

CHAPTER V

THE FENIAN RAID OF 1866



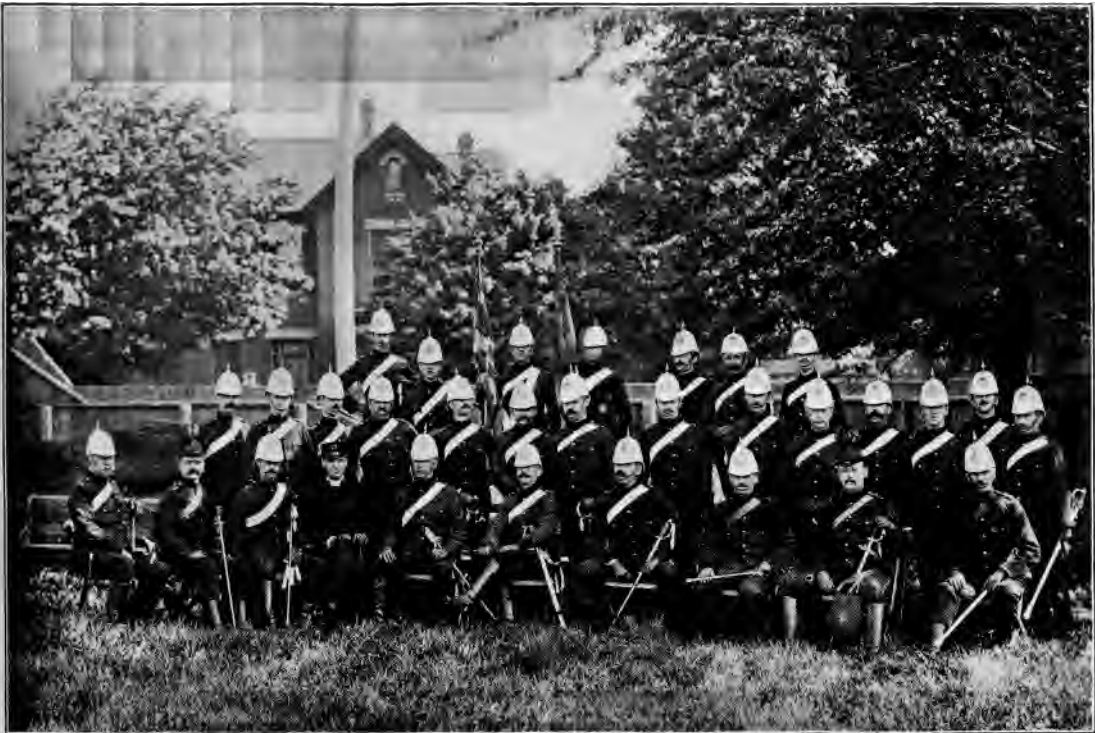
A SMALL volunteer force which had been stationed at Port Colborne since the 10th of March 'to protect the Welland Canal, was relieved from duty on the 21st of April, 1866, and sent home. The regular troops in Western Ontario, consisting of the 16th and 47th Regiments, and a battery of Royal Artillery, were stationed at Toronto, Hamilton and London. The Fenian organization was still known to be active in all the large cities of the Northern States, but so many rumors of invasion had resulted in nothing that few persons believed that they would ever attempt, to cross the frontier. In Buffalo they were particularly numerous, and several companies of " Irish Rifles" had drilled publicly during the winter.

Many lines of railway entered that city from the east, south and west, and a large body of unarmed men could easily be concentrated there without attracting much attention, and boats for transporting them to Canada could be hired without exciting the suspicions of the officers of the Federal Government, who were not generally supposed to be particularly anxious to thwart their plans. When the volunteers were withdrawn from Port Colborne, there was no body of troops under arms nearer than Hamilton. No opposition need therefore be anticipated in crossing the river, and a single day's march might put the invaders in possession of the Welland Canal.

During the last week in May considerable bodies of men, who seemed to be acting in concert, were observed moving towards the Canadian frontier along the principal lines of railway in the United States. They were unarmed and dressed in plain clothes, and, when questioned as to their destination, uniformly replied that they were on their way to the gold mines of California.

One body of '15 men, commanded by Colonel John O'Neill, left Nashville, Tennessee, on May 27th. At Louisville, Kentucky, he was joined by Colonel

Owen Starr with 144 men, and at Indianapolis by Captain Haggerty with a hundred men. On the night of the 28th they arrived at Cleveland, where they expected to cross the lake, but were ordered by telegram to proceed to Buffalo, which they reached on the morning of the 30th. The men were at once billeted in small squads in various parts of the city to evade suspicion. A very large and enthusiastic Fenian mass meeting had been held in St. James' Hall the night before, at which the invasion of Canada had been publicly discussed. It is stated on good authority that maps of the British Provinces were exhibited, and the ardor of the audience was stimulated by a general invitation to select



OFFICERS OF THE THIRTEENTH BATTALION OF INFANTRY MAY, 1899.

the farms they wanted after the conquest was effected. The excitement of the local Fenians was accordingly at fever-heat.

On the night of the 31st it is believed that at least 1,500 men assembled at their drill-halls and other places of rendezvous, many of them already armed and equipped. Before midnight they again separated into small parties, but instead of returning to their homes and lodgings as usual, they marched rapidly, by different routes, to the suburb of Lower Black Rock, about five miles from the heart of the city, where several canal boats and a steam tug lay in readiness to convey them across the river, and nine waggons loaded with arms and accou-

trements were also waiting their arrival. Brigadier General Lynch had been appointed to the command of the expedition, but as he did not arrive, Colonel O'Neill took his place. O'Neill was a gallant and efficient soldier, who had served for eight years, first in the regular and then in the volunteer army of the United States. He had fought his way from the ranks to the rank of Captain, and had been recommended for further promotion when the civil war came to an end. He was a sincere and unselfish enthusiast. His justification of the enterprise is brief and candid : " You recognize the English government as your government, and the English flag as your flag. We desired to destroy both. You were ready to defend both ; hence our only cause of quarrel with you. If we had been able we would not have hesitated to kill every soldier who was ready to fight for England."

The number of men reported to him in readiness to cross the river at that time was only eight hundred. Many of these men were veterans of the civil war, some of whom still wore the blue or grey uniform of their respective armies. The resident Fenians of the city failed to appear in any considerable numbers. The passage of the river was easily accomplished, and at four o'clock on the morning of June 1st, four canal boats filled with men were safely moored at the Lower Ferry Dock, two miles below the village of Fort Erie. The number that actually crossed at this time, according to O'Neill's account, did not exceed six hundred. Lord Monck's letter to Mr. Cardwell, based probably upon information telegraphed from Buffalo, agrees with this estimate exactly. Their landing was first noticed by some country people who had been spearing fish by torchlight, and they spread the alarm as they hurried home. O'Neill ordered the telegraph wires to be cut, and sent Colonel Starr with a detachment to occupy Fort Erie village and take possession of the railway yard near the old fort. This was effected about sunrise but not before the officials of the Buffalo and Lake Huron Railway had succeeded in removing all their rolling stock in one huge train. A small party on a hand car pursued them for six miles up the line, and burnt the bridge at Sauerwein's over the Six Mile Creek. O'Neill made a requisition for provisions upon the Reeve of the village, but assured him that no depredations would be committed by his men. His demand was complied with, and at to o'clock he marched his whole force down the river to the mouth of Frenchman's Creek, about a mile below his landing place, where he encamped and awaited reinforcements. But the United States steamer Michigan had entered the river, and prevented the remainder of the force that had assembled at Black Rock from crossing in a body. Small unarmed parties passed over on the ferry that still continued to ply between Upper Black Rock and Fort Erie village, and a few are said to have crossed in small boats. These accessions may have increased his strength for the moment to Boo or 900, as estimated by the British Consul. Still, another telegram from Buffalo



DOHRAN, PHOTO.

FIELD AND STAFF OFFICERS OF THE THIRTEENTH BATTALION OF INFANTRY.

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| 1. LIEUT.-COLONEL H. MCLAREN, COMMANDING. | | |
| 2. MAJOR J. STONEMAN. | 3. MAJOR E. G. ZEALAND. | 4. HON. MAJOR J. J. MASON, PAYMASTER. |
| 5. SURGEON-MAJOR H. S. GRIFFIN, M. D. | 6. CAPTAIN AND ADJUTANT W. O. TIDSWELL. | |
| 7. SURGEON-CAPTAIN G. S. RENNIE, M. D. | | |
| 8. CAPTAIN T. W. LESTER, QUARTERMASTER. | 9. REV. G. A. FORNERET, M. A., CHAPLAIN. | |

asserted that 1,340 men had then crossed with six field guns and 2,500 stand of arms, and that by next morning they fully expected to be joined by all the men they could arm. This false statement unquestionably had its effect next day on the movements of the British troops.

Foraging parties were sent out in all directions to obtain provisions and to seize horses and cattle. They found most of the neighboring farmhouses deserted by their inhabitants, who had generally removed their horses, but they secured a sufficient number, to mount their field officers and a party of scouts. During the afternoon Captain Donohue, commanding one of these parties, who had advanced several miles along the river road, reported that he had seen British scouts who at once retired. Later on Colonel Hoy was sent out on the same road and encountered, as he thought, a party of scouts six miles from camp. O'Neill had been joined by Major John C. Canty, a Fenian, who had taken up his residence in Fort Erie about a year before, and seems to have been his principal agent in obtaining intelligence. How this was managed can only be conjectured. At all events the Fenian leader knew, at 8 p. m., that two columns of troops were advancing against him, the stronger by way of Chippawa, composed of regular troops and volunteers, the other by way of Port Colborne, consisting of volunteers only.

At ten o'clock that night he seems to have abandoned all hope of receiving further reinforcements. He destroyed his spare arms and began his march down the river road towards Chippawa. After advancing in this direction about four miles he turned westward on the road separating the townships of Bertie and Willoughby, and moved along it until he crossed the Erie and Niagara Railway, when he allowed his men to lie down in the fields between the railway and the right bank of Black Creek. This was a very secluded spot, as there were no houses within a mile, and the road was little travelled. It is possible that he may have expected that the column of troops at Chippawa would attempt to advance by rail during the night and intended to waylay them as they crossed Black Creek. It must then have been nearly midnight. He states that his force had been already reduced by desertion to about five hundred. Some of the deserters had recrossed the river and others remained about Fort Erie. This statement is partly substantiated by the large number of stragglers captured at that place next day. Within a few hours he seems to have received further information, for at three o'clock he roused his men and after allowing them to breakfast he marched rapidly southward until he struck the Ridge Road, which winds southwesterly from the river to Lake Erie, along the summit of a bold ridge of limestone rock which crops out of the ground in many places. His object, he explains, was "to get between the two columns, and if possible defeat one of them before the other could come to its assistance." The column advancing from Port Colborne was the weaker in every respect and



COCHRAN, PHOTO.

CAPTAINS OF THE THIRTEENTH BATTALION OF INFANTRY.

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| 1. CAPTAIN AND BREVET MAJOR E. E. W. MOORE. | | 3. CAPTAIN AND BREVET MAJOR F. B. ROSS. |
| 2. CAPTAIN AND BREVET MAJOR S. C. MEWBURN. | 5. CAPTAIN J. H. HERRING. | 6. CAPTAIN C. A. P. POWIS. |
| 4. CAPTAIN R. H. LABATT. | 7. CAPTAIN G. D. FEARMAN. | 8. CAPTAIN W. H. BRUCE. |

he had decided to strike it where he expected that its advance would be checked by the destruction of the railway bridge below Ridgeway.

On the evening of the 31st of May, instructions had been received in Hamilton and Toronto to assemble the volunteer force of those cities at an early hour next morning in readiness to proceed to the frontier. Before daylight orders came directing their movements. From Toronto eight companies of the Queen's Own Rifles embarked in a steamer for Port Dalhousie, with instructions to proceed at once by rail to Port Colborne. The two remaining companies followed later in the day by the same route. At noon three companies of the 47th Regiment and a battery of Royal Artillery went by rail through Hamilton to Niagara Falls, followed at 4 p. m. by a second train conveying two more companies of the 47th and the Tenth Battalion of Active Militia.

The Thirteenth assembled at 7 o'clock a. m., but did not entrain until nearly ten, when they were sent to Dunnville by way of Paris, arriving about 3 p. m. They detrained and were billeted in the village. They were joined by the York and Caledonia rifle companies from the County of Haldimand, under Captains Robert H. Davis and Jackson. In the evening the whole force was moved forward by rail to Port Colborne, arriving at it p. m. From Hamilton, also, 200 men of the 16th Regiment were sent forward by rail to Niagara Falls. When these movements were completed, a force of about 900 volunteers was assembled at Port Colborne, composed of the Queen's Own Rifles, 480 men, Thirteenth Battalion, 265 men, York and Caledonia Rifles, 95 men, Welland Canal Field Battery (acting as infantry), 60 men, and a regular force at Niagara Falls, consisting of 200 men of the 16th Regiment, 200 of the 47th, and a battery of Royal Artillery, under Colonel Peacocke, of the 16th. As the enemy was reported moving upon Chippawa, Peacocke pushed forward that evening to secure the bridge, his infantry proceeding by rail, and the artillery following by road, as no cars could be procured to convey it. Chippawa was occupied about 9 p. m., and at 4.30 a. m. Peacocke was joined by 150 men of the 47th, the Tenth Battalion, 415 men, and the Nineteenth Battalion, 350 men. The distance between Chippawa and Port Colborne by the shortest route is about fifteen miles, and shortly before midnight Colonel Peacocke despatched Captain Akers, R. E., across the country with instructions to the commandant at that place to form a junction with his column at Stevensville next day at 10 a. m., but does not seem to have indicated the route he wished him to pursue.

The long train of rolling stock that had escaped from Fort Erie jumped the track and was wrecked three miles east of Port Colborne, but during the day the road was cleared, and a party sent down under escort to repair Sauerwein's bridge. Mr. Larmour, the Superintendent, went on in a hand-car to Fort Erie, where he arrived at 10 p. m., and found the place not only unoccu-



COCHRAN. PHOTO.

LIEUTENANTS OF THE THIRTEENTH BATTALION.

1. LIEUTENANT J. D. LAIDLAW. 2. LIEUTENANT F. R. WADDELL. 3. LIEUTENANT W. A. LOGIE.
4. LIEUTENANT C. G. BARKER. 5. LIEUTENANT W. R. MARSHALL.
6. LIEUTENANT R. A. ROBERTSON. 7. LIEUTENANT A. K. MCLAREN. 8. LIEUTENANT W. L. ROSS.

pied by the Fenians, but practically deserted. He met Mr. Richard Graham, Collector of Customs, who had visited the Fenian camp and seen, as he supposed, their whole force. There was no indication of any movement on their part when he came away, and he had seen a good many drunken men. Mr. Larmour persuaded Mr. Graham to accompany him to Port Colborne. On returning to Sauerwein's he found that the bridge had been made passable for trains, and the line was accordingly again opened to Fort Erie. With this information he returned to Port Colborne before midnight. When Colonel Booker arrived there with the troops from Dunnville, he found Lieut.-Colonel J. S. Dennis, Brigade Major of the District, in command, whom he outranked and superseded. The wildest rumors were in circulation, and the Queen's Own and Field Battery were standing under arms in the streets. After listening to Mr. Graham's statement, Colonels Booker and Dennis decided upon a plan of operations by which they hoped to cut off the retreat of the Fenians and ensure the capture or destruction of their whole force. Eighty men, composed of the Welland Field Battery and Dunnville Naval Brigade, were to embark in the steam-tug Robb, proceed down the lake to Fort Erie and patrol the river, while the remainder of his column would advance at once by rail as far as practicable and unite with Colonel Peacocke next day in a general attack on the enemy's camp. While they were yet consulting, Captain Akers arrived and was induced to consent to their plan. At 3 a. m., a telegram, announcing their decision, was despatched to Colonel Peacocke, and without waiting for a reply the men were embarked on the Robb. Colonel Dennis, and Captain Akers himself, went on board, and the tug steamed out of the harbor. The troops were entrained and on the point of moving, when at 3.45 a. m., a peremptory message was received from Colonel Peacocke saying that his original instructions must be adhered to, and a junction formed at Stevensville. Colonel Booker was directed to leave Port Colborne at 7 a. m. It was deemed useless to detain as the troops had no quarters to go to. Some of the men were noisy, and there was little sleep for anybody. At 5 a. m. the order was given for the train to pull out. The force under Lieut.-Colonel Booker, nominally 840 of all ranks, probably did not exceed 300 effectives. They had been under arms for twenty-four hours in a state of intense excitement, fatigued by travel, deprived of sleep and insufficiently fed. They were without blankets, knapsacks, haversacks, mess tins or water bottles, and the only means they possessed of carrying their overcoats was by wearing them. The only horse with the column was ridden by Lieut.-Colonel Booker, and had to be taken to Ridgeway in a mail car. No attempt seems to have been made to mount the other officers. There were no means provided for transporting the reserve ammunition after leaving the train. There was no ambulance party, nor hospital corps, except three surgeons, one of whom was not in uniform, and carried his instruments in a hand-bag.



COCHRAN, PHOTO.

SECOND LIEUTENANTS OF THE THIRTEENTH BATTALION.

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| 1. LIEUTENANT A. F. ZIMMERMAN. | 2. LIEUTENANT J. AMBREY. | 3. LIEUTENANT A. E. MASON. |
| 4. LIEUTENANT P. DOMVILLE. | 5. LIEUTENANT G. J. HENDERSON. | |
| 6. LIEUTENANT J. A. TURNER. | 7. LIEUTENANT E. V. WRIGHT. | 8. LIEUTENANT A. PAIN. |

Shortly before six o'clock the train arrived at Ridgeway, where it was determined to detrain as the nearest point to Stevensville. This village consisted of a single hotel, a couple of stores, and about twenty houses. It was almost deserted, and few of the soldiers were able to procure anything to stay their hunger. Some time was necessarily consumed in forming and inspecting the troops and distributing ammunition. Although the necessary waggons undoubtedly could have been obtained by a proper effort to convey it with the column, all the reserve ammunition was ordered back to Port Colborne on the train. While preparations for the march were still in progress, some horsemen rode in with information that the Fenians were not far distant on the Ridge Road, but their warning was unheeded. This story indeed seemed improbable, as they were known to be encamped at the mouth of Frenchman's Creek, ten miles away, at nine o'clock the night before. Yet these men had actually seen an advance party of Fenians, and had been mistaken by them for mounted scouts. This was reported to O'Neill, and at the same time the sound of bugles and the whistles of a locomotive was heard in the direction of Ridgeway. He continued to advance until he definitely ascertained that troops were approaching along the Ridge Road, when he occupied a position on the Bertie road, running eastward to Fort Erie. His right flank rested on a brick house, with wooden barn and other outbuildings, surrounded by a garden and small orchard, at the intersection of this road with the Ridge Road, and his line extended eastward five or six hundred yards, curving forward into a strip of woods to flank the advance of his assailants as they approached along the Ridge Road, or over the open ground to the right. The fence in front was strengthened with additional rails and other available materials. A small reserve was stationed in an orchard some three hundred yards in the rear, and a weak line of skirmishers was thrown forward, nearly half a mile, under Colonel Owen Starr. O'Neill's force probably numbered between five and eight hundred men, but they were the pick of his command, inured to fatigue and hardship, and accustomed to fighting under cover. They probably had not had much to eat since their landing, but to many of them that was no new experience. They were desperate men, thoroughly alert, and ready for action.

Colonel Booker advanced along the Ridge Road in a column of fours, the Queen's Own, under Major Gilmore, leading, followed by the Thirteenth, commanded by Major Skinner, and the York and Caledonia rifle companies. The sun was hot and the road dusty. After marching a little more than a mile armed men were seen lurking behind trees and fences. A company of the Queen's Own, armed with Spencer repeating rifles, was ordered to extend. Some shots were fired, and two other companies of the same battalion were sent forward, on the double, to prolong the firing line on either flank. Within ten minutes the fire became rapid and continuous. The Fenian skirmishers were steadily

forced back, or retired intentionally, reserving their fire until their pursuers attempted to cross a fence, or were checked by some other obstacle. After advancing in this manner for a few hundred yards it was discovered that the woods on the right were occupied by the enemy, and the University and Highland companies of the Queen's Own were extended to the right front to drive them out. Within fifteen or twenty minutes the firing line in front had got rid of all their ammunition to very little purpose beyond enveloping themselves in a dense cloud of smoke, under cover of which they had advanced, with trifling loss, nearly half a mile. They were close upon O'Neill's temporary breastworks, where he had decided to make a determined stand. Here they were relieved by Numbers One, Two, and Three companies of the Thirteenth and the York rifle company, who moved forward very steadily to the assault of the enemy's position in extended order. Separated from them by an interval of two or three hundred yards, and forming an obtuse angle with the remainder of the firing line, were the University and Highland companies of the Queen's Own, still engaged with the enemy in the woods, whom they had failed to dispossess. On the Ridge Road, and in the fields on the right, about three hundred yards in rear of the firing line, formed as supports, were the remaining three companies of the Thirteenth and the Caledonia Rifles. About the same distance further to the rear were six companies of the Queen's Own in quarter column, three of whom had exhausted all their ammunition. After sending a message to Ridgeway to bring forward the reserve ammunition that he had sent away to Port Colborne, Colonel Booker seems to have dismounted and stationed himself near the reserve. From this position he could not possibly see what was *going* on in front, and he had not a single mounted officer with him to bring infor-



OFFICERS OF D COMPANY, 1866.

CAPT. JOHN BROWN.

ENSIGN JOHN B. YOUNG.

LIEUT. PERCY G. ROUTH.

mation or convey orders. His only means of transmitting commands to the force under his command was by sound of the bugle.

The new firing line advanced with so much vivacity that it is supposed the Fenians mistook them for regular troops. The York Rifles and some of the Thirteenth passed down into the fields below the shelf of rock along which the road winds, and, availing themselves of some slight cover of brushwood, turned the enemy's right flank. At all events the Fenians failed to make the resistance that might have been expected at this point. They gave ground and were briskly pursued. O'Neill states that he "fell back a few hundred yards and formed a new line." Some of his mounted officers came into view riding rapidly forward on the Ridge Road, and a party of horsemen was discovered about the same time at the turn of the road on the left, leading to Stevensville. The latter were inhabitants attracted by the sounds of battle. Some one hastily raised a cry of "cavalry," which was rapidly passed on to the rear. The firing line attempted to form rallying squares in the fields, and the supports and reserves did the same upon the road. The Fenians in front saw their advantage, and came on with loud yells, while their comrades in the woods directed their fire with considerable effect upon the square formed by the reserve. Scarcely had the squares been formed then the bugle, by Colonel Booker's orders, sounded "retire." In an instant all was confusion, and the retreat commenced in much haste and disorder. When No. 3 Company of the Thirteenth, which had been working around the enemy's right, after turning them out of their breastworks, regained the road, they saw their supports and reserves retreating in a confused mass. Majors Skinner and Cattley, and Captain Henery, were conspicuous in their efforts to hold the enemy in check. The two companies of the Queen's Own on the left were isolated for the moment, and lost seven men killed or wounded and two prisoners in coming off. The pursuit was not vigorously pushed, although the Fenians actually followed the retreating column as far as Ridgeway, whence it retired towards Port Colborne along the railway track. Colonel Booker seems to have at once abandoned all hopes of rallying his men and resuming the advance. When about half way to Port Colborne they met Mr. Larmour with an engine and two flat cars bringing up the reserve ammunition. By noon they were again at Port Colborne. The total loss on this occasion was too insignificant to account for the panic that occurred. One officer, one sergeant and seven men were killed, five officers and twenty-six rank and file wounded, several of whom fell into the hands of the enemy, with seven unwounded prisoners. In this, and the subsequent skirmish at Fort Erie, O'Neill stated his loss, as nearly as could be ascertained, at eight killed and fifteen wounded, but nine of his men were subsequently buried on the field by the inhabitants, and he left six severely wounded behind, besides removing several in waggon. Among the killed was Lieut. E. R. Lonergan, of Buffalo, and

among the wounded left behind, Michael Cochrane, the color-sergeant of the Indianapolis Company, a very gallant fellow, who was conspicuous by leading the final charge.

After the action O'Neill lost no time in retreating. He did not even linger to bury his dead. Colonel Starr, with one column, marched down the railway to destroy the bridges, while O'Neill himself retired by the Garrison Road to Fort Erie. At that place he encountered the Welland Field Battery, and after a brief skirmish captured the greater part of it. During the night a tug and scow came over, in which the Fenians embarked, and escaped into American waters.

The loss of the Thirteenth Battalion was remarkably light, considering the heavy fire to which it was exposed for a considerable length of time. None were killed, and only one officer and six men wounded. These were Lieut. Percy Gore Routh (No. 4), and privates Edwin Hilder (No. 1), S. Dallas, J. G. Powell, James Stuart, Richard Pentecost (No. 3), George McKenzie (No. 4), and John Donnelly (No. 5). Privates James S. Greenhill and Joseph Simpson were taken prisoners ; privates James Cahill, W. B. Nicolls (No. 1), Crossman, Henderson, Mason, Urquhart (No. 4), and Irvine (No. 6), were sent to the hospital after their arrival at Port Colborne, suffering from exhaustion or sunstroke. Privates Morrison, Laker and Cahill died of disease contracted in the campaign. The officers present in the action were Lieut.-Colonel Booker, Majors Skinner and Cattley ; Captains Watson, Askin and Grant ; Lieuts. Sewell, Ritchie, Routh, Ferguson and Gibson ; Ensigns McKenzie, Baker, Armstrong, Roy and Young, and Captain and Adjutant Henery. The colors were borne by Ensigns Armstrong and Baker.

From the 2nd to 10th of June, 1866, the Thirteenth was quartered at Port Colborne, forming part of a small brigade of regulars and volunteers, commanded by Lieut.-Colonel Villiers, H. M. 47th Regiment. On August 10th, Lieut.-Colonel Booker, who had been effectually discredited by the unfortunate result of the action at Ridgeway, retired from the command and was succeeded by Major Skinner. Two months later the battalion proceeded to the camp at Thorold, where it was brigaded with the Queen's Own, the Twenty-Second Oxford Battalion, three companies of the 16th Regiment, and two batteries of Royal Artillery, under Colonel (now Field Marshal) Wolseley.

The Fenian Raid of 1866 once more demonstrated the unfaltering determination of the Canadian people to defend their frontier at all hazards. Lord Monck observed, in his dispatch of June 8th, they " responded instantaneously to the call to arms, and I am sure I do not exaggerate when I say that within twenty-four hours after the issue of the order, 20,000 men were under arms, and that within forty-eight hours after the same time they, in combination with the regular troops, were disposed by the Lieutenant-General commanding in positions which rendered the Province secure from attack."