

CHAPTER II.

Before the Invasion.

Benjamin Franklin once remarked that the war of 1776-1783 was the War of the Revolution, but the war of independence still remained to be fought. Events during Jefferson's and Madison's administrations proved the truth of the remark, for the infant nation was vexed and harassed not only by England and France but by the pirates of the Mediterranean and the Indians at home as well. Through the operation of Orders in Council, and the Berlin and Milan Decrees promulgated by both England and France, our commerce, just beginning to flourish, was almost driven from the seas; thousands of our seamen were compelled to serve in British vessels through the infamous practice of impressment; our ships were stopped and searched on the high seas for alleged British subjects or suspected breaches of neutrality; Indians formerly friendly to us were armed and incited to revolt: and these things occurred not once, but many times. Indeed, as Madison put it in his communication to Congress of June first, 1812:

" We behold, in fine, on the side of Great Britain a state of war against the United States, and on the side of the United States a state of peace toward Great Britain."

The United States dreaded hostilities, and Madison would gladly have avoided them, yet there seemed no alternative if we desired to take our place among the nations of the world. Congress accordingly declared war on June eighteenth, 1812, and the next day it was proclaimed by the president.

The declaration of war found the country totally unprepared for hostilities. Our army consisted of barely six thousand men, while our navy was composed of about twenty-five war ships carrying three hundred guns, against the thousand war vessels of

the British. Not only in men and war ships were we lacking, but in munitions of war of every description as well; and to further embarrass the administration, both the Federal Party and the New England states strongly opposed the war, and mass meetings were held and pamphlets continually circulated by the peace party.

The war opened disastrously with the surrender of Detroit by Hull, and, as a result, the loss of the territory of Michigan. During the years 1812 and 1813 nearly all the land operations displayed the incompetency of American commanders and the cowardice of American militia. In short, we were as uniformly unsuccessful on land as we were successful on the sea; and no part of our territory suffered more severely than the Niagara frontier. It is not within the scope of this chapter to recount these defeats or dwell upon the victories—few and far between—which served to hearten up the people.

Buffalo, then a village of about one hundred and twenty-five houses, was burned by the British and Indians on the thirty-first of December, 1813, and the first of January, 1814. Only one house, a blacksmith shop, and the jail were left standing. Between forty and fifty people of both sexes were killed, stripped to the skin, and scalped by the Canadian Indians accompanying the column.

While the burning of Buffalo was contrary to the laws of war, it was an act of retaliation for the wanton burning of the flourishing village of Newark (now Niagara) situated near Fort George in Canada, consisting of one hundred and fifty houses. This was done by the Americans under General McClure, who acted entirely without orders or any justification or excuse whatever. Doubtless many of the scenes at the burning of Buffalo were only repetitions of those at Newark, as each side was assisted by a large number of Indians, who at such times were uncontrollable. The homeless settlers managed to survive the winter

through assistance afforded by the people of the state, who generously contributed supplies. Money was voted by the Legislature and by various cities, amounting in the aggregate to upwards of fifty thousand dollars.

The dreary winter at last came to a close, and things began to look brighter. A brickyard was put into operation; building was commenced; and, owing to the presence of a considerable body of troops quartered at Buffalo, money was quite plentiful. Johnson, in his *History of Erie County*, is authority for the statement that by May twentieth the village boasted three taverns, four stores, twelve shops, twenty-three houses, and thirty or forty huts, besides many buildings in process of erection.

Along in June rumors of an invasion of Canada began to be current. The force at Buffalo then consisted of two brigades of regulars, the First and Second, under General Winfield Scott and General Ripley respectively, and a portion of one brigade of militia under General Porter, besides about six hundred Senecas. The monthly return of General Brown's division for July first, 1814, was as follows:

	Present for Duty, N. C. O. and Men.	Officers.	Aggregate Present and Absent.
Artillery, -	330	15	413
Scott's Brigade,	1,312	65	2,122
Ripley's Brigade,	992	36	1,415
Porter's Brigade,	710	<u>43</u>	<u>830</u>
Total,	3,344	159	4,780

A portion of General Porter's brigade did not join him until July seventh, after the invasion had begun.

The whole force numbered about four thousand men effective for duty. Considerable attention had been given to disciplining and drilling the regulars, until these troops were in a fair state of efficiency and eager for an invasion of Canada. As an instance of the discipline that prevailed, it is related that four privates from the regulars convicted of desertion were shot in the presence of General Scott, his staff, and the army, near the present corner

of Front Avenue and Maryland Street, in June, 1814. The volunteers, however, were in poor condition for service. On many occasions during the war these troops had shown not only inefficiency but absolute cowardice. The reason for this is clear enough. The militia of that day consisted of men who would volunteer only for short terms, and a man who had served five or six months was looked upon as a veteran, the average term of service being but a few weeks. They were poorly armed, equipped, and commanded; and it is no wonder that they were content to endure the hardships incident to a soldier's life for only a few weeks.

The late war with Spain has clearly shown how difficult it is to supply an army with the thousand and one things it requires, although at the present time the resources of this country are practically inexhaustible. When the condition of the country during the War of 1812 is considered, the statement that the volunteers were scantily supplied with equipment will cause no astonishment. For instance, on July third, the day Fort Erie was captured and the Canadian invasion was begun, Porter's brigade had not been issued a rifle, saber, bayonet; or blanket, and but a small number of tents.

The volunteers were green troops, and badly handled; and, being jeered at and made a convenience of by the regulars in the fatigue work, it is of small wonder that army life was distasteful and that poor service resulted. In the training and control of these volunteers, General Peter B. Porter, then a Buffalonian, showed great ability; and, as he was one of the foremost men of this locality—and, indeed, of the state—a gentleman born and bred, of fine bearing, and courtly manners, he commanded their respect and admiration. General Brown, in a letter to Governor of the to Porter, only stated a fact when he said, "In the midst of the greatest danger I have found his mind cool and collected and his judgment to be relied upon." He was full of resources and prompt to seize a favorable opportunity to secure an advantage, although not bred a soldier. His conduct during

this war was justly recognized by the government, which brevetted him a Major General; and for his gallantry and bravery during the war Congress voted him a gold medal. Volunteer generals of capacity and aggressiveness even unto this day are jealous of the regular army officers and a trifle insubordinate. Porter appears to have been no exception to the rule, as his letters to Governor Tompkins disclose, but when it came to a fight he loyally supported his superiors and freely exposed his life to gain a victory. Under Porter the militia stood up against the trained troops of the British like veterans, and at Chippewa, Lundy's Lane, and Fort Erie their conduct went far to redeem the bad reputation the American militia had acquired during the preceding years of the war.

Porter died at Niagara Falls, aged seventy-one. A beautiful monument was erected over his grave, and upon it is engraved the following epitaph, which is so apt an estimate of his services and character that a portion of it, at least, is well worth quoting.

PETER BUEL PORTER.

A pioneer in western New York ; a statesman eminent in the annals of the nation and the state ; a general in the armies of America defending in the field what he had maintained in the council. * * **Known and** mourned throughout that extensive region which he had been among the foremost to explore and to defend.

The characters of Brown, Scott, and Ripley are well known. Each was uniformly successful. Brown and Scott were brave even to recklessness, and ready to fight under any and all circumstances, while Ripley inclined to overcautiousness.

The monthly return of the regulars for June thirtieth, 1814, was as follows:

SCOTT'S BRIGADE (First).	Present for Duty.		Aggregate Present and Absent.
	N. C. O. and Men.	Officers.	
Ninth Regiment,	332	11	642
Eleventh Regiment,	416	17	577
Twenty-second Regiment,	217	12	287
Twenty-fifth Regiment,	354	16	619
General staff,		4	4
Total,	1,319	65	2,129

RIPLEY'S BRIGADE (Second).	Present for Duty.		Aggregate Present and Absent.
	N. C. O. and Men.	Officers.	
Twenty-first Regiment,	651	25	917
Twenty-third Regiment,	34r	8	496
General staff		2	2
Total,	992	35	1,415
ARTILLERY (Major Hindman).			
Towson's,		89	101
Riddle's,		80	104
Ritchie's,		96	138
Williams's,		62	73
Total,		327	416