

Backwater River and British Bluster: America wins the Arms Race on the Detroit River

Prelude: The British Fleet Cruises Cleveland

In a preview of the pivotal battle of Lake Erie in September of 1813, the British fleet from Fort Malden consisting of the *Queen Charlotte* and *Lady Prevost* with various smaller vessels appeared off Cleveland on June 19, 1813, and approached the mouth of the Cuyahoga River making ready to land. Terrified Clevelanders rushed to rally the militia, and soon scores of men with muskets on their shoulders, were hurrying toward the mouth of the Cuyahoga.

When the British fleet had sailed within a mile and a half of the harbor, the wind died down and the ships had to lie becalmed until afternoon. In the meantime, the militia gathered nearby and debated how to wheel the small, unmounted cannon from Cleveland village to the Cuyahoga River. Judge James Kingsbury, a paymaster in the army, took the back wheels of a heavy wagon, mounted the little cannon on them, and set it into position to shoot into the British ranks if they did land. The small ships moored in the Cuyahoga River were moved two miles up the river out of harm's way.

Suddenly, a powerful thunder storm shattered the calm of the afternoon and swept down Lake Erie, driving the British fleet far to the east of Cleveland. When the storm subsided, the British lay opposite Euclid Creek in the town of Euclid and a detachment of British sailors went ashore. They killed an ox, cut it up, including the hide, and took it on shipboard. This particular British crew turned out to be exceptionally polite, because they left a golden guinea in a cleft stick at the place where they had killed the ox and a note. In the note the British sailors apologized because they had been in such a hurry that they spoiled the

hide, and assured the Americans that if the thunder shower had not come they would have eaten their beef in Cleveland. The British sailed off down the lake, and the next time their vessels appeared in Lake Erie they were searching for the newly assembled American fleet, a prelude to the Battle of Lake Erie.¹

The War of 1812 ensured the survival of the United States as a sovereign nation and was fought in as many diverse ways as Americans were diverse. Soldiers fought the war with tomahawks and bayonets in the middle of swarms of black flies in forest clearings and in mosquito infested swamps. Armies lined up sixty feet apart on grassy fields, shooting to kill each other at point blank range. War canoes travelled 1,000 miles in ten days along ribbon waterways that flowed into the Great Lakes. Newly launched frigates fired cannon balls at each other and empires rose and fell on the strength of one battle. The French and the British fought the global parts of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, but crucial encounters in the struggle between the British and the Americans for domination of North America took place on the Detroit River with historic precedents from the French and vital contributions from the Native Americans. In fact, Native Americans and their maritime and woodsmen skills played an important part in the French and Indian War and the in the War of 1812.

In many respects the outcome of the struggle for the North American continent boiled down to the shipbuilding on the Detroit River and Lake Erie on both the American and British fronts and one decisive battle on Lake Erie. The British established a Navy Yard at Amherstburg at the mouth of the Detroit River where it flows into Lake Erie and built ships for Commander Barclay's British fleet, and Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry assembled his fleet at the little hamlet of Erie, Pennsylvania on Lake Erie. The two naval forces would meet at Put-in-Bay in Lake Erie and change the course of the world war raging in Europe.

¹ J. B. Mansfield, ed., *History of the Great Lakes*. Volume I(Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1899) p. 211-236.

Even though many British officers considered the war with the United States a minor annex to the European conflict, they had to divert troops to fight in the American theater and if they had diverted but a few more, they probably would have won the War of 1812. As it played out, when the British had defeated Napoleon and dispatched more troops to America in 1814, they raided the Chesapeake region and burned Washington D.C. before the Americans finally stopped them.

The Arms Race: Kings Navy Yard

The British had a head start in preparing for the epic battle with the Americans that culminated in the Battle of Lake Erie in September 1813. After the Americans won their War of Independence from Britain, the British kept a tight grip on several major posts on the Great Lakes that they were bound by treaty to evacuate. The British considered the Detroit region, in Michigan Territory, an essential post and they maintained substantial military installations there, including a fort at Detroit, one called Fort Malden in Amherstburg and a navy dockyard for over a decade after the Treaty of Paris ended the Revolutionary War.

The American Revolutionary War also influenced Canadian nationhood. British North America issued a Declaration of Independence and Constitution of its own with the Constitutional Act of 1791. In fact, Loyalists from the American colonies were partially responsible for the act. American Colonists who remained loyal to Great Britain during and after the American Revolution immigrated to Canada and introduced a new English speaking segment into the country, one accustomed to representative government and ownership of land by free men. The Quebec Act of 1774 did not adequately assimilate or govern these new settlers and the new Loyalist settlers quickly recognized and exploited this fact. In 1791, the British Parliament passed the Canada Act, now called the Constitutional Act of 1791, providing for the division of Quebec into Lower and Upper Canada and setting up assemblies

in both parts and freehold land tenure in Upper Canada. Ironically, the citizens of both French and English Canada would play important roles in the War of 1812.²

After they surrendered Detroit in 1796, the British began to build the Amherstburg Navy Yard in earnest and by May 1796, Lt. Colonel Richard England of the 24th Regiment reported, “I have the satisfaction of reporting that not a foot of timber that could be converted into any use is left here.”³ The British began constructing Fort Malden in 1799, and completed the earthworks and palisades of the fort in 1801. By 1804, troops had built at least ten buildings, including a guard house, powder magazine and blockhouse/barracks. Fort Malden served as the military garrison for the British along the Detroit River, a navy yard operated within it, and it also housed the headquarters for the British Indian Department.⁴

The navy yard, called the King’s Navy Yard operated from 1796-1813, was located south of the fort near the growing town of Amherstburg, and its facilities included blockhouses, a timber yard and a wharf. The Provincial Marine built the ships it used on the Great Lakes at the Navy Yard and Master Builder William Bell directed the building of ships ranging from small, open bateaux to three-masted schooners.⁵

Since the British desperately needed vessels to resupply the garrisons on the upper Great Lakes, the ships that were first built in the Navy Yard were small with a draft shallow enough to clear the bar at the entrance of Lake St. Clair. The engineers at the Navy Yard directed the troops in constructing blockhouses, store houses, a magazine, a wood yard and a

² Ernest J. Lajeunesse, ed. *The Windsor Region: Canada’s Southernmost Frontier: A Collection of Documents*. (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1960) p. 213

³ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Navigation a Century Ago*, *Detroit Free Press*, August 30, 1863; The Provincial Marine functioned as a small Canadian hybrid Navy, performing naval work but run by the military. The governor and commander of forces in British North America administered the Provincial marine and the Quarter-master General’s department of the army over saw it; Lajeunesse, *Canada’s Southern most Frontier: a Collection of Documents*, p.3

wharf. Later they built lime and mortar houses and wooden defensive picketing around the Navy Yard. By 1805, private contractors had built a rope walk near the Navy Yard, consisting of narrow, roofed sheds about 350 yards long with open sides. The contractors used locally grown hemp fiber to manufacture the yards of rope and cable that the sailing vessels of the day required.

The Deputy Quarter Master Department of the Provincial Marine recruited the sailors to man the ships that were built at the Kings Navy Yard. An 1802 report illustrated that the sailors who signed on the Provincial Marine were for the most part civilian mariners. Between April 1794 and October 1801, the Provincial Marine signed on 189 seamen. They were made up of 71 Englishmen, 36 Irish, 19 Scots, 29 foreigners and 34 Canadians. At this historical point, “Canadians” usually meant the French Canadians who accounted for about 20 percent of the enlistments as did the Irish. The English made up 40 percent.⁶

The Provincial Marine also provided a dockyard at the Navy Yard and the Store Keeper’s General Department hired the dockyard workers who consisted of highly skilled tradesmen. Sixteen people were listed in a quarterly pay report for Amherstburg, broken down into two foremen, seven carpenters, a blacksmith and his assistant, five sawyers and one laborer. Unlike the sailors, the dockyard workers had “British” names, with only one Canadian in their midst.⁷

Many skilled shipbuilders were lured to the Navy Yard at Amherstburg, including William Bell from England who signed on with the Provincial Marine as a shipwright in the Navy Yard. His skill earned him the position of Master-Shipwright and he drew the plans and

⁶ W.A.B. Douglas "The Anatomy of Naval Incompetence: The Provincial Marine in Defence of Upper Canada before 1813," *Ontario History*, 71, no. 1(March 1979): 3-25. Fort Malden National Historic Site Resource Centre Files.

⁷ Ibid

constructed all of the major vessels that the Navy Yard produced until the British burned it in 1813.

Bell and the other Provincial Marine shipwrights faced the chronic problem of the rapid decay of the wood used to build ships. Shipwrights believed they had to use green timber because of the difficulty of curing wood without first letting it rot, and as a result ships built with green wood wore out rapidly. The *Camden*, probably built between 1799 and 1804, was noted as unfit to go to sea and the six year old *General Hunter* as “falling fast into decay.”⁸

The schooner *Camden* was the first major vessel that Bell built at Amherstburg and in 1803 he drew up plans for the *General Hunter*. Initially, he rigged the *General Hunter* as a schooner, but later changed it to a brig. Construction began on the *General Hunter* in 1804 and her launching took place in 1805. She could carry eight 18 pounder carronades and four 4 pounder long guns.⁹

Both the *Camden* and the *General Hunter* illustrated the dual role of the Provincial Marine. The ships were constructed so that the holds could accommodate troops, but with partitions that held cargos that made stealing them a difficult task. The railings were strong enough to hold ringbolts for gun breechings. The Amherstburg yard also manufactured smaller craft. The workmen built ship’s boats for the marinas in Detroit and a long boat for the *Camden* in 1804. Bell’s workers also built many bateaux, which were large, open multi-oared boats with a single sail that were useful for carrying supplies and troops.¹⁰

⁸ William Wood, ed. *Select Documents of the Canadian War of 1812*. 3 volumes.(New York : Greenwood Press, 1968.)Vol. 1, p. 241.

⁹ General Hunter File. Ft. Malden Historical Site

¹⁰ William Wood, ed. *Select Documents of the Canadian War of 1812*. 3 volumes(New York Greenwood Press, 1968.)Vol. 1 p.242.

The Provincial Marine authorized the building of a larger ship in 1809, the *Queen Charlotte*, which Bell envisioned to be a three-masted, square rigged ship. She was 101 feet along the keel with a beam of about 28 feet and had full bulwarks instead of the open railings of the *General Hunter*. She was pierced for sixteen cannon and in many respects was built as a warship and not a transport vessel although she could carry troops and supplies. When she was launched in 1810, the *Queen Charlotte* was the largest in the Upper lakes fleet and provided the Provincial Marine with serious combat potential. She remained the largest ship in the fleet until the *Detroit* was completed in 1813. Also in 1810, the Navy Yard workers turned out the *Lady Prevost*, which was rigged as a schooner, displaced 96 tons, and measured 68 feet long along the deck and 18.5 feet in breadth. She could carry ten 12 pound carronades and three 9 pounder long guns.¹¹

At the King's Navy Yard in Amherstburg, Ontario, Ship master William Bell supervised the construction of the *Detroit*, his largest and last ship built at the Kings Navy Yard in the spring and summer of 1813, under very trying circumstances. King George III commissioned the *Detroit* to be built in honor of the brief capture of Fort Detroit, but shortages of everything from skilled labor, timber, cordage, ironwork and armament made building the *Detroit* difficult. Despite the difficulties, the workers completed her and she became the new flag ship of the Lake Erie Squadron. The *Detroit* was 400 tons burthen, about 120 feet long and

¹¹ William Wood, ed. *Select Documents of the Canadian War of 1812*. 3 volumes (New York Greenwood Press, 1968.) Vol. 1 p.242.

28 feet wide, and carried a variety of arms because of the shortages of armament, including eight 9 pounders, a 24 pounder and 18 pounder carronades.¹²

Besides building his major ships, in the spring of 1813 Bell built two gunboats, probably at Amherstburg. He and his builders quickly put them together to support General Procter's assault on Fort Meigs in April and the British burnt both of them to prevent the Americans from capturing them during the retreat along the Thames in October 1813.¹³

Throughout the 1790s the Provincial Marine supported the British military on the lakes by furnishing them with reliable ships to transport cargo and troops from garrison to garrison, but then like black wisps of cannon smoke, rumors about Amherstburg's commander Alexander Grant began to drift to the ears of government officials in York and Quebec City. By the 1810s, the governments at York and Quebec City were scrutinizing the Provincial Marine service and Commodore Alexander Grant was fixed firmly in their binocular sights.¹⁴

Along with William Bell, Alexander Grant had steadily advanced the cause of the Provincial Marine at Amherstburg. Born in 1734 in Scotland, he came to North America during the French and Indian War, probably as an ensign in the 77th Regiment of Foot. After the war, he continued his service with the Provincial Marine by taking charge of the dockyard at Navy Island and then at Detroit in 1771. By the end of the American Revolutionary War Grant commanded 77 personnel and eleven civilians and had expanded his private shipping interests. He built his home, Castle Grant, in Grosse Point, Michigan Territory, and continued to live there even after the British surrendered the Michigan Territory to the Americans in

¹² Ibid

¹³ Shipbuilding at Fort Amherstburg 1796-1813. Parks Canada. 1978.

¹⁴ "The Provincial Marine and Royal Navy on the Upper Great Lakes 1796-1815." In Navy - Provincial Marine File. Fort Malden National Historic Site Resource Centre.

1796. He may have been the only commodore of a military force on active duty to live in the land of his eventual opponent.¹⁵

Despite all of his other interests, Grant felt that his first duty was commander of the Provincial Marine at Amherstburg. Even though he had competently served his country through the French and Indian and Revolutionary Wars, Grant's contemporaries began to change their attitude toward him as the War of 1812 approached. They criticized him for what they termed lack of professional initiative as commodore of the upper lakes squadron and they disputed his administrative style. In February 1812, Captain Andrew Gray of the Quartermaster-General's Department noted in a report on the Provincial Marine that the seventy-eight year old Commodore should be removed because he was no longer effective and, indeed, might become a detriment to the Marine. After fifty four years with the Provincial Marine, Grant retired in March of 1812 and his second in command, Captain George B. Hall, replaced him.¹⁶

After Grant retired, the British assessed their position at Amherstburg. In the same report that recommended that Commodore Grant retire, Captain Gray listed the vessels that were ready or could be readied for service in 1812. He listed the *Queen Charlotte*, with ten 24 pounder carronades, and six long guns; the *Lady Prevost*, with ten 12 pounder carronades; and the General *Hunter*, with six 6 pounder carronades. Captain Gray's allegation that the British did not have enough personnel to adequately operate their ships as warships seemed to be validated by the 1812 Provincial Marine numbers. There were five officers, two petty officers, forty seamen and two naval yard personnel, clearly not enough to man three vessels

¹⁵ Carol Whitfield, "Alexander Grant", in *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Volume 5. ed: Frances G. Halpenny. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), pp 363-367.

¹⁶ Wood, Vol 1, p. 254. Whitfield, "Alexander Grant." Grant and his Theresa is wife of 36 years had a family of 11 daughters and one son. Grant died on May 8, 1813 at his beloved home Castle Grant and was buried in Sandwich. (Now Windsor)

as warships. Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada General Isaac Brock proposed that an additional 100 seamen be added to the roster and that two companies of troops from the Royal Newfoundland Regiment be used as Marines and seamen.¹⁷

Arms Race: Native American Mariners

When the first Europeans arrived in North America, they brought advanced maritime technology, firearms, and advanced metals technologies into the contest to seize the New World. Their first miscalculation occurred when hardy Native American tribesmen greeted them instead of representatives of the Chinese Empire. Their second miscalculation was underestimating Native American sophistication. Native Americans brought superior sanitation, agricultural innovation and the technology of the birch bark canoe, an invention that ultimately led to the destruction of their culture.

For decades, Europeans depended on boats built with the basic technological elements as their sea going ships to navigate inland waters in the New World and stayed behind the technological curve as a result. When the first French explorers penetrated the St. Lawrence River system in the late 1500s, they were astonished to find Native Americans using boats made of birch bark to travel the smallest streams to the greatest of the Great Lakes.

There is no record of the first Native American inventor who came up with the idea of using birch bark as the hull covering for a canoe. The design may have come from the kayaks of the Inuits of the far north who fearlessly sailed their hide covered boats across hundreds of miles of open ocean. Around 1500 A.D., an inventive Native American or a group of tribesmen built a frame of split cedar or spruce and covered it with large sheets of bark carefully peeled from birch trees. Gradually, the Chippewa who called themselves the Ojibwa

¹⁷ Wood, Volume 1, p. 289.

standardized the classic birch bark canoe. They built their canoes in a variety of sizes and traded some of them to the Ottawa who established a great inland North American trade empire well before the Europeans “discovered” the New World.

When the French arrived, the Native Americans had already developed an extensive system of inland trade routes and the technology to exploit them. Depending on perspective, Samuel de Champlain’s actions in helping an Algonquian tribes fight their Iroquois neighbors was either a disaster because he initiated 200 years of Iroquois hatred for the French or a coup because he made instant friends of the Ottawa and the rest of the Algonquian tribes who had spent generations under the domination of the hated and feared Iroquois.. At one point in his journeys, Champlain abandoned his sailboats and used 24 war canoes that his Indian allies had on hand.¹⁸

The French quickly adapted the Ojibwa canoe technology. Eventually, French fur traders standardized canoes into three sizes, the canot-any canoe up to about twenty or so feet long; the canot du nord (north canoe)-canoes of about 25 feet long; and the canot de maitre-master canoe- also called the Montreal canoes- canoes of 35-40 feet long. The smaller canoes were used on small and shallow inland rivers and creeks. North canoes – cargo capacity of about three tons-were primary freight haulers on medium rivers. Giant Montreal canoes-cargo capacity of about six tons- were used to transport freight on the largest rivers and the Great Lakes. The Native Americans also developed war canoes which were painted in symbolic

¹⁸ Raymonde Litalien and Denis Vaugeois. *Champlain: the birth of French America* (McGill: Queen’s University Press, 2004) p 45.

designs, and were once a familiar sight on the Great Lakes. They held at least 15 warriors, some who paddled and some who fired weapons at their enemies.¹⁹

Birch bark canoes had some drawbacks. Although they were relatively tough, their hulls could be torn in rocky rapids and were not practical to use where birch bark for repairs was not readily available. Basically, Native Americans handed Europeans the seeds of their own destruction when they taught them birch bark canoe technology. Without canoes, the exploration and exploitation of the interior of North America would have taken a very different course and the French and later the British would not have been able to establish the fur trade in North America. War canoes and the Native Americans and voyageurs who manned them were also important weapons in the War of 1812.²⁰

After the American Revolution, the British had maintained their old Indian alliances through the activities of military garrisons and Indian agents and regularly distributed presents as part of these efforts. The British Indian Department in Amherstburg played a vital role on the Detroit River. Experienced and resourceful people such as Simon Girty, Matthew Elliott, and Alexander McKee, veterans of the Revolutionary War led the Amherstburg Indian Department which sought the allegiance of the tribes in the Northwestern Territories and their loyalty in case of a war with America. The efforts of Girty, Elliott, and McKee and other Indian Agents made Fort Amherstburg a supply center for the Indian tribes and their main source of food, cloth, tools, weapons and ammunition. The success of these Indian Agents just across the river irritated Americans who felt that the Amherstburg Indian

¹⁹ The Canadian Canoe Museum; Reflections, "Those Marvelous Ojibwa built birch bark canoes," Roger Matile, *Ledger-Sentinel*, Oswego, Illinois. November 9, 2006.

²⁰ *Historical collections. Collections and researches made by the Michigan pioneer and historical society ...* Reprinted by authority of the Board of state auditors. Volume 16 FROM MR. ASKIN-Indians, p. 76. Clark Historical Library. Central Michigan University.

Department was interfering with internal American affairs. The parade of war canoes paddling down the Detroit River inflamed many Americans and the policies of the Amherstburg Indian Department pushed the United States and Great Britain closer to a confrontation.²¹

As the year 1811 drew to a close, the Indians of the Great lakes region were increasingly armed and restless, due in large part to the influence of the Amherstburg Indian Department. M. Lothier, agent for the Michilimackinac Company, wrote on January 13, 1812, that the Indians in the territory where his company traded were all unhappy with the American government and that if a war between the British and Americans happened “every Indian that can bear arms would gladly commence hostilities against the Americans.”²²

Shawnee Chief Tecumseh emerged as the most prominent British ally. Like the Amherstburg Navy Yard and the British and Americans, the Indian involvement in the War of 1812 was rooted deeply in previous wars and Indian alliances. Both the French and British had divided and exploited Native American alliances during the French and Indian War and the American Revolution had proven disastrous to Native American alliances and lands. The Western Confederation of the Revolutionary War which had begun as a purely Indian political organization had gradually become absorbed into a European alliance despite the efforts of its earlier leaders like Joseph Brant to keep it separate.

After the Americans won the Revolutionary War, they continued to appropriate Indian lands and destroy Indian villages and the Confederation had been forced to move to the Huron/Wyandot village of Brownstown or Sindathon’s Village at the mouth of the Detroit River, a move that confronted the issue of the Confederation’s relationship with the British.

²¹ “Navigation a Century Ago,” Detroit Free Press, August 30, 1863.

²² Gregory Evans Dowd. *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815*(Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993 pp.)xiii, 135-137.

The move also came with a price for the Indians. Joseph Brant and the Iroquois demanded that the Huron or Wyandot make a clean break with the British before they would agree to light a council fire at Brownstown. After the Sandusky villages of the Wyandot were destroyed by their enemies, they moved the council fire to Brownstown. Walk-in-the-Water and seven other of the Wyandot chiefs petitioned the United States on February 5, 1812, and won a fifty year possession of Brownstown and Monguagon. He lived at Brownstown and commanded the Wyandot warriors.²³

Tecumseh led a force made up of several Indian tribes including Ottawa, Shawnee, and Pottawatomie in their role in the War of 1812. Although he was born just outside the present day town of Xenia, Ohio, he eventually settled in what is now Greenville, Ohio where his younger brother Tenskwatawa or “The Prophet” lived. In 1805, Tenskwatawa led a religious revival urging Native Americans to reject the ways of the white man and warning them not to cede any more land to the United States. Following the self destructive thread in their history, the Indians did not agree among themselves and a Shawnee leader Black Hoof opposed Tenskwatawa and worked to maintain a peaceful relationship with the United States.

Eventually Tenskwatawa and his brother Tecumseh established a series of multi-tribal villages under their leadership, first at Greenville and later at Tippecanoe, that remained largely but not entirely outside the network of American alliance chiefs. Tecumseh and Tenskwatawa were involved in the Shawnee movement to resurrect the confederation council fire at Brownstown. Tecumseh revived an old idea of Blue Jacket and Mohawk leader Joseph Brant which stated that all tribes commonly owned Indian lands and that no land could be sold without them all agreeing to the sale. The movement also involved an effort to restore

²³ Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge University Press, 1991) p.433.

an alliance between the Brownstown allies, the Cherokee, the Sauks and the Fox to resist the Americans.

By the early nineteenth century the primary source of resistance to the Americans and the one that Tecumseh would ultimately rely on did not come from Brownstown, but from the villages in Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin made up of Kickapoos, Sauks and Fox, Chippewas, Winnebagos, Menominees, and western Potawatomis. For a short time in 1812 and 1813 in the closing days of the peace before the Americans declared war, the British and the Algonquians resurrected an alliance on the middle ground. Tecumseh's rebuilt confederacy merged into a British alliance in the War of 1812.²⁴

After the Americans declared war on the British in June 1812, "Tecumseh's War" became part of that struggle. Because of American-Native American events like the Treaty of Greenville and the Battle of Tippecanoe, the American effort to neutralize British-Native American cooperation backfired and Tecumseh and his followers became more firmly committed to an alliance with Britain. For a time the British strategy for the defense of western Canada was a joint British-Algonquian strategy,

In August 1812, Tecumseh joined British Major-General Sir Isaac Brock in forcing the Americans to surrender Fort Detroit. Tecumseh demonstrated his military prowess in this endeavor. Brock advanced to a point just out of range of Detroit's guns and Tecumseh ordered his warriors to parade from a nearby wood and circle around to make their numbers seem larger. Brigadier General William Hull, the commander of Ft. Detroit, surrendered because he feared a massacre from the large Indian force.

The British had devoted much time and effort to consolidating their Indian allies. John Askin wrote from Michilimackinac in June 1813 that he was actively recruiting Indians

²⁴ White, *The Middle Ground*, p. 516

from the Michigan side of Lake Huron including the Chippewa from the Genesee Valley and the Detroit area Indians. He and other British agents and traders persuaded many of the Indians that “the lives of their children” depended on British success in the War.²⁵

Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry’s victory in the Battle of Lake Erie in the fall of 1813 cut British supply lines and forced them to withdraw from Detroit. They burned all public buildings and retreated into Upper Canada along the Thames Valley. Tecumseh followed, fighting rearguard actions to slow the United States advance, but the British were defeated and Tecumseh was killed at the Battle of the Thames

The British and Canadian accounts of the War of 1812 feature numerous mentions of Indian allies and the important part their canoes and maritime back up played in the battles and daily skirmishes. One of the few of the American mentions of Native Americans taking part in battle occurs in the account of Dr. Usher Parsons aboard the *Lawrence*. He said that when the battle of Lake Erie was raging most severely, “Midshipman Lamb came down with his arm badly fractured. I applied a splint and requested him to go forward and lie down; as he was leaving me, and while my hand was on him, a cannon ball struck him in the side, and dashed him against the other side of the room, which instantly terminated his sufferings. Charles Pohig, a Narragansett Indian, who was badly wounded, suffered in like manner.”²⁶

As was always tragically true in European-Algonquian relations, British imperial goals superseded Native American interests. After Tecumseh died at the Battle of the Thames, his alliance died with him. The imperial contest ended with the War of 1812 and the pivotal role of the Indian did as well. Native Americans were no longer a major threat or asset

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ J. B. Mansfield, ed., *History of the Great Lakes*. Volume I (Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1899) p. 211-236.

to an empire or republic. Fortunately for Tecumseh, death released him from long years of exile and a legacy of American defeat and domination.

The War: Year One, 1812

Lt. Rolette Captures the *Cuyahoga*

When the United States declared war on Great Britain on June 19, 1812, the British immediately seized control of Lake Erie. They already enjoyed the benefit of the Provincial Marine's small core of war ships and generations of occupation and influence in the Great Lakes. It took several days for word of the war to reach Fort Amherstburg. When Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas St. George of the 63rd Regiment received the news, he acted promptly. On July 2, 1812, the American schooner *Cuyahoga* sailed up the Detroit River loaded with supplies and a military band. A contingent of sick soldiers belonging to Brigadier-General William Hull's North Western Army followed in a smaller boat. Even though St. George knew that Great Britain and America were at war, the Americans did not.

As the *Cuyahoga* passed Fort Amherstburg, Lieutenant Frederick Rolette of the Provincial Marine rowed out to the ship backed by a polyglot force of soldiers, sailors and Native Americans. The surprised Americans put up only token resistance and after he fired his pistol in the air to get the *Cuyahoga* to heave-to, Lt. Rolette captured the *Cuyahoga*, although the smaller boat carrying the sick soldiers passed on unmolested to Detroit. Lt.

Rolette rejoiced to discover that the *Cuyahoga* carried Hull's papers outlining various plans for a campaign against Fort Amherstburg.²⁷

Thomas Vercheres de Boucherville described the capture of the *Cuyahoga* on July 2, 1812:

At two o'clock in the afternoon a small vessel appeared sailing lightly from the open lake into the mouth of the river but the wind was unfavorable and her speed lessened somewhat. With the aid of a glass it was easily discovered that she carried the American flag and it seemed probable that her captain was unaware of the knowledge we had, that war had been declared. Finding myself by chance in the ship yard where the Queen Charlotte was under construction, I came upon Lieutenant Frederic Rolette in the act of launching a boat manned by a dozen sailors, all well armed with sabers and pickaxes, and I hastened to ask him where he was going with that array. "To make a capture," he replied, as he ordered his men to row in all haste in the direction of the vessel which was slowly but steadily making her way up the river, all unconscious of the fate awaiting her. I asked some Indians who were standing around if they would follow that boat. They expressed their readiness for the venture and we hurriedly entered one of their canoes, our sole weapons being three guns loaded with duck shot and two tomahawks. Rolette's boat reached the vessel's side a few minutes ahead of us and the men boarded her without meeting any resistance. Either the crew was unaware that war had been declared or they were uncertain of the relations between the two countries. The next instant I came up with my Indians and to leap aboard required only a moment. My friend then ran up the British flag and ordered the American Band to play "God Save the King." I should have stated that this vessel carried all the musical instruments of Hull's army

²⁷ Milo Milton Quaife, editor. *War on the Detroit: The Chronicles of Thomas Vercheres de Boucherville and the Capitulation by an Ohio Volunteer* (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, R.R. Donnelley & Sons, Co., Christmas 1940) p. 77-78.

*besides much of the personal baggage of his men. This was the first prize of the war and it was taken by a young French Canadian.*²⁸

The capture of the *Cuyahoga* was not the last time that the Americans would encounter Provincial Marine Lieutenant Frederic Rolette. Lieutenant Rolette entered the Royal Navy as a young boy, was wounded at the Battle of the Nile in 1799, and also fought at Trafalgar in 1805. He took a commission as a second lieutenant in the Provincial Marine in October 1807, and commanded the Brig *General Hunter* until the Royal Navy arrived at Fort Malden in 1813.

Lieutenant Rolette performed daring exploits during the War of 1812 that often drove him onto dangerous shoals, and his pistol shot at the taking of the *Cuyahoga* may have been the starting shot of the war. Besides the *Cuyahoga*, Lt. Rolette also captured over a dozen other ships during the war, including boats and bateaux. He also had an important role in the defense of the River Canard in July 1812 and at the capture of Detroit in August 1812. He commanded a Marine contingent during the Battle of Frenchtown in January 1813, where he once again was badly wounded. He recovered sufficiently enough to take part in the Battle of Lake Erie and took over command of the *Lady Prevost* when the Royal Navy commander Lieutenant Edward Buchan was incapacitated. He was also severely wounded in the Battle of Lake Erie and spent the rest of the war in an American prisoner of war camp. The citizens of Quebec presented him a 50 guinea sword after the war in recognition of his services. He died in 1831 at the age of 48, never completely recovering from his many wounds.²⁹

Determined to give the Americans a good fight, British General Isaac Brock sent 600 Ojibwa, 180 French-Canadian voyageurs and 60 redcoats to take Fort Mackinac. General

²⁸ Milo Milton Quaife, editor. *War on the Detroit: The Chronicles of Thomas Vercheres de Boucherville and the Capitulation by an Ohio Volunteer* (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, R.R. Donnelley & Sons, Co., Christmas 1940) p. 77-78.

²⁹ Wood, Vol. 1, p. 558

Brock signed an agreement with Tecumseh, forging an alliance between British troops and northern Indians.³⁰

Lt. Hanks Had a Premonition

For over a week, Lieutenant Porter Hanks, in charge of America's most remote outpost at Fort Mackinac, had felt a premonition of disaster. The small island garrison of Michilimackinac rests in the narrow waterway where the northern tips of Lake Huron and Lake Michigan meet, so although small in size, its strategic value is immense. Lt. Hanks had noticed a cooling in the attitudes of the Native Americans in the area and with each passing day, he observed an increasing number paddle past the Fort heading north. He assumed that the Indians were rendezvousing at the British fort on St. Joseph's Island, but he could not think of a reason for them to gather there.

The Indians had a good reason to paddle the forty-five miles to the northeast. They journeyed to join a group of voyageurs, traders, and British regulars who had spent several days preparing to capture Fort Mackinac. After he heard that America had declared war, General Brock immediately sent a team of voyageurs to canoe 1,200 miles up to Ft. St. Joseph to officially confirm that America had indeed declared war. Shortly after that, General Brock issued an order to attack Michilimackinac. Lt. Hanks had not heard anything about these developments; in fact, he had not heard anything from American Secretary of War Henry Dearborn in nine months.³¹

Shortly before dawn on the morning of July 17, 1812, Lt. Hanks and his garrison were still asleep when seventy war canoes and ten overloaded bateaux deposited the British force

³⁰ Milo Milton Quaife, editor. *War on the Detroit: The Chronicles of Thomas Vercheres de Boucherville and the Capitulation by an Ohio Volunteer* (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, R.R. Donnelley & Sons, Co., Christmas 1940) p. 77-78.

³¹ Alec Gilpin, *The Territory of Michigan: 1805-1837* (Michigan State University Press, 1970) p. 149.

two miles away at the north end of Michilimackinac. By daybreak, two British cannon had been set up on a hill overlooking the fort and trained Americans in their sights. The British herded all of the inhabitants of the village from their homes and guarded them in the distillery at the south end of town. Everyone but Lt. Hanks and his battalion of sixty ill and ill-prepared soldiers realized that the British had indeed landed.

As the soldiers awakened, the British and their Indian allies revealed their presence and Lt. Hanks, being an experienced officer, carried out textbook defensive measures. He watched his men scramble for arms, and accurately read the handwriting on the wall. The British, who had positioned themselves well, heavily outnumbered the American soldiers and the Indian presence made Lt. Hanks uneasy, because he sensed a real potential for a massacre.

The British accurately interpreted the apprehension of Lt. Hanks and approached under a flag of truce to give him the chance to surrender. Civilian hostages in the truce party and his friends urged him to save his men and give up the Fort, and Lt. Hanks surrendered. By sheer cunning and audacity, the British force captured strategic Fort Mackinac, and the traders, Indians, and British soldiers seized the supplies of whiskey, pork and furs in the Fort. Lt. Hanks and his men were among the first official prisoners in the War of 1812, a war that they were not aware had started.

The British shipped Lt. Hanks and his men off to be paroled in America and compelled the remaining inhabitants of the Fort to swear allegiance to the British King. They did not mind swearing allegiance to the King, because many of them had been British subjects before the Americans landed on Mackinac Island less than twenty years before.

Lieutenant Rolette Helps Capture Detroit

Lieutenant Rolette, in the meantime, was present at the capture of Detroit in August 1812. On July 5, 1812, General Hull and his army arrived in Detroit and by July 12, 1812, General Hull and his forces had crossed the Detroit River between Detroit and Sandwich above Fort Amherstburg in an invasion of Upper Canada. General Hull issued a proclamation assuring Canadians that “I come to protect and not to injure you.”³²

The American Army was twice the size of the British detachment so when the Essex Militia stationed in Sandwich met them at a bridge over the River Canard on July 16, 1812, the Americans pushed back the British. The British withdrew to Amherstburg, but General Hull worried about his supply lines and lack of heavy artillery to batter Fort Amherstburg, so he did not follow up his victory. The Americans set up camp at Francois Baby’s farm on the Detroit River and General Hull issued a proclamation that convinced about 500 Canadian Militiamen to desert. The Americans followed the British towards Amherstburg, but Canadian ships anchored near the mouth of the River Canard and British troops and Indians stopped the Americans from advancing to Amherstburg. General Hull wanted to use his large guns against Fort Malden at Amherstburg, so he delayed the attack for two weeks while the guns were being readied.

The British were not yet strong enough to push the Americans off Canadian soil, so they focused their military efforts against Hull’s supply lines. Groups of British regulars, Canadian Militia and Indians fanned out from Fort Amherstburg, jeopardizing American communication and supply lines on the west bank of the Detroit River. They attacked two key American supply lines and in early August 1812, Captain Henry Brush led an American relief column from the River Raisin in Monroe to Detroit, bringing in cattle and other

³² James J. Talman, *Basic Documents in Canadian History* (Toronto: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1959)p. 78.

supplies to General Hull's Army. Captain Brush sent a messenger to General Hull who was encamped at the Canadian town of Sandwich, near present day Windsor, Ontario. The message advised him that Shawnee Chief Tecumseh and some of his warriors had crossed the Detroit River and advanced to the vicinity of Brownstown, and that British regulars were probably escorting and advising him.³³

Captain Brush asked General Hull to send him troops from Detroit to protect his supply column and on August 4, 1812, Major Thomas Van Horne, commander, and 200 Ohio militia marched south down the road they had just cut through the Black Swamp to bring supplies to Detroit. As Major Van Horne and his men crossed Brownstown Creek, three miles north of the village, Tecumseh and 24 of his Indian combatants ambushed one of the supply columns. Amidst the confusion of crackling rifles, flitting shadows and revolving battle lines the Americans began to retreat. The Indians chased the Americans as far as the Ecorse River before they melted into the woods and the Americans returned to Detroit.³⁴

The American casualties in the Battle of Brownstown included 18 men killed, 12 wounded and 70 men missing. The Indians lost one chief. The skirmish outside of Brownstown did not turn the tide of the war, but it did reveal that the American supply line to Ohio was not secure and convinced General Hull that the British and Indian forces outnumbered him, a conviction that would ultimately lead to the surrender of Detroit to the British.³⁵

For days after the Battle of Brownstown, the British forces stayed in place, anticipating another American force that had not materialized. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas

³³ The Battle at Brownstown: American and British accounts, Columbian Centinel, September 12, 1812. Parks Canada Teacher Resources Centre: file:///A:/americanindians_1812.htm

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ The Battle at Brownstown: American and British accounts, Columbian Centinel, September 12, 1812. Parks Canada Teacher Resources Centre: file:///A:/americanindians_1812.htm

St. George had sent in reinforcements so that now the British numbered nearly four hundred, but days of inactivity and depleted rations had caused Adam Muir to order his force back into their boats and return to Fort Malden. Suddenly, Tecumseh galloped up and told Muir about another detachment of Americans coming. Tecumseh planned another ambush, this time close to the Indian village of Monguagon. The odds seemed to be in favor of the 600 American soldiers, including an artillery unit which would be pitted against Muir's 400 British militiamen and Tecumseh's Indian soldiers.³⁶

On August 8, another American force marched toward Monroe on a mission to reach Hull's supply train at River Raisin and escort it to Detroit. Near Monguagon, American Scouts ran into the British and Indian force of about 400 men, led by Captain Adam Muir and Tecumseh. The British and Indians blocked the road south and Lieutenant Colonel James Miller quickly mustered his Americans. In a running battle, the Americans drove the British and Indians back through Monguagon until the British retreated across the Detroit River in canoes and rowboats.

During the following week, Major General Isaac Brock, acting Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada docked at Amherstburg with reinforcements. The deserting militiamen returned and Tecumseh and Brock designed a plan to attack Detroit. The British reoccupied Sandwich and started to shell Detroit. On August 16, they crossed the Detroit River and the British and Militia fanned out to the southwest of Detroit and Tecumseh's native warriors scattered into the woods west and north of Detroit. Their combined strength- approximately 2,000 strong-almost matched the strength of Hull's remaining forces. A thoroughly demoralized Hull surrendered Detroit on August 16, 1812.³⁷

³⁶ Alec R. Gilpin, *The Territory of Michigan, 1805-1837* (Michigan State University Press, 1970)p. 13-32.

³⁷ Ibid

Hull's surrender gave the British several unanticipated advantages. The British confiscated cannons, muskets and supplies stored at Detroit to equip and feed the Canadian Militia and their Indian Allies. The lack of an American Army reduced the threat to Fort Amherstburg and southwest Upper Canada and paved the way for the British and Canadians to occupy Michigan territory. Now that Brock had secured his flank, he could shift his forces away from the Detroit River region to the Niagara Frontier. Colonel Henry Procter of the 41st Regiment inherited Brock's command and a military conundrum: how to hold Detroit and Michigan territory with very limited forces – the very same question that Hull had pondered.

In October 1812, Governor General Sir George Prevost asked Lord Bathurst, Colonial Secretary, for drafts of Royal Navy officers and men to provide a core of naval professionals to man the vessels on the lakes. This call proved to be timely because by December 1812, Captain Andrew Gray, now Acting Deputy Quarter Master General, sent a memo to Prevost, evaluating the American project of constructing a fleet at Presque Isle, Pennsylvania. Captain Gray saw the America fleet as such a threat to British control of the Great Lakes that he felt “nothing can save our navy from destruction.”³⁸

The War: Year Two, 1813

The Americans did not allow Hull's surrender to demoralize them. They built a second North Western Army with William Henry Harrison, Governor of Indiana Territory, in command. Governor Harrison planned a winter campaign to regain lost territory and to attack the British at Amherstburg, hoping that ice on the Detroit River would encase the British vessels and serve as a bridge for his 4,000- man army. General Harrison and the British commander, General Procter, and their forces clashed at the Battle of Frenchtown on January 22, 1813. Although the battle was hard fought with heavy losses on both sides, Procter and

³⁸ Wood, Volume 2, p. 298

his troops prevailed. The next day the Indians massacred wounded American prisoners, creating enough American outrage to ensure their inevitable defeat. A detachment of the Provincial Marine, numbering 28 men of all ranks and acting as artillerymen actively participated in the Battle of Frenchtown. They suffered over 50 percent casualties with one man killed and sixteen wounded.³⁹

The British had to control Lake Erie to win the War of 1812, and they faced a severe supply problem in maintaining this control. The region around Lake Erie and the Detroit River did not produce enough crops and livestock to feed General Procter's troops, the British sailors on Lake Erie or the multitude of Tecumseh's warriors and their families gathered at Amherstburg. The British maintained their control of Lake Erie from June 1812 until July 1813, when the American fleet that Commodore Perry was building at Presque Isle became a deciding factor in the War.

In the spring of 1813, the Provincial Marine proved itself once again as an effective transport service when it carried General Henry Procter's force of Regulars and Militia across Lake Erie to besiege the American base of Fort Meigs in Perrysburg, Ohio. Over 500 Regulars embarked on the *Queen Charlotte*, *General Hunter*, *Chippewa*, *Mary*, *Nancy* and *Miamis*, and 462 Essex Militia were loaded onto numerous bateaux. The Marine also shipped large stores and large caliber cannons to bombard the fort. The operation and one later in July did not defeat the Americans, but the officers and men of the Provincial Marine were an important part of the campaign.

Responding to the American threat on the Great Lakes, the British sent two Royal Naval contingents to the Great Lakes in the spring of 1813 to supersede the Provincial Marine. Captain James Lucas Yeo commanded the largest group of about 446 officers and

³⁹ Wood, Volume 2, Page 10

men that arrived directly from England. Robert Heriot Barclay, a Royal Navy veteran of the Battle of Trafalgar, led a smaller group of nine officers and gunners who came from the Atlantic command of Sir John Warden.

Robert Heriot Barclay had a similar seafaring biography to Oliver Hazard Perry. Barclay served aboard the *HMS Diana* in the English Channel and in November 1809, lost his left arm leading a boarding attack on a French convoy. He recovered and continued to serve as a Lieutenant aboard several ships on the North American station. After the United States declared war in June 1812, Admiral Sir John Borlase Warren, Commander in Chief of the North American station, detached Barclay and two other Lieutenants, Robert Finnis and Daniel Pring, to act as captains of corvettes on the Great Lakes. On May 5, 1813, Barclay arrived at Kingston on Lake Ontario and took charge of the squadron there as acting commander. Ten days later Captain James Lucas Yeo took charge and when his friend William Mulcaster declined his offer to be commander of the detached squadron on Lake Erie because he felt the squadron was undermanned and unprepared, Captain Yeo extended the offer to Barclay. Barclay immediately accepted.⁴⁰

By 1813, the Americans dominated Lake Ontario and held the Niagara Peninsula, and Commander Barclay had to travel overland to Amherstburg to his command with just a handful of officers and seamen. Arriving there on June 5, 1813, he immediately set sail in two of his armed vessels to assess the American fleet. At this point the Americans did not

⁴⁰ Barclay was not actually a captain in rank. He was a commander, a rank midway between lieutenant and captain. Since he commanded a ship on Lake Erie he was in fact a captain and was so addressed. Actually he should have been called by courtesy a commodore, like Perry, who was only a lieutenant in rank, because he commanded a squadron. But Barclay's superior, Sir James Yeo, was only a commodore. Howard H. Peckham, "Commodore Perry's Captive. *Ohio History: The Scholarly Journal of the Ohio Historical Society*, Volume 72., p.222

have any armed vessels on the lakes, but they were constructing ships at Presque Isle and transferring several from Black Rock. Commander Barclay reconnoitered Presque Isle and noted that the Americans had a force of 2000 militia and the two American brigs already had their lower masts fitted. Next, he attempted to intercept the American ships from Black Rock, but the foggy weather caused the two fleets to miss each other. Later Commander Barclay learned that he and the Americans had been only about fourteen miles apart off Cattaraugus Creek.

Only a small portion of the Royal Navy officers and seamen were sent to the Navy Yard at Amherstburg. Captain Yeo ordered Barclay there to assume the command of Commodore Hall and Barclay arrived with three officers, a surgeon, a purser, a master's mate and nineteen men. He had only the smallest core of naval professionals and the majority of the seamen and many of the officers that he commanded were not Royal Navy sailors. A roster for July 1813 listed 108 Canadians, 54 sailors, and 106 of the 41st regiment soldiers as serving aboard the vessels at Amherstburg.⁴¹

Commander Barclay pleaded for an additional 250-300 professional seamen, but had received fewer than fifty reinforcements before the battle of Lake Erie. During the summer of 1813, Barclay, Bell and General Procter frantically tried to prepare the *Detroit* and the Amherstburg fleets for action. The lack of trained seamen and supplies were to be critical factors in the autumn encounter with Oliver Hazard Perry and his fleet.

The Arms Race: Perry and Dobbins Build a Fleet

The most significant American threat to Fort Amherstburg materialized in late 1812 and into the summer of 1813. On July 16, 1812, Captain Daniel Dobbins was at Mackinac with his schooner *Salina* that he had just purchased. Captain Dobbins had navigated the lakes

⁴¹ Wood, Vol 2, p. 252; Wood, Vo. 2, p. 298.

for many years and intimately knew their shores, harbors, and citizens on both sides of the border. Word came that the United States and Great Britain were at war. The American force at Fort Mackinac, 56 in all, was captured and Captain Dobbins and his crew were ordered to take the oath of allegiance or give their word of honor not to take up arms against Great Britain during the war. Captain Dobbins refused to do this and because of the intercession of Mr. Wilmoth of the British Northwest Fur Company, he was allowed to leave with the *Salina* as cartel, to take his fellow prisoners to Fort Malden. His fellow prisoners included Rufus Seth Reed and William W. Reed of Erie and 29 others.

At Detroit, Captain Dobbins and the *Salina* found General Hull and his troops camped on the Canadian shore and Captain Dobbins joined two different expeditions against the British. He came back to Detroit with General Hull's army and was in Colonel Mack's Company which volunteered to take some mounted guns and drive the British ship *Queen Charlotte* and brig *Hunter* from their moorings off Spring Wells where they were landing soldiers to march into Detroit. Hull refused to allow them to try to stop the *Queen Charlotte* and the *Hunter*. After Hull surrendered Detroit, Captain Dobbins and the other prisoners were taken to Fort Malden at Amherstburg. Word reached the British commanding officer, General Brock, that Captain Dobbins had broken his parole by taking up arms to defend Detroit.

In August 1812, Captain Dobbins fled to the woods around Fort Malden, hiding part of the time under the upside down hulk of a wreck partly buried in the sand, and part time in the woods. The British offered a reward for his capture, dead or alive, and Indians were delegated to track him down. He made his way on foot along the bank of the Detroit River, until he reached its mouth where he found a dugout. He paddled across Lake Erie to

Sandusky, making his camp over night on the shore of Put-in-Bay, which just a year later would become the scene of Perry's victory.⁴²

Soon after Captain Dobbins reached the American forces in Ohio, General William Meade immediately sent him to Washington with the first official account of the surrender of Mackinac and Detroit. Captain Dobbins testified before the Cabinet at Washington and the government granted him a sailing master's warrant. After President James Madison had heard from several other sources, he exclaimed, "There is one thing to be done. We must gain control of the lakes. Therein lies our only safety."⁴³

The government issued Captain Dobbins a sailing master's warrant, and ordered him to go to Erie and began building gunboats, and to contact Commodore Isaac Chauncey commander of the American fleet on Lake Ontario, for further instructions. On September 26, 1812, Captain Dobbins began his ship building on Cascade Creek, about a mile above Erie, where the lake was deeper. He had only the carpenters that he obtained locally and could only find one ship's carpenter for master builder, Ebenezer Crosby of Black Rock. He had to transport his ship building materials from Pittsburgh, over bad roads and there were no local mills for sawing lumber, only the standing trees as raw material.

⁴²Frank H. Severance., *Publications of the Buffalo Historical Society Volume VIII*, Buffalo Historical Society, Buffalo, New York, 1905. Frank H. Severance, *Career of Daniel Dobbins*, page 257 of volume VIII.

⁴³Frank H. Severance., *Publications of the Buffalo Historical Society Volume VIII*, Buffalo Historical Society, Buffalo, New York, 1905. Frank H. Severance, *Career of Daniel Dobbins*, page 257 of volume VIII.

In December, 1812, Commodore Chauncey and Henry Eckford, a naval architect, arrived at Erie, from Lake Ontario, and finished the drawings of the two twenty gun brigs, leaving instructions for getting out the timbers for them and for more gunboats. Noah Brown, chief master builder, arrived at Erie in February 1813 from New York with 25 carpenters, and Commodore Isaac Chauncey appointed Commander Oliver Hazard Perry as commodore of the fleet in March 1813.

Oliver Hazard Perry had succumbed to the siren song of the sea shortly after his thirteenth birthday. Early in 1799, the U.S. Frigate *General Greene* was fitting out for service against France, and her captain, Christopher Perry, recommended his son Oliver for one of the midshipman appointments. Oliver was warranted a midshipman in the U.S. Navy on April 7, 1799, and over the next six years he participated in the undeclared war against France and the Tripolitan War against the Barbary pirates. During that time Perry served on such well known ships as the *Constellation* and *Constitution*, and after an extended leave in 1806-1807 he directed the building of a flotilla of small gunboats in Connecticut and Rhode Island. In April 1809, he received his first seagoing command, the 14-gun schooner *Revenge*. He did not enjoy commanding the *Revenge* and when the Navy offered him the chance to build and command the Lake Erie fleet, he eagerly accepted the task.⁴⁴

In March, 1813, Captain Oliver Hazard Perry arrived at Presque Isle, and he noted that much work had already been done. Workers had laid the keels of two twenty gun brigs and a clipper schooner had been constructed at the mouth of Cascade Creek. Two gunboats were nearly finished at the mouth of Lee's run, and a third had been started. In May 1813, three smaller vessels were afloat and on May 24, the two brigs were launched. With boundless energy Perry purchased three schooners and a sloop and employed skilled workers to build three other schooners and two twenty-gun brigs which later accompanied the

⁴⁴ Theodore Roosevelt. *The Naval War of 1812*. Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 1987. P. 56.

captured British brig *Caledonia*. The six ships built at Erie were the two twenty gun brigs *Lawrence* and *Niagara* and the schooners *Scorpion*, *Tigris*, *Porcupine* and *Ariel*. Noah Brown launched *Scorpion* in the spring of 1813 at Presque Isle, and Sailing Master Stephen Champlin, Oliver Hazard Perry's first cousin, commanded the *Scorpion*.

After Commodore Perry had satisfied himself that the Presque Isle project was operating smoothly, he traveled to Lake Ontario to acquire seamen from Commodore Isaac Chauncey, and to command the American schooners and gunboats at the Battle of Fort George. Then he went to Black Rock to inspect the American vessels that the British had released when they abandoned Fort Erie at the end of May. On June 6, 1813, he had the ships towed up the rapids at the head of the Niagara River, a difficult task that took six days to complete. These vessels were the *Caledonia*, the schooner *Somers*, the schooner *Amelia* that carried one long 18 pound gun; the schooner *Ohio*, carrying one long 24 pounder; and the sloop *Trippe*, carrying one long 18 pounder. The flotilla sailed from Buffalo and reached Erie, on June 18, moving "at the rate of twenty five miles in twenty four hours," on account of headwinds. They reached Erie barely ahead of a British cruising squadron under Captain Robert Finnis of the Royal Navy which had been searching for them.⁴⁵

Like British Commander Barclay, one of Commodore Perry's biggest problems was manpower. He had only 120 men and he needed over 700 to operate his ships. He wrote to Commodore Chauncey several times requesting reinforcements, but received no reply. Desperate, Perry went over Commodore Chauncey's head and wrote directly to the Secretary of the Navy. Commodore Perry's audacity paid off, because pressure from Washington D.C. and other naval places motivated Chauncey to send about 150 men from Sackets Harbor to Lake Erie. Perry's rash action provoked several irate letters between Perry and Chauncey.

⁴⁵ Theodore Roosevelt. *The Naval War of 1812*. (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 1987) 56.

Perry wrote to Chauncey complaining about the quality of the men that arrived, noting that the men who came were a rag tag set of “blacks, soldiers, and boys.”⁴⁶

Again Perry bypassed Chauncey and complained to the Navy Department and again Chauncey wrote Perry a biting letter. Chauncey commented that he was sorry that Perry was not pleased with the men that he had sent but he noted:

“For my knowledge a part of them are not surpassed by any seamen we have on the fleet, and I have yet to learn that the Colour of the skin, or cut and trimmings of the coat, can effect a man’s qualifications or usefulness. I have nearly 50 blacks on board this Ship (the General Pike) and many of them are amongst my best men...”⁴⁷

Commodore Perry’s best men included Thomas Holdup Stevens who Chauncey made an acting lieutenant in July 1813. Born in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1795, Stevens was warranted a midshipman on the *U.S.S. Hornet* at Charleston in February 1809, and served in the *John Adams* at New York at the beginning of the War of 1812. He volunteered for lake service and after serving on the Niagara frontier eventually joined Oliver Hazard Perry at Erie in April 1813. In the battle of Lake Erie, Stevens commanded the sloop *Trippe*-one long 32-pounder- last in the line. The *Trippe* passed the *Tigress* and *Porcupine* to engage the *Queen Charlotte* and after the action assisted the *Scorpion* in pursuing and capturing two escaping enemy ships. Stevens said that he was not specifically mentioned in Perry’s dispatches because he had differences with Jesse Duncan Elliott, second in command, under whom he had served previously in the *Niagara*. Congress awarded him the silver medal for officers in

⁴⁶ “African Americans and the Battle of Lake Erie.” U.S. Brig Niagara, Erie, Pennsylvania. Gerry Altoff, Erie Maritime Museum.

⁴⁷ “African Americans and the Battle of Lake Erie.” U.S. Brig Niagara, Erie, Pennsylvania. Gerry Altoff, Erie Maritime Museum.

the Battle of Lake Erie and his home town of Charleston awarded him a sword. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.⁴⁸

Preparing For Battle

In July 1813, Commander Barclay effectively blockaded Perry's American squadron at Presque Isle Bay. Then he and his fleet disappeared on August 2, 1813, lifting the blockade for three days and allowing Perry to get his ships across the sandbar at the harbor entrance. From this point until September 10, Perry cruised the western end of Lake Erie, trying to find the British and bring them to battle. In the meantime at King's Navy Yard, Commodore Barclay stalled for time, waiting for the *Detroit* to be completed.

Barclay blockaded Presque Isle for the next few weeks, preventing Perry's fleet from crossing the sandbar at the mouth of the harbor. Several times he requested Yeo to send him more sailors and arms. He also petitioned Major General Francis de Rottenburg, Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada to send him reinforcements for Major General Henry Procter's troops at Amherstburg. He did not get his reinforcements.

Perry's superior squadron instituted a counter blockade of Amherstburg and food supplies there rapidly dwindled. Finally, with supplies almost exhausted, Barclay ventured onto the Detroit River into Lake Erie to battle Perry. By August of 1813, Commander Oliver Hazard Perry had taken his squadron out into Lake Erie. Part of his strategy involved cutting the British supply route across Lake Erie and by September the Commissariat at Amherstburg showed only bare shelves. The garrison and the Indian forces camped outside of Amherstburg

⁴⁸ Biography. Thomas Holdup Stevens. Arlington National Cemetery Website.

faced starvation. General Procter and Captain Yeo ordered Commander Barclay to try to break the blockade.⁴⁹

On the eve of the Battle of Lake Erie the Commander Robert Barclay had 150 men from the Royal Navy, 80 Canadian sailors and 240 soldiers, mostly regulars, and some Indians. Adding their officers, this force amounted to a little over 500 men. About one-quarter of Commodore Perry's American crews were from Rhode Island and one quarter regular seamen, American or cosmopolitan, about one quarter raw volunteers from Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Kentucky, and one quarter blacks, numbering about 490 men on the muster roll. Of Perry's 490 men, all but 116 were sick with bilious or "lake fever," and were too weak to come on deck, which made the able-bodied force of the squadron a little less than 400.⁵⁰

Battle of Lake Erie

Commander Barclay led six British ships out of Amherstburg to meet Perry's nine vessel fleet on September 10, 1813. The six British ships were *Chippewa*, *Detroit*, which was the flagship of the fleet and the only British man of war on the Great Lakes, the *Hunter*, the *Queen Charlotte*, the *Lady Prevost*, and the *Little Belt*. Perry's fleet nine-ship fleet consisted of the *Scorpion*, the *Ariel*, the *Lawrence*, Perry's flagship, the *Caledonia*, the *Niagara*, commanded by Jesse Elliott, the *Somers*, the *Porcupine*, the *Tigress*, and the *Trippe*.⁵¹

At daybreak on the morning of September 10, 1813, the lookout on the *Lawrence* spotted sails on the horizon and sang out, "Sail ho!" Then the *Lawrence* signaled the fleet,

⁴⁹ Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812*, VI (Originally published New York, 1869. Sumersworth: New Hampshire Publishing Company, 1979)p 509-515.

⁵¹ Theodore Roosevelt. *The Naval War of 1812*. (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 1987)98.

“Enemy in sight,” and “Get under way!” At sunrise the Americans spotted British vessels on the northwest horizon.

Dr. Usher Parsons, surgeon’s mate on the *Lawrence*, gave one of the most definitive eye witness accounts of the Battle of Lake Erie. He described Perry’s fighting flag as being inscribed with large, white letters on a blue ground, the letters saying, “Don’t Give Up the Ship.” As the crew assembled on the quarter deck, they gave three hearty cheers that the crews of the vessels of the entire American line joined and the flag went to the top of the fore-royal.⁵²

Aboard his flag ship the *Lawrence*, Commodore Perry stood on the quarterdeck with two young officers, Thomas Breeze and his brother Alexander Perry. Their duty was to run with his orders to all parts of the ship because no officer could be heard ten feet away in the din and uproar of battle. Dr. Parsons reported that Commodore Perry’s dog hid in the bottom of the closet holding all of the crockery. A cannon ball passed through the closet, and smashed both crockery and door, covering the floor with fragments. The dog set up a barking protest against the right of such an invasion of his chosen retirement.⁵³

As the morning and the battle wore on, the *Lawrence* became crippled, making it necessary for Commodore Perry to move to the *Niagara*. At about 2:30 that afternoon, Commodore Perry left the *Lawrence* with just his little brother Alexander and fourteen other men alive and unhurt and boarded a small boat with eight stout seamen at the oars. He stood tall in the stern of the boat and the British aimed a shower of grape, canister, and bullets at

⁵² Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812* VI (Originally published New York, 1869, Reprinted by Benchmark Publishing Corporation, Glendale, New York) p. 526-533.

Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812*, VI (Originally published New York, 1869. Sumersworth: New Hampshire Publishing Company, 1979)p 509-515.

⁵³ Ibid

the boat and at Commodore Perry. He ignored them until his crew tearfully pleaded with him to sit down. The boat quickly reached the *Niagara*.

By 2:45 p.m. Perry had taken command of the *Niagara* and closed in on the British line which stood about half a mile away. The *Niagara* poured broadsides into the *Queen Charlotte* and the *Detroit* and when he saw the *Niagara* coming, Commander Barclay of the *Detroit* attempted to veer around to give the *Niagara* a broadside, but in his maneuvering he crashed into the *Lady Charlotte* and sustained a serious wound himself. The *Somers*, in command of Lt. Elliott, with the *Tigris* and *Porcupine* pressed down upon the *Queen Charlotte* who finding herself exposed ahead and astern, struck her colors. The *Detroit*, now unmanageable, also gave up and the *Lady Prevost* and *Hunter*, both disabled, pulled down their colors. The *Little Belt* at the head, and the *Chippewa*, at the rear of the line, made sail and ran, but the *Scorpion* and *Trippe* pursued them and after a close chase, took and brought them back. Not a sail of the enemy escaped and the victory was complete.

Perry: “We have met the enemy and they are ours..”

Immediately after the battle Perry sent this message to General William Henry Harrison: “Dear General: We have met the enemy and they are ours; two ships, two brigs, one schooner and one sloop.” He added in a postscript, “Send us some soldiers to help take care of the prisoners, who are more numerous than ourselves.”⁵⁴

Commodore Perry helped nurse Commander Barclay’s wounds at Put-in-Bay and they became friends. The Americans paroled Commander Barclay and when he had recovered enough to travel he went to Quebec. In early 1814 the citizens of Quebec presented the Commander with a commemorative piece of silver and he received the same honor in

⁵⁴ Howard H. Peckham, “Commodore Perry’s Captive. *Ohio History: The Scholarly Journal of the Ohio Historical Society*, Volume 72., p.222

London from the Canadian merchants there. Since all captains who lost their ships had to be court-martialed, Commander Barclay was tried in Portsmouth Harbor in September 1814 and was “most fully and most honorably acquitted.”⁵⁵

On September 12, 1813, British Commander Barclay wrote a letter from Put-in-Bay to William Jones, British Secretary of the Navy in which he reminded the Secretary that he had last written on September 6 that he desperately needed more seamen at Amherstburg or he would have to sail with what he called the “deplorably manned” squadron that he had. He reminded Secretary Jones that supplies had been so scarce at Amherstburg that there was not a day’s flour in store. He also reminded Secretary Jones that he had been following Major General Procter and Commodore Yeo’s orders when he risked a battle with the Americans. He described the battle to Secretary Jones and concluded by saying, “Captain Perry has behaved in a most humane and attentive manner, not only to myself and officers, but to all the wounded. I trust that, although unsuccessful, you will approve of the motives that induced me to sail under so many disadvantages, and that it may be hereafter proved that under such circumstances the honor of His Majesty’s flag has not been tarnished.”⁵⁶

All ships were anchored after the Battle of Lake Erie and the survivors cleared away the wreckage, tended the wounded and buried the dead. They buried the enlisted men at sea at twilight and officers from both sides were buried together on South Bass Island the next day when all of the ships returned to Put-In-Bay. The entire American squadron suffered greatly, but more than two-thirds of the loss was on the *Lawrence*. She had 22 men killed and 61 wounded. The *Niagara* had two killed and 2 wounded. The *Caledonia* had three wounded, the *Somers* two, and the *Trippe* three. The *Ariel* had one killed and three wounded and the

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812*, VI (Originally published New York, 1869. Sumersworth: New Hampshire Publishing Company, 1979)p 509-515.

Scorpion had two killed. The total loss was 27 killed and 96 wounded of whom three died.

The British losses, which fell most heavily on the *Detroit* and the *Queen Charlotte*, amounted to 41 killed and 94 wounded.⁵⁷

Most historians state that the Americans won the Battle of Lake Erie because of what Theodore Roosevelt described as “Superior heavy metal.” Commodore Perry bought his cannon from the foundries on Chesapeake Bay and moved them to Presque Isle with great difficulty. Perry could get the materials and fittings from Pittsburgh which was becoming a major manufacturing center. On the other hand, British Commander Barclay had to transport his guns and supplies up the Saint Lawrence River to Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. In 1813, the Americans controlled Lake Ontario and occupied the Niagara Peninsula so Barclay’s supplies had to be carried overland from York (Toronto). The American victory at the Battle of York meant that the guns intended for the *HMS Detroit* fell into American hands and the *Detroit* had to be outfitted with miscellaneous guns available at Amherstburg. These guns were supposedly defective, but performed very well during the Battle of Lake Erie.⁵⁸

The battle could have gone either way, especially if the outcome depended on the ship builders and crews. On the British side, William Bell supervised building the fleet at Amherstburg, including the *Detroit*, which was the best built ship on Lake Erie and the only British warship built on the Lake during the War of 1812. The building went slowly because Bell was such a perfectionist. In the meantime, the Americans had built six ships and this was an important ingredient in the American victory. Some historians argue that even if Barclay had possessed more ships he would not have been able to get crews and armament for them.

⁵⁷Ibid

⁵⁸Theodore Roosevelt. *The Naval War of 1812*. (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 1987) 147.

On the American side, Daniel Dobbins, the experienced and skilled lake mariner, oversaw the initial construction efforts of the American fleet at Presque Isle and the movement of supplies to Erie. Noah Brown constructed most of the ships at Erie and designed the two largest brigs. These two men were the driving forces in the building of Perry's fleet.

Both the British and American crews were a mixture of professional and inexperienced seamen, lake sailors and boatmen or voyageurs. At least fifty or more of Perry's seamen were experienced sailors drafted from the *USS Constitution* which at the time was being refitted in Boston. Volunteers from General William Henry Harrison's army made up the American crews, while Commodore Barclay drafted several soldiers from Procter's 41st Regiment. He may have had some Native Americans in his crew, as he routinely used them.⁵⁹

The Battle of Lake Erie was the first decisive fleet action of the United States Navy, and its tactical inexperience explains some of the difficulty in getting all of the ships engaged. This was also the first time a British fleet, even though a small one had been forced to surrender every ship. Circumstances had forced the British to go to battle unprepared and outgunned, and their defeat was a serious blow to their pride. National morale greatly improved in the United States whose tiny fleet had defeated part of the best Navy in the world.

The Battle of Lake Erie left the United States in complete control of Lake Erie and eliminated any chance that the British could resupply their garrison at Detroit. The defeated British fleet slipped away to Detroit and General Procter, realizing that safely lay in flight, had four of the vessels hastily loaded with arms, ammunition, stores, government papers and

⁵⁹ David Skaggs, and Gerard Atloff, *A Signal Victory: The Lake Erie Campaign, 1812-1813*(Naval Institute Press. 1997) 12-15

other plunder from Detroit. With all speed, the four ships sailed to Lake St. Clair and then took refuge on the Thames. Even before Procter learned of Barclay's defeat, he prepared to fall back on the British position at Burlington at the western end of Lake Ontario. Tecumseh knew that this would remove all protection from the tribes in the confederation whose lands lay to the west of Detroit and he unsuccessfully attempted to dissuade Procter from leaving.

General Harrison anticipated Procter's retreat and ordered his 1,000 mounted troops to begin advancing along the lake shore to Detroit. Commodore Perry used his combined fleet to transport Major General Harrison's army of about 2,500 soldiers to the north shore of Lake Erie where he intercepted the retreating British army and defeated it at the Battle of the Thames River on October 5, 1813. It was during this battle that Tecumseh was killed. His death and disillusionment with the British led to the collapse of the Indian confederacy's alliance with the British. The British were never able to reestablish their power in the West and the United States was able to secure its northern frontier.

After they lost the Battle of Lake Erie, the British knew that they had to evacuate Amherstburg. The Americans blocked the supply line across Lake Erie to the east and the British had no fleet to prevent William Henry Harrison's Northwestern Army from invading Amherstburg. Procter ordered the destruction of Fort Amherstburg, the Navy Yard and all of the government buildings in Amherstburg, and by late September the British and the Indians began their retreat from Amherstburg.

On September 23, 1813, Procter ordered all of the government buildings in Amherstburg to be burned. The Navy Yard ceased to exist. After the war the Royal Navy built a new navy yard at Penetanguishene on Georgian Bay, far away from the United States border. Amherstburg retained a small military presence, but it was no longer a British naval base on the Upper Great Lakes.

At the end of September 1813, the Americans entered Amherstburg and started building a new fort on the ruins of the British fort, facing the same problems of manpower shortages and lack of materials and tools that the British had encountered when they built it. After the War of 1812 ended, the Americans returned control of the partially rebuilt fort to the British on July 1, 1815.

Encore: The Schooner *Nancy* of the Northern Theater

The schooner *Nancy* was not built at the Amherstburg Navy Yard, but practically speaking Amherstburg served as her home supply base when she was the sole surviving British ship on the Upper Great Lakes. The *Nancy* was built for the fur trade in 1789 at Detroit which Britain still occupied. John Richardson of Forsayth, Richardson and Company of Montreal supervised her construction and designed her to be approximately 80 feet long with a 22 foot beam or width, and the depth of her hold was eight feet. Under the command of Captain Mills, she performed her fur trade duties by carrying goods that included food, clothing, rum, meat, powder, blankets, tools, trinkets, weapons and ammunition up the lakes and then returning with furs. In 1793, Forsayth sold the *Nancy* to George Leith and Company, merchants and fur traders who in turn sold her to the North West Fur Company. In 1805 Captain Alexander Mackintosh succeeded Captain Mills as her commander and she continued to transport fur and merchandise on Lakes Erie, Huron and Michigan.

When the United States declared war on Great Britain in June of 1812, the *Nancy* lay moored at Macintosh's wharf at Moy (Windsor) across from Detroit. Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas St. George, commander of the garrison at Amherstburg quickly requisitioned her as a British transport and rechristened her *HM Schooner Nancy*. On July 30, 1812, *HMS Nancy* joined her first convoy with the Provincial Marine schooner *Lady Prevost*, moving military

stores and sixty men of the 41st Regiment of Foot from Fort Erie to Amherstburg. During the summer and early fall of 1812, *HMS Nancy* constantly traveled Lake Erie between Detroit and Fort Erie, hauling stores and provisions. In his inventory to General Isaac Brock, Colonel Matthew Willot described her as being capable of mounting six four-pounder carriage guns and six swivel guns.⁶⁰

On April 23, 1813, *HMS Nancy* joined a squadron transporting General Henry Procter's force from Amherstburg to Miami Bay outside of Toledo, Ohio, where he planned to attack Fort Meigs. General Procter commanded a division of 423 men of the British 41st Regiment, 63 men of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, 31 men of the Royal Artillery, 16 men from other units, and 462 Canadian militia. Shawnee Chief Tecumseh and his force of about 1,250 American Indian warriors also supported General Procter. On May 1, 1813, General Procter and his forces lay siege of Fort Meigs in Perrysburg, Ohio and the American defenders suffered heavy losses, but the Fort withstood Procter and Tecumseh's siege and they finally withdrew. The Americans counted this an important psychological as well as tactical victory after their recent defeats at the battles of Detroit and Frenchtown and the British lifting of the siege marked the turning of the war on the Northwest frontier in favor of the Americans.

On September 10, 1813, Oliver Hazard Perry defeated Robert Heriot Barclay at the Battle of Lake Erie, leaving *HMS Nancy* the only British warship on the Upper Great Lakes. In October of that year, the Americans nearly captured *HMS Nancy* near the St. Clair River as she made her way to Detroit which the Americans had recaptured after they won the Battle of Lake Erie. Later in the month, *HMS Nancy* traveled to Sault Ste. Marie, where she was refitted and spent the winter.

⁶⁰Barry Gough, *Through Water, Ice and Fire: Schooner Nancy And The War Of 1812*, (Dundurn Press, 2006)22-26

After the Americans won the Battle of Lake Erie in September 1813, they controlled the British supply route to the Upper Great Lakes. The British acted quickly. They chose the Nottawasaga River near Georgian Bay as their new supply route, a route running partially overland from York (Toronto) north to the Holland River. Indians had used the route from Lake Simcoe to Lake Huron for decades and now the *HMS Nancy* used the Nottawasaga River to receive and transport supplies to the British garrison at Fort Mackinac between Lakes Huron and Michigan.

In February 1814, Colonel Robert McDougall commanding a British relief party made of up ten officers, 220 infantry and artillerymen and twenty seamen left Kingston for Fort Mackinac. They traveled the Lake Simcoe and Nottawasaga River route and arrived at Mackinac on May 18, 1814. The British had planned to cut down the *HMS Nancy* to a gunboat to add to their defenses, but they decided not to cut her down and she continued to serve as a transport. During the spring of 1814, she made three round trips from Fort Mackinac to the mouth of the Nottawasaga River for supplies.

Quickly detecting this new British supply route, and failing in their August 1814, bid to recapture Fort Mackinac, the Americans decided to capture the *HMS Nancy* which they believed to be in Georgian Bay. The American forces wanted to destroy the *HMS Nancy* because they hoped to starve the northern garrison at Fort Mackinac into surrender and gain control of the Upper Great Lakes.

A British scout, Lieutenant Ramsay Livingston made a 360 mile canoe trip from Fort Mackinac to the Nottawasaga River with a message warning Lieutenant Commander Miller Worsley of the Royal Navy who had recently taken command of the *HMS Nancy* to hide her up river from the searching eyes of the approaching Americans. Worsley ordered her to be taken two miles up the Nottawasaga River and also arranged for a blockhouse to be built.

On August 13, 1814, American commander Captain Arthur Sinclair and his three ships the *Niagara*, *Tigress* and *Scorpion* arrived off the mouth of the Nottawasaga River in pursuit of the *HMS Nancy*. Soldiers in several wood gathering parties were astonished when they stumbled upon the *HMS Nancy* in her hiding place because the officers still thought her to be in Georgian Bay. The next day, August 14, the *Niagara*, *Tigress* and *Scorpion* moved in to bombard the *HMS Nancy*, but the sand dunes effectively blocked the shells. The Americans had to land a detachment with a mortar before the shots inflicted any damage on the *HMS Nancy*.

Lieutenant Worsley and his force of 22 seamen, 23 Indians and nine French Canadian voyageurs and Lieutenant Livingston, valiantly defended the *HMS Nancy*, but they were overwhelmed by the American force of about 500 men. As soon as Lieutenant Worsley realized his forces were losing the battle to the Americans, he made two difficult decisions. He hid the *HMS Nancy's* boats upstream on the Nottawasaga and he decided to scuttle the *HMS Nancy* instead of surrendering her. Before his men could finish the preparations to scuttle her, a shell hit the blockhouse and started a fire that swiftly spread to the *HMS Nancy*. She burned to the waterline and sank and Worsley and his men escaped up the river.

General Sinclair returned to Detroit after the battle, but the *Scorpion* and *Tigress* stayed behind to patrol the river and prevent canoes and bateaux from getting supplies to Fort Mackinac. The Americans blocked the river mouth with felled trees and left, hoping to intercept canoes carrying furs on Lake Huron. Lieutenant Worsley and his men rowed two bateaux and a canoe up Lake Huron toward Fort Mackinac, 360 miles away. During their trip they slid past the *Tigress* and *Scorpion* near St. Joseph Island, but they continued on their journey, arriving at Fort Mackinac on August 31, 1814.

At Fort Mackinac, Lt. Worsley convinced Colonel McDougall to allow him to attack both the American vessels and he hastily left Fort Mackinac on September 1, 1814, with a party of 92 men. One boat carried sailors and three others a detachment of Lieutenant Andrew Bulger's Royal Newfoundland Regiment of Fencible Infantry. Two of the boats carried small artillery pieces and some Native American escorts. Native American scouts had reported sighting the *Tigress* and *Scorpion* in Georgian Bay, in an area known as the Detour and Worsley moved as quickly as a Lake Huron storm to catch and capture them. On September 3, Worsley went ashore to look for the American ships and after he had traveled six miles he found the *Tigress* anchored alone. Sailors and soldiers paddled off under the cover of night to take the *Tigress* by surprise and they had reached ten yards of her before the Americans sounded the alarm. After a brief skirmish, Worsley and his men captured the *Tigress* with only two men killed and two wounded.

The British soldiers sent their American captives to Mackinac, after interrogating them and discovering that the *Scorpion* was just fifteen miles away. On September 5, 1814, Robert Livingston, of the Native Department, went to search for her and in two hours returned to report that the *Scorpion* was moving toward the British position. She soon came into view and anchored nearby. Worsley kept the American flag flying on the *Tigress* to avoid raising the alarm, and Bulger's men concealed their red jackets with greatcoats.

At dawn on September 6, 1814, Lt. Worsley and his men sprang into action. They bore down on the *Scorpion* and its unsuspecting crew. When they were twelve yards away, Worsley opened fire and the Newfoundlanders cast off their great coats, fired a volley and stormed onto the *Scorpion's* deck. Within minutes, the *Scorpion* was a British ship.

The British took the *Scorpion* and *Tigress* to Fort Mackinac. They renamed the *Scorpion* *Conflance* to honor a ship that Commodore Sir James Lucas Yeo had captured from

the French and they renamed the *Tigress Surprise*, to commemorate how they had captured her. Their bold actions allowed the British to regain control of Lake Huron and their vital supply lines to the Northwest, hastening the end of the war and the signing of the Treaty of Ghent in 1814.

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