

ALFRED THAYER MAHAN

SEA POWER IN ITS
RELATIONS TO THE WAR
OF 1812. VOLUME 2

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A. T. Mahan

Sea Power in its Relations to the War of 1812 / Volume 2

CHAPTER IX

THE WINTER OF 1812-1813—BAINBRIDGE'S SQUADRON: ACTIONS BETWEEN "CONSTITUTION" AND "JAVA," "HORNET" AND "PEACOCK"— INCREASING PRESSURE ON ATLANTIC COAST

The squadron under Commodore William Bainbridge, the third which sailed from the United States in October, 1812, started nearly three weeks after the joint departure of Rodgers and Decatur. It consisted of the "Constitution" and sloop of war "Hornet," then in Boston, and of the "Essex," the only 32-gun frigate in the navy, fitting for sea in the Delaware. The original armament of the latter, from which she derived her rate, had been changed to forty 32-pounder carronades and six long twelves; total, forty-six guns. It is noticeable that this battery, which ultimately contributed not merely to her capture, but to her almost helplessness under the fire of an enemy able to maintain his distance out of carronade range, was strongly objected to by Captain Porter. On October 14 he applied to be transferred to the "Adams," giving as reasons "my insuperable dislike to carronades, and the bad sailing of the "Essex," which render her, in my opinion, the worst frigate in the service."¹ The request was not granted, and Porter sailed in command of the ship on October 28, the two other vessels having left Boston on the 26th.

In order to facilitate a junction, Bainbridge had sent Porter full details of his intended movements.² A summary of these will show his views as to a well-planned commerce-destroying cruise. Starting about October 25, he would steer first a course not differing greatly from the general direction taken by Rodgers and Decatur, to the Cape Verde Islands, where he would fill with water, and by November 27 sail for the island Fernando de Noronha, two hundred and fifty miles south of the Equator, and two hundred miles from the mainland of Brazil, then a Portuguese colony, of which the island was a dependency. The trade winds being fair for this passage, he hoped to leave there by December 15, and to cruise south along the Brazilian coast as far as Rio de Janeiro, until January 15. In the outcome the meeting of the "Constitution" with the "Java" cut short her proceedings at this point; but Bainbridge had purposed to stay yet another month along the Brazilian coast, between Rio and St. Catherine's, three hundred miles south. Thence he would cross the South Atlantic to the neighborhood of St. Helena, remaining just beyond sight of it, to intercept returning British Indiamen, which frequently stopped there. Porter failed to overtake the other vessels, on account of the bad sailing of the "Essex." He arrived at Fernando de Noronha December 14, one day before that fixed by Bainbridge as his last there; but the "Constitution" and "Hornet" had already gone on to Bahia, on the Brazilian mainland, seven hundred miles to the southwest, leaving a letter for him to proceed off Cape Frio, sixty miles from the entrance of Rio. He reached this rendezvous on the 25th, but saw nothing of Bainbridge, who had been detained off Bahia by conditions there. The result was that the

¹ Captains' Letters. Navy Department.

² Ibid., Bainbridge, Oct. 13, 1812.

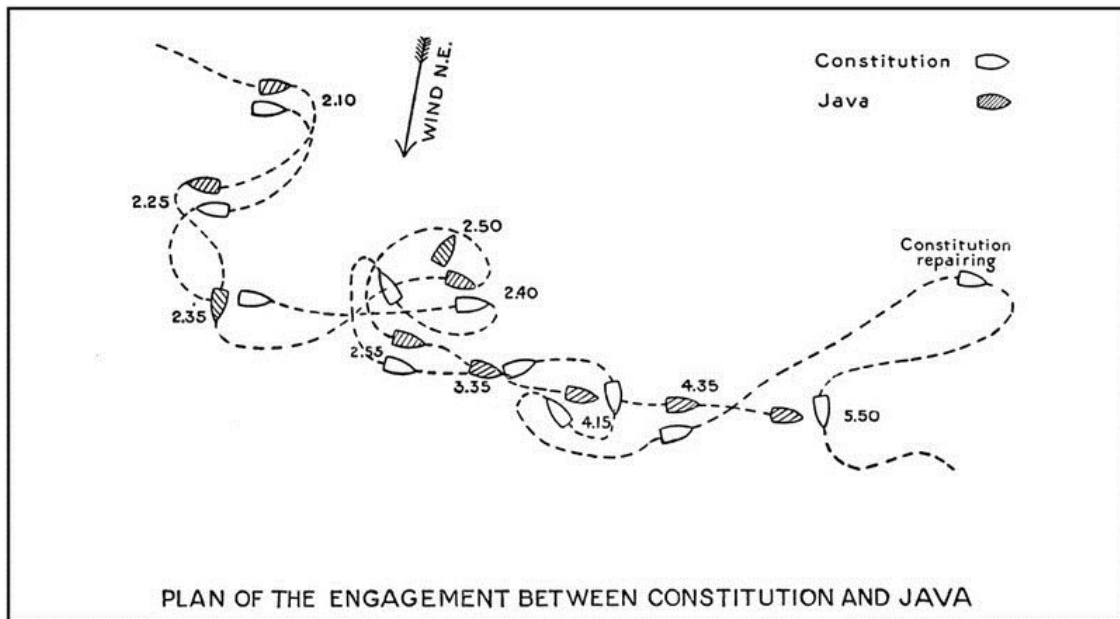
"Essex" never found her consorts, and finally struck out a career for herself, which belongs rather to a subsequent period of the war. We therefore leave her spending her Christmas off Cape Frio.

The two other vessels had arrived off Bahia on December 13. Here was lying a British sloop of war, the "Bonne Citoyenne," understood to have on board a very large amount of specie for England. The American vessels blockaded her for some days, and then Captain Lawrence challenged her to single combat; Bainbridge acquiescing, and pledging his honor that the "Constitution" should remain out of the way, or at least not interfere. The British captain, properly enough, declined. That his ship and her reported value were detaining two American vessels from wider depredations was a reason more important than any fighting-cock glory to be had from an arranged encounter on equal terms, and should have sufficed him without expressing the doubt he did as to Bainbridge's good faith.³ On the 26th the Commodore, leaving Lawrence alone to watch the British sloop, stood out to sea with the "Constitution," cruising well off shore; and thus on the 29th, at 9 A.M., being then five miles south of the port and some miles from land, discovered two strange sail, which were the British frigate "Java," Captain Henry Lambert, going to Bahia for water, with an American ship, prize to her.

Upon seeing the "Constitution" in the south-southwest, the British captain shaped his course for her, directing the prize to enter the harbor. Bainbridge, watching these movements, now tacked his ship, and at 11.30 A.M. steered away southeast under all plain sail, to draw the enemy well away from neutral waters; the Portuguese authorities having shown some sensitiveness on that score. The "Java" followed, running full ten miles an hour, a great speed in those days, and gaining rapidly. At 1.30, being now as far off shore as desired, Bainbridge went about and stood toward the enemy, who kept away with a view to rake, which the "Constitution" avoided by the usual means of wearing, resuming her course southeast, but under canvas much reduced. At 2.10 the "Java," having closed to a half mile, the "Constitution" fired one gun ahead of her; whereupon the British ship hoisted her colors, and the American then fired two broadsides. The "Java" now took up a position to windward of the "Constitution," on her port side, a little forward (2.10); "within pistol-shot," according to the minutes submitted by the officer who succeeded to the command; "much further than I wished," by Bainbridge's journal. It is not possible entirely to reconcile the pretty full details of further movements given by each;⁴ but it may be said, generally, that this battle was not mainly an artillery duel, like those of the "Constitution" and "Guerrière," the "Wasp" and "Frolic," nor yet one in which a principal manœuvre, by its decisive effect upon the use of artillery, played the determining part, as was the case with the "United States" and "Macedonian." Here it was a combination of the two factors, a succession of evolutions resembling the changes of position, the retreats and advances, of a fencing or boxing match, in which the opponents work round the ring; accompanied by a continual play of the guns, answering to the thrusts and blows of individual encounter. In this game of manœuvres the "Constitution" was somewhat handicapped by her wheel being shot away at 2.30. The rudder remained unharmed; but working a ship by relieving tackles, the substitute for the wheel, is for several reasons neither as quick nor as accurate.

³ Niles' Register, vol. iv. p. 25.

⁴ Bainbridge's report is in the Captains' Letters. Navy Department, Jan. 3, 1813. It will be found also in Niles' Register, vol. iii. p. 410. Both give extracts from Bainbridge's journal, which is very full on the subject of manœuvres and times. The British account will be found in the Naval Chronicle, vol. xxix. pp. 403-408, from which the plan of the battle is copied.



PLAN OF THE ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN CONSTITUTION AND JAVA

Certain salient incidents stand out in both accounts, marking the progress of the engagement. Shortly before three o'clock the head of the "Java's" bowsprit was shot away, and with it went the jib-boom. At this time, the fore and main masts of the British frigate being badly wounded, with all the rigging cut to pieces, Captain Lambert looked upon the day as lost unless he could board. The sailing master having been sent below wounded, the first lieutenant, whose account is here followed, was directed to run the ship alongside the enemy; but the helm was hardly put up when the foremast went overboard, at five minutes past three, a time in which both accounts agree. The British narrative states that the stump of their bowsprit caught in the mizzen rigging of the "Constitution" (3.35). This Bainbridge does not mention; but, if correct, the contact did not last long, for the "Constitution" immediately wore across the "Java's" bow, and the latter's maintopmast followed the foremast. The British frigate was now beaten beyond recovery; nevertheless the flag was kept flying, and it was after this that Captain Lambert fell, mortally wounded. Resistance was continued until 4.05, by the American accounts; by the British, till 4.35. Then, the enemy's mizzenmast having fallen, and nothing left standing but the main lower mast, the "Constitution" shot ahead to repair damages. There was no more firing, but the "Java's" colors remained up till 5.25,—5.50 by the British times,—when they were hauled down as the "Constitution" returned. The American loss was nine killed and twenty-five wounded; that of the British, by their official accounts, twenty-two killed, one hundred and two wounded.

The superiority in broadside weight of fire of the "Constitution" over the "Java" was about the same as over the "Guerrière." The "Java's" crew was stronger in number than that of the "Guerrière," mustering about four hundred, owing to having on board a hundred supernumeraries for the East India station, to which the ship was ultimately destined. On the other hand, the material of the ship's company is credibly stated to have been extremely inferior, a condition frequently complained of by British officers at this late period of the Napoleonic wars. It has also been said, in apparent extenuation of her defeat, that although six weeks out from England, having sailed November 12, and greater part of that time necessarily in the trade winds, with their usual good weather, the men had not been exercised in firing the guns until December 28, the day before meeting the "Constitution," when six broadsides of blank cartridges were discharged. Whatever excuse may exist in the individual instance for such neglect, it is scarcely receivable in bar of judgment when disaster follows. No particular reason is given, except "the many services of a newly fitted ship, lumbered with stores;" for in such

latitudes the other allegation, "a succession of gales of wind since the day of departure,"⁵ is incredible. On broad general grounds the "Java" needed no apology for being beaten by a ship so much heavier; and the "Constitution's" loss in killed and wounded was over double that suffered from the "Guerrière" four months before, when the American ship had substantially the same crew.⁶ Further, Bainbridge reported to his Government that "the damage received in the action, but more especially the decayed state of the "Constitution," made it necessary to return to the United States for repairs." Although Lieutenant Chads, who succeeded Lambert, was mistaken in supposing the American ship bound to the East Indies, he was evidently justified in claiming that the stout resistance of the "Java" had broken up the enemy's cruise, thus contributing to the protection of the British commerce.

The "Java" was considered by Bainbridge too much injured to be worth taking to the United States. She was therefore set on fire December 31, and the "Constitution" went back to Bahia, where the prisoners were landed under parole. Thence she sailed for home January 6, 1813, reaching Boston February 27. Before his departure the Commodore directed Lawrence to blockade Bahia as long as seemed advisable, but to beware of a British seventy-four, said to be on the coast. When it became expedient, he was to quit the position and move northward; first off Pernambuco, and thence to the coast of Cayenne, Surinam, and Demerara, a favorite cruising ground for American commerce-destroyers. The "Hornet" was to be in Boston in the first fortnight of April.

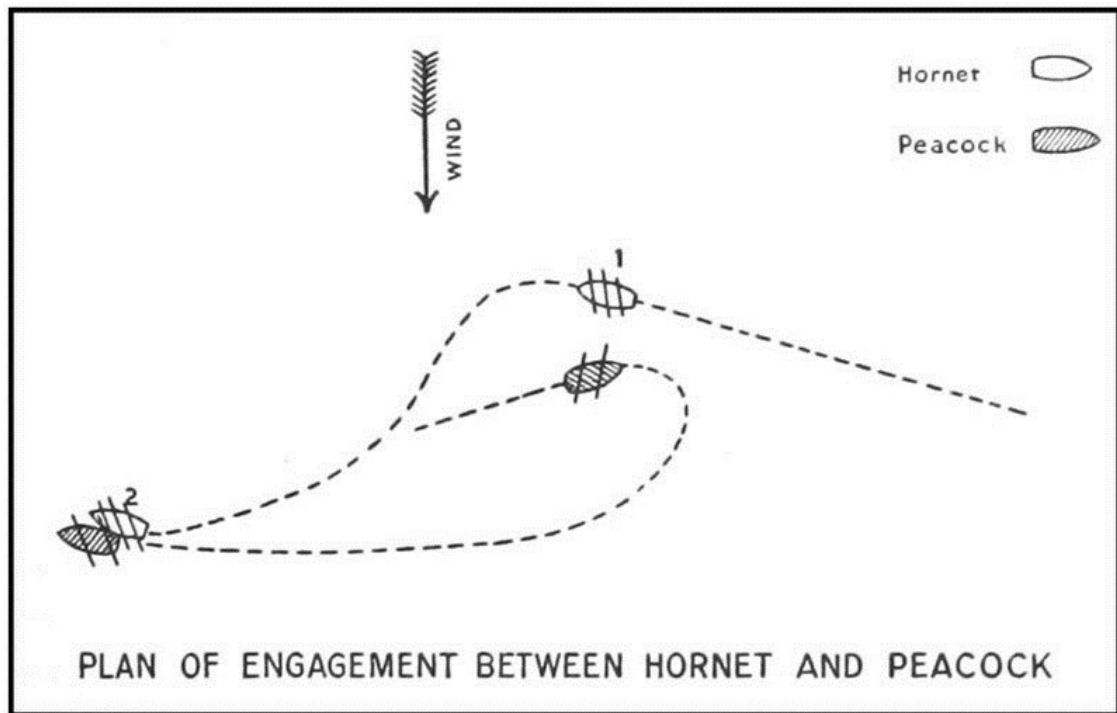
In pursuance of these discretionary orders Lawrence remained off Bahia for eighteen days, till January 24, when the expected seventy-four, the "Montagu," appeared, forcing him into the harbor; but the same night he came out, gave her the slip, and proceeded on his cruise. On February 24, off the Demarara River, he encountered the British brig of war "Peacock," a vessel of the same class as the "Frolic," which was captured a few months before by the "Wasp," sister ship to the "Hornet." There was no substantial difference in size between these two approaching antagonists; but, unfortunately for the equality of the contest, the "Peacock" carried 24-pounder carronades, instead of the 32's which were her proper armament. Her battery power was therefore but two thirds that of the "Hornet." The vessels crossed on opposite tacks, exchanging broadsides within half pistol-shot, the "Hornet" to windward(1). The "Peacock" then wore; observing which, Lawrence kept off at once for her and ran on board her starboard quarter (2). In this position the engagement was hot for about fifteen minutes, when the "Peacock" surrendered, hoisting a flag union down, in signal of distress. She had already six feet of water in the hold. Being on soundings, in less than six fathoms, both anchored, and every effort was made to save the British vessel; but she sank, carrying down nine of her own crew and three of the "Hornet's." Her loss in action was her commander and four men killed, and twenty-nine wounded, of whom three died; that of the American vessel, one killed and two wounded. The inequality in armament detracts inevitably from glory in achievement; but the credit of readiness and efficiency is established for Lawrence and his crew by prompt action and decisive results. So, also, defeat is not inglorious under such odds; but it remains to the discredit of the British commander that his ship did no more execution, when well within the most effective range of her guns. In commenting upon this engagement, after noticing the dandy neatness of the "Peacock," James says, "Neglect to exercise the ship's company at the guns prevailed then over two thirds of the British navy; to which the Admiralty, by their sparing allowance of powder and shot for practice, were in some degree instrumental."

With the survivors of the "Peacock," and prisoners from other prizes, Captain Lawrence found himself now with two hundred and seventy-seven souls on board and only thirty-four hundred gallons of water. There was at hand no friendly port where to deposit his captives, and provisions were running short. He therefore steered for the United States, and arrived at Holmes' Hole on March 19.⁷

⁵ James' Naval History, edition 1824, vol. v. p. 313.

⁶ Bainbridge in a private letter speaks of the men looking forward to prize money for the "Guerrière" on their return. Niles' Register, vol. iii. p. 411.

⁷ Lawrence's Report of these transactions is in Captains' Letters, March 19, 1813. It will be found also in Niles' Register, vol. iv. p. 84.



PLAN OF ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN HORNET AND PEACOCK

The capture of the "Peacock" was the last of five naval duels, three between frigates and two between sloops, all favorable in issue to the United States, which took place in what may justly be considered the first of the three periods into which the War of 1812 obviously divides. Great Britain, long reluctant to accept the fact of war as irreversible, did not begin to put forth her strength, or to exercise the measures of repression open to her, until the winter of 1812-13 was drawing to a close. On October 13, convinced that the mere news of the revocation of the Orders in Council would not induce any change in the American determination, the hitherto deferred authority for general reprisals was given; but accompanying them was an express provision that they were not to be understood as recalling the declaration which Warren had been commissioned to make, in order to effect a suspension of hostilities.⁸ On November 27, however, hopes from this source having apparently disappeared, directions were sent the admiral to institute a rigorous commercial blockade of Delaware and Chesapeake bays,⁹ the usual public notification of the fact to neutral Powers, for the information of their shipping affected by it, being issued December 26, three days before the action between the "Constitution" and "Java." On February 21, three days before the "Hornet" sank the "Peacock," Warren wrote that in compliance with the orders of November 27 this blockade had been put in force. The ship "Emily," from Baltimore for Lisbon, under a British license, with a cargo of flour, was turned back when attempting to go to sea from the Chesapeake, about February 5; Warren indorsing on her papers that the bay had been placed under rigorous blockade the day before.¹⁰ Captain Stewart, the senior United States officer at Norfolk, notified his Government of these facts on February 10.¹¹ Soon after, by an Order in Council dated March 30, the measure was extended to New York, Charleston, Port Royal, Savannah, and the Mississippi River.¹² Later in the year Warren,

⁸ Naval Chronicle, vol. xxviii. p. 305.

⁹ Admiralty to Warren, British Records Office.

¹⁰ Niles' Register, vol. iii. p. 383.

¹¹ Captains' Letters.

¹² Niles' Register, vol. iv. p. 159. The Admiralty's letter to Warren to institute this blockade is dated March 25. British Records

by a sweeping proclamation, dated November 16,¹³ widened its scope to cover Long Island Sound, inside of Montauk and Black Point; the latter being on the Connecticut shore, eight miles west of New London. From thence it applied not only to the ports named, but to all inlets whatsoever, southward, as far as the Florida boundary. Narragansett Bay and the rest of New England remained still exempt.

These restrictions, together with the increase of Warren's force and the operations of 1813 in the Chesapeake, may be considered as initiating the second stage of the war, when Great Britain no longer cherished hopes of any other solution than by the sword, but still was restrained in the exercise of her power by the conflict with Napoleon. With the downfall of the latter, in April, 1814, began the third and final act, when she was more at liberty to let loose her strength, to terminate a conflict at once weakening and exasperating. It is not without significance that the treaty of peace with the restored Bourbon government of France was signed May 30, 1814,¹⁴ and that on May 31 was issued a proclamation placing under strict and rigorous blockade, not merely specified places, but "all the ports, harbors, bays, creeks, rivers, inlets, outlets, islands, and sea-coasts of the United States," from the border of New Brunswick to that of Florida.¹⁵ In form, this was only the public notification of a measure already instituted by Warren's successor, Cochrane, embracing Newport, Boston, and the East under restrictions heretofore limited to New York—including Long Island Sound—and the coast southward; but it was not merely the assertion of a stringent resolution. It was a clear defiance, in the assurance of conscious power, of a principal contention of the United States, that the measure of blockades against neutrals was not legitimately applicable to whole coasts, but only to specified ports closely watched by a naval force competent to its avowed purpose.

Despite the gathering of the storm, the full force of which was to be expected in the spring, the United States ships of war that reached port in the early and middle winter of 1812-13 remained. There is, perhaps, an unrecognized element of "hindsight" in the surprise felt at this fact by a seaman of to-day, knowing the views and wishes of the prominent officers of the navy at that period. Decatur, with the "United States," reached New York in December, accompanied by the "Macedonian." Neither of these vessels got to sea again during the war. By the time they were ready, both outlets to the port were effectually blocked. Rodgers, with the "President" and "Congress," entered Boston December 31, but did not sail again until April 23. The "Constellation," Captain Stewart, was reported, perhaps erroneously, as nearly ready for sea at Washington, November 26, waiting only for a few additional hands. Later in the winter she went to Annapolis, to examine her powder, leaving there for Hampton Roads February 1, on account of the ice. On the 4th, approaching her destination, she discovered two ships of the line, three frigates, and two smaller British vessels, working up from the Capes for the Roads. In the face of such a force there was nothing to do but to escape to Norfolk, where she remained effectually shut up for the rest of the war. Bainbridge, as already known, brought the "Constitution" back for repairs in February. Even from Boston she was unable to escape till the following December.

That there were satisfactory reasons for this seeming dilatoriness is assured by the character of the officers. Probably the difficulty of keeping up the ship's companies, in competition with the superior attractions of privateering and the very high wages offered by the merchants for their hazardous but remunerative commercial voyages accounted for much. Hull wrote from New York, October 29, 1812, that the merchants fitting out their vessels gave such high wages that it was difficult to get either seamen or workmen.¹⁶ Where no system of forced enrolment—conscription or impressment—is permitted, privateering has always tended to injure the regular naval service. Though unquestionably capable of being put by owners on a business basis, as a commercial undertaking, with

Office.

¹³ Niles' Register, vol. v. p. 264.

¹⁴ Naval Chronicle, vol. xxxi. p. 464.

¹⁵ Naval Chronicle, vol. xxxi. p. 475.

¹⁶ Captains' Letters.

the individual seaman the appeal of privateering has always been to the stimulants of chance and gain, which prove so attractive in the lottery. Stewart, an officer of great intelligence and experience in his profession, found a further cause in the heavy ships of the enemy. In the hostilities with France in 1798-1800, he said, "We had nearly four thousand able seamen in the navy. We could frequently man a frigate in a week. One reason was because the enemy we were then contending with had not afloat (with very few exceptions) vessels superior in rate to frigates. The enemy we are fighting now have ships of the line, and our sailors know the great difference between them and frigates, and cannot but feel a degree of reluctance at entering the service from the disparity of force."¹⁷ The reason seems to prove too much; pressed to an extreme, no navy would be able to use light vessels, because the enemy had heavier which might—or might not—be encountered. Certain it is, however, that when the government in the following winter, in order to stop the license trade with the enemy, embargoed all vessels in home ports, much less difficulty was experienced in getting seamen for the navy.

Whatever the reasons, the only frigates at sea during the first four months of 1813 were the "Essex" and the "Chesapeake." The former, after failing to meet Bainbridge, struck off boldly for the Pacific Ocean on Porter's own motion; and on March 15, 1813, anchored at Valparaiso, preparatory to entering on a very successful career of a year's duration in those seas. The "Chesapeake" had sailed from Boston December 17, making for the Cape Verde Islands. In their neighborhood she captured two of a British convoy, which, thinking itself beyond danger, had dispersed for South American destinations. The frigate then proceeded to her cruising ground near the equator, between longitudes 24° and 30° west, where she remained for about a month, taking only one other merchantman. Leaving this position, she was off the coast of Surinam from March 2 to 6, when she returned to the United States; passing sixty miles east of the Caribbean Islands and thence north of Porto Rico and Santo Domingo, as far west as longitude 75°, whence she ran parallel to the American coast, reaching Boston April 9. Having seen nothing between February 5 and March 19, she then began to meet sails, speaking eight between the latter date and her arrival. Most of these were Americans, homeward bound from the Spanish peninsula; the others neutrals.¹⁸ The conclusion is evident, that the British were keeping their trade well shepherded in convoys. If a ship like the "Chesapeake" struck one of them, she would probably have to fight the escorting vessel, as the "Wasp" did the "Frolic," while the merchantmen escaped; but the chances were against her seeing anything. Another evident conclusion, corresponding to the export returns already quoted, is that the enemy had not yet shut down upon the access of American merchant ships to their own coast.

This process was gradual, but steady. It is necessary to keep in mind the distinction between a blockade, in the loose use of the term, which closes a port only to the ships of the hostile nation, and the commercial blockade which forbids neutrals as well. The former may be intermittent, for the mere fact of war authorizes the capture of the belligerent's shipping, wherever found; hence to intercept them at the mouths of their own harbors is merely a more effectual method of carrying out the measure. A blockade against neutrals requires the permanent presence, before the blockaded port, of a force adequate to make the attempt to enter or leave dangerous. For this many more ships are needed. The British ministry, desirous chiefly to compel the United States to peace, and embarrassed by the gigantic continental strife in which it was engaged, sought at the outset to inflict such harassment on the American coast as would cost the least diversion of strength from the European contest. An ordinary blockade might be tightened or relaxed as convenience demanded; and, moreover, there were as yet, in comparison with American vessels, few neutrals to be restrained. Normally, American shipping was adequate to American commerce. The first move, therefore, was to gather upon the coast of the United States all cruisers that could be spared from the Halifax and West India stations, and to dispose along the approaches to the principal ports those that were not needed to repress the privateers

¹⁷ American State Papers, Naval Affairs, vol. i. p. 280.

¹⁸ Captain Evans' Report, April 10, 1813. Captains' Letters.

in the Bay of Fundy and the waters of Nova Scotia. The action of these privateers, strictly offensive in character, and the course of Commodore Rodgers in sailing with a large squadron, before explained, illustrate exactly how offensive operations promote defensive security. With numbers scanty for their work, and obliged to concentrate instead of scattering, the British, prior to Warren's arrival, had not disposable the cruisers with which greatly to harass even the hostile shipping, still less to institute a commercial blockade. The wish to stock the Spanish peninsula and the West Indies with provisions contributed further to mitigate the pressure.

These restraining considerations gradually disappeared. Re-enforcements arrived. Rodgers' squadron returned and could be watched, its position being known. The license trade filled up Lisbon, Cadiz, and the West Indies. Hopes of a change of mind in the American Government lessened. Napoleon's disaster in Russia reversed the outlook in European politics. Step by step the altered conditions were reflected in the measures of the British ministry and navy. For months, only the maritime centres of the Middle States were molested. The senior naval officer at Charleston, South Carolina, wrote on October 14, four months after war was declared, "Till to-day this coast has been clear of enemy's cruisers; now Charleston is blockaded by three brigs, two very large, and they have captured nine sail within three miles of the bar."¹⁹ The number was increased shortly; and two months later he expressed surprise that the inland navigation behind the sea islands had not been destroyed,²⁰ in consequence of its defenceless state. In January, 1813, the mouth of the Chesapeake was watched by a ship of the line, two frigates, and a sloop; the commercial blockade not having been yet established. The hostile divisions still remained outside, and American vessels continued to go out and in with comparative facility, both there and at Charleston. A lively trade had sprung up with France by letters-of-marque; that is, by vessels whose primary object is commerce, and which therefore carry cargoes, but have also guns, and a commission from the Government to make prizes. Without such authorization capture is piracy. By February 12 conditions grow worse. The blockaders have entered the Chesapeake, the commercial blockade has been proclaimed, vessels under neutral flags, Spanish and Swedish, are being turned away, and two fine letter-of-marque schooners have been captured inside, one of them after a gallant struggle in which her captain was killed. Nautical misadventures of that kind became frequent. On April 3 three letters-of-marque and a privateer, which had entered the Rappahannock, were attacked at anchor by boats from Warren's fleet. The letters-of-marque, with smaller crews, offered little resistance to boarding; but the privateer, having near a hundred men, made a sharp resistance. The Americans lost six killed and ten wounded; the enemy, two killed and eleven wounded.²¹

In like manner the lower Delaware was occupied by one or more ships of the line. Supported thus by a heavy squadron, hostile operations were pushed to the upper waters of both bays, and in various directions; the extensive water communications of the region offering great facilities for depredation. Dismay and incessant disquietude spread through all quarters of the waterside. Light cruisers make their way above Reedy Island, fifty miles from the Capes of the Delaware; coasting vessels are chased into the Severn River, over a hundred miles above Hampton Roads; and a detachment appears even at the mouth of the Patapsco, twelve miles from Baltimore. The destruction of bay craft, and interruption of water traffic, show their effects in the rise of marketing and fuel to double their usual prices. By May 1, all intercourse by water was stopped, and Philadelphia was also cut off from the lower Delaware. Both Philadelphia and Baltimore were now severed from the sea, and their commerce destroyed, not to revive till after the peace; while alarms, which the near future was to justify, were felt for the land road which connected the two cities. As this crossed the head waters of the Chesapeake, it was open to attack from ships, which was further invited by deposits

¹⁹ Captains' Letters.

²⁰ Ibid, Dec. 17, 1812.

²¹ Niles' Register, vol. iv. p. 119. Naval Chronicle, vol. xxix. p. 501.

of goods in transit at Elkton and Frenchtown. Fears for the safety of Norfolk were felt by Captain Stewart, senior naval officer there. "When the means and force of the enemy are considered, and the state of this place for defence, it presents but a gloomy prospect for security."²² Commodore Murray from Philadelphia reports serious apprehensions, consternation among the citizens, a situation daily more critical, and inadequate provision for resistance.²³ There, as everywhere, the impotence of the General Government has to be supplemented by local subscription and local energy.

At the same time, both northward and southward of these two great estuaries, the approach of spring brought ever increasing enemies, big and little, vexing the coasting trade; upon which, then as now, depended largely the exchange of products between different sections of the country. What it meant at that day to be reduced to communication by land may be realized from a contemporary quotation: "Four wagons loaded with dry goods passed to-day through Georgetown, South Carolina, for Charleston, *forty-six days* from Philadelphia."²⁴ Under the heading "New Carrying Trade" a Boston paper announces on April 28 the arrival of "a large number of teams from New Bedford with West India produce, and four Pennsylvania wagons, seventeen days from Philadelphia."²⁵ "The enemy has commenced his depredations on the coasting trade of the Eastern States on a very extensive scale, by several ships and sloops-of-war, and five or six active privateers. The United States brig "Argus" cruises at the entrance of Long Island Sound for the protection of trade, latterly jeopardized;"²⁶ a position from which she was soon driven by an overwhelming force. Hull, now commanding at Portsmouth, reports April 9, "several privateers on the Eastern coast, which have been successful in cutting coasters out of several harbors east." May 7: "A small force is indeed needed here; the enemy appear off the harbor nearly every day. A few days since, a little east of this, they burnt twelve coasters and chased several into this port."²⁷ The town is defenceless. The Governor of Rhode Island laments to the Legislature "the critical and exposed situation of our fellow-citizens in Newport, who are frequently menaced by the ships and vessels about Point Judith"; mentioning beside, "the burning of vessels in Narragansett Bay, and the destruction of our coasting trade, which deprives us of the usual and very necessary supplies of bread stuffs from other States."²⁸ The ship "Maddox," blockaded for two or three months in the Chesapeake, escaped in May, and reached Newport with five thousand barrels of flour. This is said to have reduced the price by \$2.50 in Boston, where it was ranging at \$17 to \$18; while at Cadiz and Lisbon, thanks to British licenses and heavy stocking in anticipation of war, it stood at \$12 to \$13. The arrival at Machias of a captured British vessel, laden with wheat, was hailed "as a seasonable supply for the starving inhabitants of the eastward."²⁹

Ships returning from abroad necessarily had to pass through the cruisers which interrupted the coasting trade. "Many valuable vessels arrive, making at times hairbreadth escapes." The trade of Baltimore and Philadelphia is thrown back upon New York and Boston; but both of these, and the eastern entrance of Long Island Sound, have hostile squadrons before them. The letter-of-marque schooner "Ned" has transmitted an experience doubtless undergone by many. Bound to Baltimore, she arrived off the Chesapeake April 18, and was chased away; tried to get into the Delaware on the 19th, but was headed off; made for Sandy Hook, and was again chased. Finally, she tried the east end of the Sound, and there made her way through four or five ships of war, reaching New York

²² March 17, 1813. Captains' Letters.

²³ March 17, 18, and 21. Ibid.

²⁴ Niles' Register, vol. iv. p. 222.

²⁵ Columbian Centinel.

²⁶ Niles' Register, vol. iv. p. 117.

²⁷ Captains' Letters.

²⁸ Message of the Governor of Rhode Island, May 5, 1813.

²⁹ Niles' Register, vol. iv. pp. 200, 209. There were reported in Cadiz at this time 160,000 barrels of flour, unsold. The Columbian Centinel (Feb. 17) speaks of the Lisbon market as deplorable.

April 24.³⁰ Of course, under such circumstances trade rapidly dwindled. Only very fast and weatherly vessels could hope to cope with the difficulties. Of these the conspicuous type was the Baltimore schooner, which also had not too many eggs in one basket. In the general deprivation of commerce a lucky voyage was proportionately remunerative; but the high prices of the successful venture were but the complement and reflection of suffering in the community. The harbors, even of New York, became crowded with unemployed shipping.

This condition of things coastwise, supplemented by the activity of American privateers, induced abnormal conditions of navigation in the western Atlantic. The scanty success of Rodgers, Bainbridge, and the "Chesapeake" have been noted; and it may be observed that there was a great similarity in the directions taken by these and others. The Cape Verdes, the equator between 24° and 30° west, the Guiana coast, the eastern West Indies, Bermuda to Halifax, indicate a general line of cruising; with which coincides substantially a project submitted by Stewart, March 2, 1813, for a cruise by the "Constellation." These plans were conceived with intelligent reference to known British trade-routes; but, being met by the enemy with a rigid convoy system, it was often hard to find a sail. The scattered American traders were rapidly diminishing in numbers, retained in port as they arrived; and it is noted that a British division of four vessels, returning to Halifax after a four months' cruise between the Banks of Newfoundland and Bermuda, have captured only one American.³¹ An American privateer, arriving at Providence after an absence of nearly four months, "vexing the whole Atlantic," reports not seeing a single enemy's merchant ship. Niles' return of prizes³² to American cruisers, national as well as privateers, gives three hundred and five as the total for the first six months of the war; of which seventy-nine only seem to have been taken distant from the home shores. For the second six months, to June 30, 1813, the aggregate has fallen to one hundred and fifty-nine, of which, as far as can be probably inferred, ninety-one were captured in remote waters. Comparing with the preceding and subsequent periods, we find here evidently a time of transition, when American enterprise had not yet aroused to the fact that British precaution in the Western Hemisphere had made it necessary to seek prizes farther afield.

In view of the incompleteness of the data it is difficult to state more than broad conclusions. It seems fairly safe, however, to say that after the winter of 1812-13 American commerce dwindled very rapidly, till in 1814 it was practically annihilated; but that, prior to Napoleon's downfall, the necessities of the British Government, and the importunity of the British mercantile community, promoted a certain collusive intercourse by licenses, or by neutrals, real or feigned, between the enemy and the Eastern States of the Union, for the exportation of American produce. This trade, from the reasons which prompted it, was of course exempt from British capture. Subsidiary to it, as a partial relief to the loss of the direct American market, was fostered an indirect smuggling import from Great Britain, by way of Halifax and Montreal, which conduced greatly to the prosperity of both these places during the war, as it had during the preceding periods of commercial restriction. It was to maintain this contraband traffic, as well as to foster disaffection in an important section of the Union, that the first extension of the commercial blockade, issued by Warren from Bermuda, May 26, 1813, stopped short of Newport; while the distinction thus drawn was emphasized, by turning back vessels even with British licenses seeking to sail from the Chesapeake. By this insidious action the commercial prosperity of the country, so far as any existed, was centred about the Eastern States. It was, however, almost purely local. Little relief reached the Middle and South, which besides, as before mentioned, were thus drained of specie, while their products lay idle in their stores.

As regards relative captures made by the two belligerents, exact numbers cannot be affirmed; but from the lists transmitted a fairly correct estimate can be formed as to the comparative injury done

³⁰ Niles' Register, vol. iv. p. 150.

³¹ Niles' Register, vol. iv. p. 101.

³² Ibid., p. 117.

in this way. It must be remembered that such losses, however grievous in themselves, and productive of individual suffering, have by no means the decisive effect produced by the stoppage of commerce, even though such cessation involves no more than the retention in harbor of the belligerent's ships, as the Americans were after 1812, or as had been the case during Jefferson's embargo of 1808. As that measure and its congeners failed in their object of bringing the British Government to terms, by deprivation of commerce, the pecuniary harm done the United States by them was much greater than that suffered in the previous years from the arbitrary action of Great Britain. She had seized, it was alleged, as many as nine hundred and seventeen American vessels,³³ many of which were condemned contrary to law, while the remainder suffered loss from detention and attendant expenses; but despite all this the commercial prosperity was such that the commercial classes were averse to resenting the insults and injury. It was the agricultural sections of the country, not the commercial, which forced on the war.

Niles' Register has transmitted a careful contemporary compilation of American captures, in closing which the editor affirmed that in the course of the war he had examined not less than ten, perhaps twelve, thousand columns of ship news, rejecting all prizes not accounted for by arrival or destruction. It is unlikely that data complete as he used are now attainable, even if an increase of accuracy in this point were worth the trouble of the search. Up to May 1, 1813, he records four hundred and eleven captures, in which are included the British ships of war as well as merchantmen; not a very material addition. The British Naval Chronicle gives the prize lists of the various British admirals. From these may be inferred in the same period at least three hundred seizures of American merchant vessels. Among these are a good many Chesapeake Bay craft, very small. This excludes privateers, but not letters-of-marque, which are properly cargo ships. Both figures are almost certainly underestimates; but not improbably the proportion of four to three is nearly correct. Granting, however, that the Americans had seized four British ships for every three lost by themselves, what does the fact establish as regards the effect upon the commerce of the two peoples? Take the simple report of a British periodical in the same month of May, 1813: "We are happy to announce the arrival of a valuable fleet from the West Indies, consisting of two hundred and twenty-six sail, under convoy of the "Cumberland," seventy-four, and three other ships of war."³⁴ This one fleet among many, safely entering port, numbers more than half of their total losses in the twelvemonth. Contrast this relative security with the experience of the "Ned," cited a few pages back, hunted from headland to headland on her home coast, and slipping in—a single ship by dexterous management—past foes from whom no countryman can pretend to shield her.

Even more mortifying to Americans, because under their very eyes, in sharp contrast to their sufferings, was the prosperity of Halifax and Canada. Vexed though British commerce was by the daring activity of American cruisers, the main streams continued to flow; diminished in volume, but not interrupted. The closure of American harbors threw upon the two ports named the business of supplying American products to the British forces, the British West Indies, and in measure to Great Britain itself. The same reason fixed in them the deposit of British goods, to be illicitly conveyed into the United States by the smuggling that went on actively along the northern seacoast and land frontier; a revival of the practices under the embargo of 1808. This underground traffic was of course inadequate to compensate for that lost by the war and the blockade; but it was quite sufficient to add immensely to the prosperity of these places, the communications of which with the sea were held open and free by the British navy, and in which centred what was left from one of the most important

³³ American State Papers, Foreign Relations, vol. iii. p. 584. France in the same period had seized five hundred and fifty-eight.

³⁴ Naval Chronicle, vol. xxix. p. 497. The following extract from an American journal may have interest as indicating the extent of the British convoy movement. "American brig 'Hazard,' arrived at New York from Madeira, June 5, reports: 'April 11, arrived at Funchal the outward bound East India and Brazil fleets, forty sail, under convoy. Sailed April 12. April 21, arrived outward bound Cork fleet, one hundred and eighty sail convoyed by a seventy-four, a frigate, and a sloop.' April 30, sailed from Jamaica, three hundred merchantmen, under convoy of a seventy-four, two frigates and a sloop." (Columbian Centinel, of Boston, June 9, 1813.)

branches of British trade in the days of peace. Halifax, from its position on the sea, was the chief gainer. The effects of the war on it were very marked. Trade was active. Prices rose. Provisions were in great demand, to the profit of agriculture and fisheries. Rents doubled and trebled. The frequent arrival of prizes, and of ships of war going and coming, added to the transactions, and made money plentiful.³⁵

Recalling the generalization already made, that the seacoast of the United States was strictly a defensive frontier, it will be recognized that the successive institution of the commercial blockades, first of the Chesapeake and Delaware in March, and afterward of the whole coast south of Newport, in May, were the offensive operations with which the British initiated the campaign of 1813. These blockades were supported, and their effects sustained and intensified, by an accumulation of naval force entirely beyond the competition of the American navy. In view of such overwhelming disparity, it was no longer possible, as in 1812, by assembling a squadron, to impose some measure of concentration upon the enemy, and thus to facilitate egress and ingress. The movements of the British had passed wholly beyond control. Their admiral was free to dispose his fleet as he would, having care only not to hazard a detachment weaker than that in the port watched. This was a condition perfectly easy of fulfilment with the numbers under his command. As a matter of fact, his vessels were distributed over the entire seacoast; and at every point, with the possible exception of Boston, the division stationed was so strong that escape was possible only by evasion, under cover of severe weather conditions.

Under such circumstances, the larger the ship the more difficult for her to get out. As early as the middle of April, Captain Jones, formerly of the "Wasp," and now commanding the "Macedonian" in New York, reports that "both outlets are at present strongly blocked, but I believe at dark of the moon we shall be able to pass without much risk."³⁶ May 22, when a moon had come and gone, Decatur, still on board the "United States," in company with which the "Macedonian" was to sail, thinks it will be better to try the Sound route. "The last gale, which promised the fairest opportunity for us to get out, ended in light southerly winds, which continued till the blockading ships had regained their stations."³⁷ A few days later, the attempt by the Sound resulted in the two being driven into New London, where they remained to the close of the war. The only offensive operation by sea open to the United States, the destruction of the enemy's commerce, fell therefore to the smaller cruisers and privateers, the size and numbers of which combined to make it impossible to restrain them all.

For defensive measures the seaboard depended upon such fortifications as existed, everywhere inadequate, but which either the laxness or the policy of the British commander did not attempt to overcome in the case of the seaports, narrowly so called. The wide-mouthed estuaries of the Chesapeake and Delaware, entrance to which could not thus be barred, bore, therefore, the full brunt of hostile occupation and widespread harassment. In this there may have been deliberate intention, as well as easy adoption of the readiest means of annoyance. The war, though fairly supported in the middle section of the Union, was essentially a Southern and Western measure. Its most strenuous fomenters came from those parts, and the administration was Virginian. The President himself had been identified with the entire course of Jefferson's commercial retaliation, and general policy toward Great Britain during twelve years past. It is impossible for land forces alone to defend against naval aggression a region like the Chesapeake, with its several great, and numerous small, streams penetrating the country in every direction; and matters are not helped when the defendants are loosely organized militia. The water in such a case offers a great central district, with interior lines, in the hands of a power to which belongs the initiative, with an overpowering mobile force, able at any moment to appear where it will in superior strength.

³⁵ Murdoch's History of Nova Scotia, vol. iii. p. 351.

³⁶ Captains' Letters, April 13, 1813.

³⁷ Ibid., May 22.

No wonder then that the local journals of the day speak of continual watchfulness, which from the present organization of the militia is exceedingly toilsome, and of no little derangement to the private affairs of the people.³⁸ The enemy spreads in every direction; and, although the alarm caused much exceeds the injury done, disquietude is extreme and universal. "Applications from various quarters are constantly pouring in upon us," wrote a Governor of Maryland to the President; "and as far as our very limited means will enable us we are endeavoring to afford protection. But we have not arms and ammunition to supply the demands of every section of the State; the unavoidable expense of calling out the militia for its protection would greatly exceed the ability of the State government. The capital of the State [which was three miles from the bay, on a navigable river] has not sufficient force for its protection. By the Constitution of the United States, the common defence is committed to the National Government, which is to protect each State against invasion, and to defray all necessary expenses of a national war; and to us it is a most painful reflection that after every effort we have made, or can make, for the security of our fellow-citizens and of their property, they have little to rely on but the possible forbearance of the enemy."³⁹ The process of reaping what has been sowed is at times extremely unpleasant.

³⁸ Niles' Register, vol. iv. p. 134.

³⁹ Letter of Governor Winder, April 26, 1813. Niles' Register, vol. iv. p. 204.

CHAPTER X

CAMPAIGN OF 1813 ON THE LAKE FRONTIER, TO THE BATTLE OF LAKE ERIE

In April, 1813, on the land frontier of the north and west, no substantial change had taken place in the conditions which gave to the United States the power of the offensive. Such modification as Chauncey's energy had effected was to strengthen superiority, by promising ultimate control of the upper and lower lakes. The British had not been idle; but the greater natural difficulties under which they labored, from less numerous population and less advanced development of the country and its communications, together with a greater severity of climate, had not been compensated by a naval direction similar to that exercised by the American commodore and his efficient second, Perry. Sir John Warren had been ordered to pay attention to the lakes, the naval service of which was placed under his charge. This added to his responsibilities, and to the drain upon his resources of men and materials; but, with an oversight already extending from Halifax to Jamaica and Barbados, he could do little for the lakes, beyond meeting requisitions of the local authorities and furnishing a draft of officers. Among those sent from his fleet was Captain Barclay, who commanded the British squadron in Perry's action.

The Admiralty, meantime, had awaked to the necessity of placing preparations and operations under competent naval guidance, if command of the water was to be secured. For that purpose they selected Captain Sir James Lucas Yeo, a young officer of much distinction, just turned thirty, who was appointed to the general charge of the lake service, under Warren. Leaving England in March, accompanied by a body of officers and seamen, Yeo did not reach Kingston until May 15, 1813, when the campaign was already well under way; having been begun by Dearborn and Chauncey April 24. His impressions on arrival were discouraging. He found the squadron in a weak state, and the enemy superior in fact and in promise. They had just succeeded in burning at York a British vessel intended for thirty guns, and they had, besides, vessels building at Sackett's Harbor. He had set to work, however, getting his force ready for action, and would go out as soon as possible to contest the control of Ontario; for upon that depended the tenure of Upper Canada.⁴⁰ Barclay, upon the arrival of his superior, was sent on to Amherstburg, to fulfil upon Erie the same relation to Yeo that Perry did to Chauncey.

It had been clearly recognized by the American authorities that any further movement for the recapture of Detroit and invasion of Canada would depend upon the command of Lake Erie; and that that in turn would depend largely upon mastery of Ontario. In fact, the nearer the sea control over the water communications could be established, the more radical and far-reaching the effect produced. For this reason, Montreal was the true objective of American effort, but the Government's attention from the first had centred upon the northwestern territory; upon the extremity of the enemy's power, instead of upon its heart. Under this prepossession, despite adequate warning, it had persisted in the course of which Hull's disaster was the outcome; and now, though aroused by this stunning humiliation, its understanding embraced nothing beyond the Great Lakes. Clear indication of this narrow outlook is to be found in the conditions on Lake Champlain, the natural highway to Canada. Only the scantiest mention is to be found of naval preparation there, because actually little was being done; and although the American force was momentarily superior, it was so simply because the British, being in Canada wholly on the defensive, and therefore obliged to conform to American initiative, contemplated no use of this lake, the mastery of which, nevertheless, was soon afterward thrown into their hands by a singularly unfortunate occurrence.

⁴⁰ Yeo to Croker, May 26, 1813. Admiralty In-Letters, Records Office.

Dearborn, who still remained in chief command of the armies on the New York frontier, was therefore directed to concentrate his effort upon Ontario, starting from Sackett's Harbor as a base. Chauncey, whose charge extended no farther than the upper rapids of the St. Lawrence, had of course no other interest. His first plan, transmitted to the Navy Department January 21, 1813,⁴¹ had been to proceed immediately upon the opening of navigation, with the fleet and a land force of a thousand picked troops, against Kingston, the capture of which, if effected, would solve at a single stroke every difficulty in the upper territory. No other harbor was tenable as a naval station; with its fall, and the destruction of shipping and forts, would go the control of the lake, even if the place itself were not permanently held. Deprived thus of the water communications, the enemy could retain no position to the westward, because neither re-enforcements nor supplies could reach them. To quote Chauncey's own words, "I have no doubt we should succeed in taking or destroying their ships and forts, and, of course, preserve our ascendancy on this lake."

This remark, though sound, was narrow in scope; for it failed to recognize, what was perfectly knowable, that the British support of the Lake Erie stations and the upper country depended on their power to control, or at worst to contest, Ontario. Of this they themselves were conscious, as the words of Yeo and Brock alike testify. The new American Secretary of War, Armstrong, who was a man of correct strategical judgment and considerable military information, entered heartily into this view; and in a letter dated February 10 communicated to Dearborn the orders of the President for his operations, based upon the Secretary's recommendation.⁴² Four thousand men were to be assembled at Sackett's, and three thousand at Buffalo. The former, under convoy of the fleet, was to proceed first against Kingston, then against York (Toronto). After this the two corps should co-operate in an attack to be made upon the British Niagara frontier, which rested upon Fort George on the Ontario shore, and Fort Erie upon Lake Erie. This plan was adopted upon the assumption, which was probably correct, that the enemy's entire military force upon Ontario did not exceed twenty-one hundred regular troops, of whom six hundred were at Kingston and twelve hundred at Niagara. Armstrong, who recognized the paramount importance of Montreal, had received the exaggerated impression that there might be in that neighborhood eight to ten thousand regulars. There were not yet nearly that number in all Canada;⁴³ but he was perhaps correct in thinking that the provision for the offensive, which he had found upon taking office a few weeks before, was insufficient for an advance in that quarter.

Dearborn very soon discovered objections to proceeding against Kingston, in his own estimates of the enemy's numbers, based upon remarkable reports received from sources "entitled to full credit." On March 3 he was satisfied that from six to eight thousand men had been assembled there from Quebec, Montreal, and Upper Canada; while the presence of Sir George Prevost, the Governor General, and commander-in-chief in Canada, who had seized an opportunity to make a hurried visit to Kingston to assure himself as to the progress of the ships building, convinced the American general that an attack upon Sackett's was contemplated.⁴⁴ From that time forward Dearborn realized in his own person the process of making pictures to one's self concerning a military situation, against which Napoleon uttered a warning. Chauncey was more sceptical, although he could not very well avoid attention to the reports brought in. He expresses himself as believing that a considerable number of men had been assembled in Kingston, but that their real object was to proceed against Harrison in the Far West.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Captains' Letters, Navy Department.

⁴² American State Papers, Military Affairs, vol. i. p. 439.

⁴³ Between July, 1812, and March 25, 1813, Prevost received re-enforcements amounting in all to 2,175 regulars. His total force then, for all Canada, excluding militia, was 9,177; of which 2,000 were provincial corps. British Records Office.

⁴⁴ American State Papers, Military Affairs, vol. i. p. 441.

⁴⁵ Chauncey to Navy Department, March 8, 12, and 16, 1813. Captains' Letters.

There seems to have been no foundation for any of these alarms. Prevost was a soldier of good reputation, but wanting in initiative, audacity, and resolution, as the current war was to prove. His presence at Kingston at this moment was simply one incident in a rapid official visit to the upper military posts, extending as far as Niagara, and accomplished in four weeks; for, leaving Quebec February 17, he was again writing from there on the 17th of March. As far as can be deduced from his correspondence, four companies of regulars had preceded him from Montreal to Kingston, and there may very well have been a gathering of local forces for inspection or otherwise; but no re-enforcements of regulars, other than that just mentioned, reached Kingston from down the river before May. Dearborn never renounced his belief in the meditated attack, though finally satisfied that it was abandoned; and his positive reports as to the enemy's numbers wrung from Armstrong acquiescence in a change of plan, by which York, and not Kingston, should be the first object of the campaign.⁴⁶

Chauncey, who had some sound military ideas, as his first plan showed, was also brought round to this conclusion by a process of reasoning which he developed in a second plan of operations, submitted March 18,⁴⁷ but evidently long since matured. It apparently antedates Dearborn's apprehensions, and is not affected by them, though the two worked together to a common mistaken decision. The commodore's letter presents an interesting study, in its demonstration of how an erroneous first conception works out to false conclusions, and in the particular instance to ultimate military disaster. The capture of Kingston, his first plan, and its retention, which Armstrong purposed, would have settled the whole campaign and affected decisively the issue of the war. Chauncey's new project is dominated throughout by the view, which was that of the Government, that the great object of the war was to control the northwestern territory by local operations, instead of striking at the source of British power in its communication with the sea. At this moment, the end of March, the British naval force on Ontario was divided between York and Kingston; in each were vessels afloat and vessels building. An attack upon Kingston, Chauncey said, no doubt would be finally successful—an initial admission which gave away his case; but as the opposing force would be considerable, it would protract the general operations of the campaign—the reduction of the northwest—longer than would be advisable, particularly as large re-enforcements would probably arrive at Quebec in the course of two months. On the other hand, to proceed against York, which probably could be carried immediately, would result in destroying at once a large fraction of the British fleet, greatly weakening the whole body. Thence the combined Americans would turn against Fort George and the Niagara line. If successful here, the abandonment of Fort Erie by the British would release the American vessels which by its guns were confined at Black Rock. They would sail forth and join their consorts at Erie; which done, Chauncey, leaving his Ontario fleet to blockade Yeo at Kingston, would go to the upper lake and carry against the British the squadron thus concentrated there, would co-operate with the army under General Harrison, recover Detroit, and capture Malden. Lake Erie and its surroundings would thus become an American holding. After this, it would be but a step to reconquer Michilimackinac, thereby acquiring an influence over the Indians which, in conjunction with military and naval preponderance, would compel the enemy to forsake the upper country altogether, and concentrate his forces about Kingston and Montreal.

It is interesting to see an elaborate piece of serious reasoning gradually culminate in a *reductio ad absurdum*; and Chauncey's reasoning ends in a military absurdity. The importance of Kingston is conceded by him, and the probability of capturing it at the first is admitted. Thereupon follows a long project of operation, which ends in compelling the enemy to concentrate all his strength at the very points—Kingston and Montreal—which it is most important for the Americans to gain; away from which, therefore, they should seek to keep the enemy, and not to drive him in upon them. This comes

⁴⁶ American State Papers, Military Affairs, vol. i. p. 442.

⁴⁷ Captains' Letters.

from the bias of the Government, and of the particular officer, regarding the Northwestern territory as the means whereby success was to be accomplished instead of merely the end to be attained. To make the Western territory and control of the Indians the objects of the campaign was a political and military motive perfectly allowable, and probably, in view of recent history, extremely necessary; but to make these things the objective of operations was to invert the order of proceedings, as one who, desiring to fell a tree, should procure a ladder and begin cutting off the outermost branches, instead of striking at the trunk by the ground.

Eighteen months later Chauncey wrote some very wise words in this spirit. "It has always been my opinion that the best means to conquer Canada was to cut off supplies from Lower to Upper by taking and maintaining some position on the St. Lawrence. That would be killing the tree by girdling; the branches, dependent on ordinary supplies, die of necessity. But it is now attempted to kill the tree by lopping off branches" [he is speaking of the Niagara campaign of 1814]; "the body becomes invigorated by reducing the demands on its resources."⁴⁸ By this time Chauncey had been chastened by experience. He had seen his anticipated glory reaped on Lake Erie by his junior. He had seen the control of Ontario contested, and finally wrung from him, by vessels built at Kingston, the place which he had failed to take when he thought it possible. He had been blockaded during critical months by a superior squadron; and at the moment of writing, November 5, 1814, Sir James Yeo was moving, irresistible, back and forth over the waters of Ontario, with his flag flying in a ship of 102 guns, built at Kingston. In short, the Canadian tree was rooted in the ocean, where it was nourished by the sea power of Great Britain. To destroy it, failing the ocean navy which the United States had not, the trunk must be severed; the nearer the root the better.

Demonstration of these truths was not long in coming, and will be supplied by the narrative of events. When Chauncey penned the plan of operations just analyzed, there were in York two vessels, the "Prince Regent" of twenty guns, the "Duke of Gloucester," sixteen, and two—by his information—on the stocks. On April 14 the ice in Sackett's Harbor broke up, though large floes still remained in the lake. On the 19th these also had disappeared. Eighteen hundred troops were embarked by the squadron, and on the 24th the expedition started, but was driven back by heavy weather. The next day it got away finally, and on the early morning of the 27th appeared off York. The troops were landed westward of the town, and proceeded to attack, supported by the shipping. The enemy, inferior in number, retired; the small regular force making its escape, with the exception of fifty who surrendered with the militia present. The American loss, army and navy, was a little over three hundred; among whom was General Pike, an excellent soldier, who commanded the landing and was mortally wounded by the explosion of a magazine. The "Duke of Gloucester" schooner was taken, but the "Prince Regent" had gone to Kingston three days before; the weather which drove Chauncey back had enabled her to join her fleet as soon as released by the ice. By her escape the blow lost most of its effect; for York itself was indefensible, and was taken again without difficulty in the following July. A 30-gun vessel approaching completion was found on the stocks and burned, and a large quantity of military and naval stores were either destroyed or brought away by the victorious squadron. These losses were among the news that greeted Yeo's arrival; but, though severe, they were not irreparable, as Chauncey for the moment imagined. He wrote: "I believe that the enemy has received a blow that he cannot recover, and if we succeed in our next enterprise, which I see no reason to doubt, we may consider the upper province as conquered."⁴⁹ The mistake here was soon to be evident.

No time was wasted at York. The work of destruction, and of loading what was to be carried away, was completed in three days, and on May 1 the troops were re-embarked, to sail for Fort George on the morrow. The wind, which for some days had been fair and moderate from the eastward, then came on to blow a gale which would make landing impossible off Niagara, and even navigation

⁴⁸ Captains' Letters, Nov. 5, 1814.

⁴⁹ Captains' Letters, May 7, 1813.

dangerous for the small vessels. This lasted through the 7th, Chauncey writing on that day that they were still riding with two anchors ahead and lower yards down. So crowded were the ships that only half the soldiers could be below at one time; hence they were exposed to the rain, and also to the fresh-water waves, which made a clean breach over the schooners. Under such circumstances both troops and seamen sickened fast. On the 8th, the weather moderating, the squadron stood over to Fort Niagara, landed the troops for refreshment, and then returned to Sackett's; it being thought that the opportunity for surprise had been lost, and that no harm could come of a short further delay, during which also re-enforcements might be expected.

Soon after his return Chauncey sent a flag of truce to Kingston. This made observations as to the condition of the enemy which began to dispel his fair illusions.⁵⁰ His purpose to go in person to Niagara was postponed; and despatching thither the squadron with troops, he remained at Sackett's to protect the yard and the ships building, in co-operation with the garrison. His solicitude was not misplaced. Niagara being a hundred and fifty miles from Sackett's, the fleet and army had been committed to a relatively distant operation, depending upon a main line of communication,—the lake,—on the flank and rear of which, and close to their own inadequately protected base, was a hostile arsenal, Kingston, harboring a naval force quite able to compete with their own. The danger of such a situation is obvious to any military man, and even to a layman needs only to be indicated. Nevertheless the enterprise was launched, and there was nothing for it now but to proceed on the lines laid down.

Chauncey accordingly sailed May 22, re-enforcements of troops for the defence of Sackett's having meantime arrived. He did not reach Niagara until the 25th. The next day was spent in reconnoissances, and other preparations for a landing on the lake shore, a short mile west of Fort George. On the 27th, at 9 A.M., the attack began, covered by the squadron. General Vincent, in command of the British Niagara frontier, moved out to meet his enemy with the entire force near Fort George, leaving only a small garrison of one hundred and thirty men to hold the post itself. There was sharp fighting at the coast-line; but Vincent's numbers were much inferior, and he was compelled steadily to give ground, until finally, seeing that the only alternatives were the destruction of his force or the abandonment of the position, he sent word to the garrison to spike the guns, destroy the ammunition, and to join his column as it withdrew. He retreated along the Niagara River toward Queenston, and thence west to Beaver Dam, about sixteen miles from Fort George. At the same time word was sent to the officers commanding at Fort Erie, and the intermediate post of Chippewa, to retire upon the same place, which had already been prepared in anticipation of such an emergency. The three divisions were thus in simultaneous movement, converging upon a common point of concentration, where they all assembled during the night; the whole, as reported by Vincent to his superior, now not exceeding sixteen hundred.⁵¹ The casualties during the day's fighting had been heavy, over four hundred killed and wounded; but in the retreat no prisoners were lost except the garrison of the fort, which was intercepted. Dearborn, as before at York, had not landed with his troops; prevented, doubtless, by the infirmities of age increasing upon him. Two days later he wrote to the Department, "I had presumed that the enemy would confide in the strength of his position and venture an action, by which an opportunity would be afforded to cut off his retreat."⁵² This guileless expectation, that the net may be spread not in vain before the eyes of any bird, provoked beyond control such measure of equanimity as Armstrong possessed. Probably suspecting already that his correct design upon Kingston had been thwarted by false information, he retorted: "I cannot disguise from you the *surprise* occasioned by the *two escapes of a beaten enemy*; first on May 27, and again on June 1. Battles are not gained, when an inferior and broken enemy is not destroyed. Nothing is done,

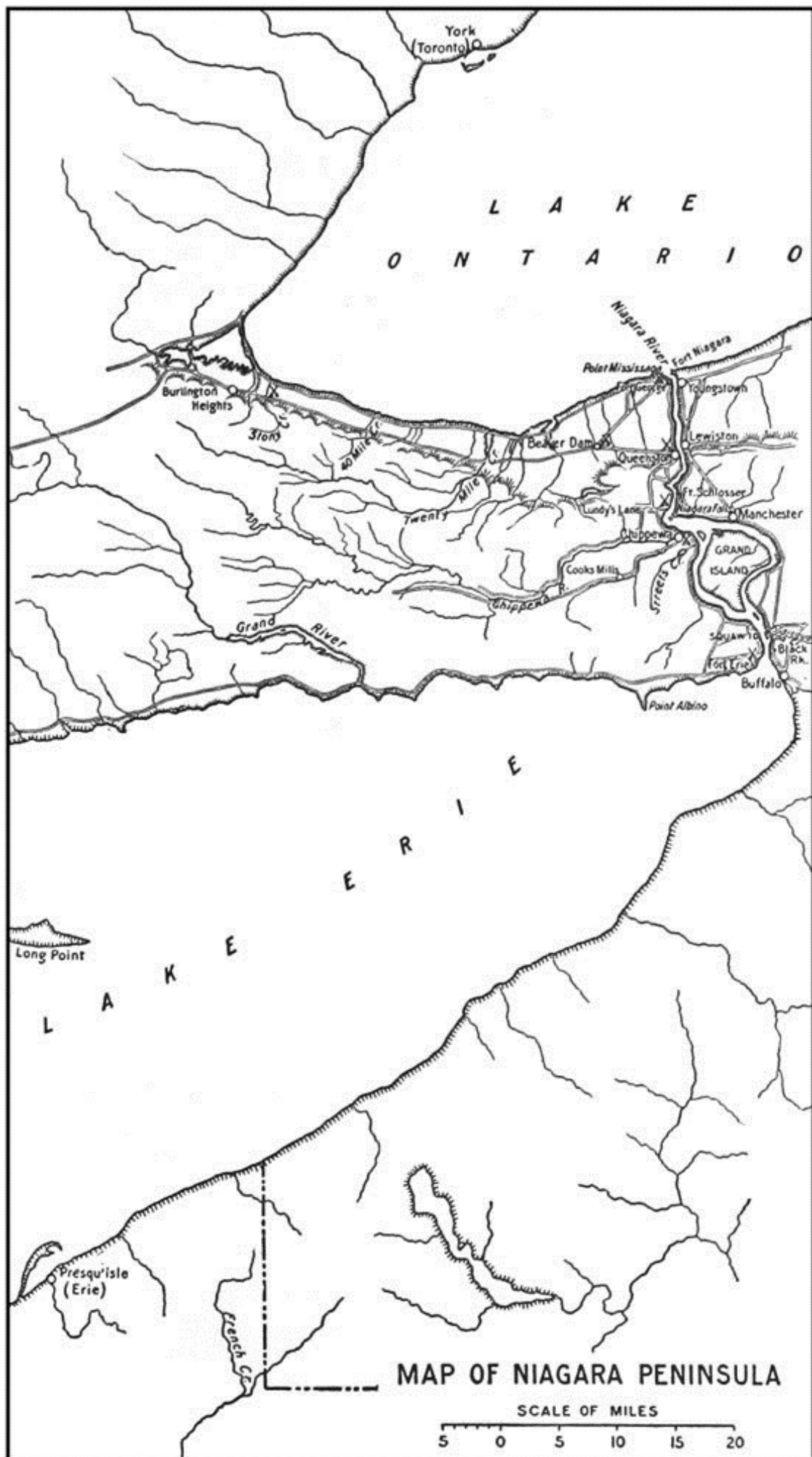
⁵⁰ Ibid., May 15.

⁵¹ Canadian Archives. C. 678, p. 332.

⁵² American State Papers, Military Affairs, vol. i. p. 445.

while anything that might have been done is omitted."⁵³ Vincent was unkind enough to disappoint his opponent. The morning after the engagement he retired toward a position at the head of the lake, known then as Burlington Heights, where the town of Hamilton now stands. Upon his tenure here the course of operations turned twice in the course of the next six months.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 449. Armstrong's italics.



MAP OF NIAGARA PENINSULA

While Vincent was in retreat upon Burlington, Captain Barclay arrived at his headquarters, on the way to take charge of the Lake Erie squadron;⁵⁴ having had to coast the north shore of Ontario, on account of the American control of the water. The inopportuneness of the moment was prophetic of the numberless disappointments with which the naval officer would have to contend during the brief three months preceding his defeat by Perry. "The ordnance, ammunition, and other stores for the service on Lake Erie," wrote Prevost on July 20, with reference to Barclay's deficiencies, "had been deposited at York for the purpose of being transported to Amherstburg, but unfortunately were either destroyed or fell into the enemy's hands when York was taken by them; and the subsequent interruption to the communication, by their occupation of Fort George, has rendered it extremely difficult to afford the supplies Captain Barclay requires, which, however, are in readiness to forward whenever circumstances will permit it to be done with safety."⁵⁵ The road from Queenston to Fort Erie, around Niagara Falls, was the most used and the best line of transportation, because the shortest. To be thrown off it to that from Burlington to Long Point was a serious mishap for a force requiring much of heavy and bulky supplies. To add to these more vital embarrassments, the principal ship, the "Queen Charlotte," which had been lying at Fort Erie, had been ordered by Vincent to leave there when the place was evacuated, and to go to Amherstburg, thus giving Barclay the prospect of a land journey of two hundred miles through the wilderness to his destination. Fortunately for him, a vessel turned up at Long Point, enabling him to reach Amherstburg about June 7.

The second step in Chauncey's programme had now been successfully taken, and the vessels at Black Rock were free to move. With an energy and foresight which in administration seldom forsook him, he had prepared beforehand to seize even a fleeting opportunity to get them out. Immediately upon the fall of York, "to put nothing to hazard, I directed Mr. Eckford to take thirty carpenters to Black Rock, where he has gone to put the vessels lying there in a perfect state of repair, ready to leave the river for Presqu' Isle the moment we are in possession of the opposite shore." Perry also was on hand, being actively engaged in the landing at Fort George; and the same evening, May 27, he left for Black Rock to hasten the departure. The process involved great physical labor, the several vessels having to be dragged by oxen against the current of the Niagara, here setting heavily toward the falls. It was not until June 12 that they were all above the rapids, and even this could not have been accomplished but for soldiers furnished by Dearborn.⁵⁶ The circumstance shows how hopeless the undertaking would have been if the enemy had remained in Fort Erie. Nor was this the only peril in their path. Barclay, with commendable promptitude, had taken the lake in superior force very shortly after his arrival at Amherstburg, and about June 15 appeared off Erie [Presqu' Isle]. Having reconnoitred the place, he cruised between it and Black Rock, to intercept the expected division; but the small vessels, coasting the beach, passed their adversary unseen in a fog,⁵⁷ and on June 18 reached the port. As Chauncey had reported on May 29 that the two brigs building there were launched, affairs on that lake began to wear a promising aspect. The Lakes station as a whole, however, was still very short of men; and the commodore added that if none arrived before his approaching return to Sackett's, he would have to lay up the Ontario fleet to man that upon Erie.

To do this would have been to abandon to the enemy the very important link in the communications, upon which chiefly depended the re-enforcement and supplies for both armies on the Niagara peninsula. The inherent viciousness of the plan upon which the American operations were proceeding was now quickly evident. At the very moment of the attack upon Fort George,

⁵⁴ Barclay's Narrative before the British Court Martial on the Battle of Lake Erie. British Records Office.

⁵⁵ Prevost to Bathurst, Canadian Archives.

⁵⁶ Mackenzie's Life of Perry, vol. i. p. 148.

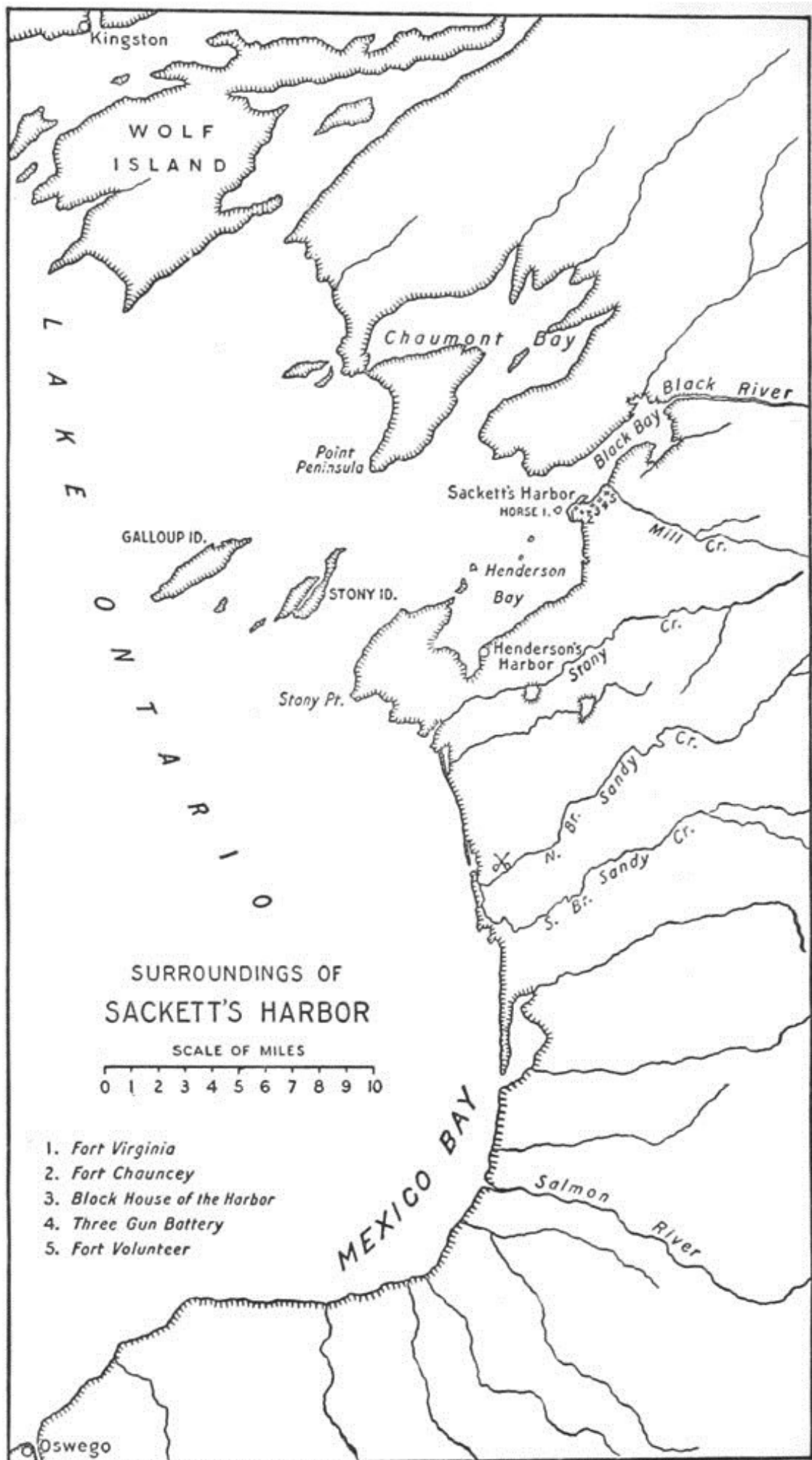
⁵⁷ Barclay's Narrative.

a threatening but irresolute movement against Sackett's was undertaken by Prevost, with the co-operation of Yeo, by whom the attempt is described as a diversion, in consequence of the enemy's attack upon Fort George. Had the place fallen, Chauncey would have lost the ship then building, on which he was counting to control the water; he would have had nowhere to rest his foot except his own quarter-deck, and no means to repair his fleet or build the new vessels continually needed to maintain superiority. The case of Yeo dispossessed of Kingston would have been similar, but worse; for land transport in the United States was much better than in Canada. The issue of the war, as regarded the lakes and the Northwestern territory, lay in those two places. Upon them depended offensive and defensive action.

At the time of the attack upon Sackett's only two vessels of the squadron were there, the senior officer of which, Lieutenant Chauncey, was in momentary command of the navy yard as well. The garrison consisted of four hundred regular troops, the coming of whom a week before had enabled Chauncey to leave for Niagara. Dearborn had already written to Major-General Jacob Brown, of the New York militia, asking him to take command of the station; for which his local knowledge particularly fitted him, as he was a resident of some years' standing. He had moreover manifested marked military capacity on the St. Lawrence line, which was under his charge. Brown, whose instincts were soldierly, was reluctant to supersede Colonel Backus, the officer of regulars in command; but a letter from the latter received on the 27th, asking him to take charge, determined his compliance. When he arrived five hundred militia had assembled.

The British expedition left Kingston with a fine fair wind on the early morning of May 27—the same day that the Americans were landing at Fort George. The whole fleet accompanied the movement, having embarked troops numbering over seven hundred; chiefly regulars. At noon they were off Sackett's Harbor. Prevost and Yeo stood in to reconnoitre; but in the course of an hour the troops, who were already in the boats, ready to pull to the beach, were ordered to re-embark, and the squadron stood out into the lake. The only result so far was the capture of twelve out of nineteen American barges, on their way from Oswego to the Harbor. The other seven gained the port.

During the next thirty-six hours militia kept coming in, and Brown took command. Sackett's Harbor is an indentation on the south side of a broad bay, called Black River Bay, into which the Black River empties. The harbor opens eastward; that is, its back is toward the lake, from which it is distant a little over a mile; and its north side is formed by a long narrow point, called Navy Point, on which was the naval establishment. Where Black River Bay meets the lake, its south shore is prolonged to the west by a projection called Horse Island, connected with the land by a fordable neck. Brown expected the landing to be made upon this, and he decided to meet the attack at the water's edge of the mainland, as the enemy crossed the neck. There he disposed his five hundred militia, placing the regulars under Backus in a second line; a steadying point in case the first line of untrained men failed to stand firm. It was arranged that, if the enemy could not be resisted, Lieutenant Chauncey was to set fire to the naval stores and shipping, and cross with his crews to the south side of the harbor, east of a work called Fort Volunteer, where Brown proposed to make his final stand. From there, although an enemy at the yard could be molested, he could not certainly be prevented from carrying off stores or ships; hence the necessity for destruction.



SURROUNDINGS OF SACKETT'S HARBOR

The British landed upon Horse Island soon after daylight of May 29, and from there advanced. The militia met them with a volley, but then broke and fled, as had been foreseen by Brown, himself yet a militia officer. Their colonel behaved gallantly, and was killed in trying to rally his men; while Brown in person, collecting a hundred of the fugitives, worked round with them to the left flank of the approaching British. These, moving through the woods, now encountered Backus and his regulars, who made upon them an impression of overwhelming numbers, to which the British official report bears a vivid testimony. The failure to carry the place is laid by this paper upon the light and adverse winds, which prevented the co-operation of the squadron's heavy guns, to reduce the batteries and blockhouse. Without this assistance, it was impracticable to carry by assault the works in which the Americans had taken refuge. The gunboats alone could get within range, and their small carronades were totally inadequate to make any impression on the forts and blockhouses. "The troops were reluctantly ordered to leave a beaten enemy." Brown makes no mention of this retreat into the works, though it appears clear that the Americans fell gradually back to their support; but he justifies Prevost's withdrawal, bitterly criticised by writers of his own nation, in the words, "Had not General Prevost retreated most rapidly under the guns of his vessels, he would never have returned to Kingston."⁵⁸

In the midst of the action word was brought to Lieutenant Chauncey that the battle was lost, and that the yard must be fired. Brown, in his official report, expressly acquitted him of blame, with words of personal commendation. The two schooners in commission had retreated up Black River; but the prize "Duke of Gloucester," and the ship approaching completion, were fired. Fortunately, the flames were extinguished before serious damage was done; but when Commodore Chauncey returned on June 1, he found that among a large quantity of materials consumed were the stores and sails of the new ship. The loss of these he thought would delay the movements of the squadron three weeks; for without her Yeo's force was now superior.⁵⁹

The defence of Sackett's Harbor obtained immediately for Brown, who was just thirty-eight, the commission of brigadier general in the army; for the new Secretary, Armstrong, was looking round anxiously for men to put in command, and was quick to seize upon one when he found him. To Chauncey, on the other hand, the affair in its consequences and demonstration of actualities was a rude awakening, to which his correspondence during the succeeding six weeks bears witness by an evident waning of confidence, not before to be noted. On June 4 he tells the Secretary of the Navy that he has on Ontario, exclusive of the new ship not yet ready, fourteen vessels of every description, mounting sixty-two guns; whereas Yeo has seven, which, with six gunboats, carry one hundred and six. "If he leave Kingston, I shall meet him. The result may be doubtful, but worth the trial." This resolution is not maintained. June 11 he hears, with truth, that Yeo was seen at the head of the lake on the 7th, and that the Americans at Fort George had taken his squadron to be Chauncey's. By the same channel he learns of a disastrous engagement of the army there, which was likewise true. His impulse is to go out to meet the British squadron; but he reflects that the enemy may then again find an opportunity to descend upon Sackett's, and perhaps succeed in burning the new ship. Her size and armament will, he thinks, give him the decisive superiority. He therefore resolves to put nothing to hazard till she is finished.⁶⁰

The impression produced by the late attack is obvious, and this decision was probably correct; but Yeo too is building, and meantime he has possession of the lake. On June 3 he left Kingston

⁵⁸ Brown's and Prevost's Reports of this affair may be found in Niles' Register, vol. iv. pp. 260, 261. That of Yeo is in the Canadian Archives; M. 389, 6, p. 22.

⁵⁹ Captains' Letters, June 11, 1813.

⁶⁰ Captains' Letters.

with a squadron, two ships and four schooners, carrying some three hundred troops for Vincent. On the evening of the 7th, about six o'clock, he was sighted by the American army, which was then at Forty Mile Creek on the Ontario shore; a position to which it had retired after a severe reverse inflicted by the enemy thirty-six hours before. Vincent's retreat had been followed as far as Stony Creek, ten miles west of Forty Mile Creek, and somewhat less distant from Burlington Heights, where the British lay. The situation of the latter was extremely perilous; for, though strongly placed, they were greatly outnumbered. In case of being driven from their lines, they must retreat on York by a long and difficult road; and upon the same poor communications they were dependent for supplies, unless their squadron kept control of the lake. Recognizing that desperate conditions call for desperate remedies, Vincent resolved to risk an attack with seven hundred men under Colonel Harvey, in whose suggestion the movement originated. These fell upon the American advance corps at two o'clock in the morning of June 6. An hour of fighting ensued, with severe loss on both sides; then Harvey, considering sufficient effect produced, drew off his men before daylight revealed the smallness of their numbers.

There was in this affair nothing intrinsically decisive, scarcely more than a business of outposts; but by a singular coincidence both American generals present were captured in the confusion. The officer who succeeded to the command, a colonel of cavalry, modestly distrustful of his own powers, could think of nothing more proper than to return to Forty Mile Creek, sending word to Fort George. Dearborn, still too weak to go to the front, despatched thither General Morgan Lewis. On his way Lewis was overtaken by two brief messages from the commander-in-chief announcing the appearance of Yeo's fleet, and indicating apprehension that by means of it Vincent might come upon Fort George before the main army could fall back there. It was most improbable that the British general, with the command of the lake in doubt would thus place himself again in the position from which he had with difficulty escaped ten days before; but Dearborn's fears for the safety of the forts prevailed, and he ordered a retreat. The movement began by noon of June 8, and in a few days the army was back at Niagara River, having lost or abandoned a quantity of stores. The British followed to within ten miles of the fort, where they took up a position. They also reoccupied Beaver Dam; and a force of six hundred Americans sent to dislodge them, under Colonel Boerstler, was compelled to surrender on June 24.⁶¹ Dearborn, who had already reported to the Department that he personally was "so reduced in strength as to be incapable of any command," attributed his embarrassments "to the temporary loss of command of the lake. The enemy has availed himself of the advantage and forwarded re-enforcements and supplies." The effect of controlling the water cannot be contested; but the conditions at Stony Creek were such that it should have been possible to drive Vincent away from any hold on the south shore of Ontario. Creditable as had been the enterprise of Colonel Harvey, it had accomplished no change in material conditions. Dearborn was soon afterward relieved. His officers, including Scott, joined in a letter of regret and esteem, prompted doubtless by sympathy for the sufferings and miscarriage of an aged officer who had served gallantly in his youth during the War of Independence.

To Colonel Harvey's attack, on the morning of June 6, a British military critic has with justice assigned the turning of the tide in the affairs of Upper Canada.⁶² It is perfectly true that that well-judged movement, admirable in conception and execution, checked the progress of the American arms at a moment most favorable to them, and put an end to conditions of advantage which never there recurred. That this effect was produced, however, is attributable to the inefficiency of the American officers in command. If Harvey had divined this, from the previous operations, and made it a part of his calculations, it is so much more to his credit; the competency of the opponent is a chief factor

⁶¹ The account of these transactions is summarized from American State Papers, Military Affairs, vol. i. pp. 445-449. For Vincent's report of the Stony Creek affair see Cruikshank's Documentary History of the Campaign on the Niagara Frontier, 1813, Part II, p. 8.

⁶² Smyth's Précis of Wars in Canada, p. 137.

to be considered in a military enterprise. It detracts nothing from Harvey's merit to say that there was no occasion for the American retreat, nor for the subsequent paralysis of effort, which ended in expulsion from the Niagara peninsula at the end of the year. "For some two months after this," wrote a very competent eye-witness, afterward General Scott, "the army of Niagara, never less than four thousand strong, stood fixed in a state of ignominy, under Boyd, within five miles of an untrenched enemy, with never more than three thousand five hundred men."⁶³ Scott seems not to have known that this inactivity was enjoined by the War Department till Chauncey could resume control of the lake.⁶⁴ From this time, in fact, the Niagara army and its plans disappear from the active operations.

Yeo remained in undisputed mastery of the water. That the British at this time felt themselves the stronger in effective force, may be reasonably inferred from their continuing to keep the lake after Chauncey's new ship was out. She was launched June 12, and named the "General Pike," in honor of the officer killed at the taking of York. Her armament was to be twenty-six long 24-pounders, which under some circumstances would make her superior, not only to any single vessel, but to any combination of vessels then under the British flag. If it was still possible, by use of favoring conditions, to contend with the American fleet after the addition to it of this ship, by so much more was Yeo able to deal successfully with it before her coming. A comparison of the armaments of the opposing forces also demonstrates that, whatever Chauncey's duty might have been without such prospect, he was justified, having this decisive advantage within reach, in keeping his fleet housed waiting for its realization. The British new vessel, the "Wolfe," with the "Royal George"⁶⁵ and the "Melville," together threw a broadside weight of nine hundred and twenty pounds,⁶⁶ to which the "Madison" and "Oneida" could oppose only six hundred; and the batteries of all five being mainly carronades, there are no qualifications to be made on the score of differing ranges. The American schooners, though much more numerous than the British, in no way compensated for this disparity, for reasons which will be given when the narrative of operations begins. Unknown to Chauncey, the vindication of his delay was to be found in Yeo's writing to the Admiralty, that he was trying to induce the enemy to come out before his new ship was ready.

Disappointed in this endeavor, the British commodore meantime employed his vessels in maintaining the communications of the British and harassing those of the Americans, thus observing the true relation of the lake to the hostilities. Mention has been made of the effect upon Dearborn; morally, in the apprehension created, actually, in the strength contributed to Vincent's army. "The enemy's fleet is constantly hovering on the coast and interrupting our supplies," wrote General Lewis, during Dearborn's incapacity. Besides incidental mentions by American officers, Yeo himself reports the capture of two schooners and boats loaded with stores June 13; and between that date and the 19th he landed parties at the Genesee River and Great Sodus, capturing or destroying a quantity of provisions. Transit between Oswego and Sackett's was also in constant danger of an unexpected interference by the British squadron. On June 20 it appeared off Oswego, with apparent disposition to attack; but Yeo, who in his exercise of chief command displayed a degree of caution remarkable in view of his deservedly high reputation for dash acquired in less responsible positions, did not pass beyond threat. All the same, the mere uncertainty exercised a powerful influence on the maintenance of intercourse. "If the schooners 'Lark' and 'Fly' are not now in Sackett's," wrote Lieutenant Woolsey from Oswego, "they must have been taken yesterday by the British boats. They were loaded with powder, shot, and hospital stores for the army." He has also cordage, powder, guns, cables, to send, and boats in which to ship them; but "under existing circumstances I dare not take upon myself to send

⁶³ Scott's Memoirs, vol. i. p. 94.

⁶⁴ American State Papers, Military Affairs, vol. i. pp. 450, 451.

⁶⁵ Formerly the "Prince Regent."

⁶⁶ Yeo's Report of the Vessels on the Lakes, July 15, 1813. British Records Office.

them farther than to Sandy Creek, under strong guard. I think it would be unsafe to venture round Stony Point [a projecting headland twelve miles from Sackett's] without convoy or a good guard."⁶⁷

On July 2, having ranged the lake at will since June 1, Yeo returned to Kingston, and Chauncey again began to hear rumors. "The fleet has taken on board two thousand men, and two thousand more are to embark in boats; an attack upon this place is the object. The plan is to make a desperate push at our fleet before the 'General Pike' can be got ready.... His real object may be to land re-enforcements near Fort George, to act with General Vincent against Dearborn. If this be his object, he will succeed in obliging our army to recross the Niagara River;"⁶⁸ a damaging commentary on the American plan of campaign. This fear, however, was excessive, for the reason that an effective American army on the Niagara had a land line of communication, bad but possible, alternative to the lake. The British had not. Moreover, the Niagara peninsula had for them a value, as a land link between Ontario and Erie, to which nothing corresponded on the United States side. Had Vincent been driven from Burlington Heights, not only would he have lost touch with the lake, and been forced back on York, but Ontario would for the British have been entirely cut off from Erie.

The "General Pike" was ready for service on July 20, and the following evening Chauncey sailed. With this begins a period, extending over ten or twelve weeks, which has no parallel in the naval lake history of the war. It was unproductive of decisive results, and especially of the one particular result which is the object of all naval action—the destruction of the enemy's organized force, and the establishment of one's own control of the water; nevertheless, the ensuing movements of Yeo and Chauncey constituted a naval campaign of considerable interest. Nothing resembling it occurred on either Lake Champlain or Erie, and no similar condition recurred on Ontario. The fleets were frequently in presence of each other, and three times came to blows. On Erie and on Champlain the opposing forces met but once, and then without any prolonged previous attempts at manœuvring. They fought immediately; the result in each case being an American victory, not only complete but decisive, which has kept their remembrance alive to this day in the national memory. On Ontario, after the close of the season of 1813, the struggle resolved itself into a race of ship-building; both parties endeavoring to maintain superiority by the creation of ever-increasing numbers, instead of by crushing the enemy. Such a contest sufficiently befits a period of peace; it is, for instance, at this moment the condition of the great naval nations of the world, each of which is endeavoring to maintain its place in the naval scale by the constant production and development of material. In war, however, the object is to put an end to a period of national tension and expense by destroying the enemy; and the failure of the commanders to effect this object calls for examination.

The indecisive result on Ontario was due to the particular composition of the two squadrons; to the absence of strong compelling conditions, such as made fighting imperative on Barclay upon Erie, and perhaps also on Downie upon Champlain; and finally, to the extreme wariness of the commanders, each of whom was deeply impressed with the importance of preserving his own fleet, in order not to sacrifice control of the lake. Chauncey has depicted for us his frame of mind in instructions issued at this very moment—July 14—to his subordinate, Perry. "The first object will be to destroy or cripple the enemy's fleet; but in all attempts upon the fleet you ought to use great caution, for the loss of a single vessel may decide the fate of the campaign."⁶⁹ A practical commentary of singular irony was passed upon this utterance within two months; for by sacrificing a single ship Perry decided his own campaign in his own favor. Given the spirit of Chauncey's warning, and also two opponents with fleets so different in constitution that one is strong where the other is weak, and *vice versa*, and there is found the elements of wary and protracted fighting, with a strong chance

⁶⁷ Woolsey to Chauncey, June 20 and 21, 1813. Captains' Letters.

⁶⁸ Chauncey to the Department, July 5, 1813. Captains' Letters.

⁶⁹ Captains' Letters. Navy Department MSS.

that neither will be badly hurt; but also that neither will accomplish much. This is what happened on Ontario.

The relative powers of the two fleets need to be briefly explained; for they constituted, so to say, the hands in the game which each commander had to play. The British had six vessels, of varying sizes and rigs, but all built for war, and sailing fairly well together. They formed therefore a good manœuvring squadron. The Americans had three vessels built for war, and at the beginning ten schooners also, not so designed, and not sailing well with the armaments they bore. Whatever the merits of this or that vessel, the squadron as a whole manœuvred badly, and its movements were impeded by the poorer sailors. The contrast in armaments likewise had a very decisive effect. There were in those days two principal classes of naval cannon,—long guns, often called simply "guns," and carronades. The guns had long range with light weight of shot fired; the carronades had short range and heavy shot. Now in long guns the Americans were four times as strong as the British, while in carronades the British were twice as strong as the Americans. It follows that the American commodore should prefer long range to begin with; whereas the British would be careful not to approach within long range, unless with such a breeze as would carry him rapidly down to where his carronades would come into play.

There was another controlling reason why short range favored the British against the Americans. The schooners of the latter, not being built for war, carried their guns on a deck unprotected by bulwarks. The men, being exposed from the feet up, could be swept away by canister, which is a quantity of small iron balls packed in a case and fired from a cannon. When discharged, these separate and spread like buckshot, striking many in a group. They can maim or kill a man, but their range is short and penetrative power small. A bulwarked vessel was, so to say, armored against canister; for it makes no difference whether the protection is six inches of wood or ten of iron, provided it keeps out the projectile. The American schooners were in this respect wholly vulnerable.

Over-insistence upon details of advantage or disadvantage is often wearisome, and may be pushed to pettifoggery; but these quoted are general and fundamental. To mention them is not to chaffer over details, but to state principles. There is one other which should be noted, although its value may be differently estimated. Of the great long-gun superiority of the Americans more than one half was in the unprotected schooners; distributed, that is, among several vessels not built for war, and not capable of acting well together, so as to concentrate their fire. There is no equality between ten guns in five such vessels and the same ten concentrated on one deck, under one captain. That this is not special pleading, to contravene the assertion advanced by James of great American superiority on Ontario, I may quote words of my own, written years ago with reference to a British officer: "An attempt was made to disparage Howe's conduct (in 1778), and to prove that his force was even superior to that of the French, by adding together the guns in all his ships, disregarding their classes, or by combining groups of his small vessels against D'Estaing's larger units. For this kind of professional arithmetic Howe felt and expressed just and utter contempt."⁷⁰ So Nelson wrote to the commander of a British cruising squadron, "Your intentions of attacking the 'Aigle'"—a seventy-four—"with your three frigates are certainly very laudable, but I do not consider your force by any means equal to it." The new American ship, the "General Pike," possessed this advantage of the seventy-four. One discharge of her broadside was substantially equal to that of the ten schooners, and all her guns were long; entirely out-ranging the batteries of her antagonists. Under some circumstances—a good breeze and the windward position—she was doubtless able to encounter and beat the whole British squadron on Ontario. But the American schooners were mere gunboats, called to act in conditions unfavorable to that class of vessel, the record of which for efficiency is under no circumstances satisfactory.

After leaving Sackett's, Chauncey showed himself off Kingston and then went up the lake, arriving off Niagara on the evening of July 27. An abortive attempt, in conjunction with the army,

⁷⁰ "History of the Royal Navy," edited by Sir W.L. Clowes, vol. iii. p. 411.

was made upon a position of the enemy at Burlington Heights, then far in rear of his main line; but it being found too strong, the fleet, with the troops still on board, bore over to York and there retaliated the injury done by Yeo at Genesee and Sodus. There was no opposition; many stores were destroyed or brought away, some military buildings burned, and the vessels then returned to Niagara. They were lying there at daybreak of August 7 when the British appeared: two ships, two brigs, and two large schooners. Chauncey had substantially his whole force: two ships, the "Pike" and "Madison," the brig "Oneida," and ten schooners. He got under way shortly and put out into the lake. Various manœuvres followed, his principal object being to get to windward of the enemy; or, when the wind failed, to sweep⁷¹ the schooners close enough for their long guns to reach; the only useful function they possessed. These efforts were unsuccessful, and night shut in with the two opponents sailing in parallel lines, heading north, with the wind at west; the Americans to leeward and in rear of the British. At two in the morning, in a heavy squall, two schooners upset, with the loss of all on board save sixteen souls. Chauncey reckoned these to be among his best, and, as they together mounted nineteen guns, he considered that "this accident gave the enemy decidedly the superiority"; another instance of faulty professional arithmetic, omitting from the account the concentration of power in the "General Pike."

Yeo did not estimate conditions in the same way, and persisted warily in keeping the weather gage, watching for a chance to cut off schooners, or for other favoring opportunity; while Chauncey as diligently sought to gain the advantage of the wind, to force action with his heavy ships. Manœuvring continued all day of the 8th, 9th, and 10th. The winds, being light and shifting, favored now one, now the other; but in no case for long enough to insure a meeting which the American with good reason desired, and his antagonist with equal propriety would accept only under conditions that suited him. At nine in the evening of August 10 the American squadron was standing northwest, with the wind at southwest, when the British, which was then following to windward, wore and stood south. Chauncey made no change in direction, but kept his vessels in two lines; this being the order of battle by which, not being able to attack himself, he hoped to induce Yeo to engage incautiously. The six smallest schooners, of the eight now left to him, were put in the weather line; therefore toward the enemy, if he persisted in keeping to windward. The lee line, abreast of the other, and six hundred yards from it, was composed of the "Pike," "Madison," and "Oneida," astern of which were the two heaviest schooners. The smaller vessels were displayed as a tempting bait, disposed, as it were, in such manner that the opponent might hope to lay hands on one or more, without coming too much under the "Pike's" heavy guns; for her two larger consorts, carrying carronades chiefly, might be neglected at the distance named. If such an attempt were made, the schooners' orders were to edge imperceptibly to leeward, enticing the enemy to follow in his eagerness; and when he was near enough they were to slip cleverly through the intervals in the lee line, leaving it to finish the business. The lure was perhaps a little too obvious, the enemy's innocent forgetfulness of the dangers to leeward too easily presumed; for a ship does not get out of the hold of a clear-headed captain as a mob of troops in hot pursuit may at times escape the control of their officers. In view, however, of Yeo's evident determination to keep his "fleet in being," by avoiding action except on his own terms, nothing better was open to Chauncey, unless fortune should favor him.

At half-past ten the British again wore, now standing northwest after the American squadron, the rear vessels of which opened fire at eleven (A). At quarter-past eleven the cannonade became general between the enemy and the weather line (B). Fifteen minutes later, the four rear schooners of the latter, which were overmatched when once within carronade range, bore up and ran to leeward; two taking position on the other side of the main division, and two astern of it (c, c). So far all went according to plan; but unhappily the leading two American schooners, instead of keeping away in obedience to orders, tacked—went about towards the enemy—keeping to windward (d).

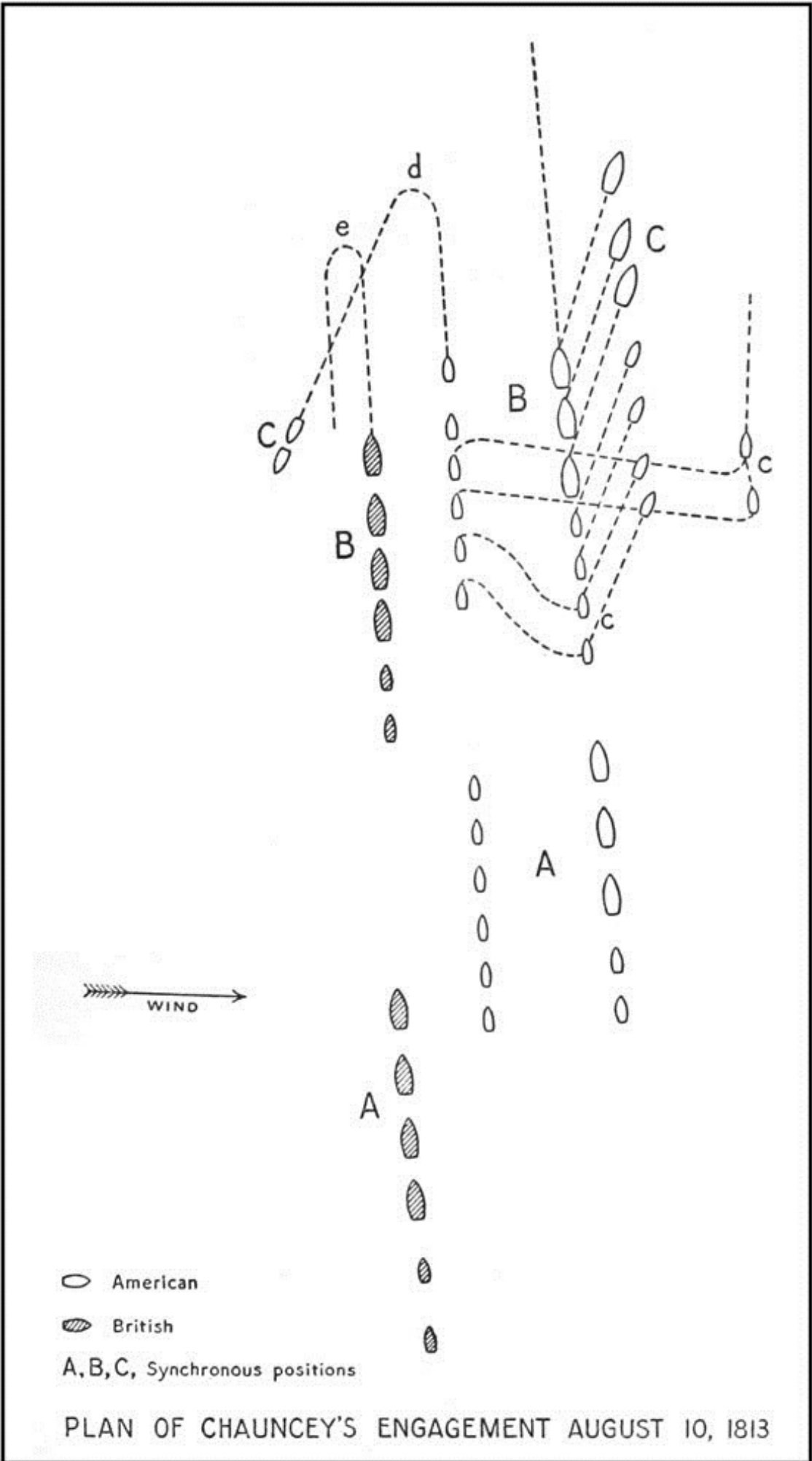
⁷¹ That is,—row

Chauncey, seeing the risk involved for them, but prepossessed with the idea of luring Yeo down by the appearance of flight set by the schooners, made what can scarcely be considered other than the mistake of keeping away himself, with the heavy ships; "filled the maintopsail, and edged away two points, to lead the enemy down, not only to engage him to more advantage, but to lead him away from the 'Growler' and 'Julia'" (C). Yeo, equally dominated by a preconceived purpose not to bring his ships under the guns of the "Pike," acted much as a squirrel would do with two nuts in sight; he went for the one safely distant from suspected danger. "He kept his wind," reported Chauncey, "until he had completely separated those two vessels from the rest of the squadron, exchanged a few shot with the 'Pike,' as he passed, without injury to us, and made sail after the two schooners" (e). Some time after midnight these surrendered to odds plainly irresistible.⁷²

The tacking of the two schooners was an act as ill-judged as it was insubordinate, for which Chauncey was in no wise responsible. His bearing up was certainly an error, which unfortunately lent itself to the statement, contemporaneously made by an American paper, that he retreated, leaving the two vessels to their fate. It was possible, therefore, for Sir James to word the transaction as he airily did: "At eleven we came within gunshot of their line of schooners, which opened a heavy fire, their ships keeping off the wind to prevent our closing. At half-past twelve this ship came within gunshot of the 'Pike' and 'Madison,' when they immediately bore up, fired their stern chase-guns, and made sail for Niagara, leaving two of their schooners astern, which we captured."⁷³ This gives a more victorious and dashing air to the success than it quite deserves. As it stood, it was real enough, though trivial. To take two vessels from a superior fleet, within range of its commander-in-chief, is a handsome business, which should not need to be embellished by the implication that a greatly desired fight could not be had. To quote Marryat, "It is very hard to come at the real truth of this sort of thing, as I found out during the time that I was in his Majesty's service." Chauncey's version is perfectly probable. Seeing that the enemy would not follow, "tacked and stood after him. At twelve (midnight), finding that I must either separate from the rest of the squadron, or relinquish the hope of saving the two which had separated, I reluctantly gave up the pursuit." His reading of Yeo's conduct is plausible. "From what I have been able to discover of the movements of the enemy, he has no intention of engaging us, except he can get decidedly the advantage of wind and weather; and as his vessels in squadron sail better than our squadron, he can always avoid an action.... He thinks to cut off our small dull sailing schooners in detail." Here and always Chauncey's conduct reflects the caution prescribed in his instructions to Perry, rather than the resolute determination the latter showed to bring matters to an issue. On the other hand, it is to be remembered that, owing to the nearly equal facilities for ship-building—for replacing ships lost—possessed by Kingston and Sackett's, a decisive naval victory would not have the finality of result to be expected on Lake Erie. Contrary to the usual conditions of naval war, the two ports, not the fleets dependent on them, were the decisive elements of the Ontario campaign; and the ignoring of that truth was the fundamental, irremediable, American error.

⁷² Chauncey's Report of this cruise is in Captains' Letters, Aug. 13, 1813. Also, in Niles' Register, vol. iv. p. 421.

⁷³ James, Naval Occurrences. Appendix, p. lxxiv.



PLAN OF CHAUNCEY'S ENGAGEMENT AUGUST 10, 1813

Chauncey returned to Sackett's on August 13, provisioned the squadron for five weeks, and sailed the same evening. On the 16th he was back off Niagara, and there again sighted the enemy; but a heavy westerly gale drove both squadrons to the lower end of the lake, where each entered its own harbor on the 19th. August 29 the American put out again, having an additional newly built schooner, named the "Sylph," large and fast, carrying three or four long 32-pounders. Chauncey reported that he had now nine vessels with ninety-one guns, but that the enemy was still superior. In number of guns, possibly; but it is difficult to accept the statement otherwise, except in the one very important particular of squadron manœuvring power. This enabled Yeo to avoid action, except when it suited him to fight; or unless Chauncey was willing to engage first with part only of his squadron, following it with the rest. Such advantage in manœuvring greatly increases the ability of the inferior to serve his own cause, but it does not constitute superiority. The delusion of measuring force by guns, irrespective of the ships that carry them, has been explained.

Yeo's intermediate movements do not appear, but on September 7 the antagonists again met off the Niagara River. From that day till the 12th the American fleet endeavored to force a general action, which the other steadily, and properly, refused. The persistent efforts of the one to close, and of the other to avoid, led to a movement round the lake, ending by the British entering Amherst Bay, five miles west of Kingston. On one occasion, off the Genesee on September 11, a westerly breeze carried the United States squadron within three-quarters of a mile of the enemy, before the latter felt it. A cannonade and pursuit of some hours followed, but without decisive result. There seems traceable throughout Chauncey's account a distinct indisposition to what is called technically "a general chase;" to press on with part of the squadron, trusting to the slower vessels coming up soon enough to complete the work of the faster. He was unwilling thus to let his fleet loose. "This ship" (the "General Pike"), "the 'Madison,' and the 'Sylph,' have each a schooner constantly in tow, yet the others cannot sail as fast as the enemy's squadron, which gives him decidedly the advantage, and puts it in his power to engage me when and how he chooses." In such a situation success can be had only by throwing the more rapid upon the enemy as an advance guard, engaging as they get within range, relying upon their effecting such detention that the others can arrive in time to their support. To this recourse, though in halting fashion, Chauncey finally came on what proved to be his last collision with Yeo, September 28.

CHAPTER XI

THE CAMPAIGN OF 1813 ON THE LAKES AND NORTHERN FRONTIER. THE BATTLE OF LAKE ERIE

While the movements last related in the preceding chapter were in progress, the contest for Lake Erie was brought to a final decision. After the successful transfer of the vessels from Black Rock to Erie, June 18, Perry remained upon the upper lake superintending all administrative work; but in particular pressing the equipment of the two brigs ordered by Chauncey the previous winter. To one of these, on which Perry intended to embark his own fortunes, was given the name of "Lawrence," the captain of the "Chesapeake," whose death, heroic in defeat, occurred at this period. The other was called the "Niagara." They were sister vessels, of five hundred tons, constructed for war, and brig-rigged; that is, with two masts, and carrying square sails on both. Their armaments also were alike; eighteen 32-pounder carronades, and two long 12-pounder guns. They were thus about equivalent in fighting force to the ocean sloops-of-war, "Wasp" and "Hornet," which, however, were three-masted. The remainder of the force would now be called a scratch lot. Three were schooner-rigged gunboats, built for the navy at Erie; the remainder were the vessels brought from Black Rock. Of these, one was the brig "Caledonia," formerly British, captured by Elliott the previous autumn; the others were purchased lake craft. When finally taking the lake, August 6, the squadron consisted of the two brigs, of the Black Rock division,—"Caledonia," "Somers," "Tigress," "Ohio," and "Trippe,"—and of three other schooners,—"Ariel," "Scorpion," and "Porcupine,"—apparently those built at Erie; ten sail, all of which, except the "Ohio," were in the final decisive battle.

On July 23 the vessels were rigged, armed, and ready for service, but there were not men enough to man them. How little exacting Perry was in this matter, and how eager to enter upon active operations, is shown by a letter from his superior, Chauncey, to the Secretary of the Navy, dated July 8: "I am at a loss," he says, "to account for the change in Captain Perry's sentiments with respect to the number of men required for the little fleet at Presqu' Isle; for when I parted with him on the last of May, we coincided in opinion perfectly as to the number required for each vessel, which was one hundred and eighty for each of the new brigs, sixty for the 'Caledonia,' and forty for each of the other vessels, making in all seven hundred and forty officers and men. But if Captain Perry can beat the enemy with half that number, no one will feel more happy than myself."⁷⁴ Chauncey having supreme control over both lakes, all re-enforcements from the seaboard were sent to him; and as he had his own particular enemy on Ontario to confront, it was evident, and natural, that Perry would be least well served. Hence, after successive disappointments, and being of more venturous temper than his superior, it is not surprising that he soon was willing to undertake his task with fewer men than his unbiased judgment would call necessary.

The clash of interests between the two squadrons, having a common superior but separate responsibilities, is seen by a comparison of dates, which shows operations nearly simultaneous. On July 23 the Erie squadron was reported "all ready to meet the enemy the moment they are officered and manned;" on July 20 the "General Pike" was ready, and on the 21st the Ontario squadron sailed from Sackett's Harbor. On August 5 Perry had his vessels across the bar at Erie, and next day stood out into the lake. On the 7th Chauncey and Yeo met for their first encounter. On the 8th the two Ontario schooners, "Hamilton" and "Scourge," were lost with nearly all on board; and on the 10th the "Julia" and "Growler" were captured. After this, it may be imagined that Chauncey with difficulty parted with men; and in the midst of his second collision with Yeo the battle of Lake Erie occurred. In it, of the one hundred and eighty men deemed necessary by Chauncey, Perry's brig had one hundred and

⁷⁴ Captains' Letters, Navy Department MSS.

forty-two, of whom thirty were sick; while the squadron, with nearly all its vessels present, instead of the intended seven hundred and forty, had but four hundred and ninety. Of this total, nearly one hundred were received from the army on August 31, only nine days before the action. For the most part these were strangers to shipboard. Barring them, Perry's fighting force was barely more than half that required by Chauncey's estimate.

Indirectly, and notwithstanding Perry's disposition to make the best of his difficulty, this condition came near causing his withdrawal from the lake service; a loss which, had it occurred, might have reversed the issues, for in few general actions has the personality of the commander counted for so much, after the battle joined. In a letter of July 26 to Chauncey, he had written: "The men that came by Mr. Champlin are a motley set, blacks, soldiers, and boys. I cannot think you saw them after they were selected."⁷⁵ Chauncey replied, somewhat testily, "I regret you are not pleased with the men sent you; for, to my knowledge, a part of them are not surpassed by any seamen we have in the fleet; and I have yet to learn that the color of the skin, or the cut and trimmings of the coat, can affect a man's qualifications or usefulness." To this he added a warning not much short of a reproof: "As you have assured the secretary that you should conceive yourself equal or superior to the enemy, with a force in men so much less than I had deemed necessary, there will be a great deal expected from you by your country, and I trust they will not be disappointed in the high expectations formed of your gallantry and judgment. I will barely make an observation, which was impressed upon my mind by an old soldier; that is, 'Never despise your enemy.'"⁷⁶

This advice was sound, rightly weighed. Yet it is not too much to say that the confidence which carried Perry on to decisive victory has in it inevitably something of that assurance of success which is akin to contempt of the enemy, and that it was the precise quality in which Chauncey, throughout his own career on the lakes, showed himself deficient, and consequently failed. His plan at that moment, as he himself said in a letter to Perry of July 14, was "to seek a meeting with Sir James Yeo as soon as possible, in order to decide the fate of this lake, and join you immediately after." This was an intelligent project: to beat one enemy first, and then carry his force over to beat the other; but never, when in presence of his antagonist, could he despise him sufficiently to cut his gunboats adrift, and throw one or two vessels into the midst of the fire, as Perry rushed his own ship in, had her cut to pieces,—and won. It is even worse to respect your enemy too greatly than to despise him. Said Farragut, speaking of an officer he highly valued: "Drayton does not know fear, but he believes in acting as if the enemy never can be caught unprepared; whereas I believe in judging him by ourselves, and my motto in action is, '*L'audace, et encore de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace!*'" This described Perry in battle.

Although Chauncey closed with expressions of confidence which might be considered conciliatory, Perry experienced an annoyance which was natural, though excessive. He was only twenty-eight, quick of temper, though amiable, and somewhat prone to see more offence than was intended. When the letter reached him, the squadron had just crossed the bar; the most critical movement of the campaign, had the enemy been duly watchful. Having accomplished this, he had before him only the common vicissitudes of naval warfare. Nevertheless, under his first impulse of resentment, he applied to be removed from the station,⁷⁷ giving as his reason, not the quality of men sent, concerning which indeed he had said, "I am pleased to see anything in the shape of a man," but that "I cannot serve under an officer who has been so totally regardless of my feelings." He then summarized the difficulties with which he had contended, and added, "The critical state of General Harrison was such that I took upon myself the responsibility of going out with the few young officers you had been pleased to send me," (Elliott, the second in command, did not arrive

⁷⁵ Mackenzie's Life of Perry, vol. i. p. 166.

⁷⁶ Mackenzie's Life of Perry, vol. i. p. 186.

⁷⁷ Perry to the Secretary of the Navy, Aug. 10, 1813. Mackenzie's Life of Perry, vol. i. p. 191.

till the squadron was over the bar), "with the few seamen I had, and as many volunteers as I could muster from the militia. I did not shrink from this responsibility; but, Sir, at that very moment I surely did not anticipate the receipt of a letter in every line of which is an insult." He then renewed his request. "I am willing to forego that reward which I have considered for two months past almost within my grasp." Fortunately for the renown of the service, from which one of its finest actions might have been lost, it was impossible to grant his application until after the battle had made the question of the command on Lake Erie one of very minor importance. The secretary replied to him with words in which rebuke and appreciation were aptly blended. "A change of commander, under existing circumstances, is equally inadmissible as it respects the interest of the service and your own reputation. It is right that you should reap the harvest which you have sown."⁷⁸

After the Frenchtown disaster⁷⁹ of January 22, 1813, the Army of the Northwest under General Harrison had remained strictly on the defensive throughout the spring and summer. The tenure of its position on the Maumee River depended upon Fort Meigs, built during the winter just above the Rapids, some twenty miles from the lake. Thirty miles east of Meigs was Fort Stephenson at the mouth of the Sandusky River, protecting the approaches to Sandusky Bay, near which were Harrison's headquarters at the time Perry's squadron was ready to move. Fort Stephenson by its situation contributed also to secure the communications of the Maumee line with Central Ohio, and was an obstacle to an enemy's approach by land to Erie, a hundred and fifty miles further east. It was not, however, a work permanent in character, like Meigs; and neither post could be considered secure, because inadequately garrisoned. Fortunately, the general tenor of the instructions received by Procter from Prevost conspired with his own natural character to indispose him to energetic measures. His force of regulars was small; and he had not the faculty, which occasional white men have shown, to arouse vigorous and sustained activity in the Indians, of whom he had an abundance at call. The use of them in desultory guerilla warfare, which was prescribed to him by Prevost, became in his hands ineffective. Nevertheless, from the number known to be under his command, and the control of the water enabling him to land where he would, the threat of savage warfare hung over the frontier like a pall, until finally dissipated by Perry's victory.

The danger to British control of the water, and thereby to the maintenance of their position in the northwest, if the American fleet now building should succeed in getting upon the lake, was perfectly apparent, and made Erie a third and principal point of interest. At the time of Perry's arrival, March 27, the place was entirely defenceless, and without any organization for defence, although the keels of the two brigs were laid, and the three gunboats well advanced in construction. By a visit to Pittsburgh he obtained from an army ordnance officer four small guns, with some muskets; and upon his application the local commander of Pennsylvania militia stationed at Erie five hundred men, who remained till the vessels crossed the bar. Under this slender protection went on the arduous work of building and equipping a squadron in what was substantially a wilderness, to which most of the mechanics and material had to be brought half a thousand miles from the seaboard, under the difficulties of transport in those days. The rapid advance in the preparations aroused the disquietude of the British, but Procter had not the enterprising temper to throw all upon the hazard, for the sake of destroying an armament which, if completed, might destroy him; while the British inferiority of force on Lake Ontario and the Niagara peninsula, together with the movement of Chauncey and Dearborn resulting in the capture of York, April 27, effectually prevented intervention from that quarter in the affairs of Lake Erie. At this time Procter made his first effort of the season, directed against Fort Meigs, which he held besieged for over a week,—from May 1 to May 9. Although unable to capture it, the mismanagement of an American relief force enabled him to inflict a very severe loss; a corps of eight hundred and sixty-six men being cut to pieces or captured, only one hundred and seventy

⁷⁸ Secretary's Letters, Aug. 18, 1813. Navy Department MSS.

⁷⁹ Otherwise known by the name of the River Raisin. Ante, vol. i. p. 370.

escaping. The chief points of interest in this business are the demonstration of the weakness of the American frontier,—the principal defence of which was thus not merely braved but threatened,—and the effect of control of the water. By it Procter brought over gunboats which ascended the river, and guns of a weight not to be transported by land. The lake also secured his communications.

After the failure before Meigs, Procter turned his attention more seriously to the situation at Erie, and demanded re-enforcements to enable him to attack the place.⁸⁰ Prevost, being commander-in-chief for all Canada, recognized the expediency of the move, and wrote him, June 20, that he had directed General De Rottenburg at Niagara, to push on re-enforcements and supplies; but Prevost was in Kingston, and De Rottenburg, immediately responsible for Niagara, wrote declining to weaken his force. He was already inferior to the United States army under Boyd, which was then confronting him, resting upon Fort George; and there was the prospect also that Chauncey might regain control of the lake. Instead of co-operation for offence, he transmitted arrangements for retreat in case of a disaster to Yeo on Ontario. Procter enclosed this letter to the commander-in-chief, remarking pathetically that he was fully confident of receiving aid from him, but intentions were of no avail. Had the force ordered been sent, he felt sure of destroying the fleet at Erie, thus securing the command of the lake, which would have benefited also the centre [Niagara] division. He should now, he said, make an attempt upon Sandusky; Erie was impossible without re-enforcements. At the same time, July 13, Captain Barclay was about to sail for Long Point, on the Canada shore directly opposite Erie, to embark one hundred troops, and then to endeavor to retain the American fleet in port until the required assistance could be sent. The new British ship "Detroit" was nearly ready for launching at Amherstburg, and could be equipped and gunned there; but seamen were absolutely needed.

In accordance with these plans Barclay went with his squadron to Long Point. There the desired soldiers were refused him; and, as also no seamen were forthcoming, he wrote on July 16 a letter directly to Sir George Prevost, "lest Sir James Yeo should be on the lake," representing the critical state of affairs, owing to the inadequate equipment of his vessels, the want of seamen, and the advanced preparations of the Americans to put afloat a force superior to his. July 20 he appeared off Erie, where Perry's fleet was still in the harbor, waiting for men. How imminent the exposure of the American flotilla at that moment, and how great the British opportunity, appears from the recently published memoirs of a prominent resident.⁸¹ "An English fleet of five vessels of war was at that time cruising off the harbor, in full view. That fleet might at any time have sent in its boats during a dark night, and the destruction of the whole American fleet was almost inevitable; for Perry's force was totally inadequate to its defence, and the regiment of Pennsylvania militia, stationed at Erie expressly for the defence of the fleet, refused to keep guard at night on board. 'I told the boys to go, Captain,' said the worthless colonel of the regiment, 'but the boys won't go.'" Like American merchant ships, American militia obeyed or disobeyed as they pleased. Two hundred soldiers, loaned by Dearborn when the Black Rock flotilla came round, had been recalled July 10. On the 23d and 30th re-enforcements were received from Chauncey, in all one hundred and thirty men. With these, and some landmen enlisted on the spot for four months, the force of the squadron, estimated to require seven hundred and forty men, was raised to three hundred; but having lately received two pressing letters from the Navy Department, urging General Harrison's critical need of co-operation, Perry determined to go out. Most opportunely for his purpose, Barclay disappeared on the 30th, Friday, which thus for him made good its title to "unlucky." He was absent until August 4, and was by the Americans believed to have gone to Long Point. Before his Court Martial he merely stated that "I blockaded as closely as I could, until I one morning saw the whole of the enemy's force over the bar, and in a most formidable state of preparation." The Court did not press inquiry on the point,

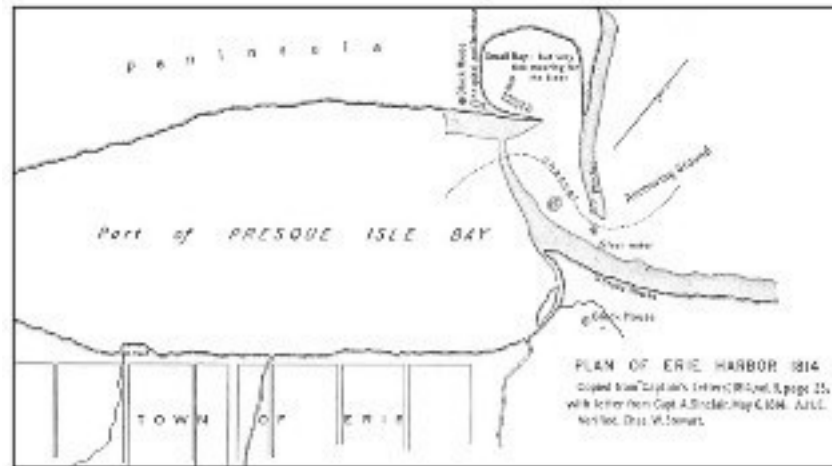
⁸⁰ The data of this paragraph are taken from the Report on Canadian Archives, 1896, Lower Canada, pp. 132, 138-140. Barclay in his Defence before the Court Martial mentions the designs on Erie.

⁸¹ Harm Jan Huidekoper, by Nina Moore Tiffany and Francis Tiffany. 1904. p. 187. Mr. Huidekoper speaks admiringly of the unfaltering composure and cheerfulness which under these circumstances accompanied Perry's energy.

which perhaps lay beyond its instructions; but the double failure, to intercept the Black Rock division on its way to Erie,⁸² and to prevent the crossing of the bar, were serious strategic misadventures when confronting superior numbers. Perry's preparations for the passage had been for some time completed, but information of contemplated movements travelled so easily from shore to shore that he gave no indication of immediate action until Sunday. On that day the officers were permitted to disperse in town as usual, but afterwards were hastily summoned back, and the vessels moved down to the bar, on which the depth ordinarily was from five to seven feet, much less than needed for the "Lawrence" and "Niagara." This obstacle, hitherto a protection against naval attack, now imposed an extremely critical operation; for to get over, the brigs must be lightened of their guns and their hulls lifted upon floats. So situated, they were helplessly exposed to destruction, as far as their own powers went.

From point to point the mouth of the harbor, where the outer bar occurs, was eight tenths of a mile wide. As shown by a sketch of the period, the distance to be travelled on the floats, from deep water within to deep water without, was a mile; rather less than more. On Monday morning, August 2, the movement of the vessels began simultaneously. Five of the smaller, which under usual conditions could pass without lightening, were ordered to cross and take positions outside, covering the channel; a sixth, with the "Niagara," were similarly posted within. The protection thus afforded was re-enforced by three 12-pounder long guns, mounted on the beach, abreast the bar; distant not over five hundred yards from the point where the channel issued on the lake. While these dispositions were being made, the "Lawrence's" guns were hoisted out, and placed in boats to be towed astern of her; the floats taken alongside, filled, sunk, and made fast, so that when pumped out their rising would lift the brig. In the course of these preparations it was found that the water had fallen to four feet, so that even the schooners had to be lightened, while the transit of the "Lawrence" was rendered more tedious and difficult. The weather, however, was propitious, with a smooth lake; and although the brig grounded in the shoalest spot, necessitating a second sinking of the burden-bearing floats, —appropriately called "camels,"—perseverance protracted through that night and the day of the 3d carried her outside. At 8 A.M. of the 4th she was fairly afloat. Guns, singly light in weight as hers were, were quickly hoisted on board and mounted; but none too soon, for the enemy appeared almost immediately. The "Niagara's" passage was more easily effected, and Barclay offered no molestation. In a letter to the Department, dated August 4, 1813, 9 P.M., Perry reported, "I have great pleasure in informing you that I have succeeded in getting over the bar the United States vessels, the 'Lawrence,' 'Niagara,' 'Caledonia,' 'Ariel,' 'Scorpion,' 'Somers,' 'Tigress,' and 'Porcupine.'" He added, "The enemy have been in sight all day." The vessels named, with the schooner "Ohio" and the sloop "Trippe," constituted the entire squadron.

⁸² See ante, p. 41.



PLAN OF ERIE HARBOR 1814

While Perry was thus profitably employed, Procter had embarked on another enterprise against the magazines on the American front of operations. His intention, as first reported to Prevost, was to attack Sandusky; but the conduct of the Indians, upon the co-operation of whom he had to rely, compelled him to diverge to Fort Meigs. Here the savages began to desert, an attempt to draw the garrison into an ambush having failed; and when Procter, after two days' stay, determined to revert to Sandusky, he was accompanied by "as many hundred of them as there should have been thousands." The white troops went on by water, the Indians by the shore. They appeared before Fort Stephenson on Sunday, August 1. The garrison was summoned, with the customary intimation of the dire consequences to be apprehended from the savages in case of an assault. The American commander, Major Croghan, accepted these possibilities, and the following day, during which the "Lawrence" was working her way over Erie bar, the artillery and the guns of the gunboats were busy battering the northwest angle of the fort. At 4 P.M. an assault was made. It was repelled with heavy loss to the assailants, and little to the besieged. That night the baffled enemy withdrew to Malden.

The American squadron having gained the lake and mounted its batteries, Barclay found himself like Chauncey while awaiting the "General Pike." His new and most powerful vessel, the ship "Detroit," was approaching completion. He was now too inferior in force to risk action when he might expect her help so soon, and he therefore retired to Malden. Perry was thus left in control of Lake Erie. He put out on August 6; but, failing to find the enemy, he anchored again off Erie, to take on board provisions, and also stores to be carried to Sandusky for the army. While thus occupied, there came on the evening of the 8th the welcome news that a re-enforcement of officers and seamen was approaching. On the 10th, these joined him to the number of one hundred and two. At their head was Commander Jesse D. Elliott, an officer of reputation, who became second in command to Perry, and took charge of the "Niagara."

On August 12 the squadron finally made sail for the westward, not to return to Erie till the campaign was decided. Its intermediate movements possess little interest, the battle of Lake Erie being so conspicuously the decisive incident as to reduce all preceding it to insignificance. Perry was off Malden on August 25, and again on September 1. The wind on the latter day favoring movement both to go and come, a somewhat rare circumstance, he remained all day reconnoitring near the harbor's mouth. The British squadron appeared complete in vessels and equipment; but Barclay had his own troubles about crews, as had his antagonist, his continual representations to Yeo meeting with even less attention than Perry conceived himself to receive from Chauncey. He was determined to postpone action until re-enforcements of seamen should arrive from the eastward, unless failure of provisions, already staring him in the face, should force him to battle in order to re-establish communications by the lake.

The headquarters of the United States squadron was at Put-in Bay, in the Bass Islands, a group thirty miles southeast of Malden. The harbor was good, and the position suitable for watching the enemy, in case he should attempt to pass eastward down the lake, towards Long Point or elsewhere. Hither Perry returned on September 6, after a brief visit to Sandusky Bay, where information was received that the British leaders had determined that the fleet must, at all hazards, restore intercourse with Long Point. From official correspondence, afterwards captured with Procter's baggage, it appears that the Amherstburg and Malden district was now entirely dependent for flour upon Long Point, access to which had been effectually destroyed by the presence of the American squadron. Even cattle, though somewhat more plentiful, could no longer be obtained in the neighborhood in sufficient numbers, owing to the wasteful way in which the Indians had killed where they wanted. They could not be restrained without alienating them, or, worse, provoking them to outrage. Including warriors and their families, fourteen thousand were now consuming provisions. In the condition of the roads, only water transport could meet the requirements; and that not by an occasional schooner running blockade, but by the free transit of supplies conferred by naval control. To the decision to fight may have been contributed also a letter from Prevost, who had been drawn down from Kingston to St. David's, on the Niagara frontier, by his anxiety about the general situation, particularly aroused by Procter's repulse from Fort Stephenson. Alluding to the capture of Chauncey's two schooners on August 10, he wrote Procter on the 22d, "Yeo's experience should convince Barclay that he has only to dare and he will be successful."⁸³ It was to be Sir George's unhappy lot, a year later, to goad the British naval commander on Lake Champlain into premature action; and there was ample time for the present indiscreet innuendo to reach Barclay, and impel him to a step which Prevost afterwards condemned as hasty, because not awaiting the arrival of a body of fifty seamen announced to be at Kingston on their way to Malden.

At sunrise of September 10, the lookout at the masthead of the "Lawrence" sighted the British squadron in the northwest. Barclay was on his way down the lake, intending to fight. The wind was southwest, fair for the British, but adverse to the Americans quitting the harbor by the channel leading towards the enemy. Fortunately it shifted to southeast, and there steadied; which not only enabled them to go out, but gave them the windward position throughout the engagement. The windward position, or weather gage, as it was commonly called, conferred the power of initiative; whereas the vessel or fleet to leeward, while it might by skill at times force action, or itself obtain the weather gage by manœuvring, was commonly obliged to await attack and accept the distance chosen by the opponent. Where the principal force of a squadron, as in Perry's case, consists in two vessels armed almost entirely with carronades, the importance of getting within carronade range is apparent.

Looking forward to a meeting, Perry had prearranged the disposition of his vessels to conform to that which he expected the enemy to assume. Unlike ocean fleets, all the lake squadrons, as is already known of Ontario, were composed of vessels very heterogeneous in character. This was because the most had been bought, not designed for the navy. It was antecedently probable, therefore, that a certain general principle would dictate the constitution of the three parts of the order of battle, the centre and two flanks, into which every military line divides. The French have an expression for the centre,—*corps de bataille*,—which was particularly appropriate to squadrons like those of Barclay and Perry. Each had a natural "body of battle," in vessels decisively stronger than all the others combined. This relatively powerful division would take the centre, as a cohesive force, to prevent the two ends—or flanks—being driven asunder by the enemy. Barclay's vessels of this class were the new ship, "Detroit," and the "Queen Charlotte;" Perry's were the "Lawrence" and "Niagara." Each had an intermediate vessel; the British the "Lady Prevost," the Americans the "Caledonia." In addition to these were the light craft, three British and six Americans; concerning which it is to be said that the latter were not only the more numerous, but individually much more powerfully armed.

⁸³ Report on Canadian Archives, 1896. Lower Canada, p. 133.

The same remark is true, vessel for vessel, of those opposed to one another by Perry's plan; that is, measuring the weight of shot discharged at a broadside, which is the usual standard of comparison, the "Lawrence" threw more metal than the "Detroit," the "Niagara" much more than the "Queen Charlotte," and the "Caledonia," than the "Lady Prevost." This, however, must be qualified by the consideration, more conspicuously noticeable on Ontario than on Erie, of the greater length of range of the long gun. This applies particularly to the principal British vessel, the "Detroit." Owing to the difficulties of transportation, and the demands of the Ontario squadron, her proper armament had not arrived. She was provided with guns from the ramparts of Fort Malden, and a more curiously composite battery probably never was mounted; but, of the total nineteen, seventeen were long guns. It is impossible to say what her broadside may have weighed. All her pieces together fired two hundred and thirty pounds, but it is incredible that a seaman like Barclay should not so have disposed them as to give more than half that amount to one broadside. That of the "Lawrence," was three hundred pounds; but all her guns, save two twelves, were carronades. Compared with the "Queen Charlotte," the battery of the "Niagara" was as 3 to 2; both chiefly carronades.

From what has been stated, it is evident that if Perry's plan were carried out, opposing vessel to vessel, the Americans would have a superiority of at least fifty per cent. Such an advantage, in some quarter at least, is the aim of every capable commander; for the object of war is not to kill men, but to carry a point: not glory by fighting, but success in result. The only obvious dangers were that the wind might fail or be very light, which would unduly protract exposure to long guns before getting within carronade range; or that, by some vessels coming tardily into action, one or more of the others would suffer from concentration of the enemy's fire. It was this contingency, realized in fact, which gave rise to the embittered controversy about the battle; a controversy never settled, and probably now not susceptible of settlement, because the President of the United States, Mr. Monroe, pigeonholed the charges formulated by Perry against Elliott in 1818. There is thus no American sworn testimony to facts, searched and sifted by cross-examination; for the affidavits submitted on the one side and the other were *ex parte*, while the Court of Inquiry, asked by Elliott in 1815, neglected to call all accessible witnesses—notably Perry himself. In fact, there was not before it a single commanding officer of a vessel engaged. Such a procedure was manifestly inadequate to the requirement of the Navy Department's letter to the Court, that "a true statement of the facts in relation to Captain Elliott's conduct be exhibited to the world." Investigation seems to have been confined to an assertion in a British periodical, based upon the proceedings of the Court Martial upon Barclay, to the effect that Elliott's vessel "had not been engaged, and was making away,"⁸⁴ at the time when Perry "was obliged to leave his ship, which soon after surrendered, and hoist his flag on board another of his squadron." The American Court examined two officers of Perry's vessel, and five of Elliott's; no others. To the direct question, "Did the 'Niagara' at any time during the action attempt to make off from the British fleet?" all replied, "No." The Court, therefore, on the testimony before it, decided that the charge "made in the proceedings⁸⁵ of the British Court Martial ... was malicious, and unfounded in fact;" expressing besides its conviction "that the attempts to wrest from Captain Elliott the laurels he gained in that splendid victory ... ought in no wise to lessen him in the opinion of his fellow citizens as a brave and skilful officer." At the same time it regretted that "imperious duty compelled it to promulgate testimony which appears materially to differ in some of its most important points."

In this state the evidence still remains, owing to the failure of the President to take action, probably with a benevolent desire to allay discord, and envelop facts under a kindly "All's well that

⁸⁴ This statement appeared in the course of a *summary* of the evidence before the British Court, given by the Naval Chronicle, vol. xxxii. pp. 241-242. The only support to it in the evidence, as recorded, is Barclay's official letter, which he appears to have confirmed under oath, that the "Niagara" kept out of carronade range, and "was perfectly fresh at 2.30," when Perry went on board her. The first lieutenant of the "Queen Charlotte," who remained in command, the captain being killed, corroborated Barclay as to her distance.

⁸⁵ In the finding—or verdict—of the British Court, as in the evidence, there is no expression of a charge that the "Niagara" was making away. The finding restricted itself to the matter before the Court, namely, Barclay's official conduct.

ends well." Perry died a year after making his charges, which labored under the just imputation that he had commended Elliott in his report, and again immediately afterwards, though in terms that his subordinate thought failed to do him justice. American naval opinion divided, apparently in very unequal numbers. Elliott's officers stood by him, as was natural; for men feel themselves involved in that which concerns the conduct of their ship, and see incidents in that light. Perry's officers considered that the "Lawrence" had not been properly supported; owing to which, after losses almost unparalleled, she had to undergo the mortification of surrender. Her heroism, her losses, and her surrender, were truths beyond question.

The historian to-day thus finds himself in the dilemma that the American testimony is in two categories, distinctly contradictory and mutually destructive; yet to be tested only by his own capacity to cross-examine the record, and by reference to the British accounts. The latter are impartial, as between the American parties; their only bias is to constitute a fair case for Barclay, by establishing the surrender of the American flagship and the hesitancy of the "Niagara" to enter into action. This would indicate victory so far, changed to defeat by the use Perry made of the vessel preserved to him intact by the over-caution of his second. Waiving motives, these claims are substantially correct, and constitute the analysis of the battle as fought and won.

Barclay, finding the wind to head him and place him to leeward, arranged his fleet to await attack in the following order, from van to rear: The schooner "Chippewa," "Detroit," "Hunter," "Queen Charlotte," "Lady Prevost," "Little Belt."⁸⁶ This, he said in his official letter, was "according to a given plan, so that each ship [that is, the "Detroit" and "Queen Charlotte"] might be supported against the superior force of the two brigs opposed to them." The British vessels lay in column, in each other's wake, by the wind on the port tack, hove-to (stopped) with a topsail to the mast, heading to the southwest (position 1). Perry now modified some details of his disposition. It had been expected that the "Queen Charlotte" would precede the "Detroit," and the American commander had therefore placed the "Niagara" leading, as designated to fight the "Charlotte," the "Lawrence" following the "Niagara." This order was now reversed, and the "Caledonia" interposed between the two; the succession being "Lawrence," "Caledonia," "Niagara." Having more schooners than the enemy, he placed in the van two of the best, the "Scorpion" and the "Ariel"; the other four behind the "Niagara." His centre, therefore, the "Lawrence," "Caledonia," and "Niagara," were opposed to the "Detroit," "Hunter," and "Queen Charlotte." The long guns of the "Ariel," "Scorpion," and "Caledonia" supplied in measure the deficiency of gun power in the "Lawrence," while standing down outside of carronade range; the "Caledonia," with the rear schooners, giving a like support to the "Niagara." The "Ariel," and perhaps also the "Scorpion," was ordered to keep a little to windward of the "Lawrence." This was a not uncommon use of van vessels, making more hazardous any attempt of the opponent to tack and pass to windward, in order to gain the weather gage with its particular advantages (position 1).

The rear four schooners, as is frequently the case in long columns, were straggling somewhat at the time the signal to bear down was made; and they had difficulty in getting into action, being compelled to resort to the sweeps because the wind was light. It is not uncommon to see small vessels with low sails thus retarded, while larger are being urged forward by their lofty light canvas. The line otherwise having been formed, Perry stood down without regard to them. At quarter before noon the "Detroit" opened upon the "Lawrence" with her long guns. Ten minutes later the Americans began to reply. Finding the British fire at this range more destructive than he had anticipated, Perry made more sail upon the Lawrence. Word had already been passed by hail of trumpet to close up in the line, and for each vessel to come into action against her opponent, before designated. The "Lawrence"

⁸⁶ There was a question whether the "Hunter" was ahead or astern of the "Queen Charlotte." In the author's opinion the balance of evidence is as stated in the text. Perry rearranged his line with reference to the British, upon seeing their array. Had the "Charlotte" been next the "Detroit," as James puts her, it seems probable he would have placed the "Niagara" next the "Lawrence."

continued thus to approach obliquely, using her own long twelves, and backed by the long guns of the vessels ahead and astern, till she was within "canister range," apparently about two hundred and fifty yards, when she turned her side to the wind on the weather quarter of the "Detroit," bringing her carronade battery to bear (position 2). This distance was greater than desirable for carronades; but with a very light breeze, little more than two miles an hour, there was a limit to the time during which it was prudent to allow an opponent's raking fire to play, unaffected in aim by any reply. Moreover, much of her rigging was already shot away, and she was becoming unmanageable. The battle was thus joined by the commander-in-chief; but, while supported to his satisfaction by the "Scorpion" and "Ariel" ahead, and "Caledonia" astern, with their long guns, the "Niagara" did not come up, and her carronades failed to do their share. The captain of her opponent, the "Queen Charlotte," finding that his own carronades would not reach her, made sail ahead, passed the "Hunter," and brought his battery to the support of the "Detroit" in her contest with the "Lawrence" (Q₂). Perry's vessel thus found herself under the combined fire of the "Detroit," "Queen Charlotte," and in some measure of the "Hunter"; the armament of the last, however, was too trivial to count for much.

Elliott's first placing of the "Niagara" may, or may not, have been judicious as regards his particular opponent. The "Queen Charlotte's" twenty-fours would not reach him; and it may be quite proper to take a range where your own guns can tell and your enemy's cannot. Circumstance must determine. The precaution applicable in a naval duel may cease to be so when friends are in need of assistance; and when the British captain, seeing how the case stood, properly and promptly carried his ship forward to support his commander, concentrating two vessels upon Perry's one, the situation was entirely changed. The plea set up by Cooper, who fought Elliott's battle conscientiously, but with characteristic bitterness as well as shrewdness, that the "Niagara's" position, assigned in the line behind the "Caledonia," could not properly be left without signal, practically surrenders the case. It is applying the dry-rot system of fleet tactics in the middle of the eighteenth century to the days after Rodney and Nelson, and is further effectually disposed of by the consentient statement of several of the American captains, that their commander's dispositions were made with reference to the enemy's order; that is, that he assigned a special enemy's ship to a special American, and particularly the "Detroit" to the "Lawrence," and the "Queen Charlotte" to the "Niagara." The vessels of both fleets being so heterogeneous, it was not wise to act as with units nearly homogeneous, by laying down an order, the governing principle of which was mutual support by a line based upon its own intrinsic qualities. The considerations dictating Perry's dispositions were external to his fleet, not internal; in the enemy's order, not in his own. This was emphasized by his changing the previously arranged stations of the "Lawrence" and the "Niagara," when he saw Barclay's line. Lastly, he re-enforced all this by quoting to his subordinates Nelson's words, that no captain could go very far wrong who placed his vessel close alongside those of the enemy.

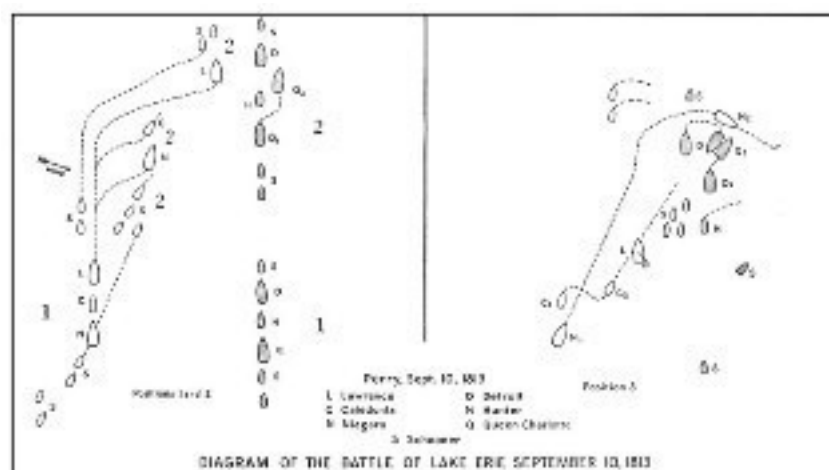


DIAGRAM OF THE BATTLE OF LAKE ERIE SEPTEMBER 10, 1813

Cooper, the ablest of Elliott's champions, has insisted so strongly upon the obligation of keeping the station *in the line*, as laid down, that it is necessary to examine the facts in the particular case. He rests the certainty of his contention on general principles, then long exploded, and further upon a sentence in Perry's charges, preferred in 1818, that "the commanding officer [Perry] issued, 1st, an order directing in what manner the line of battle should be formed ... and enjoined upon the commanders to preserve their stations in the line" thus laid down.⁸⁷ This is correct; but Cooper omits to give the words immediately following in the specification: "and in all cases to keep as near the commanding officer's vessel [the "Lawrence"] as possible."⁸⁸ Cooper also omits that which next succeeds: "2d, An order of attack, in which the 'Lawrence' was designated to attack the enemy's new ship (afterwards ascertained to have been named the 'Detroit'), and the 'Niagara' designated to attack the 'Queen Charlotte,' which orders were then communicated to all the commanders, including the said Captain Elliott, who for that purpose ... were by signal called together by the said commanding officer ... and expressly instructed that 'if, in the expected engagement, they laid their vessels close alongside of those of the enemy, they could not be out of the way.'"⁸⁹ An officer, if at once gallant and intelligent, finding himself behind a dull sailing vessel, as Cooper tells us the "Caledonia" was, could hardly desire clearer authority than the above to imitate his commanding officer when he made sail to close the enemy:—"Keep close to him," and follow up the ship which "the 'Niagara' was designated to attack."

Charges preferred are not technical legal proof, but, if duly scrutinized, they are statements equivalent in value to many that history rightly accepts; and, at all events, that which Cooper quotes is not duly scrutinized if that which he does not quote is omitted. He does indeed express a gloss upon them, in the words: "Though the 'Niagara' was ordered to direct her fire at the 'Queen Charlotte,' it could only be done from her station astern of the 'Caledonia,' ... without violating the primary order to preserve the line."⁹⁰ This does not correctly construe the natural meaning of Perry's full instructions. It is clear that, while he laid down a primary formation, "a line of battle," he also most properly qualified it by a contingent instruction, an "order of attack," designed to meet the emergency likely to occur in every fleet engagement, and which occurred here, when a slavish adherence to the line of battle would prevent intelligent support to the main effort. If he knew naval history, as his quotation from Nelson indicates, he also knew how many a battle had been discredibly lost by "keeping the line."

With regard to the line, however, it is apt to remark that in fleet battle, unless otherwise specially directed, the line of the assailant was supposed to be parallel to that of the defence, for the obvious reason that the attacking vessels should all be substantially at the same effective range. This distance, equal for all in fleets as usually constituted, would naturally be set, and in practice was set, by the commander-in-chief; his ship forming the point through which should be drawn the line parallel to the enemy. This rule, well established under Rodney, who died in 1792, was rigidly applicable between vessels of the same force, such as the "Lawrence" and "Niagara;" and whatever deductions might be made for the case of a light-framed vessel, armed with long guns, like the "Caledonia," keeping out of carronade distance of an opponent with heavy scantling, would not in the least apply to the "Niagara." For her, the standard of position was not, as Cooper insists, a half-cable's length from her next ahead, the "Caledonia;" but abreast her designated opponent, at the same distance as the "Lawrence" from the enemy's line. Repeated mishaps had established the rule that position was to be

⁸⁷ Cooper, *Battle of Lake Erie*, p. 63.

⁸⁸ See Mackenzie's *Life of Perry*, 5th edition, vol. ii. pp. 251-252. Perry's charges against Elliott, dated Aug. 8, 1818, are there given in full.

⁸⁹ See Mackenzie's *Life of Perry*, 5th edition, vol. ii. pp. 251-252.

⁹⁰ Cooper's *Battle of Lake Erie*, p. 63.

taken from the centre,—that is, from the commander-in-chief. Ships in line of battle, bearing down upon an enemy in like order, did not steer in each other's wake, unless specially ordered; and there is something difficult to understand in the "Niagara" with her topsail sharp aback to keep from running on board the "Caledonia," although the fact is in evidence. The expression in Perry's report of the action, "at 10 A.M. ... formed the line and bore up," would by a person familiar with naval battles be understood to mean that the line was first formed parallel to the enemy, the vessels following one another, after which they steered down for him, changing course together; they would then no longer be in each other's wake, but in echelon, or as the naval phrase then went, in bow and quarter line. Barclay confirms this, "At 10 the enemy bore up under easy sail, in a line abreast."⁹¹ Thus, when the distance desired by the commander-in-chief was reached,—a fact more often indicated by his example than by signal,—the helm would bring them again in line of battle, their broadsides bearing upon the enemy.

The technical point at issue is whether Perry, finding the long-gun fire of the "Detroit" more destructive than he had anticipated, and determining in consequence to shorten the period of its duration by changing his original plan, increasing sail beyond the speed of such slower vessels as the "Caledonia," had a right to expect that his subordinates would follow his example. In the opinion of the writer, he had, in the then condition of the theory and practice of fleet battles; his transfer of his own position transferred the line of battle in its entirety to the distance relative to the enemy which he himself was seeking to assume. Were other authority lacking, his action was warrant to his captains; but the expression in his report, "I made sail, and directed the other vessels to follow, for the purpose of closing with the enemy," causes increased regret that the exact facts were not ascertained by cross-examination before a Court-Martial.

Elliott's place therefore was alongside the "Queen Charlotte," so to engage her that she could attend to nothing else. This he did not do, and for failure the only possible excuse was inability, through lack of wind. The wind was light throughout, yet not so light but that the "Lawrence" closed with the "Detroit," and the "Queen Charlotte" with her flagship when she wished. None of Elliott's witnesses before the Court of Inquiry state that he made sail before the middle of the action, but they attribute the failure to get down to the lightness of the wind. They do state that, after the "Lawrence" was disabled, a breeze springing up, sail was made; which indicates that previously it had not been. Again, it is alleged by the testimony in favor of Elliott that much of the time the maintopsail was sharp aback, to keep from running into the "Caledonia;" a circumstance upon which Cooper dwells triumphantly, as showing that the "Niagara" was not by the wind and was in her place, close astern of the "Caledonia." Accepting the statements, they would show there was wind enough to fan the "Niagara" to—what was really her place—her commodore's aid; for in those days the distance between under fire and out of fire for efficient action was a matter of half a mile.⁹² Perry's formulated charge, addressed to the Navy Department, and notified to Elliott, but never brought to trial, was that when coming into action an order was passed by trumpet for the vessels astern to close up in the line; that a few moments previously to the enemy's opening fire the "Niagara" had been within hail of the "Lawrence," and nevertheless she was allowed to drop astern, and for two hours to remain at such distance from the enemy as to render useless all her battery except the two long guns. Perry himself made sail at the time the hail by trumpet was passed. The "Niagara" did not.

There is little reason for doubt that the tenor of Perry's instructions required Elliott to follow the "Queen Charlotte," and no doubt whatever that military propriety imperiously demanded it of him.

⁹¹ Barclay's Report, *Naval Chronicle*, vol. xxxi. p. 251.

⁹² The range of a 32 pdr. carronade, with which the "Niagara" was armed, throwing one solid shot, with ¼ degree elevation,—substantially point-blank,—was 260 yards; at 5 degrees, 1260 yards. The difference, 1000 yards, is just half a sea mile. A British professional writer of that day, criticising their commander's choice of position at Lake Champlain, says: "At 1000 or 1100 yards the elevation necessary to be given a carronade would have been so great that none but chance shots [from the Americans] could have taken effect; whereas, in closing, he gave up this advantage." *Naval Chronicle*, vol. xxxiii. p. 132.

The question of wind must be matter of inference from the incidents above stated: the movement of the "Lawrence" and "Queen Charlotte," and the bracing aback of the "Niagara's" topsail. A sentence in Perry's report apparently, but only apparently, attenuates the force of these. He said, "At half-past two, the wind springing up, Captain Elliott was enabled to bring his vessel, the 'Niagara,' gallantly into close action." Alluding to, without insisting on, Perry's subsequent statement that he endeavored to give as favorable a color as possible to Elliott's course, it is clear enough that these words simply state that Captain Elliott at 2.30 reached the range at which the "Lawrence" had fought since a little after noon.

Quitting now the discussion of proprieties, the order of events seems to have been as follows: Perry having taken the initiative of bearing down, under increased sail, Elliott remained behind, governed by, or availing himself of—two very different motives, not lightly to be determined, or assumed, by the historian—the technical point, long before abandoned in practice, that he could not leave his place in the line without a signal. Thus his action was controlled by the position of his next ahead in the line, the dull-sailing "Caledonia," a vessel differing radically from his own in armament, having two long and for that day heavy guns, quite equal in range and efficiency to the best of the "Detroit's,"⁹³ and therefore capable of good service, though possibly not of their best, from the distance at which Perry changed his speed. Elliott's battery was the same as Perry's. He thus continued until it became evident that, the "Queen Charlotte" having gone to the support of the "Detroit," the "Lawrence" was heavily overpowered. Then, not earlier than an hour after Perry bore down, he realized that his commander-in-chief would be destroyed under his eyes, unless he went to his support, and he himself would rest under the imputation of an inefficient spectator. He ordered the "Caledonia" to bear up, in order that he might pass (position 3; C₁, C₂). Though not demonstrably certain, it seems probable that the wind, light throughout, was now so fallen as to impede the retrieval of his position; the opportunity to close, used by Perry, had passed away. At all events it was not till between 2 and 2.30 that the "Niagara" arrived on the scene, within effective range of the carronades which constituted nine tenths of her battery.

With this began the second stage of the battle (3). Perry's bearing down, receiving only the support of the long guns of the "Caledonia" and of the schooners ahead of him, had brought the "Lawrence" into hot engagement with the "Detroit," supported a half hour later by the "Queen Charlotte." By a little after two o'clock both flagships were well-nigh disabled, hull and battery; the "Lawrence" most so, having but one gun left out of ten on the broadside. "At 2.30," wrote Barclay, "the Detroit was a perfect wreck, principally from the raking fire of the gunboats." Which gunboats? Evidently the "Ariel" and "Scorpion," for all agree that the rear four were at this hour still far astern, though not absolutely out of range. To these last was probably due the crippling of the "Lady Prevost," which by now had gone to leeward with her rudder injured. Up to this time, when the first scene closed, what had been the general course of the action? and what now the situation? Assuming, as is very probable, that Barclay did not open with his long 24's until Perry was a mile, two thousand yards, from him,—that distance requiring six degrees elevation for those guns,—an estimate of speeds and courses, as indicated by the evidence, would put the "Lawrence" in action, at two hundred and fifty yards, at 12.10. This calculation, made independently, received subsequent confirmation in consulting Barclay's report, which says 12.15.⁹⁴ The same time, for the duller "Caledonia" and the "Niagara,"

⁹³ The "Caledonia" had two long 24-pounders, and one other lighter gun, variously stated. The "Detroit's" heaviest were also two long 24's; she had besides one long 18, six long 12's, etc.

⁹⁴ With reference to times, always very difficult to establish, and often very important as bases of calculation, the following extract from the Diary of Dr. Usher Parsons, surgeon of the "Lawrence," possesses value; the more so as it is believed to have been copied from the log of the vessel, which afterwards disappeared. The phraseology is that of a log and a seaman, not of a physician. "At 10 called all hands to quarters. A quarter before meridian the enemy began action at one mile distance. In a half hour came within musket-shot of the enemy's new ship.... At 1.30, so entirely disabled we could work the brig no longer. At 2 P.M., most of the guns were dismounted, breechings gone, or carriages knocked to pieces. At half-past two, when not another gun could be worked or fired, Captain Perry hauled down the fighting flag [not the national flag], which bore this motto 'Don't give up the ship,' and repaired on

would place them one thousand yards from the British line. This range, for the 32-pounder carronades of the "Niagara," and the 24's of the "Queen Charlotte," required an elevation of from four to six degrees. Coupling this with the British statement, that the carronades of the "Charlotte" could not reach the "Niagara," we obtain probable positions, two hundred and fifty yards and one thousand yards, for the principal two American vessels at quarter-past noon.

From the general lightness and occasional failure of the wind up to 2 P.M., it is more than likely that no great change took place before that hour. What air there was might touch all alike, but would affect least the "Lawrence," "Detroit," and "Queen Charlotte," because their sails were being rent; and also they were in the centre of the cannonade, which is believed usually to kill the breeze. The tendency of the "Caledonia," "Niagara," and American vessels in rear of them, between 12.30 and 2 P.M., during which period, to use Barclay's report, "the action continued with great fury," would therefore be to approach slowly the scene where the "Lawrence," supported by the long guns of the "Ariel," "Scorpion," and "Caledonia," maintained the day against the "Detroit" and "Queen Charlotte," backed by the schooner "Chippewa" and the 6 and 4 pounder pop-guns of the "Hunter." How near they drew is a mere matter of estimate. Taking all together, it may be inferred that the "Niagara" had then been carried as close as five hundred to six hundred yards to the British line, but it would appear also towards its rear; rather, probably, that the British had advanced relatively to her, owing to her course being oblique to theirs.

The situation then was as follows: The "Lawrence," disabled, was dropping astern of the "Detroit," "Queen Charlotte," and "Hunter." More than half her ship's company lay dead or wounded on her decks. Her loss, 83 killed and wounded out of a total of 142,—sick included,⁹⁵—was mostly incurred before this. With only one gun left, she was a beaten ship, although her colors were up. The "Detroit" lay in the British line almost equally mauled. On her lee quarter,—that is, behind, but on the lee side,—and close to her, was the "Queen Charlotte." Her captain, second to Barclay, had been killed,—the first man hit on board,—and her first lieutenant knocked senseless; being succeeded in command by an officer whom Barclay described as of little experience. The first lieutenant of the "Detroit" was also wounded mortally; and Barclay himself, who already had been once hit in the thigh, was now a second time so severely injured,—being his eighth wound in battle, though now only thirty-two,—that he was forced at this critical instant to go below, leaving the deck with the second lieutenant. The "Hunter" was astern of her two consorts. The "Lady Prevost," fifth in the British order, had fallen to leeward with her rudder crippled. The position of the leading and rear British schooners is not mentioned, and is not important; the reliance of each being one long 9-pounder gun.

Before this, taking advantage of the breeze freshening, the "Niagara" had gone clear of the "Caledonia," on her windward side, and had stood to the southwest, towards the "Detroit." She had not at first either foresail or topgallantsails set; and since she passed the "Lawrence" to windward, she was then almost certainly over two hundred and fifty yards from the British line, for there is no conclusive proof that the "Lawrence" was nearer than that. Combining the narrative of the British commodore with that of his second lieutenant, who now took charge, it appears that Barclay, before going below, saw a boat passing from the "Lawrence" to the "Niagara," and that the second lieutenant, Inglis, after relieving him, found the "Niagara" on the weather beam of the "Detroit." Perry, seeing the "Lawrence" incapable of further offensive action, had decided to leave her and go on board the "Niagara," and in this brief interval was making his passage from one vessel to the other. After leaving the "Lawrence" astern, the "Niagara" had made sail; the foresail having been set, and the topgallantsails "in the act of being set, before Captain Perry came on board."⁹⁶ This necessarily prolonged the time of his passage, and may have given rise to the opprobrious British report that

board the 'Niagara,' where he raised it again. In ten minutes after we struck." Publications of the Rhode Island Historical Society, vol. vii. p. 244. This was called to the author's attention after the account in the text was written.

⁹⁵ Mackenzie's Life of Perry, vol. ii. p. 283.

⁹⁶ Evidence of Midshipman Montgomery of the "Niagara," before the Court of Inquiry.

she was making off. Her making sail as she did indicated that she had suffered little aloft; she had been out of carronade range, while her consort, still in fighting condition, was bearing the brunt; it was natural to conclude that she would not alone renew the action, now that the "Lawrence" was hopelessly disabled. The wish, too, may possibly have helped the thought. The "Lawrence," in fact, having kept her colors flying till Perry reached the "Niagara," struck immediately afterwards. Had she surrendered while he was on board, he could not honorably have quitted her; and the record was clearer by his reaching a fresh ship while the flag of the one he left was still up.

What next happened is under no doubt so far as the movements of the "Niagara" are concerned, though there is irreconcilable difference as to who initiated the action. Immediately after Perry came on board, Elliott left her, to urge forward the rear gunboats. Her helm was put up, and she bore down ahead of the "Detroit" to rake her; supported in so doing by the small vessels, presumably the "Ariel," "Scorpion," and "Caledonia." The British ship tried to wear, both to avoid being raked and to get her starboard battery into action; many of the guns on the broadside heretofore engaged being disabled. The "Charlotte" being on her lee quarter, and ranging ahead, the two fell foul, and so remained for some time. This condition gave free play to the American guns, which were soon after re-enforced by those of the rear gunboats; enabled, like the "Niagara," to close with the freshening breeze. After the two British vessels got clear, another attempt was made to bring their batteries to bear; but the end was inevitable, and is best told in the words of the officer upon whom devolved the duty of surrendering the "Detroit." "The ship lying completely unmanageable, every brace cut away, the mizzen-topmast and gaff down, all the other masts badly wounded, not a stay left forward, hull shattered very much, a number of guns disabled, and the enemy's squadron raking both ships ahead and astern, none of our own in a position to support us, I was under the painful necessity of answering the enemy to say we had struck, the 'Queen Charlotte' having previously done so."⁹⁷ A Canadian officer taken prisoner at the battle of the Thames saw the "Detroit," a month later, at Put-in Bay. "It would be impossible," he wrote, "to place a hand upon that broadside which had been exposed to the enemy's fire without covering some portion of a wound, either from grape, round, canister, or chain shot."⁹⁸ Her loss in men was never specifically given. Barclay reported that of the squadron as a whole to be forty-one killed, ninety-four wounded. He had lost an arm at Trafalgar; and on this occasion, besides other injuries, the one remaining to him was so shattered as to be still in bandages a year later, when he appeared before the Court Martial which emphatically acquitted him of blame. The loss of the American squadron was twenty-seven killed, ninety-six wounded; of whom twenty-two killed and sixty-one wounded were on board the "Lawrence."

Thus was the battle of Lake Erie fought and won. Captain Barclay not only had borne himself gallantly and tenaciously against a superior force,—favored in so doing by the enemy attacking in detail,—but the testimony on his trial showed that he had labored diligently during the brief period of his command, amid surroundings of extreme difficulty, to equip his squadron, and to train to discipline and efficiency the heterogeneous material of which his crews were composed. The only point not satisfactorily covered is his absence when Perry was crossing the bar. In his defence his allusion to this incident is very casual,—resembles somewhat gliding rapidly over thin ice; but the Court raised no question, satisfied, probably, with the certainty that the honor of the flag had not suffered in the action. On the American side, since the history of a country is not merely the narrative of principal transactions, but the record also of honor reflected upon the nation by the distinguished men it produces, it is proper to consider the question of credit, which has been raised in this instance. There can be no doubt that opportunity must be seized as it is offered; for accident or chance may prevent its recurrence. Constituted as Perry's squadron was, the opportunity presented to him could be seized only by standing down as he did, trusting that the other vessels would follow the example of

⁹⁷ Naval Chronicle, vol. xxxi. p. 252.

⁹⁸ Richardson, War of 1812, p. 243.

their commander. The shifting of the wind in the morning, and its failure during the engagement, alike testify to the urgency of taking the tide as it serves. There was no lagging, like Chauncey's, to fetch up heavy schooners; and the campaign was decided in a month, instead of remaining at the end of three months a drawn contest, to lapse thenceforth into a race of ship-building. Had the "Niagara" followed closely, there could have been no doubling on the "Lawrence"; and Perry's confidence would have been justified as well as his conduct. The latter needs no apology. Without the help of the "Niagara," the "Detroit" was reduced to a "defenceless state," and a "perfect wreck,"⁹⁹ by the carronades of the "Lawrence," supported by the raking fire of the "Ariel" and "Scorpion." Both the expressions quoted are applied by the heroic Barclay to her condition at 2.30, when, as he also says, the "Niagara" was perfectly fresh. Not only was the "Detroit" thus put out of action, but the "Charlotte" was so damaged that she surrendered before her. To this the "Caledonia's" two long twenty-fours had contributed effectively. The first lieutenant of the "Queen Charlotte" testified that up to the time he was disabled, an hour or an hour and a quarter after the action began, the vessel was still manageable; that "the 'Niagara' engaged us on our quarter, out of carronade range, with what long guns she had; but our principal injury was from the 'Caledonia,' who laid on our beam, with two long 24-pounders on pivots, also out of carronade-shot distance."¹⁰⁰

Is it to Perry, or to Elliott, that is due the credit of the "Niagara's" action in bearing up across the bows of the "Detroit"? This is the second stage of the battle; the bringing up the reserves. An absolute reply is impossible in the face of the evidence, sworn but not cross-examined. A probable inference, which in the present writer amounts to conviction, is attainable. Before the Court of Inquiry, in 1815, Captain Elliott put the question to several of his witnesses, "Was not the 'Niagara's' helm up and she standing direct for the 'Detroit' when Captain Perry came on board?" They replied, "Yes." All these were midshipmen. By a singular fatality most of the "Niagara's" responsible officers were already dead, and the one surviving lieutenant had been below, stunned, when Perry reached the deck. It may very possibly be that this answer applied only to the first change of course, when Elliott decided to leave his position behind the "Caledonia"; but if it is claimed as covering also the subsequent bearing up eight points (at right angles), to cross the bows of the "Detroit," it is to be observed that no mention of this very important movement is made in a letter addressed to the Secretary of the Navy, October 13, 1813, one month after the battle, drawn up for the express purpose of vindicating Elliott, and signed by all the lieutenants of the "Niagara," and by the purser, who formerly had been a lieutenant in the navy. Their account was that Perry, on reaching the ship, said he feared the day was lost; that Elliott replied it was not, that he would repair on board the rear schooners, and bring them up; that he did so, and "*the consequence was that in ten minutes the 'Detroit' and 'Queen Charlotte' with the 'Lady Prevost,' struck to us, and soon after the whole of the enemy's squadron followed their example.*"¹⁰¹ This attributes the victory to the half-dozen long guns of the four schooners, mostly inferior in caliber to the nine carronades on board a single vessel, the "Niagara," raking within pistol-shot of antagonists already in the condition described by Barclay. Such a conclusion traverses all experience of the tactical advantage of guns massed under one captain over a like number distributed in several commands, and also contravenes the particular superiority of carronades at close quarters. An officer of the "Detroit," who was on deck throughout, testified that the "Lawrence" had engaged at musket-shot, the "Niagara," when she bore down under Perry, at pistol-shot. Barclay, and his surviving lieutenant, Inglis, both lay most weight upon this action of the "Niagara," from which arose also the fouling of the two largest British ships.

Perry's charges of 1818 against Elliott formulated deliberate statements, under the responsible expectation of cross-examination under oath. This is his account: "When the commanding officer

⁹⁹ Barclay's Report.

¹⁰⁰ British Court Martial Record.

¹⁰¹ Navy Department, MSS. Miscellaneous Letters. My italics.

[Perry] went on board the 'Niagara,' Captain Elliott was keeping her on a course by the wind, which would in a few minutes have carried said vessel entirely out of action, to prevent which, and in order to bring the said vessel into close action with the enemy, the said commanding officer was under the necessity of heaving-to, stopping and immediately wearing said vessel, and altering her course at least eight points"; that is, perpendicular to the direction before steered. Against this solemn and serious charge is unquestionably to be placed the commendatory mention and letter given by Perry to Elliott immediately after the battle. Upon these also he had to expect the sharpest interrogation, to the mortification attendant upon which he could only oppose evidence extenuative of, but in no case justifying, undeniable self-contradiction. If the formal charge was true, no excuse can be admitted for the previous explicit commendation. As a matter of historical inquiry, however, such contradictions have to be met, and must be weighed in the light of all the testimony. The author's conclusion upon the whole is that, as Perry's action in first standing down insured decisive action, so by him was imparted to the "Niagara" the final direction which determined victory. The influence of the rear gunboats brought up by Elliott was contributive, but not decisive.

In short, the campaign of Lake Erie was brought to an immediate successful issue by the ready initiative taken by Perry when he found the British distant fire more destructive than he expected, and by his instant acceptance of necessary risk, in standing down exposed to a raking cannonade to which he for a long while could not reply. If, as the author holds, he was entitled to expect prompt imitation by the "Niagara," the risk was actual, but not undue. As it was, though the "Lawrence" surrendered, it was not until she had, with the help of gunboats stationed by Perry for that object, so damaged both her opponents that they were incapable of further resistance. In the tactical management of the "Lawrence" and her supports was no mere headlong dash, but preparation adequate to conditions. Had the "Niagara" followed, the "Lawrence" need never have struck. The contemporary incidents on Erie and Ontario afford an instructive commentary upon Napoleon's incisive irony, that "War cannot be waged without running risks." There has been sufficient quotation from Chauncey to indicate why the campaign on Ontario dragged through two seasons, and then left the enemy in control. Small as the scale and the theatre of these naval operations, they illustrate the unvarying lesson that only in offensive action can defensive security be found.

The destruction of the British naval force decided the campaign in the Northwest by transferring the control of the water. Its general military results were in this respect final. Nothing occurred to modify them during the rest of the war. Detroit and Michigan territory fell back into the hands of the United States; and the allegiance of the Indians to the British cause, procured by Brock's sagacious daring a twelvemonth before, but rudely shaken by the events narrated, was destroyed by the death of their great leader, Tecumseh, a month later in the battle of the Thames, itself the direct consequence of Perry's success. The frontier was henceforth free from the Indian terror, which had hitherto disquieted it from the Maumee to Cleveland.

A more far-reaching political issue was also here definitely settled. A sense of having betrayed the Indian interests in the previous treaties of 1783 and 1794 was prevalent in British official circles, and in their counsels a scheme had been circulated for constituting an independent Indian territory, under joint guarantee of the two nations, between their several dominions. This would be locally within the boundaries of the United States; the sole jurisdiction of which was thus to be limited and trammelled, because open to continual British representation and reclamation, based upon treaty stipulations.¹⁰² This infringement upon the perfect sovereignty of the nation inside its own borders,

¹⁰² This scheme appears outlined in a letter of Oct. 5, 1812, to Lord Bathurst from Sir George Prevost, who in support of it adduces Brock's opinion (Canadian Archives MSS). Bathurst replied, Dec. 9, 1812, "I so entirely concur in the expediency of the suggestions contained in your despatch, as to the necessity of securing the territories of the Indians from encroachment, that I have submitted it to His Majesty's Secretary for Foreign Affairs, in order that whenever negotiations for peace may be entered into, the security of their possessions may not be either compromised or forgotten." (British Colonial Office Records). Prevost transmitted a copy of the letter to Admiral Warren, in his early diplomatic capacity as a peace envoy. Gordon Drummond, the successor of Brock, and later of Prevost,

in favor of savage communities and under foreign guarantee, was one of the propositions formally brought forward as a *sine qua non* by the British negotiators at Ghent. Although by that time the United States stood alone face to face with Great Britain, at whose full disposal were now the veterans of the Peninsular War, and the gigantic navy, which the abdication of Napoleon had released from all other opponents, the American commissioners refused with dignity to receive the proposition even for reference. "It is not necessary," they replied, "to refer such demands to the American Government for its instructions. They will only be a fit subject for deliberation when it becomes necessary to decide upon the expediency of an absolute surrender of national independence."¹⁰³

The envoys of the United States were able to be firm, because secure of indignant support by their people; but it is beyond question that two naval victories had arrayed upon their side, at the moment, the preponderance of military argument, which weighs so heavily in treaties of peace. New Orleans was yet in the future, with adverse chances apparent; but, owing to the victory of Perry, the United States was in firm military tenure of the territory, the virtual cession of which was thus demanded. A year after Perry, McDonough's equally complete success on Lake Champlain, by insuring control of the water route for invasion, rolled back the army of Peninsular veterans under Prevost, at a season of the year which forbade all hope of renewing the enterprise until another spring. Great Britain was too eager to end twenty years of continued war to brook further delay. The lake campaigns of 1813 and 1814 thus emphasized the teaching of history as to the influence of control of the water upon the course of events; and they illustrate also the too often forgotten truth, that it is not by brilliant individual feats of gallantry or skill, by ships or men, but by the massing of superior forces, that military issues are decided. For, although on a small scale, the lakes were oceans, and the forces which met on them were fleets; and as, on a wider field and in more tremendous issues, the fleets of Great Britain saved their country and determined the fortunes of Europe, so Perry and McDonough averted from the United States, without further fighting, a rectification of frontier—as it is euphemistically styled,—the effecting of which is one of the most fruitful causes and frequent results of war in every continent and at every period.

Note.—For the battle of Lake Erie, the most important original data are the Court Martial upon Barclay (British Records Office), and the Court of Inquiry held at Elliott's request, in April, 1815. The proceedings and testimony of the latter are published in the appendix to a "Biographical Notice of Commodore Jesse D. Elliott," by Russell Jarvis, Philadelphia, 1835. Perry's Report of the battle, Sept. 13, 1813, is in American State Papers, Naval Affairs, vol. i. p. 295. Barclay's report is in Naval Chronicle, vol. xxxi. pp. 250-253, as well as in the record of the Court. Jarvis, and Mackenzie's Life of Perry (5th edition), give a large number of affidavits by officers present in the engagement, and Mackenzie gives also a copy of the charges preferred by Perry in 1818 against Elliott. In the controversy which arose over the battle, Mackenzie, in the appendix to the fifth edition of Perry's Life, Duer, and Tristram Burges, Battle of Lake Erie (Boston, 1839), are the principal champions on Perry's side; Jarvis (as above) and J. Fenimore Cooper, Battle of Lake Erie, on the side of Elliott; but the latter himself published several vindications of his conduct. The usual naval histories, American and British, may be consulted, and there are also incidental mentions and reports in Niles' Register and the British Naval Chronicle, which will be found useful.

expressed the same interest (Canadian Archives MSS., April 2, 1814).

¹⁰³ American State Papers, Foreign Affairs, vol. iii. pp. 710-713.

CHAPTER XII

THE CAMPAIGN OF 1813 ON THE LAKES AND NORTHERN FRONTIER, AFTER THE BATTLE OF LAKE ERIE

Perry's victory was promptly followed up by himself and Harrison. Besides its ultimate influence on the general course of events, already mentioned, it produced immediate military consequences, the effect of which was felt throughout the lake frontier, from Detroit to Champlain. That success elsewhere did not follow was due to other causes than remissness on their part to improve the occasion. Although the "Lawrence" had to be sent back to Erie for extensive repairs, and the "Detroit" and "Queen Charlotte" rolled their masts overboard at anchor in Put-in Bay on the third day after the battle, Perry within a week had his squadron and four of the prizes sufficiently in repair to undertake the transport of the army. This timely facility, which betrayed the enemy's expectations, was due largely to the "Lawrence" having borne the brunt of the action. Had the injuries been more distributed, the delay of repairs must have been greater. The British Adjutant General at Niagara, Harvey, the hero of Stoney Creek, wrote on hearing of the battle, "After an action of three hours and a half, the enemy's vessels must have received so much damage as not to be in a situation to undertake anything for some time."¹⁰⁴ By September 26 Harrison had assembled his forces at an island in the lake, called Middle Sister, twelve miles from Malden. On the 27th they were conveyed to Malden, partly in vessels and partly in boats, the weather being fine. By September 30 Sandwich and Detroit were occupied; Procter retreating eastward up the valley of the Thames. Harrison pursued, and on October 5 overtook the British and Indians at a settlement called Moravian Town. Here they made a stand and were defeated, with the destruction or dispersal of the entire body, in an action known to Americans as the battle of the Thames. Procter himself, with some two hundred men, fled eastward and reached the lines at Burlington Heights, at the head of Ontario, whither Vincent had again retreated on October 9, immediately upon receiving news of the disaster at Moravian Town.

After this the Western Indians fell wholly away from the British alliance, and Harrison returned to Detroit, satisfied that it was useless to pursue the enemy by land. The season was thought now too far advanced for operations against Michilimackinac, which was believed also to be so effectually isolated, by the tenure of Lake Erie, as to prevent its receiving supplies. This was a mistake, there being a route, practicable though difficult, from Toronto to Georgian Bay, on Lake Huron, by which necessary stores were hurried through before the winter closed in. Mackinac remained in British hands to the end of the war.

At Detroit Harrison and Perry received orders to transport a body of troops down Lake Erie, to re-enforce the army on the general scene of operations centring round Lake Ontario. By the control of the Niagara peninsula, consequent upon Vincent's necessary retreat after the battle of the Thames, the American communications were complete and secure throughout from Detroit to Sackett's Harbor, permitting free movement from end to end. The two officers embarked together, taking with them thirteen hundred men in seven vessels. October 24 they reached Buffalo. Harrison went on to Niagara, but Perry was here detached from the lake service, and returned to the seaboard, leaving Elliott to command on Erie. In acknowledging the order for Perry's removal, Chauncey regretted the granting of his application as a bad precedent; and further took occasion to remark that when he himself was sent to the lakes the only vessel on them owned by the United States was the brig "Oneida." "Since then two fleets have been created, one of which has covered itself with glory: the other, though less

¹⁰⁴ Canadian Archives MSS.

fortunate, has not been less industrious." It may be questioned whether the evident difference of achievement was to be charged to fortune, or to relative quickness to seize opportunity, when offered.

The successes on Lake Erie had come very appositely for a change recently introduced into the plans of the Government, and then in process of accomplishment. Since the middle of the summer the Secretary of War, Armstrong, who at this time guided the military counsels, had become disgusted by the fruitlessness of the movements at the west end of Ontario, and had reverted to his earlier and sounder prepossession in favor of an attack upon either Kingston or Montreal. It had now been for some time in contemplation to transfer to Sackett's Harbor all the troops that could be spared from Niagara, leaving there only sufficient to hold Fort George, with Fort Niagara on the American side, as supports to a defensive attitude upon that frontier. Assured command of the lake was essential to the safety and rapidity of the concentration at Sackett's, and this led to the next meeting of the squadrons.

General James Wilkinson, an officer advanced in years, of extremely poor reputation, personal as well as professional, and of broken constitution, had been either selected by, or forced upon,¹⁰⁵ the Secretary of War to replace Dearborn in command of the New York frontier and conduct of the proposed operations. To his suggested doubts as to the direction of effort, whether westward or eastward, Armstrong had replied definitely and finally on August 8: "Operations westward of Kingston, if successful, leave the strength of the enemy unbroken. It is the great depot of his resources. So long as he retains this, and keeps open his communication with the sea, he will not want the means of multiplying his naval and other defences, and of re-enforcing or renewing the war in the West." He then explained that there were two ways of reducing the place; by direct attack, or, indirectly, by cutting its communications with the lower river. To accomplish the latter, a demonstration of direct attack should be made by part of the troops, while the main body should move rapidly down the St. Lawrence to Madrid (or Hamilton),¹⁰⁶ in New York, and cross there to the Canadian side, seizing and fortifying a bluff on the north bank to control the road and river. This done, the rest of the force should march upon Montreal. The army division on Champlain was to co-operate by a simultaneous movement and subsequent junction. The project, in general outline, had been approved by the President. In transmitting it Armstrong wrote to Wilkinson, "After this exposition, it is unnecessary to add, that, in conducting the present campaign, you will make Kingston your *primary object*, and that you will *choose* (as circumstances may warrant), between a *direct* and *indirect* attack upon that post."¹⁰⁷

Contemporary and subsequent movements are to be regarded in their bearing on this plan. The first object was the concentration at Sackett's, for which some three thousand troops were to be withdrawn from the Niagara frontier. Wilkinson arrived at Sackett's from Washington, August 20. Chauncey was then in port, after the gale which had driven both him and Yeo down the lake. He sailed on the 29th. Wilkinson followed shortly, reaching Fort George September 4. On the 5th, Armstrong himself came to Sackett's, having established the War Department in northern New York for the campaign. On the 10th Perry destroyed the British squadron on Lake Erie, opening the way for Harrison's victorious entry to Upper Canada and subsequent transfer to Niagara.

Some days before the battle of the Thames the embarkation from Niagara for Sackett's Harbor took place under cover of the naval operations. After Yeo had gone into Amherst Bay on September 12, as already mentioned,¹⁰⁸ Chauncey remained cruising in the neighborhood till the 17th, when he went to Sackett's, the enemy having got into Kingston. On the 19th he sailed again for Niagara, to support the movement of the army. He arrived on the 24th, and found there a report of Perry's

¹⁰⁵ Scott says, "The selection of this unprincipled imbecile was not the blunder of Secretary Armstrong." Memoirs, vol. i. p. 94, note.

¹⁰⁶ Both these names are used, confusingly, by Armstrong. Madrid was the township, Hamilton a village on the St. Lawrence, fifteen to twenty miles below the present Ogdensburg.

¹⁰⁷ American State Papers, Military Affairs, vol. i. p. 464. Armstrong's italics.

¹⁰⁸ Ante, p. 60.

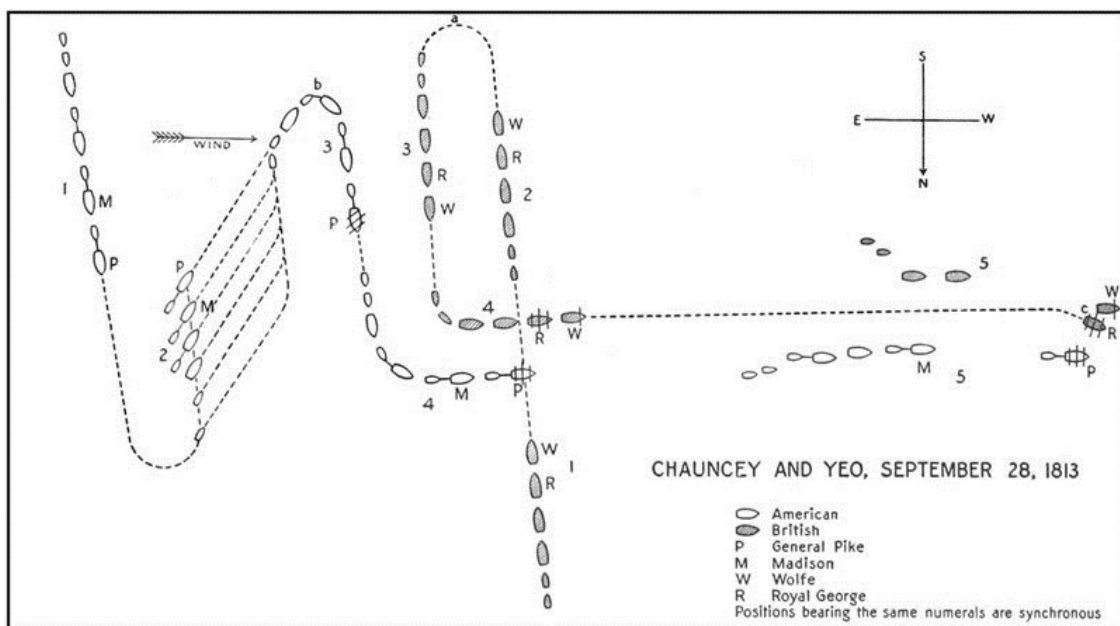
victory, which had been received on the 22d. On the 25th embarkation began, and Wilkinson hoped that the whole body, three thousand strong, would start on their coasting voyage along the south shore of the lake on the 27th; but after dark, to conceal the direction taken. At this juncture, on September 26, Chauncey heard that the British fleet was at York, which was confirmed by a lookout vessel despatched by him. As Yeo, unless checked, might molest the transportation of the troops, it became necessary first to seek him; but owing to a head wind the American squadron could not leave the river till the evening of the 27th.

As the schooner gun-vessels sailed badly, the "Pike," the "Madison," and the "Sylph" each took one in tow on the morning of the 28th, steering for York, where the British fleet was soon after sighted. As the Americans stood in, the British quitted the bay to gain the open lake; for their better manœuvring powers as a squadron would have scope clear of the land. They formed on the port tack, running south with the wind fresh at east (Positions 1). When about three miles distant, to windward, Chauncey put his fleet on the same tack as the enemy and edged down towards him (Positions 2). At ten minutes past noon, the Americans threatening to cut off the rearmost two of the British, Yeo tacked his column in succession, beginning with his own ship, the leader (a), heading north toward his endangered vessels, between them and the opponents. When round, he opened fire on the "General Pike." As this movement, if continued, would bring the leading and strongest British ships upon the weaker Americans astern, Chauncey put his helm up and steered for the "Wolfe" (b), as soon as the "General Pike" came abreast of her; the American column following in his wake. The "Wolfe" then kept away, and a sharp encounter followed between the two leaders, in which the rest of the squadrons took some share (Positions 3).

At the end of twenty minutes the "Wolfe" lost her main and mizzen topmasts, and main yard. With all her after sail gone, there was nothing to do but to keep before the wind, which was fair for the British posts at the head of the bay (Positions 4). The American squadron followed; but the "Madison," the next heaviest ship to the "Pike," superior in battery power to the "Wasp" and "Hornet" of the ocean navy, and substantially equal to the second British ship, the "Royal George," "having a heavy schooner in tow, prevented her commander from closing near enough to do any execution with her carronades."¹⁰⁹ The explanation requires explanation, which is not forthcoming. Concern at such instants for heavy schooners in tow is not the spirit in which battles are won or campaigns decided; and it must be admitted that Commodore Chauncey's solicitude to keep his schooners up with his real fighting vessels, to conform, at critical moments, the action of ships of eight hundred and six hundred tons, like the "Pike" and "Madison," to those of lake craft of under one hundred, is not creditable to his military instincts. He threw out a signal, true, for the fleet to make all sail; but as he held on to the schooner he had in tow, neither the "Madison" nor "Sylph" dropped hers. His flagship, individually, appears to have been well fought; but anxiety to keep a squadron united needs to be tempered with discretion of a kind somewhat more eager than the quality commonly thus named, and which on occasion can drop a schooner, or other small craft, in order to get at the enemy. As the dismasted "Wolfe" ran to leeward, "the 'Royal George,'" says the American naval historian Cooper, "luffed up in noble style across her stern to cover the English commodore" (c), and "kept yawing athwart her stern, delivering her broadsides in a manner to extort exclamations of delight from the American fleet (Positions 5). She was commanded by Captain Mulcaster." Her fighting mate, the "Madison," had a heavy schooner in tow. This interposition of the "Royal George" was especially timely if, as Yeo states, Chauncey was holding at a distance whence his long twenty-fours told, while the "Wolfe's" carronades did not reach.

¹⁰⁹ Chauncey's report, Oct. 1, 1813, Niles' Register, vol. v. p. 134. The extract has been verified from the original in the Captains' Letters. The report of Sir James Yeo (British Records Office) agrees substantially with Chauncey's accounts of the movements, but adds that upon the fall of the "Wolfe's" topmasts the "Pike" immediately took a distance out of carronade range, whence her long 24's would tell. "I can assure you, Sir, that the great advantage the enemy have over us from their long 24-pounders almost precludes the possibility of success, unless we can force them to close action, which they have ever avoided with the most studied circumspection."

At quarter before three Chauncey relinquished pursuit. Both squadrons were then about six miles from the head of the lake, running towards it before a wind which had increased to a gale, with a heavy sea. Ahead of them was a lee shore, and for the Americans a hostile coast. "Though we might succeed in driving him on shore, the probability was we should go on shore also, he amongst his friends, we amongst our enemies; and after the gale abated, if he could get off one or two vessels out of the two fleets, it would give him as completely the command of the lake as if he had twenty vessels. Moreover, he was covered at his anchorage by part of his army and several small batteries thrown up for the purpose." For these reasons, the commodore "without hesitation relinquished the opportunity then presenting itself of acquiring individual reputation at the expense of my country." The British squadron anchored without driving ashore. The American returned to Niagara, having received a certain amount of damage aloft, and one of the purchased schooners having lost her foremast; but the killed and wounded by the enemy amounted to only five, all on board the "General Pike." That vessel lost also twenty-two men by the bursting of a gun.



CHAUNCEY AND YEO, SEPTEMBER 28, 1813

Chauncey had been in consultation with Armstrong at Sackett's, and understood perfectly the plans of the Government. On his return to Niagara he was requested by Wilkinson to keep watch over the hostile squadron in its present position under Burlington Heights, so as to cover the eastward movement of the troops, which began October 1. On the 2d the last transport had gone, and Wilkinson himself set out for Sackett's; bringing, as he reported, thirty-five hundred men. On the 3d the British fleet was seen well towards the west end of the lake; but on the 4th a vessel sent especially to reconnoitre came back with the report that it was no longer there. This proved to be a mistake; but, as it came from a careful and competent officer, Chauncey inferred that the enemy had given him the slip and gone to the eastward. He therefore ran down the lake, to cover the arrival of the troops as he had their departure. On the afternoon of the 5th, near Kingston, he captured six out of seven transports bound thither with re-enforcements. Of these, two were the schooners taken by Yeo in the engagement of August 10, which the British had not thought fit to add to their fleet, but used simply as carriers; mounting their guns on the fortifications of Kingston. Cooper justly remarks, "This sufficiently proves the equivocal advantage enjoyed by the possession of these craft." Chauncey himself, at the end of the campaign, recommended the building of "one vessel of the size of the 'Sylph,'"—three hundred and forty tons,— "in lieu of all the heavy schooners; for really they are of no

manner of service, except to carry troops or use as gunboats."¹¹⁰ The reflection is inevitable,—Why, then, had he allowed them so to hamper his movements? It is to be feared that the long ascendancy of the gunboat policy in the councils of the Government had sapped the professional intelligence even of some naval officers.

The capture of the detachment going from York to Kingston showed that the British had divined the general character of the American plans. In fact, as early as October 2, Major General de Rottenburg, who after an interval had succeeded to Brock's place in Upper Canada, as lieutenant governor and commander of the forces, had started with two regiments to re-enforce Kingston, leaving the Niagara peninsula again under the command of General Vincent. On October 6 Chauncey's squadron entered Sackett's, where Wilkinson had arrived on the 4th. The general began at once to remonstrate strenuously with Armstrong against an attempt upon Kingston, as delaying and possibly frustrating what he saw fit to style the chief object of the campaign, the capture of Montreal. The Secretary listened patiently, but overruled him.¹¹¹ Kingston had been the principal object from the beginning, and still so continued; but, if the garrison should be largely re-enforced, if the British fleet should enter the harbor, or if the weather should make navigation of the lake dangerous for the transports, then the troops should proceed direct for Montreal by the river. Yeo apparently returned to Kingston soon after this; but when Chauncey left port on October 16, to bring forward from the Genesee River a detachment under Colonel Winfield Scott, he still had the understanding that Kingston was first to be attacked.

On October 19, however, the Secretary reconsidered his decision. The concentration of the army at Sackett's had not been effected until the 18th. On the 16th de Rottenburg, having coasted the north shore of the lake, reached Kingston with his two regiments, reckoned by Armstrong at fifteen hundred men. These raised to twenty-two hundred the garrison previously estimated at seven to eight hundred.¹¹² The numbers of the Americans were diminishing by sickness, and no further re-enforcement was to be expected, excepting by uniting with the Champlain division. This had been on the move from Plattsburg since September 19, and was now at Chateaugay, on the Chateaugay River; a local centre, whence roads running northeast, to the river's junction with the St. Lawrence, immediately opposite the island of Montreal, and west to St. Regis on the St. Lawrence, forty miles higher up, gave facilities for moving in either direction to meet Wilkinson's advance. By a letter of October 12 from its commander, General Wade Hampton, this corps numbered "four thousand effective infantry, with a well-appointed train." To bring it by land to Sackett's, over a hundred miles distant, was considered too protracted and laborious in the state of the roads; better utilize the current of the St. Lawrence to carry Wilkinson down to it. In view of these circumstances, and of the supposed increased strength of Kingston, Armstrong decided to abandon the attack upon the latter and to move against Montreal, which was believed to be much weaker, as well as strategically more important.¹¹³ The movement was hazardous; for, as planned, ultimate success depended upon junction with another corps, which had natural difficulties of its own to contend with, while both were open to obstruction by an active enemy. As a distinguished military critic has said, "The Americans committed upon this occasion the same error that the British Government did in their plan for Burgoyne's march from the head of Champlain to Albany,—that of making the desired result of an important operation depend upon the success of all its constituent or component parts." It is one of the most common of blunders in war. Wilkinson and Hampton did not meet. Both moved, but one had retreated before the other arrived.

¹¹⁰ Chauncey to Navy Department, Dec. 17, 1813. Captains' Letters.

¹¹¹ Armstrong, Oct. 5, 1813. American State Papers, Military Affairs, vol. i. p. 470.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 471.

¹¹³ Armstrong, Oct. 20, 1813. American State Papers, Military Affairs, vol. i. p. 473.

In fact, while Montreal, as the most important point in Canada for the British, except Quebec, and at the same time the one most accessible to the United States, was the true objective of the latter, concentration against it should have been made in territory entirely under American control, about Lake Champlain, and the advance begun early in the season. By its own choice the Government had relinquished this obvious and natural course, and throughout the summer had directed its efforts to the westward. When the change of operations from Niagara to the lower end of the lake was initiated, in the beginning of October, it was already too late to do more than attack Kingston, the strength of which appears to have been gravely over-estimated. Armstrong had good military ideas; but at this critical moment he seems to have faltered in the presence of an immediate difficulty, and to have sought escape from it by a hasty consent to a side measure, contrary to the soundest teachings of war.

Not the least of objections was the risk to which Sackett's Harbor, the naval base, was to be exposed. After October 16, Chauncey had remained cruising between there and Kingston, covering the approaches to the St. Lawrence. His intended trip to Genesee, to bring up Scott's eight hundred regulars, had been abandoned at the urgent demand of Wilkinson, who, while the troops were being transferred from Sackett's to Grenadier Island, at the outlet of the lake to the river, "would not allow any part of the fleet to be absent four days without throwing the responsibility, in case of a failure of his expedition, wholly on the navy."¹¹⁴ The commodore did not learn of the new scheme until October 30, ten days after its adoption, when he was asked to cover the rear of the army from pursuit by water, by taking position inside the St. Lawrence. While objecting strongly to the change of plan, he of course consented to afford all the co-operation in his power; but he wrote to the Navy Department, "If Sir James Yeo knows the defenceless situation of Sackett's, he can take advantage of a westerly wind while I am in the river, run over and burn it; for to the best of my knowledge there are no troops left there except sick and invalids, nor are there more than three guns mounted."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Scott's Memoirs, vol. i. p. 106. In consequence, though Scott personally succeeded in joining the movement from which so much was expected, this considerable number of regulars were withdrawn from it. They ultimately reached Sackett's, forming the nucleus of a garrison.

¹¹⁵ Captains' Letters, Oct. 30, 1813.

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