

## CHAPTER VI.

**A**LTHOUGH FitzGibbon speaks gratefully of the reward for his services at Beaver Darn, reference to Colonel Brock's letter, given in a previous chapter, as well as to the extract below, from the Canadian Archives, betrays the fact that the company " so graciously bestowed upon him " was not unsolicited on his part. In after years he regretted his removal into a colonial regiment. It took him from under the notice of the Commander-in-Chief, and interfered with his success and advancement in the army and as a soldier.

At the time, however, his ambition was satisfied by obtaining a company in a regiment which he knew to have been a favorite, and, to a certain extent, a creation of Sir Isaac Brock's.

" HEADQUARTERS, KINGSTON, *July* 1, 1813. "

" SIR,—I have the honor to submit to your Excellency's consideration the copy of a letter from Lieut. Johnson, of the Canadian Fencible Infantry, soliciting to be permitted to resign all pretensions to promotion in the Glengarry Light Infantry, to return to his lieutenancy in the Canadian Fencibles.

" I beg leave to inform your Excellency that Lieut. Johnson, at an early period, resigned his recruiting orders, which were transferred to Lieut. FitzGibbon of

the 49th Regiment, but were afterwards recalled and restored to Lieut. Johnson at the earnest solicitation of his father, to the great disappointment and prejudice of Lieut. FitzGibbon, who, in consequence of this prospect of promotion in the levy, resigned the adjutancy of the 49th Regiment . . . . ;

" I beg strongly to recommend to your Excellency's notice the pretensions of Lieut. FitzGibbon of the 49th, from the circumstances above stated, but most particularly from his ability as an officer of a light corps, in which line of service he has recently so eminently distinguished himself."

It would also appear from this letter that the gift of such promotion had to be earned by the recipient in the arduous and often expensive duty of recruiting a certain complement of the men to form the company over which he was granted the command.

FitzGibbon's pretensions were favorably considered, and the step in regimental rank given him, but he did not join the new regiment until January, 1814. He still retained command of the gallant little band of the 49th.

On July 3rd, he sent Ensign Winder with a note from Fort Erie, where he then was, to Chippewa, bidding him give it to any militia officer he could find who would assist him in carrying out the plan it contained.

The following report gives the result :

---

\*Letter from Colonel Baynes to Sir George Prevost, Canadian Archives, 797, Page 131.

" CHIPPEWA, *July* 5th, 1813.

" SIR,—FOR the information of General De Rottenburg, please say that I last evening received a note from Lieut. FitzGibbon, requesting me to assist Ensign Winder of the 49th Regiment, with what militia I could muster, to make a descent about day-break of this morning upon Fort Schlosser, and bring off what public boats and stores we could find there. I accordingly, in the course of the night, assembled 34, including officers, who, together with Ensign Winder, volunteer Thompson and 6 privates of the 49th, crossed over in three boats and arrived at Schlosser a little after daybreak, and were so fortunate as to surprise the guard, consisting of 2 lieutenants, 1 sergeant, 8 privates, 3 civilians, and 3 of our own subjects, in the public storehouse at and upon the wharf. We found one brass 6-pounder, 57 stand of arms, 21 kegs of musket ball-cartridges, 6 bulwarks (or musket-proof curtains for boats), 1 gunboat, 2 bateaux, 2 anchors, 20 barrels of salt, 17 casks of tobacco, 8 barrels of pork, 1 barrel whiskey, with some spades, bars and axes—all of which we brought to this place. We left at Schlosser 6 scows, 6 boats (some of them very large), and about 16 tons weight of cannon shot and shells. The scows and boats, from their being immersed in water, we could not bring off nor completely disable. We remained at Schlosser about one hour, during which time no person appeared to oppose us ; however, we had scarcely embarked in the last boat, when from 12 to 15 men came to the beach, supposed to be militia or workmen from Patey Mills. They fired about twenty shots of musketry at us, which were returned by our last two boats. No damage was done to any person

in the boats, and I believe little hurt was done to the people on shore.

" I have the honor to be, Sir,

" Your most obedient servant,

" THOMAS CLARKE,

" *Lieut.-Colonel 2nd Lincoln Militia.*

" To LIEUT.-COLONEL HARVEY,

" *Deputy Adjutant-General.*"

FitzGibbon had judged correctly in estimating that the celebration of their national festival, the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, would occupy the enemy and render them less on the alert. When sending Ensign Winder upon this enterprise, he had a twofold object in view. He wished to give his subaltern a chance of distinguishing himself in a separate service, and so draw the attention of the officer in command to him, and obtain his recommendation for promotion. He also intended with the remainder of his party to make a simultaneous raid or attack upon Black Rock, a more important and strongly garrisoned post on the enemy's shores. To his great disappointment, he could not obtain sufficient boats in which to convey his men across the river, and was reluctantly obliged to postpone the intended descent.

Sir George Prevost thought the success at Schlosser of sufficient importance to issue a general order upon t.

Two days later, Lieut.-Colonel Bisshopp informed FitzGibbon that he desired to attack Black Rock, and

had asked General De Rottenburg for three hundred men, but could obtain only two hundred.

" Do you think this number sufficient ? "

FitzGibbon smilingly replied, " I hope, sir, you will not be offended when I tell you that I am only waiting for boats to make the attack with less than fifty men."

" Then you think two hundred will do," returned the colonel ; adding, " You must not attack, but wait until I return with the men, and you shall accompany me."

Colonel Bisshopp came back the following morning. He allowed FitzGibbon to arrange the plan of attack, to lead the advance, and to undertake to cover the retreat should the main attack be frustrated.

At two o'clock on the morning of the 11th, the men embarked. A thick mist lay over the water, making the morning very dark. FitzGibbon's men were in the first four boats. Owing to the darkness and the strength of the current, they were carried farther down than their intended point of landing and had to pull up about a quarter of a mile on the enemy's side.

Although it was broad daylight, the mist still hung over the river and its shores. Advancing at once, their approach was soon discovered by the one hundred and fifty militiamen occupying one of the barracks, who were under arms to receive them. Rightly judging that Colonel Bisshopp with the main body had been carried farther down the stream, FitzGibbon had re-

course to his old tactics to gain time, in order that they might join him.

Leaving his handful of men in the background, trusting that the nature of the mist would magnify their number in the eyes of the enemy, he advanced with his bugler and a flag of truce. He was met by the American commander, Major Hall, with his militiamen close at his back. Speaking in a voice loud enough to be heard by all, FitzGibbon summoned them to surrender. " I see you are all militia, and I do not wish to be killing the husbands, fathers and brothers of your innocent families. You shall all be allowed to retire on parole."

He had scarcely finished, when the men broke their ranks and made off down the hill towards Buffalo as fast as they could run.

" Stop your men, Major Hall," called out FitzGibbon, though secretly delighted at the success of his speech, " this is quite irregular while negotiating under a flag of truce."

" I know it, sir," replied the indignant officer, " but I cannot stop them."

" Then I must detain you as my prisoner," answered FitzGibbon ; but upon Major Hall reiterating his inability to " stop his men," he added, " I see it, sir, therefore I will not detain you ; you may retire."

Colonel Bisshopp now came up. Eight large boats belonging to the enemy were seized, loaded with two 12-pounders, one 6-pounder, a large quantity of provisions and military stores, and sent over to the

Canadian side in charge of about half his men. The barracks and block-house, sufficient to accommodate five thousand men, were burned, and a schooner also set on fire.

Had Colonel Bisshopp been content with such measure of success, the enterprise had ended without loss, but excited by the unexpected result he refused to listen to Fitz Gibbon. He wished to carry off four hundred barrels of salt that were piled on the beach.

FitzGibbon knew that the panic caused by his bold words among the American militia would be only temporary—the light of the burning buildings would discover the small number of the attacking party, and unless they put the river speedily between them and the enemy the result would be fatal.

FitzGibbon never liked to speak of this, and in all his brief accounts of the affair I can find only the following statement regarding this part of it :

" The details of what followed I am unwilling to give, because it would be imputing blame to others and taking credit to myself. I will only add that we remained longer than was needed, and were attacked by a body of militia and Indians. About half of our own force having been already sent back to our own shore with the captured boats, the other half were driven to their boats, leaving behind a captain and fifteen men killed and wounded, and having twenty-seven killed and wounded in our boats. Colonel Bisshopp himself was wounded on shore and carried to a boat. He received two wounds more in the boat, of which he died five days after.

" For no man fallen in battle did I grieve so much as for him. He was a man of most gentle and generous nature, and was more beloved by the militia, over whom he was an inspecting field officer, than any other who served in the province during the war. But he wanted either experience or judgment, and fell in consequence in the prime of life, in the twenty-eighth year of his age."

From other sources, recollections of hearing the story as told by some who shared the enterprise, I have been able to piece together what the soldier could not tell himself.\*

The blazing buildings attracted the Indians. The militiamen, ashamed of their panic, when reinforced by Major Parker and the force at Buffalo, returned and attacked the British with irresistible spirit FitzGibbon, true to his command, endeavored to rally his men and cover the retreat, but the disorder was too great. In the confusion the wounded colonel narrowly escaped being left in the enemy's hands. Some of the boats had already been pushed off; when the cry arose that the colonel was wounded and down. FitzGibbon shouted, "To the rescue!" Then as the men still scrambled for the boats, he called out, " Come, my lads, we'll try for him anyway," and followed by a handful of the devoted "Green 'uns," made a rush and succeeded in rescuing and carrying the wounded

---

\* Losing refers to this in his " Pictorial History of the War "—in a note—where he says : "He (Bisshopp) was taken care of by the gallant FitzGibbon and carried to the boats," etc.

officer to the boat. Alas, that the few strokes willing arms plied could not evade the shot which carried death with it.

In reading the few private letters extant, and the scanty allusions to the condition of the army employed on the frontier of Upper Canada during the summer and autumn campaigns of 1813-14, one learns something of the hardships and suffering patiently endured by the men. The breaking down of the commissariat here, as in the other quarters both before and since, was the cause of much unnecessary privation and anxiety on the part of those in command, who, for want of the material and adequate supplies, were unable to take advantage of either their own military success or the blunders of their adversaries. The often heavy loss of life, the cruel carnage, the heap of slain which marked the taking of the enemy's guns, the loss of the hastily erected battery, or a determined stand against the onslaught of the enemy, appear much more terrible under the reflection that had the duty of those at headquarters to furnish the machinery of war been more faithfully performed, much of it might have been saved. When one reads, too, of battles fought and won, of daring deeds done in the face of the foe, victories won against great odds, one scarcely realizes that the report of killed and wounded is more than mere statistics, and is apt to dwell upon the comparison of a small numerical loss with the greater as the chief item of congratulation.

On the contrary, the weary record of men dying singly of fever, exposure, or deprivation of the absolute necessities of life, due to an inefficient commissariat, acquires an importance out of all proportion to the actual loss. A soldier will understand this. Would he not rather die a hundred deaths in the moment of victory, than one on the lingering, weariful bed of fever in camp ?

A touch is given here and there in a private letter, a bitter word of censure levelled against the Commissariat department, of indignation at the apparently wilful ignorance of the situation displayed by the Home Government, or even as near the scene of action as the headquarters at Kingston ; a bare fact stated in official despatches, or a sympathetic regret expressed by an officer for the useless sufferings of his men ; these are all we have to enable us to judge of the daily life of the soldier watching and waiting on the Niagara frontier.

" On my arrival here I found the troops in great distress for necessaries, shirts, shoes and stockings. Most of the 49th are *literally naked*," writes James J. Fulton, A.D.C. to Sir George Prevost, on June 18th. The italics are his. (Canadian Archives.)

Speaking of the 41st on July 14th, General De Rottenburg says : " That regiment is in rags, and without shoes." (*Ibid.*)

The letters of that date reveal a history of wearisome marches and counter-marches, unceasing vigi-

lance, long watches, miserable worn-out camping necessities, where there were any at all, and scarcity of provisions and medicine.

The anxiety of the poor settlers, who were also soldiers, to harvest their crops and save the produce of their farms for their own use, their reluctance to sell at any price, necessitated the placing of districts in the immediate vicinity of the headquarters under martial law.

The inefficiency of the officials, who omitted to take stock of the quantity of stores of either food or ammunition ; the harassing character of the warfare in the forest ; the heat, drenching rains, sickness, and the anxiety of each scattered handful of troops for the safety or success of the others, knowing that the defeat of one added tenfold to the dangers to be incurred by the other ; and the mystery and uncertainty in which the intentions of the Commander-in-Chief were shrouded, even to the officers immediately under his command, added to the great distance from their homes and all that life held dear to them, rendered the situation a most trying one for both officers' and men to endure with patience.

" For many months past the prospect has appeared so clouded to my imagination, and men and measures so different to those which you and others have so repeatedly expatiated on with sensations of pleasure and confidence, that I have been for months a silent spectator of events which I durst not trust my pen to dwell on. A veil of mystery and seclusion has, alas,

but too long been the prevalent\* feature in this part of the world."\*

Sickness decimated the ranks, and the great heat increased the dangers.

" The weather is intensely hot," writes General De Rottenburg from St. David's, 30th of August, in a private letter to Sir George Prevost, " and everybody is more or less affected by it. Colonels Stewart, Plenderleath, May, Williams, FitzGibbon, and a great number of others are laid up with the lake fever. We are in great want of medicine and wine for the sick."

Colonel Plenderleath had been obliged to retire from the outposts at Long Point on July 31st, owing to the great heat, drenching rains, and the sickness among his men.

In the list of the troops to be employed on the south side of the river in the projected attack on Forts Niagara and George, on August 24th, are 350 of the 49th under Major Plenderleath, including the party of Lieut. FitzGibbon.

In the plan of attack, the Light Corps under General Vincent are detailed " to rendezvous at the headquarters at St. David's, sufficiency of boats and craft to be previously at a convenient place for crossing the river, between Lewistown and the Fort. The Voltigeurs, Lieut. FitzGibbon's party and the Indians to cross in the leading boats, and to possess themselves

---

\*Extract from a letter written by Major Glegg, 49th Regiment, from camp at Cross, to Drummer Powell, Oct. 8th, 1813.

of the woody, close country near the fort. Major Plenderleath to attack and possess himself of the guns and batteries on the bank of the river facing Fort George."\*

There is no record of this carefully planned attack upon Fort Niagara having been carried out, except that portion of it under Major Plenderleath, including Lieut. FitzGibbon's party. The enemy were driven in to their inner works, and fourteen prisoners taken. The 49th had two officers and three rank and file wounded.

The tidings of the defeat of General Proctor at Moraviantown on the 5th of October, and the probable fate of the remnant of his small but brave force, made instant retreat imperative.

" My friend General V has only one decision to make, and, if I do not greatly err, his time is very short. Our sick and baggage are hastening to the rear, and I hope to God we may follow them to-morrow," writes one of the bravest and best officers of the 49th, from camp at Cross, Oct. 8th. "I shall not consider our retreat safe until we reach Burlington, and little advantage can arise from remaining there. I have this instant received a private note from Fort George, from a source to be depended on, which mentions that the Indians have been crossing all morning to this side, and an attack has been promised by Major Chapin this night or to-morrow."-f-

\* Canadian Archives, 1812, p. 480.

t Major Glegg to Drummer Powell, from camp at Cross, October 8th, 1813.

That this promise was not kept, the miserable condition of the retreating British force discovered, and a hot pursuit, of more than possible success, made by the American army, was due entirely to the bold front, the vigilance and bravery of the light troops covering the retreat.

On the 14th, Major Glegg again writes to Mr. Powell, from headquarters, Bensley's :

" I am obliged to send you hasty but very important details of our proceedings. Your consideration must make the necessary allowance. We arrived here (Bensley's) on the 12th, after undergoing a very harassing march for our poor fellows, particularly the numerous sick, whose pallid countenances cut me to the quick. The elements were most unkind during our retreat, but anything was pleasing after quitting that sink of disease on the Twelve Mile Creek, where an inactive residence had nearly annihilated as fine a body of men as were ever led against an enemy. Our men are comparatively comfortable in this position. They are all under cover, but of course barns will not last much longer. Considering all things, the casualties of our retreat have been very trifling. Fortunately the enemy did not pursue us. Colonel Murray brought up the rear with the 100th and Light Company of the King's, and he is still at the Forty Mile, merely waiting until the bateaux with the sick have passed it. He will then fall back upon Stony Creek, watching the two roads on the right and left of that place.

" Of our further movements I can give you no certain information at present. A plain statement of our situation has been transmitted to Kingston and