

CHAPTER II

THE MILITIA ON THE FRONTIER, FROM 1812 TO 1815

A SURVEY of the military strength of the Province of Upper Canada, dated December 2nd, 1811, General Brock assured the Governor-General that " although perfectly aware of the number of improper characters who have obtained extensive possessions and whose principles diffuse a spirit of insubordination very adverse to all military institutions, I still feel confident a large majority will prove faithful. It is, however, certain," he added, " that the the best policy to be pursued, should future circumstances call for active preparations, will be to act with the utmost liberality, and as if no mistrust existed. For unless the inhabitants give an active and efficient aid it will be utterly impossible for the very limited number of the military who are likely to be employed, to preserve the Province." The militia available for the defence of the Detroit frontier numbered only about 700, and the garrison of Fort Amherstburg consisted of but two regulars. About 3,000 militia and perhaps 500 Indians, he believed, could be assembled in an emergency on the Niagara River, but he qualified this estimate by the statement that " unless a strong military force be present to animate the loyal and control the disaffected, nothing effectual can be expected." The total number of persons actually liable to perform militia service in the entire Province was estimated at 11,000, of whom the Governor-General considered that it would not be prudent to arm more than 4,000.

One of the first measures undertaken by the Government in anticipation of hostilities was to authorize the formation of a battalion of 400 rank and file among the Highland emigrants, to be known as the Glengarry Light Infantry. Within six weeks from the time that enlisting orders were received it was recruited up to its full strength and their establishment was soon after increased to 600, which was completed before the end of the year. The regiment was sent to the front and took a distinguished part in many actions. In several of the engagements they lost heavily.

By General Brock's advice two companies were selected from each regiment of militia to be trained as flank companies, by which means it was estimated that a force of about 1,800 men would be produced in the whole Province. The Militia Act was amended for this purpose in March, 1812, and the sum of \$45,000 voted by the Legislature to enable it to be carried into effect. Some flank companies were immediately organized in the most populous counties, and as both officers and men were required to serve without pay, and many of them were obliged to travel a great distance to attend parade, Brock recommended that authority might at least be granted him to issue rations and provide them with clothing at the expense of the Government. By the 15th of May, 1812, he was able to report, after making a tour of inspection through the County of Lincoln that " the flank companies in the districts in which they have been established were instantly completed with volunteers and, indeed, an almost unanimous disposition to serve is daily manifested. I shall proceed to extend this system, now that I have ascertained that the people are so well disposed, but my means are very limited."

As soon as the declaration of war became known the flank companies of Lincoln militia, numbering about 700 men, were assembled on the Niagara River. They turned out " very cheerfully," but, as they were absolutely unprovided with haversacks, blankets, kettles or tents, they were exposed to extreme discomfort, and soon began to exhibit signs of impatience. Yet it was absolutely impossible to provide them with camp equipage of any kind until it could be forwarded from Montreal or Quebec. A general order of July 4th, 1812, announces that General Brock " has witnessed with the highest satisfaction the orderly and regular conduct of such of the militia as have been called into actual service, and their evident desire to acquire military instruction. He is sensible that they are exposed to great privations and every effort will be immediately made to supply their most pressing wants, but such are the circumstances of the country that it is absolutely necessary that every inhabitant should have recourse to his own means to furnish himself with blankets and other necessaries."

Similar bodies were at the same time collected at Cornwall, Prescott, Kingston, Amherstburg and Sandwich. It was at the last named point that the first invasion of the Province took place on the 12th of July, 1812, and for some weeks the militia of Essex and Kent, intimidated by the numbers and threats of the enemy, and influenced by the evil example of some of their officers, behaved badly, deserting to their homes in numbers and refusing to return to duty. Within a few days after the appearance of an invading army on British soil, a blow was struck in the west which was destined to have the most important results. Captain Roberts, who commanded a party of invalid soldiers at the island of St. Joseph, succeeded without difficulty in organizing a small



LIEUTENANT-COLONEL W. D. OTTER, A. D. C.,
COMMANDING MILITARY DISTRICT NO. 2.

battalion of volunteers among the boatmen and other employees of the fur companies, at the head of whom and his regulars he moved against the American fort of Mackinac and took it, without even a show of resistance. He attributed his easy success largely to " the unparalleled exertions of the Canadians who had manned his boats and dragged his artillery into a commanding position."

General Brock promptly determined to assail the invading force at Sandwich, before it could receive support, and with 400 picked men assembled at Port Dover and transported them in row boats to Amherstburg. On arriving there it was learned that the enemy had retired across the river. General Brock resolved to follow, and he landed in Michigan on the morning of the 16th of August with 1,330 men, of whom 400 were militia selected from the flank companies of the Essex, Kent, Oxford, Norfolk, Lincoln and York regiments. The surrender of the American force with the town and fort of Detroit took place the same day.

The subsequent good conduct of the Essex and Kent militia amply atoned for any misconduct in the beginning of the war. In September a detachment from the two Essex regiments accompanied Major Muir's expedition against Fort Wayne and it is stated to have behaved remarkably well. A month later another under Lieut. Dewar occupied an advanced position at the Miami Rapids. During the following winter detachments performed garrison duty at Amherstburg, Detroit and even Mackinac. Twelve officers and 104 men of the 1st Essex and nine officers and 87 men of the 2nd Essex, under Major Robert Reynolds were engaged in the battle at the River Raisin, January 22nd, 1813. Five privates were killed and sixteen men were wounded.

Thirty-four officers and 482 men took part in the expedition against Fort Meigs on the Miami River, April 23rd to May 9th 1813 ; Captain Bondy of the 1st Essex was killed in action and four privates wounded.

. After the withdrawal of the British regular forces from this frontier in October, 1813, a company commanded by Lieut. James McGregor, known as the Loyal Kent Volunteers, 'performed some notable service. In December Lieut. McGregor with seven of his men joined Lieut. Medcalf of the Norfolk militia in an attack on an American post at McRae's house, below Chatham, in which the whole of the enemy's party was captured. In January, 1814, he crossed the River St. Clair into Michigan, and brought off as a prisoner an American captain of militia, together with the arms of his company which were stored in his house. About a month later he received instructions to cover the passage of the river by 200 Indians who were conveying arms and ammunition to the western tribes, a service which was successfully performed. But on the 4th of March the Loyal Kent Volunteers and a company of Essex Rangers, lately raised by Captain William Caldwell of Amherstburg, supported by eight corn-



LIEUTENANT-COLONEL HENRY MCLAREN,
COMMANDING THIRTEENTH BATTALION OF INFANTRY.

panies of the Royal Scots and 89th Regiment, attacked a body of 160 American riflemen who had entrenched themselves on the bank of the Fourteen Mile Creek near Delaware, but were repulsed with severe loss. In this action Lieut. McGregor was badly wounded, as were also a sergeant and five privates of his company.

For some time after the surrender of Detroit, the flank companies of the Norfolk regiments were excused from service, but in November, 1812, four companies, commanded by Captains John Bostwick, Abram Rapelje, Daniel McCall and Lieut. Brewster Brigham, were ordered to Fort Erie. On the morning of the 28th of November, being stationed at the ferry opposite Black Rock and hearing musketry on the bank of the river below, Bostwick's and Rapelje's companies hastened to the point of attack. They soon became closely engaged with a body of the enemy that had landed and carried two small batteries, but finding themselves outnumbered and the enemy in possession of the artillery, were obliged to retreat with considerable loss.

October, 1813, brought a signal reverse on the Thames. The Niagara Peninsula was, in consequence, practically abandoned, and the remnant of General Proctor's defeated brigade fell back on Burlington, which for some weeks was the most advanced post occupied by the British forces. The militia had been disbanded and parties of marauders over-ran the country from which the troops had retired. One of these, composed largely of refugees from Canada, advancing from Buffalo, appeared in the township of Woodhouse early in November. On the 13th Lieut.-Colonel Henry Bostwick went in pursuit of them with forty-five volunteers, formed in two companies under Captains John Bostwick and Daniel McCall. The house in which the marauders had taken post was quietly surrounded. Captain Bostwick, accompanied by Lieut. Austin, advanced to demand their surrender, but on entering the building he was surprised to find it crowded with men who sprang to arms, and observing that he was apparently unsupported, fired two shots at him, inflicting a slight wound, and made him a prisoner. On hearing the report of firearms in the house the remainder of the militia rushed forward and were fired at by the enemy from the windows. The fire was at once returned and some of the enemy ran out and attempted to escape, but were shot down or taken. The rest then surrendered. Three had been killed, several were badly wounded and eighteen taken prisoners.

It is not surprising that as the County of Lincoln, as it was then constituted, formed the principal seat of war, its militia should be called to arms more frequently than any other in the actual defence of their homes. The population of the county was estimated to exceed 12,000, and the militia, organized into six battalions, numbered nearly 2,400 of all ranks. The line of defence along the Niagara River was organized in July, 1812, into four divisions, each composed of a section of field artillery, a detachment of the 41st Regiment and a body of militia.

On the 10th of July one-half of the militia were allowed to return home on furlough, as there appeared to be no immediate danger of an attack, the preference being given to "those whose presence on the farms are most required to bring in the harvest." But on the 22nd, when particulars of the invasion of the province at Sandwich became known, all militiamen absent on furlough were ordered to rejoin their regiments. Five hundred men were soon afterwards ordered to hold themselves in readiness to join the flank companies on the frontier at a moment's notice. After the surrender of Detroit, the conclusion of an armistice afforded General Brock an opportunity of permitting four-fifths of each flank company to return home for a few days.

Notice of the termination of the armistice was received on the 4th of September, and the flank companies of the Lincoln regiments were not only recalled but those of the three York regiments were brought over to Fort George. The first casualty occurred on the 19th of September, when Private John Hendershot of the 1st Lincoln, while on sentry duty at the Limekilns near Queenstown, was killed by a shot from the American bank.

In a very gallant attempt to recover the brig Detroit from the enemy in the river above Squaw Island, on the 9th of October, Major Pell, of the Niagara Dragoons was mortally wounded.

On the 5th of November one-tenth of the militia companies stationed at Fort George and Chippawa were attached to Captain Powell's company of artillery, to be trained in the use of garrison and field guns.

In announcing the termination of the armistice in a general order of the 10th of November, General Sheaffe contented himself with saying :

"To men who have already so nobly conducted themselves before the enemy, it would be superfluous in the Major-General to say more than that he is persuaded that whenever the opportunity shall present itself they will again prove themselves worthy of the glorious cause in which they are engaged, and successfully defend their country, their families and property."



LIEUTENANT-COLONEL THE HON. ISAAC BUCHANAN,
COMMANDING 13TH BATT., 1862-1865.

On the morning of the 28th of November when it became known that the enemy had effected a landing below Fort Erie in considerable force, Captain James Kerby of the Lincoln Artillery, with a field gun, marched from Chippewa with Captain Hamilton's company of the 2nd Lincoln and a small party of the 41st Regiment. After passing Block Creek they overtook Major Hatt with detachments of his own and other Lincoln regiments numbering about 200 men. On arriving at Frenchman's Creek they encountered the rear-guard of the invaders, consisting of thirty-eight men, commanded by Captain King, aide-de-camp to General Smyth. They succeeded in taking them prisoners without loss. Eighteen boats full of men were then discovered crossing the river, which were driven back by the fire of the field piece and a few rounds of musketry. Two of the boats were sunk and about 30 men killed and wounded in this attack. Major Hatt, Captain Kerby and Lieuts. Bryson and Ball of the Lincoln Artillery were specially mentioned in the dispatches.

An order of the 7th of December announced that a cessation of achy operations might soon be expected.

One week afterwards the flank companies of the 2nd and 3rd York and the battalion companies of the Lincoln regiments were released from duty. The Lincoln flank companies were retained in service until the end of the year.

Their duties during the months of November and December were extremely arduous and exhausting.

A serious alarm occurred early in February, 1813, as a considerable division of American regular troops was assembled near Buffalo, and Lake Erie was firmly frozen over.

" There being some reason to believe that the enemy meditates som attempt on the frontiers the Adjutant-General of Militia wrote to Lieut.-Colonel Clark of the 2nd Lincoln on the 11th of February, " I am directed to desire that you will with all possible expedition assemble not only the flank companies but as many spirited young men in addition as can be induced to join them at Chippewa, where quarters will be prepared for their reception.

" His Honor, the Major-General Sheaffe, trusts that on this occasion both the officers and men will recollect the very honorable and successful manner in which they have hitherto contributed to the defence of the province, and that ibr a little time longer private considerations will give way to public."

Nor was this apprehension ill founded, for the American Secretary of War had actually authorized another attempt at invasion. "As the season has now furnished you with a bridge as well for retreat as advance," he wrote to Colonel Porter, the officer commanding at Buffalo, "it is thought advisable that you do not permit circumstances so favorable to escape without making a stroke on such points of the enemy's line as may be within your reach."

The flank companies of the 2nd and 3rd Lincoln and the two Norfolk

regiments were immediately marched to the frontier and stationed along the shore of Lake Erie, from Fort Erie to Sugar Loaf Point. This show of vigilance combined with the desertion of a trusted non-commissioned officer from Buffalo, had the effect of preventing any offensive operation being undertaken beyond the bombardment of Fort Erie by the batteries at Block Rock on the 17th of March. Seventeen hundred militia were actually called out at that time to meet the impending attack, but after a few weeks service the whole, with the exception of a few flank companies, were again disbanded.

A detachment of three officers and sixty-three men taken in equal proportions from the 2nd York, 4th and 5th Lincoln, under Major Simons of the first named regiment, was stationed during April and May at Burlington, to maintain communication between York and Niagara. From this post they were obliged to retire by a superior force of the enemy in two armed schooners, who landed there on the morning of May loth, under cover of the guns of their vessels, and destroyed a small barracks.

Upon the evacuation of Fort Erie by the regular troops, Major John Warren, of the 3rd Lincoln effectually dismantled the batteries and destroyed the public stores before retiring, while Lieut.-Colonel Clark, of the 2nd Lincoln, performed a similar service at Chippewa and Queenston. The greater part of these regiments was then quietly disbanded, only sixty militiamen in addition to Captain Runchey's company of negroes and Merritt's troop of Provincial Dragoons, having accompanied Vincent's division in its retreat to Burlington. The Americans made great efforts to parole all the inhabitants that had remained at home, and in two weeks had secured a list of five hundred persons who had given their parole in the County of Lincoln.

On the retreat of the invading army from Stoney Creek, the spirit of the loyal militia along their line of march was thoroughly aroused. General Vincent at once advanced, as he stated, " to give encouragement to the militia and yeomanry of the country who are everywhere rising upon the fugitive Americans and making them prisoners, and with-holding all supplies from them." On the 9th of June a party of the 2nd Lincoln captured a depot of provisions formed by the enemy near Queenston and actually took possession of the village itself.

The blockade at the American camp at Fort George was then discontinued. On the 9th of October the British forces retired to Burlington, and for two months the Niagara Peninsula lay open to the incursions of the enemy's irregular troops and marauding parties. The militia were disbanded and mostly disarmed.

During the whole of the campaign Captain W. H. Merritt's troop of Provincial Dragoons had been most actively employed and performed effective service. Major Lisle of the 19th Dragoons, under whose orders they served from July, 1813, until December, 1814, stated that this corps " were at all times

of, the most essential service from their perfect knowledge of the country and the zeal and bravery they always displayed in its defence."

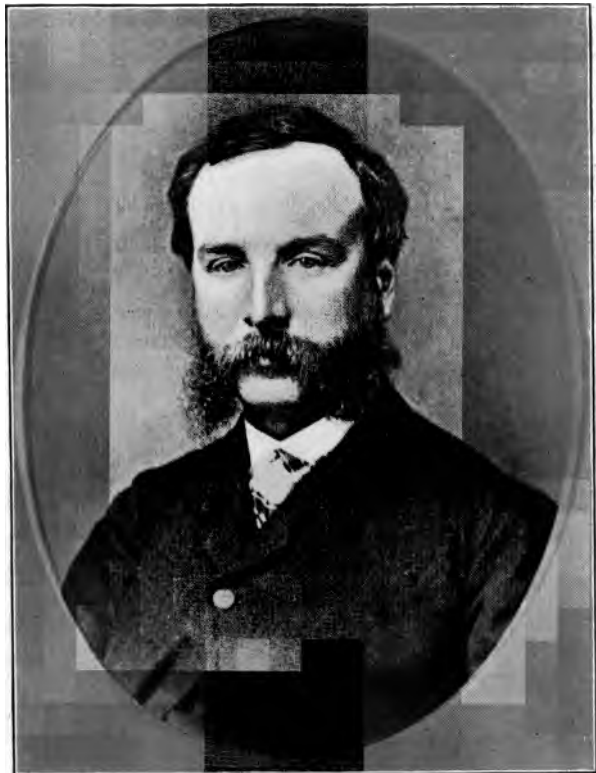
The battalion of Incorporated Militia authorized by the Act of Legislature had been recruited nearly to its full strength during the summer and autumn of 1813, chiefly with vigorous young men who had already served in the flank companies, with the exception of Captain William Robinson, of the 8th or King's Regiment, who was selected for the command with the local rank of lieutenant-colonel, and the Adjutant, Dennis FitzGerald, a lieutenant on half-pay of the 41st Regiment ; all the other combatant officers were taken from the militia, and most of them were natives of the province or had been born in the United States before the Revolution. A detachment of the new corps consisting of five officers and fifty or sixty non-commissioned officers and men had joined the centre division before Fort George in September, 1813, and other detachments were stationed at Cornwall, Kingston and York. During the winter of 1813-14 the whole of the battalion was assembled at York, and drilled into such an admirable state of discipline and efficiency that Sir Gordon Drummond determined to move it forward into the first line of defence on the Niagara, and withdraw one of the regular battalions, but before this was accomplished the enemy had again passed the river and the campaign had actually begun. On the 22nd of June, 1814, the battalion at York mustered twenty-nine officers and 402 non-commissioned officers and men. As soon as the landing of the enemy became known the 2nd Lincoln was assembled at Chippawa nearly three hundred strong. In conjunction with the light companies of the Royal Scots and moth Regiment and a body of Indians, it formed the advance of the British forces in the hard fought action at Street's Creek on the 5th of July, 1814, when after a warm contest the brigade of General Peter B. Porter, composed of volunteers and Indians from New York and Pennsylvania, was dislodged and routed with considerable loss in killed and wounded, and several of the officers made prisoners ; Lieut. Colonel Dickson was badly wounded, and the command devolved on Major David Secord, a veteran of the American Revolution, who continued the action with great bravery and judgment. Captains Rowe and Turney, Ensign Macdonell and nine non-commissioned officers and men were killed ; Lieuts. Clement and Bowman, Ensign Kirkpatrick and twelve rank and file wounded, while fifteen others reported as missing were also supposed to have been killed or wounded in the woods where the action took place.

At this time the 1st Brigade of Militia occupied an advanced position extending from the Ten Mile Creek to De Cew's and Streets Mills. " There was a good deal of skirmishing yesterday," General Riall wrote on the 19th, " with the advance of the militia and the enemy's outposts near St. Davids, and they have in consequence burnt that village and several of the neighboring houses. They have also burnt the whole of the houses between Queenston and the Falls.

The 2nd Brigade of Militia, under Lieut.-Colonel Hamilton, is at present at the Forty Mile Creek. I am happy to be able to inform you that almost the whole body of militia is in arms and seems actuated by the most determined spirit of hostility to the enemy." An American field officer fully corroborated this statement that " the whole population is against us, not a foraging party but is fired on and not unfrequently returns with missing numbers."

At the Battle of Lundy's Lane the battalion of Incorporated Militia came into contest with the enemy for the first time. In the early part of this action this corps was suddenly attacked in the flank by the 25th United States Infantry which had gained a commanding position on its left under cover of the darkness. The battalion lost heavily, fell into confusion, and was obliged to retire a short distance, when it was rallied and continued the contest with great steadiness. The total loss of the battalion was considerably more than one third of the whole number engaged.

The unusual proportion of wounded men to the number of killed was attributed to the use of buckshot by the enemy at close range, but many of the wounds were consequently very slight. Detachments of the Norfolk, Oxford and Middlesex Regiments and of the Essex and Kent Rangers arrived during the latter part of the battle, but were held in reserve and sustained no loss.



LIEUTENANT-COLONEL ALFRED BOOKER,
COMMANDING 13TH BATT. 1865-1866.

Although much reduced in numbers the battalion of Incorporated Militia shortly afterwards took an active and distinguished part in the investment of Fort Erie.

In a campaign of less than two months, beginning on the 25th of July and ending on the 17th of September, out of twenty-nine officers belonging to the Incorporated Militia three were killed and thirteen wounded, and upwards of one hundred and fifty non-commissioned officers and men were killed or wounded. It was disbanded by a general order dated March 10th, 1815.

The militia of the remaining counties of Upper Canada were afforded much less opportunity of earning distinction, but showed no less zeal and alacrity whenever summoned to defend the frontier, and likewise furnished their full quota for the Incorporated Militia. As soon as the declaration of war became known, the flank companies of the Eastern and Johnstown Districts assembled at Cornwall and Prescott and those of the Midland District at Kingston. By July 5th six hundred militia had marched into the latter town and a party of sixty men under Captain Patrick Smith sent in boats to escort some British merchant vessels into port fell in with a fleet of nine American sloops and schooners at the Upper Narrows, two of which they took and burnt and drove the remainder back to Ogdensburg, where they were blockaded for several weeks. Another party at Cornwall, commanded by Captain John Kerr, took a large number of large Durham boats ascending the St. Lawrence, one of which was converted into the gunboat Brock.

For several months during the winter of 1812-13 Ogdensburg was garrisoned, by a battalion of United States Rifles under Captain Forsyth, a very enterprising and aggressive officer, who began to annoy the inhabitants of the opposite shore by a succession of petty attacks. As early as January 19th, 1813, Colonel Vincent, then commanding at Kingston, complained to General Dodge, the commandant at Sackett's Harbor, of " the military excursions of Captain Forsyth which can have no other object in view than injury to private individuals and to increase the miseries of war to them without the possibility or even prospect of its attaining any public or private advantage." If they were not discontinued, he said, he would be forced to take such measures in self defence " as may prove very destructive to the villages and settlements on that frontier which is by no means my wish if it can be avoided."

General Dodge appears to have concurred in Vincent's estimate of Forsyth's operations for he replied that he would " take the earliest opportunity to caution the commanding officer at Ogdensburg against that inefficient mode of warfare."

Undeterred by this warning, Forsyth made a descent on Brockville on the morning of February 6th, where he surprised a flank company of the 1st Leeds Militia and made prisoners of Major Carley, Captains Ives and Stuart, Lieut. Morris and about twenty non-commissioned officers and men with nearly an equal number of unarmed inhabitants. There was no public property at the place except the arms of the militia. In reporting this incursion Lieut.-Colonel Sherwood of the Leeds Regiment suggested the propriety of retaliating by an attack on Ogdensburg if his force could be increased, and sent Captain Duncan Fraser with forty-five men across the river to reconnoitre on the night of February 7th. Fraser took a sentry and drove in the pickets when he retired without loss.

Two weeks then elapsed before the necessary permission for the attempt could be obtained. But at sunrise on February 2nd, Major George MacDonnel of the Glengarry Light Infantry, at the head of 210 regular troops and 270 militia under Lieut.-Colonel Thomas Fraser, made a direct frontal attack on the American batteries at that place. They were taken after an obstinate resistance, which cost him over fifty men in killed and wounded.

In the winter of 1813-14 a very successful little enterprise was planned and carried into execution by Captain Reuben Sherwood, of the Leeds Militia. On the 6th of February, 1814, he crossed the river from Point Iroquois to Hamilton with a subaltern and twenty Royal Marines and ten men of the Incorporated Militia, commanded by Captain Kerr. Guards were posted about the village, and every horse and sleigh in the place impressed, and he pushed rapidly forward fourteen miles inland to Madrid (now Columbia Village), where he recovered a large quantity of merchandise captured from British merchants on its way up the St. Lawrence the year before, and returned without molestation next day. " This bold excursion," says Dr. Hough, the local historian, " convinced the people that their lives and property were at the mercy of the British." It was followed up by a much more important raid by a column of about 600 regulars and militia under Colonel Scott, of the 103rd Regiment, also conveyed in sleighs, which destroyed the barrack at French Mills and brought off a great quantity of stores, February 19th to 24th, 1814.

The services of the militia during the contest, therefore, were neither few nor unimportant. The number actually enrolled in Upper and Lower Canada has been stated at 7,286, of whom 186 were cavalry, 163 artillery, 323 voltigeurs and 6,617 infantry. After the lapse of nearly thirty-five years a medal was struck to commemorate the deeds of the British army from 1793 to 1814, and strangely enough the only military operations in Canada considered worthy of notice in this manner were the capture of Detroit, the skirmish at Chateauguay and the battle of Chrysler's Farm. At Detroit and Chateauguay there was practically no fighting worth mentioning, and no militia had been engaged at Chrysler's Farm. The bloodiest and most important battles of the war, Queenston, the River Raisin, Miami, Stoney Creek, and Lundy's Lane, were absolutely unnoticed. Five hundred and thirty-one medals were, however, awarded to militiamen, 267 to residents of Upper Canada and 264 to persons living in Lower Canada ; and clasps were apportioned, 22 1 for Detroit, 260 for Chateauguay and 55 for Chrysler's Farm. Three militiamen proved their title to two clasps each, and one, Jean Baptist LeClair, to all three, but it is safe to say that the majority of the men who had seen the hardest fighting and performed the best service, received no recognition at this time.