save them. I had much difficulty in getting through the American guards. They were ten miles out in the country. When I came to a field belonging to a Mr. De Cou, in the neighborhood of the Beaver Dams, I then had walked nineteen miles. By that time daylight had left me. I yet had a swift stream of water (Twelve Mile Creek) to cross over on an old fallen tree, and to climb a high hill, which fatigued me very much.

“Before I arrived at the encampment of the Indians, as I approached they all rose with one of their war yells, which, indeed, awed me. You may imagine what my feelings were to behold so many savages. With forced courage I went to one of the chiefs, told him I had great news for his commander, and that he must take me to him or they would be all lost. He did not understand me, but said ‘Woman! What does woman want here?’ The scene by moonlight to some might have been grand, but to a weak woman certainly terrifying. With difficulty I got one of the chiefs to go with me to their commander. With the intelligence I gave him he formed his plans and saved his country. I have ever found the brave and noble Colonel FitzGibbon a friend to me. May he prosper in the world to come as he has done in this.

“CHIPPAWA, U. C., Feb. 18, 1861.”

“LAURA SECORD.

NO. IV.

ARTICLES OF CAPITULATION.

“Particulars of the capitulation made between Captain McDowell, on the part of Lieutenant-Colonel Boerstler, of the United States Army, and Major De Haren, of his Britannic Majesty’s

Canadian Regiment, on the part of Lieutenant-Colonel Bisshop, commanding the advance of the British, respecting the forces under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Boerstler:

"Article 1.—That Lieutenant-Colonel Boerstler and the forces under his command shall surrender prisoners of war.

"Article 2.—That the officers shall retain their arms, horses and baggage.

"Article 3.—That the non-commissioned officers and soldiers shall lay down their arms at the head of the British column, and shall become prisoners of war.

"Article 4.—That the militia and volunteers with Lieutenant Colonel Boerstler shall be permitted to return to the United States on parole.

"ANDREW McDOWELL,

"Captain of the United States Light Artillery.

"C. G. BOERSTLER,"

V.

LIEUT.-COL. WM. CLAUS TO LIEUT. COL. BISSHOP.

"LOUTH, June 24th, 1813.

"I put under cover a letter received from Capt. Kerr, giving an account of an action this morning between a party of the Six Nations, the Seven Nations of Canada and some of the Lake Indians, consisting of about 450 chiefs and warriors, and a detachment of the American army under Col. Bustler, with two field guns. It is with pride I mention that, notwithstanding the severe loss the Indians have met with in the death of five of the principal chiefs and warriors and upwards of twenty wounded, several prisoners were taken in the woods and brought in without the least injury to one of them. The number of killed and wounded is not ascertained; we know of the above only at present."

LIEUT. FITZGIBBON TO MAJOR DE HAREN.

"TOWNSHIP OF LOUTH, 24th June, 1813.

"Sir,—At De Cou's this morning, about 7 o'clock, I received information that about 1,000 of the enemy, with two field guns, were advancing towards me from St. Davids. I soon after heard a firing of cannon and musketry, and in consequence rode in advance about two miles on the St. Davids' road. I observed, by the firing, that the enemy was moving for the road on the mountain. I sent Cornet McKenney to order out my detachment of the 49th, consisting of a subaltern and 46 rank and file, and close upon the enemy to reconnoitre. I discovered him upon the mountain road, and took a position on an eminence to the right of it. My men arrived and pushed on in his front to cut off his retreat, under a fire from his guns, which, however, did no execution. After examining his position, I found it

difficult to approach him, there being no wood in the front or in the flank to cover the Indians, and his force, apparently 600, I could not approach. I was here informed that he expected reinforcements, I therefore decided upon summoning him to surrender. After the exchange of several propositions between Lieut. Colonel Boerstler and myself, in the name of Lieut. Colonel De Haren, Lieut. Colonel Boerstler agreed to surrender on the conditions stated in the articles of capitulation. On my return to my men to send an officer to superintend the details of the capitulation, you arrived."

LIEUT. COL. BISSHOP TO COL. VINCENT.

"BEAVER DAMS, 24th June, 1813.

"SIR,—I have the honor to inform you that the troops you have done me the honor to place under my command, have succeeded in taking prisoners a detachment of the United States Army, under Lieut. Col. Boerstler.

"In this affair the Indians, under Capt. Kerr, were the only force actively engaged; to them great merit is due, and I feel particularly obliged for their gallant conduct on this occasion. On the appearance of the detachment of the 49th, under Lieut. Col. FitzGibbon, and the light company of the 8th, or King's regiment, and the two flank companies of the 104th, under Major De Haren, and the Provincial Cavalry, under Captain Hall, the whole surrendered to His Majesty's troops. To the conduct of Lieut. FitzGibbon, through whose address the capitulation was entered, may be attributed the surrender of the American troops.

"To Major De Haren, for his speedy movement to the point of attack, and execution of the arrangements I had previously made with him, I am much obliged.

"I have the honor to enclose the capitulation entered into between Col. Boerstler and myself, and a return of the prisoners, exclusive of the wounded, not yet ascertained. I lost no time in forwarding my staff-adjutant, Lieut. Barnard, to you with this intelligence. He has been particularly active and useful to me upon all occasions. I take this opportunity of mentioning him to you, and I beg the favor of you to recommend him to Sir George Prevost, as an active and meritorious young man."

SIR GEORGE PREVOST TO LORD BATHURST.

(*Extract.*)

"KINGSTON, 3rd July, 1813.

"The details of this gallant action, which reflects so much credit on our Indian allies, as well as upon Lieut. FitzGibbon, for the promptness and decision with which he availed himself of the impression their attack made upon the enemy, will be read by your Lordship with satisfaction, and afford a decisive proof of the want of

perseverance in the American Army. In their retreat from Forty Mile Creek, almost the whole of their camp equipage, together with a quantity of stores, fell into our hands. General Dearborn has withdrawn his troops from Fort Erie, and is concentrating his forces at Fort George. Col. Vincent has advanced to support the Light Infantry and Indian warriors, who are employed in circumscribing the enemy, to compel them to make use of their own resources for the maintenance of their army."

INDIANS KILLED.

"Little Chief, a Delaware; one Chippewa Chief from La Cladu; Deyahokethe, Aheatagea, war chiefs of the Caughnawagas; Dekyateahnawea, Nippissing Chief; Kaneuyatiran, Anajareghtha, St. Regis warriors, killed the 24th June at the Beechwoods, on the mountain by Millers; Shogohiornegstha, a fine boy, lost an arm."

—*Col. Claus's Mss. Letter Book.*

COLONEL BOERSTLER TO HIS FATHER.

"HEAD OF LAKE ONTARIO, }
 "UPPER CANADA, }
 "25th June, 1813. }

"DEAR FATHER,—It becomes my unfortunate lot to inform you that yesterday I was taken prisoner, with a detachment under my command amounting to 500 men, after an engagement of about three hours. I lost not many killed, about 40 wounded, and five or six officers, myself a flesh wound, of no consequence. I am on my way to Kingston. I shall write you every opportunity. The officers under my command must say whether your son did his duty. I need only state to you that I was 17 miles from Fort George, and surrounded on all sides by more than my numbers, and the enemy's force increasing, while mine was constantly diminishing, ammunition nearly exhausted, men wearied with a march of ten miles without a mouthful of refreshments, then the engagement, then to fight our way back, the whole distance, surrounded by woods filled by Indians. On the score of humanity I determined to capitulate, as it was extremely doubtful whether a man of us would reach Fort George. What I say above will be sufficient for you. My country must apply to those under my command.

"Your son,

CHARLES.

"Col. Scott will please seal and forward the above.

"DEAR SIR,—I pray you to believe your son is not condemned for being unfortunate."

"Respectfully sir, your obedient servant,

"W. SCOTT."

GENERAL DEARBORN TO THE SECRETARY OF WAR.

"HEADQUARTERS, FORT GEORGE, }
 "June 25th, 1813. }

"SIR,—I have the mortification of informing you of an unfortunate and unaccountable event which occurred yesterday. On the 23rd, at evening, Lieutenant Colonel Boerstler, with 570 men, infantry, artillery, cavalry, and riflemen in due proportion, was ordered to march, by way of Queenston, to a place called the Beaver Dams, on the high ground about eight or nine miles from Queenston, to attack and disperse a body of the enemy collected there for the purpose of procuring provisions and harassing those inhabitants who are considered friendly to the United States; their force was, from the most direct information, composed of one company of the 104th regiment, about 80 strong, from 150 to 200 militia, and from 50 to 60 Indians. At eight o'clock yesterday morning, when within two miles of the Beaver Dams, our detachment was attacked from an ambuscade, but soon drove the enemy some distance into the woods, and then retired into a clear field and sent an express for reinforcement, saying he would maintain his position until reinforced. A reinforcement of three hundred men marched immediately, under the command of Colonel Chrystie, but on arriving at Queenston, Colonel Chrystie received authentic information that Lieutenant Colonel Boerstler, with his command, had surrendered to the enemy, and the reinforcements returned to camp. A man who belonged to a small corps of mounted volunteer riflemen, came in this morning, who states that the enemy surrounded our detachment in the woods, and towards 12 o'clock commenced a general attack; that our troops fought more than two hours, until the artillery had expended the whole of its ammunition, and then surrendered, and at the time of the surrender the informant made his escape. Why it should have been deemed proper to remain several hours in a position surrounded with woods without either risking a decisive action or effecting a retreat remains to be accounted for, as well as the project of waiting for a reinforcement from a distance of fifteen or sixteen miles.

"No information has been received of the killed and wounded. The enemy's fleet has again arrived in our neighborhood.

"With respect and esteem, I am, Sir,

"Your humble servant,

"H. DEARBORN."

REPORT OF COURT OF INQUIRY.

"BALTIMORE, 17th February, 1815.

"The court met pursuant to adjournment.

"The court having heard and considered the testimony adduced in this case, have the honor to report to the Honorable, the Secretary of War, the following statement of facts:

"That on the 23d day of June, 1813, a detachment of the army of the U. S., stationed at Fort George, in Upper Canada, was ordered to proceed against an advanced post of the enemy at DeCoo's stone house. That a detail of 575 men in proportions of infantry, artillery, dragoons and riflemen, accompanied by a party of mounted gun-men, under Captain Chapin, were ordered for the expedition, and that Lieut.-Colonel Charles G. Boerstler, of the 14th Infantry, was *selected* for the command; the riflemen were not furnished, according to the detail, and the expedition proceeded without them.

"The infantry carried in their boxes thirty-two rounds of musket-ball cartridges, and the ammunition wagon contained a reserve of 5,000 or 6,000 rounds.

"The artillery, two field pieces, was well supplied with fixed ammunition of round and canister shot.

"The expedition was accompanied by two four-horse wagons, carrying the ammunition and provisions without entrenching tools, and was not followed by any detachment, on which it could fall back in the event of disaster. It was ordered to march upon the Queenston and St. David's road, and to return upon the same route.

"No copy of the commanding general's order now remains. The book in which it was entered, and the original, have both been lost through the casualties of war, but the object of the expedition is proved to have been 'to batter down De Coo's stone house, said to be fortified and garrisoned by a company of regulars and 60 or 100 Indians, and capture or dislodge the enemy stationed there.'

"On the same day, that is on the 23rd June, 1813, the piquets of American army covered ground to the extent of two miles in front of Fort George, and no more.

"And the advanced posts of the enemy then in numbers, were;

"1. At St. Catharines, on the lake road, nine and a half miles from Fort George, and deemed the strongest. Lieut. Colonel De Haren, commanding.

"2. At Twenty Mile Creek, sixteen and a half miles from Fort George, Lieut. Colonel Bissshop, commanding.

"3. At De Coo's stone house, seventeen and a half miles from Fort George *via* Queenston, and sixteen *via* St. Catharines, Lieutenant FitzGibbon commanding; and in advance of this post, and one and a half miles from it and near a road leading to it, a camp of 450 or 500 Indians, of which nothing had been known.

"A plan of the ground is submitted to show the relative position of these posts; how they supported each other, at a distance of six or seven miles, lying in the form of a triangle, and the point to be attacked, the most distant of the three.

"The intermediate country between the two armies was, in general, covered with thick wood.

"No force was sent out to amuse or divert Lieut. Colonels De Haren and Bisshop while the post at De Coo's should be attacked. A simultaneous movement had been planned against St. Catharines (Lieut. Colonel De Haren), but was not executed.

"The expedition under Lieut.-Colonel Boerstler appears to have been founded upon information derived from Captain Chapin. His information is proved to have been erroneous.

"The guide furnished to conduct the expedition was the same Captain Chapin and at nine or ten miles from Fort George, he was, or appeared to be, ignorant of the roads. Lieut.-Colonel Boerstler took an inhabitant of the country and compelled him to become the guide.

"The detachment was ordered to lay at Queenston on the night of the 23rd and march early the next morning. It did so, laying upon its arms in silence without lights and having taken precautions to avoid surprise and from preventing the country people from carrying intelligence to the enemy.

"On the march, advance and rear guards, with flankers from each side were kept constantly out. Captain Chapin's mounted men formed the advanced guards and frequently pushed out patrols in search of discoveries.

"Between eight and nine o'clock on the morning of the 24th at a place called the Beaver Dams, a mile and a half in advance of De Coo's, the enemy's Indians were first discovered issuing from the woods in rear of the detachment and moving across the road upon which it had marched. The action commenced immediately and the column quickly forming into two lines fought at the same time to the front and rear. Lieut.-Colonel Boerstler was at the head of the first and Major Taylor at the head of the second.

"The action continued upwards of three hours. The American troops contended with a superior force of Indians, British regulars and Provincials. Several changes of position, rendered necessary by circumstances, had been executed in an orderly and military manner and every officer was at the head of his command and every company did its duty, a majority of the mounted gunmen and their commander excepted.

"But the ammunition had been nearly exhasuted, all the boxes had been exhausted of their cartridges, replenished from the wagon and again nearly exhausted; the wagon itself was emptied, or nearly so; the artillery had but two or three rounds of canister and a small number of round shot remaining. The heat of the day was oppressive and the men exhausted with the length of the action and the march in the morning.

"Seventy or eighty of the detachment were killed or wounded. Lieut.-Colonel Boerstler, Captain Machesney, Captain Cummings, and Lieutenants Marshall and Randall were among the latter.

"About noon Lieut.-Colonel De Haren arrived from St. Catharines and brought with him 120 infantry, 25 or 30 dragoons, and some Provincials.

"The enemy occupied in force the road upon which the detachment had marched. Lieut.-Colonel Boerstler collected the effectives of his command, formed them into column and gave in person his orders and the explanation of his object, 'to clear the road by a charge and retreat to Fort George.' His force under arms was diminished by one third, not altogether by death and wounds but partly by the various causes which conspire to thin the ranks of all troops during an engagement. All the wounded were brought to the centre of the column and there were but two wagons to receive them.

"When the column was ready to be put in motion, a British officer advanced and demanded its surrender. The demand was instantly and decisively rejected by Colonel Boerstler; the officer retired and presently returned with a renewal of the demand, stating the great superiority of force, and proposing that an American officer be sent to view them. Lieutenant Kearney, of the 14th Infantry, was accordingly sent, but a senior officer having come upon the ground, refused to permit the examination, but renewed the demand for a surrender. It was added that the American wounded could then be protected, but if the action recommenced, they (the British officers) could not be responsible for the conduct of the Indians.

"Lieut.-Colonel Boerstler referred to the officers about him for their opinion. They decided to surrender if honorable terms could be had, and the detachment was accordingly surrendered, prisoners of war, the officers retaining their horses, arms and baggage.

"The force of the enemy at the time of the surrender amounted to 700 or 800 men, comprising between 450 and 500 Indians, about 300 regulars and Provincial infantry, 25 or 30 dragoons, and a small number of fencibles, and exclusive of 250 Infantry following Lieut.-Colonel Bisshop from Twenty Mile Creek, and arrived near the ground at the close of the action.

"And it does not appear, but the contrary is proved, (so far as a negative can be proved) that Lieut.-Colonel Boerstler sent any messenger to Fort George to demand reinforcements, and to say that he would maintain his ground till they arrived.

"Whereupon the court respectfully submit to the Honorable, the Secretary of War, the following opinion:

"That the march of the detachment from Fort George to the 'Beaver Dams' on the 23d and 24th June, 1813, under the command of Lieut.-Colonel Boerstler, was made in an orderly, vigilant, and military manner.

"That the personal deportment of Lieut.-Colonel Boerstler in the action which followed, was that of a brave, zealous, and deliberate

officer, and the conduct of the regular officers and men under his command was equally honorable to themselves and to their country.

"That a retreat from the field after the force of the enemy had been ascertained could not be justified on any military principle, and if attempted in column, must have exposed the men to certain death in their ranks, with very little means of resistance; if by dispersion, the immediate massacre of the wounded and the slaughter in detail of a multitude of exhausted and tired fugitives, must have been the inevitable consequences.

"That the surrender was justified by existing circumstances, and that the misfortune of the day is not to be ascribed to Lieut. Colonel Boestler, or the detachment under his command.

"And the Court is unanimous in the expression of this opinion and foregoing report of facts."

"(S'gd) JAMES P. PRESTON,

Colonel 23rd Infantry, President.

"Attest: LEWIS B. WILLIS,

Captain 12th Infantry, Recorder."

EXTRACT FROM DEPOSITION OF MAJOR GEN. LEWIS.

"To the sixth and seventh interrogation, this deponent answers: That he was frequently pressed to send a detachment to the vicinity of the Beaver Dams, during the latter days of his command at Fort George, which he always resisted, because the position and means of the enemy enabled him to reinforce with the greater facility than the American army could. So strong were these impressions on the mind of this deponent, that when he quitted that command he earnestly advised the gentleman on whom it devolved to resist the youthful, ardent spirits which would probably beset him on the subject; assuring him that any detachment sent on that service, unless very powerful, would probably be sacrificed, and be, perhaps, thereby disenabled to take possession of the heights, when the necessary transportation could be furnished, which this deponent was of opinion ought to be done."



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Lundy's Lane, 1895.

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