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BATTLE OF LUNDY'S LANE

by

Mrs. ,Jesse Ketchum

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J. KETCHUM

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The Battle of Lundy's Lane.

Late in 1813 Americans under Gen. McClure burned Niagara, driving out the inhabitants, destroying grain and slaughtering cattle, before retiring to winter at Lewiston and so hoped to prevent the British wintering at Fort George. The flames at Niagara were the signal for the advance of a party of British soldiers, who arrived in time to stop the work of destruction before the barracks and defences of St. George were seriously in Gen. Drummond attacked and took Oswego and so enabled Sir James Yea to have the American fleet strictly blockaded in Sackett's Harbor.

In May American made a raid on the Erie coast, burned Port Dover and many mills filled with grain. In June Fort Erie was invested without opposition by Americans. July 5th, the sharp, short battle at Chippewa was fought, the British being compelled to retire. July 19th, the village of St. Deride' burned, and every house between Queenston and Niagara.

The most stubborn and sanguinary battle ever fought in Ontario is called by American historians Bridgewater, is blazoned on their colors by British soldiers as Niagara, while Canadians proudly remember it as homely Lundy's Lane, now a street in Niagara Falls South.

From severe campaigns during the two previous years, scarcity of food, and lack of sufficient training, the British forces were in poor shape to encounter the over-powering numbers brought against them, even under the leadership of such men as Sir Gordon Drummond, who had been selected by the Duke of York as commander of forces in Canada, on account of his "zeal, intelligence and local knowledge," Colonel Scott, who had served under Abercromby in Egypt and Wellington in India, General Riall, an active, energetic leader, Harvey, Morrison and Pearson who had fought bravely and wisely in the previous year's campaign and Lieut. Col. Wm. Drummond nephew of Gen. Drummond.

The American army was under command of General Jacob Brown, a politician rather than a soldier, but the brigades were led by Gen. Winfield Scott, a veteran of the Revolution, and probably one of the best drill masters in America. Their entire force consisted of nearly 5,000 men and 9 pieces of artillery.

General Brown, influenced by his success at Chippewa, proposed to beat the British in the field, and then march in triumph through the country, although he had hoped to have entrusted the total demolition of the forts to Commodore Chauncey, who was hindered from joining him through illness. This he might have been reasonably sure of accomplishing, considering that the 36 miles of Niagara frontier was guarded by less than 3,000 men, including garrisons at Ports Niagara, George, and Mississauga, and fieldwork at Queenston and Chippewa.

On July 10th General Riall gathered his forces together near 12 Mile Creek, numbering 1700 regulars, including the Glengarry Light Infantry and Incorporated Militia, 100 Lincoln Militia, 600 Indians; in garrison at Fort George were 660 men, at Mississauga 600, and at Niagara 550. Many among those in garrison were sick and many too young to be fit for service.

The clean sweep proposed by General Brown was prevented, however, by the coming of Sir Gordon Drummond from Kingston with 600 men of the 89th, under Col. Morrison (of Chrysler's farm fame), and the sending of reinforcements under his nephew to strengthen Riall, and at the same time the despatch of Lieut.-Col. Tucker in command of 1500 men with orders to assail the Americans at Youngstown on the 25th.

Brown had retired to Chippewa and Riall took advantage of this to push forward and take his position at the junction of Lundy's Lane and the Portage Road. On the morning of the 25th the British force was placed as follows:—

First Brigade, Col. Scott in command lay at 12 Mile Creek; 2nd Brigade, Lieut.-Col. Tucker joined by Col. Morrison occupied the forts at the mouth of the river; 3rd Brigade, Lieut.-Col. Pearson at Four-Mile Creek; 4th Brigade, Lieut.-Col. Parry, forming the right wing, stretched along the 12 Mile Creek as far as De Cew's Falls; while the flank composed of Royal Scots and militia, under Lieut.-Col. John Gordon formed a reserve.

Col. Pearson was ordered to advance, which he did, and took

possession of the high ground at Lundy's Lane. The entire force was widely ranged, but capable of being concentrated in a few hours.

When General Drummond, about six in the evening arrived at Lundy's Lane, instead of finding General Riall's entire division, he met the Light Brigade retiring before the enemy : the road to Queenston was occupied by Morrison's advancing column, and Drummond hastily changed the movement of the Light Brigade, ordering up the 24-pounders to hold the enemy in check till all troops could mass and form.

Among the peach and apple trees which then as now bordered Lundy's Lane, the Glengarry Light Infantry took their position as right wing ; among the graves besides a little frame Presbyterian church, which stood on the summit of the slope near the junction of the roads, the field guns and rocket party were placed, lower down in the fields, the Incorporated Militia, while the remainder of Morrison's column formed behind the guns as fast as it came up. When the formation was completed the total number of men was 1637, as opposed to over 4,000.

The engagement was commenced about 6.30 p.m. by General Scott making a direct attack all along the British lines, which was well sustained -except on the left where the Americans had gained a decided advantage, almost succeeding in getting possession of the Queenston road, having captured nearly 200 prisoners, among them Capt. Loring, A.D.C. to Gen. Drummond and Gen. Riall. As the cheering from the American lines over this exploit died away, the British succeeded in destroying one of the American ammunition wagons. Then occurred a sharp, hard struggle in which both sides suffered severely. Col. Morrison was carried from the field, severely wounded ; Many of the American soldiers ran away and could not be induced to return to the field. The growing darkness made artillery fire nearly useless, and the lines of battle could only be distinguished through clouds of dust and smoke.

At the end of three hours, the British force was reduced to less than 1,200 with ammunition nearly exhausted. The much needed relief, however, was at hand.

During the afternoon the order had reached Col. Scott at 12 Mile Creek, to march immediately to support Gen. Riall at Lundy's Lane. He instantly responded and marched with nearly 1,200 men of all ranks, three six. pounders and one howitzer,

till within three miles of the scene of action where he was met by an orderly bearing a despatch directing him to retreat and join Gen. Riall at Queenston. They had retreated about four miles when they were over-taken by another messenger summoning them to come with all speed to the conflict. Accordingly this weary and footsore column after a march of 20 miles came in view on the extreme right at nine o'clock.

The action was recommenced by the Americans attacking on the left and attempting to turn the flank by an attack on the right also. Their infantry proceeded to advance on the British artillery, whose attention was taken up with the batteries below. They gained the summit, after heavy loss, captured both the 24-pounders and one six-pounder, and confined Lieut. Tomkins and a few of his men in the church, from which they afterwards escaped.

The American artillery now attempted to follow the infantry to the summit, but a volley of musketry killed nearly all the riders and scattered the horses. For the next two hours the opposing lines were seldom twenty yards apart and in the flashes of 'each volley of musketry they could distinguish the faces of the opposing force and even the buttons on the coats.

It is impossible to give a connected narrative of the close of the struggle, the British striving for very life to regain the summit they had lost, and the Americans striving to thrust them down and drive them from the field.

After consultation with General Brown, General Scott led forward his brigade in the hope of forcing back the British right. By Gen. Drummond's orders the 89th knelt in a field of grain, reserving fire until their assailants were within a few paces of them and, then delivered such a volley that the American line was thrown into confusion. After having two horses killed under him and his shoulder fractured Gen. Winfield Scott had to be removed from the field. His entire brigade had been reduced by death of officers and men, and desertion, till only about 200 men remained, fighting on in despair.

About the same time Gen. Brown received a wound in the thigh and made over the command to Gen. Ripley, who decided to retreat beyond Chippewa. While preparations were in progress for this retreat. Drummond was gathering his scattered forces for a supreme effort to retrieve lost ground. Nearly one-third were dead

or wounded and both 24-prs. had been recovered and an American 6-pr. captured. The scattered detachments rallied, formed again pressed steadily up the slope, and at midnight stood triumphantly on the summit. The British held undisputed possession of the field during the rest of the night ; next morning Gen. Ripley re-crossed the •Chippawa, but finding the field occupied in force retired, destroying the bridge, and retreated so rapidly that by mid-night his wearied force lay down without waiting for tents or lights, on the heights opposite Black Rock.

British Officers, • - 5 skilled, 36 wounded.

American Officers, - 16 " 56 "

British Privates, - 76 " 532 "

American Privates, 160 "% 520 " 100 missing.

General, Drummond thanked and dismissed the militia, and remained near, Lundy's Lane.

The war was nearly ended. During August 16,000 British troops arrived to assist Canada, although through Sir George Prevosts' neglect to make the most of advantages gained, no definite progress was made. Still, the British, entered Chesapeake Bay, captured Washington and burned the public buildings, in revenge for the burning of Niagara. The Treaty of Ghent was signed December 24th, 1814.

MRS. JESSE KRTCHT.116.

