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**"PLOW-JOGGERS FOR GENERALS":  
THE EXPERIENCES OF A NEW YORK ENSIGN  
IN THE WAR OF 1812**

by John C. Fredriksen\*

During the War of 1812 New York occupied a strategic position relative to the major theaters of conflict. From Buffalo in the west to Sackett's Harbor on Lake Ontario and thence east to Plattsburg, the Empire State remained a crucial staging area for invasions into Canada. Given this operational proximity, and her sizable population, it is not surprising to find that of all states New York contributed the largest number of regiments — seven — to the regular military establishment.<sup>1</sup> These units were actively engaged throughout the war and acquired a distinguished reputation, despite the oftentimes inept leadership prevalent on the American side. After the peace, however, they were all unceremoniously disbanded by Congress and amalgamated into the regiments of a greatly reduced postwar army. And while official reports abound on their combat activities in the field, little has survived from the standpoint of the common soldier in the ranks. The memoirs of Joseph Hawley Dwight are important to historians of the War of 1812 for both these reasons. He relates the combat career of a New York regiment while at the same time adding a personal dimension that complements our official commentaries of these same actions. In short, the writings shed additional light on an area imperfectly documented and more or less neglected in the overall scheme of American military history.

Little is known about the author, Joseph Hawley Dwight, but fragmentary evidence suggests he was born in Massachusetts and relocated to New York sometime before the war. Certainly Dwight was acquainted with agriculture for he displays a sharp eye for soil and flora variations and comments on them repeatedly. But regardless of his civilian career, Dwight's military experience was a short but active one. Commissioned an ensign in the 13th U.S. Infantry, he participated in four major engagements, numerous skirmishes, and rose to regimental quartermaster, all in the span of twenty months. As a soldier his narrative is interesting because of his candid and frequently acerbic criticism of the leaders under whom he served. The deficiencies of these leaders took their toll on the author as, after months of futile campaigning, Dwight resigned his commission, apparently in disgust. He vanishes from history at this point, but he did leave one of the few narratives extant involving a New York regiment.<sup>2</sup> Because primary material of this nature is so rare, Dwight's memoir is a new source of evidence in this otherwise obscure conflict. Our understanding of the War of 1812 will be enhanced by an appreciation of the roles Joseph Hawley Dwight and the 13th U.S. Infantry played in it.

May 9, 1812. Rec'd the appointment of Ensign in the U.S. Infantry. The beginning of July repaired to Greenbush agreeable to orders recv'd of Capt. Young from Rome. Attached to the 13th reg. Continued at Greenbush until the 18th of Sept. when I marched with the Reg. for Niagara. Encamped first night three miles from Albany, put on guard.<sup>3</sup>

Sept. 19. March two miles past Schenectedy and encamped — had command of the guard at night — taken sick with fever and ague — recv'd permission to proceed [after] the Reg. which I did not join until Monday, 19 Oct. on their march from Lewiston to Buffaloe. 20th Proceeded with the Reg. to their old encampment three miles from Buffaloe village. 24th leave of absence for three days — procured a horse and proceeded to Lewistown in search of my trunk which I found in charge of Capt. Malcom at a small log house about a mile from the river. There I found Capt. Armstrong, Lt. Wm Clark of the 23rd Inf. and Ensign Lent, all wounded in the battle of Queenston on the 16th of Oct. and crowded together in one room, the same occupied by the family — being in fact the only one in the house their situation was deplorable enough.

26th Returned to camp.

Noon, 1st. Recv'd orders from Gen Smith<sup>4</sup> to proceed to Niagara for some public stores — embarked the same day in a boat in Conjockety creek with seven men in company with Ensign



THE STORMING OF FORT GEORGE, MAY 27TH, 1813.

*Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library*

Denton and twenty men — ordered to Lewiston — proceeded down the river into the Niagara and on the 2nd arrived at Schlosser; proceeded on to Niagara — obtained stores and returned to camp on the 7th, bringing the wounded officers from Lewiston to Buffaloe. Nov. 28 proceeded with all troops from our camp to the Navy yard by orders of General Smith and embarked for *Canada* — after remaining some hours in the boats, disembarking & again embarking were finally ordered to return to camp. 29th recv'd order to be at Navy yard by daylight on the 30th for invading Canada — Again, marched to the river, arrived about dawn and after waiting some time ordered to retire into the woods out of sight of the river. — here we remained until 3 o'clock on the 1st Dec. when we again marched to the river, embarked on board the boats and continued until daylight until we were *told* to disembark and return to camp for the expedition was abandoned.<sup>5</sup>

Dec 4 recv'd orders from Col. Schuyler<sup>6</sup> of the 13th to repair to Utica on the recruiting service.<sup>7</sup>

Dec 9th started from Buffaloe and arrived at Utica on the 17th — Continued in Utica through the winter and in company with Capt. Malcom, recruited sixty one men, all but two for five years or duration of the war.

1813 April 9th Left Utica for Sackett's Harbor by order of Col. Macomb,<sup>8</sup> arrived on the 11th, found Brig. Gen. Chandler<sup>9</sup> in command. Gen. C. appears to be a man of very ordinary abilities and totally unfit for the command of an army.

13th attached to Capt. Grindage's company of the 14th Inf., their company was previously attached to the 15th Reg. and is now united under the command of Capt. Nicholson, Capt. Grindage being absent on furlough.

15th We have about four thousand men here, sick and well but one half of them in very bad fighting condition — nevertheless some expedition appears to be preparing — Harbor still full

of ice — from pretty good sources I learn that upwards of 500 men have been buried at this port since the commencement of the war.<sup>10</sup>

20th The harbor is entirely clear of ice. The 1st, or Pike's<sup>11</sup> brigade is ordered to embark (together with 3 companies of artillery) on board the fleet tomorrow — Gen. Dearborn<sup>12</sup> arrived this day — he was saluted by 17 guns from Fort Tompkins and a like number from Fort Volunteer.

21st Weather very bad — not able to embark. The 6th, 15th, 16th and 21st Reg. with a detachment of artillery to go on board the fleet; in all about 1600 men. Many conjecture respecting the place of destination. Some conclude that we are to attack Kingston, but this with our present force cannot be the case as the enemy have at least 3,000 men at that place. Some suppose Prescott the place of destination and others Niagara. Some that we are to take possession of a small island off Kingston and fortify and wait for reinforcements. The last I think most probable.

22nd Embarked on board the Gov. Tompkins with detachments of the 13th, 14th & a part of the 15th. Capt. Grindage arrives and takes command of his company. Capt. Nicholson attached to the staff of Gen. Pike. Forsyth<sup>13</sup> with about 150 riflemen embark. The fleet consists of the Madison of 20 guns, Brig. Oneida 16 guns & 11 or 12 schooners carrying from 1 to 8 guns. Make sail and clear harbor — coming on to blow heavy & come to anchor — we are permitted to go on shore.

25th Again cleared out of harbor and proceeded up the lake in a heavy swell, many of the men sick.

27th About daylight appeared in sight of York harbor. About sunrise commence landing. Forsyth with his riflemen in the van, the 15th following in quick succession under the cover of guns from the shipping. The enemy met us at the water's edge and fought like men (that is, the *British regulars*). The militia ran away almost the first fire. The regular troops stood their ground until almost all were killed or wounded — as to the landing of the 15th the fate of the day hung by a thread or rather the probability of making a good landing at that time and place was extremely doubtful as the advance were obliged to retreat to the water's edge. About 9 o'clock the whole of the troops made good their landing — the remains of the enemy retreated to the fort. The place of landing was the site of old Fort Toronto about 1/2 miles from the new fort. The brigade was formed in column of sections, the 6th in advance, the Riflemen on the left flank — in this order we proceeded toward the fort, our right on the bay. About the time the column commenced its march a battery of the enemy's (calculated to rake the defile which we were to pass) blew up, by which accident they lost about fifty men and were prevented from impeding us in our advance except from two light pieces which were very badly directed. They had lost all their artillerymen in the battery. The column advanced through the defile and the head of it had arrived within one hundred rods of the fort when their magazine containing upwards of 500 casks of powder blew up with a horrid explosion — by this *accident* we lost between three & four hundred men killed and wounded, but our principal loss was in the death of Gen. Pike who was so severely wounded that he died next morning. Capt. Nicholson afterwards died at Sackett's Harbor. By one o'clock pm we were in possession of all the enemy's works. Officers killed: Gen. Pike, Capt. Hoppock & Lt. Bloomfield of the 15th, Capt. Lyon, 16th and one midshipman killed in the boat bringing troops to the shore. Enemy lost several officers and upwards of 100 men killed — we took no prisoners except the wounded and none of these they could carry away.<sup>14</sup>

May 1st Embarked on board the fleet where we remained in York harbor until the 8th — it stormed violently the whole time.

8th Made sail and arrived at Four mile creek four miles east of Fort Niagara, disembarked and lay all night on the beach in a cold rain storm without tents, blankets or fire.

9th Joined the 13th Reg. in Ft. Niagara with 21 men, the remains of 61 recruited during the winter.<sup>15</sup>

13th The Reg. marched to Two mile creek and encamped by itself under the command of Lt. Col. Chrystie,<sup>16</sup> numbering about 450 bayonets. The fleet has gone back to Sackett's Harbor after troops, when they return expect to attack Fort George.

16th Recv'd the appointment of 3rd Lt. and tendered my resignation to General Dearborn — not accepted.

27th Attacked and took Fort George. The army, about 5000 bayonets, embarked in boats at two mile creek and made a landing about one mile north east of the fort. The enemy opposed the landing with 1200 men and left 72 dead & 150 wounded on the beach besides 100 prisoners.<sup>17</sup> After all the troops had landed we took up a line of march in open column to the left and rear of the fort & village of Newark and were very faintly resisted by a few shells & shrapnels.<sup>18</sup> The enemy seeing they were likely to be surrounded, abandoned the fort and retired up the river on the Queenston road. The advance under Col. Scott<sup>19</sup> after pursuing a short distance returned by the order of Gen. Lewis.<sup>20</sup>

29th All the troops except the 13th return to Fort George.

31st Recv'd orders to march the next day for the interior.

June 1st marched to St. Catherine 12 miles. Joined the same day by Gen. Winder<sup>21</sup> and the rest of the brigade & Gen. Chandler with his brigade, the whole under his command.

2nd Marched to 20 mile creek.

3rd to 40 mile creek.

5th To Stoney creek, 10 miles. The 13th and 14th reg. and 2 pieces of artillery, the whole under the command of Col. Chrystie detached to the lake as a guard to the boats. This detachment, about 800 strong were one mile nearer the enemy than the main body from which it was stationed 1½ miles. Expecting an attack we were formed in order of battle and lay on our arms all night.<sup>22</sup> At 2 o'clock the main army attacked by about 1000 British and Indians and most of them driven from the field in utter confusion. The 5th and part of the 23rd Reg. only maintaining their ground. The darkness was so great and the attack being made in detachments that the enemy was as badly scattered as our troops. At daylight they had hardly a platoon together. At this time Col. Chrystie gave the order to march and cut off the enemy's retreat but before the order could be executed he recv'd orders to join our main body now collecting in the rear of their former encampment.<sup>23</sup> At 7 o'clock this detachment marched and took possession of the field of battle — collected our wounded, put them in waggons and at 8 o'clock took up *our* line of *march* to the rear covering the retreat of the army to 40 mile creek — Here we saw the blessed effects of having plough joggers for generals whose greatest merits consist in being warm partisans and supporting administration right or wrong. Had Chrystie have had command not a doubt remains that the whole British force would have been in our possession.<sup>24</sup>

6th Arrived at 40 Mile creek.

7th Received a reinforcement of 300 men from Fort George.

8th In the morning the Indians on the 15th and dragoons from the mountain — they are driven off by Lt. Glouge with the quarter guard of the 13th Reg. *Advanced backwards* to 12 Mile creek.

9th To Fort George by Queenston.

19th Appointed Quartermaster, 13th Reg. Gen. Lewis leaves for Sackett's Harbor.

21st In the evening the 13th Reg. marched to Queenston. Go myself with the boats and baggage.

22nd Detachment under Capt. Myers sent out. Fired on by the enemy in Lundy's Land — guide killed — enemy ran away. At night took the boats with the baggage across the river to Lewiston; the Reg. took a position two miles towards Fort George expecting to attack. 23rd Return to Queenston — collected 85 barrels of flour belonging to the enemy and put on board the boats — in the eve we returned to Fort George.<sup>25</sup>

July 8th Lt. Elbridge & 17 men of the 13th killed as they were advancing to the relief of a pickett attacked by the enemy.<sup>26</sup>

22 Col. Chrystie died at Lewiston very suddenly.

23 Col. Chrystie brought from Lewiston to Fort Niagara and buried with all the honors of war in the old British burying ground about ten yards immediately in front of the gate.

27th Fleet arrives from Sackett's Harbor.

28th Take on board 300 men and proceed up the lake. Brig. Gen. D.R. Williams<sup>27</sup> arrives.

Aug. 2 Fleet returns. Reports having been to the head of the lake, from there to York, troops landed and burnt the barracks and public stores.

7th British fleet of six sail arrive in sight of Commodore Chauncey<sup>28</sup> weighs anchor and gives chase. British fleet retire up the lake, Chauncey in pursuit. In the night between the 7th and 8th a very heavy thunder squall. Two of our schooners lost the 80 men, 15 saved.

8th Chauncey returns with the fleet.

9th British fleet appears in sight. Chauncey gives chase after taking on board 70 soldiers to serve as Marines. British fleet not in sight. Cannonading for about an hour from the Commodore's ship.

10th Both fleets in sight; proceed up the lake. Between the 10th and 11th a heavy cannonade up the lake. Lt. Bouisebourne died and is buried in the Niagara burying ground.

11th Fleet returns to port with the loss of two schooners taken by the enemy.

13th Fleet sail in pursuit of the British.

17th 11 of the enemy's Indians and five soldiers taken, our loss two Indians killed, one wounded. The enemy had 31 killed. Express from 18 Mile creek states that the British were landing troops from their fleet at 18 Mile Creek to destroy the provisions — our fleet appeared in sight, they hauled off.

18th Our Indians were in the enemy's picket, stormed their advance camp and bring off 2 pcs of artillery. Not being supported and having no horses to draw the artillery, it was retaken. Indians very dissatisfied — say that Yankees cowards, dare not fight.

24th Our picketts driven in at daylight, the enemy appear in force on the plains and in the village. Some skirmishing. We took Capt. Fitzgerald and 3 privates of the enemy. Our loss 60, enemy not known.

*Sept. 1, 1813* Doctor Shormat killed in a duel with Lt. Hormell of the 16th Reg.

2nd Buried with honors of war.

3rd Our fleet arrives from Sackett's Harbor and anchors in the river.

4th Gen. Wilkinson<sup>29</sup> arrives, salute of 18 guns; returned from Fort Niagara.

6th A skirmish on the picketts. Ensign Ingersoll of the 23rd wounded — took 1 Indian & 1 British prisoner & 1 scalp. Gen. Wilkinson addresses his orders to the army.

7th The British fleet appears off our fleet puts out chase.

Sept. 11, 1813 Moses Jenks, a private in the 25th Reg. hung for desertion.

18th The anniversary of the 13th receiving their colors, dined at Rogers.

20th Report of the capture of the enemy's fleet on Lake Erie.

21st Gen. Wilkinson reviewed all the troops.

22nd Official account recv'd of the capture of the enemy's fleet on Erie, salute fired, 17 guns from Fort Niagara.<sup>30</sup>

23rd Col. Scott embarked in boats with 450 men to go on an expedition to destroy the enemy's boats.

24th Returns without effecting anything — our fleet arrives in the river.

25th The 13th Reg. embarked on board of boats in company with the 5th, 20th and 15th, the whole under the command of Col. Bissell.<sup>31</sup> Disembarked and lay on the beach in a very uncomfortable situation until the 28th.

28th 11 o'clock AM again embarked and proceeded 6 miles when we were ordered back. On arriving on the beach learned that our fleet had been engaged. Lay on the beach until Oct. 1st.

Oct. 1 11 o'clock AM Embarked with the whole army, proceeded out of the river. Passed the fleet at anchor off 4 Mile creek.

Oct. 1, 1813 Wind ahead, raining and cold. About dark arrived at 12 Mile creek after trying until 9 o'clock PM to make a passage into the creek with wooden boats. Finding it impossible, hauled the boats "close to" and lay down upon the sand. Wind heavy, on shore several boats filled and some entirely lost.

2nd At daylight got underway and with great difficulty got off shore at 8 o'clock AM Came on to blow a gale — passed the 18 Mile creek in the field and staff boat of the 13th Reg. with the wind abaft the beam. All the rest of the boats into the 18th. At 12 o'clock put into the 40 or Johnson's creek, 22 miles from the 12. Wind and weather favorable. At sundown the remainder of the army arrived.

3rd At sunrise got underway, wind and weather fair. To Oak creek, 5 miles. Sandy, 18. Brush harbor, 5 miles. Here Maj. Malcom and myself went on shore and walked to Braddock's bay, 5 miles (on the rout killed a porcupine). Arrived at the bay before the boats. This day the wind ahead — obliged to row. Lt. Page fell overboard.<sup>32</sup>

4th 4 o'clock AM Got under way, wind fair. Made Genessee river, 7 miles — ran in for orders, the rest of the boats of the 13th proceeded contrary to orders except Capt. Myers who was found in the river. From the 40 Mile creek to Genessee appeared extremely good. Soft maple, elm, ash, sapwood, etc. Obtained orders from Gen. Boyd<sup>33</sup> to proceed to Oswego (65 miles). from Genessee to Pine point creek 9 miles, to Bear creek 9 miles, to Poultneyville 5 miles, little Salmon creek 10 miles, Big Sodus 2m, little Sodus 3m. To 9 Mile creek 6 miles, to Oswego 9 miles. Put in about sundown to Blind Sodus, men cooked their provisions. At 8 o'clock PM got underway and with a fair wind arrived at Oswego at 12 o'clock. here we found Capt. Cox & Lt. William's boats about 1 AM on the 5th — came on to blow very heavy.<sup>34</sup>



5th Storm continues.

6th Storm continues. The creeks from Niagara to Oswego which are always open are the 18 Mile, the 40 Mile or Johnson's, Oak, Orchard, Genessee, Big Sodus, Blind Sodus. The rest are sometimes open but often closed up at the mouth by Sand driven in by the waves of the lake. At such times the waters in these creeks rises above the level of the lake and runs over the bank in several places in narrow winding streams. From Oswego to Mexico of Big Salmon 15 miles, Little Sandy 10 miles, Big Sandy 7 miles, Little Stoney 5 miles, Big Stoney 3 miles. Henderson's harbor 10 miles, Sackett's harbor 8 miles. These are with the exception of Little Stoney always open, the shore more rocky than west of Oswego and the land not so good. The 13th took possession of the old fort at Oswego. It is situated on the heights east of the village and commands the harbor.<sup>35</sup>

8th & 9th The remainder of the boats of the 13th arrive except Capt. Myers which was lost.<sup>36</sup>

13th Most of the boats having arrived embarked with the rest of the army and at 10 minutes past 9 AM cleared the harbor.

Oct. 13, 1813 At 15 minutes before 3 AM arrived at Sackett's harbor — a distance of 60 miles in 5 hrs, 25 minutes in an open boat. Ours the only boat that kept the lake, many were driven on shore and lost. Some put back to Oswego, but most put into Sandy and Stoney creek.

14th Draw provisions for four days for the reg. — put on board the boat and send her back to Henderson harbor where the troops are to rendezvous — Maj. Malcom and myself walk back keeping the lake shore 10 m. At Henderson's harbor we find Mrs. Hopkins, a daughter of Mark Hopkins, Esq, of Gt. Barrington — She married Jess Hopkins, esq. — put up at their house, very well treated. The land from S. Harbor to this place generally good, lumber hard maple, beech, birch, sapwood & some hickory. The town contains 1200 inhabitants. The soil is very hard, impregnated with limestone.

15th Capt. Dox boat arrives. I am taken sick.

18th Troops sail for Grenadier Island, continue quite sick.

28th Rock out to Stoney creek — called on Mark Hopkins.

29th Engage a boat to carry me to Grenadier Island. Wind fair. Proceed to Six Towns point where we are obliged to put in, the swells rising very fast.

30th Continue at Six Town Pt. Storm increases. Snow.

Nov. 1st Storm continues with rain and snow, wind very high.

2nd Wind abates. Leave the point by rowing hard all day — make Basin harbor on Grenadier Island. The basin or harbor is formed by Fox island. The troops mostly go onto Gravelly Point. Wind high — carry away our mast. By rowing hard make the entrance of the Saint Lawrence and at 10 o'clock reach Gravelly Point and join my Reg. Find Col. Preston<sup>37</sup> in command. Our fleet arrives and anchors off the point.

Nov. 3rd At sunrise our flotilla gets underway and proceeds to French creek. No inhabitants. The advance, under Col. Macomb, has been attacked by several of the enemy's vessels & gun boats, we lost several men. The enemy were obliged to haul off towing one of their vessels with difficulty. This creek is 40 miles from Grenadier island.

5th Embark at 5 o'clock AM and after a great deal of manoeuvring form agreeable to the orders in which we are to descend the river; by the help of flags designating brigades, regiments, etc. The flag of the 13th St. George's Cross, black in a white field. 11 o'clock proceed down the river,

wind and weather extremely favorable. The land not improved on either side of the river. Arrive at Morristown about dark, boats stop. I land with Lt. Page contrary to orders to obtain something to eat. Nothing to be had. At 9 o'clock PM proceed and pass Elizabethtown on Canada shoreland four miles below our own shore. Here the whole army is in the utmost confusion. Brigades & regiments & even companies separated in the dark and land at different places. The night so very dark and shore so very rough that we find it impossible to restore order. Large fires were built on the bank for two miles in extent. The scene was grand and sublime. Had the enemy attacked us with a few gunboats the army would have been dispensed as we had not even a camp guard. Capt. Sproul and I took a large door which we laid across each wrapped up in his blanket.

6th Order issued for the troops to pass Ogdensburg by land, except sufficient to navigate the boats. Opposite Ogdensburg is Prescott which has been strongly fortified the season past.<sup>38</sup> A block house, bomb proof below the parapet. At 4 o'clock PM proceed on foot in company with Lt. Robinson to Ogdensburg, 4 m. Mistake the road, detained by the pickett, finally reach Ogdensburg at 10 o'clock PM after walking ten miles and being detained three hours. Our boats begin to pass the battery about 11 o'clock and continue passing until daylight under a most tremendous cannonading from the enemy.<sup>39</sup> The troops pass the village between 9 & 12.

Nov. 8th The fire of the enemy boats might have been badly directed, but three men were killed and two wounded. They threw about 20 shells into Ogdensburg which did no damage. I leave the village at 10 o'clock and proceed to overtake the army, but from fatigue am obliged to take shelter in a thick bush without blanket or gt. coat about 3 m. from the village.

7 Nov. Proceed to where the boats had begun to come to and got on board. Drop down about a mile to where the Reg. has halted. Just before night the Elite under Col. Malcomb & Scott proceed down the river to take a battery of the enemy's, which was expected to annoy us on our passage. They succeeded without bloodshed, taking one Capt. prisoner, but in the dark the force being divided to attack at different places came very near to having an engagement with themselves.

8th At sunrise get underway — 11 miles to the Galotte rapids, pass the town of Lisbon. 4 miles from this point Rockaway on the British shore at the head of the narrows. The river there is not more than 1/2 mile wide, an eddy which shoots the boats within a few yards of the Canada shore makes an excellent place for a battery. Army lands at Hamilton directly opposite the battery. Three days provisions ordered to be cooked. Information is here recv'd that the enemy's squadron of 30 gunboats has arrived at Prescott with 1000 men, were moving down in our rear. We expect the enemy to attempt to pass us in the night. The Elite, light artillery, cavalry, and 2nd, 3rd & 4th brigades pass the river to the Canada shore. 1st brig. remains, the 15th Reg. sent back to pt. Rockaway to annoy the enemy should they attempt to pass. The enemy land on their own shore 1 mile above the point.

9th At daylight the enemy's advance attack our advanced picketts on the river, repulsed. We lost one man. A large column of the enemy appears in sight. Conjectured to be a manoever to attract our attention while the main body pass by us in the interior of the country. At 10 o'clock AM the troops commence their march on the Canada shore, 1st brigade go by water. 4 miles from Pt. Rockaway come to rapids, from there about 6 miles to Williamsburg. Land near Chrysler's, a member of the Provincial Parliament. At 4 o'clock AM the troops that went by land arrive.

10th Early the light troops proceed down by land. We commence our march about 7 o'clock AM. After marching about 1 1/2 miles ordered to right about, the enemy has attacked our rear. Returned and formed line of battle near the ground left in the morning. The 5th reg. & two companies of the 20th detached to the 3rd Brigade. The remainder of the 1st brigade (13th Reg.

& 150 men of the 12th) ordered to advance and by endeavoring to outflank, turn the enemy left, who were drawn up in order of battle, their right on the river, their left extending to the woods in the rear of Chrysler's house. After advancing to near the outskirts of the woods, are ordered to return to the river and embark. On our return the enemy opened a fire at long shot from several pieces of artillery, situated near Chrysler's house. At the same instant recv'd orders to return to the woods and turn the enemy's left. Col. Cole,<sup>40</sup> who commanded, instead of ordering to countermarch, ordered to the right about face and we returned to the woods in this form, left in front and platoons inverted. Our arriving at the woods, we were ordered to advance into it by files from the left of platoons. After advancing nearly through, were fired upon by the enemy. The men were ordered to form platoons but the previous *errors* had so entirely disarrayed them that they could not do it, but retreated in great disorder & again advanced by the head of platoons keeping the men well closed up in order to form the line with quickness and precision. Before we had advanced half way through the wood were ordered to return and embark on boats. In this affair we had one Lt. wounded and several men, two or three, killed. I recv'd bullet holes through my clothes. Col. Preston had the middle knuckle of his bridle hand shot off. The army retreated up the river.

11th Battle of Williamsburg in which our army was most shamefully beaten. To describe the battle correctly is impossible. There was no order or system displayed on our part.<sup>41</sup> The enemy had 2500 our force only 1000. Our troops fought well when not disheartened by conflicting orders. The 13th Reg. had more than one fourth of its number in killed and wounded.<sup>42</sup> The enemy suffered severely. The whole army proceeded after the battle to the foot of the long Sault in Lake St. Francis, disembarked on the Canada shore near Barnharts Tavern. Slept on shore without a blanket. The horses of the army are all swam across the river in the night.

13th The army embarked and proceeded down the Salmon river and up that river to the French Mills to take up winter quarters. Gen. Covington<sup>43</sup> dies of wounds recv'd in the battle of the 11th.

16th Gen. Covington buried with the honors of war. I am appointed Assistant Deputy Quartermaster General.

17th Lt. Col. Dix,<sup>44</sup> 14th Inf. buried with the honors of war.

21st Gen. Boyd starts for Boston.

22nd Gen. Lewis for Washington.

24th Gen. Wilkinson for Malone.

30th Ordered to Malone to superintend the Quatermaster's Department at that post.

Dec. 5th Col. Macomb sent with a flag in the direction of Montreal.

8th Alarm at French Mills and Malone at the enemy cross at St. Regis.

11th Maj. Johnson, Inspector Gen. 2nd Division dies.

Feb. 16, 1814 Send in my resignation to General Wilkinson and return home by way of Sackett's and Henderson's Harbor.<sup>45</sup>

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> These were the 6th, 13th, 23rd, 27th, 29th, 41st, and 46th regiments. Massachusetts, with six regiments, was the next largest contributor.

<sup>2</sup> The original document is in the Oneida Historical Society, Utica, New York. The only other surviving narrative of the 13th Infantry is Mordecai Myers, *Reminiscences, 1780-1814, Including Incidents in the War of 1812* (Washington, D.C.: Crane Press, 1900). Myers subsequently became mayor of Schenectady. According to him, the nickname of the 13th was the "Jolly Snorters." Myers, *Reminiscences*, 29.

<sup>3</sup> One officer describes the difficulties of guard duty: "To command one of these picquets in those days, even twenty four hours, was a sever duty. The officer who was responsible for its safe keeping did not often shut his eyes, even during the day, much less at night, when he considered sleep as much out of the question as a feather bed. The enemy being within striking distance, there was no knowing when the blow might come. *Wide awake* was the watchword in every mind and both officers and men were as vigilant as so many cats." "First campaign of an A.D.C.," *Military and Naval Magazine of the United States* 3 (1834): 442.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Smyth, 1765-1830.

<sup>5</sup> Smyth's farce upon the Niagara consequently led to a bloodless duel with Peter B. Porter, the "War Hawk" congressman from Buffalo. For additional details consult "Reminiscences of the Late War," *Army and Navy Chronicle* 1 (1835): 59-60, and Frank H. Severance, "The Case of Brigadier General Alexander Smyth as Shown by His Own Writings," *Buffalo Historical Society Publications* 18 (1914): 213-55.

<sup>6</sup> Peter P. Schuyler of New York.

<sup>7</sup> About this time, Myers was likewise detailed to recruiting for the 13th Infantry, and here observed "many singular incidents." "I used to have the men practice firing at the top rail of a fence. On one occasion I noticed that one of them went through all the motions of loading, etc., but that he did not fire. I called him to the front and ordered him to fire off his piece. On doing so, he was wheeled about, his shoulder badly bruised, and the musket flew out of his hands. He was never after afraid to fire on charge having fired all three at the same time." Myers, *Reminiscences*, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Macomb, 1765-1833. He was the future victor of Plattsburg. See Milo M. Quaife, "Alexander Macomb," *Burton Historical Collection Leaflets* 10 (1931): 1-16.

<sup>9</sup> John Chandler, 1762-1841. For his role in the Niagara campaign see George F. Talbot, "General John Chandler of Monmouth, Maine," *Collections of the Maine Historical Society* 9 (1887): 380-95.

<sup>10</sup> Throughout the War of 1812 the death toll from disease far exceeded that experienced in combat. Speaking of the cantonment at Grenadier Island, one individual observed how "the men, being in want of food, and exposed to the inclemency of the weather died in great numbers; indeed one part of the island at this time looked like the burial ground of a populous city." Diary of David Wingfield, 41. Public Archives of Canada.

<sup>11</sup> Zebulon M. Pike, 1779-1813. Accounts of Pike are numerous with the most recent being John W. Terril, *Zebulon Pike: The Life and Times of an Adventurer* (New York: Weybright, Talley, 1968).

<sup>12</sup> Henry Dearborn, 1751-1829. Though a distinguished Revolutionary War veteran, Dearborn fell under extreme criticism for his role in the Niagara campaign and was relieved. Consult Richard A. Erney, *The Public Life of Henry Dearborn* (New York: Arno, 1979).

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Forsyth, 1760 (?) - 1814. Details on this enterprising partisan are in Sarah Lemmon, *Frustrated Patriots: North Carolina and the War of 1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973).

<sup>14</sup> A detailed description of the capture of York is in John C. Fredriksen, "A Poor But Honest Sodge: Colonel Cromwell Pierce, the 16th U.S. Infantry, and the War of 1812," *Pennsylvania History* 52 (1985): 135-41.

<sup>15</sup> Again, exposure was the reason for such high attrition. "We passed the winter of 1812-1813 camping at Flint Mills, and marching to Buffalo and Black Rock and back. The troops suffered very much for want of provisions and clothing suitable to the climate. We built comfortable log barracks, but we lost by death through the winter some three hundred men." Myers, *Reminiscences*, 21.

<sup>16</sup> John Chrystie, 1786-1813. Myers relates the following incident about the strict disciplinarian: "One night, while encamping near Utica, some of the officers applied to Colonel Chrystie for permission to go to the town, but their request was refused. In revenge they persuaded all the soldiers, officers and men, to shave their mustaches, to the great annoyance of Colonel Chrystie, who had particularly desired that they should be worn." Myers, *Reminiscences*, 49. As a consequence of his untimely death, Chrystie Street in New York City was named in his honor.

<sup>17</sup> This is an understatement on Dwight's part. According to Lieutenant Colonel George McFeely, "the action was close and warm for about ten minutes after we landed, when the enemy gave way and retreated in confusion. Gen'l Boyd's division landed at the same point and on the heels of the van about the close of the action and in place of extending the line to the right or the left they rushed right up the bank among the light troops and all became one solid mass of confusion. It was well for us that the enemy was beaten before this took place for our superior numbers were rendered useless for the space of about twenty minutes." John C. Fredriksen, "Chronicle of Valor: The Journal of a Pennsylvania Officer in the War of 1812," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 67 (1984): 262.

<sup>18</sup> One officer left us a humorous anecdote concerning the British use of shrapnel shells at Fort George: "Our attention was suddenly called to the front by the discharge of two or three cannon from the village, the effect of which was soon exhibited in sharp explosions just over the line, followed by showers of bullets that pattered on our heads, as if

a platoon had been firing from the sunny skies above us. It was a most unexpected point of assault, and one which none but a star gazer would have anticipated. Many, who would have not flinched at a ball, coming in the true horizontal fashion, buckled a little under these military pneumatics which, menacing the cranium so directly, seemed to fall plump on the very citadel of life at once. An officer of rank, who was walking at the time in front of the line, where this inclination to duck and bob slightly showed itself, remarked with a hilarity that did credit to his presence of mind that 'Soldiers should bow only to ladies.' This happy sally restored the line to perpendicularity. . . ." "First Campaign of an A.D.C.," *Military and Naval Magazine of the United States* 2 (1834): 75.

<sup>19</sup> Winfield Scott, 1786-1866. Scott would finish the war a brevet major general. The best biography remains Charles W. Elliot, *Winfield Scott, the Soldier and the Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1937).

<sup>20</sup> Morgan Lewis, 1754-1824. Lewis was much censured for calling off the pursuit. See Julia Delafield, *Biographies of Francis Lewis and Morgan Lewis*, 2 vols. (New York: A.D.F. Randolph, 1877).

<sup>21</sup> William H. Winder, 1775-1824. Though captured at Stoney Creek, Winder was paroled and later commanded American forces at the disastrous battle of Bladensburg, after which Washington, D.C., was burned by the British. See his *Statement of Occurrences on the Niagara Frontier in 1813* (Washington, D.C.: D. Green, 1829).

<sup>22</sup> This was the evening of the 3rd of June, and the 4th being the birthday of King George III, the enemy felt in good spirits, no doubt, and determined to precipitate our attack." Myers, *Reminiscences*, 31.

<sup>23</sup> "As soon as the firing was heard, Col. Chrystie moved our regiment along the beach with the intention to get in the rear of the enemy, take possession of the bridge over 'Forty Mile Creek,' and cut off the retreat. We had nearly reached our point when an express came with orders to halt and for the field officers to attend a Council of War." Ibid., 32.

<sup>24</sup> Myers concurs with Dwight's assessment: "Col. Schuyler asked for permission to follow the retreating enemy with our regiment, but the Council of War would not consent. If it had done so we might have retaken our two generals, and, perhaps, many prisoners, for General Winder told me, when he returned on parole, that at twelve o'clock the enemy had not collected five hundred men; they were not three miles from us and they expected an attack every moment." Ibid., 32.

<sup>25</sup> For a detailed account of the events around Fort George during this impasse, consult *A Sketch of the Life of Lieut. Matthew Hughes, Late of the United States Army* (Alexandria: J. Course, N. Rounsavell, 1815).

<sup>26</sup> "Only three of the forty taken from our regiment, and but few of the picket guard, returned to camp. Our regiment passed the mangled dead in pursuit of the enemy, which had fled with the scalps. The bodies were stripped and horribly mutilated. Lt. Joseph C. Elbridge, the Adjutant of the 13th Regiment, who was among the killed, was a young man of great promise, and much beloved by his fellow officers. Being recalled from the pursuit, we had to perform the melancholy duty of burying our mangled officers and men in one common grave." Myers, *Reminiscences*, 34.

<sup>27</sup> David Roggerson Williams, 1776-1830. See Harvey T. Cook, *The Life and Legacy of David Roggerson Williams* (New York: Country Club Press, 1916).

<sup>28</sup> Isaac Chauncey, 1772-1840. Chauncey's conduct while in command of the Lake Ontario fleet was the subject of much controversy. See William Fowler, *Memoirs of the Chauncey Family* (Boston: W.H. Dutton, 1858), 215-21.

<sup>29</sup> James Wilkinson, 1751-1825. A defense against charges of incompetence is his *Memoirs of My Own Times*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Abraham Small, 1816). Secretary of War John Armstrong, a bitter enemy of Wilkinson, wrote a scathing rebuttal in his "Review of General Wilkinson's Memoirs," *Literary and Scientific Repository and Critical Review* 1 (1820): 1-24.

<sup>30</sup> Here the 13th Infantry missed a monumental occasion. "At this time Commodore Perry made a requisition for a company of infantry to act as marines. When I heard of it, I went immediately to headquarters to offer my services; but I was just a few minutes too late to be accepted and thus lost the opportunity of being present at Perry's victory on Lake Erie, when he so signally defeated a superior force and gained so much glory." Myers, *Reminiscences*, 37. A company of the 28th Infantry participated in the battle.

<sup>31</sup> Daniel Bissell, 1769-1833. The only substantial biography of this neglected frontier officer is Carl J. Zell, "Daniel Bissell" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, St. Louis University, 1971).

<sup>32</sup> These accidents were a common occurrence. According to Captain Ephraim Shaler, "when going down the lake, one of the sons of Jonas Cutting fell overboard one day when the wind was blowing a gale; and but for a soldier's greatcoat he had on at the time, which aided in buoying him up, must have found a watery grave; but after blowing and puffing like a porpoise for some time, was taken aboard, and with considerable rubbing brought to his right senses." *Green Bay Republican*, March 12, 1844.

<sup>33</sup> John P. Boyd, 1764-1830. A defense of Boyd's military career is in his *Documents and Facts Relative to Military Operations in the Late War* (n.p., 1816).

<sup>34</sup> "The autumn of 1813 was the most wet and rainy of any within my recollection. It commenced raining on the 20th of September where I was and rained more or less every day but one for six weeks. No soldier of General Wilkinson's army on that expedition will ever forget that rainy season while he recollects anything. Grenadier Island near the Lower end of Lake Ontario was the rendezvous of all the troops travelling in boats, and here the army was detained three weeks by a continuous rain; and it was said among the privates, in their tents, that our chief officers were as well soaked with brandy as we were in water as it lasted." Elihu H. Shepard, *The Autobiography of Elihu H. Shepard* (St. Louis: George Knapp, 1869), 61.

<sup>35</sup> This was the site of a heroic stand by four companies of American artillery against a much larger British force on May 6, 1814. See Crisfield Johnson, *History of Oswego County, New York* (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts, 1877).

<sup>36</sup> Myers describes his predicament: “We were much scattered during the descent; many of our boats were stranded; mine, with one hundred thirty men and women, was among the number, but all were saved. Our pilot declared that our boat could not live in such a storm, and that he could make a safe port; but that, if I determined to keep on, the whole responsibility must rest on me. We saw lights on shore, boats having landed there and left their fires burning. When nearly in I told him that I heard the breakers, and asked him if he could haul off; he said it was impossible. We then kept off and ran on; the men were ordered to sling their knapsacks and stand ready to jump out on either side when the bow struck, and endeavor to shove her up. I stood on the bow with the painter and, as she struck, we all jumped out; the breakers went over us several feet; the third time she struck, she went to pieces and sixty barrels of provisions floated off. We all gained the shore, a narrow sand beach and an abruptly rocky bank at least one hundred feet high. We found that we had landed at Mexico bay.” Myers, *Reminiscences*, 38.

<sup>37</sup> James Patton Preston, 1775-1843. He was subsequently governor of Virginia.

<sup>38</sup> Myers recalled: “Prescott was a fortification with a dry ditch and drawbridge with bombproof sufficient to cover five hundred men, as I ascertained by examination in 1820. It was a strong post, mounting twelve thirty-two pounders en barbette, with an eight gun water battery; it was worth taking.” Myers, *Reminiscences*, 41.

<sup>39</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Robert Carr observed: “This morning the last of our boats and schooners have arrived, 230 having passed the batteries at Prescott under a most tremendous cannonade & bombardment — the width of the river is not above 1800 yards where the boats had to pass & it was daylight before they were half passed, notwithstanding but two men were killed & four wounded. The British fired near 600 shot & shell — chiefly over our heads.” Diary of Lieutenant Colonel Robert Carr, Manuscript Department, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>40</sup> Isaac A. Cole, 1780-1841. Cole was at one time Jefferson’s personal secretary. He assumed command of Boyd’s brigade when that officer replaced General Wilkinson, who was ill. A sketch of his military career is in *Letters, Etc., Published by Isaac Cole, Colonel of the 12th Regiment, U.S. Infantry, Concerning His Arraignment for Trial before a Military Court in September, 1814* (Washington, D.C.: n.p., 1814).

<sup>41</sup> Captain Shaler describes the encounter as follows: “The gallant 25th, commanded by Col. now Major General E.P. Gaines, formed a part of Covington’s brigade, and was moving forward to meet the foe, when Gen. Boyd rode up and said ‘Give three cheers and *rush on!*’ We, however, thought it better to wait a little, and see how matters turned out, before any cheering was made, not knowing who would have the best right to cheer, and therefore the order for cheering was postponed till the conflict was over. It happened, however, that after more than two hours fighting, neither party felt disposed to cheer; but on the contrary, each was glad to haul off as still as possible, and repair damages, and dispose of shattered legs and arms.” *Green Bay Republican*, March 12, 1844.

<sup>42</sup> Myers left us this graphic description of the 13th Infantry in action: “When we approached General Boyd near the field he said, ‘Rush on my Jolly Snorters, you are wanted.’ Before forming into line, I halted a moment to let my men go into action coolly. Giving them a few directions, I marched them into line. We met Col. Cutting with his regiment helter-skelter, just broken out of line. ‘Colonel,’ said I, ‘Where are you going?’ Said he, ‘My men will not stand.’ ‘But,’ said I, ‘you are leading them.’ They went off to the boats and I took the place of the regiment with my little detachment of eighty six. I soon saw Major Malcom and got permission to take position in a field on the enemy’s right flank, where my ‘buck and ball’ told well. My position was within two hundred yards of the right flank; my men kneeled on the left knee behind a stone wall about two feet high. I was already wounded by a musket ball passing two inches below the socket. I received the wound while advancing and, no doubt from the excitement, believed it to be a chip that struck my arm. Both sides made several attempts to charge bayonets; but as is almost always the case excepting when storming batteries, when one side charged the other fell back and vice versa.” Myers, *Reminiscences*, 42.

<sup>43</sup> Leonard Covington, 1768-1813.

<sup>44</sup> Timothy Dix was the father of John Adams Dix, future governor of New York.

<sup>45</sup> Captain Myers remained with the 13th Infantry for the duration of the war. It formed part of the Right Division based at Plattsburg in 1814 and accompanied General George Izard’s march to Niagara. However, the 13th advanced only as far as Sackett’s Harbor, where it was left behind to bolster the garrison. It was stationed there when peace arrived and, like all units of this war, was unceremoniously disbanded in 1815.