

few determined officers spurred among the malcontents, arrested the ringleader, awed his followers, and, aided by a small detachment of regulars, restored order." The refractory jurist was hustled into a wagon and sent under arrest to Williamsville with the information that if he ever returned to Buffalo he would be shot without benefit of clergy.

The force then moved off without further trouble, crossed the river, and camped on the lake shore to the left of Towson's battery, throwing up a sod breastwork for protection. **This** occurred on September tenth. Their arrival was not hailed with great enthusiasm by the regular army contingent of the garrison, whose confidence in militia seems to have been somewhat shaken. But these same troops, ununiformed, and poorly drilled and equipped, soon showed that if they could not drill they could fight; and by their gallant conduct they did more than their share toward redeeming the reputation of the American militiaman during this war.

The monthly return of our forces on August thirty-first, 1814, was as follows:

	Present for Duty.		Aggregate Present and Absent.
	N. C. O. and Privates.	Officers.	
Dragoons,	27	1	48
Bombardiers, etc.,	34		51
Artillery Corps,	206	to	369
First Brigade,	725	39	2,311
Second Brigade,	698	42	1,646
Porter's Brigade,	220	16	599
First and Fourth Rifles,	217	11	504
Total,	2,127	119	5,528

CHAPTER VII.

The Sortie.

A brilliant achievement—the only instance in history where a besieging army was entirely broken up and routed by a single sortie.—Sir *William Napier*.

Although the Americans had received reinforcements, their position was still regarded as critical. Battery Number Three, mounting the long twenty-four-pounders, had not as yet opened fire; but we had suffered quite severely from the fire of Number One and Number Two, and the new battery was much feared by Brown because it would rake our position. The spirits of the men were sinking under the long and constant strain and confinement, and, to make matters worse, the weather was bad, much rain falling. Brown, therefore, determined to risk a sortie, damage the enemy's works as much as possible without too severe a loss to himself, and then retreat upon the fort.

It will be remembered that the works of the enemy were occupied by only one brigade of the enemy, each of his three brigades alternating in this duty, while the balance of the army remained in camp, nearly two miles away through the woods. Brown's plan, briefly stated, was as follows:

Porter, with a force of about one thousand six hundred, composed of regulars, militia, and Indians, was to move out from the left, make a wide detour, strike into the woods, and, following roads prepared in advance, come upon the enemy's right at Battery Number Three, and, after crushing the right and spiking the guns of the battery, to turn towards the center and assist in the capture of batteries Number Two and Number One. Colonel Miller, "for whom batteries had no terrors," with five hundred men from the Ninth, Eleventh, and Nineteenth regiments of regulars, was to take up a position in a ravine formed by a water-course running into the lake, situate some three hundred yards

southerly from the enemy's line, and, when the noise of Porter's attack was heard, to rush in between batteries Number Two and Number Three, and attack Battery Number Two and then Number One. General Ripley, who, it is claimed, had no confidence in the success of the enterprise, and, as Brown states, wished to take no part in it, was stationed with the Twenty-first Regiment as a reserve out of sight between the westerly bastions of the fort. Major Jessup, recently wounded, was left to garrison the fort with the Twenty-fifth Regiment, only one hundred and fifty strong. The plan of attack was simple, and, if success is any criterion, extremely effective.

On September sixteenth Lieutenants Frazer and Riddle, with one hundred men each, fifty armed with muskets and fifty with axes, labored all day without being discovered, constructing rough roads for Porter's columns up to within one hundred and fifty yards of the British position. They also built underbrush roads back to the fort from a point near the front of the British position in order that the retreat might be unobstructed and the miry and impassable places avoided. Much rain had fallen during the past twelve days, and the ground in front of our position was little better than a swamp.

The morning of the seventeenth dawned cloudy and disagreeable, and a light rain was falling. During the forenoon the volunteers were paraded, and, after arousing their enthusiasm by the announcement of the recent American victories at Plattsburg and Lake Champlain, the plan of the proposed sortie was revealed to them. It was enthusiastically received. Each volunteer was thereupon directed to take off his headgear and tie a red handkerchief or red cloth around his head so that he might be readily distinguished, none of them being uniformed. As the day wore on the rain increased, and a hard thunderstorm, almost a gale, came up, which continued during the attack. This undoubtedly aided our forces in advancing unperceived to the attack until right onto the enemy's works, but many of our muskets were disabled through water getting into the pans of the guns.

In the afternoon Porter moved out to take up his position on the enemy's right. He sent forward as an advance two hundred riflemen, with some Indians, under Colonel Gibson. The balance of his force was divided into two columns, which marched parallel to each other, following the brush roads. They were guided respectively by Riddle and Frazer. Lieutenant Colonel Wood commanded the right column, which was composed of four hundred regulars and five hundred militia. These troops were to attack the enemy's position. Brigadier General Davis, of Batavia, who, while senior to Porter, volunteered to muster his brigade and fight under him, waiving all question of rank, commanded the left column consisting of five hundred militia newly raised. This column was intended to engage the enemy's reinforcements if any should be thrown in.

These columns reached their position a few yards from the right of the enemy's position without discovery, and at about three in the afternoon Brown gave Porter the order to attack. This order was executed with great vigor, and the cheers of the Americans as they rushed to the assault were plainly heard by the anxious listeners upon the American shore, notwithstanding the storm that raged.

The British lines that day were guarded by the Second Brigade, consisting of the Eighth and De Wetteville's regiments of regulars. The swiftness of the attack utterly surprised these troops, and the Americans soon captured a blockhouse in the rear of Battery Number Three, and then the battery itself, destroying the much dreaded twenty-four-pounders and their carriages and blowing up a magazine. Here the brave Wood* and Brigadier General Davis fell mortally wounded. The loss of both of these men was greatly mourned.

Porter then swung his forces around and attacked Battery Number Two conjointly with Major Miller, who had rushed forward as soon as Porter's attack was heard. After a sharp struggle

* In the cemetery at West Point, a short distance from the grave of General Scott, stands a cenotaph erected by General Brown to the memory of Lieutenant Colonel Wood. It was dedicated in 1858, and the inscription states that he fell while leading a charge at the sortie of Fort Erie, September seventeenth, 1814, in the thirty-first year of his age.

this battery was captured. Battery Number One was, so Brown says, abandoned by the enemy. At all events, it was captured; but by reason of the confusion, and the stout defense the British soon made, the Americans neglected or were unable to permanently injure batteries Number One and Number Two, although they were temporarily disabled.

Owing to the suddenness and impetuosity of the American attack, the Second Brigade of the enemy was crumpled up and driven away before any arrangements could be made to meet the attack. It is a maxim of war that "when a force is not deployed but is struck suddenly and violently on its flank, resistance is impracticable." Chancellorsville, where the Eleventh Corps of the Union army melted away before Jackson's fierce onslaught, was an illustration of the truth of this maxim. This attack was another; and our troops soon swept the front line of intrenchments almost clear of the enemy.

So far the Americans had accomplished much with little loss, but the end was not yet. As soon as the American attack was heard, De Watteville promptly sent back to the British camp for reinforcements, and the First and Third brigades hastened to the succor of the Second Brigade. In the meantime the Second Brigade was rapidly recovering from the demoralization from which it had at first suffered.

The British lines were defended by felled trees, entanglements, and abattis, and whilst the Americans were struggling to penetrate these defenses they were met with a hot fire from the enemy posted in the traverses and along the parallel lines of intrenchments. Then too, at this stage of the attack the enemy's reinforcements arrived and commenced a determined resistance to the further advance of the Americans. The fight now raged furiously. Hand-to-hand encounters occurred all along the line, and sometimes with the bayonet and sometimes with rifle fire the enemy sought to regain possession of the lines and drive off the Americans, now somewhat confused by the constant fire concentrated upon them from all points and through penetrating the

abattis and entanglements. Although outnumbered, the Americans stubbornly resisted, and, regardless of the hot fire, gave back blow for blow.

Brown, fearing for Miller's safety, ordered Ripley forward to his assistance, who promptly advanced with the Twenty-first Infantry. Ripley soon received a serious wound in the neck, and was borne to the rear.*

Miller, with excellent judgment, appreciating that nothing further could be accomplished, and in view of the superior force of the British, began an orderly retreat towards the fort; and Brown soon ordered the other columns to do the same, for the object of the sortie had been accomplished. They all reached the fort in good order, but with considerable loss, for by this time the British were pressing them fiercely. Thus in barely two hours the result attempted had been achieved, the enemy irreparably crippled, and one thousand men killed, injured, or taken prisoners.

General Drummond speaks of the retreat of the Americans as a "precipitate retrograde movement made by the enemy from the different points of our position of which he had gained a short possession." It should be observed, however, that Drummond, whatever his faults were as a soldier, was a pronounced success at what might be termed an explanatory writer. Some one has remarked of Cellini that he created his own atmosphere. The same remark applies to Drummond. His despatches to his government are well worth a perusal. Ingersoll, in his history of the war, dryly remarks apropos of this part of Drummond's report:

"The coincident exertions of both commanders, Brown to withdraw his men from, and Drummond with his to recover, the British entrenchments, soon effected it."

In this sortie we lost seventy-nine killed, two hundred and sixteen wounded, and two hundred and sixteen missing, a total of five hundred and eleven. Of this number twelve officers were

* Ripley never fully recovered from this wound, although he afterward served a term in Congress.

killed, twenty-two wounded, and ten were missing—a most serious blow to the effectiveness of so small an army.

The enemy's loss in killed, wounded, and missing was somewhat under one thousand, and, according to the American accounts, we captured nearly four hundred prisoners. In any event, the Americans totally disabled his best battery and injured the others, besides destroying the morale of his troops. Only the pen of a Drummond could convert this disaster into a repulse of the Americans, which he did with ease. According to Drummond's report his loss was one hundred and fifteen killed, one hundred and forty-eight wounded, and three hundred and sixteen missing—a total of five hundred and seventy-nine.

During the progress of the fight crowds lined the American shore and listened to the combat during the lulls in the severe storm which raged that afternoon. Dorsheimer thus dramatically describes what was probably a very simple incident :

"All through the afternoon no tidings came. Just at dusk a small boat was seen struggling in the rapids. An eager crowd soon gathered on the beach. In the midst of the breakers the little bark upset. One of its crew was seen floating in the waves. The bystanders made a line by holding on to each other's clothes, and, stretching out from the shore, seized the drowning man. As, exhausted and chilled, he staggered up the beach, he gasped into the ears of his rescuers the first news they had of the great conflict and victory."

Many friends of General Porter have contended that the sortie was planned by him and that he suggested it to Brown. Brown makes no mention of this in his official report or in his manuscript memoirs. Porter was a man of much more capacity than Brown, and it is quite likely he had to do with planning the attack, although Brown was by no means averse to any plan which would insure fighting. In any event, Porter was selected to lead the most important column, composed partly of regulars not in his brigade, which is a significant fact in Porter's favor.

Holler, at one time secretary to Porter, in an article in volume six of *The Magazine of American History*, says:

"Before battery No. 3 was completed, one bright morning early in September, as General Porter, Lt.-Col. Wood, and Major McRea of the engineers were walking from Towson's battery towards the Fort and discussing the progress of the enemy's offensive operations, Lt.-Col. Wood half-jestingly suggested that it might be expedient to attempt a sortie. But no serious proposal of such an enterprise was made until some days later, when General Porter invited his two friends to his quarters to examine a plan for it which he had prepared. This plan was discussed and fully matured in several confidential meetings of the three officers. It was then submitted to General Brown, who was still at Buffalo, whither he had retired, as has been stated, after being wounded at the battle of Lundy's Lane. He neither encouraged nor discouraged it at the outset, but, on examination of it as thoroughly as possible in his absence from the ground, he rather objected to the project.

"General Porter, however, continued to urge it, and his views were warmly seconded by the two able engineers to whom he had fully explained his plan. The whole army, General Brown included, reposed the greatest confidence in these two officers, particularly in Lt.-Col. Wood.

"General Brown finally required General Porter, whom he considered responsible for the plan, to give him a written statement of its details over his own signature. After receiving this document General Brown consented that the enterprise should be undertaken, and directed General Porter to lead it."

On the other hand, Major Jessup, at that time serving in the garrison, states positively that the sortie was planned solely by Brown ; and he was certainly in a position to be well informed as to what transpired in the little garrison. Major General Brown was in command, and as he assumed the responsibility for the movement he is entitled to the credit of its success.

The Siege of Fort Erie

An incident during the sortie, in which General Porter was the hero, is worth repeating. General Porter, so the story runs, while accompanied only by his orderly, was proceeding between batteries Number One and Number Two, when, too late to retreat, he suddenly came upon a small company of the enemy standing at ease apparently waiting orders. Coming up as though at the head of a regiment, Porter cried, "That's right, my good fellows, surrender, and we'll take good care of you." The ruse succeeded, and man by man the company from right to left threw down their arms and marched to the rear. Everything went well until the man next to the left guide was reached, who, not seeing any soldiers supporting Porter, and suspecting the trick, came to charge bayonet and demanded that Porter surrender. The boot was now on the other leg, but Porter dextrously seized the musket and endeavored to wrest it away from the soldier. Several comrades came to the man's assistance, and in the melee Porter was thrown down and wounded in the hand. Struggling to his feet, he told his assailants they were surrounded and if they did not cease their resistance he would put them to death. This created a slight diversion, and at this juncture Lieutenant Chatfield, of the militia, at the head of the Cayuga Rifles, came up, thus relieving Porter of an embarrassing situation and securing the prisoners as well. This story smacks of the political campaign more than of the particular campaign with which this narrative deals, but it may be true. In any event, Porter, in his official report, mentions Chatfield as one "by whose intrepidity I was, during the action, extricated from the most *unpleasant* situation."

On the twenty-first Drummond in great haste retired to the old position of the British at Chippewa Creek, leaving some of his stores at Fort Erie and destroying others at Frenchman's Creek. The raising of the siege showed how severely Drummond felt the sortie if his reports do not. It practically closed the campaign upon the Niagara frontier, which since July third, 1814, had waged with great fierceness.

The Sortie

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The following table of losses is interesting, although it should be remembered it does not include the losses in skirmishes and minor combats, which were constantly taking place. It is taken from General Wright's *Life of Scott*, and differs very slightly from the figures already given.

	Total British Loss.	Total American Loss.
Battle of Chippewa, July fifth, 1814,	507	328
Battle of Niagara (Lundy's Lane), July twenty-fifth, 1814,	878	860
Battle of Fort Erie, August fifteenth, 1814,	905	84
Sortie at Fort Erie, September seventeenth, 1814,	800	511
Total,	3,090	1,783

When we consider that neither side had over four thousand, if that number of men, engaged at any time, the immense percentage of loss will be appreciated.

General James Miller, writing two days after the sortie, says :

" I was ordered to advance and get into the enemy's works before the column had beaten the enemy sufficiently to meet us at the batteries. We had no alternative but to fall on them, beat them, and take them. It was a sore job for us. My command consisted of the 9th, 11th, and 19th Regiments. Colonel Aspinwall commanded the 9th and 19th and Colonel Bedel the 11th. Colonel Aspinwall lost his left arm, Major Trimble of the 19th was severely, I believe mortally, wounded through the body. Captain Hale of the 11th killed; Captain Ingersoll of the 9th Wounded in the head, and eight other officers severely wounded some of them mortally. Colonel Bedel was the only officer higher than a lieutenant in my whole command but what was killed or wounded."

After Drummond left our front the fort was garrisoned with a small force; and the volunteers, who were praised on all sides for their steadiness and bravery during the whole campaign, and especially the sortie, were dismissed to their homes. General

Brown put the matter in a few words when he said in a letter to Governor Tompkins, "The militia of New York have redeemed their character—they behaved gallantly."

The raising of the siege was completely decisive, and the pioneers along the frontier could again rest in peace without the disturbing thought that they might be scalped or burned out, or both, before another day dawned. The fort was occupied until November fifth, 1814, when it was blown up and destroyed and the stores and garrison withdrawn to Buffalo, its possession being no longer of value.

The War of 1812 has been overshadowed by the more important events which preceded and followed it, but when an adequate history of this trying period of our country's history is written, and the battles along the Niagara frontier are recounted, Chippewa, Lundy's Lane, and Fort Erie will be awarded places high up in the record of the many valorous deeds the history of our country affords. And while the history of our brave men is written, let due praise be accorded to our former foes, who, through the mutation of time and circumstance, are now our nearest neighbors and best friends.

THE END.