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## THE BATTLE OF CHIPPAWA: INFANTRY TACTICS IN THE WAR OF 1812

BY JEFFREY KIMBALL\*

AMERICAN farmer-frontiersmen in the War of 1812 preferred bush fighting and sniping to regimented mass firing on open fields. Unfortunately for the individualistic Americans, irregular warfare was inadequate to the task of driving British regulars from the Canadas. Military tactics had to conform to the technological limitations of the dominant weapon of the time—the muzzle-loading, smooth-bore, flintlock musket.<sup>1</sup>

Though its .70 caliber, one-ounce, soft lead ball had great stopping and killing power, the musket was inaccurate, limited in range, and slow to reload. Beyond 300 yards only an expert could hit a man-sized target. Against a large mass of troops the effective killing range was about 250 yards, but even at 100 yards a regimental volley might strike only five men of the enemy regiment. To load and fire the single-shot weapon required at least twelve separate movements in a standing position. Well-drilled troops could at best deliver three or four rounds per minute. Under battlefield conditions the musket misfired every six pulls on the trigger, for the flint might wear, the powder dampen, or the touchhole clog. Soldiers scattered haphazardly on an open field and firing individually had little chance of killing enough of the enemy to attain decision in battle. Before reloading they might be trampled by cavalry or bayoneted by enemy infantry advancing in mass. Massed musketeers, in close files of two or three ranks, afforded mutual protection and partly overcame inaccurate and delayed fire with the volume and weight of their volleys.

To function effectively under fire, the men in the unwieldy formations of this age of warfare needed a certain amount of group elan, discipline, and skill in maneuvering and firing shoulder-to-shoulder—qualities missing in recruits or half-trained soldiers.<sup>2</sup>

At Chrysler's Farm (November 1813) 2500 half-trained American regulars could only mimic European tactics, and they succumbed to the fire and discipline of 800 British and Canadian regulars.<sup>3</sup> Eight months later many of these same men met 300 miles to the west in a pleasant, sun-baked meadow on the left bank of the Niagara River, a mile and a half south of Chippawa, Upper Canada. The result was the reversal of the tactical verdict of Chrysler's Farm. Though indecisive when viewed from the perspective of the entire Niagara campaign of 1814, the battle of Chippawa is notable because it was—to quote the jubilant American commander, Jacob Brown—"the first victory that has been gained over the enemy *on a plain*."<sup>4</sup> Well-drilled American regulars of the Left Division, employing European tactics on an open field, overcame the machinelike precision of the thin red line. Their excellent performance was the result of intensive train-

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<sup>2</sup> On weapons and tactics these works have proved especially helpful: A. F. Becke, *An Introduction to the History of Tactics, 1740-1905* (London, 1909); Jean Colin, *The Transformations of War*, trans., L.H.R. Pope-Hennessy (London, 1912); Vincent J. Esposito and John R. Elting, "Introduction," *A Military History and Atlas of the Napoleonic Wars* (New York, 1964); Walter Millis, *Arms and Men: A Study in American Military History* (New York, 1956); Robert S. Quimby, *The Background of Napoleonic Warfare* (New York, 1957).

<sup>3</sup> Ronald L. Way, "The Day of Chrysler's Farm," *The Defended Border: Upper Canada and the War of 1812*, ed. Morris Zaslow (Toronto, 1964), 61-83.

<sup>4</sup> Brown to John Armstrong, 10 Jul 1814, Registered Letters Received, Record Group 107 (hereinafter cited as RG 107), U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereinafter cited as DNA).

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Glover, quoting Sir Julian Corbett, "War and Civilian Historians," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XVIII (Jan., 1957), 85-86.

ing by young "Fuss and Feathers," Brigadier General Winfield Scott, in the months before the campaign began—a unique experience for American soldiers in the War of 1812. The United States Army bears permanently upon it the stamp of Winfield Scott, whose training of the Left Division inaugurated the Regular Army tradition, and whose gray-clad soldiers imparted their colors to the uniforms of West Point cadets.

\* \* \* \*

The major American campaign of 1814 had inauspicious beginnings. In January, Secretary of War John Armstrong directed Major General Jacob Brown to detach six regiments from James Wilkinson's army at French Mills, New York, and proceed westward to Sackets Harbor "for the better security of the fleet." Armstrong feared a British attack against the naval base and was concerned for the safety of Captain Isaac Chauncey's lake squadron.<sup>5</sup> With its headquarters at Sackets Harbor, Brown's force became known as the Left Division of Military District No. 9, which embraced "New York north of the highlands, and Vermont."<sup>6</sup>

Late in February Armstrong urged Brown to cross the ice of Lake Ontario and "carry Kingston by a *coup de main*," provided that certain conditions, such as the hardness of the ice and the number of defenders at Kingston, were satisfactory. Kingston, across the foot of Lake Ontario, was the British counterpart of Sackets Harbor and, next to Montreal, the most important base in the interior of British

North America. Armstrong's dispatch ended with this sentence: "If the enterprise be agreed upon, use the enclosed letter to mask your object." The enclosed letter was spurious, for Armstrong falsely wrote that President James Madison had ordered Brown to besiege Fort Niagara, 200 miles to the west. The letter was to be used as a stratagem, and apparently Brown should have leaked it to the British in order to lead them to the false conclusion that Fort Niagara rather than Kingston was his objective.<sup>7</sup> But finding that the conditions for the attack on Kingston described in the first letter could not be met, Brown misinterpreted the second letter as an alternate directive and led the Left Division to the Niagara frontier in mid-March.<sup>8</sup>

By the time Armstrong learned of the mistake in faraway Washington (March 20), he decided that Brown might just as well stay at Buffalo. He saw in Brown's mistaken march the opportunity to continue with earlier plans to protect western New York, Put-in-Bay, and Detroit, to recapture Fort Niagara, and to drive the British from the Niagara peninsula. "Good consequences," Armstrong told Brown, "are sometimes the result of mistakes."<sup>9</sup> It was a strange way to begin operations in 1814. While the troops trained at Buffalo under Winfield Scott's tutelage, Brown, Armstrong, Madison, and the Cabinet worked on a plan of campaign, finally producing one on June 7, three months later.<sup>10</sup>

Brown was absent from the frontier for most of this period. In April he returned to

<sup>5</sup> Armstrong to Maj. Gen. Wilkinson, Jan. 20 and 21, in Armstrong, *Notices of the War of 1812* (New York, 1840), II, 64. Wilkinson had cantoned his army for the winter at French Mills, New York, following the battle of Chrysler's Farm.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Congress, *American State Papers, Class V, Military Affairs* (hereinafter cited as *ASPMA*), ed. Walter Lowrie and Mathew St. Clair Clarke (Philadelphia, 1813), I, 387. Wilkinson's division, headquarters located at Plattsburg, was known as the Right Division. Two regiments (2000 men) formed a brigade and two brigades a division. *Ibid.* 425.

<sup>7</sup> Armstrong, *Notices*, II, 213. The letters were dated Feb 28.

<sup>8</sup> Brown to Armstrong, Mar 4, Unregistered Letters Received; Brown to Armstrong, Mar 21, 24, 31, and Apr 8, Registered Letters Received; RG 107, DNA.

<sup>9</sup> Armstrong to Brown, Mar 20, Letters Sent, RG 107, DNA; Armstrong to Brown, Apr 7, *Documents Relating to the Invasion of the Niagara Peninsula . . . by Jacob Brown* (hereinafter cited as *Brown's Documents*) ed. Ernest A. Cruikshank, No. 33, *Niagara Historical Society Publications* (Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, 1920), 97-99.

Sackets Harbor in response to alarmed reports from a "confidential agent" in Upper Canada that the British were preparing to launch an attack against the naval base.<sup>11</sup> He did not rejoin the Left Division until June.

As far as the training of the troops was concerned, Brown was not missed, even though he ordered Major Azor Orne, the Inspector General for the Left Division, to join him at Sackets Harbor.<sup>12</sup> More responsible and energetic than most politician-generals of the war, he lacked professional polish and experience. Brown had spent the greater part of his military career with the New York militia, and his martial knowledge was notably limited in matters of drill, discipline, and camp police.<sup>13</sup> But he was aware of the necessity of basic training, and upon leaving for Sackets Harbor, he wisely placed his second in command, Winfield Scott, in charge of preparing the Left Division for field operations. Scott performed the preliminary work necessary to any campaign. He gathered materiel, obtained intelligence about British forces in the Niagara peninsula, and trained the troops.<sup>14</sup>

Scott had begun a career in law, but joined the Army in 1808 following the *Chesapeake* incident. He served at New Orleans before the war, fought at Queenston Heights in 1812, and planned and led, with Captain Oliver Perry, the highly successful amphibious

assault on Fort George in 1813. His military reputation, like those of most of the officers of the Left Division, emerged unscathed from his participation in Wilkinson's fall campaign of 1813, which had ignominiously ended at Chrysler's Farm. On 9 March 1814, three months before his twenty-eighth birthday, he was promoted to the rank of brigadier general.

Six feet, five inches tall, weighing over 230 pounds, with an erect bearing and a head of hair rising stiffly from his forehead, Scott looked the part of an outstanding military commander. He rarely exhibited concern for the personal problems of the common soldier and doubtless appeared to them somewhat of a martinet. But he was able to bring forth the best efforts of his officers and men. Scott occasionally highlighted this achievement by issuing bombastic calls to glory in the heat of battle in apparent attempts to make his men forget the reality of life and death. At a crucial moment during the battle of Queenston Heights, for example, he is quoted as crying to his men: "Hull's surrender is to be redeemed. Let us, then, die arms in hand. The country demands sacrifice. . . . The blood of the slain will make heroes of the living."<sup>15</sup> Despite a youthful cockiness that he exhibited throughout the war, Scott was to show in 1814 signs of his future brilliance as a field commander in Mexico. He was, above all, a stern disciplinarian and an able administrative soldier, and one who constantly studied foreign military literature. Without his efforts at Buffalo it is doubtful whether the Left Division would have achieved what it did in the Niagara campaign of 1814.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Cabinet Memorandum, Jun 7, *Writings of James Madison*, ed. Gaillard Hunt (New York, 1908), VIII, 279-80. Brown, not Armstrong, first suggested the plan. See: Brown to Armstrong, Apr 8, Registered Letters Received; Brown to Armstrong, Apr 17, Unregistered Letters Received; Armstrong to Madison, Apr 30, Letters Sent to the President, RG 107, DNA.

<sup>11</sup> The first of these was Brig. Gen. Edmund Gaines to Brown, Apr 14, Unregistered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA. On May 6 the British attacked Oswego instead of Sackets Harbor. For additional background material, see J. Mackay Hitsman, *The Incredible War of 1812* (Toronto, 1965), 175-205.

<sup>12</sup> Brown to Armstrong, May 8, Registered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA.

<sup>13</sup> Winfield Scott, *Memoirs* (New York, 1864), I, 118.

<sup>14</sup> Scott to Armstrong, May 17, Registered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA.

<sup>15</sup> Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812* (New York, 1869), 402.

<sup>16</sup> T. Harry Williams, "The Macs and the Ikes," *American Mercury*, LXXV (Oct, 1952), 32-39, provides a brief character sketch of Scott. See also: Charles W. Elliot, *Winfield Scott: The Soldier and the Man* (New York, 1937); Edward D. Mansfield, *Life and Services of General Winfield Scott* (New York, 1852); William A. Ganoe, "Winfield Scott," *Dictionary of American Biography*, ed. Dumas Malone (New York, 1935), XVI, 505-11.

The regiments of the Left Division were more fortunate in their preparation for hard fighting than most units of the Regular Army. The United States maintained no permanent camps of instruction to prepare recruits before they arrived at the front. Depending on the intelligence, experience, and energy of their field commander, they might or might not learn the rudiments of discipline, drill, and weaponry. According to the "Rules and Regulations of the Army," the instruction of troops was "governed by circumstances, as to time, place, and frequency; of which the commanding general will judge."<sup>17</sup> Rarely did American generals find the circumstances appropriate.

Even if they did, the quality of training was poor. Besides a serious scarcity of good general and junior officers, there existed no "uniform system of discipline . . . in training the armies of the United States, either in line, by battalion, or company."<sup>18</sup> General Alexander Smyth had published a "system of discipline," or a drill manual, in 1812, but most American generals agreed upon its inadequacy, and the Adjutant and Inspector General replaced it in 1813 with one written by the editor of the Philadelphia *Aurora*, William Duane.<sup>19</sup> Like Smyth's book, however, Duane's was incomplete, poorly illustrated, unprofessional, inconsistent, and generally useless for the systematic training of the Army. In answer to a War Department query of February 1814, whether Duane's book should be altered or discarded, all of the ranking field officers questioned recommended the latter alternative. The War Department ac-

cepted the officers' opinions, but no drill regulations appeared in 1814 to replace Duane's.<sup>20</sup>

Always resourceful, Scott based his training program at Buffalo upon the "French system." He had with him one French and one English edition of the *Ordonnance du Premier Août*, 1791.<sup>21</sup> He first instructed his officers in the "schools" of the soldier and company—the soldier's stance, his steps and movements for marching, the manual of arms, methods of firing and target practice, how to change from line to column and column to line, and how to wheel to the right or left. Scott then supervised the officers as they drilled their own squads and companies. The training progressed in this manner until, for the first time in the war, units of battalion size together moved through the so-called evolutions of the line, "to the great delight of the troops themselves, who now began to perceive why they had been made to fag so long at . . . drill."<sup>22</sup>

Scott's daily schedule was strenuous. After a 4:00 A.M. reveille, the trainees drilled, breakfasted, drilled, lunched, drilled, supped, and retired at 9:00 P.M.<sup>23</sup> The officers and

<sup>20</sup> A major objection was that no one was quite sure which edition of Duane's *Hand Book* to use. Adj. and Insp. Gen. J. De B. Walbach to Armstrong, 1 Apr 1814, Unregistered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA.

<sup>21</sup> Scott, *Memoirs*, I, 119-20, only referred to the "French system." No doubt he meant the Ordinance of 1791. See Quimby, *Napoleonic Warfare*, Chap. xiii, 300-44, for details of the Ordinance. The edition available to Quimby was John Macdonald (trans.), *Rules and Regulations for the Field Exercise and Manoeuvres of the French Infantry* (London, 1806). The edition available to the author was *Règlement Concernant L'Exercice et Les Manoeuvres de L'Infanterie*, 2 vols. (New ed. with notes; Paris, 1816).

<sup>22</sup> Scott, *Memoirs*, I, 120-21. Whether the Left Division actually engaged in extensive target firing is doubtful. The Ordinance of 1791, however, did prescribe it. *Règlement*, I, 118. "Regiment" and "battalion" were commonly used interchangeably. But the former officially described a unit of ten companies, and the latter usually had reference to a regiment whose light and grenadier companies, or "flank companies," were detached, leaving eight "line" or "battalion" companies.

<sup>23</sup> "Narrative of McMullen," *The Documentary History of the Campaigns Upon the Niagara Frontier*, ed. E. A. Cruikshank (Welland, Ontario, 1896-1908), II, 372.

<sup>17</sup> ASPMA, I, 427.

<sup>18</sup> Secretary of War James Monroe to the House of Representatives, 22 Nov 1814, *ibid.*, 523.

<sup>19</sup> Smyth, *Regulations for the Field Exercises, Manoeuvres, and Conduct of the Infantry of the United States* (Philadelphia, 1812); Duane, *Hand Book for Infantry* (Philadelphia, 1813). Originally published in 1812, Duane's *Hand Book* went through nine editions by 1814. See *American Bibliography: A Preliminary Checklist*, comp. Ralph R. Shaw and Richard H. Shoemaker (New York, 1963).

men began to long for "orders to beat up the enemy's quarters."<sup>24</sup> By mid-May Scott boasted that his charges were "already broken into the habits of subordination, are becoming expert in their tactical exercises, and will in another month . . . possess the firmness and cohesion of veterans."<sup>25</sup> As reinforcements arrived Scott broke them into the routine. Of the troops, some had served in previous campaigns, many were recruits, and others were militia. All profited in the sense that they had become better fighters. But as such, they were less likely to break ranks, run, or take cover after a British volley, and more of them would probably die by standing fast and returning shot for shot. In such situations eighteenth-century formations were not always noted for their ability to preserve lives.

Like the French, Scott emphasized the line for fire delivery and the column for maneuver.<sup>26</sup> The line of battle for a full-strength, ten-company regiment of 900 privates had a depth of three ranks and a front of 300 files.<sup>27</sup> Columns were formed in various ways: on a half-company, whole-company, or two-company front. The Ordinance of 1791 stressed the latter as the column of attack, because its shallower depth facilitated rapid deployment into line. One "division" (two companies abreast in a three-deep line) led the column, and the other four followed in the same order with a distance of three paces between each division.<sup>28</sup> Columns afforded

greater maneuverability than lines as formations of march and of readiness, especially in the broken country of the American frontier. They avoided the necessity of occasionally having to halt, dress ranks, and realign, as was the case with an advancing line of battle. Once on the desired spot in the field, the column deployed to engage the enemy in fire combat. In line each company could bring its muskets to bear over an extended front, but in column only the first two ranks of the leading division could fire.<sup>29</sup>

British tactical doctrine was significantly different. By the turn of the century the two-rank line was in common use and was the trademark of the British Army.<sup>30</sup> Because all 1200 men of the battalion could use their weapons in an elongated front of 600 files, the greater firepower of the two-deep line more than compensated for the superior depth of the three-deep line. The latter was only two-thirds as wide as a thin red line of the same number of men, and third rank was useless except to load and pass muskets to the second rank or to fill gaps in the line due to

<sup>29</sup> Contrary to John K. Mahon, who seems to follow Charles C. Oman, the primary advantage of the column was not "that it had great penetrating power" and that it was sanctified by Napoleon who used it as "his most frequent attack formation." "Civil War Infantry Assault Tactics," *Military Affairs*, XXV (Summer 1961), 64. The French *colonne d'attaque* was not meant to penetrate an enemy line, though it could if the circumstances were favorable. Guibert frowned on such use of columns. He declared that there were four occasions when it was advantageous to maneuver in column: (1) To withdraw in the face of cavalry; (2) To maneuver preparatory to deploying in order of battle; (3) To change one's order of battle; (4) To countermaneuver, i.e., to counterbalance moves by the enemy. Quimby, *Napoleonic Warfare*, 126-27. For the errors of Oman and the "column versus line" controversy, see *ibid.*, 326-44. For related questions, see A.M.J. Hyatt, "The Origins of Napoleonic Warfare: A Survey of Interpretations," *Military Affairs*, XXX (Winter 1966-67), 177-85.

<sup>30</sup> Like the empire, the two-deep line came into being in a fit of absentmindedness. It was long in use before receiving official sanction. Cf. John W. Fortescue, *History of the British Army* (London, 1915), IV, Part II, 921, and J. F. C. Fuller, *British Light Infantry in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1925), 157. Hitsman, *The Incredible War of 1812*, 31, claims the two-deep line received official sanction in 1809, but Quimby, *Napoleonic Warfare*, 339, says 1824.

<sup>24</sup> Scott, *Memoirs*, I, 119.

<sup>25</sup> Scott to Armstrong, May 17, Registered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA. At first only the 9th, 11th, 21st and 25th Regiments (regulars) and two companies of the 2nd Artillery were with Scott.

<sup>26</sup> Mansfield, *Life and Services of Scott*, 101.

<sup>27</sup> As of December 1813 the authorized size of an American infantry regiment was 900 privates, 180 company officers, NCO's, and musicians, one colonel, and thirteen staff officers—a total of 1094. (*ASPMA*, I, 424-25.) Officers and musicians took positions on the flanks and rear of the line and column. *Reglement*, II, *planche* 1, between pp. 6 and 9.

<sup>28</sup> *Reglement*, I, 236-39. One pace equaled 24 inches. *Ibid.*, 18. See: Quimby, *Napoleonic Warfare*, 129, for Jacques Guibert's thoughts on the deployment of various types of columns.

battle losses.<sup>31</sup>

The British were less likely than the Americans and the French to maneuver in column when in close contact with an opponent. Defense and firepower were their forte owing to superb cohesion and fire discipline. In the battles of Chrysler's Farm and Lundy's Lane, as in the battles of the Iberian Peninsula,<sup>32</sup> the British deployed first into line on favorable ground to receive the Americans, and then attacked after their own fire had disorganized American formations. In the only other battle of the war fought between British and American regulars who employed European tactics on open fields—the battle of Chippawa—the British commander, Phineas Riell, departed from this procedure and lost.

The extended order of the thin red line rendered it an unmanageable formation for all but the most highly trained and experienced officers and men.<sup>33</sup> But British Army instruction was generally good, and the Wars of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars had produced a reservoir of capable leaders by 1812. With the aid of good drill sergeants and drill manuals, aristocratic officers trained and disciplined their social inferiors until they could march anywhere in any direction when the situation demanded, though with less speed than the Americans and French in columns and three-deep lines.<sup>34</sup> The redcoat was steady as a rock in

combat and, because he received live target practice, was renowned for his ability to deliver rapid and accurate volleys.<sup>35</sup>

British tactical doctrine was superior to the American in at least one particular. Even Scott neglected it. Whenever possible the British consistently employed relatively large units of light infantry as skirmishers, who fought in an orderly but loose and open single or double rank with a small detachment in reserve. Men of agility, stamina, courage, and marksmanship, who were specially trained in this mode of fighting, they were a major asset to line infantry in difficult terrain. Operating on the flank or in advance of the close-filed line and column and taking cover when necessary, they riddled an enemy formation with accurate, individual musketry. Skirmishers either prepared the way for a massed infantry attack or protected their own infantry against enemy attack.<sup>36</sup>

Though Americans occasionally employed militiamen as skirmishers, it was not a consistent policy. Their primary functions were to garrison outposts, repair roads and bridges, guard prisoners, scout, and fight equally inexperienced Canadian militia. As skirmishers they lacked the cohesion of trained light troops. Americans had even forgotten the practice in the War of the Revolution of gathering the light companies of regular regiments into independent battalions for specific missions and skirmishing duty.<sup>37</sup> In the Niagara campaign the light companies under Brown and Scott would fight with the line companies of their own regiments. Scott apparently made no attempt to train the militia units at his disposal in skirmishing tactics.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 310-11. In peacetime a British regiment in the Canadas comprised one battalion. In war several battalions, each ideally totaling about 1200 men in ten companies, might be added to the regiment. Hitsman, *The Incredible War of 1812*, 30; Jac Weller, *Wellington in the Peninsula, 1808-1814* (New York, 1963), 26.

<sup>32</sup> Oman, "Column and Line in the Peninsula," *Studies in Napoleonic Wars*, 99, *passim*.

<sup>33</sup> Cyril Falls, *A Hundred Years of War, 1850-1950* (paperback ed.; New York, 1962), 29-30, makes the point that the effectiveness of the thin red line had deteriorated by the advent of the Crimean War, because British infantry received no training in formations. See also, Richard L. Blanco, "Reform and Wellington's Post Waterloo Army, 1815-54," *Military Affairs*, XXIX (Fall 1965), 123-31.

<sup>34</sup> Weller, *Wellington in the Peninsula*, 25-26; Glover, *Peninsular Preparation: The Reform of the British Army, 1795-1809* (Cambridge, 1963), 111-42.

<sup>35</sup> Weller, *Wellington in the Peninsula*, 26; Quimby, *Napoleonic Warfare*, 343. Glover, *Peninsular Preparation*, 141, however, found no evidence that British platoons were trained to aim or that they even moderately engaged in target practice and live firing.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 122-29, and Quimby, *Napoleonic Warfare*, 326-44, and *passim*. See: Wav, "Chrysler's Farm," 75-77, for a description of the effectiveness of these tactics.

<sup>37</sup> John W. Wright, "The Corps of Light Infantry in the Continental Army," *American Historical Review*, XXXI (April, 1926), 454-61.

The Ordinance of 1791 provided no instructions for the purpose, and Scott's Regular Army bias probably inclined him against it.<sup>38</sup> Ironically, Scott, like most Americans, lacked a proper appreciation of the usefulness of trained skirmishers.

The Left Division was in an excellent state of readiness when Brown returned to Buffalo in June with plans for the invasion. The troops were healthy despite the inclement weather and unfavorable terrain. In April and May the winds off Lake Erie had blown cold, and in June the warm weather nightly produced a thick fog, which rose at sunset from the surrounding forest and marsh only to disappear after sunrise. But the soldier's ubiquitous enemies, diarrhea, typhus, and rheumatism, made relatively few appearances, and only two deaths were reported. Hospital Surgeon Joseph Lovell attributed this to exercise, constant activity, strict discipline, and rigid police.<sup>39</sup> Scott had established "the service of outposts, night patrols, guards, . . . sentinels . . . a system of sanitary police . . . [and] rules of civility, etiquette, and courtesy."<sup>40</sup> He had moved the district quartermaster department from Batavia to Buffalo and kept the troops well-fed and punctually paid. Except for a shortage of blue Regular Army uniforms, supplies were "abundant and of good quality."<sup>41</sup> Even when a number of recruits—whom Lovell described as "the miserable refuse of society who never had the energy to demonstrate that they lived"—arrived in June, the efficiency of camp police checked the diseases they brought in their

wake.<sup>42</sup> Private Alexander McMullen of the Pennsylvania volunteers succinctly described the situation at camp: "Constant exercise, wholesome provisions, and strict discipline soon made our regiment have another appearance."<sup>43</sup>

At peak strength late in June the Left Division comprised two regular infantry brigades, one artillery battalion, and one volunteer-militia brigade. The aggregate of regular and militia troops in or near the area was approximately 4800.<sup>44</sup> Winfield Scott commanded the First Brigade, Brigadier General Eleazar Ripley led the Second, and Major Jacob Hindman commanded the four artillery companies, previously of the 2nd Artillery Regiment, now of the consolidated Corps of Artillery.<sup>45</sup> Brigadier General Peter B. Porter, formerly a war hawk Congressman, commanded the Third Brigade of Pennsylvania and New York volunteers, plus about 300 Indians led by the Seneca chief, Red Jacket. Besides having excellent young general officers, Brown enjoyed the services of promising young junior officers, particularly Major Thomas Jesup, Major Henry Leavenworth, and Captain Nathan Towson. The Left Division was the best trained and led force the United States put in the field during the entire war, and one for which no counterpart can be found in previous American military history save the Continental Army. Its capacity for fighting was quite unknown to the British.

<sup>42</sup> "Report of Lovell" *Documentary History* (ed. Cruikshank), II, 452.

<sup>43</sup> "Narrative of McMullen," *ibid.*, 372.

<sup>44</sup> This figure includes Peter B. Porter's militia "brigade," which at this time was not fully assembled at Buffalo. "Strength of Major-General Brown's Army, July 1, 1814," Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America During the Administration of James Madison* (new ed., New York, 1930), Vol. II, Bk. viii., 37. Volunteer-militia were simply militiamen who volunteered to serve under Regular Army officers or for specific missions for specific lengths of time.

<sup>45</sup> Formed 17 May 1814 by consolidation of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Regiments of artillery and consisting of twelve battalions of four companies each. Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army* (Washington, 1903), I, 52.

<sup>38</sup> Apparently, however, inexperienced and untrained men could frequently function rather effectively as skirmishers. Quimby, quoting Jean Colin, *Napoleonic Warfare*, 330. On the other hand, Glover, "War and Civilian Historians," n. 8, 88, observes that recruits could not adequately execute the manifold roles of light infantry without training and that militiamen were inferior to trained light infantry as skirmishers.

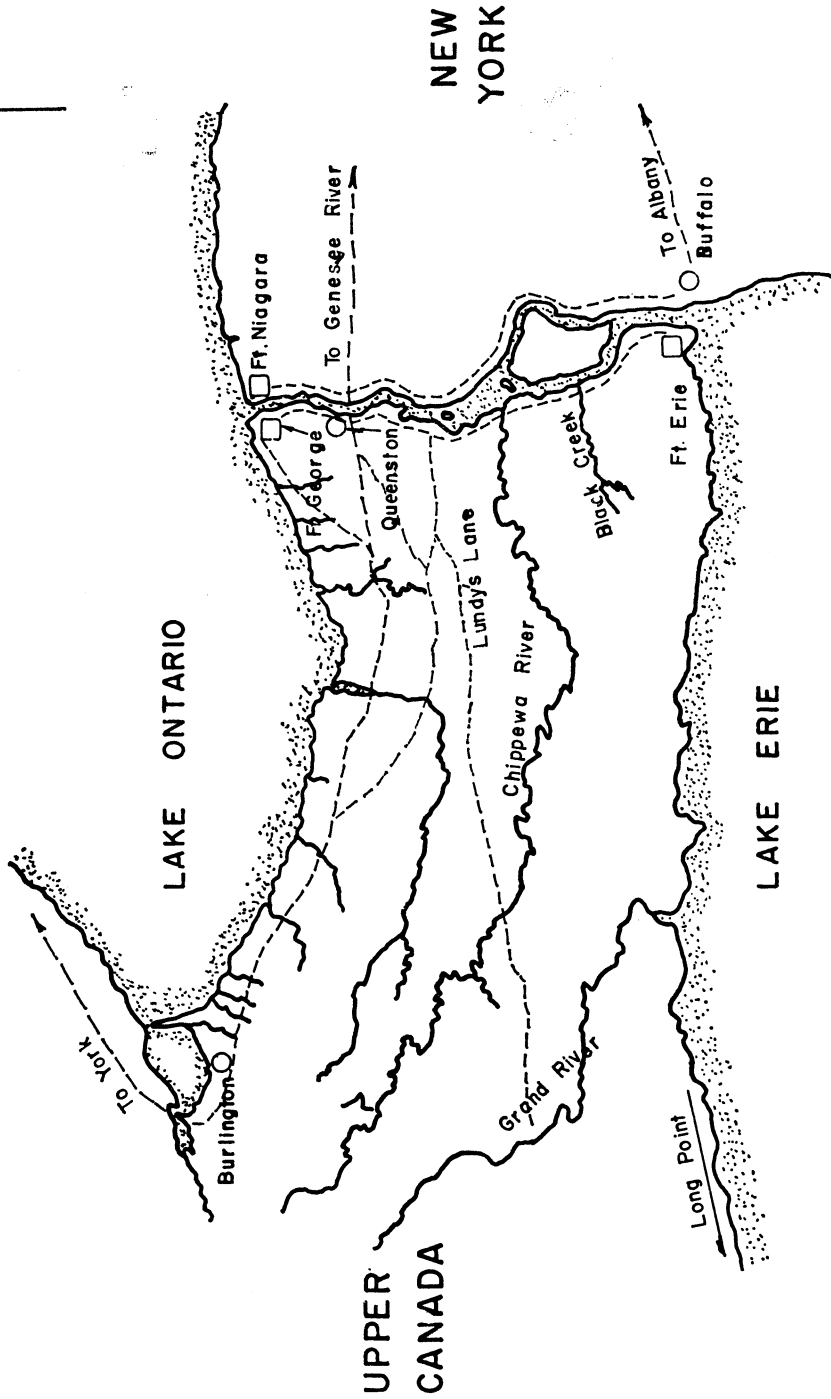
<sup>39</sup> "Report of . . . Lovell of the State of Diseases," *Documentary History* (ed. Cruikshank), II, 452.

<sup>40</sup> Scott, *Memoirs*, I, 119.

<sup>41</sup> Scott to Armstrong, May 17, Registered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA; Elliot, *Winfield Scott*, 146.



# NIAGARA FRONTIER



Scale in Miles

M.A. Rangel

Brown's objective was to run past or reduce the line of British fortifications along the left bank of the Niagara River and rendezvous with Isaac Chauncey's naval squadron at a point on the shore of Lake Ontario. The rendezvous was crucial to a successful campaign. Buffalo was not a true base of operations, but rather a combined staging and mounting area. The Left Division's source of supply was nearly 100 miles away at the junction of the Ridge Road and the Genesee River, which, in turn, was the marshaling point for troops and supplies arriving from Sackets Harbor and Albany. But Brown lacked sufficient numbers of wagons, horses, and boats to carry out continuous supply from the rear,<sup>46</sup> and the British garrison at Fort Niagara, on the right bank of the river, threatened his communications between the Niagara and the Genesee.<sup>47</sup> The Left Division would thus enter the peninsula as a self-contained force that devoured its own resources and possessed a limited ability to maintain itself in enemy territory. The war-ravaged Niagara region could not provide sufficient forage.<sup>48</sup> The entire strategic and logistical situation inhibited Brown's movements within the peninsula. Once committed to invasion, he would have to effect a speedy rendezvous with Chauncey in order to establish a secure line of communications. This done, he planned to complete the destruction of British forces in the peninsula, strike at Burlington, and then drive on to York, the provincial capital.<sup>49</sup> His aim was nothing less than the conquest of the major part of Upper Canada, and for this he had at his disposal

Scott's well-sharpened military instrument.

In Brown's way stood the British Right Division—British and Canadian regulars and provincial militia. Though numerically equal to the Left Division, its Irish commander, Major General Phineas Riall, labored under one great disadvantage. His forces were dispersed at strategic points over the entire frontier, with 165 men at Fort Erie, 500 at Chippawa, 290 at Queenston, 1050 at Fort George, 780 at Fort Niagara, 295 at Long Point, 460 at Burlington, and 1040 at York.<sup>50</sup> Even after the invasion got under way and the Americans revealed their landing zone, many of these troops (notably the fortress garrisons) would have to remain at their positions.

Reinforcements, however, were racing to the Niagara peninsula, and it would be Riall's task to stall Brown until they arrived. Riall's superior, Lieutenant General Gordon Drummond, had anticipated the Niagara invasion as early as March and had been feeding reinforcements to the Right Division since April.<sup>51</sup> As soon as enough of Wellington's veterans moved inland to protect Kingston and the line of the St. Lawrence River, Drummond intended to join Riall with many more.<sup>52</sup>

The Americans were counting on Riall's initial disability. Brown and Armstrong hoped he would either risk his small field

<sup>49</sup> In the last few days before the launching of the invasion, Brown and Armstrong altered the Cabinet's plan of campaign. It had called for an amphibious landing of the Left Division on the southern shore of the Niagara peninsula. Brown, however, crossed the Niagara River directly from Buffalo to Fort Erie. For details, see the author's "The Niagara Campaign of 1814" (unpublished Master's thesis, Queen's University, Dept. of History, 1964), 89-150.

<sup>50</sup> "Return of the Right Division," 22 Jun 1814, *Documentary History* (ed. Cruikshank), I, 28-30. These are rounded numbers.

<sup>51</sup> Drummond to Prevost, Mar 5 and 11, C 682; Drummond to Prevost, May 21 and Jun 16, C 683, RG 8, PAC.

<sup>52</sup> Drummond to Prevost, Jul 9, C 684, RG 8, PAC. British regulars from Europe and the colonies began arriving at Halifax and Montreal in June. Fortescue, *History of the British Army*, X, 105.

<sup>46</sup> Brown to Scott, Apr 20, *Brown's Documents* (ed. Cruikshank), 8; Armstrong to Brown, Jun 10, Letters Sent; and Brown to Armstrong, Jun 26, Registered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA. See also, Erna Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army: A History of the Corps, 1775-1939* (Washington, 1962), 164-66.

<sup>47</sup> For an analysis of the strategic importance of the forts, see Alfred T. Mahan, *Sea Power in Its Relations to the War of 1812* (Boston, 1905), II, 274-75.

<sup>48</sup> Drummond to Prevost, Mar 5 and 11, C 682, RG 8, Public Archives of Canada. (hereinafter cited PAC).

force in battle or avoid contact until the Left Division seized the bridge over the Chippawa River, which severed the road leading north to Lake Ontario.<sup>53</sup> Their first hope was not groundless. In a March dispatch covering various defensive dispositions to be assumed against an American invasion from any one of several possible points, Drummond had instructed Riall "to oppose any descent made from above Chippawa." He assured him that a rapid concentration of his forces would enable him to effect, "by one action, the defeat, capture, or destruction of a considerable part of the enemy's disposable force."<sup>54</sup>

During the foggy early morning of July 3,<sup>55</sup> the Left Division crossed the Niagara River into Upper Canada and, in the course of that Sunday, invested Fort Erie, located in the southeastern corner of the peninsula. Constructed of sod and harboring only three small caliber guns, the British work posed no serious obstacle to the invaders. After exchanging a few perfunctory shots with American artillery, the garrison surrendered at 5:00 P.M.<sup>56</sup>

Riall learned of the crossing at 8:00 A.M. Sunday morning. He immediately led five companies of the 1st or Royal Scots Regiment from Fort George to Chippawa. Confident that he could defeat Brown in the field even if he were slightly outnumbered, he planned to counterattack that night. But Riall was

unable to act either on Sunday or Monday, for the expected arrival of 500 men of the 8th or King's Regiment from York did not materialize.<sup>57</sup>

Monday morning, Brown ordered Scott to the bridge. If possible, he was to seize it. In any event he was to establish a nearby camp. Scott marched under a warm Fourth of July sun with the First Brigade, a troop of light dragoons, and Captain Towson's artillery company. Ten miles north of Fort Erie his vanguard encountered a British scouting party of light troops and dragoons. Following a brief skirmish the British withdrew across the Chippawa. Scott pursued, but balked at attempting to force a crossing.<sup>58</sup> The river was deep and 150 yards wide, a *tête-de-pont* battery guarded the bridge, and about 1000 troops manned entrenchments and batteries on the northern shore.<sup>59</sup> At sunset the weary Americans retraced their steps for a mile, halting south of Street's Creek to encamp for the night.

The creek was deep and miry at its mouth, but fordable several hundred yards upstream. The farmhouse of Samuel Street lay a few hundred feet north of the creek. Brown, Ripley, the Second Brigade, the rest of the artillery, and some wagons joined Scott at 11:00 P.M.

The campsite was not ideal. Dense woods, three-quarters of a mile from the Niagara shore, bordered the grassy plain on both sides of the creek. Through them British snipers and reconnoitering parties could approach the rear of the camp undetected. All during the morning of July 5, a small body of Canadians and Indians, posted in the woods near the

<sup>53</sup> Armstrong to Brown, Jun 10, Letters Sent; and Brown to Armstrong, Jun 17, Registered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA.

<sup>54</sup> Written by Drummond's adjutant, Lt. Col. John Harvey, to Riall, Mar 23, C 682, RG 8, PAC.

<sup>55</sup> Chauncey had assured the Americans concerned that he would sail on July 15. But Armstrong had urged Brown to invade as early as possible even if it meant before Chauncey had definitely sailed. Actually Chauncey did not put out to sea until August. See: Armstrong to Brown, Jun 10, Letters Sent, RG 107, DNA.

<sup>56</sup> Brown's memoranda, *Brown's Documents* (ed. Cruikshank), 72-73; Way, "Defences of the Niagara Frontier, 1764-1870," (unpublished Master's thesis, Dept. of History, Queen's University, 1938), 35-36; Brown to Armstrong, Jul 6 and 7, Registered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA; Porter to Governor Daniel D. Tompkins, Jul 3, *Documentary History* (ed. Cruikshank), I, 26-27.

<sup>57</sup> Riall to Drummond, Jul 6, C 684, RG 8, PAC.

<sup>58</sup> Brown to Armstrong, Jul 7, Registered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA; Brown's memoranda, *Brown's Documents* (ed. Cruikshank), 73-74; Scott, *Memoirs*, I 124; Scott to the Adj. Gen., Jul 15, Registered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA; Riall to Drummond, Jul 6, C 684, RG 8, PAC.

<sup>59</sup> "Plan of the Niagara Frontier," enc. Prevost to Henry Bathurst, Jul 12, Colonial Office 42, Vol. 157, Manuscript Group 11, PAC; Hitsman, *The Incredible War of 1812*, 195.

northern shore of the creek, harassed American pickets and prevented them from taking positions on the left of the camp.<sup>60</sup>

The King's Regiment finally reached Riall that same Tuesday morning. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Pearson, a skilled leader of light troops and militia and one of the victors at Chrysler's Farm, reconnoitered the American camp before noon. His militia and Indians, some of whom climbed nearby trees, reported that Brown's army numbered less than 2000 men. Though inaccurate by 1000, Riall accepted the figure. He was unaware of the fall of Fort Erie and concluded that the main body of Americans had not as yet joined Scott's brigade. With 1430 British regulars, 300 Canadian militia, 300 Indians, Royal Artillery detachments, and some provincial dragoons, Riall decided to attack.<sup>61</sup>

At 4:00 P.M. his force moved across the Chippawa bridge. The 100th, the King's, and the Royal Scots Regiments marched in three columns up the river road. Ahead on the right, the Indians filed through the forest, followed on the edge of the woods by Pearson with the 2nd Lincoln Militia and the light companies of each regular unit.<sup>62</sup>

Meanwhile Brown was becoming increasingly annoyed with the snipers. When Peter Porter arrived at camp in the afternoon with 300 Pennsylvania volunteers and an equal number of Indians, Brown directed him to scour them from the woods.<sup>63</sup> Out of sight one-half mile south of the camp, Porter lined up the Indians and about 150 volunteer-militia. They silently entered the woods shortly before 4:00 P.M.—about the same moment Riall left Chippawa. The Indians, adept at

stalking the forest, led the way, followed by the volunteers who aligned in single rank at wide intervals. Fifty regulars trailed in reserve.

Porter's men quickly forced the snipers out of their positions and in a wild mile-long chase, led by the Indians and punctuated by "savage yells," captured or tomahawked all but a few. Then proceeding a little farther, his Indians suddenly encountered an unexpected volley of musketry, which sent them scurrying back toward the volunteers. They had collided with the Lincoln Militia leading Riall's columns. Porter and his officers restored the disorganized line, and the two sides exchanged a few volleys. But a line of red-coated light troops soon appeared on the scene, rushing to support the Lincoln Militia, and Porter ordered a retreat. It quickly developed into flight as the British accelerated their charge.<sup>64</sup>

For thirty minutes since Porter's departure Brown, near Street's farmhouse, had listened to the rising rattle of musketry. Finally looking north over the plain, he spotted the dust raised from the tramp of Riall's troops. Startled by this turn of events, he galloped back to camp to prepare the division for battle.<sup>65</sup> Brown found Scott near his tent. Fortunately the First Brigade was ready to march. Having just awakened from an afternoon nap, Scott was in the process of forming his regiments for drill. After summarizing the situation, Brown ordered Scott to move his brigade onto the plain. Scott, who had as low an opinion of the British as Riall had of the Americans, doubted he would "find 300 of the enemy."<sup>66</sup>

As the American camp came alive and Scott approached the creek bridge, Riall's regulars began to deploy for battle about 700

<sup>60</sup> Brown to Armstrong, Jul 7, Registered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA.

<sup>61</sup> Riall to Drummond, Jul 6, C 684; Drummond to Prevost, Jul 10 and 11, C 684, RG 8, PAC. The figure for Lincoln Militia may be too large, but Cruikshank, *The Battle of Lundy's Lane* (pamphlet; Welland, Ontario, 1888), 13, gives it as 300.

<sup>62</sup> Riall to Drummond, Jul 6, C 684, RG 8, PAC.

<sup>63</sup> Brown to Armstrong, Jul 7, Registered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA.

<sup>64</sup> Porter to W. L. Stone, 26 May 1840, *Documentary History* (ed. Cruikshank), II, 363-65. See also Porter to Brown, n.d., *ibid.*, 410-11; "A Captain, Pa. volunteers, to the *Boston Sentinel*," Jul 7, *ibid.*, I, 49.

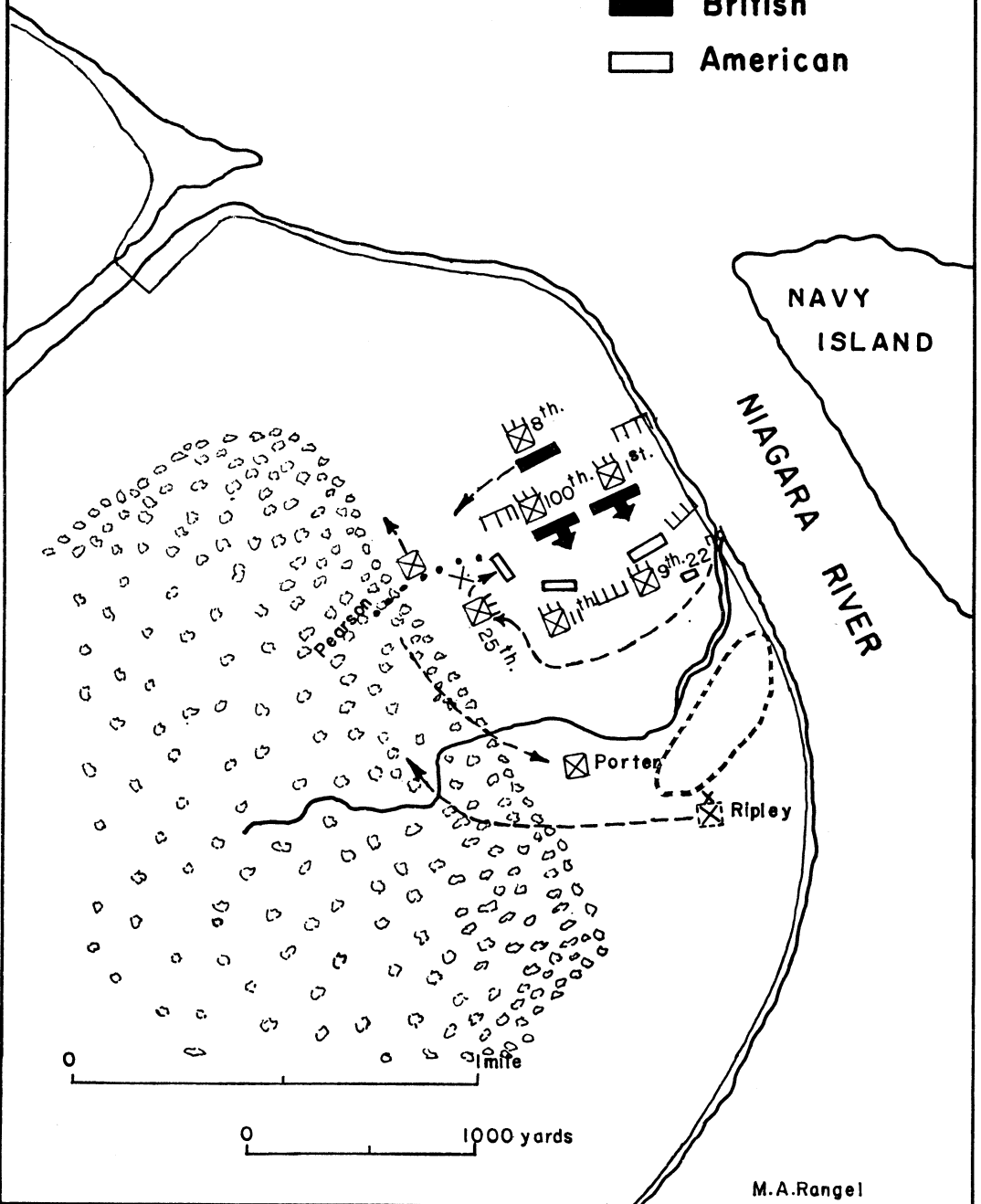
<sup>65</sup> Brown to Armstrong, Jul 7, Registered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA.

# BATTLE OF CHIPPAWA SECOND PHASE

5 JULY 1814

## POSITIONS OF REGIMENTS

- British
- American



M.A.Rangel

yards from the mouth of the creek into a typical Wellingtonian order. Riall apparently believed that Porter's detachment was one similar to Pearson's—a skirmishing group leading the flank of an attack. The Royal Artillerymen unlimbered two 24-pounders and one 5.5 howitzer on the road, facing the bridge. The Royal Scots and the 100th deployed on the meadow, with three 6-pounders on the right of the 100th. The King's hung in reserve. The militia and light troops till pursued Porter's command through the woods. Most of Riall's Indians had taken a round-about route from Chippawa and were out of the action.<sup>67</sup>

The main British battery on the road opened on Scott's brigade as it filed across the narrow bridge. Captain Towson, having crossed earlier at Brown's command, was near the river bank just north of the bridge with two 6-pounders and one 5.5 howitzer. He partially covered the exposed American infantry by annoying the British gun crew and infantry line with his fire. Despite some losses the First Brigade advanced on the road past Street's farmhouse and deployed toward the left in excellent order. The 9th Regiment and a detachment of the 22nd, both commanded by Major Henry Leavenworth, lined up near the road, facing the Royal Scots on Riall's left. Colonel John Campbell fed the 11th to the left of the 9th, but taking his position in line he received a severe knee wound, and Major John McNeil succeeded to the command. Towson moved his pieces forward on the road to the right of Leavenworth's 22nd.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Brown's memoranda, *Brown's Documents* (ed. Cruikshank), 74-75; "Narrative of General T. S. Jesup," *Documentary History* (ed. Cruikshank), II, 473-74. According to Scott, *Memoirs*, I, 127-28, he had just returned from a nearby field after exercising his men, who had previously eaten a heavy lunch in belated celebration of Independence Day.

<sup>67</sup> Riall to Drummond, Jul 6, C 684, RG 8, PAC; Capt. Mackonochie (Royal Artillery) to Maj. Gen. Glasgow, Aug 19, *Documentary History* (ed. Cruikshank), I, 49; Drummond to Prevost, Jul 10, C 684, RG 8, PAC.

Riall supposedly exclaimed at this moment: "Why, these are regulars!" Part of Scott's brigade was wearing militia gray owing to the shortage of blue cloth, and Riall might at first have thought that "nothing but a body of Buffalo militia" was deploying to face his veterans. American aplomb under fire had taken him by surprise. Both sides completed their battle dispositions at about the same time—the British slightly in the lead—and Riall immediately directed the Royal Scots and the 100th to advance against the American line. A space of perhaps less than 300 yards separated the opposing forces—"a little beyond the effective range of musketry."<sup>69</sup>

Earlier, when the entire First Brigade had cleared the bridge, Scott ordered Major Thomas Jesup's 25th Regiment to the extreme left, there "to be governed by circumstances." It was in the rear of McNeil's 11th when Jesup noticed that "the enemy greatly outnumbered us in the field"—the advancing British line overlapped McNeil on his left. Jesup led the 25th in column along a dirt road parallel to the creek toward the woods. At about the same moment, Porter's routed men raced across the creek headed for camp, threatening to expose the American left flank to British skirmishers. The Lincoln Militia and some Indians took positions behind fences and fallen oak logs in the woods on Riall's extreme right. The light troops formed on the meadow in front of the right flank of the 100th.<sup>70</sup>

As Jesup's 25th moved in column toward the woods, the British line approached McNeil and Leavenworth through the tall

<sup>68</sup> Scott to the Adj. Gen. Jul 15, Registered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA; "Narrative of Jesup," *Documentary History* (ed. Cruikshank), II, 474.

<sup>69</sup> Scott, *Memoirs*, I, 129. Scott, *ibid.*, recalled that at this moment he saw the opportunity to make amends for the fact that the day before his brigade had been unable to "engraft its name, by a decisive victory." He then rode along the line yelling: "Let us make a new anniversary for ourselves!"

<sup>70</sup> "Narrative of Jesup," *Documentary History* (ed. Cruikshank), II, 474.

grass. Scott, like Jesup, observed that the Royals and 100th outflanked McNeil on his left.<sup>71</sup> The reason was not, as Jesup supposed, that "the enemy greatly outnumbered us." Counting all regulars on the field, the sides were about equal. The British total was 1430—500 of the Royals, 450 of the 100th, and 480 of the King's.<sup>72</sup> The precise number of Americans is unknown. The nineteenth-century historian, Henry Adams, basing his guess on the troop count of June 30, placed it at about 1320—330 for the 9th Regiment, 220 for the 22nd, 420 for the 11th, and 350 for the 25th.<sup>73</sup> The 970 men of the 9th, 22nd, and 11th faced hardly more than 850 men of the Royals and 100th, whose light companies were detached. But in a two-deep line, these British units presented a front of 425 men. Three-deep, the American line was only 325 men wide.<sup>74</sup> In addition, the three 6-pounders on the right of the 100th, the light troops in front, and the King's in reserve made the British line of battle appear wider and heavier than it actually was.

To counterpoise the British advantage Scott directed McNeil to enlarge the interval between his 11th and Leavenworth's 9th, and, in the process, throw his left wing forward.<sup>75</sup> McNeil probably accomplished the movement through a left oblique march—made famous by Frederick the Great—and finally a right wheel.<sup>76</sup> The maneuver was entirely successful. The left of the 11th overlapped the right of the advancing 100th at a slight angle across its front. Facing the Royal Scots, Leavenworth's battalions were parallel to the

attack. "The battalions of Leavenworth and McNeil thus formed, pointed to an obtuse angle in the centre of the plain, with a wide interval between them, that made up for deficiency of numbers."<sup>77</sup>

Jesup at last completed his swing to the left. Crashing through a fence separating the meadow and the dirt road, the 25th sped forward past McNeil's 11th to deploy only seventy yards from the right wing of the 100th, but facing the British skirmishers on the 100th's right and front.<sup>78</sup> For the second time since the opening of the engagement, Riall was surprised at the rapid and orderly movements of American units under fire. In his matter-of-fact account of the battle, one sentence stands out for its hint of astonishment: "The Enemy moved a very heavy column towards the front of his left, which deployed with the greatest regularity and opened a heavy fire."<sup>79</sup>

Jesup found the skirmishers' fire too deadly and his position untenable, however, and ordered his men to cease firing and charge. Unequal to a massed formation, the British skirmishers immediately withdrew toward the woods and the Lincoln Militia. Captain Daniel Ketchum and the light company of the 25th filed off after them to prevent a rally.<sup>80</sup>

By the time Riall spotted Jesup's column movement, the two main lines had probably approached one another to within about 100 yards, the British halting periodically to fire and the Americans answering. With Jesup and McNeil on the left, the American configuration resembled Hannibal's deployment at Cannae. Sensing the danger Riall ordered the King's Regiment, which was some distance in

<sup>71</sup> "... besides the invisible force [i.e., the light troops] that had just driven Porter and the militia out of the wood." Scott, *Memoirs*, I, 130; Scott to the Adj. Gen., Jul 15, Registered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA.

<sup>72</sup> Marginal notation of Drummond in Riall to Drummond, Jul 6, C 684, RG 8, PAC.

<sup>73</sup> *History of the United States*, Vol. II, Bk. viii, 35, 42.

<sup>74</sup> Roughly 425 and 325 yards, respectively, considering the intervals between battalions.

<sup>75</sup> Scott to the Adj. Gen., Jul 15, Registered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA; Scott, *Memoirs*, I, 130-31.

<sup>76</sup> Described in *Reglement*, I, 214-15, 305-307.

<sup>77</sup> Scott, *Memoirs*, I, 131.

<sup>78</sup> "Narrative of Jesup," *Documentary History* (ed. Cruikshank), II, 474-75.

<sup>79</sup> Riall to Drummond, Jul 6, C 684, RG I, PAC. The independent clause of this sentence is absent from the transcription of Riall's letter in *Documentary History* (ed. Cruikshank), I, 31-32, thus giving the impression that Riall meant the Royals and the 100th deployed with the greatest regularity.

<sup>80</sup> "Narrative of Jesup," *ibid.*, II, 474.

# BATTLE OF CHIPPAWA

FIRST PHASE

5 JULY 1814

## SYMBOLS

☒ Detachment of Infantry

☒ Regiment of Infantry

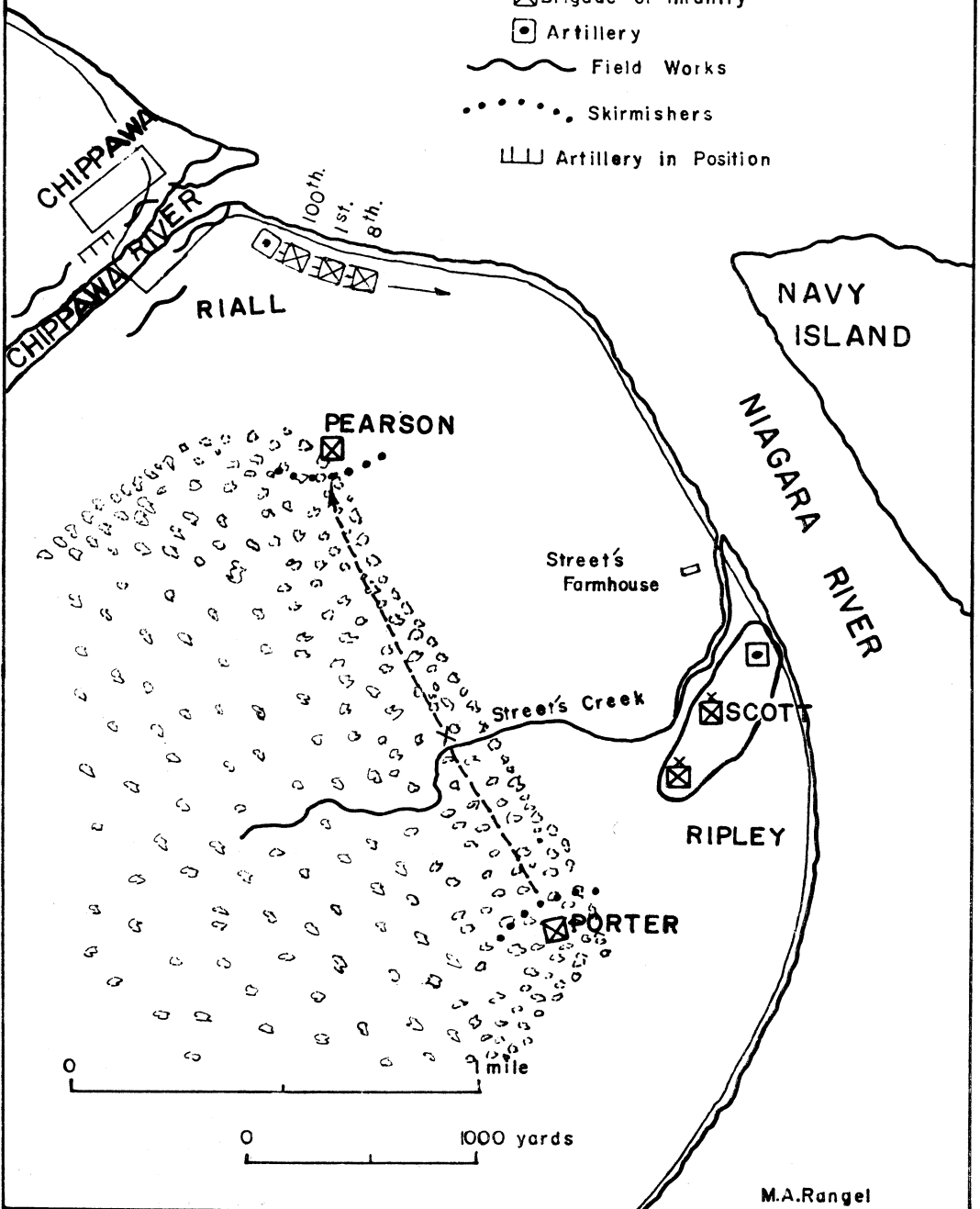
☒ Brigade of Infantry

◻ Artillery

~~~~~ Field Works

..... Skirmishers

▤ Artillery in Position





the rear, to move forward and form on the right of the 100th. He simultaneously directed the Royal Scots and the 100th to charge. It threatened to carry them dangerously into the jaws of the crescent-shaped American line.<sup>81</sup>

Towson, meanwhile, duelled with the British battery on the road. At first it appeared that the superior weight of the British pieces would overwhelm Towson's light guns, for early in the action he lost the howitzer and several of its crew. Finally American marksmanship, rapid delivery, and a bit of luck told. Towson's remaining guns disabled one British 24-pounder and then struck their ammunition wagon. The explosion silenced the entire battery. Towson then turned his pieces on the charging British infantry, enfilading their line with canister. Scott's brigade at this time also received support from three 12-pounders directed by Captains Thomas Biddle and John Ritchie, which Brown had positioned in the gap between McNeil and Leavenworth.<sup>82</sup>

In the face of withering crossfire the British charge ground to a halt. A stationary firefight ensued at sixty paces.<sup>83</sup> Scott later described the scene: "The fire of these corps (including the artillery) produced a prodigious effect on the enemy's ranks. That of Major McNeil's was the most effective from the oblique position which his corps judiciously occupied."<sup>84</sup> Jesup's 25th, fresh from dispersing the skirmishers, wheeled across the flank of the 100th and opened fire into its front and rear, forcing part of it to retire behind the protection of a fence. Thus assisted, McNeil threw his left wing against the

flank of the remainder of the 100th, which began to yield ground. On the right Leavenworth also advanced for the kill.<sup>85</sup>

His line wavering and artillery immobilized, Riall ordered a retreat. The King's failed to reach the front before the bugle sounded. Some segments of the opposing lines were closely engaged—ten paces according to one account—but the British retired before bayonets crossed.<sup>86</sup> Judging from Towson's volume of fire (120 rounds), less than one hour had elapsed since the First Brigade had cleared the bridge.<sup>87</sup>

The defeat was no rout. Though outnumbered during the last firefight, the British had maintained their ground for an appreciable period of time. The retreat was orderly until they approached the Chippawa and broke into a run. Scott pursued, but the King's and light troops covered the retreat, and Riall crossed the river safely.<sup>88</sup>

Viewing the carnage after the battle, Captain Joseph Baker of the Pennsylvania volunteers was surprised, but pleased, to find the ground strewn with so many bodies of the "Red coated Gentry."<sup>89</sup> British dead, wounded, and missing totaled 515! The 100th and Royals alone lost 432—a testimony to the steadiness of British regulars. Against this count of dead, writhing, gasping British, American casualties totaled 328. The ratio of dead was 148 British to sixty Americans. The preponderance of British casualties was due to the American crossfire, Towson's canister, the superior number of Americans engaged, and the habit Scott's musketeers

<sup>81</sup> Riall to Drummond, Jul 6, C 684, RG 8, PAC.

<sup>82</sup> Maj. Hindman to the Adj. Gen., n.d., *Documentary History* (ed. Cruikshank), I, 44; Mackonochie to Glasgow, Aug 19, *ibid.*, 49; Scott to the Adj. Gen., Jul 15, Registered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA; Brown's memoranda, *Brown's Documents* (ed. Cruikshank), 76.

<sup>83</sup> Scott, *Memoirs*, I, 131.

<sup>84</sup> Scott to the Adj. Gen., Jul 15, Registered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA.

<sup>85</sup> "Narrative of Jesup," *Documentary History* (ed. Cruikshank), II, 474-75.

<sup>86</sup> Joseph Baker's Memory Book, G. Militia, Vol. 17, MG 24, PAC.

<sup>87</sup> Letter of an American officer to a friend, Jul 7, *Documentary History* (ed. Cruikshank), I, 49. A good gun crew could deliver two rounds per minute per light gun. Esposito and Elting, "Introduction," *Napoleonic Wars*, n.p.

<sup>88</sup> Scott to the Adj. Gen., Jul 15, Registered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA; Riall to Drummond, Jul 6, C 684, RG 8, PAC.

<sup>89</sup> Memory Book, G 17, MG 24, PAC.

had of putting three buckshot in the barrel of their weapons along with the .70 caliber ball. British artillery and musketry no doubt shared in inflicting 186 casualties upon the 9th, 22nd, and 11th. Though mainly engaged with skirmishers, the 25th lost seventy-six men.<sup>90</sup> In the end the American victory was due to superior artillery and superior mobility, which had enabled Scott to bring superior weight to bear upon the British flanks.

Riall might have fared better had he waited to receive an American attack with his thin red line supported by skirmishers and artillery. But he could not have known that Scott's brigade would maneuver so well, and probably expected to pounce on the Americans while in a state of confusion. Committing himself too early to a charge, Riall prevented the King's Regiment from participating in the battle.

Complete victory escaped the Americans, because Brown had been dilatory in calling up his reserve, Ripley's Second Brigade. After rushing back to camp at Riall's approach and ordering Scott's brigade forward, Brown had instructed Ripley to hold his position, for he feared a light infantry attack through the woods upon the rear of the encampment. He then rode to the front. While lining up Biddle's and Ritchie's artillery between McNeil and Leavenworth, he spotted Porter's fleeing volunteers spilling out of the woods. After ordering Captain Samuel Harris to rally the militia with his dragoons, Brown went to Jessup to assess the situation. The British charge had just failed, and Jessup was preparing to advance against the 100th.

<sup>90</sup> "Return of the Killed, Wounded and Missing of the Right Division," Jul 5, C 684, RG 8, PAC; Report of the Killed, Wounded and Missing of the Left Division," *Documentary History* (ed. Cruikshank), I, 43. The percentages of killed and wounded regular infantry to those engaged were 31% for the British and 20% for the Americans. The combined percentage was 25%. Cf. the battles of Zorndorff (38%), Eylau (33%), Borodino (28%), Chickamauga (27%), and Spottsylvania (16%). See: Falls, *A Hundred Years of War*, 68.

Once on the spot Brown recognized the opportunity for an enveloping movement. He sent a message to Ripley, directing him to make a sweep to the left through the woods and fall upon the rear of the British right wing. But to accomplish the envelopment, Ripley's brigade inadvertently took a circuitous route. By the time the men waded through chin-high creek water and trudged through swampy ground the battle was over and the British had won the safety of Chippawa.<sup>91</sup>

The victory won had been a near thing. As Porter noted later in the month, Brown had really been "lucky" in repulsing Riall's attack.<sup>92</sup> He had not posted guards on the road or reconnoitered the British camp, and was only forewarned of Riall's approach through Porter's accidental collision with the Lincoln Militia. With less able troops and officers, Brown would have suffered a humiliating defeat. Reflecting on the battle some years later, Jesup wrote: "We were all young soldiers, and the wonder should be, not that we blundered, but that we did not blunder more, and that our talented and veteran enemy should have out blundered us."<sup>93</sup>

Strategically Chippawa was only a Pyrrhic victory. American casualties, though fewer than the British, were heavy. The dead and wounded regulars were not replaced, while the British Right Division received small but timely reinforcements in the next three weeks. The battle delayed the American advance, and Riall, having taken the measure of the enemy and learned his lesson, eluded Brown until help arrived—almost as Drummond had planned.

On July 25 Scott, overconfident from his

<sup>91</sup> Brown to Armstrong, Jul 7, Registered Letters Received, RG 107, DNA; Brown's memoranda, *Brown's Documents* (ed. Cruikshank), 75-76; *Niles Register*, VI, 403.

<sup>92</sup> Porter to Tompkins, Jul 29, *Documentary History* (ed. Cruikshank), I, 101.

<sup>93</sup> "The Campaign on the Niagara," Jesup Papers, Box 11, Manuscript Div., Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Chippawa victory, arrogantly attacked a slightly larger British force in excellent position at Lundy's Lane, about three miles north of Chippawa. Artillery and skirmishers, defending a fifty-foot hill, brought down one-third of Scott's brigade before the rest of the Left Division arrived on the field. The ensuing night-long battle devoured the little American army. Both sides lost nearly 900 men, but the British continued to be reinforced during the following weeks, and diminished American strength proved the ruin of the Niagara campaign. Retreating to Fort Erie, the Americans were unable to meet Chauncey's squadron when it tardily arrived off Fort George on August 5.

Ultimately the Americans failed in the Niagara peninsula owing to the absence of adequate logistical support from the Navy, not because they were outfought or outgeneraled. Chauncey's late arrival enabled the British to reinforce by Lake Ontario and left Brown virtually stranded in the peninsula. He was unable to exploit the Chippawa victory, because, lacking reinforcements, he could not make good his losses, and lacking naval assistance, he could not secure his communications. The battle of Lundy's Lane resulted from Brown's desperate reaction to a British move against his land communications.

The importance of the battle of Chippawa, or "this little action," as Sir John Fortescue referred to it, is not to be found in its strategic impact, for that was nil. Rather, "the British were beaten, and it was evident that the experience of two campaigns had at last turned the Americans into soldiers who were not to be trifled with."<sup>94</sup> Insofar as the United States Army was concerned, the battles of Chippawa and Lundy's Lane were, according to John McAuley Palmer, turning points in its history: "Since then it has never failed to give a good account of itself."<sup>95</sup> Much of the credit goes to Winfield Scott, who at the training camp in Buffalo made so-called American regulars into highly disci-

plined soldiers. The discipline came too late to affect the outcome of the war.

Congress and the War Department, appreciating the need for a viable system of tactics, recognized Scott's achievement. In 1815 and 1829 he traveled to Europe to study European army organization and tactics. In 1815, 1821, 1824, and 1826 he served as president of boards of tactics for the Army. His major contribution was the writing and publication of a handbook of drill regulations in 1835.<sup>96</sup> It was a plagiarism of the French Ordinance of 1791, which Scott translated into English with an additional section on the training of light troops as skirmishers.<sup>97</sup> Scott's *Infantry Tactics* was a standard textbook up to the Civil War and a significant step toward the development of American tactical literature.<sup>98</sup>

The experience of the Left Division and the influence of Scott after the war challenges the view of Daniel Boorstin, who contends that "colonial methods of warfare, reflecting New World environmental factors, had exerted a profound influence in shaping our later military tradition."<sup>99</sup> Scott, like Washington and Steuben, was less impressed by colonial militia tactics than by regular European tactics. Technology and the European cultural tradition were more significant in the long run.

<sup>94</sup> Fortescue, *History of the British Army*, X, 109-10.

<sup>95</sup> *America in Arms* (New Haven, 1941), 72-73. Cf. a similar observation by Louis Sérurier, French Minister, cited in Irving Brant, *James Madison: Commander in Chief, 1812-1836* (New York, 1961), 289.

<sup>96</sup> *Infantry Tactics, or Rules for the Exercise and Maneuvers of the U.S. Infantry*, 3 vols. (New ed., New York, 1859).

<sup>97</sup> Comparison of the two works has satisfied the author that Scott merely translated the French text.

<sup>98</sup> Francis A. Lord, *They Fought for the Union* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1960), 41.

<sup>99</sup> Don Higginbotham, "American Historians and the Military History of the American Revolution," *American Historical Review*, LXX (Oct 1964), 29, referring to Boorstin's "A Nation of Minute Men," *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York, 1958), 345-72.