

THE U.S. ARMY CAMPAIGNS  
OF THE WAR OF 1812

*The  
Canadian  
Theater*

*1814*







*The Canadian Theater*  
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by

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## *Introduction*

The War of 1812 is perhaps the United States' least known conflict. Other than Andrew Jackson's 1815 victory at New Orleans and Francis Scott Key's poem "The Star-Spangled Banner," written in 1814 during the British attack on Baltimore, most Americans know little about the country's second major war. Its causes are still debated by historians today. Great Britain's impressment of American sailors, its seizure of American ships on the high seas, and suspected British encouragement of Indian opposition to further American settlement on the western frontier all contributed to America's decision to declare war against Great Britain in June 1812.

None of these factors, however, adequately explain why President James Madison called for a war the country was ill-prepared to wage. Moreover, the war was quite unpopular from the start. Many Federalists—chiefly in the New England states—opposed an armed conflict with Great Britain, continued to trade with the British, and even met in convention to propose secession from the Union. Some members of the president's own Republican Party objected to the war's inevitable costs and questionable objectives, such as the conquest of Canada.

To declare war was one thing, but to prosecute it successfully was a different matter. Much of the story of the War of 1812 is about the unpreparedness of America's Army and Navy at the conflict's outset, and the enormous difficulties the new nation faced in raising troops, finding competent officers, and supplying its forces. Most of America's military leaders were inexperienced and performed poorly, particularly in the first two years of war. Only gradually did better leaders rise to the top to command the more disciplined and well-trained units that America eventually fielded. But despite costly initial setbacks, by the time the fighting stopped American arms had won key victories at Chippewa, Lundy's Lane, and New Orleans under excellent officers such as Winfield Scott, Jacob Brown, and Andrew Jackson. Although the United States achieved few of its political objectives in the War of 1812, its Regular Army emerged more professional, better led, and fit to take its place as the foundation of America's national defenses.

I encourage all Army leaders and soldiers to read this pamphlet and the others in our series of campaign pamphlets in commemoration of the bicentennial of the War of 1812. We can all profit from greater knowledge about the beginnings of our Army: an Army forged in victory and defeat during what has often been called the second war of American independence.

RICHARD W. STEWART  
Chief Historian



# *The Canadian Theater*

1814

After eighteen months of war, victory over Great Britain remained an elusive goal for the United States in January 1814. American attempts to conquer Canada had failed, and Britain had not budged on its assertion that it had the right to impress U.S. sailors of British birth. In the South, fighting with the Red Stick Creeks smoldered, while on the Atlantic seaboard the Royal Navy had tightened its blockade and begun raiding villages and plantations on Chesapeake Bay with impunity.

Along the border with the province of Upper Canada, results had been mixed. In the West, Master Commandant Oliver Hazard Perry's stunning naval triumph on Lake Erie in September 1813 had led directly to Maj. Gen. William Henry Harrison's decisive victory at the Battle of the Thames and the subsequent recapture of Detroit the following month. The Indian confederacy had died with Tecumseh, and Indian power in the Northwest now lay shattered. However, victory in the West had not translated to success elsewhere. The British still occupied Fort Mackinac, which controlled the waters between Lakes Huron and Michigan. In December 1813, the British had destroyed virtually every building along the Niagara frontier, forcing U.S. citizens to flee through the deep snows to seek shelter miles inland. A British flag flew over Fort Niagara. The attempts to capture Montreal late in 1813 had been disastrous failures. American troops had withdrawn to winter quarters in the brutal cold of French Mills and Plattsburgh, New York.

In all of this, President James Madison had come to realize the severe shortcomings of many of his senior officers. Maj. Gens. Henry Dearborn, James Wilkinson, Wade Hampton, and Morgan Lewis had all failed in command. Only Harrison had established a reputation for competence and aggressiveness. But if many had been found wanting, the hard knocks of 1812 and 1813 had also identified reasons for hope. Some brigadier generals, such as Jacob Brown, had risen above the mediocrity and demonstrated that they were ready for

high command, and a crop of colonels had also proved their mettle under trying circumstances. Moreover, American junior officers and the troops they led had shown that what they lacked in skill they made up for in spirit. Realizing the errors of the past, a growing number of officers had begun to redress the serious organizational problems that had bedeviled U.S. military forces with an eye toward fielding a better-trained and more effective force in the coming year.

The development came none too soon. In March 1814, Napoleonic France capitulated in its long war against Britain, Prussia, Russia, and Austria. With the war in Europe over, Britain could begin transferring large numbers of experienced soldiers and sailors to join the struggle against the United States. The year 1814 would test whether the United States had learned enough from the disappointments of the past eighteen months to defeat the wave of British veterans that was about to reach North America.

## STRATEGIC SETTING

Madison and his cabinet understood only too well that, if the United States was to win its war, victory would have to come quickly before the full might of Britain arrived on America's borders. To achieve this end, the Army would need to be stronger. Congress attempted to expand the size of the Army by raising the enlistment bonus from \$40 to \$124 and by increasing the authorized strength to 62,500 men. It also augmented the numbers of regimental officers and noncommissioned officers to give regimental commanders more recruiters. Despite these measures, Army strength rose only to approximately forty thousand men by the time active campaigning began in 1814.

Meanwhile, Madison and Secretary of War John Armstrong set out to improve the Army's senior leadership. In March, General Hampton, who was thoroughly outraged at General Wilkinson's attempts to make him the scapegoat for the failed 1813 campaign to capture Montreal, resigned. Two months later, Harrison, who had bickered with Armstrong over command issues throughout 1813, resigned as well. General Lewis, Wilkinson's second in command in the 1813 campaign, was too ill for field duty, so in early 1814, Armstrong sent him away from the front lines to command the 3d Military District. Meanwhile, General Wilkinson, an inveterate intriguer, attempted to redeem his failing reputation with an invasion of Lower Canada in April 1814. After a small British force stopped him in his tracks at Lacolle Mill in Lower Canada, Armstrong removed Wilkinson from command, charging him with neglect of duty and



intoxication. Wilkinson remained on the sidelines during 1814 and was acquitted of charges in January 1815. Thus, by the end of the summer of 1814, the only man remaining who had held a major generalcy at the start of the year was Dearborn, and Armstrong had shunted him off to command the defenses of New York City.

Madison and Armstrong understood that cutting the British supply line extending from Montreal westward along the St. Lawrence River and across the length of Lake Ontario would prove decisive to the war effort. This region came within the responsibility of the 9th Military District, which was composed of Vermont and all of New York State above the Highlands. Armstrong massed his forces there, and it was in this area that two new major generals took their commands.

Both of the generals in the 9th District had significant combat experience. Educated in European military schools, George Izard had commanded the 2d U.S. Artillery and a brigade in Hampton's division during the October 1813 Battle of Chateaugay. Jacob Brown had been a general in the New York militia until success at the Battle of Sackett's Harbor had earned him the rank of brigadier general in the Regular Army. He had competently commanded the advance guard in Wilkinson's 1813 campaign. The Senate approved both of Madison's nominations, and Izard and Brown were promoted to major general on 24 January 1814, with Izard's promotion taking precedence over Brown's. Armstrong then reorganized the forces in the 9th Military District. Izard commanded the Right Division on Lake Champlain, while Brown commanded the Left Division that was responsible for the border between Buffalo, New York, on Lake Erie to Ogdensburg, New York, on the St. Lawrence River. Brown initially established his headquarters at Sackett's Harbor. Armstrong ducked the obvious



John Armstrong  
*by John Wesley Jarvis*  
(National Portrait Gallery,  
Smithsonian)

violation of unity of command within the military district, directing that each general would command the forces assigned to his division and that Izard, as the senior officer, would command when both divisions were united.

Madison reinforced these efforts by elevating to brigadier general several talented colonels, four of whom would figure prominently in the battles ahead. Alexander Macomb, a career soldier, was both intelligent and competent. He commanded a brigade in Izard's Right Division. Winfield Scott, another career soldier, was aggressive and charismatic. Armstrong assigned him to command a brigade in the Left Division. Eleazar Wheelock Ripley had been a successful politician when the war erupted. Commissioned as a lieutenant colonel, he had turned the 21st Infantry into a particularly effective fighting organization. Brown gave him command of a brigade in his division, although the two were of distinctly different temperaments. Ripley was much less aggressive than either Brown or Scott. Edmund Pendleton Gaines was promoted last of the four. A professional soldier, Gaines commanded the critical shipbuilding base at Sackett's Harbor whenever Brown was away.

Secretary Armstrong issued guidance that would confuse Brown and ultimately direct the Left Division away from the decisive objectives of the British shipbuilding base at Kingston or the key logistical center at Montreal. Armstrong sent Brown two letters. The first directed him to consider attacking Kingston across the ice "if practicable." The second directed Brown to take a large force westward to retake Fort Niagara. Armstrong suggested that he use this second letter to mask his true objective should he choose to attack Kingston. Brown consulted with Commodore Isaac Chauncey, commander of



George Izard  
(Arkansas History  
Commission)



Jacob Brown  
*by James Herring*  
(New-York Historical  
Society)

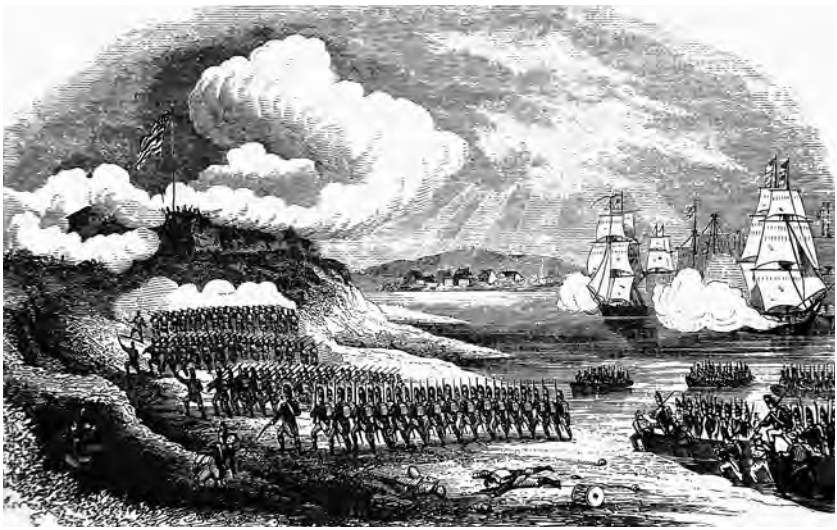
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naval forces on the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain. Chauncey and Brown agreed that an attack across the ice was too risky to attempt. Chauncey also persuaded Brown that the second letter was an alternate course of action. Brown put his troops on the march to the Niagara frontier. When Armstrong realized that Brown had misconstrued his guidance, he failed to redirect him but instead urged him to “go on and prosper. Good consequences are sometimes the result of mistakes.”

While Brown worked out the many logistical and administrative issues of the upcoming campaign, General Scott undertook preparation of the troops. His brigade arrived in Buffalo in mid-April amid a late snowfall. Scott embarked on an intensive training regimen for his men. Six days a week and starting before breakfast, Scott’s men, in their threadbare uniforms, practiced

individual and company drill. In the afternoon, regimental commanders drilled their men in battalion movements and maneuvers. During the nineteenth century, tactical drill was referred to as “discipline.” Drummer Jarvis Hanks remembered Scott as “the most thorough disciplinarian I ever saw.”

Early in the campaign season, three minor engagements on the shores of the Great Lakes shaped strategic thinking for the remainder of the war. Maj. Gen. Sir Gordon Drummond, commander of British forces in Upper Canada, and Commodore Sir James Yeo, commander of the Royal Navy on the Great Lakes, understood well that command of the water was the key to defending the province. While Sackett’s Harbor had been strongly reinforced after the abortive raid of May 1813, the major American supply depot at Oswego, New York, on Lake Ontario was largely undefended. General Brown learned of



Attack on Fort Oswego, by *William Strickland*  
(New York Public Library)

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the British plan to raid Oswego and sent Lt. Col. George Mitchell and 342 artillerymen fighting as infantry to protect the ammunition, guns, and naval stores intended for Commodore Chauncey's fleet at Sackett's Harbor.

Mitchell and his small battalion arrived at Oswego only days before the British attack. Guarding the mouth of the Oswego River as it entered Lake Ontario stood old Fort Ontario. Capt. Rufus McIntire of the Corps of Artillery noted that "the hands of time had destroyed every picket and the escarp could be easily ascended on any point—in some places as easily as through a gate." Mitchell found five condemned artillery pieces, and his men repaired them as best as they could for the battle ahead. They had hardly completed preparations when Yeo's fleet carrying over a thousand soldiers and marines arrived on 5 May 1814. Due to adverse winds, Yeo could not land his troops until the following day. The resulting engagement was short and sharp, with Mitchell's men fighting a determined withdrawal in the face of overwhelming odds. Mitchell brought his men to the large supply cache at Oswego Falls and prepared to defend that station. Yeo was unwilling to move upriver and contented himself with the capture of nine naval cannons and a large amount of food. President Madison recognized Mitchell's

success in preventing the majority of naval stores from falling into enemy hands with a brevet promotion to colonel.

The Battle of Oswego led directly to one of the most lopsided engagements of the war. Yeo's squadron blockaded Sackett's Harbor, and Chauncey desperately needed the naval guns at Oswego Falls to complete his two new frigates. Master Commandant Melancthon Woolsey loaded thirty-four heavy guns into nineteen bateaux and moved stealthily along the shore toward the American shipyard at Sackett's Harbor. Maj. Daniel Appling and about a hundred fifty men of the 1st U.S. Rifle Regiment protected this supply convoy, while an additional escort of a hundred fifty Oneida Indian allies moved along the shore. Yeo discovered the convoy and sent seven small vessels and two hundred marines and sailors to capture the precious cargo. Woolsey pulled his bateaux into Big Sandy Creek, and Appling set up an ambush. On 30 May, the British raiding party walked into the fire of the expert riflemen. Nineteen British troops fell in the fusillade, and the remainder—more than a hundred seventy—surrendered. Woolsey and Appling delivered the guns to Chauncey's fleet.

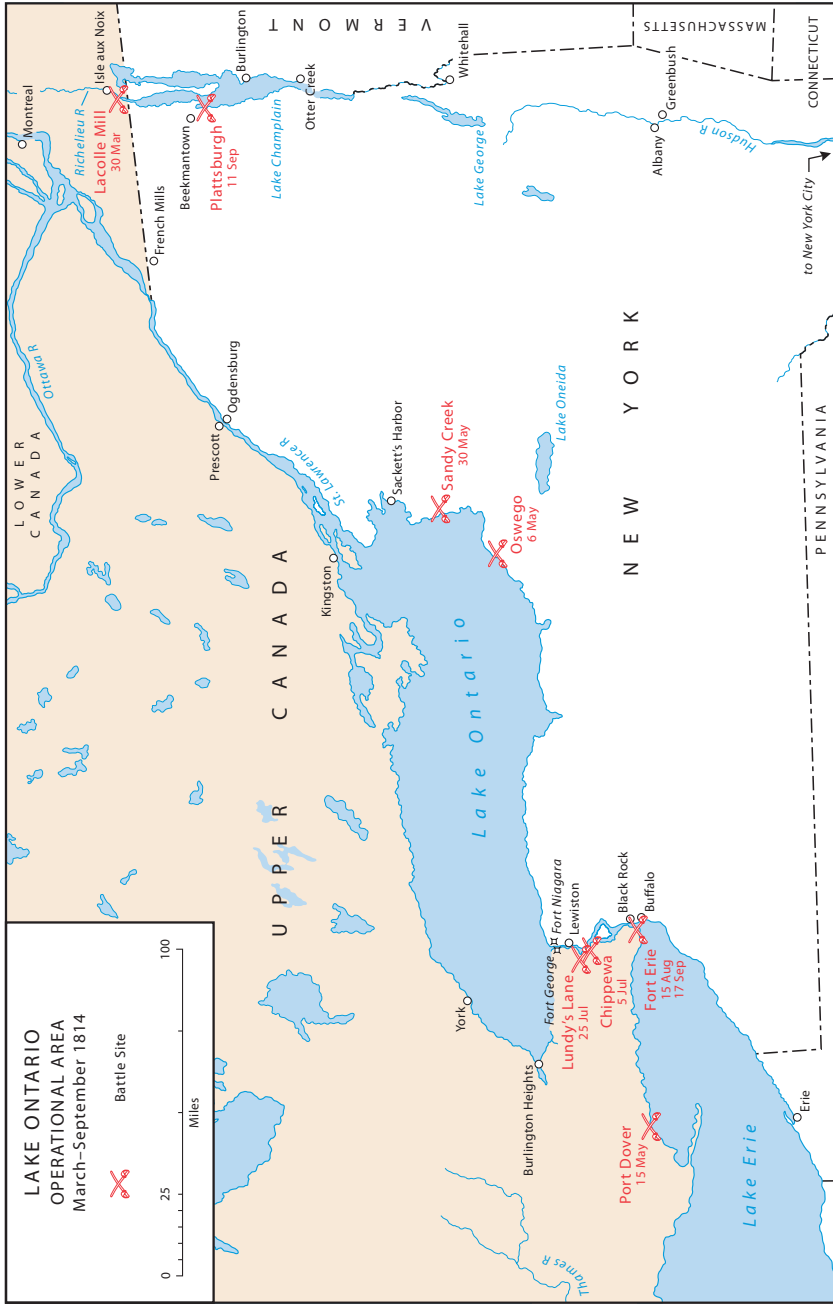
The other event that shaped wartime strategy was the raid on the Canadian village of Port Dover on the northern shore of Lake Erie. On 13 May 1814, about three hundred regulars and four hundred Pennsylvania militiamen under Col. John Campbell departed Erie, Pennsylvania. At daylight on Sunday, 15 May, they landed at Port Dover and burned about forty buildings—legitimate targets such as mills and storehouses, but private homes as well. Pvt. Alexander McMullen of the Pennsylvania Volunteers recalled, "A scene of destruction and plunder now ensued, which beggars all description. In a short time the houses, mills, and barns were all consumed, and a beautiful village, which the sun shone on in splendor that morning, was before two o'clock a heap of smoking ruins." The gratuitous vandalism so disgusted the Governor General of British North America, Lt. Gen. Sir George Prevost, that he appealed to V. Adm. Alexander Cochrane to retaliate. Cochrane obligingly launched destructive raids on Chesapeake Bay, culminating in the burning of Washington, D.C.

On 7 June, Madison met with his cabinet to discuss the strategy for the border with Canada. Secretary of War Armstrong reported that eight thousand regulars were guarding the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, and twenty-one hundred regulars were stationed in the West, mostly around Detroit. About eight thousand regulars were available in the 9th Military District—five thousand with Izard and the rest with Brown. Armstrong believed that approximately seven thousand new recruits were available for commitment. Madison ordered one thousand troops

and the Lake Erie squadron to retake Fort Mackinac on Mackinac Island. Izard would make a movement toward Montreal to divert British attention from Brown. Brown's Left Division would make the main attack to seize Burlington Heights, thus cutting British supply lines to the West. However, the cabinet understood that Brown could not move on to York (present-day Toronto) or Kingston unless Chauncey defeated Yeo on Lake Ontario. Chauncey, cautious to a fault, would not challenge Yeo until he was ready. Yeo, for his part, would not accept battle unless he was confident of victory. The 1814 campaign hung in the balance of a naval battle that might never occur (*Map 1*).

## OPERATIONS

Brown's Left Division quickly grew in strength for the attack on the Niagara frontier. Scott commanded the 1st Brigade, his soldiers all wearing new gray uniform coats and white trousers. They drilled as smartly as they looked. In addition to Scott's brigade, General Ripley commanded the 2d Brigade, also of regulars. The last brigade to join the division included a diverse collection under Brig. Gen. Peter B. Porter. Porter, an ardent War Hawk, had left his seat in Congress to serve in the New York militia. The war was a personal matter for Porter; he lived and maintained a business on the Niagara River and had lost property in the British raid of the previous winter. His 3d Brigade consisted of several elements. A party of six hundred Iroquois warriors—Seneca, Oneida, Onondaga, and Tuscarora men, with a few women as well—fighting under the command of the elderly Seneca chief, Red Jacket, was the first to join. A small company called the Canadian Volunteers followed. These men, many of them U.S. born, had lived in Upper Canada but had become disaffected with the Crown and now served as scouts for the Americans. Col. James Fenton's Regiment of Pennsylvania Volunteers arrived next. Scott had little use for militia. When he learned that the Pennsylvanians would join the invasion, he wrote to Brown, "Col. Fenton and his militia are already in march for this place. I am sorry for this circumstance, for I had rather be without that specie of force, than have the whole population of New York & Pennsylvania at my heels. I now give it as my opinion that we shall be disgraced if we admit a militia force either into our camp or order of battle." A company of New York mounted riflemen was the last group to join Porter's brigade. They were the only portion of a brigade of New York Volunteers to arrive, the rest of which, having been delayed due to a lack of camp equipment, missed the opening battles.



**MAP 1**

## *The Battle of Chippewa, 5 July 1814*

The Left Division began crossing into Canada after midnight on 3 July. Brown had kept that date a secret, even accepting an invitation from his staff for a gala Fourth of July dinner. He knew that if there was a celebration of national independence, it would take place in a foreign land. A dense fog on the water delayed the movement. British pickets discovered Scott's brigade as it landed on the western shore of the Niagara River and rushed back to warn the garrison of Fort Erie. The pilots of the vessels carrying Ripley's brigade across Lake Erie lost their way and found the Canadian shore only after dawn. Scott's and Ripley's brigades surrounded Fort Erie, and the British commander surrendered his garrison of 137 soldiers late in the afternoon. All that night vessels went back and forth over the Niagara River ferrying Porter's brigade, wagons, cannons, animals, and tons of supplies. The major campaign of 1814 had begun.

Alerted to the U.S. invasion but still unaware that Fort Erie had fallen, Maj. Gen. Phineas Riall, commanding the *Right Division* of the British Army of Upper Canada, directed reinforcements from Fort George to move south to the Chippewa River. He also sent orders to York for the *8th Regiment of Foot* to sail immediately for Fort George. Lt. Col. Thomas Pearson, a particularly competent and experienced British officer, assembled a small force of infantry, native warriors, and dragoons to contest the American movement north from Fort Erie. Brown designated Scott's brigade as the advance guard, and Independence Day found Scott's and Pearson's men disputing every stream crossing along the western shore of the Niagara River as the Americans pushed relentlessly northward.

Pearson's troops drove off cattle and horses and destroyed every bridge over the numerous streams ahead of the advancing Americans. Fortunately, the water levels were low and allowed Scott's men to ford with little difficulty. One particular incident in the approach caught Scott's attention. He had sent Capt. Turner Crooker and his company of the 9th Infantry across a stream to cut off a party of Pearson's men. The British withdrew before Crooker arrived. Scott watched from the south side of Black Creek as Crooker's men crossed an open area north of that stream. Seemingly from nowhere, a detachment of British dragoons charged out of the woods heading directly for Crooker's company. The captain immediately ordered his men to fall back to the shelter of a small house, from where the heavy fire of the infantrymen eventually drove back the dragoons. Scott asserted, "I have witnessed nothing more gallant in partisan war than was the





Winfield Scott,  
by Joseph Wood  
(Library of Congress)

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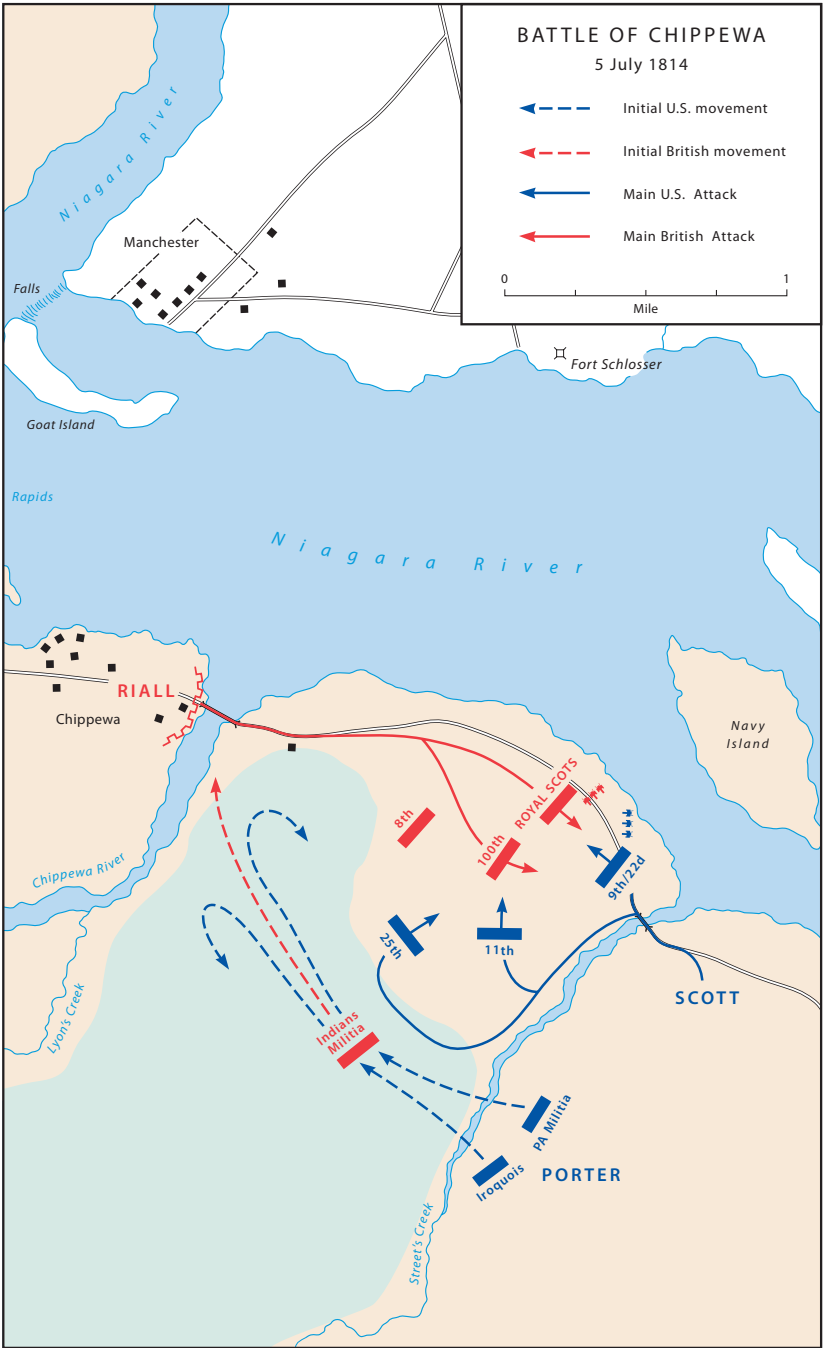
conduct of Captain Crooker and his company.” Crooker won the first of many brevet promotions during the long campaign.

Scott’s brigade reached the Chippewa River. When Scott noted the strong defenses on the north bank, he moved south of Street’s Creek and established camp. During the evening, Ripley’s men arrived and pitched their tents as well. Both commanders sent out pickets to provide early warning of any British activity. Brown planned to attack the British position on the Chippewa on 6 July after the arrival of Porter’s brigade. Riall had other ideas. He believed that the American units were fragile and would not withstand a determined assault. He resolved to strike as soon as the *8th Foot* arrived.

Flat meadowland defined the area between the two camps. The long convex shore of the Niagara bordered the battlefield

on the north and east while the Chippewa River, too wide to ford, lay to the northwest. A primeval forest, heavy with deadfall, lay to the southwest, and fordable Street’s Creek completed the perimeter of the battlefield. Of particular note, a long tongue of the forest extended to within a quarter mile of the Niagara, forming a natural defile between the camps and cutting the view between the bridges over the Chippewa and Street’s Creek (*Map 2*).

Early on 5 July, Riall sent Indian warriors and Canadian militiamen into the forest to determine the U.S. strength. From their reports, Riall estimated that he faced only two thousand Americans. The *8th Foot* had just conducted a grueling eighteen-mile forced march from Fort George. Riall planned to attack at 1600 after the newly arrived infantrymen had an opportunity for a short rest. Meanwhile, Porter’s brigade approached the American camp from the south.



MAP 2

Brown conferred with Porter and directed him to clear the forest of the enemy. Porter assembled his brigade late in the afternoon and issued his orders. He formed a long thin line perpendicular to the Niagara River with the Iroquois on the left and the Pennsylvania militiamen on the right. Pennsylvania militiaman Private McMullen watched as the native warriors readied for the fight. "One of their chiefs in a speech, which for gesture and strength of lungs I had never heard equaled, was preparing them for a bloody battle." The Iroquois put on red and black war paint and white headbands, while the militiamen removed their hats to better identify friend from foe. Leaders stepped ahead of the line and put out scouts even farther forward. On Porter's command, the brigade, about eight hundred strong, entered the dark forest. As the extended skirmish line crossed Street's Creek, it overwhelmed a body of British-allied Indians. Riall sent a small battalion of Canadian militiamen and more native warriors into the forest from the north. Porter's line disintegrated as small bodies on both sides rushed one another in close combat. While the desperate no-quarter fighting continued in the forest, Brown spotted dust rising from the direction of the bridge over the Chippewa, indicating Riall's advance had begun.

General Scott was forming his brigade in camp to drill in the meadow north of Street's Creek when Brown rode up and ordered him to cross the creek and fight the approaching British. At first, Scott could hardly believe that the British would leave their strong defensive line to give battle. However, British cannonballs flying over the head of Maj. Henry Leavenworth's battalion persuaded everyone that a battle was in the offing. Leavenworth's combined battalion of the 9th Infantry and 22d Infantry led the brigade across the Street's Creek bridge followed by Col. John B. Campbell's 11th Infantry and Maj. Thomas S. Jesup's 25th Infantry. Meanwhile in the forest, Colonel Pearson led a battalion of British light infantry into the fray, routing the Americans and their Iroquois allies. As they retraced their steps through the forest, Porter's men passed over the bodies of eighty-seven British-allied Indians and eighteen Canadian militiamen. The Americans had lost twelve dead in fighting.

General Riall carefully brought his brigade through the defile and placed two battalions forward, the *100th Regiment of Foot* on the right and the *Royal Scots* on the left. He then positioned small artillery batteries on each flank and maintained the *8th Foot* in reserve. For his part, Scott positioned Leavenworth's battalion on the right of the line. Campbell moved his men to the left of Leavenworth. After he collapsed with a severe knee wound, Campbell was quickly evacuated, and command of the 11th Infantry passed to Maj. John



U.S. Corps of Artillery, 1814–1821, by *H. Charles McBarron Jr.*  
(Company of Military Historians)

McNeil. Scott, watching Porter's men streaming to the rear along the wood line, sent Jesup and the 25th into the forest to secure the left flank of the brigade and to work their way around the British right flank. Capt. Nathan Towson, Scott's artillery commander, brought his guns up between Leavenworth's line and the Niagara River and

soon returned British fire. The British approached the American line, and the musketry volleys commenced.

When he first saw Leavenworth's gray-jacketed troops crossing the bridge, Riall remarked to the commander of the *100th Foot* that he would have no trouble, as the troops were obviously militiamen. However, as Scott's brigade deployed into line heedless of the screaming shot and shell, Riall realized his error and remarked, "These are regulars!" Both sides were quite evenly matched. Not counting Porter's brigade or Pearson's command fighting in the forest, Riall had about 1,400 infantrymen and 6 pieces of artillery on the Chippewa plain, while Scott had 1,350 infantry and 7 guns.

Hardly an opening existed between the two leading British battalions as they pressed forward. Scott had left a sizable gap between Leavenworth's and McNeil's battalions; thus, they overlapped the flanks of the oncoming British. Scott saw an opportunity and ordered McNeil to throw his left flank forward. Soon the 11th Infantry faced the *100th Foot* at an oblique angle, and, as the British approached, U.S. fire was striking them in the flank. The two sides fired furiously at one another. Every American cartridge contained three buckshot and a musket ball, which caused greater destruction than the British ammunition. Although the British decried "buck and ball" as ungentlemanly, they could not dispute its effectiveness. A British artillery shot severed Capt. Thomas Harrison's leg below the knee, but he refused attention until after the battle. Scott noted that "so glorious a display of fortitude had the happiest effect." Lt. Col. John Gordon, leading the *Royal Scots*, was shot through the mouth and unable to give commands. When an American bullet severed the Achilles tendon of the Marquess of Tweeddale, commander of the *100th Foot*, his men placed him on a horse so that he could remain effectively in command. Neither side would budge. It all came down to the two regiments not yet in contact: the British *8th Foot* and Jesup's 25th Infantry.

Riall ordered the commander of the *8th Foot*, Maj. Thomas Evans, to bring his men into the fight on the far right of the British line. However, before Evans could do so, Jesup marched his men out of the forest and onto the British right flank. Jesup had his men fire three quick volleys and then attack into the British. McNeil saw the 25th advancing and ordered his battalion forward. Soon, Leavenworth had his men assault as well. The British line lost cohesion as soldiers withdrew, bringing many of their wounded with them. Soon, Riall's brigade was back across the Chippewa River, with the men removing the bridge planking as they retreated. The Battle of Chippewa was over, and the Americans were exultant.



The Battle of Chippewa, by *H. Charles McBarron Jr.*  
(U.S. Army Art Collection)

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Among regulars, Indians, and militia, Riall had between 2,130 and 2,280 in the fight on 5 July. Of these, approximately 500 were killed, wounded, or missing, which amounted to a casualty rate of about 22 percent. Brown's Left Division had 2,105 engaged and suffered 325 losses, or about 15 percent. However, soldiers and warriors were not the only casualties. After the battle, Capt. Benjamin Ropes of the 21st Infantry recalled that "our doctor was very angry after the action. The enemy hove a cannon shot through his marquee [large tent] in which lay his hospital stores. [It] struck a cask [of] wine and he lost the whole." Wine, of course, was used in various medical treatments during the nineteenth century.

In an oft-quoted passage, historian Henry Adams wrote,

The battle of Chippewa was the only occasion during the war when equal bodies of regular troops met face to face, in extended lines on an open plain in broad daylight, without advantage of position; and never again after that combat was an army of American regulars beaten by British troops. Small as the affair was, and unimportant in military results, it gave to the United States Army a character and pride it had never before possessed.

Scott stands out as the person most closely associated with this victory, not only for his inspirational battlefield leadership, but also for his work in training his officers and men during the months preceding the invasion. General Brown sent a report to Secretary of War Armstrong noting that “Scott is entitled to the highest honors our country can bestow to him, more than to any other man, am I indebted for the victory of the fifth of July.” The troops idolized Scott. Captain McIntire of the Corps of Artillery wrote to a friend that “Genl. Brown is a very industrious officer but I consider Genl. Scott as the life and soul of that army.” Madison conferred brevet promotions for gallantry to Scott’s three battalion commanders—Leavenworth, McNeil, and Jesup—and to three other officers.

Brown lost no time in exploiting his victory. He had not destroyed Riall’s force; the Left Division had much work yet to do. Over the next several days, the men of the Left Division buried their dead and those of their enemy. Ripley’s brigade built a bridge upriver from Riall. Threatened with being outflanked, Riall withdrew his men to Fort George. Brown put his division on the march and moved in pursuit. General Drummond at Kingston read Riall’s battle report and immediately decided to confront the Americans along the Niagara River. He ordered several battalions to sail or march to Fort George and Burlington Heights. For their part, most of the native warriors withdrew from the campaign. Iroquois on both sides were sickened by the heavy casualties among their clans. Red Jacket, the nationalist, had achieved his goal; he got the Iroquois out of the war with honor. Reinforcements joined the Left Division to make up for the departure of the Iroquois. Lt. Col. Philetus Swift brought his battalion of six hundred New York Volunteers, and 2d Lt. David Douglass marched into camp with his company of bombardiers, sappers, and miners. This unique unit, with engineering and artillery skills, had recently been a demonstration company at West Point.

Brown halted the Left Division at Queenston Heights while he waited for Chauncey and the Lake Ontario naval squadron. He had only four 18-pounder guns with his division, not enough, in his opinion, to batter down the walls of Fort George. At this point, Brown received a disquieting letter from General Gaines at Sackett’s Harbor. Gaines stated that he thought it unlikely that Chauncey would sail soon, and, if he did, Chauncey would focus on Yeo’s squadron, not on assisting the army on the Niagara.

With his campaign unraveling, Brown moved to force the issue with Riall. On 20 July, he marched the Left Division to within a mile of Fort George and offered battle, but the British commander refused to leave

the safety of his fortifications. After the army arrived in front of Fort George, Scott and a party of officers inspected the fortification through telescopes from about a mile away. A gun barked out from the fort. Scott, seeing the muzzle flash, raised his sword to measure the trajectory and saw that the cannon shot was coming straight at his group. Scott and his officers wheeled their horses and scattered just as the round impacted on the spot where they had been standing. All escaped without injury.

Disappointed that the British would not meet him in battle, Brown reluctantly marched the Left Division back to its camp south of the Chippewa River. He then decided to attack Burlington Heights and block the road to York, thereby cutting Riall's supply line. While Brown got his men ready to move, General Drummond arrived at Fort Niagara on 24 July, determined to turn back the U.S. invasion.

Learning that the Americans at Youngstown, New York, were building artillery positions that could fire on Fort George, Drummond ordered five hundred troops from Fort Niagara to capture the guns and destroy any boats on the eastern bank of the Niagara River as far south as Lewiston, New York. He ordered Riall to move with two small brigades closer to the U.S. position south of the Chippewa to distract Brown from the operation on the New York side of the river. Riall then sent his men to occupy a low ridge along Lundy's Lane within a mile of Niagara Falls.

The British raiding party found neither guns nor boats in New York and returned to Fort Niagara. However, the militiamen guarding the stockpile of supplies at Fort Schlosser panicked and sent urgent reports across the river to Brown. The American general feared losing his supplies just as he was readying his division to move on Burlington Heights. Unable to reinforce Fort Schlosser, he decided to send Scott and his brigade north to Queenston Heights. Scott's movement on the western shore might intimidate the British on the eastern shore enough to break off their advance. Brown had dismissed reports from his pickets of sightings of British dragoons and infantry. For his part, Scott believed that he had been ordered to find and fight the British. The Battle of Lundy's Lane was about to begin.

### *The Battle of Lundy's Lane, 25 July 1814*

Scott's brigade consisted of about eleven hundred infantrymen in four regiments: Leavenworth's 9th, McNeil's 11th, Col. Hugh Brady's 22d, and Jesup's 25th. For support, Scott had Bvt. Maj. Nathan Towson's artillery company and Capt. Samuel Harris' company of light dragoons. As the brigade moved northward, Scott received a report that about eleven hundred enemy were situated along Lundy's Lane.



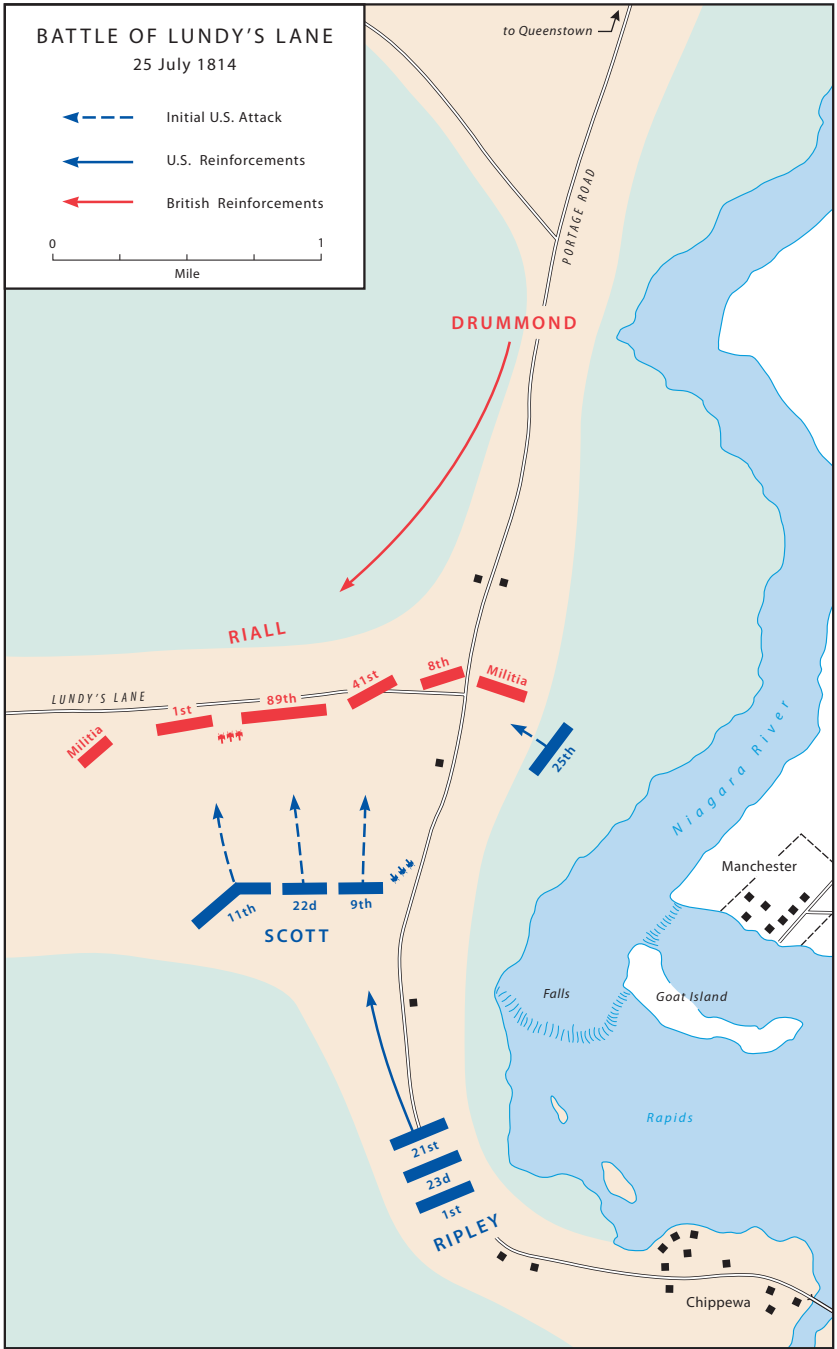
Without personally viewing the British position, Scott decided to attack and sent a note to Brown to that effect (*Map 3*).

As the U.S. column emerged from the woods, Scott realized that the enemy was in greater strength than had been reported. Nonetheless, he decided to press the attack. Looking across a large open area surrounded by woods, Lundy's Lane sat six hundred yards away atop a long, low ridge that at its highest point rose about fifty feet above the surrounding area, with five British guns positioned near the summit. The gun crews opened fire as Scott's men deployed into a long line parallel to Lundy's Lane. Scott sent Jesup into the woods to the east with orders to move on the left flank of the British line. Towson posted his two 6-pounder guns and a howitzer on Portage Road, which ran alongside the Niagara River, and returned fire. However, with the objectives on higher ground, the U.S. guns missed their targets. Thus, the American fire was less accurate and less deadly than the British, whose round shot bounced through the lines of infantry.

British grape and round shot methodically ravaged Scott's brigade for about an hour in the dwindling light. U.S. infantrymen opened fire with their muskets at a range of nearly four hundred yards and inflicted few casualties. McNeil was wounded early in the action, and every company commander in his regiment was either killed or wounded. Colonel Brady was wounded as well but refused to leave his men. Drummer Jarvis Hanks remembered a particular act of bravery amid the carnage. As a drummer, he stood very near to the regimental flag in the center of the 11th Infantry's line. The enemy aimed at the color party hoping to break the morale of the regiment.

During this engagement, nine different persons were shot down, under this flag, successively. At last, this sergeant Festus Thompson, took it and threw its proud folds to the breeze. He was wounded in the hip, and the staff was severed into splinters in his hand. But he again grasped it by the stump, and waved it triumphantly over his own, and his fellow soldiers' heads, until the close of the battle.

One element of Scott's brigade, Jesup's 25th Infantry, found success on its part of the battlefield. Jesup led his men stealthily through the woods and drove off a battalion of Canadian militia. He then posted his troops to watch the junction where Lundy's Lane met Portage Road. In the rapidly fading light, the 25th captured more than two hundred British troops traveling through the crossroads. One of the captives was General Riall, who had been wounded and was heading to the rear to seek medical attention.



**MAP 3**

The second phase of the battle began in the dark as the rest of the Left Division entered the fray. As soon as he heard the cannons fire from the north, General Brown directed Ripley to assemble his men and the artillery and march to Scott's aid. He ordered Porter to prepare his brigade to march as well. None of the U.S. generals—Brown, Ripley, or Porter—had expected a major battle, and now they urgently summoned their soldiers from guard details and work parties to form and advance toward the sound of the guns. Arriving on the battlefield, Brown saw the many dead, wounded, and stragglers from Scott's brigade. He also saw an opportunity with the British having moved out from behind their defenses and in position to give battle. Maj. William McRee, Brown's chief



Eleazar W. Ripley  
(Minnesota Military  
Museum)

engineer, conducted a reconnaissance of the British line and reported that the artillery position atop the ridge was the key to the battle. Brown agreed and ordered Col. James Miller to attack the enemy battery with the 21st Infantry. Miller famously replied, "I'll try, sir."

Ripley formed his brigade in the dark between Scott's shattered brigade and Drummond's extensive line. He sent Maj. Daniel McFarland's 23d Infantry to the right of Miller's battalion. Most unexpectedly, a new unit appeared on the battlefield. Lt. Col. Robert C. Nicholas brought with him two companies, about a hundred fifty men, of the 1st Infantry. The 1st Infantry had been in St. Louis when it received Secretary of War Armstrong's orders in March to move east. Traveling by boat and road, the regiment had reached Buffalo that day and had continued on to the American camp, arriving just in time to join the battle. Ripley positioned Nicholas on the left of the 21st. Due to the darkness, however, none of the regimental commanders could see one another and Ripley could not coordinate the assault. There was every reason to believe that the crucial attack would miscarry.



Lundy's Lane (Niagara Falls Museum)

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And miscarry it nearly did. The 1st Infantry stepped off and immediately drew intense fire from the numerous British troops on the ridge. The fire stopped the Americans cold, and Nicholas withdrew them to re-form for a second try. On the far right, the men of the 23d were greeted with the fierce musket fire that was the hallmark of stalwart British infantry. Momentarily recoiling, the regiment approached to within twenty yards of the British line and opened its own fire. In the ensuing exchange, British musketry cut down Major McFarland.

With the British infantry distracted by the attacks of the 1st Infantry and 23d Infantry, Miller was able to move his men stealthily forward toward the artillery. The 21st Infantry delivered a single volley that bowled the British gunners over. The Americans followed with a furious bayonet assault that overran the enemy artillery. Miller re-formed his lines quickly as Ripley moved his other two battalions to the crest of the ridge. The maneuver occurred just in time, as the British *89th Regiment of Foot* was starting up the northern slope, determined to recapture the lost guns. The next few minutes' fighting was intense. Captain Ropes of the 21st Infantry observed, "The enemy finding he had lost his artillery made some desperate charges to retake it and gain the rise of ground, but all in vain for our men

fought like bull dogs. So close did they charge that the fire from their discharges would seem to strike our faces.”

The Americans beat back the first attack, and General Drummond ordered the *89th* to assault again. It marched to within twenty yards of the American line, halted, and delivered volley after volley. The U.S. infantry returned fire with equal speed and accuracy. Drummond threw nearby units into the fray, but American steadiness prevailed and the British line receded into the darkness. Drummond's horse was shot out from under him, and a bullet passed through the general's neck. Refusing medical attention, he tied handkerchiefs around the wound and continued to lead his soldiers. He refused to accept the loss of the guns and sent riders to gather nearby units for another assault. Meanwhile, Brown sent Porter with about three hundred men to form the left of the U.S. line, bending it back to better protect the flank. Jesup brought the 25th Infantry up the ridge and positioned his men just south of Lundy's Lane and linked in with Ripley's brigade on his left. Maj. Jacob Hindman brought his three artillery companies forward and spread them across the American front. Bvt. Lt. Col. Henry Leavenworth gathered the remnants of Scott's brigade and formed them as a single composite battalion behind the center of the U.S. line. General Brown and his aide rode forward in the darkness to get some sense of the location of the British. After perceiving some troop movement to their front, Brown's aide boldly called out, "What regiment is that?" "The *Royal Scots*," came the response, inadvertently giving away their position. Rewarded with this intelligence, the two Americans quickly returned to their line.

Drummond had assembled about three thousand soldiers in a lengthy line a few hundred yards north of Lundy's Lane. They tramped forward and up the slope toward the thin American line, stopping about forty yards away. Both sides opened fire with controlled volleys. British fire cut down so many U.S. artillerymen that too few remained to man the guns. Sgt. James Commins of the *8th Regiment of Foot* had only one explanation for the determination of the U.S. infantry. "The Yankees was loth to quit their position and being well fortified with whiskey made them stand longer than ever they did." Sergeant Commins, like Drummond, was unwilling to accept that the U.S. Army was now on parity with the British regiments in Canada. British attitudes would change by the end of the campaign.

Unable to break the American line, Drummond withdrew his men to regroup them for another try. After about twenty to thirty minutes, the British surged forward for another counterattack. The two sides opened fire. Ripley urged Brown to bring Scott's brigade



*Private of Scott's brigade, 1814, by Don Troiani*  
(Don Troiani Image Bank)

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back into the action. Brown gave the order, and Scott directed Leavenworth to form the remaining two hundred fifty soldiers of the 1st Brigade into an attack column. Scott later wrote that he “resolved to try an experiment,” and led the column through the 2d Brigade

directly toward the British line. However, in the darkness and on the steeply sloping ground, the column veered hard to the left, so that it moved between the U.S. and British lines. Receiving fire from friend and foe alike, Scott and Leavenworth managed to return to the far left of the American position.

For its part, Porter's brigade was deep in the fighting, standing in line of battle exchanging volleys with the British. Private McMullen recalled,

I had twenty rounds of cartridge in my box when I went to the battle ground, and when the firing ceased on examining my box I found that the last was in my musket. Cartridges and flints were now hastily distributed along the line, and our brave brigade, blackened with powder, marched forward toward the top of the hill to drive the enemy from his position there. In our march we passed over the dead and dying, who were literally in heaps, especially where the British had stood during the battle.

For a second time, Drummond saw that his attack had stalled. He signaled a withdrawal to reorganize his men for another push.

About 2330, the British made the third and final attempt to force the Left Division off of the ridge. The *Royal Scots* and the *89th Foot* were locked in desperate hand-to-hand fighting with the 1st Infantry and 21st Infantry. Ripley was everywhere urging his men to fight on. Two musket balls pierced his hat, and his horse was shot out from under him. On the far left, Scott and Leavenworth formed up the two hundred undaunted survivors of the 1st Brigade. Without waiting for orders, Scott led these brave men out from the American line. As the British sensed the oncoming assault, they opened a fierce fire that fractured the U.S. column into two pieces. The trailing portion withdrew to the American line, while the enemy destroyed the leading fragment. Capt. Abraham Hull, son of the disgraced General William Hull and cousin of naval hero Capt. Isaac Hull, lost his life at the head of the U.S. bayonet assault.

After he brought his wrecked brigade back to the American line, Scott galloped off to see his orphaned battalion, Bvt. Lt. Col. Thomas Jesup's 25th Infantry. While Scott and Jesup conversed, British musket fire found the two officers. Jesup received his third wound of the day but remained on his feet. Scott was not so fortunate; struck down and unconscious, he was out of the battle and the war. At about the same time, two bullets struck General Brown. He was evacuated from the battlefield, unable to continue in command.

At this most critical moment, just when so many U.S. officers were out of the fight, General Drummond called off the attack. The British infantrymen receded into the darkness, and the Americans paused to evacuate their wounded.

Ripley reported to Brown for orders. Weak from loss of blood, Brown directed Ripley to march the men back to camp to get water and ammunition and to be back on the battlefield at dawn to fight the British if they should appear. Ripley got the army moving back to camp but failed to tell the regimental commanders to prepare their men to reoccupy the ridge they had so valiantly defended. The few uninjured American artillerymen did what they could to withdraw their guns from the exposed position atop the ridge. However, from miscommunication and lack of horses, the artillerymen failed to bring back the captured British cannons. Once back at their tents, the exhausted Americans rested as best as they could. Some of the worst wounded were already on their way to the hospitals in Buffalo and nearby Williamsville, New York.

As the sun rose the next morning, the soldiers realized how harsh the fighting had been. Private McMullen noted that “the next morning a scene of distress presented itself to my view, which I hope I may never witness again. I started early to see Thomas Poe, hearing he was lying in a house at Chippewa, a short distance from our camp. Calling at some of the tents as I passed along, I found that nearly all of them contained one or more wounded men, their clothes covered with blood and they were suffering severely.”

Once the sun was up, Brown became aware that his division was still in camp. Frustrated that Ripley had disobeyed his orders, he directed the army to march. Just before 0900 Ripley led about fifteen hundred soldiers back to the battlefield, only to discover that Drummond had reoccupied the ridge after dawn. Vastly outnumbered, Ripley turned his men around and returned to camp. When he reported his failure to Brown, the division commander was furious. As he was being evacuated across the Niagara River, Brown sent word to General Gaines at Sackett’s Harbor to report immediately and assume command of the Left Division.

Ripley then gave an order that shocked many of his officers. He directed the division to give up its excellent defensive position south of the Chippewa River and to move to the ferry site opposite Black Rock, New York. When subordinate commanders protested his actions, Ripley, unwilling to accept responsibility for the army if it remained in Canada, sought permission from the wounded Brown to withdraw back into the United States. Refusing to accept that the



campaign had been a failure, Brown gave Ripley a written order to defend Fort Erie. Twenty-four days after the invasion began, the Left Division was back where it started.

The Battle of Lundy's Lane was the largest and hardest fought engagement of the war until that time. The Left Division went toe-to-toe with some of the finest British battalions in North America and retained possession of the battlefield until voluntarily withdrawing. Clearly, the U.S. Army had become equal to the regular British and Canadian regiments in the theater. Casualties were heavy and roughly equal.

<i>Army</i>	<i>Killed</i>	<i>Wounded</i>	<i>Missing/Captured</i>	<i>Total</i>
British	84	559	235	878
American	173	571	117	861

Yet, as the sun rose on 26 July 1814, the initiative had passed to the British, and the campaign would extend deep into the autumn.

### *The Siege of Fort Erie, 1 August–17 September 1814*

When the Americans captured Fort Erie in early July, it had consisted of two stone barracks and two earthen bastions. The small garrison Brown had left behind had erected a redoubt to protect the bastions. Still, the fort was hardly large enough to accommodate more than two hundred men. The Left Division returned to Fort Erie on 27 July. The following day, Bvt. Lt. Col. William McRee and Bvt. Maj. Eleazar Wood began laying out a fortified camp. Fort Erie anchored the northern end of the camp, and a large sand mound known locally as Snake Hill anchored the southern. A breastwork and ditch seven hundred fifty yards long connected the two positions. Work parties labored without rest; Drummond and his army were expected at any moment. The breastwork was six to seven feet high, and the ditch outside the earthworks was three to four feet deep. The men also constructed traverses—earthen walls set at right angles to the breastwork—to stop any incoming cannonballs from careening through the length of the camp. Soldiers cut down small trees, sharpened the branches, and embedded them into the breastwork and ditch and outside the ditch to create an abatis, an additional barrier protecting the camp from a direct infantry assault. Engineer Lieutenant Douglass fortified a limestone kiln between Fort Erie and the shoreline, converting it into an artillery site. Work parties leveled Snake Hill and built timber gun platforms. Captain Towson placed his artillery pieces atop the resulting strong position, called Towson's Battery.

Three schooners cruised offshore, adding protection to the camp. Regular shuttles across the Niagara between Fort Erie and Buffalo brought supplies and reinforcements and evacuated the wounded. As each day passed, the American fortification grew stronger.

For his part, General Drummond lost several days resupplying his men and waiting for reinforcements before pursuing the Left Division. His delay probably saved the U.S. position. Drummond ordered a raid on the New York side of the river for the purpose of destroying boats and supplies around Black Rock and Buffalo. In the early hours of 3 August, six hundred British regulars crossed the Niagara and began their march south. Maj. Ludowick Morgan, a gifted tactician, had seen signs of British activity the previous day. Suspecting British intentions, he led a small battalion of the 1st Rifle Regiment to a strong position immediately south of Conjocta Creek. For nearly three hours the British attempted to cross the steep-banked creek, each assault rebuffed by accurate rifle fire. Despairing of accomplishing their mission, the British called off the raid and recrossed the river. Drummond had lost his best chance to cut off Fort Erie from its supplies.

General Drummond decided to lay siege to the American camp. Over the next two weeks he moved more than two thousand men, supplies, heavy artillery, and ammunition toward Fort Erie. Drummond was confident that superior British discipline would overcome the shaky American foe. He had not fully accepted the notion that the men of the Left Division were well trained and well led. General Gaines arrived at Fort Erie on 4 August to assume command from the brave but pessimistic Ripley, who resumed command of his brigade. Capt. J. B. Varnum, writing to his senator-father, noted, "since Gen[eral] Gaines has taken command, a new life and spirit appears to have been inspired into our army." Gaines energetically took charge. He sent parties of men into the forest to skirmish with the British pickets nearly every day. In one of these forays, British fire cut down Major Morgan at the head of his men. The Americans mourned the passing of this gallant leader and redoubled their efforts to prepare for an assault that was sure to come. Gaines kept one-third of the division awake throughout the night hours. The remainder slept fully clothed with their weapons at their sides.

Drummond's engineers served him less well than the U.S. engineers served their commander. The first battery constructed proved too far away to bring the most effective fire on the American camp. A Canadian observer related that he doubted "if one shot in ten reached the rampart at all, and the fortunate exceptions that struck the



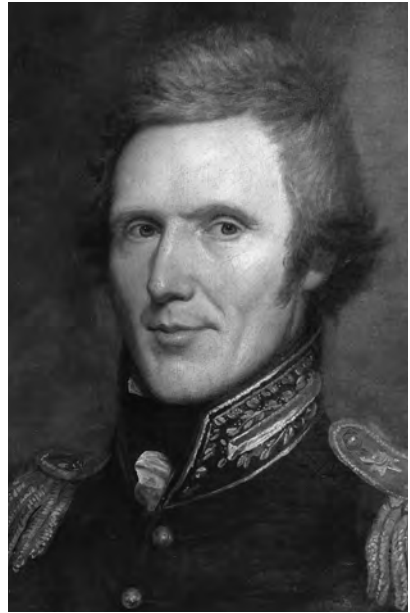
The American Soldier, 1814, by *H. Charles McBarron Jr.*  
(U.S. Army Art Collection)

stone building at which they were aimed, rebounded from its sides as innocuous as tennis balls.” Nonetheless, the sheer quantity of cannon and mortar fire took its toll. It knocked over rows of tents and disrupted camp life. Dr. William E. Horner treated casualties in a field hospital across the river in Buffalo.

I remember, one day, in making my hospital rounds, a patient just arrived presented an amputated forearm, and in doing so could scarcely restrain a broad laugh; the titter was constantly on his face. “What’s the matter? This does not strike me as a subject of laughter.” “It is not, Doctor, but excuse me, I lost my arm in so funny a way, that I still laugh, whenever I look at it.” “What way?” “Our first Sergeant wanted shaving, and got me to attend to it, as I am a

Corporal. We went out together in front of his tent, I had lathered him, took him by the nose, and was just about applying the razor, when a cannon ball came, and that was the last I saw of his head and of my hand. Excuse me, doctor, for laughing so; I never saw such a thing before.”

Drummond carefully planned a three-pronged night assault. Lt. Col. Victor Fischer would conduct the main effort, a bayonet assault by a thousand infantrymen around the southern flank. Drummond had directed that Fischer’s men remove the flints from their firelocks so that an accidental discharge would not warn the Americans standing guard in the night. Fischer would lead his men into the gap between Snake Hill and Lake Erie, unaware that the Americans had recently constructed an abatis across this area. The second prong of the strike would spring forward when Drummond heard the noise of Americans firing at Fischer’s men. Col. Hercules Scott would then



Edmund P. Gaines,  
*by Rembrandt Peale*  
(Historical Society of  
Pennsylvania)

lead seven hundred men against the breastworks connecting Fort Erie to the lake. Once this attack commenced, Lt. Col. William Drummond would lead a charge of three hundred sixty soldiers, sailors, and marines directly into Fort Erie. General Drummond expected that these two secondary assaults would persuade Gaines not to send reinforcements to stop Fischer's onslaught at the southern end of the U.S. camp. Gaines had about twenty-six hundred men, mostly veterans, waiting for the British offensive.

Fischer moved out of the cover of the forest about 0200 on 15 August. American pickets, fully expecting a night attack, gave warning and scurried as fast as they could through a narrow opening in the abatis to the safety of the camp. Fischer's men followed so closely that 2d Lt. William Belknap of the 23d Infantry, bringing up the rear of the pickets, received a bayonet wound while entering camp. As Fischer's soldiers rounded the corner of Snake Hill, they encountered the abatis. Major Wood, leading four companies of the 21st Infantry, directed his men to fire over the abatis and into Fischer's troops. During the attack, the guns of the battery commanded by Captain Towson fired so quickly that after the battle, the Americans referred to it as Towson's Lighthouse. Caught in a blizzard of musket and artillery fire, dozens of British infantrymen moved into the waters of Lake Erie in an attempt to work their way into the rear of the American line. General Ripley sent two companies to counter this threat. Over the long minutes of the engagement, the Americans killed, wounded, or captured over a hundred sixty British soldiers. Finally, Fischer had no choice but to call off the attack.

As Fischer's survivors retreated into the forest, Colonel Scott ordered his attack to commence. Again, American pickets gave ample warning and returned to the protection of their line. The defenders heard Scott's officers urging the men forward. Without waiting to see their foe, the Americans opened with tremendous musket and cannon fire. Scott was mortally wounded almost immediately when a musket ball penetrated his forehead. His second in command and fourteen officers also fell. With few leaders remaining, the attack column broke up and returned to the protection of the forest.

Of the three prongs of the British strike, Colonel Drummond's assault into Fort Erie achieved the most success. The British attackers scrambled into the ditch and threw ladders against the northeast bastion of the fort. In the desperate hand-to-hand fighting, no quarter was granted by either side. The two artillery officers commanding the bastion, Capt. Alexander Williams and 1st Lt. Patrick McDonough, died defending their guns. The British captured the bastion but could

move no farther into the fort. Gaines sent reinforcements into the deadly brawl but could not force out the tenacious attackers.

Lieutenant Douglass, who commanded the U.S. battery close to the fort, recalled,

But suddenly, every sound was hushed by the sense of an unnatural tremor, beneath our feet, like the first heave of an earthquake; and almost at the same instant, the centre of the bastion burst up, with a terrific explosion; and a jet of flame, mingled with fragments of timber, earth, stone, and bodies of men, rose, to the height of one or two hundred feet, in the air, and fell, in a shower of ruins, to a great distance, all around. One of my men was killed by the falling timber.

No one can say for certain what caused the explosion of the gunpowder stored in the bastion. The attacking force was all but annihilated. Colonel Drummond was among the dead. The British assault was over.

The next day, U.S. defenders found more than a hundred bodies in the ruins of the bastion. First Lt. Jonathan Kearsley of the 4th U.S. Rifle Regiment stated, “Day soon after dawned and an appalling scene presented itself—some dying, others groaning under their wounds and dead bodies heaped upon them, other[s] burnt and blind, many crying out for water to slake their burning thirst, in short every form of human suffering and misery.” Kearsley himself had received a bayonet wound over his left eye in the close combat. The Americans sent dozens of severely wounded soldiers, friend and foe alike, to the hospital in Buffalo. General Drummond reported 905 casualties in a battle that had lasted less than three hours. Gaines counted 2 officers and 15 soldiers killed and 57 wounded. Brown recognized Gaines as the architect of the stunning U.S. victory, and President Madison rewarded him with a brevet promotion to major general. Brown’s decision to replace Ripley with Gaines had been fully vindicated.

Despite the heavy losses of the night attack and an unsure supply of food, Drummond decided to continue the siege. It rained nearly every day, and soldiers in both camps struggled with the mud as they strengthened their defensive lines. The British opened a second battery, much closer to the U.S.-held fort, and started work on a third battery, nearer still. Some days as many as five hundred rounds of shot, shell, and Congreve rockets landed in the American camp. Eventually, the men inside Fort Erie became somewhat used to the persistent cannonade. Lieutenant Douglass observed that “the soldier-boys of the camp were seen constantly running races with

spent balls and throwing stones at a bombshell, just ready to explode, in much the same spirit as we see them, sometimes, stoning a hornet's nest." Then, on 28 August, a British shell crashed through Gaines' headquarters, severely injuring the general. Brown, still recovering from his wounds, refused to hand command of the fort to Ripley. He left his sick bed in Batavia, New York, and moved to Fort Erie to assume personal command of the 2,246-soldier garrison.

Both sides poured reinforcements into the siege. At Plattsburgh, General Izard reluctantly obeyed a questionable order from Secretary of War Armstrong and led the Right Division across New York to assist the Left Division on the Niagara. Not to be outdone, Prevost sent thousands of British soldiers to Drummond and positioned nearly fourteen

thousand more men to move on Plattsburgh. Feeling hard pressed by the British counteroffensive, General Brown asked New York Governor Daniel Tompkins to call out the militia for operations along the Niagara River. Tompkins was more concerned with the defenses of New York City in the face of news that Britain was sending thousands of veteran troops to North America. Nonetheless, he gave his aide, Lt. Col. John B. Yates, full authority to summon the militia of western New York for federal service. Yates immediately called four thousand militiamen to rendezvous at Williamsville on 1 September. General Porter departed Fort Erie immediately to arm and equip this force with the intention of aiding the Left Division.

By 9 September, more than three thousand New York militiamen had gathered at Buffalo. General Porter assembled the men in a drizzling rain and asked for volunteers to cross the Niagara to relieve the Left Division. A few hundred volunteered immediately, and, with a band playing martial music, Porter marched these men around the



Peter B. Porter,  
*by Lars Sellstedt*  
(Buffalo and Erie County  
Historical Society)

others. Heartened by the opportunity to fight under Generals Brown and Porter to break the siege at Fort Erie, hundreds more joined them. Eventually, Porter marched twenty-two hundred New York citizen-soldiers to the river, where boats began shuttling them across to Fort Erie. Once in Canada, the New Yorkers established a camp near Snake Hill and constructed breastworks to protect themselves. Now, Brown had the men necessary to break the siege.

After learning that only about one-third of the British force was assigned to protect the three batteries while the rest remained in camp two miles away, Brown determined to launch a raid to destroy the siege guns. Porter would lead a strong column of regulars, volunteers, militia, and Indians through the forest to attack Battery 3. The raid would follow two trails that American axmen had carved through the woods to within a hundred fifty yards of the target. Col. James Gibson, a West Point graduate, would command the advance guard of two hundred riflemen and native warriors. Another West Pointer, Major Wood, would lead the column moving along the right trail while militia Brig. Gen. Daniel Davis led the column on the left. Meanwhile, Bvt. Brig. Gen. James Miller, formerly commander of the 21st Infantry, would infiltrate a smaller column of about six hundred fifty regulars from Fort Erie to occupy a ravine north of the fort. When he heard Porter's column assaulting Battery 3, Miller would lead his men toward Battery 2. General Ripley would command a small reserve of regulars, about five hundred fifty soldiers. With the plan set, Porter's men moved into the forest at about noon on 17 September in a light fog and a drizzle.

Two hours later, Porter's brigade attacked the British at Battery 3. The defenders were completely surprised. As the Americans emerged from the fog and rain, many British regulars surrendered or rapidly withdrew. The British position consisted of a maze of trenches protected by scattered abatis and a blockhouse. Nevertheless, Porter's men blew up stores of ammunition and used sledgehammers to disable the guns. Two lieutenants blew up the blockhouse with gunpowder found nearby. Upon hearing the noise of the assault, General Miller led his men out of the ravine and into the forest. By now, Porter's men were thoroughly intermixed as militiamen and regulars coalesced around the nearest officers. Some militiamen escorted the numerous prisoners to the rear. The rest, with Porter in the lead, found Miller's column. The two groups pressed on toward the second battery. The noise of the raid also alerted the British camp. British regulars grabbed their weapons and cartridge boxes, formed up, and soon were on their way to drive off the attackers.



The defenders of Battery 2, unlike their unfortunate comrades at Battery 3, were waiting for the strike. The rain had rendered many muskets inoperative, and much of the fighting was hand to hand. The New York militia did not hang back but pressed forward. Colonel Gibson was killed in the fighting, but eventually numbers told, and the battery fell into U.S. hands. By this time, the American leaders were losing control over their scattered followers. It took some time before Porter, Miller, and their officers exerted enough control to move on toward Battery 1. Once there, the first of the British relief forces crashed into the Americans.

The British killed General Davis and mortally wounded and captured Major Wood. General Porter got ahead of his men and came on a group of redcoats standing while waiting for orders. Porter tried to bluff his way out of a tricky situation by yelling commands to nonexistent followers and demanding that the British surrender. Not to be outwitted, a British soldier knocked Porter to the ground and pierced Porter's hand with his bayonet. Fortunately, an American militia company arrived on the scene and captured the British. More British troops arrived at Battery 1 and eventually drove out the Americans. General Brown sent Ripley into the forest with the reserve force in an attempt to help extricate the attackers. Porter's men, Miller's, and now Ripley's merged in a confused mass and started a fighting withdrawal back to Fort Erie. A musket ball passed through Ripley's neck taking him out of the fight. British-allied Indian warriors entered the fray and caught isolated Americans, smashing their heads with tomahawks. Slowly the Americans exited the forest. The bloody, chaotic fight had lasted about two hours.

The Americans fared better in the fight in terms of casualties. Brown reported 79 killed, 216 wounded, and 216 missing; a total of 511. General Drummond reported a loss of 719: 115 killed, 178 wounded, and 426 missing. The number of missing corresponds to Brown's report that he captured about four hundred of the enemy. Brown was very pleased with the results of the sortie in spite of the heavy losses. The militia had fought well under trying circumstances, and Brown told Governor Tompkins that "they behaved gallantly." The loss of the talented Major Wood saddened all in the Left Division. Brown reported that Wood "died as he had lived, without a feeling but for the honor of his country and the glory of her arms."

Ironically, the U.S. sortie proved unnecessary to break the siege because Drummond had already decided to withdraw his forces. He could not continue to supply his division around Fort Erie, and his men were becoming ill from daily exposure to the cold rain. The Americans, who knew none of this, rejoiced in the victory. The British



Repulsion of the British at Fort Erie, 15th August 1814, by E. C. Watmough (Chicago History Museum/Bridgeman Art Library)

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buried the dead from both sides in the trenches around the gun positions and hauled away the artillery that had not been ruined in the attack. On the evening of 21 September, Drummond marched his army northward. His men left their campfires burning so that the Americans were unaware of their departure until the next day. General Brown maintained contact with the British, now largely north of the Chippewa River, but did not move the bulk of his division. He wanted to act in concert with Izard's Right Division, even then approaching the Niagara.

As the first columns of his division tramped into Sackett's Harbor on 15 September, Izard briefly considered an attack on Kingston to destroy the shipyard there. However, he felt compelled to rescue the Left Division. Torrential rains and adverse winds prevented sailing for several days. Finally, starting on 21 September, Commodore Chauncey's squadron began moving the Right Division westward as far as the mouth of the Genesee River. There, the army quartermasters hired the few wagons and teams of horses available. The Right Division, about three thousand soldiers, picked up the march westward, leaving behind many of its tents and other camp equipment. Brown and Izard met at Batavia to consider how to proceed. They thought about retaking Fort Niagara. While Brown pinned Drummond in place on the Chippewa River, Izard would lay siege to the former

U.S. fort. The problem, however, was siege artillery. The Americans had only one 24-pounder gun and a few 18-pounders, insufficient to breach Niagara's walls. Over the next several days, Brown and Izard decided to forgo a move on Fort Niagara and resolved to unite their divisions and attempt to destroy Drummond's army along the Niagara River instead.

On 5 October, as his men arrived in Lewiston, Izard received a letter from James Monroe, who had replaced Armstrong as secretary of war on 27 September 1814. Correcting one of Armstrong's poor decisions, Monroe placed Izard in command of the entire 9th Military District. Izard renamed his command the Northern Army and designated his division as the 1st Division. Brown's Left Division became the 2d Division. The two brigade commanders of the 1st Division were a talented pair. Brig. Gen. Thomas A. Smith, former commander of the 1st Rifle Regiment, commanded the 1st Brigade, and Brig. Gen. Daniel Bissell commanded the 2d Brigade. Bissell had been the commander of the 5th Infantry.

Izard wanted to cross the Niagara somewhere close to the mouth of the Chippewa. However, too few boats were available near the desired site. Instead, the 1st Division marched to Buffalo and traversed it there on 10 October. This delayed the campaign as a cold winter approached. Over the next few days, Izard's Northern Army of fifty-five hundred regulars and eight hundred militia volunteers closed on the Chippewa River, stopping at the site of Scott's victory three months earlier. There, the men saw Drummond's strong defenses on the northern shore. Izard pondered how to maneuver Drummond out of his defensive works and force him to give battle. Brown offered Izard the plan he had used in July following the Battle of Chippewa, and Izard agreed. Brown's men started cutting a usable trail that would terminate near where Lyon's Creek joined the Chippewa River.

The next several days underscored the profound difference between the cautious Izard and his risk-taking subordinate. Izard despaired of accomplishing anything further. In a letter to Monroe he wrote, "I confess, sir, that I am greatly embarrassed. At the head of the most efficient army which the United States have possessed during this war, much must be expected from me, and yet I can discern no object which can be achieved at this point, worthy of the risk which will attend its attempt." Izard decided to try to bring Drummond to battle, but failing that, he would return the Northern Army to New York and put it into winter quarters.

The next day Izard pulled both divisions back from the Chippewa and arrayed them for combat, hoping to entice Drummond to leave his defenses to give battle. Unlike General Riall in July, Drummond would have none of it. Izard then withdrew the army even farther south, hoping that Drummond would take advantage of the increased maneuver

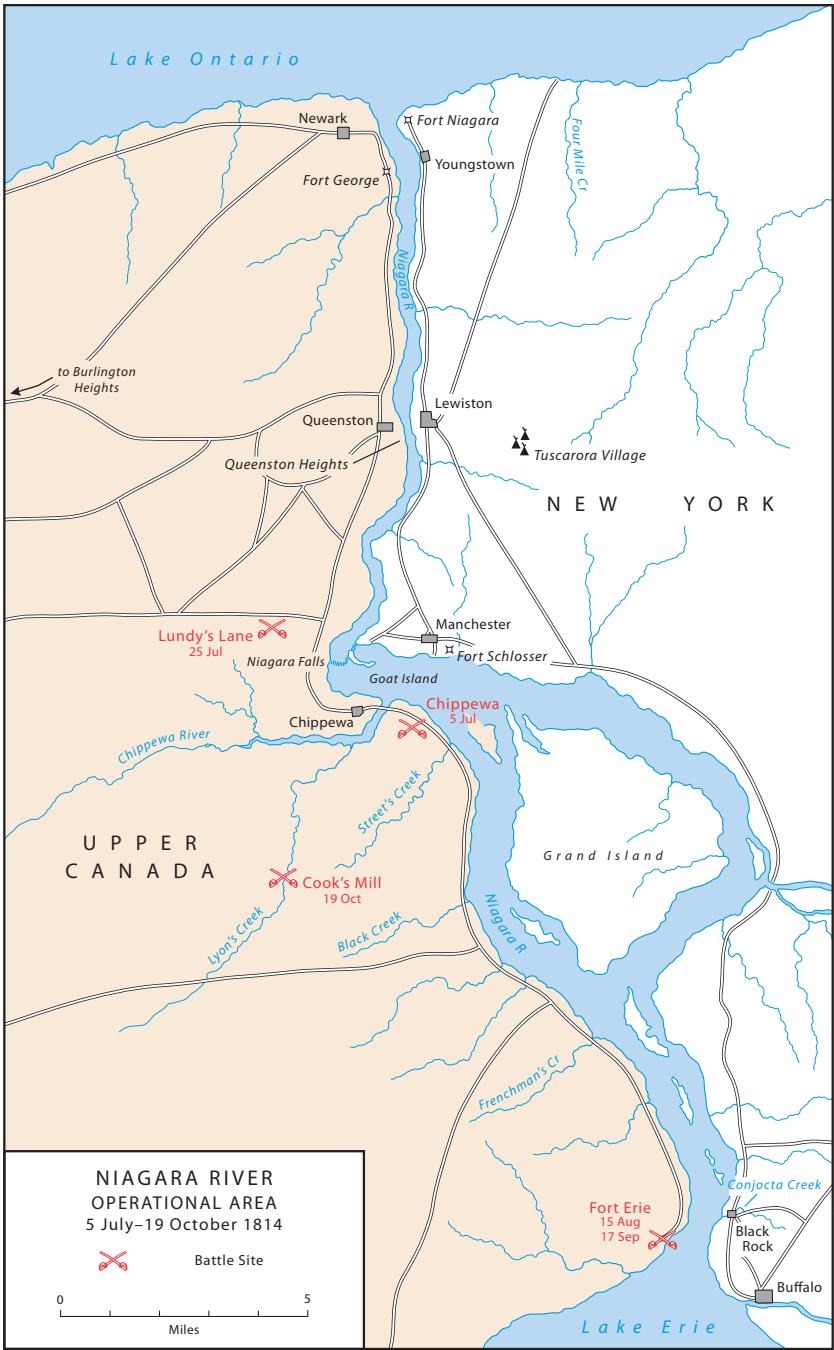
room and attack. By this time, however, Commodore Yeo had blockaded Chauncey in Sackett's Harbor, and Drummond, with his supply lines secured, had even less reason to risk his division in a fight against superior numbers. Much to Brown's frustration, the stalemate continued.

Izard did, however, take one offensive action. Upon learning of a large supply of flour at Cook's Mill on Lyon's Creek, he sent General Bissell to seize or destroy the flour. Bissell led his men out of camp on the morning of 18 October to fight what would become the last battle of the Niagara campaign.

Paralleling Black Creek, Bissell's four infantry battalions, augmented by a company of riflemen and a detachment of dragoons, struggled along bad roads and across numerous smaller streams. After arriving at Cook's Mill, Bissell built a bridge over Lyon's Creek. He sent the riflemen and two companies of light infantry across the bridge to secure it, but the remainder of the brigade rested south of the creek. When Drummond learned of Bissell's advance, he suspected an attempt to outflank the British position north of the Chippewa. He sent Col. Christopher Myers with a brigade of infantry, supported with one 6-pounder gun and a Congreve rocket launcher, to learn more about Bissell's intent. That night, the British and American pickets skirmished, but casualties were light (*Map 4*).

The next morning, 19 October, Myers arrayed his troops in line at a right angle to Lyon's Creek and about a mile east of Cook's Mill. His mission was to learn more about this puzzling U.S. force, not to become decisively engaged. A shallow ravine leading toward the creek separated the British brigade from the American security force, with a small wooded area west of the ravine. Myers decided to probe the American pickets in the woods and deployed the skilled Canadian fighters of the *Glengarry Light Infantry Fencibles*. The *Glengarries* traversed the ravine and confronted the American riflemen and light infantry in the woods. When Bissell heard the sporadic firing, he ordered the 5th Infantry and 14th Infantry to cross Lyon's Creek, and he alerted the 15th Infantry and 16th Infantry to be ready to move as needed. The *Glengarries* advanced relentlessly against the outnumbered American skirmishers, pushing them back through the woods and onto open ground. As the situation became clearer to Bissell, he decided to drive off the Canadians.

Bissell ordered the 14th Infantry to march directly toward the woods and the 5th Infantry to pass north of the woods to trap the *Glengarries*. He brought the 16th Infantry north across Lyon's Creek and moved the 15th eastward along the creek to get closer to the main British line. Myers ordered the *Glengarries* to withdraw. As Bissell moved forward, it appeared to him that he was driving off the British. The two main lines opened fire at long range, the British throwing artillery and rocket fire into



MAP 4

the mix. Myers expected Bissell to attack, but the U.S. general declined to send his brigade across the ravine. Myers determined that Bissell's force was not an imminent threat to Drummond and withdrew about three miles through the forest toward the British camp on the Chippewa. Bissell believed that he had bested the British. His men destroyed about two hundred bushels of grain but left the mill intact.

The Battle of Cook's Mill or Lyon's Creek was not decisive. The British suffered thirty-six casualties, the Americans sixty-seven. When it became clear to Brown that Izard would not press the fight, he used the opportunity to take his men to Sackett's Harbor to defend that post over the winter. With dysentery spreading through the Northern Army, Izard began the careful process of bringing the 1st Division back to Buffalo and establishing them for the winter. He directed Porter to muster his men out of federal service so that they might return to their homes. Brown's regulars spent seventeen days marching through rain and sleet across muddy roads and arrived at Sackett's Harbor on 13 November. There were two thousand wounded and ill at the hospitals at Buffalo and Williamsville, and Izard ordered as many as possible to be evacuated to Greenbush, New York, where food and medical care were more available.

Izard's last decision of the campaign was to abandon Fort Erie. He believed that it would be nearly impossible to keep a garrison supplied through the winter, and the fort would not be of much use in the next campaign. Work parties took twenty-five pieces of artillery back to Buffalo and dug shafts into the earthen ramparts, which they packed with gunpowder. On 5 November, explosion after explosion rocked the venerable fort. The stone barracks were reduced to rubble, and Snake Hill was once again a pile of sand. The campaign on the Niagara that had started four months earlier had come to a close without changing the strategic situation, but it did establish a shining tactical legacy for the U.S. Army.

### *The Battle of Plattsburgh, 11 September 1814*

In September 1814, about the time the fighting on the Niagara was sputtering to a close under General Izard's leadership, American arms won a resounding victory at Plattsburgh. Ironically, the victory came as the result of errors committed by the national government.

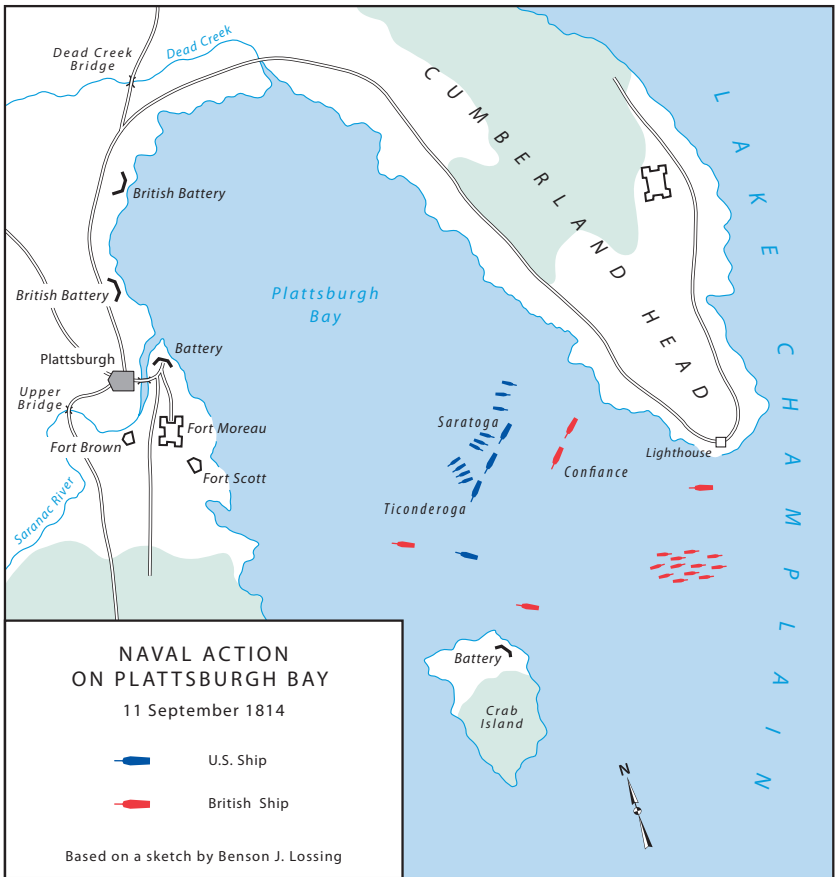
Madison and Armstrong appeared to have forgotten that Montreal and Quebec City were more decisive strategic goals than anything on the Niagara River. In late July, the president had prompted his secretary of war to send Izard's Right Division from Plattsburgh on Lake Champlain to the Niagara River to assist the Left Division. Izard had protested the order. He warned, "I will make the movement you direct if possible; but I shall do it with the apprehension of risking the force under my com-

mand and with the certainty that every thing in this vicinity but the lately constructed works at Plattsburgh and at Cumberland Head [New York] will in less than three days after my departure, be in the possession of the enemy." Even as Izard wrote, thousands of British troops, most of them veterans of the lately concluded war in Europe, were landing at Montreal and preparing to march toward Plattsburgh and Lake Champlain.

The Plattsburgh region had enormous strategic value. Long, narrow Lake Champlain lay along a break in the Appalachian Mountains and was a traditional invasion route between Montreal and New York City. Except for a short portage at Lake George, the waters of the Hudson, Lake Champlain, and the Richelieu River connected New York City with the St. Lawrence River. The village of Plattsburgh was important because it sat near the northern end of Lake Champlain, near the Canadian border and astride this route between Montreal and the Hudson Valley. It was situated north of the Saranac River that emptied into Plattsburgh Bay on the lake (*Map 5*).

The two sides still had forces in the area. U.S. Navy Master Commandant Thomas Macdonough had built a squadron on Lake Champlain and maintained shipyards at Plattsburgh and Whitehall, New York, and in Burlington and at Otter Creek, Vermont. The Royal Navy based a competing squadron at Isle aux Noix, Lower Canada, on the Richelieu River, less than ten miles from the international border. The U.S. Army had occupied the peninsula formed between the Saranac River and Plattsburgh Bay. Izard's men had fortified their camp by constructing a line of three earthen redoubts across the peninsula and by blocking the southern approaches. These New York redoubts were named Forts Brown, Moreau, and Scott. Although the encampment was fairly strong, no escape route existed. Defeat meant certain capture.

When Izard departed for the Niagara front on 29 August with the bulk of his army, he left General Macomb in charge at Plattsburgh. Macomb had been commissioned an ensign in the Light Dragoons at age sixteen and in 1805 had completed training as an engineer at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York. Secretary of War William Eustis had selected Macomb to be acting adjutant general of the Army at the beginning of the war; however, Macomb wanted a troop command. Madison had promoted him to colonel and had transferred him from the Corps of Engineers to the artillery. Macomb had commanded the 3d U.S. Artillery with distinction in 1813 and had served under Brown during the Chrysler's Farm campaign. Promoted to brigadier general in 1814, Macomb was an intelligent, energetic, and inspirational leader. After Izard's departure, Macomb had about seventeen hundred men, many of them new recruits, and more than nine hundred hospitalized



## MAP 5

soldiers to defend Plattsburgh. He coordinated a joint land-sea defense with Master Commandant Macdonough, and he called on the governor of Vermont for volunteer militia. Macomb put hundreds of soldiers and militiamen to work building more field fortifications between the three forts. He was determined to hold onto his camp between the Saranac and Lake Champlain come what may.

On 29 August, the day Izard departed for the Niagara, British General Prevost crossed the border with more than ten thousand soldiers, heading for Plattsburgh. He organized his troops into a division of three brigades commanded by Maj. Gen. Sir Francis De Rottenburg. Two of the brigades were composed of veterans from Europe, while other British and Canadian troops made up the third. Tensions existed between Pre-





Alexander Macomb,  
*by Thomas Sully*  
(West Point Museum)

most and the officers from Europe, who tended to regard the Canadian governor general as a man of lesser accomplishment compared with their former commander, Field Marshal Sir Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington.

When the populace in and around Plattsburgh learned that the British were on the march, more than three thousand people abandoned their homes and fled for safety. Macomb's job was easier without civilians to feed and defend. He reacted to the British advance by sending Lt. Col. Daniel Appling with about a hundred riflemen and some New York militia dragoons to slow down the British while the garrison at Plattsburgh struggled to complete preparations for the upcoming battle.

Soon after, militia Maj. Gen. Benjamin Mooers led about seven hundred militiamen to destroy

bridges and block roads. On 6 September, Mooers called on Macomb for reinforcement against the British, who were advancing on two parallel routes. Macomb sent Maj. John Ellis Wool and two hundred fifty regulars and two cannons north to support the militia. Wool made contact with the British near Beekmantown, New York, on the western route, while Maj. John Sproull blocked the eastern approach at the bridge crossing Dead Creek. Wool directed his regulars and a handful of militiamen who chose to stand and fight in a delaying action. The Americans formed a skirmish line and fired at the marching columns of British infantry as they approached. Then, the Americans broke contact, moved rearward, and repeated the sequence. Wool kept his troops under tight control; he feared that his men risked being outflanked if they remained too long in any position. Appling and his riflemen joined Sproull at Dead Creek. Two U.S. gunboats approached the shore, directing their cannon fire into the British columns. The British brought their own artillery forward and drove off the gunboats. After a short firefight, Sproull withdrew his men. In the skirmishing that day, the Americans suffered forty-five casualties, the British about a hundred.

Prevost planned a coordinated attack. He intended for the naval squadron to attack Macdonough's flotilla in Plattsburgh Bay, while the army assaulted the U.S. camp. Prevost urged Capt. George Downie, the commander of the Royal Navy squadron at Isle aux Noix, to sail, but Downie demurred. His shipwrights were struggling to complete his flagship, the frigate *Confiance*, which carried more than one-third of all of the naval guns in the British squadron, and Downie refused to give battle until it was ready. While waiting for the Royal Navy, the land armies opened a cannonade that lasted four days.

Although greatly outnumbered, American morale remained high. Capt. George McGlassin of the 15th Infantry led fifty men in a nighttime raid that frightened off as many as three hundred British soldiers and damaged a battery of Congreve rockets without the loss of a single soldier. In another act of bravery, the commander of the guns at Fort Brown, 1st Lt. John Mountfort, picked up a small British bomb that had landed inside the fort and threw it over the ramparts saying, "Don't be alarmed, boys; it is nothing but a humbug." Actions like these steadied the soldiers, inspiring them to fight.

Meanwhile, news of the British attack stimulated an outburst of patriotism in Vermont. Despite the fact that the governor of Vermont opposed the war and refused to mobilize his militia, local militia officers on their own authority raised more than twenty-five hundred volunteers. Boats of every description crossed Lake Champlain each day, bringing more citizen-soldiers over to the camp on the Saranac. New York and Vermont militiamen likewise ranged the woods firing on British pickets.

Early in the morning of 11 September, Downie's squadron began rounding Cumberland Head to enter Plattsburgh Bay. The British squadron consisted of the frigate *Confiance*, a brig, two sloops, and a dozen gunboats. Before them at anchor in a line were Macdonough's ship *Saratoga*, a brig, a schooner, and a sloop, supported by ten gunboats. Macdonough had chosen to give battle in Plattsburgh Bay for two reasons. First, the northern winds that would bring Downie south would impede the British squadron as it rounded Cumberland Head. Second, Macdonough's vessels had a preponderance of short-range carronades, while the British vessels were armed largely with long-range guns. In deep water, the British would be at an advantage, able to fire more ordnance at long range than the Americans. However, the confines of Plattsburgh Bay could negate this British firepower advantage. The American commander put his four largest vessels on line, supported by ten gunboats. He had his vessels "set anchor spring lines." By planting their bow anchors at the stern, when the sailors drew in the anchor line, they could rotate their ship 180 degrees. When the guns of the starboard battery were out

of action, the ship's crew could rotate the vessel and present the enemy with the portside guns.

As Macdonough had foreseen, the British vessels had to tack into the northerly winds and entered the fight piecemeal. Eight British gunboats never joined the battle. By 0900, the engagement was general. A shot from *Saratoga* killed Downie early in the battle. Macdonough was also knocked to the deck twice. For two hours, the fleets battered one another mercilessly. When all the *Saratoga's* starboard guns were out of action, Macdonough ordered his crew to bring the ship around. Soon, the fresh port batteries poured fire into *Confiance*. The maneuver proved decisive, and by 1100 the battle was nearly over. One British vessel after another struck its colors, and the Battle of Plattsburgh Bay was decided.

Meanwhile, as soon as the naval battle had commenced, the British land batteries in and around the village of Plattsburgh had opened a terrific fire on the U.S. camp. The American artilleryists, sensing that the day would see an attempt to storm their positions, answered the cannonade with equal vigor and accuracy. Prevost finally gave the order for two of his three brigades to ford the Saranac southwest of the U.S. forts. Maj. Gen. Frederick Robinson commanded the two brigades. Unfortunately for the British, their guides took the wrong road from the camp to the ford. Robinson's men arrived at the ford as the naval battle was winding down. The British easily drove off the militia and volunteers guarding the ford and soon began crossing. Once the entire force was across, Robinson intended to assault the three American forts that he could see in the distance. Then, an order arrived from Prevost. Citing the surrender of the squadron, Prevost called off the strike and directed the troops to return to camp. Obedient to orders, the columns of redcoats turned about and retraced their steps. One company of British soldiers did not receive the word to retire. Vermont volunteers attacked the isolated unit, killing or capturing most of the company.

British artillery continued firing on the U.S. forts until about 1500. After the British ceased fire, the American musicians in Fort Moreau played "Hail Columbia" and "Yankee Doodle," and the soldiers gave three cheers to celebrate their victory. A Vermont volunteer, Jonathan Stevens, recalled, "The forts kept firing till night having silenced the most part of the enemy's guns. The last of all they fired a federal salute, gave three cheers, then the music struck up *Yankey Doodle* thus ended the conflict with Governor Prevost who took leave of us that night without bidding us good by."

The battle's outcome stirred controversy in Britain. Although Maccomb, in his report, claimed to have repulsed the attackers, the British actually had withdrawn on their own and not under pressure. Prevost

came under intense criticism for starting the land attack late and then for calling off the assault. He wrote to his superiors that without naval support to bring him supplies, he could not maintain his army. He also noted that the American forts were useless and not worth the loss of blood to assault them. That evening, in the darkness, the British pulled their guns out of position and started moving them northward. With few wagons and teams to evacuate all the ammunition and camp equipment, the British destroyed all that they could not carry. The Battle of Plattsburgh was over, a resounding U.S. victory in a war too full of defeats.

### *Operations in Northern Maine*

Perhaps nowhere in the United States was political divisiveness and the lack of preparedness more evident than in the loss of eastern Maine in 1814. The District of Maine was a detached part of Massachusetts and many of its citizens were Federalists. The Federalist Party had vigorously opposed the war, and Massachusetts Governor Caleb Strong had repeatedly refused to allow the use of state militia outside of the state. Moreover, the merchants of Maine carried on a thriving trade with their counterparts in the British maritime provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. When Congress had declared war in 1812, legal trade had turned into smuggling, and British forces survived on American flour and meat. Maine also supplied the Royal Navy with tar, turpentine, spars, and other naval necessities. Britain chose to spare New England from the blockade of the U.S. Atlantic and Gulf coasts that it slowly established. However, with the defeat of Napoleon, the British government changed its policy toward New England. Implicit collusion shifted into territorial ambition.

In June 1814, the British government ordered Sir John Sherbrooke, lieutenant governor of Nova Scotia, to conduct operations against Maine. His objective was to secure the land route between the maritime provinces of British North America and the city of Quebec. Sherbrooke also wanted to secure New Brunswick by occupying eastern Maine from the Penobscot River to the western border of New Brunswick. Because of a lack of trust and cooperation between the federal government and the governor of Massachusetts, few regular troops were in Maine, and the Maine militia was notoriously reluctant to support “Mr. Madison’s War.”

On 21 June, the British launched a minor raid on the coastal villages of St. George and Thomaston just west of Penobscot Bay. British forces easily captured two small forts and spiked the guns. The raiders also captured four coastal traders laden with goods and then made their way back to Nova Scotia. The local militia failed to intervene. Sherbrooke in-

terpreted these results as indicative of an absence of defensive capability. He followed this strike with a more ambitious operation, an expedition to occupy the islands of Passamaquoddy Bay. Admiral Horatio Nelson's protégé, Capt. Thomas Hardy, led a naval squadron and a battalion of regulars into the bay. On 11 July, Hardy anchored off Moose Island and demanded the surrender of the village of Eastport and nearby Fort Sullivan. Maj. Perley Putnam, commanding about eighty soldiers of the 40th U.S. Infantry, surrendered to the overwhelming odds as the local militiamen failed to rally to defend their homes. Sherbrooke annexed Eastport into New Brunswick and forced any citizens who failed to take an oath of allegiance to the king to leave the island.

Sherbrooke himself led the largest expedition directed against Maine. On 1 September, a large Royal Navy squadron carried twenty-five hundred British regulars to Castine. The defenses there were intended to protect the entrance to Penobscot Bay. However, these small fortifications had been sadly neglected. A single battery manned by about forty regulars and a hundred militiamen stood in the way of the invasion force. After firing one volley from the four small cannons of the battery, the defenders, regulars and militia alike, withdrew as fast as they could to avoid capture. Moving upriver, the British confronted about six hundred untrained militiamen guarding the 28-gun sloop-of-war, USS *Adams*. Striking in a dense fog and supporting their attack with the fire of Congreve rockets, the British scattered the militia and took eighty-one of them prisoner. The crew of *Adams*, now without infantry support, burned their vessel and escaped. The British proceeded upriver and accepted the surrender of the village of Bangor without a fight. Days later, Machias similarly surrendered.

The British worked peacefully and well with the civil authorities in eastern Maine. They required that citizens take oaths of neutrality and allowed them to keep personal weapons. Open trade between eastern Maine and the maritime provinces resumed and expanded. President Madison conferred with his military advisers on the prospects of retaking the lost territory. However, Governor Strong refused to back the campaign. Without the support of the Massachusetts militia and control of coastal waters, success was improbable. The peace negotiations between the United States and Britain in Ghent, Belgium, eventually determined the fate of these occupied lands.

### *Operations in the Old Northwest*

Three significant operations occurred in the Old Northwest and western Upper Canada in 1814. The first was the struggle to control the upper Mississippi River. The second was the American attempt to

recapture Fort Mackinac, held by the British since July 1812. The third was Brig. Gen. Duncan McArthur's raid across Upper Canada to bring some relief to U.S. forces on the Niagara River.

When the British had captured Fort Mackinac and Detroit in 1812, they had moved quickly to establish civil authority in occupied U.S. territory for the purpose of controlling the lucrative fur trade. Good relations with the native population were essential, and the British provided food and trade goods insofar as they were able, given the tenuous supply lines to the east. Indian tribes were much more inclined to align themselves with the British as a means of forestalling creeping American expansion into native lands. General Harrison's victory at the Battle of the Thames in 1813 had removed British domination, yet General Drummond did what he could to maintain a British presence on the upper Mississippi and in western Upper Canada.

In May 1814, the governor of the Missouri Territory and famed explorer, William Clark, mounted a campaign from St. Louis that captured Prairie du Chien, a small, yet important, settlement of trappers and traders in Illinois Territory (present-day Wisconsin). Clark wanted to reestablish a U.S. presence in the fur country, which might serve to cool relations between the Indians and the British. He left a small garrison in a newly erected stockade that he named Fort Shelby. The British reacted quickly. Lt. Col. William McKay, commander of the *Michigan Fencibles*, surprised the garrison at Fort Shelby when he arrived on 17 July with approximately a hundred twenty Canadians and five hundred Indian warriors. First Lt. Joseph Perkins and about seventy soldiers inside the fort were prepared to defend as long as possible. A large gunboat was anchored close by the fort in the Mississippi to assist Perkins and the garrison, but leaks forced it to withdraw down the river for repairs. Both sides were running low on ammunition, and, on the fourth day of the siege, the Americans ran out of water. Perkins surrendered the fort, and, in return, McKay allowed him and his men to withdraw to St. Louis.

Knowing that the garrison at Fort Shelby was woefully understrength, Governor Clark had sent more than a hundred regular U.S. infantrymen and rangers under Capt. John Campbell up the Mississippi to reinforce Perkins. On 18 July, Campbell's command, traveling in five large boats, arrived at the Rock Island Rapids, Illinois Territory, near present-day Moline, Illinois. Bad weather delayed its movement farther and gave time for more than four hundred hostile Fox, Sac, and Kickapoo warriors to gather. On 21 July, the natives attacked and boarded several of the boats. Fighting desperately, Campbell's men managed to escape downriver after losing seventeen killed and twenty-six wounded. The Indians suffered two dead.

Upon learning of the twin defeats at Prairie du Chien and Rock Island Rapids, Brig. Gen. Benjamin Howard dispatched a punitive expedition against the Indians along the Rock River. Future president Maj. Zachary Taylor led about four hundred thirty regulars, rangers, and Missouri militia upriver. On 5 September, more than twelve hundred warriors led by the Indian chief Black Hawk attacked Taylor's command at the Rock Island Rapids. Taylor led a determined yet futile assault against the natives. Unable to advance, he ordered his expedition back downriver. The natives pursued, and Taylor's men conducted a fighting withdrawal in their boats. Finally breaking free of their attackers on the shore, the Americans retreated to the mouth of the Des Moines River, leaving the upper Mississippi in British hands until the end of the war.

President Madison himself insisted that the recapture of Fort Mackinac on Mackinac Island be a strategic goal for 1814. The island was a major transshipping station for the fur trade, and Madison wanted to ensure that it was not permanently lost in a peace settlement. On 4 August, Capt. Arthur Sinclair's Lake Erie squadron landed Lt. Col. George Croghan and seven hundred fifty regulars and two hundred fifty Ohio militiamen on Mackinac Island. The British commander, Lt. Col. Robert McDouall, decided not to allow the Americans to invest the fort. Instead, he formed in the open field about two hundred regulars and militia in line to block the road to the fort, with about three hundred sixty Indians in the woods on both of his flanks. Croghan marched his men into the open area, formed a line opposite the British infantry, and sent flanking parties into the woods to work their way around the British line. The Americans in the clearing opened fire and advanced slowly on the defenders. The woods on both sides of the gap erupted in violent combat as the flanking parties ran into Indian warriors. The fighting was intense, and shortly the Americans gave way. Unable to dislodge McDouall's men, Croghan broke off the attack and returned to Sinclair's boats. The Americans lost nineteen dead and forty-five wounded, while British losses were negligible. The Americans had been on Mackinac Island less than five hours. Like Prairie du Chien, Fort Mackinac would remain in British hands until the end of the war.

The last military action of substance to occur in the Old Northwest during 1814 occurred when Brig. Gen. Duncan McArthur advanced to assist U.S. forces on the Niagara frontier. McArthur had assumed command of the Northwestern Army when Maj. Gen. William Henry Harrison resigned his commission in May 1814. He departed Detroit on 22 October at the head of seven hundred fifty mounted volunteers and rangers and seventy-five Wyandot warriors. He intended to capture Burlington Heights, thus cutting off the British who were contesting General Izard's forces along the Niagara River. McArthur's fast-moving column

came within fifteen miles of the Grand River in Upper Canada before the British detected it. A scratch force of British regulars, Canadian militia, and allied warriors destroyed the ferry across the Grand River and blocked McArthur's path eastward. The U.S. column rode along the southern bank of the Grand River looking for a place to cross. The Americans brushed aside about five hundred Canadian militiamen at Malcolm's Mills on 6 November but failed to find a usable ford between them and their objective. Finally giving up, McArthur turned his raiders around and returned to Detroit. Other than destroying a number of mills, the operation was a failure. Even had McArthur reached Burlington Heights, Izard had called off his campaign and returned to New York before the fight at Malcolm's Mills. At the end of 1814, the British and their Indian allies thus maintained a precarious hold over the upper Mississippi and the fur trade routes of the upper Great Lakes.

## ANALYSIS

Flawed strategy and a continuing lack of success in harnessing national resources led directly to the U.S. failure to seize Upper and Lower Canada in 1814. Despite measurable improvements in the quality of troops, leadership, and logistics, victory eluded the American republic.

Strategic misjudgments hindered the U.S. effort. The president and his cabinet understood that the capture of Montreal and Quebec City would lead, eventually, to the possession of all of Canada west of those points. Once in American hands, the president could either keep Canada or trade it for recognition of neutral rights and protection from impressments. Yet President Madison and Secretary of War Armstrong continued to direct national power away from those decisive objectives. Control of Lake Ontario would move the national effort in the right direction, yet Commodore Chauncey could neither bring himself to attack the Royal Navy shipyard at Kingston nor to force battle with Yeo's squadron on the lake waters. Chauncey was an able administrator, but his methodical approach and refusal to accept reasonable risk meant that a decisive naval battle never took place. Clearly, he was not Oliver Hazard Perry.

Armstrong failed the nation repeatedly. His mismanagement of the war in the north lost the United States its last chance at victory. His petty meddling in Maj. Gen. William Henry Harrison's command led directly to the loss of that charismatic and successful general. His failure to unite the command in the 9th Military District meant that no one general had responsibility for this critical region. Generals Izard and Brown tended to focus on their assigned local areas, but neither looked to a unified approach to advance on Kingston or Montreal. Armstrong's muddled guidance



to Brown had sent that aggressive general to the indecisive front of the Niagara frontier. Armstrong's insistence that Izard leave Plattsburgh to assist the Left Division was an unconscionable strategic decision. Only the resolute defiance of Master Commandant Macdonough and General Macomb, and lack of resolution in Lt. Gen. Sir George Prevost, saved Plattsburgh.

Although Armstrong mismanaged strategy, he did play a role in moving old generals away from battlefield commands and replacing them with younger, more energetic leaders. Promotion and important commands went to Izard and Brown. Likewise, a class of new brigadier generals such as Scott, Macomb, and Gaines served the nation courageously and well.

American troop performance improved in 1814. For all of its efforts and incentives, Congress could not entice enough young men to join the Regular Army. Raw recruits barely replaced experienced soldiers who left the service at the completion of their enlistments. Citizens who sought adventure preferred to serve in volunteer units whose success was mixed. Yet, unexpectedly, state militias saw much more success in 1814 than in previous years. Brown could not have attacked the British batteries without the hundreds of New York militiamen who waived their constitutional rights and volunteered to cross the Niagara to save the soldiers in beleaguered Fort Erie. Likewise, Vermont militiamen, defying the clear intentions of their governor, flocked to the defense of Plattsburgh in New York. Militia generals, such as Porter and Davis, led from the front and inspired their men. Meanwhile, the quality of the regular officer corps had improved considerably as the war progressed. Regimental officers, such as Leavenworth, Jesup, and Mitchell, trained and motivated their men, creating battalions that achieved tactical parity with British units at Chippewa, Lundy's Lane, and Fort Erie.

At the end of 1814, the United States controlled only a small portion of Upper Canada across from Detroit. Great Britain occupied eastern Maine, Fort Niagara, Fort Mackinac, and the upper Mississippi Valley. The stunning and unlikely victory at Plattsburgh maintained Lake Champlain as a U.S. possession. Fortunately, Britain was ready for peace and agreed that all occupied territories would be returned to their original owners at the conclusion of the war.

For the U.S. Army, the War of 1812 marked a watershed. Competent leaders such as General Scott would remain on active duty for years, and soldiers of all ranks achieved levels of experience and confidence that could be gained only through active campaigning. Spurred in part by the war, the Army would embark on a long and successful quest for professionalism. Perhaps most of all, the Army established a reputation for endurance, a heritage of service, and a legacy of tactical victory that continues to inspire soldiers to this day.



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*For more information on the U.S. Army in the War of 1812, please read other titles in the U.S. Army Campaigns of the War of 1812 series published by the U.S. Army Center of Military History.*



**CANADA 1812-1815**

