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Volume XXI

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the Command of  
Lake Ontario  
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# The Contest for the Command of Lake Ontario in 1814

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

During the autumn of 1813 and the following winter the rival shipyards at Kingston and Sackett's Harbour were the scene of amazing activity. At the former two frigates were laid down early in October, the largest of these being a ship of one hundred and fifty feet in length of keel, with a moulded breadth of forty-two feet and a depth of hold of sixteen feet four inches, or nearly equal in size to Nelson's famous flagship, the *Victory*. The other, originally designed as a brig, but subsequently enlarged, had a length of keel of one hundred and ten feet, a moulded breadth of thirty-six feet and ten feet depth of hold. On the 23rd of that month Captain O'Connor, who had just returned from a fruitless mission to Lake Erie, reported:

"The vessels building would have been considerably advanced if the artificers were steadily employed on them. They are frequently removed to perform various duties represented as being of great and immediate importance, viz., completing the defects of the squadron, building and repairing gunboats, constructing a flying bridge for transporting troops and artillery between Kingston and Point Frederick, making masts, oars, &c., &c., and a floating battery. This necessarily takes up much time. . . . If shipwrights cannot be procured, axmen probably may. . . . The best arrangements respecting their pay shall be made without losing their services. Give me leave to assure you the interest of the public has always been kept in view and every exertion used to satisfy the reasonable demands of the men employed in the naval yard, but their demands have been uniformly exorbitant and will continue so. while aware how very important and necessary they are. The arduous task you justly think I have to contend with in constructing two ships of such dimensions would give me very little uneasiness if our whole attention could be directed to them. This I am sorry to say cannot be the case just yet. The buildings have been neglected in my absence, the wharves are going to destruction, while the growing defects of the *Royal George* render attention to them highly necessary to enable us, if possible, to heave her down towards the fall. It is the difficulties I have to contend with together with the serious situation of the times which prevent my requesting his Excellency to do me the favor to accept my resignation of an appointment attended with considerable trouble and vexation. So long as he is pleased to consider them useful my feeble but ardent services will be at his command."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>O'Connor to Freer, Kingston, Oct. 23, 1813.

Fourteen shipwrights, who had absconded shortly before, were arrested and sent back to work and a written contract was then drawn up by which they were bound to complete their engagements. An "active, bustling man was sent down to entice shipwrights" from Montreal and Quebec. An experienced builder and twenty skilled shipwrights, who had been employed in the navy yard at Amherstburg, opportunely arrived soon after, having left that place before it was evacuated.

Toward the end of October, Captain Stephen Popham, R.N., an officer of high reputation, arrived at Quebec from England, with two lieutenants, some midshipmen and petty officers, and 350 seamen as a reinforcement for the establishment on the lakes. About the same time two battalions of Royal Marines and a company of Royal Marine Artillery arrived from Bermuda for the same service. These seamen and marines were sent forward as speedily as possible to Montreal, partly on foot and partly by steamboat and schooners. There they were detained for some time, one battalion of the marines and the company of artillery being finally sent to Isle aux Noix for the winter while the seamen were ordered to man the flotilla of gunboats on Lake St. Francis. Captain Mulcaster, with the gunboats operating in the St. Lawrence, descended the river and joined those commanded by Popham at Coteau du Lac. He took command of the whole and continued to watch the large American flotilla lying in Salmon River until it was securely locked up by ice. His scouts and spies kept him extremely well informed of the situation and force of the enemy during the winter.

On November 24 O'Connor reported that progress on both vessels had been so rapid that he feared the workmen would be soon thrown out of work by the delay in forwarding supplies from Montreal, particularly spikes, which were indispensably needed. "Your expectation of soon forwarding a supply of shipwrights," he added, "together with the zeal and cordial exertion pervading all stations in the yard have given me confidence of executing by the ensuing spring the services required and of having both vessels ready for launching when the season will admit."<sup>1</sup>

On the following day he wrote:

"A flag of truce arrived yesterday from Sackett's, of course to obtain information, but were disappointed off Nine Mile Point by the *Beresford*. They report the enemy have laid down two frigates, *The More Glory* and *My Dear Sir*; the more exertion on our part required.

"His Excellency will of course have certain information on this subject, which, if true, may direct our attention to building another vessel, for which I have prepared, if your promised supplies of shipwrights arrive."<sup>2</sup>

Early in December, Yeo wrote to the Governor General:

"I have no doubt Your Excellency will agree with me that great military advantages may be obtained by our squadron being on the lake three weeks or a month before that of the enemy, which, from the forward state of the new ships, I think likely. They are, however, of a size and force that will require a large

<sup>1</sup>O'Connor to Freer, Kingston, Nov. 24.

<sup>2</sup>O'Connor to Freer, Nov. 25.

complement of men (both will take 550 seamen), particularly the large one, which, if properly appointed, will exceed any frigate in the British navy.

"I deem it a duty to assure Your Excellency that great credit is due to Captain O'Connor for his very zealous exertions in the dockyard. Both ships are in a very forward state and every thing goes on with a spirit that is highly satisfactory.

"The only anxiety I have is the safe and early arrival of supplies from below. In my next letter to Lord Melville I shall suggest the propriety of any reinforcements or supplies sailing from England on or about the 20th of March."<sup>1</sup>

He had already suggested an attempt to destroy the hostile squadron on Lake Erie by a sudden attack if it was laid up for the winter either at Erie or Amherstburg and projected the construction of two or three brigs at Long Point in the spring to regain the command of that lake.<sup>2</sup>

Prevost, in reply, encouraged his proposal to attack the American squadron, but declined to favour the establishment of a new shipyard for the present.

"It is my decided opinion," he declared, "that nothing worthy of consideration for the creation of a second fleet on Lake Erie can be attempted whilst we remain inferior to the enemy on Lake Ontario and that the inevitable consequence of not consecrating all our means and resources for that highly important object would be failure in both undertakings.

"If it were practicable to carry on the construction in more places in Upper Canada than Kingston, I feel strongly disposed to give Lake Huron the preference over Lake Erie, because the naval ascendancy upon the former might be means within our compass, whilst on the other all our efforts would prove but a wanton waste of valuable materials and invaluable time. Even on this point I encourage no expectation of success as unless we can obtain the command of Lake Ontario, every thing else done on the other lakes would be in vain.

"I have informed Sir John Warren of the impossibility of his withdrawing any seamen from the service of the lakes and have transmitted to him as well as to the Government your demand for an additional number next spring."<sup>3</sup>

Painful experience had demonstrated in the plainest way the absolute necessity of arming the new ships largely with heavy long guns and demands for these had accordingly been made. Two officers of the Royal Navy were appointed to supervise and hasten the transportation of these guns and other necessary stores and supplies of every kind during the sleighing season. Yeo was positively assured that he might rely on receiving during the months of February and March thirty-eight twenty-four pounders, ten eighteen-pounders and six sixty-eight pounder carronades. The conveyance of these ponderous guns from Montreal and Three Rivers to Kingston in the winter was a task of considerable magnitude. Two hundred ox-teams were secretly hired in Vermont and New Hampshire with the necessary number of drivers and brought into Lower Canada for this purpose. The expense of hauling six thirty-two pounders from Quebec to Kingston was estimated at £2,000. The cost of transporting forty twenty-four pounders in this way from Montreal to Kingston amounted to £4,000, and

<sup>1</sup>Yeo to Prevost, Kingston, Dec. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Yeo to Prevost, Kingston, Nov. 29.

<sup>3</sup>Prevost to Yeo, Montreal, Dec. 5.

that of hauling a cable of the largest size from Sorel to Kingston came to £1,000.

On December 17, O'Connor wrote in high spirits:

"The *Prince Regent* promises to be as fine and formidable a frigate as any sailing on the Atlantic. The *Princess Charlotte*, (late *Vittoria*), has likewise the appearance of being a most desirable vessel, in size equal to our small frigates, but in force superior from the heavy metal she is intended to carry.

"The wharves have undergone considerable repairs and are in a fit state for heaving down any ship. Shears have been erected on them for expeditiously masting and putting on board of vessels heavy ordnance, stores, &c.

"I have great satisfaction in stating the business of the yard goes on remarkably well and feel confident the vessels will be ready for launching when the navigation will admit."<sup>1</sup>

His progress report showed that four large gunboats were also under construction, one of them by a private contractor at Ernesttown.<sup>2</sup> The schooner, *Syren*, scuttled by Wilkinson near Prescott, to avoid capture on his passage down the river, had been raised and converted into a serviceable gunboat, under the name of the *Buffalo*.

Early in February, General Drummond, who had taken over the command of the troops in Upper Canada, approved of the immediate construction of another ship at Kingston. O'Connor lost no time in reporting favourably.

"My opinion is that with exertion a small class frigate may be constructed by July ensuing. The country people now supplying the naval yard are much easier to retain than again collect from their homes whither they will return if informed no further supplies are required.

"I beg leave to observe that the guns of the *Aeolus* are particularly light and convenient to transport."<sup>3</sup>

Ship timber could no longer be procured with ease from the woods near by, but had to be hauled considerable distances from the interior, as the north shore had been nearly stripped of its best timber for export before the war began.

To arm this projected new ship and complete the armament of the others and the new gunboats, Sir John Warren was required to send on thirty thirty-two pounder carronades and an equal number of long guns of the same calibre from Halifax as soon as navigation opened.<sup>4</sup>

The plan for an expedition to destroy the enemy's ships on Lake Erie had received much careful consideration. On the 11th December, 1813, Yeo reported that from information obtained by an officer who had just returned from that quarter he believed that such portion of their naval force lying at Erie might be destroyed and the prize vessels, *Detroit* and *Queen Charlotte*, retaken and brought over to Long Point.

"The *Detroit* and *Queen Charlotte* he left moped for the winter in Put-in-Bay with only a few men to guard them," he said. This place cannot be approached in the winter and if we got possession of them in the spring they have not a mast standing, consequently [we] would run the risk of being cut off by the

<sup>1</sup>O'Connor to Prevost, Kingston, Dec. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Return dated Kingston, Dec. 16.

<sup>3</sup>O'Connor to Prevost, Kingston, February 3, 1814.

<sup>4</sup>Prevost to Warren, Quebec, March 7 and 13.

enemy's small vessels out of Presqu'Isle. It therefore becomes a necessity, (in my opinion), to take Presqu'Isle first, cut off their communication at the same time with Put-in-Bay, destroy their large vessels and proceed immediately in their small ones to the two ships which would fall with little or no resistance and from its being an island, they could not receive any reinforcements in time. Should the enemy destroy their small vessels at Presqu'Isle our small boats would be equal to perform the service.

"The principal difficulty of this enterprise is obtaining sufficient transport to convey a force equal to the service, particularly as it must be reached in a few hours and with great secrecy. Yet this I think could be accomplished with great exertion and circumspection.

"Four hundred troops and two hundred seamen would be sufficient and perhaps less.

"I would propose, (for this number of men), fourteen boats, all of the same dimensions. These boats to be built at Kingston as in my opinion the only place to prevent suspicion.

"I have a model of a boat making. My idea is to have the frame of the boat as light as possible to go together with bolts and screws, the outside to be covered with hides instead of plank, which can be made exactly to fit the bottom of the boats and can be put on in a few hours. These hide covers when made can be forwarded by the Commissary to York or Burlington without people knowing what they are. Oars can also be made at York, said to be intended for this yard. My reason for being so particular about the boats is to have our flotilla created and ready for embarkation in two or three days, as the expedition remaining for any time at Long Point must lead to suspicion and possibly defeat our object. For the same reason I think any boats ordered to be built at that place would be attended with the same evil. The enemy can never suspect us as long as he supposes we are destitute of transport on that lake. On the seamen leaving this it might be given out that they were going to Lakes Simcoe and Huron, by which their true destination could not be discovered until they had left York, if even then. I would recommend the seamen leaving this sufficiently early to be at Long Point by the time navigation is open, which, I am given to understand, is always earlier than on this lake, if so, that service could be accomplished and the seamen return to Kingston by the time the squadron is ready to take the lake."<sup>1</sup>

As usual Prevost's reply was worded with characteristic caution.

"In the first place, I very much fear," he wrote, "supposing all the other circumstances to be arranged according to your wishes, that you have miscalculated upon the time when Lake Erie will become navigable as well as upon that which under the most favorable circumstances it will require to accomplish your object and in which, should you be mistaken, the return to Kingston of the seamen employed in the expedition will probably be delayed beyond the period when your squadron may be ready to take the lake. Important as it certainly is to us to regain the ascendancy on Lake Erie, you must have already observed from my former communication to you that it is with me but a secondary object to that of ensuring our superiority on Lake Ontario, which, once firmly estab-

<sup>1</sup>Yeo to Prevost, Kingston, December 11.



lished, will materially facilitate all our plans and operations for the other lake. I wish you, therefore, to consult with Lt. Gen. Drummond and maturely to consider whether the object you have in view is to be attained without the sacrifice of higher interests. If, after obtaining every possible information from the most correct sources, the General and yourself should agree in opinion on the probability of the success of your plan, without risking any material delay in the early operations for Lake Ontario, I have no objection to its being carried into execution."<sup>1</sup>

Later on the same day he wrote to Drummond asking him to submit his views on this project. Before this letter reached its destination the military situation in Upper Canada had been materially altered for the better. Drummond had not only succeeded in re-occupying the whole of the Niagara peninsula, but he had taken all the American posts on the right bank of the river. Three armed schooners belonging to the enemy's squadron on Lake Erie had been destroyed near Buffalo. Another had foundered in a gale. All boats of every description on the American side had been destroyed or brought off. The British positions on that line might be considered reasonably secure for some months to come. On his return to Kingston on the 14th of January, Drummond immediately consulted Yeo and Colonel Robert Nichol, the Quartermaster-General of Militia, whose local knowledge and experience gave his opinion great weight. It was ultimately decided to undertake a joint expedition against Detroit and American shipping, known to be lying fast in the ice at Put-in-Bay, with a force of 1,700 men, including 200 seamen and 140 marines, moving in sleighs in two columns, one by the Talbot road and the other through Oxford down the Thames. As it was considered necessary to take provisions for twenty-one days, one hundred and thirty-two sleighs would be needed for this purpose alone. "It is, however, proposed to take three hundred sleighs," Drummond wrote, "as in moving the troops forward they might, as it is called, ride and tie, that is, suppose a column of 500 men on the march, 250 might make 12 or 15 miles without halting, while the other 250 went on in sleighs. After the end of this march, the party in sleighs, having refreshed themselves, would proceed on foot, leaving the sleighs for the party in rear, who would get into them and overtake the party in advance in the evening, by which means they might proceed thirty miles per day."<sup>2</sup> Both Drummond and Yeo proposed to accompany this expedition. But the successful execution of such a plan necessarily depended on the fit state of the roads and as sufficient snow to make good sleighing had not yet fallen west of the Bay of Quinte, it was still impracticable. Secrecy and rapidity of movement were the most essential factors. Rumours of some such projected movement soon leaked out and reached the enemy, who immediately made successful efforts to reinforce the garrisons of Erie and Detroit.

While preparations were being made for this expedition, information was received from a reliable source that a serious attack was contemplated upon Prescott or Kingston or perhaps both places. On the 7th of January, General Wilkinson had in fact proposed to resume the offensive early in February by advancing with two columns, each composed of two thousand men, from Chateau-

<sup>1</sup>Prevost to Yeo, Montreal, December 17.

<sup>2</sup>Drummond to Prevost, Kingston, January 21, 1814.

guay and Plattsburg to unite at St. Ferre and then attack the British posts at St. Philippe, L'Acadie, and St. Jean, in succession. At the same time four thousand men starting from French Mills would be ordered to cross the St. Lawrence on the ice and occupy Cornwall, thus interrupting all communication between Montreal and Kingston.

"To secure a favourable issue to these enterprises without much loss of blood," he wrote with his usual fatuity, "the demonstrations heretofore made of fear and alarm on our part will be continued by more than ordinary means of military deception, in which you may be able to assist me powerfully through the medium of the prints known to be friendly to the war; the recent alarm at Plattsburg, of which I have made much, has enabled me to bring on the cavalry and other troops from Burlington capable of hardy service without exciting the smallest suspicion on the part of the enemy, and the defences projected and put up at our three posts, the caution, vigilance, and extensive excursions of our outlying patrols and scouts, and the deception of his spies and the impositions of my own, it is believed, may continue the enemy in the security they appear to indulge; in fine, we shall march in force to justify the most favourable expectations, and in case of disappointment shall have the same ground to retire upon over which we had advanced from our fortified cantonments, where we shall have guards, and where in any extremity we shall be able to defend ourselves against any force the enemy can at present command."<sup>1</sup>

But a few days later he had substantially altered his plans. The difficulty of supplying his large force had become so great that he was barely able to maintain it in its present quarters from day to day.

"In this situation," he wrote, "instead of advancing on the enemy we are in danger of being compelled to retrograde for want of subsistence, and it would almost destroy the troops to erect second cantonments at this inclement season. With the approbation of the government I will endeavour to find quarters for them in Prescott and Kingston, which I consider practicable to a corps of hardihood and resolution, aided by the facility of movement to be derived from sleds.

"Charge me not with caprice for thus suddenly varying my plan of operations, since it was caused by posterior information, which presents an insuperable obstacle to the execution of the project submitted in my despatch of the 7th instant. The object now presented had not escaped my mind, but it was opposed by my repugnance to give ground to the enemy and to sacrifice our boats, the infallible consequence of its execution. Reduce Prescott and Kingston and the occupancy and maintenance of these posts would be secured by our proximity to our own resources and our distance from those of the enemy."<sup>2</sup>

He then proposed to detach a thousand picked men in sleds to take Prescott by surprise, following them in a few hours with his main body, numbering four thousand five hundred effectives. He counted on the support of two thousand regular troops, advancing from Sackett's Harbour, and perhaps two thousand volunteers assembled from the New York militia.

<sup>1</sup>Wilkinson to the Secretary of War, Malone, January 7, 1814.

<sup>2</sup>Wilkinson to the Secretary of War, Waterford, January 16.

During the night of January 25, two trustworthy spies arrived at Cornwall from Hamilton, N.Y., and informed the commandant that five hundred sleighs from the surrounding country were being collected with the greatest secrecy at Sackett's Harbour for the purpose, it was presumed, of conveying three thousand men to make an attack either upon Kingston or Prescott, but it was generally believed that the latter place would be their first objective. Orders were accordingly issued at once that the garrisons of Cornwall, Prescott, and Gananoque, should be kept on the alert and no officer or soldier allowed to sleep outside the works except the necessary pickets.

The proposed movement was delayed for the approval of the Secretary of War and instead of receiving that, Wilkinson was imperatively ordered to break up his cantonments at the French Mills and Malone, where his troops were very sickly, and after detaching two thousand men under Brown to Sackett's Harbour, to retire with the remainder to Plattsburg. These instructions entailed the destruction of the large flotilla of boats, frozen fast in the Salmon River and the abandonment of a considerable quantity of bulky stores, for which no transport could be obtained. As soon as this movement was fairly under way, it became known to the British commandant at Coteau du Lac, and a body of nearly thirteen hundred regulars and militia, rapidly assembled for that purpose from the neighbouring posts near Cornwall, crossed the river on the ice, took possession of the deserted cantonments, completed the destruction of the boats and buildings, and brought off all the stores worth removing by means of teams and sleighs impressed from farmers in the vicinity.

Meanwhile the Governor General had given his sanction to the projected expedition against Detroit and the ships at Put-in-Bay.

"The consequences which would result from the complete success of such an expedition are obvious," he wrote, "in fact that feat only seems wanting to the brilliant issue of the campaign, as it would place us in the proud attitude of again re-occupying the widely extended frontier of the Canadas, an event exceedingly to be desired.

"Unless a sudden change should occur in the enemy's disposition of his force, the troops you propose to remain would give sufficient security to the Niagara frontier, and the force intended for the proposed service seems adequate; still there are obstacles of magnitude to be encountered, but the principal arise from the very advanced state of the season, the little time left to mature preparations, and were they even now complete, the impossibility of advancing for the want of snow."<sup>1</sup>

Unless the objects in view could be accomplished by the 25th of February, he deemed it unwise to proceed with the enterprise at all. Colonel Harvey was directed to go to Kingston immediately to assist in making preparations.

Prevost's interest in the project became much stronger within a few days and he wrote again to urge its execution.

"I am desirous of strongly impressing upon you the necessity of making every effort during the remainder of the winter for the destruction of the enemy's naval force on Lake Erie as the reduction of the enemy's present superiority

<sup>1</sup>Prevost to Drummond, Montreal, January 29. Secret.

is of high importance to the preservation of Upper Canada and for the maintenance of our relations with the Western Indians. Nothing but the impracticability of the measure from the causes alluded to in my late letter will justify its not being attempted."<sup>1</sup>

Before this letter was received by Drummond, he had announced his intention of abandoning the expedition owing to unfavourable weather.

"The obstacles that Your Excellency pointed out to that highly desirable and important object are no doubt numerous, but they had not escaped my attention," he remarked.

"And I am so sanguine as to think they could have all been by suitable energy and exertion surmounted, were it not for the peculiarly uncommon mildness of the season which has been so unusually free from cold and frost that I could not form any hope that at this late period the ice would attain a sufficient degree of strength and soundness for our purpose during the remainder of the month."<sup>2</sup>

Arrangements were then made for the movement of a small body of troops and seamen, with a sufficient supply of provisions and stores to last a whole year for the reinforcement of the garrison of Mackinac, which had been isolated since September. To accomplish this and establish a suitable naval force on Lake Huron, Drummond was instructed to build gunboats and bateaux at Penetanguishene. Two companies of Royal Marines and a detachment of seamen of the Royal Navy under a lieutenant were at first allotted for this service, but soldiers of the Royal Newfoundland regiment were eventually substituted for the marines.

"No useless consumer of provisions is to be allowed to accompany this detachment," Prevost wrote, "but as it should be composed of men that should prove a benefit and not an incumbrance to the service, the arrangements regarding the movement will be completed immediately after I have met the Commodore.

"The Northwest Company being interested, their opinions must be left out of the question whilst we are considering the advantages which may result from the preservation of Mackinac.

"I consider it as vitally important as respects our Indian alliance; it being the rallying point, the last link by which their warriors still faithful, cling to our interest; severed from that they will find themselves an abandoned people, deserted by us in their utmost need, and reduced by despair to seek mercy from their bitterest foes. Then the chain of British influence would be dissolved and hopeless becomes the prospect of ever regaining their confidence.

"But the preservation of the Indian alliance is not the only solitary good which will result from our being able to retain possession of Mackinac, the spirits of our auxiliaries would be so revived by it that in the event of operations being undertaken for the recovery of Amherstburg and Detroit, a most essential co-operation might be looked for from Lake Huron for the accomplishment of so great an object."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Prevost to Drummond, Quebec, February 2.

<sup>2</sup>Drummond to Prevost, Kingston, February 3.

<sup>3</sup>Prevost to Drummond, Quebec, January 8.

The departure of even so small a detachment, scarcely numbering two hundred of all ranks, was sensibly felt, and it must be soon replaced, or the efficiency of the squadron would diminish.

In response to Yeo's insistent application for the loan of more seamen, Admiral Griffith decided rather reluctantly to lay up two sloops of war at Halifax, and despatch their crews in two other sloops to St. John, N.B., where the two latter vessels were also laid up, and the crews of all four began their march overland to Quebec. A very energetic officer, Captain Edward Collier, of the sloop *Manly*, who had volunteered for this service with his entire crew, was selected for the command of the whole reinforcement. A week was spent at St. John in the instruction of officers and men in the use of snow shoes. The Provincial House of Assembly and the Corporation of the City of St. John each voted a sum of one hundred pounds for the assistance of this detachment while passing through the Province, and by this means the whole body, consisting of two hundred and three of all ranks, was transported in sleighs and sleds as far as Presqu'Isle. On the 19th of February the first division arrived at St. Rocques, near Quebec, and the second at Kamouraska. After a few days the march was continued to Kingston, where they arrived on the 21st and 22nd of March, having left behind one officer and fourteen men disabled by sickness or fatigue, and lost three men by desertion. "Considering the character and general habits of sailors," Collier reported, "the march has been orderly."<sup>1</sup>

Two carpenters employed at the Kingston dockyard, who had been sent some weeks before as spies to Oswego and Sackett's Harbour, returned on February 5 with important intelligence which in the main proved correct. They reported that the garrison of the latter place was composed of not less than two thousand regulars and that the keels of three vessels had recently been laid, these being a ship 154 feet in length, a brig and a large schooner. They had counted seventeen sail in the harbour. The guns for the new ship were expected to arrive by the turnpike road in about three weeks. Contracts had been let for the construction of fifty large gunboats at Oswego and three schooners at Catfish Creek. At Oswego many boats had already been completed. It was generally believed that another expedition would be directed against Montreal in the spring or that an attempt would be made to occupy Prescott and thus sever the communication between Kingston and Lower Canada.

Acting on this information, Yeo immediately proposed to proceed with the construction of a ship 150 feet in length on the gun deck and 44 feet in extreme breadth. "I believe Your Excellency will agree with me that the more concentrated our force the better," he wrote. "She may be ready by July, when we shall most likely have sufficient seamen to man her; if not I can take the seamen out of the small vessels for so desirable a ship."<sup>2</sup>

As several of the best shipwrights had been detached to build boats for service on Lake Huron, he considered it necessary to engage every skilled carpenter that could be found in the neighbourhood of Montreal.

<sup>1</sup>Griffith to Croker, January 10; Griffith to Warren, January 11. Warren to Croker, January 20; Collier to Prevost, January 19; Griffith to Croker, March 8; Collier to Griffith, February 28 and March 25.

<sup>2</sup>Yeo to Prevost, Kingston, February 8; Drummond to Prevost, February 3.

"I feel persuaded that the great struggle for naval prowess and superiority will be contended on Lake Ontario," Yeo wrote to Sir Sidney Beckwith, the new Quartermaster-General. "It is the only place where an equal force of the same magnitude are likely to meet. I am therefore naturally solicitous to have such a force ready as may serve the country, honour the British flag, and do credit to myself.

"I request that you will give orders that any canvas that may be at Montreal or may arrive from Quebec for this establishment is forwarded without a moment's delay, as we have not received one-third what was demanded, and the ships cannot take the lake without sails. We are also very short of oakum and we commence caulking the new ships next week."<sup>1</sup>

Still later information from Sackett's Harbour indicated that the three vessels under construction were a ship intended to carry forty-four guns, a second ship to mount thirty-two guns and a brig of twenty-six guns. In consequence of this, Sir George Prevost approved his proposal to build a third ship without hesitation. "I am led to believe," he remarked, "from the secret information I have received, that, since withdrawing their army from the frontier of Lower Canada, the attention of the American Government has been exclusively directed to the attainment of the naval superiority on Lakes Ontario and Champlain, and that every exertion is using to increase the number of their vessels during the winter for that purpose."<sup>2</sup>

As guns for the new ship could not by any means be supplied in Canada, Sir John Warren was required to send forward thirty thirty-two pounder carronades and the same number of long twenty-four pounders with carriages and tackling from the naval depot at Halifax. Before this demand was despatched Yeo reported that he had learned that the largest ship under construction at Sackett's Harbour would be armed with thirty long thirty-two pounders on her main deck and thirty-two forty-two pounder carronades on her spar deck. This information impelled him to request most urgently that long thirty-two pounders be substituted for twenty-four pounders if such guns could be obtained at Halifax. At the same time intelligence received by the Quartermaster General from another secret source stated that immense supplies of every description of naval stores destined for Sackett's Harbour had already arrived at Watertown and that the main road leading from Albany was thronged with trains of wagons loaded with similar stores, artillery, ammunition, and provisions for the fleet on Lake Ontario. The new vessels were being rapidly planked and Commodore Chauncey had returned from New York to supervise and hasten their completion. The ships lying in the harbour were moored in a highly favourable position for defence, fully armed and manned. The ice was cut around them every morning to leave a free channel of open water and they would be ready to take the lake as soon as it was navigable.

As the Governor General had intimated that he considered former reports on this subject were much exaggerated, Yeo took this opportunity of emphasizing his view of the serious nature of the situation.

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<sup>1</sup>Yeo to Beckwith, February 10.

<sup>2</sup>Prevost to Buxhurst, No. 140, Quebec, March 12, 1814.

"From the information obtained thro' the Qr. Master-General, I am decidedly of the opinion that the enemy will use every exertion to establish a formidable force on Lakes Ontario and Champlain. It is the only measure at this moment likely to be popular in America.

"I pledge myself to Your Excellency that every exertion of my mind and body shall be devoted to defeat the enemy's views, and that the force entrusted to my command never shall surrender to the enemy while *I have life*.

"I feel persuaded at the same time that Your Excellency will agree with me that to ensure such an important object as the naval superiority on the lakes as little ought to be left to chance as possible. I therefore request Your Excellency will urge the Commander-in-Chief or Admiral at Halifax to forward sails, rigging, and cables with all possible despatch.

"I have written to Admiral Griffith and Commissioner Woodhouse on the same subject. There are only 40 32-pr. carronades and fifty-one long twenty-fours yet arrived, but suppose the remainder are on the road. No 68s arrived."

Chauncey returned to Sackett's Harbour on February 23, having been absent more than two months. He found the three vessels under construction well advanced under the management of his capable Scotch superintendent, Henry Eckford. The ribs of the ship were set up and the two brigs were entirely planked and partially caulked. It was expected that they would be ready for launching as soon as the ice disappeared. The ship had been enlarged two feet in breadth over the original design, but his instructions to enlarge the brigs had arrived too late to be carried out. "The roads," he wrote, "are dreadful, and if the present weather continues, we shall experience difficulty in getting on our stores. I, however, hope for cold weather yet."<sup>2</sup>

On the 4th of March, he reported: "I have the mortification to inform you that all our heavy guns are stopped at and below Poughkeepsie in consequence of the badness of the roads and that the teamsters have abandoned them there." His only alternative would be to wait for the opening of navigation on the Hudson and Mohawk rivers, which he anticipated would take place in about ten days.<sup>3</sup>

On the very next day, a deserter from the *Lady-of-the-Lake* arrived at Kingston and made a sworn statement that two ships, two brigs and a schooner were being built at Sackett's Harbor and that the *Madison*, *Oncida*, and *Sylph* were to be rearmed with much heavier guns, giving precise details. His deposition was so circumstantial and seemed so well corroborated by information from other sources that Yeo forwarded a copy immediately to Sir John Warren.

"You will regret with me," he said, "that the enemy's preparations are so great, and yet so short a time back as the 26th January not a keel was laid at Sackett's Harbour. Now they have 400 shipwrights and two of their new ships nearly ready for launching, and a third will be ready by the first of May and a fourth by the end of that month.

"The roads from Albany, Boston and New York are covered with ordnance and stores for these vessels, which, when added to their old squadron, will be far superior to anything I can bring against them. It therefore becomes my

<sup>1</sup>Yeo to Prevost, Kingston, February 28; Yeo to Beckwith, February 26.

<sup>2</sup>Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Sackett's Harbor, February 24.

<sup>3</sup>Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Sackett's Harbor, March 4.

duty to acquaint you that unless I receive *immediate* reinforcements of guns, long 24 and 32 pounders, men and stores of every description, Upper Canada will, in my opinion, be lost to His Majesty.

"In the meantime I shall use every exertion to collect the shipwrights in the country and build, (if possible), to be on something like equal terms with the enemy, altho' their resources are so much nearer to them than ours are to us, that if they exert themselves it will be *impossible* for us to get an equal force.

"You, however, may rely that this squadron will do all in its power to uphold the honour of the British flag, nor shall it ever be surrendered to the enemy under any circumstances whatever."<sup>1</sup>

He despatched a similar letter at the same time to the Lords of the Admiralty urgently soliciting reinforcements.

Brown's brigade of infantry, which had set out from French Mills on February 13, arrived at Sackett's Harbour on the 24th without having suffered any excessive hardship on the march, considering the season of the year. About that time, the Secretary of War at Washington had received some intimation that Prevost contemplated the creation of a naval force at some point on Lake Erie, which he very reasonably inferred could only be accomplished by weakening other points of his line of defence and particularly Kingston or Montreal.

"If the detachment from the former be great," he wrote to Brown, "a moment may occur in which you may do with the aid of Commodore Chauncey, what I last year intended Pike to do without aid, and what we now all know was very practicable, viz.: to cross the river or head of the lake on the ice and carry Kingston by a *coup de main*. This is not, however, to be attempted, but under a combination of the following circumstances: practicable roads, good weather, large detachments, (made westerly), on the part of the enemy, and a full and hearty co-operation on the part of our own naval commander. If the enterprise be agreed upon, use the enclosed letter to mask your object, and let no one into your secret but Chauncey."<sup>2</sup>

Very explicit instructions were enclosed for the movement of the greater part of his division toward the Niagara river. "The truth is," this letter read, "that public opinion will no longer tolerate us in permitting the enemy to keep quiet possession of Fort Niagara. Another motive is the effect which may be expected from the appearance of a large corps on the Niagara in restraining the enemy's enterprises westward of that place. But will a corps so constituted be able to reduce Niagara or long impose on an enemy as well informed as itself? This is not to be expected—whence it follows that the President orders you to assemble means for conveying the brigade you brought from French Mills to Batavia, where other and more detailed orders await you."<sup>3</sup>

These instructions were received by Brown about the 10th of March but, having consulted with Chauncey, they both arrived at the conclusion that it would be very unwise to attempt an attack upon Kingston with a less force than four thousand men, which they could not muster and the second letter

<sup>1</sup>Yeo to Warren, Kingston, March 5.

<sup>2</sup>Armstrong to Brown, Washington, February 28.

<sup>3</sup>Armstrong to Brown, War Department, February 28, No. 2, (intended to deceive the enemy).



was then construed as offering an alternative which might be carried out. On March 13, Brown accordingly began the movement of four regiments of infantry and five companies of artillery with their guns toward Batavia. The whole numbered something less than three thousand of all ranks and marched by the same road in three nearly equal bodies on successive days. A week later, when Brown himself, who was in advance, had reached Geneva and his rearguard had arrived at Auburn, he received a communication from General Gaines, which convinced him that he had misinterpreted his instructions. Writing a hasty apology to the Secretary of War, in which he declared himself "the most unhappy man alive," he countermarched with the utmost speed; a portion of his force, it was reported, marching at the rate of thirty miles a day. After he had returned, another conference with Chauncey and "other confidential men," again led him to believe that his movement toward the Niagara had actually been authorized, and he resumed his march in that direction as rapidly as the state of the roads and the season of the year would permit. About the end of the month his brigade arrived at Batavia and finding no orders for any further movement, he placed it in quarters for the next four weeks. Shortly afterwards he received another letter from the Secretary of War saying: "You have mistaken my meaning . . . If you hazard anything by this mistake, correct it promptly by returning to your post. If, on the other hand, you left a competent force for its defence, go on and prosper. Good consequences are sometimes the result of mistakes."<sup>1</sup>

Gaines was sent back immediately to command the troops at Sackett's Harbour.

Deserters and spies reported the departure of these troops and their subsequent movements to and fro to Drummond within a few days and naturally caused him some perplexity. The information received about the same time from a shipwright who had deserted from the navy yard induced him to believe that Chauncey would not be able to find a sufficient depth of water to launch his large ship.

Spies were again sent out with instructions to visit all ports on the southern shore where boats could be built and depots of supplies formed. Yeo obtained an advance of £300 to carry out this secret service. These measures seem to have soon become known to Chauncey, who immediately offered a reward of \$500 for the apprehension of such agents.

On the 6th of April a committee appointed by the Governor General to enquire into the naval situation reported that the two ships under construction at Kingston would be launched in a few days, and that all guns and stores necessary for their armament and equipment had been delivered at the yard. The keel of a three-decked ship of very large dimensions had been laid and it was confidently anticipated that by great exertions this vessel might be made ready to launch in July and her guns and stores forwarded. On the afternoon of the 14th the two fine frigates, the *Prince Regent*, of fifty-eight guns, and the *Princess Charlotte*, of thirty-six, were launched without accident. The schooner *Nelley* had sailed for Niagara that morning and arrived at her destination next day with guns for the forts and a small reinforcement of troops.

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<sup>1</sup>Armstrong to Brown, March 20.

As an overture had been received from the American government, through a private letter from James Monroe, the Secretary of State, addressed to General Winder, who was still a prisoner of war at Beauport near Quebec, suggesting an armistice, this proposal was referred to Yeo for an opinion.

"After the most deliberate consideration," he wrote in reply, "I am of opinion that so far as relates to naval operations, it is by no means certain that the enemy will have the advantage at the commencement of the campaign, and the reinforcement of seamen and supply of stores which His Majesty's Government mean so frequently to assist us with, will, I have no doubt, enable us to acquire the ascendancy on the lake.

"The third ship now building is, I believe, of far greater force than any the enemy can launch at Sackett's Harbor, and doubts have arisen as to the practicability of launching the large ship now ready, as will appear from the deposition of the carpenter of the *Madison*. But even admitting the enemy are able to launch their large ship and have received the whole of their guns and stores, (of which I entertain a doubt), we never have been so competent to engage them with a reasonable prospect of success as at present. For although the enemy have a greater number of guns of heavy calibre, yet my having two ships of such effective strength as the *Prince Regent* and *Princess Charlotte*, closely to support each other, may give me an advantage in the early part of the action which I feel confident the talents of the officers and the spirits of the men under my command would immediately avail themselves of. I perceive two of the enemy's new vessels are brigs and however formidable they may be as to *weight of metal*, should any accident befall their gaff or main boom, they become for the time unmanageable. Brigs have never been esteemed as effective as ships in battle. In short, Sir, I am fully persuaded that with the means I now possess and with those the Government mean to place at my disposal, I shall be able either to bring Chauncey to a decisive action, or, should I find him too superior, (for I cannot rely on his strength until I see his squadron), manoeuvre with him until the third ship is ready, and which vessel I look upon to be of a description to look down all opposition. In the interim of this ship being ready, the reinforcements of seamen can be placed in heavy gunboats that may effectively assist me during the calms at the commencement of the season.

"These considerations induce me to be decidedly of the opinion that were Your Excellency to accept of the proposed armistice it would neither conduce to the credit of His Majesty's Government or the honor of his arms, while it would enable the enemy to gain time for launching and equipping more ships, augmenting and concentrating his forces, and bringing them to bear, (should a rupture of the armistice come, a measure I fear from the known enmity and insincerity of the American Government too likely to occur), with redoubled force against us."<sup>1</sup>

Drummond also stated that he considered that Monroe's letter had been written with two objects, "first, to gain time for organizing their naval and military force, second, to cause the proposal for the armistice, (the discussion of which is to afford that time), to originate with Your Excellency."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Yeo to Prevost, Kingston, April 13.

<sup>2</sup>Drummond to Prevost, Kingston, April 2, secret and confidential.

Yeo was informed that the most important service he could render for the defence of the province was the immediate reinforcement of the Right Division with the 103rd Regiment, which had lately arrived at Kingston, and the conveyance of a sufficient supply of stores and provisions to the forts guarding the mouth of the Niagara river. He was directed to send one of his smaller vessels into York to embark some heavy guns for those posts and after landing the troops and supplies there to cruise along the southern shore of the lake, examining all the smaller harbours and creeks and particularly reconnoitring Oswego with a view of landing and bringing off the supplies reported to have been collected there. After doing this he was instructed to reconnoitre Sackett's Harbour closely and if he considered that an attack would offer any "rational hope of success," he was to despatch a fast sailing boat to Kingston with information and follow quickly with the squadron to take on board troops with that object.<sup>1</sup>

Harvey took care to qualify these instructions by adding that "new circumstances or fresh intelligence may confirm or render it necessary wholly or partially to change the plan of operations both with regard to the troops and the squadron."

It was then learned that instead of sanctioning the construction of more ships at Kingston the Admiralty had decided to send out the frames of two fir-built thirty-two gun frigates and two twenty gun brigs to be put together after their arrival at that port. Prevost strongly disapproved of this proposal but requested a professional opinion from Yeo.

"I perfectly agree with Your Excellency," Yeo wrote, "that the impediments to this scheme are numerous and very difficult to overcome, if not, (under existing circumstances), wholly impracticable. The timber to be provided here can be procured but the time that would elapse ere the frames could be transported, considering the immense supplies Your Excellency must also send for the subsistence of the troops and the seamen, would be so long, that the third ship, equal in force to three or four of such frigates, would be built, equipt, and on the lake ere the frames of the two fir ships could be sent up. That the enemy would permit of such immense convoys to pass unmolested cannot be supposed, and the large escorts which must necessarily accompany them would weaken Your Excellency's force on those points where they might be more essentially useful. But what in my opinion should chiefly influence Your Excellency's decision respecting them, is that the strength of the third ship, now building, is such as to give us a reasonable hope that their being sent up is unnecessary."<sup>2</sup>

Confidently anticipating that the addition of the two new frigates to his squadron would give Yeo a decided but temporary superiority, Prevost once more suggested to Drummond the expediency of undertaking a combined attack upon Sackett's Harbour.

"I am induced to urge the serious consideration of this measure," he wrote, "because, if the enemy is left undisturbed to prosecute their plans, the vastly superior resources they possess for shipbuilding and in procuring seamen, must terminate in their acquiring a superior naval force at no very distant period,

<sup>1</sup>Harvey to Yeo, Kingston, April 11, most secret and confidential.

<sup>2</sup>Yeo to Prevost, Kingston, April 22.

and once in possession of that advantage, it will not be possible to guard a very extended frontier from insult. The destruction of the American naval force on Lake Ontario would effectually cause all hostile operations in that quarter to cease, while it would afford many facilities to our own."<sup>1</sup>

Drummond promptly replied that "the imperious necessity which exists for an immediate attempt to destroy the enemy's fleet" had already been considered, but it was agreed that the employment of a land force of not less than four thousand effective men would be necessary to ensure a reasonable prospect of success, as the defences of his port had been enormously strengthened by the construction of additional batteries and blockhouses and he had ascertained that the garrison numbered not less than eighteen hundred regular soldiers and was being constantly increased by the arrival of recruits, and the fleet was manned by fifteen hundred or two thousand sailors. Yeo had fully concurred in this opinion. For this operation eighteen hundred men could be detached from the garrison of Kingston, four hundred could be drawn from Cornwall and Prescott and an equal number with two hundred Indians could be brought from York and Burlington. Adding to this force four hundred effective men from the second battalion of Royal Marines, he would have a total of only three thousand troops. Militia must necessarily be called in from the adjacent country to garrison these posts during the absence of the regular troops. He proposed to employ a few heavy howitzers and field guns from Kingston and two twenty-four pounder field guns from Fort George as siege artillery.

"Troops and light artillery alone would be of no use whatever numbers employed," he remarked. "Heavy ordnance is indispensably necessary to the success of an attack on an enemy whose principal defence consists not in a breastwork as assumed in the memorandum but in a connected chain of blockhouses armed with guns of heavy calibre. The two large mortars, (or 68 pounder carronades), might be useful both against the blockhouses and shipping."<sup>2</sup>

Not less than eight hundred men must, therefore, be sent up from Montreal to give him the force deemed necessary to undertake this enterprise. The armament of the new ships had been delayed for lack of ring-bolts presumed to be on the way from Montreal. When these arrived and were fitted, the squadron would be ready to sail. Yeo would then proceed with his whole force to reconnoitre Sackett's Harbour and afterward attack Oswego, where it was reported that a large depot of naval stores, ordnance, and provisions had been formed, including heavy guns and other equipment for the enemy's large ship on the stocks. "Should Sir James, in co-operation with the force I intend embarking on board the fleet," Drummond added cheerfully, "be so fortunate as to seize or destroy the guns and stores and thereby retard the progress of this vessel—the advantage to be derived from such a measure would be incalculable."

From Oswego a brig would be sent to Niagara and the head of the lake to bring down the guns and troops needed for the attack on Sackett's Harbour. The depleted state of the local supply of provisions in the province gave him great anxiety and would not justify protracted operations. "I will not say exactly how long our resources may hold out," he remarked significantly, "but

<sup>1</sup>Prevost to Drummond, Montreal, April 23.

<sup>2</sup>Drummond to Prevost, Kingston, April 28.

I am very apprehensive that at no very remote period difficulties the most serious and alarming in this respect will be felt by the Right Division."<sup>1</sup>

On the 20th of April, a man giving the name of Constant Bacon came into Fort Niagara, representing himself to be a sutler, lately serving with the American forces on that frontier, seeking to escape from his creditors. He was taken into custody and sent to York under suspicion of being a spy. On examination by Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Nichol he reported that considerable depots of provisions had been lately formed at the mouth of the Genesee river, Irondequoit Bay, Pulteneyville, and Sodus, protected only by weak guards of ill-trained militia. Nichol became convinced that this information was reliable and immediately proposed that these depots should be attacked in succession at an early date. "Great quantities of provisions of which we are much in want may be brought off," he wrote confidently, "and what we cannot bring away can be easily destroyed."<sup>2</sup>

Drummond's application for troops from Lower Canada to enable him to attack Sackett's Harbour had the unexpected result of causing Prevost to abandon the project altogether.

"In order to render so many disposable at Kingston," he wrote. "I ought to augment your present force there to at least 5,000 effectives, an increase little calculated to diminish the great difficulties which you are laboring under for provisions and forage to maintain a much smaller force. But the fact is that the force in this country is insufficient to enable me to concentrate at any one point in Upper Canada the number of regulars you require for this important service without stripping Lower Canada of nearly the whole of them that are at present in it, and committing its defence to Provincials and militia.

"The views of His Majesty's Government respecting the mode of conducting the war with America, do not justify my exposing too much at one stake. It is by wary measures and occasional daring enterprises with disproportionate means that the character of the war has been sustained, and from that policy I am not disposed to depart.

"But a presumption that the Government of the United States is animated by a sincere desire of an armistice from a firm belief that the negotiation commenced at Gothenburg will terminate in peace has induced me to accede to the President's proposal to appoint an officer of rank to discuss and arrange tomorrow on the part of H.M.'s Government with a similar person on the part of the American Gov't the articles of a suspension of arms at the village of Champlain."<sup>3</sup>

After his return to Sackett's Harbour, Chauncey continued to push the work in the dockyard with his customary energy. The dimensions of the new ship were considerably enlarged as a result of information from Kingston that the *Prince Regent* was already caulked and decked and would carry sixty guns. On the 24th of March he learned with much perturbation that Yeo had laid the keel of a three-decked ship designed to carry one hundred guns. On the

<sup>1</sup>Drummond to Prevost, Kingston, April 28; Drummond to Prevost, April 26; Statement of the Force and Means which it is assumed may be collected in Upper Canada for the attack on Sackett's Harbour.

<sup>2</sup>Nichol to Drummond, York, April 22.

<sup>3</sup>Prevost to Drummond, Montreal, April 30. Secret and confidential.

29th he wrote: "I am very apprehensive that we shall be detained for our heavy guns, for the winter has been so very open and mild that a large portion of the guns which left New York in the early part of February are still on the road between Albany and New York, and must now come by water by the way of Oswego. I am making every arrangement that there shall be as little delay at Oswego as possible. That post, however, requires a military force at it, as it is now entirely destitute, and I believe not a gun mounted."<sup>1</sup>

Sickness had disabled many of his sailors and artificers. For five months quite one-half of the crew of his flagship had been unfit for any duty and almost a fifth of the whole died of disease during the winter. On the 7th of April one of the new brigs was launched and named the *Jefferson*. Three days later the other was launched and called the *Jones*. Neither men nor guns to man and arm them had arrived and in the existing impassable state of the roads there seemed little prospect of receiving them for several weeks. A party of twenty-one seamen had actually been eight days in coming from Utica, a distance of less than ninety miles. On the 11th a trusted agent whom he had sent into the vicinity of Kingston returned with most alarming news.

"The enemy has all his fleet ready, (with the exception of the new vessels), in the stream, he has 12 to 14 gunboats and a number of small craft, and 3,000 troops ready to embark for this place, and it is said they are only waiting for a favorable time to make the attack. My own impression is that they have understood that we are going to York and that they have prepared this force for the purpose of attacking the harbor the moment our fleet leaves it. The enemy, however, may be determined to make the attack at all hazards, as the object to them is of immense importance, and I am sorry to say that our force is but little adapted to the defence of this place. There are not a thousand effective men here besides the sailors and marines. General Gaines arrived here yesterday and assumed the command and we shall endeavor to defend the place as long as we can with the means we possess."<sup>2</sup>

This information was transmitted to General Brown, who returned with all haste from Batavia, arriving on April 24, and resumed command of the garrison which was rapidly reinforced with both regulars and militia. As soon as the channel was free from ice the *Lady-of-the-Lake* was sent outside the bay to maintain a close watch for the approach of any hostile force. Strong guards were mounted at the dockyard to protect the ship on the stocks. The *Madison* was moored in a position to rake the ways of approach to the yard with all her guns loaded with sacks of musket-balls. Double chains of sentries were posted all round the place and the entrance to the basin closed with heavy booms. These extraordinary precautions were soon justified. On April 25, Lieutenant Dudley in command of a guard boat, discovered shortly after dark that three row-boats were stealthily approaching and fired on them at once. They made no reply but pulled swiftly away. Although he gave chase, he failed to overhaul them. Next day on making a search near the spot six small barrels filled with gunpowder were found floating in the water, roped together, two and two, in

<sup>1</sup>Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, U.S. Ship *General Pike*, Sackett's Harbour, No. 24, March 29.

<sup>2</sup>Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Sackett's Harbour, April 11.

such a manner that each pair could be handily carried by one man. Fuse holes had been bored in these barrels and it was evident that a daring attempt to destroy some of the ships had been frustrated. Soon after this event, the death of a well-known shipwright, who was accidentally shot by a sentry, caused such excitement and indignation among his fellow-workmen that they ceased work and remained idle for several days. Many of the sailors joined them in parading the town and fought with the soldiers in the streets. Several men were injured before these disturbances were ended and the artificers persuaded to resume work. Owing chiefly to this loss of time, the new ship, which, from her great size, was proudly named the *Superior*, was not launched until May 2. Only eighty days had elapsed since her keel was laid. Another smaller ship was at once laid down on the same blocks. Guns and cables were slowly arriving in gunboats from Oswego, but the greater part of the ordnance and other indispensable stores required to equip her were still struggling forward along the difficult and roundabout route of the Mohawk River, Wood Creek, Lake Oneida, and the Oswego River.

On the evening of May 4, the *Lady-of-the-Lake* came in, firing alarm guns and signalling information that the British squadron had been seen that afternoon coming out of Kingston just before dark and steering for Amherst Bay. Later reports made it certain that both new frigates were included in this squadron and Chauncey prudently determined to remain in port and decline an action.

Having definitely decided to attack Oswego and other depots, Drummond embarked a land force numbering nine hundred and ninety-one of all ranks, composed of a detachment of thirty-three, all ranks, of the Royal Artillery with a brass twelve-pounder field gun and a five and a half-inch howitzer, commanded by Captain Cruttenden, six rocket men under Lieutenant Stevens, twenty-four sappers, under Lieutenant Gosset, R.E., the light company of the Glengarry Light Infantry, fifty-eight of all ranks, six companies of the Regiment de Watteville, under Lieutenant-Colonel Fischer, and the second battalion of Royal Marines under Lieutenant-Colonel Malcolm. He had already received information of the launch of the *Superior* and that another frigate had been laid down in her place at Sackett's Harbour, which, it was reported, would be completed for launching in six weeks.

"If such be the case," he wrote, "it is impossible for us to keep pace with such exertions. I must again beg leave to repeat my opinion that the only way to secure the Upper Province is a vigorous combined attack of army and navy against the enemy's chief means of annoyance, their fleet and stores at Sackett's Harbour.

"But on this occasion the most ample measures must be taken to ensure success, and the small force which the Upper Province can afford must be assisted by a regular force from Your Excellency of certainly not less than 800 effective men from the Lower Province. In all these opinions I am joined by the naval commander, Sir James Yeo."

He embarked at daybreak on May 4, accompanied by Lieutenant-Colonel Harvey, his chief staff officer, and the squadron, consisting of the *Prince Regent*,

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<sup>1</sup>Drummond to Prevost, Kingston, May 3.

Captain R. J. L. O'Connor, flying the broad pennant of the Commodore, the *Princess Charlotte*, Captain W. H. Mulcaster, the *Montreal* (formerly the *Wolfe*), Captain S. Popham, the *Niagara* (formerly the *Royal George*), Captain F. B. Spilsbury, the *Charwell* (formerly the *Maira*), Captain A. Dobbs, the *Star* (formerly the *Melville*), Captain C. Anthony, the *Magnet* (formerly the *Sir Sidney Smith*), Captain E. Collier, and eleven gunboats, weighed anchor immediately. "The appearance of the *Prince Regent* and *Princess Charlotte* on so small a piece of water was truly magnificent," a military observer wrote with unwonted enthusiasm. "They appear to sail remarkably well. They were not out of sight at 5 o'clock p.m."

As the wind was light and variable, Yeo was constrained to anchor off the Ducks for several hours during the night and did not come in sight of Oswego until late next morning. The approach of a hostile squadron was, however, made known to the garrison at a much earlier hour and messengers were despatched to call in the militia and active preparations made for a resolute defence. About the 30th of April, Lieutenant-Colonel Mitchell had arrived from Sackett's Harbour with his battalion, (four companies), of the Third United States Artillery and one company from another battalion, numbering in all less than four hundred of all ranks. The old fort standing on commanding ground, on the right bank of the river was occupied and put in as fair a state of defence as time would permit. The palisades were repaired and platforms built for guns, four of which, two twenty-four pounders, a twelve, and a six pounder, were mounted to command the entrance to the harbour, where there was a safe anchorage for small vessels with a depth of twelve feet of water. Another twelve pounder was mounted *en barbette* in a small earthwork near the water's edge on the same side of the river. The village, which was built on the opposite bank, had not more than five hundred inhabitants before the war, but had since increased in size and become a place of considerable importance. Wharves, warehouses, and barracks had been built and a floating bridge established. To make the garrison appear more numerous than it actually was, or to furnish accommodation for expected reinforcements, all the tents in store were pitched on that side of the river, while the troops were actually quartered in the barracks in the fort. The United States schooner *Græzler*, armed with three long guns, lay in the harbour with three merchant schooners and a number of large sailing boats, having been assembled by Captain Woolsey to transport stores to Sackett's Harbour.

At 3 p.m. the squadron lay to, within long range of the shore, and the gunboats were sent close in under the supervision of Captain Collier to induce the garrison to disclose the position and number of their guns by opening fire. The gunboats soon occupied a position within point blank range and drew the fire of all four guns in the fort, but no guns could be discovered on the opposite side of the river. Considerable bodies of troops were seen on the glacis and near the water, apparently held in readiness to oppose a landing. This cannonade continued from 4 p.m. until 5.30 p.m., when Captain Collier, having completed his reconnoissance to his satisfaction, drew out of range. After the troops had taken their suppers, they were ordered to embark in the ships' boats and begin

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\*Stovin to Prevost, Kingston, May 5.



landing. Before this could be accomplished, a violent squall of wind sprang up as the sun was setting, blowing directly toward the land, which not only forced them to return on board the ships in the greatest haste, but obliged the entire squadron to get under way and beat laboriously out into the open lake. During this storm four boats were cut adrift and lost. Toward daybreak the gale fell and the wind continued to be light and uncertain until 10 a.m., when it shifted to the east. An hour later the squadron was again able to approach the harbour. The *Princess Charlotte*, *Montreal*, and *Niagara* worked slowly in, as close as the depth of water would permit without grounding, to engage the fort. The *Magnet* was ordered to sweep the streets of the village with her fire and prevent a body of militia, which had assembled there, from crossing the river. The brigs were assigned the task of towing in the boats, loaded with troops and covering their landing by searching with their fire a narrow strip of woods near the water's edge which was occupied by a party of the enemy's riflemen. The company of Glengarry Light Infantry and half of the light company of the Regiment de Watteville were embarked in a large flat-boat propelled by twenty-four oars, while the remainder of the light company and the whole of the grenadiers of de Watteville's went on board the gunboat *Cleopatra*. The marines and two hundred seamen commanded by Captain Mulcaster entered the boats, completely filling them. The detachments of artillery and sappers and the battalion companies of de Watteville's regiment remained in reserve on board the *Princess Charlotte* and *Star*, as no boats could be provided for their immediate disembarkation. A low sandy point jutting into the lake was selected as a suitable landing place. As the boats approached it, the enemy's guns and riflemen began an effective fire which caused some loss. The boats soon grounded and the troops were obliged to plunge into the water, waist-deep or more, and wade ashore. Their movement was carefully supervised and directed by Captain O'Connor, who then returned to the ships with the boats for the remainder. Captain Popham boldly ran the *Montreal* into such a position that he drew upon her nearly the whole fire of the guns of the fort. His ship was three times set on fire by red-hot shot, and the fire was not completely extinguished for three hours. Her hull, masts, and rigging were considerably damaged. Popham himself was painfully wounded in the right hand; his sailing master, James Richardson, formerly of the Provincial Marine, received a wound which caused the amputation of his left arm; one seaman of her crew was killed and four were wounded.

The company of Glengarry Light Infantry, being first to gain the land, extended rapidly and entered the woods, driving out the enemy's riflemen but losing nine men wounded. The remainder of the landing party, formed in two columns, the marines and seamen on the right under Malcolm and Mulcaster, and the detachment of de Watteville's on the left under Captain de Bersy.

The fort stood on very high ground, rising steeply sixty feet above the surface of the river and lake, which partly encompassed it on the north and west, and twenty or twenty-five feet above a sloping glacis on its southern and eastern faces. Yeo described it as the most formidable position that he had seen on that lake.

As soon as the columns were properly formed Fischer gave the signal to advance. The movement up the long, steep slope was quickly accomplished in the face of a heavy fire of musketry, which was continued until the leading ranks reached the edge of the glacis, when the opposing riflemen retired within their works. Captain Holtaway of the Marines fell at the head of his company and Captain Mulcaster was disabled by three wounds within a few yards of the rampart. They were instantly replaced by Lieutenants Laurie and Scott and the storming party leaped into the ditch and scrambled over the palisades, which were found not to be a very serious obstacle. At the same time the detachment of de Watteville's regiment, gallantly led by de Bersy, gained an entrance at another place. In the course of the assault several men were killed or wounded by the fire of the ships, directed against the fort. The size of the works was much too great to be properly defended by so small a garrison, although it had been reinforced by most of the crew of the *Growler*. After retiring to the farther side of the fort and even into the ditch beyond, the defenders still kept up an intermittent fire of musketry which caused considerable loss. Two marines who attempted to climb the garrison flagstaff were shot down in succession. Then Lieutenant John Hewett of the same corps succeeded in making the ascent amid a shower of bullets and struck the flag which had been nailed to the mast, receiving three wounds in the effort. Yeo and Drummond had landed just in time to witness this gallant act. The garrison left behind one officer and twenty-four others killed on the spot and about the same number badly wounded. The troops in reserve had then landed and were sent across the river to take possession of the town from which the militia had been expelled by the fire of the *Magnet*. It was reported, probably with truth, that they had scarcely fired a shot in its defence. Mitchell retired with the remnant of his force toward Oswego Falls, carefully breaking down the bridges and obstructing the roads to retard pursuit. The delay in landing caused by the gale of the previous evening had given him time to throw a boom across the river and remove fifty or sixty guns to a place of comparative safety. When it was seen that the landing would probably succeed, an attempt was made to scuttle the schooners and boats in the harbour, which was partially successful. Not more than sixty prisoners were taken, half of them being wounded. The loss of the storming party was severe, amounting to one officer and eighteen other ranks killed and two officers and sixty other ranks of the troops and marines wounded. Besides these, three seamen were killed and four officers and six seamen wounded.

Nine heavy guns intended for the new ships at Sackett's Harbour were captured and brought off, six others had been rendered unserviceable or sunk in the river with a large quantity of round shot and gunpowder. A large supply of naval stores and provisions was found in the warehouses. As these articles were of almost incalculable value at that time, every effort was made to remove them to Kingston. This work went on all night. Three schooners which had been sunk in the harbour were floated, repaired, and loaded. Among them was the *Growler*, which had already changed hands twice. A fourth schooner was destroyed. Eight hundred barrels of flour, five hundred barrels of pork, six hundred barrels of salt, five hundred barrels of hard bread, seventy coils of

large rope and cordage, considerable quantities of tar, fixed ammunition, round shot, and ships' blocks were put on board. The fort was dismantled, the barracks, warehouses with all remaining stores, magazines, bridges, and gun platforms were burned or otherwise destroyed. Drummond reported, with justifiable complacency, that "the loss to them, therefore, has been very great and I am sanguine that by this blow they have been deprived of the means of completing the armament and particularly the equipment of the large man-of-war, an object of the greatest importance."<sup>1</sup>

This expedition was unquestionably well planned and ably executed. Yeo has, however, been unjustly censured by a modern critic for "great lack of energy" in failing to pursue his enemy to Oswego Falls.<sup>2</sup> His chief reasons for breaking off the pursuit were probably anxiety to remove the captured stores and return to Kingston to prepare for the more important expedition planned against Sackett's Harbour, combined with a disinclination to risk his boats in the dangerous navigation of Oswego river.

The defence of the place was stubborn and altogether creditable to the force engaged. General Brown was, on the other hand, openly blamed by naval officers for not making a larger detachment for its protection, but he was naturally unwilling to weaken too much the garrison of his principal naval station.

The troops and seamen were quickly embarked and shortly after daybreak the squadron set sail. Twelve hours later it was seen at a great distance from Sackett's Harbour, where an exaggerated report of the taking of Oswego had already arrived.

Yeo remained at Kingston until May 11, probably awaiting a reply from the Governor General to Drummond's letter of the 3rd, respecting the contemplated attack on Sackett's Harbour. When this came, the project was at once renounced as no longer practicable.

Prevost wrote: "I cannot at this moment supply you from this Province with the 800 effective men you deem necessary to enable you to attempt, by a combined operation, the destruction of the enemy's fleet and stores at Sackett's Harbour, and it will depend upon the force which His Majesty's Government may place at my disposal from England during the next month whether the seat of war may be transferred to the enemy's possessions contiguous to Upper Canada, or, whether, as at present the case, I shall be obliged to retain the whole of the troops I have in Lower Canada for its defence."<sup>3</sup>

Yeo took on board a small body of troops to act with his marines as a landing party and sailed at once to raid the smaller depots on the American side. His squadron was dogged at a respectful distance by the *Lady-of-the-Lake* until nightfall, when she returned to Sackett's Harbour with the information that it was steering toward Oswego or the Genesee, accompanied by a number of gun-boats and other small craft.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Drummond to Prevost, H.M.S. *Prince Regent*, Lake Ontario, off Oswego, May 7; Fischer to Harvey, May 7; Yeo to Croker, May 8; Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, May 7; New York Evening Post, May 19, an extract from a letter dated Oswego Falls, May 7.

<sup>2</sup>Roosevelt, *The Naval War of 1812*, II, p. 91.

<sup>3</sup>Prevost to Drummond, Montreal, May 7. Secret and confidential.

<sup>4</sup>Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Sackett's Harbour, May 12.

Next morning a landing was made at Oswego without opposition and all private warehouses and other buildings were closely searched for public stores. None were discovered and there was no sign of the presence of any military force. Information was obtained that a strong force was assembled at Oswego Falls and that workmen were employed in cutting a road through the woods from that place to Sackett's Harbour for the conveyance of heavy guns. It was expected that this road would not be completed for three weeks or a month. A gunboat was left behind to blockade the port and the remainder of the squadron went on to Genesee Bay, where it anchored on the 13th. A considerable body of militia with two field guns and some mounted men had already been assembled for the defence of the depot under General P. B. Porter. A demand for the surrender of all public property was resolutely rejected and although some of the gunboats approached the shore and opened fire, it was considered that the opposing force was too formidable to risk a landing. Next morning Yeo came to off Pulteneyville, where a landing was made in sight of a small party of militia that quickly retired. A written agreement was signed by Brigadier-General Swift of the New York militia, who was understood to be in command, undertaking to surrender all public property on the condition that the buildings would not be destroyed. Three leading residents were taken prisoners as hostages. A small quantity of flour was accordingly removed. When this had been done the rear guard was suddenly fired upon by some rifleman in ambush. A sergeant of marines was killed and Captain Short and four men of the same corps wounded. It was then ascertained that all the stores formerly deposited at Sodus Bay had been removed inland and no landing was attempted there. Meanwhile the gunboat stationed off Oswego had captured a large boat loaded with flour and carried her prize into Kingston. These events naturally caused great alarm along the coast and large bodies of militia were embodied in consequence. More than three thousand men were assembled for the protection of the depot at Oswego Falls alone.<sup>1</sup>

On May 19 Yeo anchored off Kingston and reported that he would immediately take up a position between the island and Sackett's Harbour which would completely prevent any vessel from passing without his knowledge and effectually secure the communication by water with the ports at the head of the lake. Late in the afternoon he approached the enemy's port and chased in the *Lady-of-the-Lake*, which narrowly escaped capture by being towed in by boats sent to her assistance. Chauncey made a careful reconnoissance next morning, approaching in a schooner within a mile or two while Yeo changed position at the same time to conceal the strength of his force.

"Five sail, (four ships and one brig), are now anchored between Point Peninsula and Stony Island, so that they completely guard both passages." Chauncey wrote rather dolefully. "This is the first time I have experienced the mortification of a blockade since I have been on the lake, and I hope this mortifying situation will be of short duration."<sup>2</sup>

Quantities of stores were then gradually arriving by wagon from North Bay on Lake Oneida, whither they were being conveyed by water from Oswego

<sup>1</sup>Drummond to Prevost, Kingston, May 19; New York Evening Post, May 2.

<sup>2</sup>Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, May 20; New York Evening Post, May 30.

Falls. Although the roads were still very bad from frequent heavy rains, he hoped to receive everything he needed except guns, anchors, and large cables. Owing to their great bulk and weight, these could only be transported by the lake.

Very accurate information on these matters was transmitted to Kingston about May 14 by two spies acting independently whose reports agreed very closely. "The general opinion is that the fleet cannot get out in less than six weeks," one of these men reported. "About fifteen only of the long 32 pounders had reached Sackett's Harbour by way of Oswego when our attack on that place was made, the remainder of them were at the Falls as likewise a very great quantity of rigging and other stores. Nothing further than Col. Mitchell's force which had retreated thither to guard them. The enemy are quite at a loss how to get on the 32 prs. to Sackett's Harbour. They dread a rigorous blockade and from Oswego the road is only passable for a horseman, and these guns, weighing upwards of three tons, are found too heavy for transportation by wagon, by which means their 42 pr. carronades are brought from Utica. Quantities of ammunition lately brought by the same conveyance to the Harbour. Within the last week, near 60 wagons with that article, rigging, stores and 42 pr. carronades have arrived."<sup>1</sup>

The other man had "no doubt of every exertion being immediately made to get the guns, &c., to the Harbour and was of the opinion that their small fast-sailing schooners would be used for that purpose."<sup>2</sup>

On May 20, Captain Dobbs, with the *Charwell*, *Nelley*, and two small schooners, was detached to convey three companies of the 103rd Regiment to the head of the lake. After landing these troops at Burlington, he was directed to return immediately to Kingston for the remainder of that corps.

The importance of maintaining a strict blockade was evident. Writing from his flagship off Sackett's Harbour on May 21, Yeo described very clearly the difficulties which still beset him.

"As to pursers, gunners, boatswains and carpenters, I have not men qualified to hold such situations. I have only seven midshipmen who have passed, two of whom, I think, alone deserve promotion, and the captains cannot send above half the number of men worthy of being rated as petty officers agreeably to their Lordships' new establishment. . . .

"The ships of the squadron are very short of the complement, agreeable to the Admiralty establishment, and the third ship building at Kingston, (which will be ready in August), will require a complement equal to fight one hundred and two guns.

"The enemy's large ship, which is launched, will carry thirty-two long 32 pounders on the main and thirty-four long 24 pounders on the spar deck. Their two new brigs mount twenty-two 42 pounder carronades, one long 24 and two long 12 pounders. Another ship of 140 feet keel will be launched in three weeks. I, therefore, leave their Lordships to judge what I have to contend with."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Drummond to Prevost, Kingston, May 14; Report of information given by . . .

<sup>2</sup>Secret intelligence received from Lieutenant Colonel Morrison, commanding at Fort Wellington (Prescott).

<sup>3</sup>Yeo to Croker, H.M.S. *Prince Regent*, at anchor off Sackett's Harbour, May 21.

Soon after this, Yeo was prostrated for several days by a severe attack of illness which compelled him to turn over the command to Captain O'Connor, although he remained on board his flagship. It was then observed that the *Superior* had taken on her foremast, thus completing her lower masts, and the new brigs and remainder of the American squadron seemed entirely ready for service. On the 24th Drummond visited the blockading squadron with the intention of making a personal reconnoissance. As the next morning was calm and very foggy, it was considered inadvisable to get under weigh or approach the harbour closer than eight miles. In the afternoon he embarked in a canoe and went within a mile and a half of the entrance whence he obtained a tolerably clear view of the port and shipping. "Their vessels have all top-gallant yards across," he reported, "and are perfectly ready to take the lake with the exception of the *Superior*, which although deep in the water and her mizen, mizen-top, and mizen-top-gallant masts up and completely rigged, has not an atom of cordage to her fore or main masts. I am in consequence induced to suppose that she has all her stores and many of her guns on board, but that the heavy cordage for the shrouds, stays, and rigging of these two masts have not yet arrived at the harbour."<sup>1</sup>

This inference was soon corroborated by the report of a spy,<sup>2</sup> who stated that forty guns had been taken on board this ship and that rigging for her was being brought forward by wagons from Lake Oneida. It was expected that the ship on the stocks would be ready to launch on June 5. Three hundred seamen had just arrived from the seaboard.

His heavy guns and cables had now been detained at Oswego Falls for near three weeks and despairing of getting them on by any other means, Chauncey resolved on the somewhat hazardous course of conveying them to some landing-place within a moderate distance of Sackett's Harbour by a flotilla of boats, moving by night and lying concealed in one of the numerous creeks or inlets by day. The point selected for landing was the head of boat navigation on Stoney Creek, a small stream which falls into Lake Ontario a few miles south of Black River Bay, just outside the station of the blockading ships, whence there was a fairly good road leading to another landing on Henderson's Bay, a distance of only three miles. Woolsey was directed to keep his intentions absolutely secret and select dark and moonless nights for the movement. Great pains were taken to spread information that all these guns and stores were to be removed back into Oneida Lake for transportation overland. On the afternoon of May 28, Woolsey ran the rapids with nineteen large bateaux, loaded with twenty-one long thirty-two pounders, ten long twenty-four pounders, three forty-two pounder carronades and ten large cables, and arrived at Oswego about sunset. He was accompanied by one hundred and fifty rank and file of the First United States Rifle Regiment as an escort, commanded by Major Daniel Appling, and distributed in the proportion of eight men to a boat. Including seamen and boatmen his entire force exceeded four hundred of all ranks. His scouts reported that no enemy was in sight and after dark the flotilla cautiously entered the lake. Making the best use of their sails and rowing hard at the same time.

<sup>1</sup>Drummond to Prevost, Kingston, May 27.

<sup>2</sup>Copy of information, enclosed in Drummond's letter to Prevost, May 27.

Woolsey arrived at the Big Salmon River, twenty miles on his way, but found that one of his boats had parted company and disappeared. After entering the river to rest and refresh his men, he was joined by a band of one hundred and twenty Oneida Indians who had been directed to march there from their village to act as a reinforcement to the escort by moving along the shore on the flank of the boats. When they moved off the flotilla resumed its voyage and at noon arrived at the mouth of Big Sandy Creek, ten miles further on, but still eight miles short of its destination. It then became almost certain that the missing boat had been captured by the blockaders and a further advance was considered too dangerous to be risked by daylight. Woolsey, therefore, decided to enter the creek and lie quiet in a position where his boats would be hidden from the lake by woods and sandhills. He ascended the stream for two miles and sent a message to Sackett's Harbour to ask the protection of more troops accompanied by field guns.

The stray boat from Woolsey's flotilla, loaded with two twenty-four pounders and a nineteen and a half -inch cable for the *Superior*, was taken by the blockading squadron early on the morning of Sunday, the 29th of May. Information of the composition and destination of the flotilla was obtained from the prisoners. Captain Popham of the *Montreal* then started in search of the other boats with the gunboats *Cleopatra* and *Lais*, the Commodore's gig, and a cutter. After looking into Stoney Creek where nothing was discovered, he cruised along the shore in the direction of Oswego. In the course of the afternoon he was joined by Captain Spilsbury of the *Niagara* with two more cutters, whom he took under his command. He then had a force of one hundred and seventy-five of all ranks, of whom two-thirds were seamen and the remainder marines. During the night information was received that the enemy's flotilla had certainly taken refuge in Sandy Creek. Popham arrived at the mouth of this stream shortly after daybreak on May 30, where he landed to reconnoitre, accompanied by Captain Spilsbury and some other officers. From the summit of the sandhills the masts of eighteen boats were plainly seen rising over the marsh, and as they did not seem to be very near the woods and no opposition was offered at the entrance to the creek, the conclusion was drawn that they were protected by a force of militia only. Popham had been cautioned by Yeo of the danger of the ascent of such a stream, referring in particular to the disastrous result of such an attempt at Cranberry Creek, the year before. But the result of a successful attack appeared to him of such great importance that any risk would be fully justified. The creek was narrow, not being more than fifty yards in width at any point, crooked, and sluggish, with marshy borders. He was not then aware that an escort of riflemen had accompanied the boats and had been subsequently reinforced by a band of Indians.

Woolsey was already warned of his approach. At two o'clock that morning a message was received from Chauncey in consequence of which an officer was sent out to reconnoitre in the direction of Black River Bay. He was discovered by one of Popham's boats and pursued until he was observed to enter the creek. The riflemen and Indians were then moved half a mile below the boats where they found a suitable position of ambush in the woods.

The two gunboats advanced slowly up the creek followed at some distance by the cutters and gig. When the leading gunboat had approached within distant range of the American boats, Lieutenant Cox with the greater part of his detachment of Royal Marines landed on the left bank, while Captain Spilsbury with a party of seamen and marines armed with muskets, taking with them a light colhorn, landed on the right bank. Two hours had elapsed before this movement was completed. During this time a squadron of dragoons, a company of light artillery with two field pieces, and a body of riflemen, numbering in all some three hundred men, had arrived from Sackett's Harbour. These troops were held in reserve for the immediate protection of the boats.

Having unwisely divided his small force into three weak parties, separated by the stream, Popham finally gave orders for a simultaneous advance. The parties on shore had not gone far when they were assailed by a converging and well sustained fire from many rifles at close range. Several men were instantly killed; Lieutenants Cox and McVeagh of the marines and many others were dangerously wounded. Master's mate Charles Hoare of the *Montreal* bravely rallied all who were not disabled and led them against their hidden enemies. He soon fell mortally wounded, pierced by no less than eleven bullets, and this attack was repelled with severe loss. All who were able to do so retreated toward their boats. The *Cleopatra* had opened fire from the 68 pounder howitzer mounted in her bow upon a small party of Indians, who had ventured in pursuit, and drove them to cover again. Then moving forward, she rounded a bend of the stream and came in sight of the American flotilla and drew the fire of their field guns. In a hurried attempt to reply, her heavy gun became accidentally disabled and an effort was made to turn the boat about to bring a 24 pounder in the stern to bear. Appling immediately advanced with his whole force and concentrated an overwhelming fire on this boat and others immediately behind. Effective resistance and escape were soon seen to be equally impossible. All the British were compelled to surrender in a very few minutes to save the lives of the survivors. Besides Mr. Hoare, eighteen men had been killed or died of wounds. The remainder were all made prisoners, of whom two officers and not less than fifty other ranks were wounded. The fact that only one rifleman and one Indian were wounded on the part of their opponents places the unequal character of the contest beyond any doubt. Singularly enough, Popham considered it necessary to remark that "the exertions of the American officers to save the lives of the prisoners whom their own men and the Indians were devoting to death were conspicuous and deserve our warmest gratitude."

The loss of two of his best commanders and so many trained officers and men was a serious blow to Yeo, and disconcerted his plans beyond immediate remedy. Until these casualties could be replaced by the arrival of reinforcements he was obliged to draft the whole of the crews of the *Magnet* and *Nelley* into the ships with the exception of about eight hands left in each for the purpose of navigating them with supplies to the head of the lake. A projected bombardment of the shipping in Sackett's Harbour was abandoned, as Drummond reported, because "so many gunboats and others have been lost to the service that the Commodore has not a sufficiency or indeed scarcely any to protect the



rocket boats, (which are already fitted out), during such an enterprise, and it would not answer to stand in or anchor with the squadron under the batteries."<sup>1</sup>

It was not unnatural under the circumstances that Yeo should censure Popham rather severely for imprudence in entering the creek with his boats. The subsequent Court Martial, however, fully exonerated him from blame and both he and Spilsbury were promoted next year.

On June 1 the *Charwell* and *Netley* returned to Kingston but sailed next morning with supplies for the squadron. On the 3rd, observing that the top-masts of the *Superior* had been fitted and she would soon be ready for service, Yeo concluded that he must make a definite decision as to his future action. "There are two things to be considered," he wrote to Drummond, "First, What the enemy's squadron can effect before our large ship is ready? Secondly, What object have we for risking an action with our present force when we will so soon have the superiority?"

"From the large reinforcements Government are sending to this country, it appears to be their wish that a respectable naval force should be established to meet the enemy and that any such ill-timed or unnecessary risk would defeat their views. The enemy are not in sufficient force to undertake any expedition in the face of our present squadron but any disaster on our side might give them a serious ascendancy.

"In making this communication I trust you will give me credit when I assure you that I do not write from the feeling of a captain of a ship but consider myself placed here in a highly responsible situation as commanding the naval force in this country on which most materially depends the safety or loss of this province.

"I therefore require of you, Sir, as the General Officer with whom I am acting, your opinion on the several points in my letter. I shall at all times be ready to take the squadron into action whenever the General Officer with whom I am acting represents to me that he thinks it necessary for the good of the service and the safety of the colony, but such sanction or authority under existing circumstances I will require as I can never take the whole responsibility upon myself."<sup>2</sup>

He had already proposed to change the port of blockade to Oswego but Drummond had advised him to remain off Sackett's Harbour with his ships and detach some of his smaller vessels to watch the other place as he considered that the formal abandonment of the blockade of the enemy's naval base would greatly increase their confidence and that the communication by water with the head of the lake would be imperilled. Prevost had also directed that a close blockade should be maintained until "the nature and extent of the reinforcements which His Majesty's Government propose sending from England for the defence of Canada be ascertained."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Popham to Yeo, Sackett's Harbour, June 1; Drummond to Prevost, Kingston, June 2; Prevost to Bathurst, Montreal, June 8; Cooper, *Hist. U.S. Navy*, Vol. II, pp. 479-80; Mahan, *War of 1812*, II, pp. 286-90; Roosevelt, *Naval War of 1812*, II, pp. 91-3; Drummond to Prevost, Kingston, June 4.

<sup>2</sup>Yeo to Drummond, H.M.S. *Prince Regent*, at anchor off Sackett's Harbour, June 2.

<sup>3</sup>Prevost to Drummond, Montreal, May 25; Drummond to Prevost, Kingston, June 2.

After due consideration, Drummond acquiesced in the opinion that it would be unwise to persist in the blockade at the risk of a general action at a disadvantage.

"It appearing, however, from your letter that the enemy's squadron, including his new ship, (*Superior*), and brigs, is now ready for sea, it is evident that the blockade has not had all the effect to which we looked, and moreover, it cannot be maintained without risking an action with a squadron, quite equal if not superior to that under your command, and under circumstances on our part of a decided disadvantage. With regard to the probable objects of the enemy, and to what their squadron may be able to effect, I am of opinion that whatever may be their ultimate views, they will not undertake any offensive operations until their large ship is ready, and even then I am very much disposed to concur with you that they will not venture in the face of your present squadron, and with the knowledge of the powerful addition to it which is in rapid progress, to encumber theirs with troops and other means necessary for the invasion of any part of this province.

"It follows therefore as my opinion, and I have no hesitation in giving it as such, that there exists at present no motive or object connected with the security of this province, which can make it necessary for you to act otherwise than cautiously on the *defensive*, (but at the same time closely watching all their movements), until the moment arrives when by the addition of the large ship now on the stocks you may bring the naval contest on this lake fairly to issue, or by a powerful combined expedition, (if the enemy, as is probable, should decline meeting you on the lake), we may attack and destroy him in his stronghold."

On the morning of June 5, Yeo received the welcome information of the arrival of three belated troopships at Quebec, having on board, besides 1,500 soldiers, 231 seamen, commanded by Captains Davies and Hickey, and 280 workmen for the dockyard at Kingston with the frames of two frigates and two brigs. As an officer sent in with a flag of truce on some pretext corroborated the conclusion derived from a previous close reconnoissance, by reporting that the *Superior* was undoubtedly nearly if not quite ready for service, he decided that it was no longer advisable to remain at his anchorage within six or eight miles of the enemy, and changed his station that day to the vicinity of the Upper Gap for convenience of receiving this reinforcement and at the same time protecting transports conveying supplies up the lake.

"Rocket boats," he said, "could not get near enough to the enemy's fleet to seriously injure them without being powerfully supported by other vessels or under cover of the ships. Boats I am without and I cannot oppose the ships to their batteries."

A memorandum prepared by him that day stated that exclusive of his flagship, the *Prince Regent*, which was also considerably undermanned, the other vessels of his squadron required 279 seamen to complete their complements. The *Montreal*, whose crew had lost heavily at Sandy Creek, needed eighty men

<sup>1</sup>Drummond to Yeo, Kingston, June 6.

<sup>2</sup>Yeo to Prevost, H.M.S. *Prince Regent*, off the Upper Gap, June 5.

and the *Niagara* required sixty-five. Besides these, six hundred and forty would be needed to man the ship on the stocks.

As Drummond had surmised, Chauncey did not yet feel strong enough to take the lake although he had received reliable information of the comparative force of the opposing squadron which tended to inspire him with confidence.

During May the entire crews of the *Macedonian* frigate, and the *Erie*, a new sloop of war, both of them closely blockaded in Atlantic ports, had arrived at Sackett's Harbour, besides a considerable number of volunteers from privateers in the same predicament. On June 8, Chauncey reported that all guns, rigging, and other stores required for the equipment of his squadron had been received and that the *Superior* would be entirely armed next day and he would have sufficient guns for all the other ships in commission. Captains Trenchard and Elliott had joined him to take command of the two largest ships.

"I, therefore, begin to feel," he wrote confidently, "as if we would be in a condition to take the lake; in fact there will be nothing to prevent my sailing on the first of July if seamen arrive to man the vessels but we are still five hundred short. . . . The *Congress*, *Hornet*, and the new frigate at Philadelphia are in situations which makes it very doubtful whether they will be able to get to sea before next winter, and if we could be supplied with our complement from those ships, I should hope to put the mastery of the lakes beyond a question."<sup>1</sup>

He had learned that reinforcements of seamen, marines, soldiers, and carpenters, reported to have sailed from England about the first of April, had arrived at Quebec and were expected at Kingston in a few days.

On the day before this letter was written by him, the President had held an important meeting of his cabinet at which a definite plan of campaign was adopted for taking the offensive on the Niagara, where they believed that a sufficient numerical superiority would be obtained. This was at once communicated to all commanding officers, whose co-operation was required.

"What remains of the fleet at Buffalo will be put under orders to transport General Brown's division to the Canada shore," the Secretary of War wrote. "The place of landing will be selected by the discretion of the general under the best information of which he may be possessed. Burlington Heights will be his first object. There he will fortify and as soon as Commodore Chauncey will be in a condition to co-operate with him, say the first of July, he will proceed to attack the enemy's other posts on the peninsula in succession.

"A number of armed galleys, such as those employed on Lake Champlain, will be immediately constructed at Sackett's Harbour, and while we have the ascendancy on Lake Ontario, these will be pushed into the St. Lawrence with orders to occupy the rapids of that river and thus intercept the water communication between Montreal and Kingston. The better to effect this object, a post will be established on the south bank of the St. Lawrence, strongly fortified and garrisoned by a competent force, say 1,500 men and sustained by the first division of the right. The moment for beginning this establishment will be that which opens to us the command of Lake Ontario. An engineer will be employed by the War Department to select the site."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, U.S.S. *Superior*, Sackett's Harbour, June 8.

<sup>2</sup>The Secretary of War to General Izard, War Department, June 10.

On the 8th and 9th of June the two first divisions of seamen arrived at Kingston from Quebec and were sent on at once to the squadron at the Upper Gap. Information was received on the 9th that the *Superior* would certainly be ready by the end of the week and that the ship on the stocks was completed for launching with the exception of laying her deck. It was reported that General Brown had again taken his departure for the Niagara with 1,500 men and six guns. Yeo was then requested to detach his two brigs to convey troops to the head of the lake to oppose the expected offensive. The third and last division of seamen was ordered to bring up five gunboats from Coteau du Lac into the upper St. Lawrence for the protection of the line of communication. This proved an arduous task which delayed them many days. So many men were lost by desertion or fatigue during this operation that Drummond was induced to recommend the improvement of the navigation of the river by the construction of a system of short canals to avoid the rapids at Mille Roches, Moulinette, and Longue Sault.<sup>1</sup>

On June 11, the frigate on the stocks at Sackett's Harbour, designed to carry 56 heavy guns, was launched and named the *Mohawk*. A few days later the entire crew of the *Congress*, laid up for repairs at Portsmouth, N.H., began to arrive by detachments. Chauncey was still considerably worried by disquieting information which he continued to receive from his secret agents who visited the vicinity of Kingston from time to time.

"The enemy's fleet has not been in sight since the 5th, and I have some reason to believe that he is preparing for some expedition." He wrote on the 15th of June. "He is now at Kingston collecting boats and transports. A large reinforcement of seamen and marines has arrived. The marines are said to amount to about 2,000 men. Boats are constantly passing up the St. Lawrence with troops, naval stores, and munitions of war. Last week more than two hundred boats passed Ogdensburgh for Kingston, and contrary to the usual practice, all the boats were detained at Kingston for some purpose or other.

"I have good reason to believe that the enemy contemplated an attack upon this place about the time he lost his boats and men at Sandy Creek. That loss, together with the severe indisposition of General Drummond, (who still lays very low), induced the enemy to defer the attack, but I am persuaded that he has not abandoned it, and only waits for his reinforcements and a favorable opportunity, and why he has deferred it so long is most astonishing; for we are now pretty well prepared to take care of ourselves, but if Sir James had landed 3,000 men when he first appeared off this harbour and made a simultaneous attack with the fleet, he must have carried the place; for our new vessels, (with the exception of the *Jefferson*), at that time were without their armament, and the military force had been considerably weakened by five hundred of the best troops being ordered from this place to Buffalo, and a few days ago about seven hundred more marched in the same direction. I really do not understand the policy of leaving the most important post upon the frontier the weakest in point of force; for although the fleet will be in a situation in a few days not only to take care of itself but to act offensively, yet if we should be obliged to visit the

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<sup>1</sup>Drummond to Prevost, Kingston, June 11 and 16.

upper part of the lake, the enemy would avail himself of the absence of our fleet, make a push at this place, and, I have no doubt, would carry it and destroy the place with all the naval and military stores and provisions here, which would put us back at least a campaign, besides the mortification of the country at the loss of so important a post."<sup>1</sup>

While he continued in such a nervous frame of mind there was little probability that he would undertake a vigorous offensive.

On June 16, Lieutenant-Colonel Drummond returned to Kingston from Sackett's Harbour, whither he had been sent the day before in the *Vincent* schooner, as the bearer of a flag of truce, obviously in quest of information. The enemy were on the alert, for shortly after he came in sight of that place, he was detained by the *Lady-of-the-Lake* at such a distance and in such a position that he could see nothing of the shipping in the bay, beyond their masts. The officer in command of the American vessel talked freely, however, and stated that a strong body of seamen had lately arrived from the seaboard and that their new ship would be ready to sail in about a month.<sup>2</sup>

General Drummond then suggested to Yeo that as he had received a considerable reinforcement of seamen, he should either resume the blockade or employ his entire squadron in the transportation of troops and supplies to the Right Division of the army. With the latter object in view, Yeo came into Kingston and embarked the greater part of two battalions that had lately arrived from Montreal and a large quantity of stores, and sailed on the 7th with a light but favourable breeze which soon shifted and compelled him to anchor until the next morning when he continued his voyage.

The termination of the blockade gave Chauncey an opportunity for a disconcerting blow at the line of communication below. Lieutenant F. B. Gregory, a daring and skillful young officer, was despatched on this mission with two gunboats and a cutter, having with him Dixon and Vaughan, two master mariners of the merchant marine, who had taken a leading part in the successful raid of the previous summer. Gregory concealed his boats at Tar Island where he remained for a couple of days awaiting the appearance of a brigade of boats from Montreal. On the morning of June 19, one of his boats was discovered by Captain Herman Landon of the 1st Grenville militia, commanding the gunboat, *Black Snake*, who had just landed a lookout party on Grenadier Island. Mistaking this boat for one of his own flotilla, Landon incautiously approached her in a skiff and was made a prisoner. Observing that their commander had gone on board the stranger, the crew of Landon's boat rowed toward her without any suspicion until two other boats came out from their lurking place and rendered any resistance useless. The capture of this gunboat was reported during the day at Kingston by an inhabitant of Tar Island who came in for that purpose, and Captain Owen went in pursuit with several other gunboats. One of these, armed with a single eighteen-pounder carronade and manned with a crew of eighteen soldiers under Lieutenant Campbell of the 104th Regiment, discovered and chased Gregory's boats and, after firing a few shots, compelled him to scuttle and abandon his prize. He then effected his escape by pulling swiftly around

<sup>1</sup>Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, U.S.S. *Superior*, Sackett's Harbour, June 15.

<sup>2</sup>Drummond to Prevost, Kingston, June 16.

Gravelly Point. Landon and his whole crew of eighteen men were carried off as prisoners. The *Black Snake* was immediately raised and taken into Kingston for repairs and her gun and stores were recovered.<sup>1</sup>

This event caused some delay in the movement of supplies and considerable alarm for their protection in future. On receiving the official report, Prevost remarked:

"I have been in constant apprehension that the enemy would attempt to molest our water line of communication and have expressed myself to Sir James Yeo to that effect.

"I cannot help thinking that the loss in the present instance is to be attributed to the premature raising of the blockade at Sackett's Harbour. At this moment it is particularly essential that the river communication should be well guarded as the augmentation of our forces in Upper Canada must necessarily depend on the safe transport of supplies and provisions."<sup>2</sup>

In reply Drummond assured him that Yeo had made careful arrangements to provide every brigade of bateaux or other craft employed in the transport of stores with a sufficient escort of gunboats.

On the morning of June 23, the British squadron returning from Burlington Bay, where it landed the troops and stores taken up the lake, anchored off the Ducks and entered Kingston harbour next day, when Yeo was requested to detach the *Nelley* with a gunboat to take a company of marine artillery to Niagara, after which the gunboat was to be portaged around the falls and stationed at Chippawa for the protection of the left flank of the fortified position at that place.

"I am of opinion," Drummond wrote, "that the enemy's principal designs are intended against that frontier, a re-occupation of which would prove of such essential service to them and of such incalculable injury to us, and that they will strain every nerve to effect so desirable an object and I conceive their manoeuvres in the neighbourhood of Plattsburg to be merely for the purpose of preventing our sending sufficient reinforcements for the security of their intended point of attack."<sup>3</sup>

This forecast proved remarkably correct, but Prevost evidently disagreed with it, for he pencilled a note on the margin of his letter. "Very much obliged to Genl. D. for his opinion. Unfortunately for him, it is not founded in fact as not one soldier for U.C. has been prevented from moving forward by the enemy's demonstrations in the vicinity of Odletown."

By June 24, Chauncey had received information which enabled him to compile a comparative statement of the opposing squadrons on Lake Ontario for the information of the Secretary of the Navy.

"I shall sail the first week in July to offer the enemy battle," he added. "If he accepts the invitation the superiority on this lake will soon be decided, and the victors will remain masters of these waters during the war. If, however, the enemy pursues the policy that he did last year and avoids a general action,

<sup>1</sup>Lieutenant J. J. Hewson to Lieutenant-Colonel Morrison, June 19; Lieutenant Blakerney to Lieutenant-Colonel Morrison, June 19; Drummond to Prevost, June 21 and 23.

<sup>2</sup>Prevost to Drummond, Chamblay, June 22.

<sup>3</sup>Drummond to Prevost, Kingston, June 21, 23 and 25.

it will force us to a blockade of his fleet until he can add to it a force much superior to ours, which will be as soon as he can launch and fit the 84, now in great forwardness at Kingston. This ship is progressing rapidly and the enemy calculates to launch her the first of August and fit her out immediately. My own impression is, however, that she cannot be got ready for service before October. If, however, I should be mistaken and the enemy add this ship to his present force before next fall, I should again be obliged to submit to the mortification of a blockade, and we have nothing to oppose so overwhelming a force, and as this class of vessel is so much beyond anything which the Government contemplated when I had the honour of your instructions in January last, I should not feel myself authorized even to prepare to build anything to oppose such a vessel without special authority."<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile Gregory and Vaughan were despatched with a gunboat and a barge to strike the line of communication above Kingston. After lying in ambush without results for a day or two in the Bay of Quinté, they landed at midnight, July 1-2, on the mainland and brought off an inhabitant, who was compelled to pilot them to Presqu' Isle harbour, where they burned a storehouse and a merchant schooner on the stocks. It was reasonably suspected that they had been furnished with useful information by some resident of the locality. "There is such a set of infernal rebelly disaffected vagabonds above here that the magistrates are in danger of their lives at Court days," one of them declared. "How necessary it is for some of the military to protect this quarter."<sup>2</sup>

On July 5, Chauncey reported that the captain of the *Congress*, while on the way to join him, had fallen seriously ill, and that this mishap would compel him to break up the crew of that frigate, which might detain him in port a few days longer than he had anticipated. The *Mohawk* had then all her sails bent and only required a little ironwork to make her ready.

The information obtained by Drummond and Yeo by means of spies and deserters from time to time, although reasonably correct, was of such a character as to keep them constantly in suspense. On the evening of July 2, a man, who stated that he had left Sackett's Harbour on June 30, arrived at Cornwall and reported that the *Superior*, of sixty-four guns; the *Pike*, of thirty-two; the *Madison*, of twenty-six; the *Jefferson*, of twenty-six; the *Jones*, of twenty-four, and the *Oncida*, of eighteen, were entirely ready, but the *Mohawk*, of thirty-two guns, had not received the whole of her armament. Chauncey had publicly announced that he would not sail until all his ships were ready, which he expected would be on the 4th of July, but this informant did not believe he would be able to take the lake before the 8th, or perhaps the 10th. It was further stated that the American Commodore intended to act in such a way as to induce the British squadron to come out and engage him before the ship on the stocks was completed. A few days later Yeo received a note from one of the officers taken at Sandy Creek, saying that the *Superior* was extremely low between decks and had been armed with thirty-two pounders, her ports being unusually close together. The defensive works at Sackett's Harbour had been much strengthened

<sup>1</sup>Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, Sackett's Harbour, June 24.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Wilkins, J.P., to Drummond, Carrying Place, July 2; R. G. Wilkins to Captain Loring, Carrying Place, July 2.

and, in his opinion, could not be attacked with any prospect of success by a land force of less than 7,000 men. On July 7, Drummond was notified by the Governor General that three more battalions of regular troops, numbering in all 1,930 rank and file, had been given orders to march to Kingston in addition to the reinforcements already sent him, numbering 1,775 rank and file. "The aggregate," he remarked, "constitutes a force far exceeding that which preserved the upper province during the first and part of the second campaign, such a one as favours an expectation of being soon able to undertake the reduction of Sackett's Harbour and the destruction of the dockyard and arsenal and at the same time to resume possession of the territory we have lost on the Detroit."<sup>1</sup>

He added that a contract had been let on satisfactory terms for the transportation to Kingston of the frame of one of the frigates that had arrived at Quebec from England.

Drummond replied rather coldly on July 7 that had this force arrived "during the time of our naval superiority, I should then have had it in my power to have struck such a blow at Sackett's Harbour as would have decided, I think, the present contest. As matters now are, with decided naval superiority on the part of the enemy, and with the various additions and improvements they are daily making to the defences of that place, instead of 4,000 effective troops, which I long since stated to Your Excellency, would be requisite in my opinion to ensure success, I now consider that not less than 5,000 would be sufficient, exclusive of artillery and Indians."<sup>2</sup>

On the 9th, Drummond learned that General Brown had invaded the Niagara peninsula with a strong force and had taken Fort Erie. Two battalions of the promised reinforcements had then, indeed, arrived at Montreal, but obviously too late to be of immediate service. A spy, who came in that day, reported that it was expected that the enemy's squadron would sail in a few days with a considerable body of troops which it was intended to land near Burlington Bay. The schooners, *Magnet*, *Netley* and *Vincent* had remained at the head of the lake for the purpose of keeping up communication between York, Burlington and Niagara, where in fact they performed notable service in the conveyance of troops, wounded men, supplies and despatches to and fro. Yeo was requested to send off the two brigs, which had lately returned to Kingston, with all the pork and other provisions that they could take on board, to York and Burlington under the command of Captain Dobbs, who was instructed to remain at the head of the lake and take command of all the detached vessels. The three fortified ports there, situated at the angles of an equilateral triangle, about thirty miles apart, would afford him a tolerably safe base of operations.

The unexpected success of Brown's operations in the capture of Fort Erie, the defeat of the opposing force, and its expulsion from its defensive position behind the Chippawa, followed by his advance towards the forts at the mouth of the Niagara river, which were reported to be untenable against a resolute attack, naturally caused considerable anxiety.

"It is now you are beginning to feel the great disadvantages of the loss of the naval ascendancy," Prevost wrote to Drummond. "I hope Sir James Yeo

<sup>1</sup>Prevost to Drummond, Montreal, July 4.

<sup>2</sup>Drummond to Prevost, Kingston, July 7.



proposes to diminish such an evil by occasionally showing himself on the lake so as to impede the enemy's fleet from taking the lake encumbered with troops on board or in charge, tho' at the moment I doubt much there being at Sackett's Harbour many disposable.

"It is far from my wish that he should expose his squadron to an unequal contest but in the last extremity of our affairs but, by manœuvring off Sackett's Harbour and in the vicinity of Kingston, it is probable he would bring Chauncey back from working mischief at Niagara without being under the necessity of risking an action.

"I am satisfied that you are as sensible as I can be of the delicacy of interfering in naval concerns and may only be induced to suggest to the Commodore what should be done for the preservation of the Right Division, whilst that course holds out a hope of success."

This letter was received by Drummond when he was on the point of leaving Kingston for the scene of the invasion. He had furnished Major General Stovin with special instructions for the defence of the place in consequence of a considerable reduction in the garrison which he had been forced to make. The works begun for the protection of Point Henry, which was regarded as the key of the position, were still unfinished. Yeo was suffering much from the disease which ultimately proved fatal and it was considered expedient to contradict exaggerated reports of his ill health which had been published in a Montreal newspaper.<sup>2</sup>

"It is impossible, however, not to be aware of the great difficulties, independent of the risk which would attend his complying with the suggestion," Drummond remarked in his reply. "He has already afforded the army the greatest assistance by detaching four vessels of the squadron, the two brigs and two schooners. The services of the latter have been invaluable in transporting troops and stores between York and Niagara. During the time this garrison has been so weak, Sir James has likewise landed his marines to do duty at Point Frederick. Independent of this he has manned all the gunboats and should he go out with the remainder of the squadron, the suspension of labour on the new ship would be an evil incalculable, there being at least five hundred of the seamen constantly employed in the dockyard."

General Brown had occupied Queenston Heights on July 10, whence he obtained a wide view over the upper part of the lake, but much to his disappointment, failed to discover any sign of a friendly squadron. After waiting in vain for three days, he addressed an urgent appeal to Chauncey for co-operation.

"Meet me on the lake shore north of Fort George with your fleet," he said, "and we will be able, I have no doubt, to settle a plan of operations that will break the power of the enemy in Upper Canada and that in the course of a short time. At all events let me hear from you. I have looked for your fleet with the greatest anxiety since the 10th. I do not doubt my ability to meet the enemy in the field and to march in any direction over his country, your fleet carrying

<sup>1</sup>Prevost to Drummond, Montreal, July 14. Harvey to Stovin, Kingston, July 15, secret and confidential; O'Connor to Arthur Gifford, Kingston, July 15.

<sup>2</sup>Harvey to Stovin, Kingston, July 15; secret and confidential.

<sup>3</sup>Drummond to Prevost Kingston, July 17.

the necessary supplies. We can threaten Forts George and Niagara, carry Burlington Heights and York, and proceed direct to Kingston and carry that place. For God's sake let me see you. Sir James will not fight; two of his vessels are now in the Niagara."<sup>1</sup>

Sickness among his artificers, which had delayed the equipment of the *Mohawk* for a few days, was considered by Chauncey as a sufficient reason for postponing his departure from port and he endeavoured to make it clear that his subsequent movements would be mainly regulated by those of his adversary. On the 8th of July he informed the Secretary of the Navy that he would sail in a few days and take a station near the Ducks to watch the British ships in Kingston harbour. Four days later in a conversation with General Gaines, he declared that he would not go to the head of the lake unless called there by Yeo's movements. On the 14th he reiterated his intention of going to the Ducks in a letter to the Secretary of the Navy. It is not improbable that ill health may have influenced his decision, as on the 15th he went to bed with a high fever which disabled him for the next eighteen days. Brown's letter of the 13th arrived when he was too ill to read it and remained unanswered until after his recovery. He had then planned to sail on the 20th. A battalion of riflemen, escorting a small train of heavy guns urgently demanded by Brown for siege operations, was embarked in bateaux by Gaines and started up the lake, but returned in a few hours through apprehension of an attack from the British ships reported to be cruising off the Ducks. Chauncey had not turned over the command to Captain Jones, the next senior officer, who was not disposed to assume it otherwise. Gaines wrote to Brown despondently on the 20th, saying that the harbour was blockaded and that he was unable to inform him when the squadron would sail or when the troops and guns could be safely sent on. On receiving this letter, Brown retired immediately from Queenston to Chippawa.

"I have thought proper to change my position with other objects," he said. "You know how greatly I am disappointed and therefore I will not dwell on that painful subject, and you can best perceive how much has been lost by delay and the command of Lake Ontario being with the enemy, reliance being placed upon a different state of things."<sup>2</sup>

On July 25, Chauncey had recovered sufficiently to dictate a letter to the Secretary of the Navy, merely stating that his squadron had been prevented from leaving port through delay in the arrival of blocks and ironwork, and that he had been too ill to write for several days. Another week was lost before his health was sufficiently restored to enable him to be carried on board his flagship and take command.

Meanwhile the brigs, *Star* and *Charwell*, had reached York with valuable cargoes of provisions, which relieved the immediate wants of the garrison, and two brigades of bateaux loaded with supplies followed soon after. As soon as they were unloaded the brigs were sent over to Niagara with four hundred effective men of the 89th Regiment, who barely arrived in time to turn the scale in the stubbornly contested fight at Lundy's Lane, which was followed by

<sup>1</sup>Brown to Chauncey, Queenston, July 13.

<sup>2</sup>Brown to the Secretary of War, Chippawa, July 25.

the retreat of the American force to an intrenched camp at Fort Erie. During the same period the schooners *Magnet* and *Nelley* were actively employed in a similar service.

"Without their valuable aid in the transport of troops and stores," Drummond reported, "I certainly should not have been able to have attempted offensive operations so soon after my arrival. I feel infinite obligations to Sir James Yeo for his prompt acquiescence in my request to detach those vessels, and I feel the appointment of an officer of such conciliating manners and such zeal and professional ability as Captain Dobbs as an additional favour."<sup>1</sup>

During the last week in July reliable reports were received at Kingston that fifty or sixty large gunboats and bateaux, each sixty or seventy feet in length, were being built at Sackett's Harbour, avowedly with the intention of intercepting or harassing the brigades of boats engaged in the transportation of stores and troops from Montreal to that place. On August 1, Yeo was informed that the American squadron was actually coming out and during the afternoon, the *Niagara*, cruising off Long Point, signalled ten sail in sight, four ships, four brigs and two schooners. Three cutters and barges sent out to reconnoitre, had captured a schooner and a large Durham boat, loaded with flour and salt, within four miles of this squadron, and brought in their prizes.<sup>2</sup>

Next morning all these vessels had disappeared and no further information of their movements was obtained until the 5th, when two more merchant schooners loaded with provisions were taken by scouting boats. Some of the prisoners stated that the squadron had sailed for the head of the lake, taking under convoy a brigade of boats, conveying two companies of artillery and a battalion of riflemen. Measures were immediately taken to intercept another small vessel reported to be about to leave Sackett's Harbour with a supply of ammunition.<sup>3</sup>

Calm and adverse winds prevented Chauncey from arriving in sight of Niagara until the morning of the 5th. The *Magnet*, bound from York to Niagara with a detachment of troops on board, was intercepted and forced to run aground near the mouth of Ten Mile Creek to avoid capture. The brig *Sylph* was then ordered to work in close to the shore and destroy her by gun-fire. Before this could be accomplished, the stranded schooner was set on fire by her own crew and soon blew up. Her commander was severely censured by Drummond for this "act of unpardonable precipitation," as a body of troops with field guns was already on the march from Fort Missassauga for her protection. Next day the troops and guns convoyed by the squadron were landed at the mouth of a creek a few miles to the eastward of Fort Niagara, whence a passable road led to Buffalo. On the same morning, the *Lady-of-the-Lake* looked into Toronto Bay and exchanged shots with the batteries guarding the entrance. Having ascertained from this reconnoissance that there were no armed vessels there, but that two brigs and a schooner were at anchor in Niagara river, where they were protected by the forts, Chauncey detailed the brigs, *Jefferson*, *Oncida*

<sup>1</sup>Drummond to Prevost, Camp before Fort Erie, August 12.

<sup>2</sup>Stovin to Prevost, Kingston, August 1 and 2; Stovin to Freer, Kingston, July 28; Freer to Stovin, July 21.

<sup>3</sup>Stovin to Prevost, Kingston, August 7.

and *Sylph*, to blockade them and set sail for Kingston with the remainder of his squadron.

"My anxiety to return to this end of the lake," he explained, "was increased by the knowledge I had of the weakness of Sackett's Harbour, and the apprehension the enemy might receive large reinforcements at Kingston and, embarking some of the troops on board his fleet, make a dash at the harbour and burn it with my stores in our absence. When I left the harbour there were but about 700 regular troops fit for duty. It is true a few militia were called in, but little could be expected of them should an attack be made. My apprehension, it seems, was groundless, the enemy having contented himself with annoying, in some trifling degree, the coasters between Oswego and the harbour in his boats."<sup>1</sup>

His movements at the head of the lake had excited some apprehension of an attack on the forts at the mouth of Niagara River or the depots of stores elsewhere. The officer commanding the garrison of York was in consequence directed to detach half a battalion of regular infantry for the protection of the post at Burlington.

At 4 p.m. on the 9th, the approach of four square-rigged vessels was signalled from the observation station at Cataragui. The *Niagara* had been cruising outside Nine Mile Point and as the wind had fallen, she was hastily towed into the harbour by her boats. The further movement of troops by water to reinforce Drummond had obviously become impracticable.<sup>2</sup>

"The naval ascendancy on Lake Ontario," Prevost said, "enables him to perform in two days what our troops going from Kingston to reinforce the Right Division require from sixteen to twenty of severe marching. Their men arrive fresh; ours are fatigued and with an exhausted equipment. The route from Kingston to the Niagara frontier exceeds 250 miles, mostly of country impracticable for the conveyance of supplies. By our exertions the Right Division has been placed beyond apprehension of material want till the period fixed by Sir James Yeo for taking the lake. While Kingston is blockaded no movement can be undertaken against Sackett's Harbour. It will require extreme vigilance to prevent the interruption of our intercourse from hence to secure the supplies now on their way."<sup>3</sup>

On the day after his arrival off Kingston, Chauncey replied to General Brown's letter, dated the 13th of July, seeking to justify his conduct and angrily resenting in particular his statement in a subsequent letter to the Secretary of War, which had been published, that he had relied on the co-operation of the squadron.

"From the tenor of your letter," he remarked, "it would appear that you had calculated much upon the co-operation of the fleet. You cannot surely have forgotten the conversation we held on this subject at Sackett's Harbour, previous to your departure for Niagara. I then professed to feel it my duty as well as inclination to afford every assistance in my power to the army and to co-operate with it whenever it could be done without losing sight of the great

<sup>1</sup>Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, U.S.S. *Superior*, off Kingston, August 10.

<sup>2</sup>Stovin to Prevost, Kingston, August 9, half past 8 p.m.

<sup>3</sup>Prevost to Earl Bathurst, No. 187, Montreal, August 14.

object for which this fleet has been created—to wit, the capture or destruction of the enemy's fleet, but this was a primary object, would be first attempted, and that you must not expect the fleet at the head of the lake, unless that of the enemy should induce us to follow him there.

"I will not suffer myself to believe that this conversation was misunderstood or has been forgotten. How then shall I account for the intimation thrown out to the public in your despatch to the Secretary of War that you expected the fleet to co-operate with you? Was it friendly or just or honourable not only to furnish an opening for the public but thus to assist them to infer that I had pledged myself to meet you on a particular day at the head of the lake for the purpose of co-operation, and in case of disaster to your army to turn their resentment from you, who are alone responsible, upon me, who could not by any possibility have prevented, or even retarded, your discomfiture? You well know, Sir, that the fleet could not have rendered you the least service during your late incursion upon Upper Canada. You have not been able to approach Lake Ontario on any point nearer than Queenston, and the enemy were then in possession of all the country between that place and the shore of Ontario, and I could not even communicate with you without making a circuit of 70 or 80 miles. I would ask of what possible use the fleet would have been to you in threatening or investing Fort George when the shallowness of water alone would prevent an approach with these ships within two miles of that fort or Niagara? To pretend that the fleet could render the least assistance in your projected capture of Burlington Heights on your route to Kingston is still more romantic, for it is well known that the fleet could not approach within nine miles of those heights.

"That you might find the fleet somewhat of a convenience in the transportation of provisions and stores for the use of the army and an agreeable appendage to attend its marches and countermarches, I am ready to believe, but, Sir, the Secretary of the Navy has honoured me with a higher destiny—we are intended to seek and to fight the enemy's fleet. This is the great purpose of the government in creating this fleet and I shall not be diverted in my efforts to effectuate it by any sinister attempt to render us subordinate to or an appendage of the army."<sup>1</sup>

In this amazing letter, Chauncey not only disregarded the positive instructions of his government, but seems to have forgotten that the only effective service of his squadron the year before at York and Niagara had been performed in close conjunction with the land forces.

Later in the day he received two letters from the Secretary of the Navy containing instructions "to destroy the enemy's fleet or to blockade his force and cut off his entire communication with the head of the lake."<sup>2</sup>

He hastened to reply and justify his conduct. "I do assure you, Sir, that I have never been under any pledge to meet General Brown at the head of the lake, but on the contrary, when we parted at Sackett's Harbour I told him distinctly that I should not visit the head of the lake unless the enemy's fleet did. I can ascribe the intimation of General Brown to no other motive than a

<sup>1</sup>Chauncey to Brown, U.S.S. *Superior*, off Kingston, August 10.

<sup>2</sup>Secretary of the Navy to Chauncey, July 19 and 24.

cautious attempt to provide an apology to the public against any contingent disaster to which his army might be exposed." He concluded by a statement intended to induce the belief that his four ships were barely equal to the force they were blockading in the harbour of Kingston, which was very far from being the case.

"My fixed determination," he said, "has always been to seek a meeting with the enemy the moment the fleet was ready, and to deprive him of any apology for not meeting me. I have sent four guns ashore from the *Superior* to reduce her armament in number to an equality with the *Prince Regent's*, yielding the advantage of their sixty-eight pounders. The *Mohawk* mounts two guns less than the *Princess Charlotte*, and the *Montreal* and *Niagara* are equal to the *General Pike* and *Madison*. I have detached on separate service all the brigs, and am blockading his four ships with our four ships in hopes that this may induce him to come out."<sup>1</sup>

As a matter of fact, he knew very well that his flagship was at least one-fourth stronger than Yeo's and that the *Pike* was half as strong again as the *Montreal*, and that all the British ships were much undermanned.

He was destined to learn in a few days that the prolonged inactivity of his squadron was regarded with grave disfavour by the Cabinet, and was in fact considered as the principal cause of the failure of their elaborate plan of campaign. His excuses were plainly dismissed as flimsy and insufficient.

Writing on August 3, the Secretary of the Navy informed him that his explanation as to the delay experienced in obtaining blocks and iron seemed so unsatisfactory "that I cannot withhold from you the extreme anxiety and astonishment which the protracted and fatal delay of the squadron has excited in the mind of the President." Two days later, after the result of the action at Lundy's Lane had become known in Washington, he wrote that "the known detention of the squadron at Sackett's Harbour until the 27th ultimo, the very feeble and precarious state of your health, the evils which have already resulted from delay, have induced the President, though with extreme reluctance and undiminished confidence in your zeal and capacity, to order Commodore Decatur to proceed to Sackett's Harbour and take upon himself the naval command on Lake Ontario."

Chauncey immediately replied in a lengthy, laboured and unconvincing argument.

"I don't remember making any positive assurance that the squadron should sail the first week in July, but not having my letter book with me, I cannot refer. My present impression is that I stated to the Department that I *hoped* to be ready to sail the first week in July, but your own experience, Sir, must have convinced you how fallacious all calculations are, when made upon mechanics in the fitment of a new ship, even under the most favourable circumstances. The reason of my silence from the 8th to the 14th (the day that I was taken sick), was owing to the impossibility of naming a day when the squadron should sail, owing to the sickness of the mechanics and the difficulty in procuring the articles absolutely necessary to fit the ships to meet the enemy. I was moreover mortified that the squadron was detained in port longer than I had expected,

<sup>1</sup>Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, U.S.S. *Superior*, off Kingston, August 10.

and I was determined that when I did name a day for its sailing, to go to sea at all hazards. For a number of days after I was taken sick, I knew nothing of what took place, as my physician did not allow any communication or intercourse with me whatever, not even from my most intimate friends. I perceive, Sir, with regret (by some expression in your letters), that General Brown has succeeded in deceiving you as well as the President and the nation by his *insidious letters*. Now, Sir, I can prove to the satisfaction of every man of candour that if the American squadron had been on the lake three weeks before it was, the result to the army under General Brown in all probability would not have been different from what has taken place, and that the fleet would not have rendered it any assistance whatever. The enemy did not receive large reinforcements by their fleet. Sir James Yeo has not been up the lake with his fleet since the latter part of June, nor has his fleet been nearer Sackett's Harbour than the Ducks since the 5th of June, notwithstanding all the vapouring in the papers about this harbour being blockaded and the enemy running the riflemen on shore, &c., &c. It is true that the enemy about the middle of July sent two brigs from Kingston with either troops or stores; if with troops, both vessels could not have carried more than 250 besides their own crews. This could not be considered an important reinforcement. The fact is that all the reinforcements that have gone to the head of the lake, have gone up the Bay of Quanta in boats and have marched from Presque Isle to York by land. This route the enemy prefers because less liable to interruptions and with strong westerly winds, (which generally prevail on this lake), much the shortest route. From York they cross directly to the Niagara river, if they have transports and no interruption, but if our whole fleet was at the head of the lake, it would not detain a regiment from Fort George more than twenty-four hours, for as they have abundance of boats, they embark their troops in the evening and push over for the 20 or 40 Mile Creek, where they arrive long before daylight. If they land at the 20 Mile Creek, they are only that distance from Fort George, where they can march in six hours. Any one who knows anything of the navigation of this lake knows that boats may cross the head of the lake from York to the opposite shore unobserved by any fleet during the night. The fact is that whether I had sailed the first of July or the first of August, it could have had no influence on the operations of the army under General Brown, nor would it have varied the result of his excursion into Canada. General Brown has been anxious to provide against a disaster and to prepare the public mind to shift the responsibility from himself to me.

"The General's conduct in this particular has been more like that of a *political demagogue* than the honorable conduct of an officer high in command. But as the President has deemed it necessary to pass a censure upon my conduct, I have to request that, (as soon as the public service will admit), you will be pleased to institute an inquiry into the whole of my official conduct from the day of my appointment to the command on this lake up to the present time."<sup>1</sup>

When it was ascertained that his squadron had actually taken the lake and established a blockade of Kingston, the proposed change of command was revoked and an investigation was not considered expedient.

<sup>1</sup>Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, U.S.S. *Superior*, off the Ducks, August 19, No. 140.

His command of the lake had become sufficiently effective to embarrass Drummond's operations in a very serious way, and in all probability, prevented him from expelling the invading force from its last foothold in the province. On August 18, Drummond was confronted by a return from his chief commissary, which to his extreme surprise and alarm, showed that the supply of provisions in store would be barely enough to feed his force for a month, although he had been assured before leaving Kingston that it would be ample for its subsistence until October 1 and perhaps a week or two longer.

"In this alarming state," he wrote that day, "I have to solicit Your Excellency to urge the necessity of Sir James Yeo hastening with increased exertions the completion of the new ship and the subsequent sailing from harbour of the fleet on the very first opportunity. By which means, and by which means alone, the supplies of provisions of all kinds of which the army stands in need, can be forwarded to this frontier.

"I trust that Your Excellency will impress on the Commodore's mind that the Right Division after the disastrous misfortune of the 15th instant, depends almost entirely upon his prompt and vigorous exertions for its relief, nay, perhaps, even for its safety. How widely different the glorious prospects which were in view on the day preceding that deplorable catastrophe!

"I have directed Mr. Couche at all risques to forward to York some flour in bateaux. But still its safe arrival cannot be calculated upon with certainty. And I have desired that all other small craft at Kingston be freighted with cargoes and kept in constant readiness to seize the first opportunity of running for the head of the lake, either on our squadron leaving port or on the enemy's fleet betaking themselves for any occasion to their own harbour."

The Commissary General at Montreal was equally surprised and disconcerted by this amazing information. On the 27th of August, he commented disconsolately on the gloomy prospect thus presented to him.

"The difficulties in accomplishing this object are well known to Your Excellency even if nothing but provisions had been required, but when it is considered the immense quantity of naval stores that have been transported to meet the common expenditure of an extensive dockyard, to construct frigates and ships of the first rate, with their armament, ordnance and other stores, besides all the hospital, barrack, engineer, and regimental stores, with the innumerable other articles, requisite for the supply of forts, garrisons, and camps, I feel confident that the exertions of my department will be acknowledged, and that they have exceeded the expectations of Your Excellency as much as I confess they have done my own. For the impediments of the navigation, the scarcity of workmen, labourers and *voyageurs* are not to be described—in fact they are incalculable, yet they have been surmounted hitherto and at a time when the supply of all the posts in this district and the arrival of troops and the general increase of every establishment and of the military force throughout the Canadas, forming it may be said, a new era in the present war, have all called for new and incessant efforts as all these circumstances necessarily create fresh labours in the commissariat. Deputy Commissary Couche has endeavoured by every means to forward supplies to the head of Lake Ontario, and several

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<sup>1</sup>Yeo to Prevost, Camp before Fort Erie, August 18.



small vessels were despatched while the enemy's squadron were unable to leave Sackett's Harbour, but as the exertions of the enemy have been more successful than ours in completing ships sufficient to command the navigation of the lake, that resource is for the moment cut off and only bateaux can be employed. These are [not] a very useful conveyance, not only from the danger of the enemy's small vessels which can approach the shore without difficulty, but also from the want of proper seamen, steersmen, pilots, and middlemen.

"Mr. Couche has, however, succeeded in despatching twenty-four bateaux, loaded with flour and pork, which have been chiefly manned by the soldiers of the Nova Scotia Fencibles and a few pilots procured with great difficulty from the country. But this feeble means of transport will never effect the forming a sufficient depot at York, Burlington Heights and Niagara, and unless the commissariat can be aided to a great extent by the Royal Navy, the most disastrous consequences must ensue, which no arrangement of mine can avert.

"My only hope rests upon the prospects of our fleet being very soon superior to that of the enemy, when the first object, I trust, will be to convey provisions from Kingston to the head of the lake, of the necessity of which, it would be useless for me to dwell upon, after the foregoing representations, for Your Excellency is aware that the road between Kingston and Niagara is not practicable for loaded waggons, therefore land carriage is out of the question, and the most ample assistance from the Royal Navy will be most imperiously demanded as the only means of supplying the Right Division of the army."<sup>1</sup>

Two battalions of the 6th and 82nd Regiments, that arrived in Montreal on the 8th and 9th of July, although kept constantly on the march, did not succeed in joining Drummond before Fort Erie until the 24th of August and 2nd of September.

Yeo continued to make the most strenuous efforts not only to complete the ship on the stocks but to obtain seamen to man her. On June 29 he wrote to Admiral Griffith, commanding on the Halifax station, asking a reinforcement of four hundred men for that purpose. Griffith replied rather curtly that as no doubt the Admiralty had been informed by Yeo of his intention to build this ship, measures would probably be taken to provide the necessary crew from England, and it had been reported to him that since the date of his letter, seven hundred seamen had actually arrived at Quebec for service on the lakes. Still he would write to the senior naval officer at Quebec instructing him to select and forward that number of men which he presumed might be available there, owing to the recent loss of the frigate *Leopard* by shipwreck and the arrival of four troopships. Before this reply was received one hundred and forty men had been actually forwarded to Montreal to man the new ship under construction for service on Lake Champlain. The First Battalion of Royal Marines was distributed between the squadrons on these two lakes, seven officers and three hundred and twenty-four other ranks being sent from Isle aux Noix to Kingston during the last week in August. Toward the end of that month, one hundred and eighty-three of all ranks, including sixteen marines from the crew of the frigate *Junon* and fifty-three volunteers from the transports, arrived from

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<sup>1</sup>Commissary General W. H. Robinson to Prevost, Montreal, August 27.

Quebec. Anchors, cordage, cables and much of the wrought iron required for this vessel had to be ordered from England.<sup>1</sup>

Shortly after his arrival at the Ducks, Chauncey stationed the *Sylph* and the schooner *Conquest* off Presqu'Isle to intercept any small craft that might attempt to pass either way and despatched the *Jones* to take the place of the *Sylph* off Niagara. The remainder of his squadron continued to cruise between the Ducks and Sackett's Harbour, seldom losing sight of Kingston. On the 20th of August his ships were driven into the lake by a violent gale and after returning to the anchorage near the Ducks, Lieutenant Gregory was sent into the Bay of Quinté to reconnoitre. He captured and set on fire a raft of timber intended for the fortifications under construction at Kingston, but was shortly afterwards chased and finally overtaken by Lieutenant John Scott, R.N., in command of two barges sent out from that port to intercept his return. In the sharp encounter that followed a midshipman was killed and five men badly wounded out of a crew of ten on Gregory's boat, before he surrendered. The prize proved to be Yeo's own gig, which had been taken at Sandy Creek.<sup>2</sup>

A few days later, a party from Sackett's Harbour landed in the night near Presqu'Isle under guidance of a refugee and after lying in ambush for some time, succeeded in capturing the official mails from both directions, containing important despatches giving information as to contemplated movements of troops, and got away with them.

On the 1st of September, the officer stationed at the advanced observation post, outside Kingston harbour, reported that all of the blockading squadron had disappeared, having presumably returned to their port. A couple of days after, they resumed their stations, leaving the *Oneida* behind to receive some repairs. On the 11th, with the wind blowing free from the northward, Chauncey stood in close to the entrance of Kingston harbour and hove to just out of range of the batteries, hoist his ensigns and firing guns as a defiance. A gale came up next morning which forced him again to seek the open lake, and continued to blow violently for three days. On the 15th he received a message that a division of troops under Major-General Izard had arrived from Plattsburg, on its way to the Niagara and urgently required transportation to the mouth of the Genesee River, whence it would march overland. He had already promised to employ the whole of his cruising squadron on this service, together with seven schooners and fifteen barges, each seventy-five feet long and armed with two guns, built specially for the purpose of transporting troops and stores. Chauncey immediately returned to port, having kept the lake for forty-five days, much of the time under sail. Next day the *Lady-of-the-Lake* was sent off to recall the vessels on detached service. During the last gale the two brigs blockading the Niagara had been driven before the wind toward the head of the lake and the *Jefferson* barely succeeded in keeping off shore by carrying sail and throwing overboard ten guns.

On July 19, Izard had proposed to the Secretary of War to undertake an offensive movement into Lower Canada as a diversion in favour of Brown. This was approved under date of July 27, but the Secretary indicated a preference

<sup>1</sup>Griffith to Yeo, H.M.S. *Centurion*, Halifax, July 26; Yeo to Prevost, Kingston, August 23.

<sup>2</sup>Yeo to Freer, Kingston, August 27; Cooper, Hist. U.S. Navy, II. 486.

for an advance against Prescott with an ultimate view of a combined attack upon Kingston in conjunction with Chauncey's squadron and the troops at Sackett's Harbour. This letter was not received by Izard until August 10, when he knew that Brown had retired to Fort Erie and was besieged there. He replied rather dubiously, "I will make the movement you direct, if possible, but I shall do it with the apprehension of risking the force under my command, and with the certainty that everything in this vicinity, save the lately erected works at Plattsburg and Cumberland Head, will, in less than three days after my departure, be in the hands of the enemy."<sup>1</sup>

On August 12, Armstrong wrote again, explaining that his letter had been written on the assumption that Chauncey had defeated Yeo or blockaded him in port, and adding that in the event Kingston had been strongly reinforced, "a safer movement was to march two thousand men to Sackett's, embark there, and go to Brown's assistance." After receiving this letter on August 20, Izard prepared to obey, but on consulting his chief subordinates, came to the conclusion that a march by the northern route at first proposed would be too risky and might expose his long column to a dangerous flank attack. He decided to move by the longer but safer route by way of Utica. On August 29, he began his march from the camp at Chazy with four thousand effectives, and arrived at Sackett's Harbour on September 16. Brown's appeals for relief became constantly more insistent. On September 10, he wrote, "I have been expecting with much anxiety to hear from you and to learn the aid you can afford this army. . . . I will not conceal from you that I consider the fate of this army very doubtful unless speedy relief is afforded, and my opinion is that the wisest course will be to effect a junction by landing below Niagara, marching on the American side of the strait, and crossing over from Buffalo." Next day he added, "Should you deem it proper to pass rapidly to this theatre of war, I do not doubt it will be in your power to carry everything within this peninsula. However, if with the aid of the fleet and the forces at Sackett's Harbour you can succeed in carrying Kingston, you will accomplish a much more important object."<sup>2</sup>

After a consultation with Chauncey it was decided that the success of a joint attack on Kingston was extremely doubtful. About three thousand men were embarked on September 19, but another heavy gale prevented the squadron from sailing until the morning of the 21st. These troops were landed next day at the mouth of the Genesee. The dragons and artillery, for whom no accommodation could be found on the transports, continued their march and did not arrive until a week later.

On the morning of July 25, a detachment of seamen with the boats of the *Star* and *Charwell*, lying at Niagara under Captain Dobbs, were employed in transporting troops up the river to Lewiston and Queenston, and after the battle of Lundy's Lane, that officer with thirty men accompanied General Drummond in his advance toward Fort Erie. On the night of August 2-3, he ferried troops across the river to make an attack on the batteries near Black Rock, which was repulsed. After August 5, both his briggs and the schooners *Nelley* and *Vincent*

<sup>1</sup>Izard to Armstrong, August 10.

<sup>2</sup>Brown to Izard, Fort Erie, September 10 and 11.

were closely blockaded in the river by a much superior force. The detachment at Fort Erie was strongly reinforced from their crews and a gig and several other boats were portaged around the falls into the upper river and thence by the Ridge Road from the mouth of Miller's Creek to the bay below Point Abino in Lake Erie, a distance of nine miles, being carried on the shoulders of the men a considerable part of the way. This was accomplished with such secrecy that, during the night of August 12-13, Dobbs succeeded in approaching the three American armed schooners, lying at the foot of the lake in such a position as effectively to protect the right flank of their entrenched camp at Fort Erie, without being discovered until his boats were close alongside. The *Somers* and *Porcupine* were boarded and carried after a desperate hand-to-hand fight, lasting only a few minutes, in which Lieutenant Coples Radcliffe, commanding the *Nelley*, and one seaman were killed and two seamen and two marines wounded. The cables of these two prizes being cut immediately to get them out of the reach of the batteries, they drifted to leeward and downstream with the current and the third schooner was not attacked. Each of the captured schooners was armed with three guns and had a crew of thirty-five of all ranks, of whom one petty officer was killed and two officers and seven men were wounded. The prizes were taken down the river to a safe anchorage in Chippawa Creek.

Dobbs commanded a body of fifty seamen and ninety marines in the assault on Fort Erie during the night of August 14-15, which resulted in a most disastrous and bloody repulse. Midshipman Hyde was killed, Dobbs and two other officers were severely wounded, twenty seamen and thirty marines were killed or disabled. This was a serious loss, for, as Yeo remarked, although the marines could be replaced, the seamen could not. Six of the infantry battalions under Drummond's command were so much reduced by loss as to be no longer fit for service in the field.

"I had intended to order another regiment from Kingston," he wrote on August 16, "but from the badness of the roads since the recent rains, I could not calculate upon their arrival before our squadron will be able to take the lake, and as even at present the diminution of stores and provisions is beginning to be felt, I entreat Your Excellency will impress upon the Commodore the necessity of conveying to the Right Division, the very first moment the squadron can leave harbour, a full supply of both as well as a reinforcement of troops."

Writing to Yeo two days later, he said: "The operations of this division being by the late unfortunate events protracted so much beyond the period which had been expected, and the consequent necessity of bringing forward to this position a greater force than was intended, its wants in provisions, ammunition, and stores of every kind have become so alarmingly great and urgent that nothing but the assistance of the whole of H.M. squadron on Lake Ontario can enable it to continue its operations against the enemy, or even to retain its position on this frontier. I enclose for your information the latest return of the provisions with this division. Of the utter impossibility of getting up an adequate or timely supply from Kingston in the present interrupted state of our communi-

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<sup>1</sup>Drummond to Prevost, Camp before Fort Erie, August 16.

cations, (a blockading squadron of the enemy's vessels being off Niagara for the important object of obstructing it), you are yourself perfectly aware."<sup>1</sup>

On August 20, however, the brigs blockading Niagara were blown out of sight by a violent gale and Dobbs took advantage of their absence to send off a party of seamen in bateaux to York with a large number of deserters from the enemy, under instructions to bring back full cargoes of supplies. On the third day the blockading vessels reappeared and resumed their former station. Soon after this six bateaux were ordered up to Chippawa, making twenty-four in service above the falls. As the enemy's brigs had again disappeared, the *Vincent* succeeded in running across to York with prisoners and sick and the *Charwell* and *Nelley* followed with the next fair wind. They were detained for several days at York for the purpose of taking over the 97th Regiment, then on its march from Kingston. Before this battalion could be embarked the enemy's brigs returned and it was obliged to continue its movement by land. Owing to heavy rains and bad weather this march occupied six days and the 97th did not arrive at the camp before Fort Erie until after a partially successful sortie of the garrison had inflicted serious loss. In the interval a large brigade of bateaux from Kingston, loaded with the most necessary supplies, had reached Niagara.

On September 21, Drummond was informed on reliable authority that Izard's division was moving toward the Niagara by a route which would bring it to Lewiston, whence it could attack Fort Niagara or interrupt his line of communication. He accordingly decided to raise the siege of Fort Erie and retire behind Chippawa Creek where he could protect his left flank with the captured schooners and armed boats.

On September 10, the three-decked ship on the stocks at Kingston was launched and named the *Saint Lawrence*. She had been only four months under construction and was a remarkably large and well built vessel, greatly exceeding in size any hitherto afloat on the lakes and nearly equal in force to the largest ship of the line in the British navy. Her gun-deck was one hundred and ninety-four feet in length by fifty-two feet five inches in extreme breadth. Her light draught of water afore was twelve feet and abaft fifteen feet. She was designed to mount thirty-four thirty-two pounders on the gun-deck, thirty-four long twenty-four pounders on her middle deck and thirty-four thirty-two pounder carronades on her upper deck. Her full complement of crew was six hundred and forty of all ranks. Every resource of the dockyard was strained to rig and equip her with the utmost speed.

On September 11, the British squadron on Lake Champlain sustained a crushing reverse and Prevost retired from Plattsburg without attempting an assault on the enemy's works. He then turned his attention again to the contemplated operations against Sackett's Harbour, when the command of Lake Ontario was recovered. On September 15, he wrote to Drummond:

"The impracticability of carrying on any operations without a sufficient naval co-operation has caused me to turn the whole of my attention to Upper Canada in hopes to be enabled to inflict on the enemy in that quarter the chastisement they so richly deserve.

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<sup>1</sup>Drummond to Yeo, Camp before Fort Erie, August 18

"Sir James Yeo's report of the *St. Lawrence* having been launched in safety on the 10th instant, renews the hopes I have long cherished that Sackett's Harbour, almost the only object now to be cared for, may be attacked with certain success, provided the means and force we possess can be conveyed there. The impending blow must be struck the moment the Right Division has been relieved by the supplies which the fleet is in the first instance to convey to it. My only apprehension is that by the time that service has been performed, the season of the year may prove unfavourable for so serious an undertaking; a design pregnant with such results cannot fail to fill the enemy with despair and dismay and should be indefatigably followed up until accomplished . . . One great embarrassment still exists and that arises from the insufficiency of the depot of provisions at Kingston and my inability to increase it whilst the navy continues to require so considerable a proportion of our means of transport for the armament and equipment of the large ship, to which objects all others have given way."

Five days later he received a letter from Major General Kempt, who had taken over the command of the garrison at Kingston, stating positively that the new ship could not be made ready for service before October 7, and consequently the squadron could hardly be expected to reach Niagara with supplies until the 20th.

"The Commodore seems disposed to believe Chauncey will venture on an engagement; if such is the disposition of the American naval commander, it will soon be ascertained. I confess that considering what will be the comparative force of the two squadrons at that period, I have no expectation of it. However, until that point is decided, Sir James Yeo will avoid any service likely to encumber his fighting ships. Should the hostile fleets spend any time manœuvring, the transports you possess may find opportunities of crossing the lake in security with those articles which you most require, and of none do you seem to be so much in want of as of ordnance stores."

An entire brigade of regular infantry employed in the expedition against Plattsburg had been placed under orders to march at once to Kingston, where it would be in readiness for the projected attack on Sackett's Harbour. It was suspected, however, that the enemy had obtained information which would put him on the alert.

"Altho' I cannot trace anything in my correspondence with you about the period when the bags coming and going were treacherously intercepted which would afford the enemy a view of the contemplated attack of Sackett's Harbor," Prevost replied to an inquiry from Drummond on September 19, "yet the precautionary measures that are pursuing at that place strongly indicate their having received sufficient information to place them completely on their guard."

Prevost's letter of September 15 was received by Drummond just after he had retired behind the Chippawa.

"The observations contained in the concluding paragraph of the letter of the 15th, (in Your Excellency's own handwriting), embrace a wide field," he remarked. "As, however, any attempt at the realization of the proposed

<sup>1</sup>Prevost to Drummond, Head Quarters, Montreal, September 15.

<sup>2</sup>Prevost to Drummond, Head Quarters, Montreal, September 20.

plan must depend upon a contingency that has not yet happened, viz.: the fall of Fort Erie, it may be sufficient for the present to observe that with regard to Amherstburg, the difficulty probably consists more in the deficiency of provisions and transport than of any other means. The same difficulty must be equally applicable to every other operation in this country, as it prevents the collection at any point of an adequate force for any object. These difficulty we must continue to experience until our squadron appears superior on the lake, and even then, the transport which Sir James Yeo may think it prudent to afford the departments will, I fear, prove very inadequate to the relief of all the wants of this division."<sup>1</sup>

Izard's advance was delayed in the first instance by the necessity of collecting horses and wagons to transport baggage and provisions from the adjacent farms, and afterwards by heavy rains and mud. Although he marched from the point of disembarkation on September 24, he did not arrive at Lewiston until October 5. His first intention was to lay siege to Fort Niagara, which was not strongly garrisoned, but he was eventually persuaded by Brown and Porter, who came to consult with him, to agree to an immediate concentration of the entire force south of the Chippawa and defer any operations against the forts at the mouth of the river as long as Drummond was able to keep the field. He was advised by them to cross the river at the foot of Grand Island for which purpose they had already collected some boats in Cayuga Creek. But the inadequate number of these boats and the presence of hostile gun-vessels at Chippawa caused him to abandon this plan. He marched up the river to Black Rock where the passage of the river was accomplished on October 10 and 11, but the advance toward Chippawa was not begun until the afternoon of the 13th.

At daybreak on September 28, Chauncey's squadron, returning from the Genesee, arrived in sight of Kingston and discovered two large ships standing out of the harbour under press of sail. His first thought was that the new ship had been equipped and the whole British squadron was coming out. This made him cautious and he beat off to windward. A thick fog soon set in, obscuring all distant objects from view until afternoon. When it cleared, two British ships were seen outside Nine Mile Point, but on being approached they beat into the harbour. He then came to the reasonable conclusion that Izard's movement toward the Niagara had become known and that these two ships had been ordered to proceed up the lake with troops and provisions. His squadron came to anchor near Grenadier Island and the *Lady-of-the-Lake* was sent in close to the harbour to keep a strict watch and report any movements of ships by signal guns or rockets. Next day her commander reported that the *Saint Lawrence* was hauled out in the stream and completely rigged but her sails were not yet bent. Four other ships and a schooner were lying in the stream apparently ready to sail. Chauncey then conjectured that Yeo would certainly take the lake in the course of a week and that his first effort would be "to retrieve at Sackett's Harbour what he lost at Plattsburg."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Drummond to Prevost, Head Quarters, Falls of Niagara, September 24.

<sup>2</sup>Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, U.S.S. *Superior*, off the Ducks, October 1.

On October 1, Kingston was again closely reconnoitred but no material change in the appearance of the British squadron could be observed. On the 5th the *Sylph* looked into the harbour and reported "the enemy's large ship with sails bent, topgallant yards across and to all appearance perfectly ready for sea." Next day Chauncey returned to Sackett's Harbour at the urgent request of the commandant of the garrison to make final arrangements for the defence of the place. Izard had left behind for that purpose a detachment of artillery and two battalions of regular infantry. The militia of the neighbouring country had been called in, making a total force of nearly six thousand of all ranks and arms.<sup>1</sup>

On October 5 Prevost learned that the *Saint Lawrence* would be certainly ready on the 15th, and he decided to go at once to Kingston to supervise future operations. He arrived there the day after Chauncey abandoned the blockade which had been effective for the last six weeks. "The vigilance of the American cruisers on Lake Ontario was felt even by our bateaux creeping along the shore with provisions for the Right Division," he reported. "In consequence I found the wants of that portion of the army had grown to an alarming extent."<sup>2</sup>

There could no longer be the least doubt that the most effective service the squadron could render would be the transportation of a large quantity of supplies to the head of the lake. It was decided accordingly that, as soon as the *Saint Lawrence* was ready, every available vessel would sail with full cargoes for Niagara.

"Reinforcements Sir James Yeo declines taking from the apprehension of being brought to action by Commodore Chauncey, but as soon as he has ascertained that the American fleet is in Sackett's Harbor and in appearance laid up for the winter, Sir James Yeo will then be disposed to convey from hence an extensive supply of articles most required on the Niagara frontier, as well as remove the sick and disabled from thence to Burlington and York, provided the weather does not suddenly change so as to render the navigation of the lake hazardous."<sup>3</sup>

A battalion of regular infantry that had been under orders to embark in the squadron was accordingly directed to march to York, whence he hoped it might be taken across the lake in the ships. But he foresaw that the projected attack on Sackett's Harbour must be relinquished.

"The naval ascendancy has been acquired at too late a period of the year to be otherwise useful than in relieving the wants of the troops on the Niagara Frontier and at York," Prevost wrote, "and as the enemy have made Sackett's Harbor a place of considerable resistance against any force capable of being brought against it, the greatest exertions must be made during the winter in the dockyards for the construction of a sufficiency of gun and mortar boats and craft for the conveyance of troops. I have so arranged with the Commodore."<sup>4</sup>

The quantity of supplies actually embarked was much less than had been anticipated. "The *St. Lawrence* has storage," he remarked, "for a greater

<sup>1</sup>Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, October 2 and 7; Hough, History of Jefferson County, N.Y.

<sup>2</sup>Prevost to Bathurst, No. 199, Head Quarters, Kingston, October 11.

<sup>3</sup>Prevost to Bathurst, Kingston, October 11.

<sup>4</sup>Prevost to Bathurst, No. 199, Kingston, October 11.



quantity than that which is assigned to her but she already draws 21 feet of water, a depth for which the Commodore at present feels some alarm and would deem it imprudent to increase. In taking on board all she could convey she would be lowered two feet more. I am unwilling to urge anything which might be construed into risk of this important vessel. In addition to the supplies detailed in the enclosed statement, the squadron have on board six weeks' provisions, the remainder of which the Commodore proposes leaving with you on his quitting Niagara, retaining only such a quantity as may be necessary to bring him into port. . . . Should the enemy's squadron show a disposition to remain in Sackett's Harbor, it is the intention of Sir James Yeo to order down immediately the three vessels that are now at the head of the lake and he will forthwith employ them in transporting to you reinforcements and supplies."<sup>1</sup>

The *Montreal* was sent off to reconnoitre Sackett's Harbour and returned on October 12 with information that the whole of the enemy's fleet was assembled there. On the 14th Yeo reported that the *Saint Lawrence* was completely equipped and would be ready to sail next day.

"The enemy's squadron of ten sail are now off Sackett's," he wrote, "and whether they will engage or not is uncertain. If they do I have reason to hope a complete victory, as I think it impossible any of their vessels can withstand the fire of this ship. Should they seek shelter under their batteries, I have the satisfaction that, (by means of this ship), I have gained the superiority on this lake. . . . It is impossible to describe the prodigious labor and difficulty we have had in equipping this ship, in having to get all our supplies from Quebec and Montreal. To give their Lordships some idea of the navigation of the river between this and Montreal, I need only mention the time it took to bring up the frame of the frigate B., which only arrived the end of September, having been upwards of three months from that place."<sup>2</sup>

Yeo eventually agreed to take on board five hundred men of the 90th Regiment and Drummond was informed that he had consented to land the whole of his marines for the defence of the forts, should the military situation require their aid.<sup>3</sup>

Izard's movement against the British position was retarded by the destruction of all bridges over Black Creek and other small streams crossing his line of march and he did not arrive in view of it until the morning of October 15. He spent the remainder of that day and the whole of the next in making a careful reconnoissance but the result only served to increase his embarrassment.

"I have just learned by express from Sackett's Harbor," he wrote in evident perplexity that evening, "that Commodore Chauncey, with the whole of his fleet, has retired into port, and is throwing up batteries for its protection. This defeats all the objects of operations by land in this quarter. I may turn Chippawa, and should General Drummond not retire, may succeed in giving him a great deal of trouble, but if he falls back on Fort George or Burlington Heights,

<sup>1</sup>Prevost to Drummond, Kingston, October 11.

<sup>2</sup>Yeo to Croker, H.M.S. *Saint Lawrence*, Kingston, October 14.

<sup>3</sup>Prevost to Drummond, Kingston, October 15 and 17.

every step I take in pursuit, exposes me to be cut off by the large reinforcements, it is in the power of the enemy to throw in twenty-four hours on my flank or rear.

"All the artillery and all the ordnance stores are inadequate to the siege of one of the enemy's fortresses. Three-fourths of the arms of the troops from the westward are unfit for service. The severe season is approaching. A fact, which I was not aware of before I witnessed it from Lewiston Heights, is that the communication by water from York to the mouth of the Niagara was uninterrupted notwithstanding our supremacy at that time on Lake Ontario. I saw a large square-rigged vessel arriving and another, a brig, lying close to the Canada shore. Not a vessel of ours in sight."<sup>1</sup>

In fact Captain Dobbs reported only a few days later that the little squadron under his command had carried to and fro during the summer not less than five thousand troops.<sup>2</sup>

Sailing from Kingston on October 15, Yeo was delayed by head winds and did not succeed in making his appearance off Niagara until the 18th. The fact that his squadron was at last in sight was reported the same day at noon to Drummond at his headquarters near Niagara Falls. Believing that he was threatened by an immediate attack from an enemy of twice his numbers who was then manoeuvring to turn his right flank and prevent a retirement toward Burlington Heights, Drummond directed his chief staff-officer to request Yeo to land some of his marines in addition to the troops on board. "Though I have no idea of his acquiescence, in such a proposal, I have nevertheless thought it right to make it," he remarked. "I have already told Your Excellency that the squadron, unless it brings me a strong reinforcement of troops, will by no means relieve the difficulties of my situation."<sup>3</sup>

His surmise that Yeo would decline to consent proved quite correct.

"I am concerned," Yeo replied, "General Drummond should make a request I cannot comply with without exposing the honor of the flag, the interest of the country, and my own reputation to most eminent danger. The enemy's fleet may very possibly engage the squadron under my command, and the marines compose the most efficient part of their crews. Under these circumstances it is impossible I can comply with his request."<sup>4</sup>

Rough weather prevented him from landing either troops or stores for the next three days. This service was not effected until the 21st and 22nd. The remnant of the 1st battalion of the 8th (King's) Regiment and the flank companies of the 104th, which had become ineffective from hard service, were embarked and the squadron set sail on the evening of the 22nd.

"The disappointment I experienced in finding that half the 90th Regiment had been left to struggle through the dreadful roads betwixt Kingston and York, at such a season and at such a crisis, was greater than I can express," Drummond wrote with unusual warmth.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Izard to the Secretary of War, Head Quarters, Northern Army, near Street's Creek, October 16.

<sup>2</sup>Dobbs to Yeo, H.M.S. *Star*, October 20.

<sup>3</sup>Drummond to Prevost, Falls of Niagara, October 16.

<sup>4</sup>Yeo to Drummond, October 19.

<sup>5</sup>Drummond to Prevost, October 20 and 23.

Yeo anchored at Kingston on the afternoon of the 24th, bringing a false report of the evacuation of Fort Erie. As soon as his ships were reported in sight, Prevost despatched his Adjutant General to meet him in a boat, bearing a letter containing an urgent request for him to receive on board immediately a company of Royal Artillery in charge of a brigade of nine-pounder field guns, and all the effective officers and men of the 9th and 37th Regiments, numbering upwards of sixteen hundred of all ranks, besides as great a supply of provisions as could be stowed away, with the object of reinforcing Drummond to such a degree as would enable him to expel the invaders before winter set in. It had been previously ascertained beyond doubt that Chauncey's fleet was still in port and showed no sign of an intention to resume offensive operations. In an interview with the Governor General next day, however, Yeo declared in the most positive language that he could not undertake to navigate his squadron properly if he took on board more than a thousand soldiers, and the force directed to embark was reduced accordingly. Drummond was instructed to establish a shipyard at Turkey Point on Lake Erie, protected by a sufficient military force, for the construction of a frigate and some smaller vessels during the winter and employ the crew of the *Montreal* in this service and, if an opportunity offered, in an attack on the enemy's shipping on that lake. Commissioner Sir Robert Hall was directed to proceed with the squadron to superintend the organization of this dockyard and another at Penetanguishene on Georgian Bay, taking with him a company of the Canadian Fencible Regiment composed of expert axemen. Yeo did not succeed in clearing the harbour until October 30, but the number of rank and file actually embarked exceeded twelve hundred with a substantial supply of provisions and ordnance stores. He appeared off Niagara on the morning of November 2, but after sending the troops ashore with the exception of the artillery and their guns, went across to York apparently with the intention of transferring the stores into the vessels of light draught for convenience of landing. Before night Drummond arrived at Niagara for the express purpose of concerting a combined offensive on the right bank of the river and was much disappointed to find no ships in sight. He lost no time in crossing the lake to ask the co-operation of a strong body of sailors with boats. On the 3rd Izard was informed that the British squadron had anchored off the mouth of the river at a great distance the day before and commenced landing troops. As he had already detached all the effective infantry of Brown's division for the defence of Sackett's Harbour, he decided to abandon his last foothold in Upper Canada before an attack could be made upon him. The principal part of the defences of Fort Erie had already been mined and otherwise prepared for destruction and early on the morning of November 5 they were evacuated and blown up. When this became known to Drummond on the afternoon of the same day, he did not relinquish his design of making an attack upon Buffalo, but Yeo again positively refused to co-operate, basing his objections on the uncertainty of weather at that season and the danger of leaving his ships at anchor weakly manned in a position where they might be attacked. He readily consented to detach the *Niagara* at once to Burlington Bay with the company of the Canadian Fencibles and the naval stores intended for the new dockyard on Lake Erie. After landing these, Captain Collier was directed to return to York, lay up his ship, and pro-

ceed with his crew to Turkey Point. The other small vessels were also sent to Burlington to receive on board the remnant of the 103rd Regiment. These arrangements had hardly been completed when an express arrived from Kingston with a letter addressed by the Adjutant General to the commandant of that garrison, warning him that a very large force had been assembled at Sackett's Harbour, where it was reported that thirty thousand rations were issued daily. Instructions had been sent out to call in the militia from Ogdensburg and Utica. Gunboats were being collected and refitted. An important offensive seemed to be contemplated. Yeo decided to return to Kingston without awaiting the arrival of his detached vessels and set sail on the evening of November 8, accompanied by Drummond. On arriving there on the morning of the 10th they were evidently relieved to find that no confirmation of this alarming intelligence had been received.<sup>1</sup>

As a fact, since his return to port, Chauncey had made the most active preparations to resist an attack which he stated would likely take place in ten days. The return of the British squadron on October 24 had increased his apprehensions and there is no evidence to indicate that he even thought of any offensive operation during its absence. Urgent appeals for assistance had been previously addressed to General Izard and seem to have influenced his decision to retire to Fort Erie.

"The infantry of Major General Brown's division under Brigadier General Winder," he wrote, "proceeded, (as was intended), on the 24th, and must be now well on their way to Sackett's Harbor. I entertain great doubts of the enemy attacking that place this winter, but even should they do so, this reinforcement of troops, who have seen severe service, will be a most important addition to its defence. The crowds of disorganized, unarmed militia, which have assembled there in the last few weeks, would be of more disadvantage than service. A letter from a Brigadier General Tucker of the New York Militia, dated the 20th ultimo, states the number to be then between four and six thousand, without guns, mutinous, and determined to move off, (as they came), *en masse* on the 25th inst., should they not be previously discharged. The arrival of Major General Brown, will, I hope, have the effect of calming these people, to whom he has for years been personally known and among whom he is popular."<sup>2</sup>

Thus while Yeo was conveying troops from Kingston to Niagara to expel Izard from the peninsula, nearly three times their number had been detached from Izard's force and were marching painfully over wretched roads to the relief of Sackett's Harbour, which was not even menaced.

On the 13th, Drummond learned with great dismay that a column of mounted riflemen, advancing swiftly from Detroit, had destroyed nearly all the mills and much of the garnered grain in the country west of the Grand River, from which he had expected to draw the greater part of his supplies for the troops stationed on the line of the Niagara and in the vicinity of the head of

<sup>1</sup>Major General Robinson to Drummond, Kingston, November 4; Prevost to Drummond, Kingston, October 25; Drummond to Prevost, Falls of Niagara, November 5; Drummond to Prevost, H.M.S., *St. Lawrence*, off the Ducks, November 8 and 10.

<sup>2</sup>Izard to the Secretary of War, Buffalo, November 2.

the lake. He came to the conclusion that the necessary quantity of provisions must be forwarded before the close of navigation for which nothing less than the aid of the entire squadron would be sufficient. He accordingly required Yeo to take on board every barrel of provisions, which could be spared from the storehouses at Kingston, and suggested that the smaller vessels should land their cargoes at Burlington Beach. Once more the Commodore refused to consent with evident regret.

"I have at all times," he said, "from motives of duty and inclination, been ready and solicitous to co-operate and assist the army to the utmost of my means and ability, and therefore on the present occasion feel the more distressed that it is not in my power to comply with your request without exposing His Majesty's squadron to the most imminent danger, such as no officer would be warranted in risking. I have consulted Messrs. Richardson, the pilots, and others best acquainted with the lake, who give it as their opinion that it would be the height of imprudence and hazardous in the extreme to take the large ships on the lake at this advanced season of the year. That it has ever been the custom to lay up the vessels on the 15th of this month, and though small vessels have been on the lake as late as the 1st of December, they have narrowly escaped being lost; that the snow storms generally last twenty-four hours with great violence, and there is no anchorage for large ships between this and York. I do not hesitate in declaring that, if the squadron were to be caught on the lake in such a storm, it is my opinion their loss would be inevitable. It is also to be considered that were the squadron at this moment ready to sail, the service would not be accomplished under ten days at least from its being impossible to approach the Niagara River within six miles, Burlington is out of the question, and at York, which is the only place the squadron can communicate with, the ships are obliged to lay at the distance of three miles, and it is only with moderate weather that boats could land the provisions. It would therefore be December before the squadron could return, and then could not get into port if the wind was easterly."

The master builder had reported the *Montreal* unfit for further service without undergoing repairs and apprehensions were entertained for the safety of the two brigs still on the lake.<sup>1</sup>

When they came in, it was found that the *Star* had sprung her masts in a gale and would be unable to take the lake again that season. On November 24, Drummond reported that the *Niagara* was taking on board guns and stores for the proposed naval station on Lake Huron and that the *Charwell* would sail at once to the head of the lake with a small supply of stores and provisions. Both these vessels seem to have reached their destination and returned in safety.<sup>2</sup>

Early in November Chauncey recommended the immediate construction of two ships of the line of the first class. He stated that the depth of water in the harbour was sufficient to float vessels of any size and that space could readily be found to build three ships of the largest dimensions. Timber could be conveniently procured close at hand and he estimated that four hundred tons of

<sup>1</sup>Drummond to Yeo, Kingston, November 13; Yeo to Drummond, H.M.S. *St. Lawrence*, at Kingston, November 14.

<sup>2</sup>Drummond to Prevost, Kingston, November 24.

round shot and kentledge could be obtained from the furnaces at Onondaga and Rome and another hundred tons from the small furnaces in the neighbourhood of Utica. Other necessary materials could not be obtained nearer than Albany and not a great quantity even there. To build these vessels he needed six hundred ship carpenters, sixty ship joiners, one hundred and twenty sawyers, seventy-five blacksmiths, twenty-five block and pump makers, ten boat builders, ten spar makers, fifteen carriage makers, ten armourers, and five tanners. Special shops, storehouses and wharves must be constructed and a ropewalk established with machinery to lay cables twenty-four inches in diameter.

"Two ships of the line of 90 or 100 guns can certainly be built and prepared for service by the 15th of May, and I should say three, but for the difficulty which I apprehend, will be found in procuring timber of sufficient dimensions of vessels of so large a class, but there will be unavoidably in so great a collection of timber a large quantity which cannot be worked into the line of battle ships, but will answer for a smaller one. I am confident that a frigate might also be built and in readiness at the same time.

"If we can prepare three ships of the line by the middle of May, it will give us decidedly the superiority on the lake, and I think that the two ships of the class proposed and a frigate added to our present force would be superior to anything that the enemy could produce in the same time.

"From the best information I can collect, the enemy has no timber prepared to build any vessel of a larger class than a frigate, and he has neither guns nor stores at Kingston for fitting even such a ship, nor could he procure them but with extreme difficulty, if a proper position upon the St. Lawrence was taken up by our troops in order to impede or prevent his transportation by that river or along its banks.

"The frames of one or both of the frigates sent out from England last spring have arrived at Kingston, and the keel of them is laid and stem and stern-posts raised, but I understand that neither of them will be built unless we commence building here. The dimensions of these frigates are said to be about the same as those of their 38-gun frigates.

"Timber is not so easily procured in Canada as on this side, particularly oak, which I understand to be extremely scarce, and I am inclined to believe that the enemy could not procure mechanics to perform any very extensive operations.

"If the division of the army, which is now on the Niagara frontier, should take a position on the St. Lawrence at or near Hamilton, it would command the passage of the river and oblige the enemy to send his stores and munitions of war by land and under strong convoy; and even then he would be subject to interruption and loss, as the road lays near the bank of the river.

"The advantages to our country to result from the military occupation of such a position will readily present themselves.

"Besides the injury the enemy would sustain in the interruption and loss of stores, he would feel it still more severely in the harassing his troops with constant watching and fatigue, and the consequent sickness and desertion.

"It may be asked what is to become of the Niagara frontier? I answer, leave its defence to the brave General Porter and the militia and volunteers of the State of New York.

"It has always been my opinion that among the best means to conquer the Canadas was that of cutting off the supplies from the lower to the upper province, by taking and maintaining a position on the St. Lawrence. This would be killing the tree by 'girdling'; the branches deprived of their ordinary supplies from the root, die of necessity. But if it is intended to kill the tree by lopping its uppermost branches, the body becomes invigorated by reducing the demands upon its resources.

"The attempt to take Kingston by crossing at Erie in preference to being landed a few miles of the spot is a species of military policy much beyond my comprehension, particularly when it is recollected that in the *first mode* our troops would be obliged to march through a well settled enemy's country upwards of 200 miles, their strength and resources constantly diminishing, while that of the enemy would be as rapidly augmenting. when by landing in the vicinity of Kingston, they might go fresh to the assault with their whole force unexhausted by fatigue, and undiminished in numbers."<sup>1</sup>

The Secretary of the Navy promptly sanctioned Chauncey's proposal to build these large ships, considerably exceeding the *St. Lawrence* in size. The mechanics required were quickly engaged and sent forward. While awaiting their arrival Chauncey undertook no offensive operation beyond despatching Midshipman McGowan with a torpedo in a barge to attempt the destruction of the *St. Lawrence*. His approach was discovered and he was driven off but succeeded in taking a couple of row-boats engaged in patrolling the harbour of Kingston.

The frame of the frigate which had been so laboriously transported from Montreal to Kingston at a cost of £2,588, was put together with such alterations as would enable her to mount fifty-two guns. She was launched on Christmas Day, 1814, and named the *Psyche*. Information was received soon after from reliable secret agents in the United States that five hundred shipwrights had arrived at Sackett's Harbour for the purpose of building three ships of the line and that heavy anchors and cables and forty long guns intended for them had reached Albany on their way to Oswego. Yeo immediately laid the keel of another ship of about the same size as the *St. Lawrence*. A contemporary historian of the British Navy remarked rather scornfully that "before spring, peace came, otherwise, there is no saying whether the building mania would not have continued until there was scarcely room on the lake for working the ships."<sup>2</sup>

On March 1, the Governor General was officially notified by the British chargé d'affaires at Washington that the treaty of peace had been ratified and the termination of hostilities was at once announced. Yeo resigned his command and returned to England, travelling through the United States by way of Sackett's Harbour and embarking at New York. He was evidently impressed by the signs of active preparation for the anticipated campaign observed by the

<sup>1</sup>Chauncey to the Secretary of the Navy, U.S.S. *Superior*, Sackett's Harbour, November 2.

<sup>2</sup>James, *Naval History of Great Britain*, VI. p. 338; Prevost to Bathurst, No. 216, Montreal, November 20; Prevost to Bathurst, No. 221, Quebec, January 15, 1815.

way. His remarks on the future defence of Canada were embodied in a letter to Lord Melville, written soon after.

"The experience of two years' active service," he said, "has served to convince me that tho' much has been done by the mutual exertions of both services, we also owe as much if not more to the perverse stupidity of the enemy; the impolicy of their plans; the disunion of their commanders, and lastly between them and their *Minister of War*. The fatal and fortunate for us *mistaken confidence* they placed in the *attachment of the Canadians* to their cause was another delusion highly favorable to *ours*, which they are now convinced of, and there is no doubt but in the event of another war with this country, they will rectify their past errors by their past experience. This will be effected by totally reversing their late plans of operations and giving a new and different turn to their mode of attack, which will consequently lead to a change of ours, for what might have been applicable perhaps to the nature of the service *last war* may never be so again.

"The preservation of Canada by means of a naval force on the lakes will, in my opinion, be an endless, if not a futile undertaking. On Lake Erie the only place for building ships of war is Amherstburg, which is situated at the very end of that lake, consequently no provisions, stores, and other supplies can be conveyed there but by water and to secure which we must of course possess the naval ascendancy on that lake, and that even must depend on the naval superiority of Lake Ontario, without which nothing can be conveyed to the upper lake. But even allowing that we possess these two-fold advantages, our operations would be crippled and rendered nugatory from the insufficiency of transport on the River St. Lawrence, the navigation of which being so much exposed to the fire of the enemy's riflemen from its banks that our bateaux would be exposed to perpetual annoyance in every communication with us. Independent of this, should the enemy cross over, (which they easily might do), and take any strong position between Montreal and Kingston, our fleet and army in the upper province would be perfectly useless, cut off from their supplies and liable to capture or defeat, and this is the plan which I have no doubt of their adopting upon any future rupture with this country. Much has been said of the advantages to be derived from the taking of Sackett's Harbor. Could the place when taken be rendered tenable, I will not dispute it, but that's impossible. The many difficulties our forces would have to oppose in the acquisition of this *temporary* benefit would be more than it is worth and the injury we should do them would only stimulate them to greater exertions and the improvement of the many advantages they possess and must possess as things stand, over us. Such are their facilities that I can assure Your Lordship, they more than half finished two ships of 120 guns each in thirty days. When I was at Sackett's Harbor on my way to New York, they had the guns, anchors, &c., for three first rates, and I found an excellent water communication all the way, except from Utica to Sackett's, a distance of ninety miles, and a good winter road. It therefore appears to me that to maintain Upper Canada, a very large military and naval establishment must be kept up, as a small force being there would only subject the poor defenceless inhabitants to the miseries of a predatory warfare."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Yeo to Lord Melville, Brompton, near Chatham, May 30, 1815.