

OVERCOMING THE ODDS: A COMPARISON OF THE
U.S. NINTH AND TENTH MILITARY DISTRICTS
DURING THE FINAL CAMPAIGNS OF
THE WAR OF 1812

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ABSTRACT

OVERCOMING THE ODDS: A COMPARISON OF THE NINTH AND TENTH MILITARY DISTRICTS DURING THE FINAL CAMPAIGNS OF THE WAR OF 1812, by MAJ Joseph D. Davidson, 124 pages.

During the first year and a half of the War of 1812 the United States Army fought with little success against a professional British Army and Canadian Militia who lacked troops and supplies due to the ongoing Napoleonic Wars. In October 1813 Great Britain's allies had defeated Napoleon at the Battle of Leipzig. With victory in Europe behind them, the British began diverting battle proven troops and supplies to North America. The perception of this policy changed the complexion of the war to heavily favor the British in numbers of experienced and battle hardened troops. By comparing the Ninth and Tenth Military Districts the question this study will investigate is, "How did the United States Army prepare to face the Napoleonic War veteran British Army during the last year (1814) of the American War of 1812?" The two factors that were most imposing on them during this preparatory phase, besides the enemy, were support and political-military relationships. Critical to this study is the political--military relationship between the Secretary of War and his military district commanders. Additionally, the War of 1812 will be used as an example to help the United States understand and gain insights from history about how to initiate homeland defense today.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The War of 1812 is regarded by many as the United States' most obscure war. There are many theories as to the causes of the war. However, whether the United States went to war with Great Britain over maritime causes, a desire to annex Canada, or national political causes is not within the scope of the thesis.¹

During the first year and a half of the War of 1812 the United States Army fought with little success against a professional British Army and Canadian Militia who lacked troops, and supplies due to the ongoing Napoleonic Wars. In October 1813 Great Britain's allies had defeated Napoleon at the Battle of Leipzig. With victory in Europe behind them, the British could begin diverting battle proven troops, and supplies to North America. This policy perhaps had the potential to change the complexion of the war to heavily favor the British in numbers of experienced and battle hardened troops.

With the United States alone in the field against Great Britain, many Americans expected the British to be vindictive. The leading Republican Joseph Nicholson stated, "We should have to fight hereafter not for 'free trade and sailors' rights,' not for the conquest of the Canadas, but for our national existence."² The question this study will investigate is how did the United States Army prepare to face the Napoleonic War veteran British Army during the last year (1814) of the American War of 1812? Additionally, the War of 1812 will be examined in light of the historical threat to help understand, and gain insights facing the United States as it deals with homeland defense today.

Primarily three men developed the United States' initial strategic plan for the war. One was Henry Dearborn, a veteran of the American Revolution, and former Secretary of War under President Jefferson. Dearborn, at age sixty-one was commissioned as a major general, and appointed as commander of the Northeast and given the title Senior General of the Army. The Secretary of War William Eustis and the Republican President James Madison rounded out the planning team. In the summer of 1812 they concluded that the strategic objective was the conquest of Canada.³

The triumvirate decided the key to controlling Canada as Eustis stated was to “advance three columns: One along the line of Lake Champlain toward Montreal, the middle one 250 miles southwestward along the Niagara River, and the westernmost 200 miles yet farther southwest at the Detroit River.”⁴ The rationale for this strategy was as much political as tactical. Politically, there was little interest in attacking Quebec because it was both heavily fortified, and lay north of Federalist New England. The president was determined not to further distance the New England states, so Quebec was out. That left Montreal. Although its importance as a target was justified, capturing Montreal alone would do little for the enthusiasm in the northwestern states, and territories nor protect that region from Indian attacks. Hence the president adopted the three-prong attack developed by General Henry Dearborn.⁵

This strategy was flawed both politically, and militarily. Politically, the predominately Federalist New England states opposed the war on economic and philosophical grounds. New England, whose largest export-trading partner was Great Britain, saw the war as an attempt by southern states to weaken its economic stronghold within the United States. Jealousy of the ruling party played as much an influence to the

sentiments of the leaders of New England as the concerns for economic worries.

Regardless, without New England's support, especially in terms of troops (militia), and supplies, the campaign into Lower Canada would be difficult to accomplish.

Initially Eustis managed the war by dividing the theater of operations amongst his three top generals. By early 1813 this schematic proved to be ineffective. Eustis' replacement John Armstrong divided the operational areas into nine, later extended to ten, military districts (figure 1). Military district boundaries generally conformed to existing state boundaries. In general, the majority of ground combat operations during the War of 1812 occurred in the Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Military Districts.

The Seventh Military District, part of the Southern Theater, was composed of Tennessee, Louisiana, and the Mississippi Territory. The Eighth Military District incorporated the Western Theater and included Kentucky, Ohio, and the Territories of Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Missouri. The Ninth Military District, located in the Central Theater, included all of Vermont, New York north of the highlands (north of present day Rockland County), and Pennsylvania, from the Allegheny to its western border. The Tenth Military District was created in July 1814 to address the importance, and overcome the shortcomings in the Washington, DC, area. It centered on the Chesapeake Bay, and consisted of the State of Maryland, the District of Columbia, and the part of Virginia lying between the Rappahannock and Potomac Rivers.⁶

The previous framework is established as a means to examine the research question. The distinction by military district lends itself to a logical arrangement for analysis. The military districts operated fairly independently of one another. The exception for this study will be the Eighth Military District. Although there are lessons to

be learned from the war in that district, by the time the British went on the offensive in early 1814, military action in the Eighth District had been reduced to reestablishing American control after the defeat of the British Right Division at the Battle of the Thames in October 1813. Therefore, it is outside the scope of the research question and will not be examined.

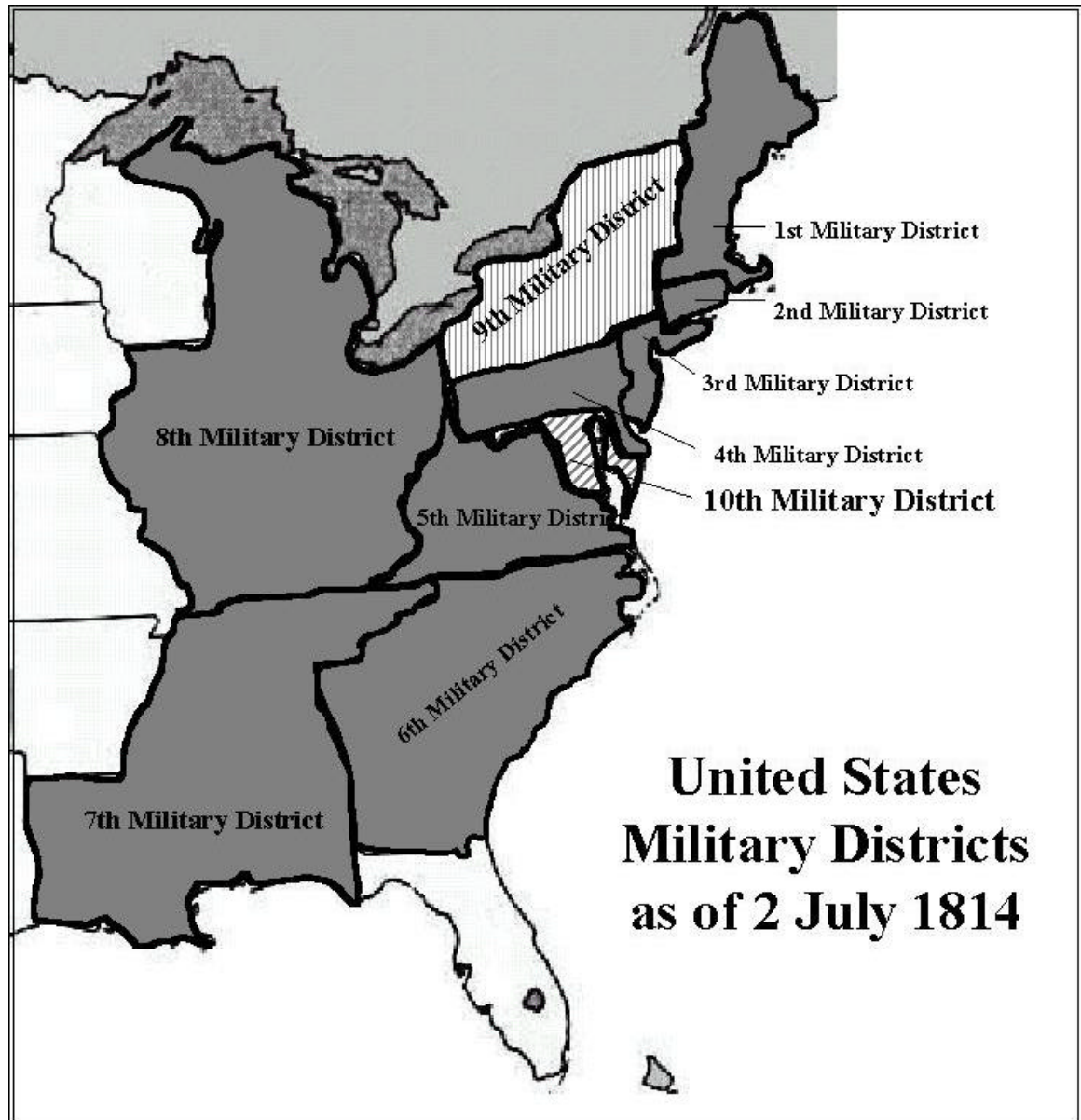


Figure 1. U.S. Military Districts as of 2 July 1814

During the research it became clear that the author would have to limit the scope of his study to two military districts due to time availability. The crux of the study will focus on the challenges the respective military district commanders faced as they prepared for homeland defense against the British offensive in 1814. Many factors influenced and shaped the military district commanders as they prepared their troops for the upcoming campaign season. The two factors that were most imposing on them during this preparatory phase, besides the enemy, were support and political-military relationships.

For this paper the definition of support equates to resources in terms of raising, maintaining, organizing, equipping, and training the army. Political-military infrastructure relates to both the civilian Secretary of War, and his military district commander and the respective states' relationship to the army that was operating within its borders.

In limiting the scope of the study, a few factors played a large part. Most notables are the amount of written primary source documentation readily available. The other factors used were the relationship between the respective Military District Commanders, and the Secretary of War; how the Secretary of War influenced the fight; and the proximity, in distance, from the national leadership to each respective military district. In the early nineteenth century, proximity to higher headquarters determined to a large extent the command influence it had on the field army's commander. In this case the proximity of the national leadership to the military district either allowed for autonomous field command when the distance was great or a micromanaged command when the distance was short.

The Tenth Military District, which is centered on the capital, obviously had the closest proximity between the Secretary of War, and the military district commander. With the close proximity is a short paper trail of orders and correspondence that is well documented and available today. The Tenth District is the only one of the military districts that shows the command relationship with a short line of communication. Therefore, it has been chosen as the first of two districts to be studied.

That left the Ninth, and Seventh Military Districts to examine. Both had equidistant lines of communication to the capital, nullifying that factor. The Ninth Military District had been the United States' main effort of the war leading to 1814. The written and documented correspondence is abundant between the Secretary of War, and the Ninth District Commander. On the other hand, Major General Andrew Jackson the Seventh Military District commander routinely ignored correspondence from the capital, and was concerned with fighting mostly with Native Americans prior to 1814. Therefore, the second of the two districts to be analyzed will be the Ninth Military District.

Militarily, the United States Army was ill prepared at the start of the war. In 1811 Eustis asked Congress for an additional 10,000 men added to the regular army because relations with Great Britain were deteriorating. The debate in Congress raged over the issue of whether to have a standing army or rely solely upon the militia. The vote reflected neither party allegiance nor geographic origins. States with a strong militia, such as Massachusetts, favored citizen soldiery, while most other states were in favor of regulars. In the end, an additional ten infantry regiments, two artillery regiments, and a regiment of light dragoons were authorized; however, the ranks of these units were never more than half-filled.⁷

Little attention had been paid to either the existing United States Regular Army or the state militias since the end of the War for Independence. Most of the neglect of the army can be directly linked to the Militia Act of 1792. This law established that the states, through their militias, maintain the readiness, and discipline of the nation's army during peace. It denied the federal government the ability to maintain a small but well disciplined regular establishment.⁸ Additional fault was with the politicians because they filled the army's senior leadership with men who had little experience with high levels of command. The ironic part is that the majority of the army's senior leaders attained their position by political appointment. For the most part, the enlisted men were inexperienced, and ill disciplined with low morale. In the opening months of the war, desertion rates were so high that President Madison issued a proclamation pardoning all deserters who returned to duty.⁹

The opening campaigns of the war for the United States reflected a series of miscues, lost chances, and incompetence on the part of both political and military leaders. During the first one and one-half years of the war the army surrendered, refused to fight, broke ranks, or met the enemy, and lost. The enemy they fought was a combination of British regulars, with little Napoleonic war experience, local Canadian Militia, and select Native Indian tribesmen.

The complications the American army suffered early in the war were a combination of political and social naivete, inexperienced military leadership, and political and military incompetence. The naivete of the nation that it could raise an effective army almost instantaneously with little or no training that would be capable of defeating the world's strongest military power at that time is unfathomable. Politicians

and military leaders today can gain valuable insight on how not to conduct a war by studying the opening phases of the War of 1812.¹⁰

A month after the United States declared war, the army experienced its first setback, the surrender of Fort Mackinac, without a round fired.¹¹ This event was followed within a month by more embarrassing setbacks at Forts Dearborn and Detroit. The later battles of Queenston, Frenchtown, York, Fort Meigs, Fort George, and Sackett's Harbor all ended in the United States' defeat or a draw. By the late summer 1813, the country had grown weary of surrenders, and defeats. The use of the militia was an issue from the start of the war. Difficulties surfaced universally and continuously regarding enlistment and retention. The situation became dire with the realization that a French defeat at the Battle of Leipzig in October 1813 would allow the British to concentrate resources and manpower on their effort in North America.

Herein lay a foreboding challenge for the United States. How could the army manage to defeat the Napoleonic War veteran British Army during the campaign season of 1814?

The Ninth Military District Prior to 1814

The Ninth Military District was clearly the principal theater of operations because within its boundaries two-thirds of the United States' strategic war plans were concentrated. It is in this district that the tone of the war was set shifting from patriotic motivation and chivalrous conduct to a self-serving, brutally violent conflict.¹²

The war in the Ninth District in 1812 started with politically appointed military leadership, inexperienced troops, and a shortage of supplies. Despite Congress' increase in authorized strength to 35,000 soldiers, at the time the war started the Regular Army

had 6,744 soldiers.¹³ The veteran troops were scattered at key locations throughout the country, concentrating at New Orleans.¹⁴ In order to implement his strategy of capturing Montreal, President Monroe relied heavily on State Militia forces. The New England states, primarily Massachusetts, and Connecticut, refused the president's request to supply troops, and equipment.¹⁵ For the Ninth District, militia support would primarily be provided from New York, and Pennsylvania. Without New England troops, the prospective invasion plan had to be altered.

Discontent between Eustis, and Dearborn began almost immediately. Eustis felt Dearborn spent an inappropriate amount of time in Boston fruitlessly trying to obtain New England's support. Once Dearborn was prodded to Albany to prepare for the invasion, his inexperience at high command showed.¹⁶ He knew very little about the strategic command, and even less about the day-to-day operations of his command.¹⁷

Until late July Eustis assumed that preparations were underway for the planned three-column invasion. General Dearborn, however, felt that he did not have enough men. He, therefore, proposed a new strategy that leveraged the use of available militia. The end-state of the plan was the capture of Montreal after preliminary offensives on Detroit, Niagara, and Sackett's Harbor.¹⁸ On the Niagara frontier New York Governor Daniel Tompkins had appointed Stephen Van Rensselaer commander in chief of the New York militia. Van Rensselaer's plan called for a simultaneous attack on Fort George, and the dominating heights at Queenston.¹⁹

Execution of the plan went horribly wrong for the Americans. Colonel Solomon Van Rensselaer, cousin of the general, commanded the assault force. His plan had relied upon surprising the small detachment of British at Queenston Heights. Logistically the

Americans were not prepared for the operation they lacked many items but most importantly they had too few boats to ferry them across the river. Upon launching the first wave of boats Van Rensselaer lost the element of surprise alerting the Canadian sentries. Another byproduct of the troubled amphibious operation was the delay of troops into the battle because of British artillery fire. Most of the militia was planned to cross in the second, and third sorties. However, upon hearing, and seeing the British artillery, and the wounded from the return boats, refused to cross the river, and deserted. By being alerted early of the attack, British General Isaac Brock was able to reposition troops quickly from nearby Fort George. The small American contingent that managed to assemble, and make its way to the battlefield could not hold off the British reinforcements from Fort George. The inexperienced American troops had initial success. However, the Americans were driven from the field, and eventually the Americans who had not broken ranks were captured.²⁰

The Americans' defeat on the battlefield was predominantly due to poor command, and control throughout the operation, especially at the embarkation point of the assault. Other contributing factors were inexperienced leaders, unwilling militia, and lack of unity of command. The bright spots were a few young leaders, most noticeably Lieutenant Colonel Winfield Scott, who proved himself a capable leader, after assuming command when Colonel Van Rensselaer was wounded. Ground operations concluded the in the Ninth District for 1812 with the United States Army badly lacking leadership, and direction.²¹ Lessons learned during 1812 demonstrated that conquering Canada required more than just a large army. Logistical requirements, training of soldiers, and militia-regular army relations, elements missing in 1812, had to be instituted.

The Campaign of 1813 began with a change of leadership at the national level. John Armstrong was appointed as the Secretary of War on 13 January 1813. With the new leadership in the cabinet came new policies regarding the war effort. To better control the army, Secretary Armstrong divided the nation into nine military districts, putting a regular officer in charge of each district with orders to report directly to the War Department.²² Armstrong adopted a policy of advancing talented young officers to positions of authority to counter the clearly evident leadership gap in the army.²³

In 1813, the president, and Secretary of War expanded American strategy. The campaign depended on control of Lakes Ontario, and Erie. The lack of good roads through the densely wooded wilderness made the transportation of troops, and supplies into the theater dependent on water transportation. Thus, whoever controlled the lakes controlled the northern frontier border region.²⁴ The new strategy focused on cutting off the British sea-lanes of communication in the Central Theater. The principal naval base on Lake Ontario, Kingston, was the primary target; followed by York, a secondary naval base, and finally Forts George, and Erie, located at the respective mouths of the Niagara River.²⁵

The U.S. Army slowly adapted to the lessons of the first year of the war. Even with some fresh leadership, the ill-disciplined and undrilled forces still suffered defeat on the battlefield. An exception to this was in April 1813 when an American expedition of 1,700 soldiers led by Brigadier General Zebulon Pike, captured the Canadian capital city, York.²⁶

In light of these setbacks, individuals who possessed, and demonstrated effective leadership began to emerge. One of them was a militia officer named Jacob Brown. In

the spring of 1813, Brown was in charge of the militia forces defending Sackett's Harbor, the key U.S. naval base on Lake Ontario. The British leaders, Admiral Sir James Yeo, and Governor General Sir George Prevost, decided to attack Sackett's Harbor in order to relieve pressure from Fort George, and destroy a key American shipyard.²⁷

When the British regulars came ashore, the local militia force of about 400 men broke ranks, and ran. This left roughly 600 inexperienced American regulars to face the 700 men attacking British force. Brown's physical courage, and inspirational leadership, induced the militiamen to return to the battle, and his tactical abilities prevailed to turn back the attackers. A strategic loss was avoided by the Americans, retaining the key shipyard, a fact that would not be realized for yet a few months. For his leadership, Jacob Brown was rewarded with an appointment as a brigadier general in the regular army.²⁸

In November 1813 in one of the last battles of 1813 in the Ninth Military District, a numerically inferior British force at Chrysler's Farm defeated the Americans. Brigadier General John Boyd, a capable, and experienced career officer who had extensive command experience including leading mercenaries, was put in charge of 2,000 troops determined to displace the British regulars from their positions.²⁹ Despite their inferior numbers, the British counterattack drove the Americans from the field. British casualties were about 180 while the Americans lost 340 killed, and wounded and an additional 100 captured.³⁰

Late in 1813, military command in Upper Canada was given to the aggressive Lieutenant General Sir Gordon Drummond. He was anxious to take advantage of the deteriorated American circumstances along the Niagara River. The British attacked on 19 December, and surprised the Americans at Fort Niagara. They inflicted 80 casualties,

and captured over 350 American prisoners, while suffering fewer than a dozen casualties themselves. By regaining the fort, the British also acquired a large supply of war material, which proved as costly to the Americans as the loss of the men, and fort itself.³¹ Thus, by the end of the year the American position along the entire Niagara Valley had collapsed in failure at the hands of meager, yet effective British forces.

The Tenth Military District Prior to 1814

The Tenth Military District centered on Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and the Chesapeake Bay. Due to the escalation of operations along the Niagara frontier the majority of the U.S. regular army was committed to the Ninth Military District. Therefore, ground forces in this theater were comprised almost entirely of militia. Also unlike the Ninth District military operations in the Tenth District consisted primarily of naval warfare, and British amphibious raids inland amounting to small skirmishes against raiding parties.

In the spring of 1813 the British were still too preoccupied with Napoleon on the European continent to allocate sufficient forces to North America. This reduced British strategy to maintaining a dominant naval, and potentially amphibious presence along the Atlantic coastline. Tactics were reduced by circumstance to establishing a blockade, creating diversions, and continuing terror by sporadic forays inland. To assist in this latter task, raiding parties of 2,300 troops were attached to Admiral John B. Warren, Squadron Commander of the British Royal Navy assigned with the Blockade mission.³²

The early harassment raids along the Chesapeake saw British forces under the command of Rear Admiral Cockburn rout, plunder, and burn the towns of Havre de Grace, Fredrickstown, and Georgetown.³³ At Havre de Grace, Maryland, Cockburn with

150 marines, and 5 artillerymen, conducted a dawn surprise attack on the town. There was a brief skirmish between the British Marines, and the town's militiamen. After the initial volleys, all but one of the militia broke, and ran. John O'Neill tried by himself to service his artillery piece. After a few unsuccessful volleys, O'Neill was injured, captured, and scheduled to be hanged. After further consideration Admiral Cockburn released him as a warning for others. The British looted Havre de Grace then burned forty of the sixty houses. The only person to be killed at Havre de Grace was struck by a Congreve rocket (earning the dubious distinction of being the only fatality inflicted by that weapon during the war).³⁴

From Havre de Grace Cockburn's terror force moved up the Susquehanna River, and destroyed local citizens' boats along the way. The British stopped at Principio, Maryland, where one of the principal American cannon foundries was located. They destroyed sixty-eight cannons, then returned back from the head of the bay.³⁵

Cockburn's terror force traveled up the Sassafras River to the town of Georgetown. The admiral sent two messengers to warn the surrounding towns that resistance would result in the destruction of their town. Gallantly the local militia of Georgetown confronted the British Marines with a force of about 400 men. The fight lasted minutes as only a handful of the militia stood its ground. True to his word, the Admiral burned the town. Next the British terror force crossed the river to the north bank, looted, and then burned Fredericktown, Maryland. As an example for other communities to follow, Cockburn spared the neighboring village, because it had not sent troops nor offered any resistance. At the end of the twelve-day mission, Admiral Cockburn had fearfully shaken the morale, and confidence of the population along the

Chesapeake. He had also earned a place in history, however unpopular he was with Americans, as the first practitioner in America of riverine warfare on an organized scale.³⁶ Additionally, Cockburn was also the first leader, other than warring Native Americans, who employed terror attacks against American towns, villages, and settlements.

Homeland defense against terrorist attacks became the priority of the people living along the Chesapeake. Federal financial restraints limited militia mobilization in the region, but that in no sense undermined the importance of a need for homeland defense. Unfortunately, not until the terror attacks grow in size and scope did the president allocate resources to adequately defend, and protect against the terrorist. The defense in the meantime would consist of individual state militia piecemealed along the coast.

With few exceptions, when against a professional British Army, American militia forces along the Chesapeake broke, and ran. The British continued to dominate the conflicts along the Chesapeake for the remainder of 1813 in places, like Hampton, Virginia, where a battle lasted only a couple of hours because many of the 400 untrained U.S. recruits fled against 2,000 British. The U.S. forces were outgunned, and outnumbered but still sustained approximately thirty killed, wounded, or missing, compared to fifty for the British. Yet, it was not the actual battle that made Hampton significant, but the aftermath of ensuing rampage by the British, burning, looting, pillaging, and raping.³⁷

After Hampton Admiral Cockburn's fleet discontinued large-scale attacks for the remainder of the summer of 1813. British attacks to this magnitude would not occur

again in the Chesapeake region until 1814. The mere presence of the fleet was sufficient to maintain the feeling of terror that Cockburn had spread.

Conclusion

A comparison of the two districts early in the war similarities, and dissimilarities between the two begin to leap into focus. Primarily, the overall American strategy differed in the two districts. In the Ninth District a major underlying objective was to invade, and conquer parts of Canada. On the other hand, in the Tenth District, was concerned with a successful defense of British marauding and terror forces exclusively.

At the same time a common element can be noted. Americans in both military districts were fighting the same enemy, an enemy distracted, and diminished by the concentration of its forces, and resources across the Atlantic Ocean, against Napoleon. America in 1812, and 1813 found its enemy at its weakest, and couldn't win. Indeed, it lost badly enough that it could have been annihilated, and the enemy varsity had yet to take the field.

America in 1812 was essentially unprepared for war. Political considerations surfaced before, and early in the war affecting the selection of leaders, and the provision of troops, and materiel. One result of such political incursion into military preparation was that the country began the war with a miniscule regular army promised on paper to be sufficiently augmented by ready militia forces. The militia that arrived when any did was, as shall be seen, often anything but ready.

¹Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 1-2.

²John Armstrong to State Governors, 4 July 1814, *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, vol.1: 549.

³John K. Mahon, *The War of 1812* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1972), 38.

⁴Eustis to Dearborn, 28 May 1812, in U.S. Department of War, *Letters Sent by the Secretary of War Relating to Military Affairs, 1800-1889*, Microfilm Series M6, National Archives, Washington, DC.

⁵Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 80.

⁶Raphael P. Thian, *Notes Illustrating the Military Geography of the United States, 1813-1880* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1881), 31-34.

⁷Mahon, *The War of 1812*, 3-4.

⁸Emory Upton, *The Military Policy of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907), 105.

⁹Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 20-21.

¹⁰Mahon, *War of 1812*, viii.

¹¹Porter Hanks to General Hull, 4 August 1812, in U.S. Department of War, *Letters Received the Secretary of War, Unregistered Series, 1789-1861*, Microfilm Series M222, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹²Barbuto, *Niagara*, 37.

¹³Upton, *Military Policy*, 95.

¹⁴Theodore J. Crackel, "The Battle of Queenston Heights, 13 October 1812" in *America's First Battles, 1776-1965* Ed. Charles E. Heller AND William A. Stofft. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 42.

¹⁵Upton, *Military Policy*, 96-7.

¹⁶Eustis to Dearborn, 26 June 1812, M6, Reel 5.

¹⁷Dearborn to Eustis, 10, 13, 28 July 1812, in U.S. Department of War, *Letters Received the Secretary of War, Registered Series, 1801-1870*, Microfilm Series M221, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁸Eustis to Dearborn, 26 July 1812, *Letters Sent by the Secretary of War Relating to Military Affairs*, Reel 5; Dearborn to Eustis, 30 July 1812, *Registered Letters Received*, Reel 43.

¹⁹Crackel, "The Battle of Queenston Heights," 42.

- ²⁰Ibid., 43-5.
- ²¹Ibid., 44-7.
- ²²John Armstrong, *Notices of The War of 1812*, vol. 1 (New York: George Dearborn, Pub., 1836), 238.
- ²³U.S. War Department, *Letters Sent by The Secretary of War, Relating to Military Affairs*, 1:336.
- ²⁴Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 127.
- ²⁵Ibid.; Armstrong to cabinet, 8 February 1813, in *American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 1:439; and Armstrong to Henry Dearborn, 10 and 24 February, 29 March, and 19 April 1813.
- ²⁶Barbuto, *Niagara*, 74.
- ²⁷Ibid., 77.
- ²⁸Ibid., 77-8.
- ²⁹Ibid., 339, note 5.
- ³⁰Wilkinson to Armstrong, 16 November 1813, in *ASP:MA*, 1:475-8.
- ³¹McClure to Armstrong, 22-25 December 1813, in War Department, *Letters Received by The Secretary of War, Registered Series, 1801-1870*. Reel 55; and Lewis Cass to Armstrong, 12 January 1814, in *ASP: MA*, 1:488.
- ³²Mahon, *The War of 1812*, 117.
- ³³William M Marine, *The British Invasion of Maryland 1812-1815* (Baltimore: Society of the War of 1812 in Maryland, 1913), 22.
- ³⁴Mahon, *The War of 1812*, 116.
- ³⁵Marine, *Invasion*, 23.
- ³⁶Ibid., 25.
- ³⁷Ibid., 25.

CHAPTER 2

PRELIMINARIES

The military district commanders' common burdens of preparing for the upcoming battles of 1814 against a British Army replenished with battle-seasoned troops need to be examined in any analysis of the political--military dimensions of the War of 1812. In this chapter the preliminaries of the political--military interaction from the predeclaration of war in April 1812 until the start of the last British offensive in March 1814 will be reviewed. Specifically the relationships between the respective military district commanders, and their superior, the Secretary of War will be examined. It will be necessary to focus on each military district commander's view of the political-military infrastructure in his district, his sense of his purpose, and how he conducted operations. Additionally, what the respective states provided as support will be reviewed. Finally, the chapter concludes with a synopsis of how the enemy conducted operations up until March 1814, and how they prepared for their prospective offensive

Ninth Military District

At the outbreak of hostilities in July 1812, the United States' plan within the Ninth Military District's area of operations relied heavily upon the affected and surrounding states, New York, Massachusetts, Vermont, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania, for both troops, and logistical resources. The federal government was testing the mobilization process outlined in the Constitution for the first time. How quickly the states mobilized their militia, and at what level they resource them played a large part in maturing the American strategy.

On 10 April 1812 the United States Congress apportioned a schedule to the seventeen states then in the union, a 100,000 men Militia requirement entitled “An Act to authorize a detachment from the Militia of the United States”. Each state was assigned its own proportionate allocation of the 100,000 total.¹ Wasting little time to prepare for war on 15 April 1812, the Secretary of War, William Eustis, issued letters to the Governors of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire. The letters stated: “I am instructed by the President of the United States to call upon the Executives of the several states to take effectual measures to organize, arm, and equip according to law, and hold in readiness to march at a moment’s warning, their respective portions of the hundred thousand militia, officers included, by virtue of an act of Congress.”² For the first time since the ratification of its Constitution, the United States mobilized its army.

As with all firsts, the procedures of mobilization were not clear. Various issues acted as elixirs for the subject. In June 1812, Major General Henry Dearborn had contacted the Governor of Massachusetts, Caleb Strong, to inform him that he had received official information that Congress has declared war against Great Britain, and consequently what militia troop movements he planned for the coastal defense of Massachusetts.³ By July, Massachusetts had yet to reply, prompting Eustis to write to Strong on 21 July 1812 to stress that a delay in troop movement for defense of the coast would lead to injurious consequences to the country. Additionally Eustis was concerned because he had assumed that the arrangement of the militia was preparatory to the march of regular troops to the northern frontier.⁴

Strong wrote to the Eustis on 5 August, that he had considered the matter of calling the militia into service, but felt that there was no threat upon his state. He did authorize the mobilization of a few militia companies in towns along the seacoast, but stated that the people of his state expressed no desire that any part of the militia should be called out for their defense. He stated that against predatory incursions, the militia of each place would be able to defend their property, and, in a very short time, the militia of the surrounding country would aid them, if necessary. Two other points that he highlighted as points of concern originated from the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court.

1st. Whether the commanders in chief of the militia of the several States have a right to determine whether any of the exigencies contemplated by the Constitution of the United States exist, so as to require them to place the militia, or any part of it, in the service of the United States, at the request of the President, to be commanded by him, pursuant to acts of Congress? 2nd. Whether, when either of the exigencies exist, authorizing the employing of the militia in the service of the United States, the militia thus employed can be lawfully commanded by any officer but of the militia, except by the President of the United States?⁵

To make matters worse Connecticut Lieutenant Governor, John Cotton Smith, acting on behalf of his ill Governor Roger Griswold, replied to Eustis in July 1812, that they too would not comply with the orders which they felt were in violation of the constitution. As was the case in Massachusetts, Smith argued that

The constitution of the United States has ordained that Congress may provide for calling forth the militia to execute the laws of the Union, suppress insurrections, and repel invasions. Accordingly, the acts of Congress of February 1795, and of April 1812, do provide for calling forth the militia in the exigencies above mentioned. The Governor is not informed of any declaration made by the President of the United States, or of notice by him given, that the militia are required 'to execute the laws of the Union, suppress insurrections or repel invasions.' As, therefore, none of the contingencies enumerated in the constitution, and recognized by laws, are shown to have taken place, his

Excellency considers that, under existing circumstances, no portion of the militia of this State can be withdrawn from his authority. Farther, if the call had been justified by either of the constitutional exigencies already recited, still, in the view of his Excellency, an insuperable objection presents itself against placing the men under the immediate command of an officer or officers of the army of the United States. . . .

He trusts the General Government will speedily provide an adequate force for the security, and protection of the sea coast. In the meantime, his Excellency has issued the necessary orders to the general officers commanding the militia in that quarter to be in readiness to repel any invasion which may be attempted upon that portion of the State, and to co-operate with such part of the national forces as shall be employed for the same purpose.⁶

Rhode Island also did not provide any militiamen for federal service during 1812.

However a company of volunteers was formed to guard Newport. This unit was federalized with the stipulation that it could not be employed elsewhere without its own consent. New Hampshire sent less than 300 militiamen to federal service during 1812. Vermont aligned more with its western neighbor, New York than with its sister New England states. This decision by Governor Jonas Galusha reflected political support for the Madison administration. In 1812 Vermont sent almost 2,500 militiamen into federal service. These small contributions by the New England states reflected a traditional reluctance to fully acknowledge a central authority but also demonstrated the untested strength of the 1789 Constitution. The states within the Ninth Military District that provided the brunt of manpower were Pennsylvania, which sent 4,494 militiamen into federal service, and New York, which sent 14,866 in 1812.⁷

In addition to providing soldiers, the States also had to provide the logistical resources that would enable an army to conduct a war. One such item was the necessary arms that were issued to the militiamen. By October 1812 various contractors had been working for several years to equip the militia with weapons. All but one contractor was

from a northeastern state. Weapons contractors from Pennsylvania accounted for 33,500 muskets, New Jersey for 9,200, Massachusetts for 24,000, Connecticut for 6,500, Rhode Island for 7,000, and New Hampshire for 2,500 muskets. Though the New England states may have balked at providing militiamen, they were not as recalcitrant in profiting from the war as they accounted for almost fifty percent of all arms manufactured in support of the war effort.⁸

In order to effectively examine the political-military interaction in the Ninth Military District before the British offensive in the spring of 1814, an understanding of who the key decision-makers needs to be established. The principal player in the political-military interaction was the secretary of war. Not inspired by the work Eustis was doing prior to 1813, President Madison decided a change was necessary. His first choice was James Monroe, the Secretary of State, who declined hoping for a military field command. Next Madison offered the position to Dearborn, who also turned it down. The President's next choice was the energetic Governor of New York, Daniel D. Tompkins. Although the post was tempting to Tompkins, he declined to avoid abdicating his gubernatorial position to the federalists. Finally Madison offered it to another New York democrat, John Armstrong. Armstrong's resume was long, and impressive. A former Revolutionary War officer, senator, and minister to France, he was more than qualified for the position. Armstrong did, however, bring with him a few drawbacks; most notable was an underlying treasonous sentiment that was attributed to the Newburgh Addresses he wrote at the close of the Revolutionary War. So strong were the feelings against Armstrong's joining the cabinet that Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin threatened to resign.⁹

Another of Armstrong's detractors was James Monroe. Monroe was adamantly convinced that Armstrong would try to be both secretary of war, and field army commander. He thought Armstrong lacked the capacity for the position, and that he was indolent, and insubordinate. Finally, Monroe thought he was overly pretentious, especially about military knowledge that he was sure Armstrong did not possess. Because of these concerns, he feared Armstrong would try to micro-manage the battlefield.¹⁰

Despite these unpleasant opinions, on 5 February 1813 when John Armstrong took over his duties as Secretary of War, the efficiency of the War Department immediately improved. His first order of business was to rid the army of the aging and ineffective general officers that had been running the various departments. With Armstrong's advice, President Madison appointed four major generals to head the war effort. Among them was James Wilkinson, an old associate of Armstrong's from the Revolution. In March the military district reapportionment was published, and Wilkinson was appointed as the Ninth Military District Commander.¹¹

A year before his appointment Armstrong wrote to Eustis, and advised him on his strategy for the war. He had advised Secretary Eustis to take advantage of the prevailing low prices to accumulate supplies, the need to gain military intelligence, and identified the control of the Great Lakes as the focal point for a successful American strategy. True to his word, during his tenure, he dedicated a lot of his time, and effort to gain control of the Great Lakes.¹²

Armstrong made grave errors in the assignment of certain general officers to the Ninth Military District in March 1813. Perhaps, one of these decisions more than any

other early in the war influenced American strategy, and performance on the battlefield. Armstrong appointed Major General James Wilkinson as the Ninth Military District Commander. He then placed Major General Wade Hampton as one of Wilkinson's subordinates (Commander of the Ninth District's Right Division). In doing so Armstrong had aligned two gentlemen with such a mutual hatred that command judgements from both in this crucial district would be skewed. To make matters worse, although the chain of command was established, Armstrong would often and frequently circumvent Wilkinson writing directly to subordinates orders, and guidance.¹³ How effective can any leader be under these circumstances? Wilkinson inherited a bad situation upon taking command of the Ninth Military District. Morale and retention were low from the previous year's operations. Then as added measure Armstrong micro-managed Wilkinson. At such a crucial juncture in the war one of these incidents would have caused problems, all of them spell certain disaster.

Armstrong to his credit provided Wilkinson, with a clear purpose immediately upon his taking command. On 23 July Armstrong wrote to Wilkinson illustrating that the strategic aim was to sever the British lines of communication between Kingston, and Montreal. Armstrong gave his new general a choice of two courses of action. The first proposed a main attack against Kingston, with a secondary attack against Montreal. The second course of action called for a two-pronged attack on Montreal with forces originating from Plattsburg, and Sackett's Harbor.¹⁴

Wilkinson thought that a more elaborate and thorough plan would better suffice. He wrote:

Will it not be better, to strengthen our force already in Fort George; cut up the British in that quarter; destroy Indian establishments, and march a detachment and capture Malden. After which, closing our operations on the peninsula, razing all works there, and leaving our settlements on the strait in tranquillity, descend like lightning with our whole force on Kingston, and having reduced that place, and captured both garrison and shipping, go down the St. Lawrence and form a junction with Hampton's column, if the lateness of season should permit.¹⁵

To that Armstrong replied that such a strategy if successful would only serve to "leave the strength of the enemy unbroken; . . . and, of course, not calculated to hasten the termination of the war. . . . Kingston is the great depot of his resources; . . . Kingston, therefore, as well on grounds of policy, as of military principle, presents the first, and great object of the campaign."¹⁶ Indeed, besides Wilkinson not following clear and unambiguous guidance as to his purpose, his strategy was inconsistent, and unattainable. What ground of hope existed, that his force, after cutting up one enemy, and beating and capturing another, could break down Indian establishments, and sweep from the peninsula everything hostile? The super troops would then have to be in condition to reduce Kingston, and capture both fleet, and garrison. Then, weather permitting, Wilkinson intended to descend the St. Lawrence, and effect a linkup with Hampton, and attack Montreal. How could Armstrong have faith in his general's professional knowledge or judgment? The answer is he did not, so Armstrong joined Wilkinson at Sackett's Harbor where they tried to formulate a plausible plan. Armstrong's additional purpose in the trip was to persuade Hampton to withdraw his resignation. Success in the latter mission was only temporary. By March 1814, Hampton resigned in disgust.

To say that the political--military relations were stressful is an understatement. Wilkinson's leadership style combined with Armstrong's micromanagement resulted in continuing American disorder in the district. Wilkinson's manner dealing with his

subordinates provides another valuable insight into what was needed if the Americans were going to overcome their failures by 1814. After his first campaign into Canada in fall 1813 failed at Chateaugay, and Chrysler's Farm, because of poor cooperation, and lack of synchronization, Wilkinson immediately went into winter quarters, and began assigning blame. His long-time personal enemy, Hampton, received the bulk of the blast. For example, Hampton's refusal to unite with Wilkinson's army "defeats the grand objects of the campaign in this quarter, which, before the receipt of your letter were thought to be completely within our power."¹⁷

Who was to blame for the poor political--military infrastructure, and the resulting battlefield losses? Certainly Wilkinson contributed. His lengthy and protracted delay in planning a strategy with Armstrong hindered success. His overall waste of time, both in assuming his duties, and then in planning the operation resulted in opening the campaign in miserable weather. Due to his tactical incompetence (most noteworthy, failing to destroy a less formidable British field force led by Lieutenant Colonel Morrison outside of Kingston), valuable strategic opportunities were missed. Finally, his lack of leadership qualities, personal feuds aside, inspired none of his subordinates to excel.

Armstrong also had a large stake in the failure. His micro-management of the war effort by supervising the war from within the theater, perhaps to earn personal glory, added to the confusion. By not setting deadlines for Wilkinson, he fostered the procrastination of the latter's planning. Most importantly, he provoked conditions that led to a poor command climate by assigning two personal enemies as commander, and subordinate.¹⁸

Enemy Situation

The British had successfully defended Canadian territory with a combination of British Regulars, Canadian militia, and various Indian tribes for almost two years. As the war in Europe drew to a close, the British commander of forces in North America, Lieutenant General Sir George Prevost was informed that he would shortly be receiving massive reinforcements. As early as February 1813, the Marquess of Wellington wrote from Portugal to British Minister of War, Lord Bathurst that although he hated to lose a regiment, he was glad that it was going to reinforce Prevost.¹⁹ Considerable time would elapse, however, before any or all of this information about reinforcements could actually get to Prevost at Quebec. Correspondence had to travel across the Atlantic by ship to Halifax, over to Nova Scotia by sleigh, and finally by a courier wearing snowshoes along the portage route to Prevost's residence. Over a period of eight months, from April to December 1814, the number of British regular troops in North America would more than double--from 19,477 to 48,163.²⁰

Of the thirty-four total infantry, and cavalry battalions that were sent to North America, seventeen (i.e., half) were designated for service in Canada. Of those, approximately three-quarters of them were deployed to oppose the U.S. forces in the Ninth Military District. The remaining seventeen infantry, and cavalry units five went to Maritime Provinces, and twelve to either Louisiana or the Chesapeake.²¹ This was a clear indication as to the priority Canada, especially along the St Lawrence River Valley, had in the British strategy.

In a letter dated 3 June 1814, Lord Bathurst finalized the British campaign plan, and gave directions to Prevost for the use of his newly arriving additional troops. Prevost did not receive the letter until the second week in July. The plan had two objectives.

When this force shall have been placed under your command, His Majesty's Government conceive that the Canadas will not only be protected for the time against any attack which the enemy may have the means of making, but it will enable you to commence offensive operations on the Enemy's Frontier before the close of this Campaign. At the same time it is by no means the intention of His Majesty's Government to encourage such forward movements into the Interior of the American Territory as might commit the safety of the Force placed under your command. The object of your operations will be; first, to give immediate protection: secondly, to obtain if possible ultimate security to His Majesty's Possessions in America.²²

After receiving this guidance, Generals Prevost, and Gordon Drummond developed a new British tactical offensive and strategic defensive plan for Canada for 1814. Drummond arrived on the Niagara Frontier in late 1813 to serve as the commander of forces for Upper Canada. Influenced by his easy victories over the Americans in December, and January, Drummond proposed a strategy that would regain all the territory lost the preceding years. Prevost on the other hand simply wanted a strategy that retained Quebec at all costs. All offensive actions in his opinion were to be conservative, with minimal risk, and ultimately contributed to the defensive strategy.²³

The British had a large, and extensive intelligence-gathering network along the Northern Frontier from which Drummond could base his plans. Reportedly Prevost gathered a lot of relevant information regarding congressional army, and navy appropriations to general officer appointments from American newspapers.²⁴ Their agents were so busy that an American order published at Sackett's Harbor on 7 April 1814 read:

The commanding officers of the navy and army, from recent information, know that the enemy have spies in, and about the harbor. To detect, and bring them to punishment is the duty of every good and honest citizen.

Any person or persons who will apprehend, and cause them to be prosecuted to conviction through the commanding officer of the navy or army, shall receive five hundred dollars. Every officer in the navy, and army is ordered to apprehend all suspicious persons, and every citizen is earnestly requested to report such persons to the navy or army, that they may be immediately secured.²⁵

With a large area to defend, Drummond had to establish a defensive plan based on anticipating where the Americans would attack. If he concentrated his forces at key positions, he could effectively defend, and also attempt limited counterattacks. He decided to put one battalion of regulars at York, three on the Niagara Peninsula and the rest in Kingston in order to guard that important line of communication to Montreal. Drummond also sought to make improvements to defensive structures. He built Fort Mississauga at the mouth of the Niagara River overlooking the beach where American troops had landed the previous year. He improved the defenses at Fort Niagara, and Burlington Heights because the retention of a secure harbor on Lake Ontario was crucial for British success. Lastly, he ordered a small fortification be built atop Queenston Heights that would be permanently manned.²⁶

Early on in his planning Drummond proposed to Prevost that he conduct a spoiling attack against Sacketts Harbor as a preemptive for the American attack he foresaw. He rationalized that without a fleet to transport supplies, an invasion force could not advance too far into Canadian territory. Drummond estimated a force of 4,000 could seize the American naval base. Prevost rejected Drummond's proposal because he could not justify exposing too much on one venture.²⁷ When the reinforcements started

to show up in earnest then large-scale offensive operations could be justified. Until that time defensive posture was the priority.

Tenth Military District

Although not designated a military district command until July 1814, the area that the Tenth District encompassed was experiencing the same struggles as the Ninth District. The enemy was the same formidable British Empire. The situations that drove the escalation of forces, especially militia federal activation, were slightly different, however the labors to establish a creditable fighting force were the same.

Due to British terror raids on land, thousands of citizens were called out along the shores of the Mid-Atlantic States as a security force. By 1813 all of the states in, and around the Mid-Atlantic had established a call up program for militia to be federalized. Delaware, which did not have a single man in federal service in 1812, called up 3,019 men in 1813; Maryland jumped from 318 men in 1812 to 23,539 men; the District of Columbia from zero to 2,143 men, and Virginia from 901 men to 32,121 men.²⁸

Most of these Mid-Atlantic seaboard states complained that the federal government was failing to protect them. The Federalist legislature of Maryland went so far as to charge the United States with being too preoccupied with conquering Canada to attend to the coasts. Nearly all the Mid-Atlantic States appropriated money for arms, and ammunition. Virginia even authorized a state army of two regiments to serve for the duration of the war, although it was defunct within four months.²⁹ In general, the Mid-Atlantic States were almost as active as the northeastern states in their support of the war.

Unlike the ninth district however, this district received a lot of attention for its defensive plan against a British invasion from its most vociferous residents, U.S.

Congressmen. As early as July 1813, Armstrong responded to correspondence from the Chairman of the Military Committee of the Senate, the Honorable Joseph Anderson on the defensive readiness for the Naval Yard, and other public property in the City of Washington.³⁰ Of course the proximity of this military district also had some advantages. Congressmen were all too happy to appropriate funds for the construction of needed defensive fortifications. In a report communicated to the Senate dated 1 August 1813 “Reference Additional Fortifications, and an Increase of the Army,” Anderson, agreed with Armstrong’s assessment:

That, in my opinion, the present protection of the seaboard is not sufficient, and that the measures to be taken for its better defence are of two kinds: additional fortifications, and an increased number of regular troops. . . . It is proposed to erect a work of earth, (or of more durable materials, if found advisable) on a small island of the Delaware, called Pea Patch. . . . A work of the same description at Hawkins’s Point, near Baltimore. A work on Maryland Point, or on that called Cedar Shoal Point on the Potomac. It cannot be doubted but that the seat of National Government should be placed, not merely beyond injury, but beyond disturbance, from the enemy.³¹

President Madison became concerned about the increased activity of the enemy in the Chesapeake during the early summer of 1814. Consequently, he met with his cabinet on 1 July, and created a new Tenth Military District centered on the Capital, and consisting of the State of Maryland, the District of Columbia, and that part of Virginia lying between the Rappahannock, and Potomac Rivers.³² The next day, without consulting Armstrong, Madison named Brigadier General William Winder to command the district. Winder’s chief qualification was that he was the nephew of Levin Winder, governor of Maryland. The fact that Maryland’s cooperation to the defense of the district was critical underpinned the decision.³³

Winder had been captured in 1813 at Stoney Creek, and then was released early in 1814 specifically to go to Washington, and negotiate the exchange of prisoners. While in Washington, he received an appointment from the President to be the U.S. representative for all prisoner exchange negotiation. From his efforts a convention with the British was agreed upon on 16 April 1814, and set in motions a general prisoner exchange system.³⁴

At its inception the Tenth District had about 1,000 regulars assigned, and 10,000 militiamen were to be held in readiness by neighboring states, and the District of Columbia for a call up by General Winder. Winder's initial assessment to Armstrong was that a force of 4,000 militiamen needed to be assembled "for one, two or three months."³⁵ Armstrong, who was concerned about the expense, and convinced that the militiamen were not going to fight, disagreed with Winder. Armstrong argued that militiamen could be used most advantageously "upon the spur of the occasion, and to bring them to fight as soon as called out."³⁶ Winder insisted, to his credit, that if the enemy did attack his district he would not have the proper time required to assemble a fighting force, and bring them to bear with the enemy. Regardless of the debate, Armstrong remained adamant against early call out of the militia. In a letter dated 12 July, he instructed Winder to call out the militiamen only, "in case of actual or menaced invasion of the District . . . proportion the call to the exigency."³⁷

Winder had experienced his first official dealings with Armstrong, and further resisted the restrictions placed upon him. He did feel the need to remind the Secretary of War that he still had some clout in the political arena. On 16 July he wrote to Armstrong that although the Governor, and Council of Maryland had taken steps to comply with the

federal government's recent requisition for militia, "I fear, from my recent experience, it will be in vain to look for any efficient aid upon a sudden call upon the militia."³⁸

On 12 July 1814 Winder received permission from Armstrong to call out 6,000 militia from his uncle's state of Maryland. The Maryland administration however responded ambiguously to the call up. Six weeks later no more than 250 troops were under the Tenth District command. In the meantime Winder had no authority over any forces until they were organized, equipped, and formally turned over to him by the War Department. Since no written records or reports were made (or possibly kept) it was never known how many of the 6,000 troops from Maryland actually entered into the service.³⁹

Unlike his northern counterpart, Winder did not have an ample amount of time to prepare for the likely British attack. In the dizzying days that preceded his appointment, he was constantly on the move surveying the terrain, and paid little attention to organizing his command. Not until 23 July, did he designate Bladensburg, four miles north of Washington, as the rendezvous for the Maryland militia. He did not even make time to inspect the regular troops under his command, the 36th and 38th Regiments, until almost a month in command. In fact he finally established his headquarters in Washington on 1 August. Events and commitments of command escalated quickly for Winder, and proved to be a challenge of his leadership abilities.⁴⁰

Enemy Situation

The British were very active along the Atlantic coast and in the Chesapeake Bay in 1813. Under the command of Admiral Sir George Cockburn, they made several raids upon the largely unprotected communities on the upper Chesapeake Bay. In early 1813

the Duke of Wellington assessed the situation in North America. He deduced that General Prevost, in Canada, would not be able to hold any ground that he might take from the Americans. Therefore, he proposed a strategy of strong defense. Admiral Warren, on the other hand, continued to insist that the best defensive strategy for Canada was to divert American efforts elsewhere, and proposed diversionary attacks against the United States. His recommendation called for two expeditions. One was an attack against the southern coast, along the Gulf of Mexico. The other was to harass the Chesapeake Bay area with 6,000 to 8,000 men.⁴¹ When Vice Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane replaced Warren, he adopted Warren's plans as his own.

The British War Ministry dispatched a fleet of twelve troopships from the Garonne, France, on 2 July 1814. On board were about 3,000 men from Wellington's army; they were commanded by Major General Robert Ross, a seasoned veteran with twenty-five years of commissioned service. He had served, and fought against the French in Egypt, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and France. Ross had the typical trademark of a general who served under Wellington; he was dashing, and bold. Lord Earl Bathurst, The British War Minister, instructed that Ross be guided by Admiral Cochrane's plans. He specified that the expedition was nothing more than a diversion and that Ross must not operate too far from the coast. While afloat, and during embarkation, Ross was under naval command; however, the admiral had been directed to consult Ross on all strategic decisions. It was Ross' discretion to refuse to commit his troops to any mission he did not deem appropriate.⁴²

As the campaign of 1813 concluded in both the Ninth and Tenth Districts more disappointing news reached the capital. To further burden the President, and Secretary of

War, the Ninth Military District Commander, Major General James Wilkinson's first campaign into Canada in the fall of 1813 failed with the Battles of Chateaugay, and Chrysler's Farm. Herein lay the biggest challenge to the United States. Now, the British, having repelled abortive incursions into Canada using an assortment of regular, militia, and Indians, might be expected to counter-invade their one-time colonies with veteran professional soldiers riding the crest of their historic victory over Napoleon.

¹Benjamin Franklin Cooling, Edited by *New American State Papers, Military Affairs*, (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1979), 5 (hereafter referred to as *NASP:MA*).

²*NASP:MA*, 14.

³*Ibid.*, 15.

⁴*Ibid.*, 16.

⁵*Ibid.*, 16-18.

⁶Smith to Eustis, 2 July 1812, Griswold to Eustis, 18 Aug 1812, *ASP:MA*, 1:325-26.

⁷"Volunteers from each state during the War of 1812," *Senate Document in the U.S. Congress Serial Set*, 100, 15 February 1812, 16 Congress, 2nd session in *ASP:MA*; Eustis to Commanding Officer, Newport, 18 August 1812, *Letters Sent by the Secretary of War*.

⁸Letter on Militia Arms, 18 December 1812, in *ASP:MA*, I.

⁹John K. Mahon, *The War of 1812* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1972), 101.

¹⁰Glenn Tucker, *Poltroons and Patriots: A Popular Account of the War of 1812* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1954), 274.

¹¹"Register, United States Army," 27 December 1813, *ASP MA*, 1:384-425.

¹²Armstrong, *Notices*, Armstrong to Eustis, 2 January 1812, vol.1, 234-41.

¹³*Ibid.*, vol. 1, 238-43.

- ¹⁴Ibid., letter dated 23 July 1813, 187-188.
- ¹⁵Ibid., Wilkinson's letter, 6 August 1813, 31.
- ¹⁶Ibid., Armstrong to Wilkinson, 8 August 1813, 189.
- ¹⁷Wilkinson to Hampton, 12 November 1813, in *ASP:MA*, 1:463.
- ¹⁸Barbuto, *Niagara*, 89.
- ¹⁹J. Mackay Hitsman, *The Incredible War of 1812* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), 107.
- ²⁰Donald E. Graves, "The Redcoats are coming!: British Troop Movements to North America in 1814," *Journal of the War of 1812* – Summer 2001, 12.
- ²¹Ibid., 13.
- ²²Bathurst to Prevost, 3 June 1814 from Hitsman, *Incredible War*, 250-1.
- ²³Mahon, *The War of 1812*, 223.
- ²⁴Hitsman, *Incredible War*, 115.
- ²⁵Ibid., 181.
- ²⁶Barbuto, *Niagara*, 107.
- ²⁷Ibid., 108-9.
- ²⁸"Volunteers from each state during the War of 1812," *Senate Document in the U.S. Congress Serial Set*, 100, 15 February 1812, 16 Congress, 2d session, in *ASP:MA*.
- ²⁹Marine, *British Invasion of Maryland*, 30.
- ³⁰*NASP:MA*, 59.
- ³¹Armstrong stated in a Report on "Additional Fortifications and an increase of the Army," *NASP:MA*, 46.
- ³²Thian, *Military Geography*, 34.
- ³³Armstrong, *Notices*, 128.
- ³⁴Mahon, *The War of 1812*, 291.
- ³⁵Winder statements, *Annals of Congress: Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States, 1789-1824*, 13th Cong., 3rd sess., 1577-1578, in *ASP:MA*.

³⁶Armstrong to Winder, 12 July 1814, as quoted in Edward D. Ingraham, *A Sketch of the Events which preceded the Capture of Washington by the British on the twenty-fourth of August, 1814* (Philadelphia, 1849), 159.

³⁷Armstrong to Winder, 12 July 1814, *Ibid.*, 160.

³⁸Winder statements, *Annals of Congress: Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States, 1789-1824*, 13th Cong., 3d sess., 1579, in *ASP:MA*.

³⁹Secretary of War to the Governors, 4 July 1814, *ASP: MA*, Microfilm group 6 reel 7; "Inquiry into the Causes of the Capture of Washington," *ASP: MA*, 1:524-99.

⁴⁰Winder to Armstrong, 23 July 1814 Winder Statements, *Annals*, 13th Cong., 3rd sess., 1603, in *ASP:MA*.

⁴¹John K. Mahon, "British Strategy and Southern Indians, War of 1812," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, vol. 44, 1966, 36.

⁴²Mahon, *The War of 1812*, 292-293.

CHAPTER 3

NINTH MILITARY DISTRICT, MARCH 1814--SEPTEMBER 1814

By the late summer of 1813, the country had grown weary of hollow victories, and clear defeats. The use of the militia was an issue from the start of the war. Difficulties surfaced universally and continuously regarding enlistment and retention. The situation became dire with the realization that a French defeat at the Battle of Leipzig in October 1813 would allow the British to concentrate forces and material in North America.

Preparatory Phase

Perhaps the most important event that affected the American forces for the planning for this defense was the change in military leadership within the Ninth Military District. Wilkinson was removed from command following a haphazard March-April 1814 expedition along the La Colle River aimed at threatening the British Naval-shipping yard at Isle Aux Noix. Wilkinson's force of about 4,000 men failed to overtake a mill guarded by 200 British regulars, and Canadian militia along the La Colle River forcing him to return to Plattsburg. Armstrong could no longer tolerate Wilkinson's lack of tactical skills and strategic ineptitude.¹

Following the horrendous performance of the leadership in the autumn of 1813, Armstrong recommended new leaders for the rank of major general. Coincidentally along with these recommendations came the voluntary resignations of Major Generals Wade Hampton, and Morgan Lewis. In December 1813, Armstrong had recommended George Izard and Thomas Flournoy for promotion to Major General. Izard had been a

Brigadier under Hampton at Chateaugay and prior to that had commanded the defenses of New York City. Flournoy was a Brigadier General commanding at New Orleans, Wilkinson's old command. In his recommendation Armstrong passed over his two best fighting brigadiers to that point, Andrew Jackson and Jacob Brown.² Madison however, corrected Armstrong's oversight, and sent the nominations of Izard and Brown to Congress in January 1814.³

Promotions at this time tended to have a domino effect, and junior officers also moved up in rank and position. From the array of talented colonels, Winfield Scott, Eleazar Ripley, Edmund Gaines, Alexander Macomb, and Thomas Smith were promoted to brigadier general. Scott, Gaines, and Ripley were assigned to the Left Division commanded by Major General Jacob Brown. Macomb and Smith were assigned to the Right Division commanded by Major General George Izard. All would play prominent roles in the ensuing months. Once Armstrong relieved Wilkinson of command of the Ninth District, he chose not to replace him, but rather to deal directly with the two division commanders, an odd arrangement, which would hinder the efforts of both divisions.⁴

The dual independent command situation caused confusion to both Brown and Izard. Neither was sure whether his command was based on assigned troops or a geographic region. Although they were promoted to major general on the same day, technically Izard out ranked Brown by virtue of being named first on the order. Izard asked Armstrong to clarify the nature of his command on 9 May 1814. Armstrong replied in a letter dated 18 May 1814 stating, "Territorial limits of command are found inconvenient. The corps assigned to your division, and all officers belonging to these

unless specially designated for other duty, will form your command. Where two or more divisions unite; the senior officer will necessarily command. The quartermaster general, the apothecary general, and the ordnance department, at Albany will obey your requisitions.”⁵ By dividing the Ninth Military District, Armstrong prevented unity of command, and repeated a similar mistake he made the previous year with Hampton and Wilkinson.

Secretary Armstrong did not in my opinion prepare the Ninth Military District for success for the 1814 campaign season. The lack of unity of command, and intradistrict communications left both generals competing for limited resources, and made both reliant on Armstrong to resolve disputes. President Madison noted the lack of communication between the commanders on the northern front and the lack of coordination with the naval commanders. Starting in May 1814 Madison started an investigation of Armstrong’s duties. He requested all of Armstrong’s correspondence of recent months with his generals. Armstrong replied that Generals Izard and Gaines were fully informed of General Brown’s movements by letters from the secretary of war. Upon which Madison noted, “It remains that no instruction to correspond among themselves, appears to have been given or presumed.”⁶

Since Armstrong repeated this scenario the previous year perhaps, this arrangement fulfilled a need for power. In 1813 the situation led him to move to Albany so he could plan, and control the campaign. This unique experiment of the secretary of war going to the front must be counted as a failure. There is nothing to indicate that Armstrong performed any creditable function, which he could not have performed in Washington. Being forward only increased his need to micro-manage his commanders.

The many activities that he did perform, such as forwarding supplies, issuing calls for troops, and issuing tactical orders were more properly the duties of the commanding general and his staff. In 1813 Armstrong did little that was useful, much that was unnecessary, and a few things that were actually detrimental. He focused too closely on one theater of operations instead of concentrating on the bigger picture, and greater need for a homeland defense plan. In 1814 he did not have the luxury of front-line interference. An illness sustained at the end of 1813 kept him in Washington. The lack of direct intradistrict communication hampered the generals of the district. The Ninth District's division commanders were left to make time sensitive decisions that directly impacted each other and the overall success of the campaign, and they had to do so without much intelligence, either directly gathered or shared.

The Left Division--Ninth Military District

American Strategy

In a letter dated 28 February 1814, Armstrong developed a strategy for the Left Division that entailed a deception plan. It was a two-part plan that he delivered to Brown via one letter.⁷ On 21 January 1814, Armstrong directed Brown to detach six regiments from James Wilkinson's army at French Mills, New York, and proceed west to safeguard Sackett's Harbor, a vital American naval base. Armstrong was concerned for the safety of Captain Isaac Chauncey's lake squadron.⁸

In the first part of the 28 February letter to Brown, Armstrong urged him to cross the ice of Lake Ontario, and "carry Kingston by a coup de main," provided that certain conditions existed, such as thickness of ice, favorable weather, superior force ratio to the defenders at Kingston, and Chauncey's full cooperation. After Montreal, Kingston was

the most important base because of its location on Lake Ontario across from Sackett's Harbor. Armstrong ended his letter with: "If the enterprise be agreed upon, use the enclosed letter to mask your object."⁹ The enclosed letter detailed how President Madison had ordered Brown to attack Fort Niagara, some 200 miles to the west. This second letter was to be used as a stratagem with the intention for Brown to somehow leak it to the British in order to deceive them that Fort Niagara, not Kingston, was their objective.¹⁰

Both Brown and Chauncey agreed that the conditions could not be met for a successful attack on Kingston. Various reasons prompted their decision, among them that the cross-ice raid was not practical, and that, since Wilkinson's fiasco at French Mills, Brown only had 2,000 regulars fit for duty. Brown, buttressed by Chauncey's advice, misinterpreted the second letter as an alternate directive since the conditions in the first letter could not be met. As a result, in mid-March Brown led the Left Division to Batavia enroute to the Niagara Frontier.¹¹

Self-doubt haunted Brown over his decision to march to Batavia. Finally, at Geneva, New York, Brigadier General Gaines persuaded his commander that he had indeed misunderstood the Secretary's instructions. The brigade was now about 110 miles into their march; nevertheless, Brown ordered them to reverse direction back to Sackett's Harbor. He then sped to Sackett's Harbor to again consult with Chauncey. Once there, Chauncey again convinced him that their original interpretation was correct, and that Armstrong wanted his men at Batavia. Once again the General reversed his brigade's direction, and by the end of March they closed in at Batavia. Brown left Gaines in charge of the remaining forces at Sackett's Harbor while he was away.¹²

Armstrong, now back in Washington, did not receive Brown's letter dated 20 March until early April. His conclusion was that Brown might as well just stay in the Buffalo area. In Brown's mistake he saw the opportunity to continue with earlier plans to protect western New York, recapture Fort Niagara, and drive the British for good from the Niagara Peninsula.¹³ "Good consequences," Armstrong wrote to Brown, "are sometimes the result of mistakes."¹⁴ It was indeed a very strange way to begin in earnest the operations in 1814, and illustrated that Armstrong did not have a clear strategic goal.

The key to successful operations for the Left Division was to attack the peninsular fortifications prior to the arrival of the veteran British army. The limiting factor was the ability of the naval force to gain superiority on Lake Ontario. The need for land batteries to protect the fleet was so great that not until Chauncey became "Master of the Lake" could Brown initiate his attack.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Brown had been receiving updates on the progress of the British veteran army. In a letter dated 7 May 1814 Armstrong relayed to him that "a most terrific account of the landing and moving westward of ten thousand British troops along the St. Lawrence."¹⁶ Brown knew he had to attack quickly before the arrival of the veterans but he was hampered by the need to provide protection for the American naval fleet until it was strong enough to control the lake. The two needs directly conflicted. Armstrong certainly was aware of this conflict, but gave no guidance to Brown as to which task had a higher priority.

The American strategy for the campaign was simple but relied upon too many variables, notably the navy, to effectively synchronize operations. Armstrong further created an easily avoidable problem by issuing the confusing order to Brown leading to

the misunderstandings of his strategic plans. This miscommunication was hardly a way to instill confidence in a subordinate, as he was about to embark upon a major campaign.

The Leadership

A starting point at which to analyze the readiness of the Left Division to meet the operational challenge has to be the composition of units assigned, and more importantly, the background and characteristics of its leadership. It was with the leadership that the genesis of any and all success blossomed. As is generally the case, the leadership reflected its commander.

Major General Jacob Brown took command of the Left Division on 12 April 1814. Brown was not a professional soldier; he had spent the greater part of his military career with the New York militia. He was perhaps the last of the politician-generals commanding this late in the war. What he lacked in martial knowledge and experience he overcame with an energetic, aggressive, and responsible attitude.¹⁷

Brown faced the greatest challenge for a division commander--planning, and executing a campaign plan. Luckily he was assigned as his brigadiers three of the most capable officers, and leaders the United States Army had at the time. These newly promoted generals faced the hardest challenges of their budding careers within the next few months, and the fate of the Left Division rested upon their aptitude and military skills.

The most notable of Brown's lieutenants was Winfield Scott. Upon his promotion to brigadier general on 9 March 1814, the then twenty-seven-year-old Scott had accumulated a wealth of experience in the art of military tactics. Scott had abandoned a budding law career, and joined the army in 1808. Commissioned in the

artillery, he served under Wilkinson in New Orleans prior to the war. A stern disciplinarian, and able administrator, he constantly and feverishly studied foreign military literature. Characterized by his peers as a vain man who was exceedingly aggressive in battle, Scott exhibited leadership abilities early in the war as a lieutenant colonel, when he led the defense of the American forces at Queenston Heights. Although he failed on the battlefield that day, and was captured, his reputation as a solid military leader was born. Eventually released, Scott returned to duty in the Ninth Military District under Dearborn to plan, along with Captain Oliver Hazard Perry, the successful amphibious assault on Fort George in 1813. Throughout the 1813 campaign Scott got a close first hand education on leadership, through the experience of both success and failure.¹⁸

Edmund Pendleton Gaines had entered the army in 1809, and spent the early years of the war in the Northwestern Army. His last position in the Northwest Theater had been as Major General William Henry Harrison's adjutant general. Upon his posting to the Ninth Military District in 1813, he commanded the Twenty-fifth Infantry Regiment with distinction at Chrysler's Farm.¹⁹

The last of Brown's immediate lieutenants was Eleazar Wheelock Ripley. Unlike his peers, Scott, and Gaines, he was not a professional soldier. Prior to the war Ripley had been a successful lawyer and politician. His last position before the war had been as the President of the Massachusetts Legislature. In early 1812, Ripley was commissioned as a lieutenant colonel in the Twenty-first Infantry. A year later he was promoted to colonel, and given command of the same regiment. Unlike his peers, Ripley was described as quiet, reserved, and extremely intelligent. These traits allowed him to

complement his peers, and help in building a cohesive climate in Brown's command. Like his peers, Ripley learned from his experiences in battle. He participated in the battles of York, Fort George, and Chrysler's Farm.²⁰

Raising the Army

During spring 1814 the Left Division of the United States Ninth Military District prepared for its impending campaign. However, the number of soldiers on its rolls was woefully short for conducting the main attack into Canada. Brown departed the division's winter quarters at French Mills with about 2,000 men fit for duty. The bulk of the district manpower lay in Izard's Right Division, which had about 6,000 men. Brown wrote to Armstrong outlining his shortfall, and requested at least 4,000 regulars in order for him to achieve his goal of clearing the Niagara Peninsula. Armstrong's plan to strengthen the Left Division depended on a vigorous recruiting effort, but ultimately the results were insufficient.²¹

Obtaining accurate manpower estimates for this time period is extremely difficult. This is the result of various issues such as no standardized reporting procedure established by the war department, and the inability of regiments to properly report soldiers who chose discharge rather than reenlistment. It was the practice of the United States Army in the early nineteenth century for individual infantry regiments to recruit from a specific geographic area. Specialty arms such as dragoons, and artillery did not follow this practice, and recruited from the entire country due to the relatively smaller size of their regiments compared to the infantry and their need for soldiers with specific skills. The decentralized nature of recruiting placed a heavy burden on the individual regiments. It has been estimated that at any given time during the War of 1812, up to 30

percent of a regiment's officers were performing recruiting duties, and not in the field with their unit.

To further complicate matters, regiments very rarely operated as a whole unit. Task organizations of a company from one regiment, and a detachment from another regiment would often join a different parent regiment for training or to prepare for an upcoming campaign. One regiment might have up to three or four subordinate units at completely different locations. In view of these factors, accurate reporting was difficult to say the least. It was entirely possible for regimental adjutants to miss or worse double count (as when a parent unit adjutant, and a geographically distant attached unit adjutant both would report the "attached" (albeit separated) troops. The timeliness of reports was another factor due to poor communications back to Washington. All of these reasons added confusion to a matter complicated to begin with.²² Between January and June 1814, only 9,421 soldiers enlisted or re-enlisted into the army as a whole. Of that, 2,801 men were recruited by the fifteen regiments in the Ninth (and Eighth) Military District. Secretary Armstrong's recruitment plan included using the Eighth Military District's manpower since there was no ongoing or projected fighting in the Northwest Territory. To add to the shortfall in recruiting, two separate groups of veteran experienced soldiers' initial enlistments were coming due in 1814. The first group had joined for a five-year enlistment when the army started its growth in 1809. The latter group contained many one-year enlistees who had rallied around the flag for the 1813 offensive. The end result was a gross loss in army strength for the first half of 1814. Additionally, the army replaced experienced, trained soldiers with raw recruits. That experience had come with

a heavy price in 1813, which further magnified the trained, and available manpower problem.²³

Organizing the Left Division

The Left Division consisted of five infantry regiments, a battalion of riflemen, a troop of dragoons, and several companies of artillery.²⁴ Eventually the units would be organized to comprise two regular infantry brigades, one artillery battalion, and one volunteer-militia brigade.²⁵ Flexibility and adaptation to circumstance were the orders of the day.

Brown was fortunate to command an assortment of infantry regiments that by 1814 had battle-tested experienced junior officers, and commanding officers. A review of the regiments in the Left Division reveals that the common denominator between them all was that by spring 1814 many of the weaker, ineffective officers had left. The remaining officers were experienced, brave, and eager to prove their merits on the battlefield. This one trait, bravery, would be the biggest element in lowering the odds against the numerically and qualitatively superior British in the upcoming campaign.²⁶

Equipping the Army

By June 1814, the Left Division was in an excellent state of readiness. That readiness was the result of a maturation of the logistics system as it had adapted to the war. The Quartermaster General's Department had experienced a steep learning curve. Supply preparations were initiated shortly after Congress enacted legislation increasing the size of the Army early in 1812. At the direction of Eustis, the military agents at Philadelphia, Boston, and Albany purchased and had manufactured tents, knapsacks,

canteens, cartridge boxes, and belts. The military agent at Albany, Anthony Lamb also took steps to provide barracks, storehouses, and a hospital near the city for the troops to be quartered there.²⁷ Although these steps were made in the right direction, the processes to acquire the appropriate materials and the transportation of the finished materials to the soldiers in the field still were to be worked out.

The biggest obstacle to providing the proper supplies to the field units lay in communicating the requirements. Delay started at the field units, and escalated as the request went through the system. The torpor of nineteenth century communications added to the problem as units often changed location prior to their supplies reaching them. To fix this endemic problem, a system was instituted to send all supplies (especially clothing for recruits) to the headquarters of the district where it would be sub-issued to the commanding officers of the requesting units upon their rendezvous in the military district.²⁸

Transportation of the supplies, and men continued to be the hardest obstacle to overcome for the quartermasters throughout the war. Supplies, and baggage moved in wagons, manned by civilian teamsters or soldiers detailed from the line, usually under the direction of wagonmasters. On the supply lines, clothing, equipment, medical supplies, and military stores were transported in wagons, which the quartermasters hired. To prevent loss, the supplies were usually placed under the care of conductors who accompanied the wagons. This means of ground transportation took a considerable amount of time, and was expensive. In the winter months, and when wagons could not be used, the quartermasters hired packhorses, and in some areas used sleds. To improve the service, water routes were essential.²⁹

One of the reasons for the improvement in supplying the troops of the 9th Military District was that Armstrong, on the suggestion of the Quartermaster General, appointed an assistant deputy quartermaster general for the harbor of New York. He not only speeded the transportation of supplies up the Hudson to Albany but also procured supplies in the New York area. Tentage and camp equipment for the troops on the Niagara were therefore drawn from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, and funneled through Albany. Clothing was principally drawn from Philadelphia although commissaries also purchased clothing at New York, Norwich, and Boston. The troops were supplied with arms from the Springfield, and Philadelphia arsenals.³⁰

The only supply deficiency that the Left Division experienced in the spring of 1814 was a lack of blue cloth for their uniforms. Taking what he could get, Scott equipped his brigade with gray uniforms. Scott wrote to Armstrong in May 1814 claimed that supplies were “abundant and of good quality.”³¹

The Left Division’s main supply depot was located along the Genesee River about 100 miles east of Buffalo. This location was centrally located between Sackett’s Harbor, the decisive point for the American Army in 1814, and Albany, where most of the supplies, and replacement personnel originated. Brown’s Division, however, lacked sufficient numbers of wagons, horses, and boats to haul the large amounts of supplies needed from the rear.³² To make matters worse, the British garrison at Fort Niagara threatened Brown’s logistical supply route along the Niagara, and possibly the Genesee Rivers. With a severely limited logistical support train, Brown had to plan his attack on the assumption that his force would have to depend upon foraging as a primary means for

food resupply, thereby allowing the limited supply trains to concentrate on ammunition resupply.³³

Training the Army

Possibly the most significant leadership trait of Jacob Brown was his ability to admit his shortcomings, and appoint one of his subordinates with an area of expertise in that field as his action officer. By assigning Winfield Scott to train the Left Division for field operations prior to his departing Buffalo, Brown made one of the most important decision of the war by an American field commander to that point of the war. Scott approached his task with the stern, and calculating manner of a professional officer. He started by gathering the facts necessary to prepare for the upcoming campaign. He collected material, obtained intelligence on the British forces operating in the Niagara Peninsula, and trained the troops assigned.³⁴ Scott wasted little time gathering intelligence. He sent out spies to Upper Canada, the undercover men compiled information from American sympathizers as to the composition, disposition, and intentions of enemy forces. Additional sources such as deserters, traveling civilians, and returned prisoners of war helped Major Azor Orne, Scott's inspector general compile his enemy situation report. From these sources Orne was eventually able to locate every regiment then in Upper Canada.³⁵ Without his efforts at Buffalo, it is doubtful whether the Left Division would have attained any success on the battlefield during the summer of 1814.

Scott's challenge was significant considering that the United States Army had not established a permanent training facility for new recruits by 1814. That responsibility was left up to the individual regiments. In most instances the training a new recruit

received amounted to nothing more than the rudiments of discipline, drill, and weaponry. The quality of the training was often poor. The army lacked a quality pool of general and junior officers to properly train the men. In a report to Congress following the war, Secretary of War James Monroe reported that there was no “uniform system of discipline . . . in training the armies of the United States, either in line, by battalion or company.”³⁶

A second challenge Scott faced was that the army was in a state of confusion over what training manual to use. General Alexander Smyth had published a drill manual in 1812, but most American generals had thought it inadequate, and the Inspector General replaced it with one written by William Duane in 1813.³⁷ Scott believed that Duane’s manual was incomplete, inconsistent, and generally useless. He therefore based his training at Buffalo upon the French Ordinance Manual of 1791 which he believed made the training more efficient.³⁸

Scott used the premise of training the trainer to establish his “school” of infantry training. He instructed his officers first in the details of soldier training. The proper stance, movements for marching, the manual of arms, methods of firing, and target practice, and changes in formations were drilled by Scott into his officers. Scott then supervised his officers as they drilled their own companies and squads. Eventually the training progressed to include battalion size maneuvers.³⁹ By the time Scott had finished molding, and training his force, the regiments of the Left Division were better trained, and more prepared for hard fighting than most units within the United States Army.

Overall the Left Division was in better shape to conduct their offensive operations in the summer of 1814 than the two preceding years. Armstrong’s strategy for the campaign was simple but reliant upon too many variables, most notably the support of

Chauncey, and the navy. At the heart of the strategy was the need to attack quickly, and seize the Niagara Peninsula prior to the arrival of the veteran British army. The division's strength lay with experienced leadership that had been promoted due to successful battlefield accomplishments. The division struggled with various issues in its preparations such as replacing experienced, trained soldiers with raw recruits. It prepared to operate with a severely limited logistical support train, and depended upon foraging as a primary means for food resupply, and allowed the few supply trains to concentrate on ammunition resupply. Most importantly along with strong leadership, the intense training the regiments received made them more prepared for hard fighting than most units within the United States Army. It is arguable that given the situation, the Left Division was as prepared as it could possibly be to enter a campaign season against veterans of Wellington's army.

Right Division--Ninth Military District

American Strategy

The Commanding General of the Right Division, Ninth United States Military District, Major General George Izard did not receive direction from the Secretary of War about the 1814 campaign strategy until 22 June 1814. He had been in command six months. Izard's Right Division was in defensive positions along Lake Champlain, preparing for what Izard believed would be the main British attack into the U.S. along a traditional invasion route.

After receiving numerous instructions from Armstrong regarding administrative matters, the micro-management proved too much for Izard who wrote a private letter to Armstrong on 3 June 1814 inquiring, "What degree of responsibility am I to have in the

exercise of my functions as Commander of an Army of the United States, [when] the imperative tone in which instructions are frequently sent to me from the War Office, and against the minute detail with which my operations are dictated.” He further stated that he was ready to receive the orders of his superiors, but added that if the secretary of war had a different conception of his authority, then he was prepared to resign his command.⁴⁰ Armstrong’s reply to Izard, if any, cannot be found. Undoubtedly this letter had a great influence on his subsequent attitude toward Izard.

After a strategy session in Washington with President Madison, Armstrong issued his intent for his Right Division Commander on 11 June 1814 for that portion of the Ninth Military District. Izard was to establish, and garrison a post of 1,500 men on the south bank of the St. Lawrence River in order to support armed galleys that were also to be stationed at the garrison. The galleys had the mission to operate on the river, and sever the British water lines of communication. In addition, the strategy formulated in Washington had Izard’s division conducting a demonstration toward Montreal in order to divert Prevost’s attention from the Left Division’s attack across the Niagara River.⁴¹

Izard had conducted his own estimate of his division’s sector prior to receiving his orders from Armstrong. He concluded that he was severely outnumbered, that the British would attack through his sector, and that his division was filled with inexperienced junior leaders and recruits. In early June he made the best possible disposition of his division to meet the imminent British attack. He moved two of his three brigades north of Plattsburg. One he moved near the village of Champlain, which is located just south of the Canadian border. The second brigade moved to the village of

Chazy about twenty kilometers north of Plattsburg, and twelve Kilometers south of Champlain. The last brigade he retained at his headquarters at Plattsburg.⁴²

Izard envisioned the imminent battle taking place near Chazy, and these dispositions would allow him to support his brigade there with the brigade at Plattsburg. Armstrong's order telling him to split his already numerically inferior force, and was counter to his own plan. After waiting a few days, Izard replied to his superior by asking that Armstrong re-examine his strategy because he believed that a standing British force of 5,500 men, and 30 guns were directly across the border was poised to attack.⁴³

Izard did comply with his orders to an extent. He sent out one of his engineer officers, Major Joseph Totten, to locate a suitable spot for the building the fortification Armstrong had directed. Major Totten returned ten days later, and submitted his findings, recommending an ideal location about sixteen miles east of Ogdensburg, and nearly 150 miles from Plattsburg. Izard dutifully forwarded the report to Armstrong, and pursued it no further.⁴⁴

The Leadership

Major General George Izard commanded the Right Division. He started the war as a colonel in the artillery having previously served in the army earlier in his life. He was one of the few leaders formally trained in military arts in the American Army during the war. Izard was commissioned a second lieutenant in 1794 while he was studying in Germany. Upon his return to the states he commanded Castle Pinckney in Charleston, South Carolina. After his promotion to captain in 1799, he was appointed as aide to Major General Alexander Hamilton. In 1803 he resigned his commission, and returned to civilian life. He returned to the army in 1812 as a colonel in the artillery, and because

of his military background was promoted to brigadier general in March 1813, and placed in charge of New York City's defense. Prior to his promotion to major general he never trained nor led troops in battle. He was impressive in appearance, and exhibited manners that he was confident to command.⁴⁵

Brigadier General Thomas A. Smith commanded the First Brigade of the Right Division. Smith had been commissioned a second lieutenant in 1803, and served under General Wilkinson in New Orleans. By the start of the war, Smith was a lieutenant colonel in the Rifle Regiment. He was promoted early in the war to colonel, and command of the regiment. By the time he was appointed a brigadier, his experience level was higher than most serving officers. He had served in Georgia, led troops in the failed siege at St. Augustine in Spanish East Florida, fought in the Northwest under General Harrison, and commanded the Rifle Regiment under Wilkinson during the failed attempt to capture Montreal. His latest action had been as a brigade commander at La Colle Mill in March 1814.⁴⁶

Brigadier General Daniel Bissell commanded the Second Brigade of the Right Division. Like Smith, Bissell had a considerable amount of experience. Unique for a general officer of his era, he came up through the regular ranks, having served three years with the First Infantry Regiment, and discharged as a sergeant. When his enlistment ended, he was commissioned, and rose through the ranks to become a colonel and commander of the Fifth Infantry Regiment in August 1812. He served in Brown's advance guard during the Chrysler's Farm campaign, and, like Smith, participated as a brigade commander at La Colle Mill.⁴⁷

Brigadier General Alexander Macomb commanded the Third Brigade of the Right Division. Unlike most of his peers, he had received a formal military education, although his early career was a bit unorthodox by today's standards. Macomb entered the United States Military Academy in 1803 as a first lieutenant of the new engineer corps. He had originally secured a commission as a cornet of light dragoons in 1799. After being promoted to second lieutenant, he left the service in 1800. Macomb reentered the army in 1801 as a second lieutenant in the 2d Infantry. He served as General Wilkinson's secretary on the commission with Indian tribes in the southeastern states. In 1803 he was promoted to first lieutenant, and entered the Military Academy. He was one of the first two students to complete the course of study. Later, as a captain, he was in charge of improving coastal fortifications in the Carolinas, and Georgia. Macomb was promoted to major in 1808, and lieutenant colonel in 1810. At the start of the war he was commissioned a colonel commanding the 3d Artillery Regiment. He had commanded the garrison at Sackett's Harbor, was involved in the capture of Fort George in May 1813, and commanded the reserve force during Wilkinson's ill-fated St. Lawrence Expedition in the fall of 1813.⁴⁸

Raising the Army

The bulk of the Ninth District manpower lay in the Izard's Right Division, with about 6,000 men. The Right Division went through the same pains that its sister division experienced in terms of retention, and recruitment of soldiers. The horrible conditions that the soldiers lived through in the winter of 1813 in upstate New York led many a man whose enlistment was up to leave the army.⁴⁹ Many of the regiments that were assigned to the Right Division had originally been recruited in southern states. Since regiments

were recruited from specific geographical areas they had to compete with the state militia. As the war went on, recruitment in the states closest to the nation's capital had to compete with the state militia forces being raised to protect against the harassing British raids along the coastline. When some of the regiments, such as the Tenth and Twelfth Infantry, that were assigned to General Izard's Division did recruit a substantial amount of men, those troops were formed into new companies and battalions, and assigned to duty in the Tenth Military District.⁵⁰

To make matters worse, as the summer months approached, the Right Division still lay idle in northern New York. General Izard's manning situation suffered even more due to troops not being paid. He was fully expecting an attack by the British at any time, which even led to some of his officers resigning.⁵¹ It seems the prospect of facing veterans of Wellington's army did not sit too well with at least a few of Izard's young officers.

Organizing the Right Division

The Right Division had seven infantry regiments assigned to it that were organized into three brigades.⁵² All had limited battle experience, usually characterized by defeat. Izard was fortunate to have under his command an assortment of junior officers, and commanding officers that by 1814 had trained hard, and prepared their defensive positions. A review of the regiments in the Right Division reveals that the common denominator between them all was that by spring 1814 many of the weaker, ineffective officers had left. The remaining officers were experienced, brave, and eager to prove their merits on the battlefield. This one trait, bravery, would be the biggest factor in lowering the odds against the British in their upcoming campaign.⁵³

Izard also had five full companies of artillery; each with five to six guns each, in Plattsburg. They employed a mix of cannon size. Unlike the British, the American artillerists had no formal training for his craft. However, by 1814 a seasoned artilleryman's experience and training was at a sufficient level that he composed a formidable force. Additionally at any given time two or three squadrons of cavalry, consisting of approximately fifty men each were a part of the Right Division. Because the cavalry was not heavily armed they were not used as shock action troops. The light dragoons of the Right Division were used as scouts, guides, and messengers.⁵⁴

Equipping the Army

The same logistical infrastructure that supported the Left Division also supported the Right Division. Early in the war the production of essential war items was the major problem. Once that was solved, then, of course, the quality of the items was a constant point of consternation throughout the war.⁵⁵ The lack of transportation for supplies caused the biggest delay, and caused the field units to go without vital items such as food, and winter clothes for long periods at a time. As the war progressed, the quartermaster generals worked out many of the problems in the budding logistical system of the army.⁵⁶

Though communications and transportation issues hindered most units, these factors had a lessened affect on the Right Division. Unlike the Left Division, the Right Division was in a semipermanent location, at Plattsburg. That permanency reduced much friction, and led to fairly timely, and dependable communications and logistical support. With the appointment of an assistant deputy quartermaster general in New York, the transportation element was also simplified. Since Plattsburg was located on a major water route coming out of Albany via New York City, the Right Division experienced

faster and more efficient resupply.⁵⁷ Izard reported to Armstrong that the additional supplies he requested were arriving when he corresponded to him in late May.⁵⁸ No other wants or need for supplies are mentioned in the correspondence for the remainder of the summer, and into the fall. From this we may assume that the Right Division was well equipped for homeland defense against the British Army.

Supporting the Army

In spring 1814 the pace of campaign preparations increased when Izard arrived to take command of the Right Division. In late May Armstrong ordered Izard to fortify Rouse's Point, which was just inside the American border, and overlooked a narrow channel of Lake Champlain. Controlling Rouse's Point prevented further British naval incursions into the lake, and protected the small American fleet on Lake Champlain commanded by Captain Thomas McDonough.⁵⁹ Izard did not like this plan, and wrote back to his superior pointing out the dangerous proximity Rouses Point had to British posts in Canada, and the potential that construction would provoke the British into an unwanted attack.⁶⁰ Instead Izard built a battery of four 18-pound artillery pieces on the shore of the Cumberland Head citing that he could not adequately protect a battery at Rouse's Point. Major Joseph Totten, Izard's chief engineer opposed the Cumberland Head plan stating that the emplacement would not be able to impede an invasion fleet.⁶¹ As it turned out Totten was correct, the emplacements established at Cumberland Head were worthless, and abandoned when the British first approached.

At the same time the gun emplacements were being built, Izard directed the establishment of three forts on the peninsula of land just south of Plattsburg village. Izard envisioned these forts as the main defensive positions to protect Plattsburg Bay. He

named the principal fort in the center, Fort Moreau. The other forts were each located on the shore of Lake Champlain, and on the high bank above the Saranac River.⁶²

Training the Army

In the spring and summer of 1814 Izard, and his second in command, newly promoted Brigadier General Alexander Macomb, prepared their officers and men for the inevitable British attack. For the past two years the Americans had trained for the offensive, however now the Right Division had to prepare for defense. The anticipation of British veteran reinforcements from Europe heightened the threat of possible invasion.

Izard's Division numbered about six thousand by midsummer. Included in that number were almost a thousand injured and sick, and an additional hundred men who were in the stockade.⁶³ Training consisted mainly of firing practice and close order drills. Macomb understood that their only hope of survival against a numerically superior force was to religiously practice loading and firing the musket. Contrary to popular belief, the soldiers who made up the American regiments in the War of 1812 were not farmers with skills in outdoorsmanship, and firearms. The farmers tended to stay at home on the farm where they were needed. The demographics of soldiers in the regiments illustrate that most were from towns and cities, and had no firearm skills at all. Izard instructed that the soldiers get training in firing and reloading from cover, as opposed to open formations, because that is how he envisioned the battle taking place.⁶⁴ The officers under direction of Izard drilled their men an average of seven hours a day using Von Steuben's *Blue Book* as the primary reference.⁶⁵

The Battles of the Left Division

As Scott completed his training of units at Buffalo, new regiments arrived in camp. A combination of recruitment, and Armstrong's directive brought additional men to Buffalo to join the Left Division.⁶⁶ The first major subordinate unit to arrive was a large contingent of Pennsylvania volunteers who were immediately assigned to Brigadier General Peter B. Porter's Third Brigade. Next to arrive was the largest regular army contingent, the 400 man strong Twenty-third Infantry. The regiment had recently finished a successful recruitment drive in central New York State. Four newly recruited companies of the Twenty-second Infantry Regiment arrived next under the command of Colonel Hugh Brady. Brady, a veteran of "Mad" Anthony Wayne's Fallen Timber campaign, and the Revolutionary War, was still enroute to Buffalo, so his troops would be temporarily consolidated with the Ninth Infantry. Additional smaller companies and detachments of regular and volunteer units from New York continued to arrive up until the invasion was initiated.⁶⁷

Brown reorganized his two brigades of regulars to even out the quality of the subordinate units. Scott's brigade consisted of three maneuver elements: the Ninth, with attachments from the Twenty-second Infantry. The Eleventh Infantry Regiment, and the Twenty-fifth Infantry Regiment. Ripley's brigade consisted of two maneuver elements: the Twenty-first, with a company from the Seventeenth Regiment, and two companies from the Nineteenth Regiment attached, and the Twenty-third Infantry Regiment. The Third Brigade led by Porter consisted of the Pennsylvania, and New York volunteers, plus about 300 Seneca Indians under Red Jacket.⁶⁸ Additionally, the division had one artillery battalion to support it. The aggregate of regular and militia troops under

Brown's command was approximately 4,800 men.⁶⁹ In early July 1814, the best-trained and led force the Americans would field during the war was prepared to go on the offensive.

In the last few days before the launching the invasion, Brown, and Armstrong altered the cabinet's campaign plan. It had called for an amphibious landing of the Left Division on the southern shores of the Niagara peninsula. Brown, however, changed that, and decided to cross the Niagara River directly from Buffalo to Fort Erie. His objective was to bypass or reduce the line of British fortifications along the west bank of the Niagara River. The plan also called for a rendezvous with Commodore Isaac Chauncey's naval squadron at a point on the shore of Lake Ontario. Logistics had as much to do with this plan as tactical dispositions. Buffalo was only a staging area, not a base of operation. This was because the division's main supply point was nearly 100 miles away at the junction of the Ridge Road, and the Genesee River. The division lacked the necessary resources, such as horses, wagons, and boats, to provide continuous supply to the regiments. Of tactical concern was the British garrison at Fort Niagara, which threatened the division's water line of communication between the Niagara, and Genesee Rivers. The strategic and logistical situation inhibited Brown's movements within the peninsula. A speedy rendezvous with Chauncey was necessary to establish a secure water line of communication. Once that was complete, Brown then planned to destroy British forces on the peninsula, attack Burlington, and then capture the provincial capital of York.⁷⁰

Tactically the American plan had merit. The British and Canadian regulars, and provincial militia, under the command of General Phineas Riall, were dispersed at strategic points across the peninsula, and roughly equaled the Left Division numerically.

Brown knew that even after the invasion commenced, and revealed their landing sites, many of Riall's forces could not move from their strategic positions. Countering against this strategy Lieutenant General Gordon Drummond, Riall's superior, had anticipated the Niagara invasion for a few months. He knew they had positioned troops at the correct strategic locations, but lacked sufficient numbers in mass on the Niagara Peninsula to protect all of the sites. His plan was to move the newly arrived Peninsular veterans quickly inland to protect Kingston, and the sea lines along the St. Lawrence River. Once those troops were in place, he hoped to gain time in order to join Riall with as many reinforcements as he could muster.⁷¹

Brown and Armstrong were counting on Riall's inflexibility in regard to movement of his troops. They hoped that Riall would either risk his small-dispersed field force in battle or avoid contact until the Left Division could seize the bridge over the Chippawa River. The capture of that bridge would sever the road leading north to Lake Ontario, and effectively prevent quick British reinforcement.⁷²

The Battle of Chippawa

On 3 July 1814 Major General Jacob Brown led the Left Division across the Niagara River, and easily overpowered the small British garrison at Fort Erie without loss of life on either side (figure 2). The American army had a foothold in Canada from which they could begin their advance northward.⁷³ On 5 July as the Left Division approached the Chippawa River, Indians harassed them with fire from a nearby forest. Brown ordered Porter's volunteer and Indian brigade to drive off the hostile Indians. Porter's men were successful but they also encountered a unit of British regulars forcing Porter to retreat south in disorder.⁷⁴

Scott appeared with his brigade of approximately 1,500 troops. Soon his brigade engaged a British force equal in size to his own commanded by Riall. Despite heavy artillery fire, Scott's troops maintained their formation, and advanced toward the enemy. Riall, who mistakenly assumed that the gray uniforms worn by Scott's brigade signified militia, was taken aback by the good discipline of the Americans. Scott's men mounted a bayonet charge, which broke the British right flank, and forced Riall to retreat across the river. The Battle of Chippawa was over, with the British suffering 500 casualties while the American losses were 325 men.⁷⁵

Brown moved his entire army across the Chippawa River, and then onward to Queenston, which had been evacuated. His division advanced to the shores of Lake Ontario in hope of linking up with Commodore Chauncey's fleet. Upon link up Brown planned for a combined assault on Burlington. Luckily for the British the flotilla never appeared. General Riall feared that none of the three forts--Niagara, George, or Mississauga--could withstand a heavy attack. He proposed minimal manning at the garrisons, and taking all other troops from the garrisons along with a detachment from Burlington to attack the enemy's rear.⁷⁶

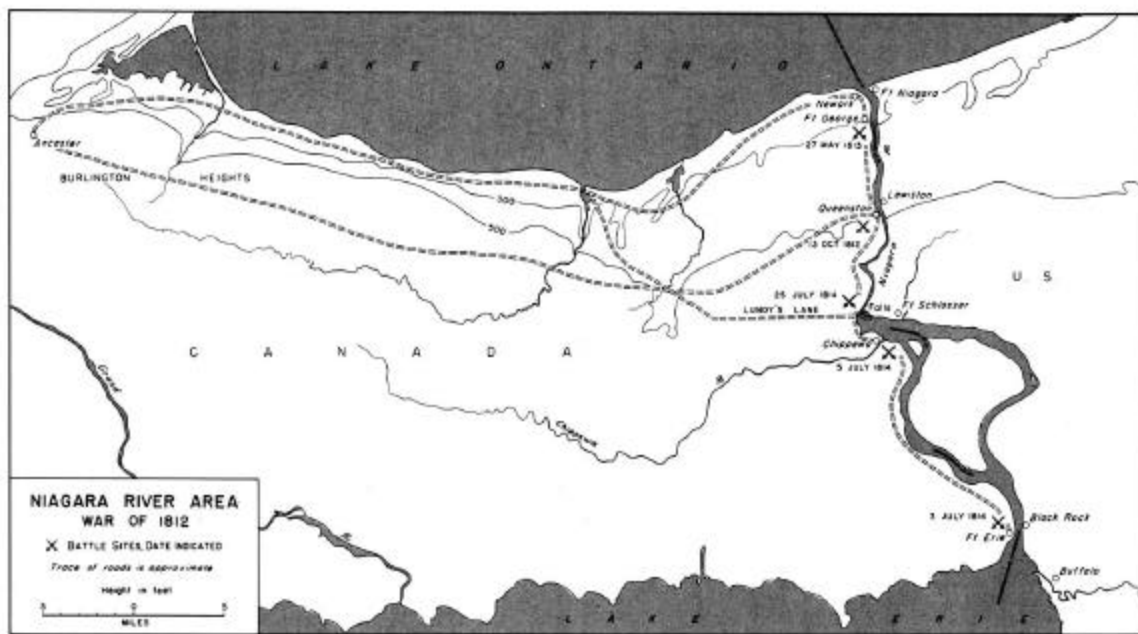


Figure 2. Niagara River Area--War of 1812. *Source:* University of Texas, Niagara River Map. [maps on-line].

The Battle of Lundy's Lane

Even without naval support Brown was eager to seek out the enemy. On 25 July, the Left Division engaged the main British force at Lundy's Lane, several miles north of the Chippawa River. The aggressive Scott attacked a numerically superior force. Scott's brigade fought determinedly holding until reinforcements arrived. The British forces were also reinforced from bases in close proximity. By dusk the American force numbered roughly 2,100 to the British 3,000. The fighting carried on into the night. Scott's men reinforced by a regiment from Ripley's brigade pushed the British left flank back. Simultaneously, Colonel Miller's Twenty-first Regiment assaulted the British center. They overran a powerful battery then withstood several British counterattacks. After five hours the British withdrew. Brown also withdrew his forces back to the American camp, which brought an end to the battle.

The cost to both sides was high. Brown and Scott were wounded, Scott so seriously that this was his last engagement of the war. Both of the British senior officers, Drummond and Riall, were also wounded, with Riall also being captured. The Americans suffered 855 casualties. Total losses for the British were approximately 880.⁷⁷

The remnants of the Left Division returned to Fort Erie. With Brown in the hospital he gave command to Eleazar Ripley with an order to defend Fort Erie. The Americans quickly went about improving the unfinished works of the fort. Brigadier General Edmund P. Gaines had been called from Sackett's Harbor to command the army, now only 2,200 men. On 15 August, three British columns totaling 2,100 men advanced on the fort with fixed bayonets. When the attack got under way, the main column stalled, but the other two penetrated one of the fort's bastions, and engaged the American defenders in close combat for nearly two hours.⁷⁸ The British were finally dislodged when a powder magazine blew up. Gaines reported that "The explosion was tremendous, it was decisive."⁷⁹ Both British commanding officers were killed. In all, the British suffered over 900 casualties to the Americans 74.⁸⁰

Having failed to take Fort Erie, the British mounted three heavy batteries about 500 yards north of the fort, hoping to bombard it into submission. Brown, who had resumed command even though still recovering from wounds sustained at Lundy's Lane decided to knock out the British guns. His plan was "to storm the batteries, destroy the cannon, and roughly handle the brigade upon duty, before those in reserve could be brought into action."⁸¹

Two assault forces were formed. In the middle of the night on 17 September during a rainstorm, the Americans surprised the British, and after severe fighting overran

two of the batteries, spiked the guns, and retired. The engagement was costly to both sides. The British suffered over 600 casualties, the U.S. a little over 500. The American Army was in no condition to follow, and bring another battle. The Niagara campaign thus came to an end. Most of the American troops soon re-crossed the Niagara River to Buffalo, while the British reverted to garrison duty along the Niagara frontier.⁸²

Battles of the Right Division

While the Left Division decisively engaged the enemy on the Niagara Peninsula, the Right Division continued to train, and prepare defenses for the British attack on Plattsburg. The last guidance Izard had received from Armstrong was in late June instructing him to move a large contingent westward to cut the British lines of communication along the St. Lawrence River. Izard selected a site, notified his superior of the site, and never acted upon it fearing that he would have to leave the Plattsburg area exposed, and vulnerable to attack.⁸³

At the president's request, Armstrong sent a series of letters to his Right Division commander starting on 27 July. In the letters Armstrong outlined several options for the employment of Izard's Division. On 2 August Armstrong outlined to Izard his instructions to proceed with 4,000 troops, and either attack Kingston or move directly to Sackett's Harbor to operate against General Drummond on the Niagara Peninsula.⁸⁴

Izard was not pleased with the order. He hastily informed Armstrong on 11 August that the enemy forces in his vicinity was now superior to his, and he believed threatened an attack at any day. He speculated that the only reason they had not yet attacked was because of their caution, and the expectation of reinforcements. Izard wrote "I will make the movement you direct, if possible, but I shall do it with the apprehension

of risking the force under my command, and with certainty that everything in this vicinity but the lately erected works at Plattsburg, and on the Cumberland Head will in less than three days after my departure, be in the possession of the enemy.”⁸⁵ Izard wanted a record of his warning to Armstrong of the precarious situation that would result if he executed the order. “It has always been my conviction,” he continued, “that the numerical force of the enemy has been underrated,” and he asserted that his army had kept a much larger British force in check for many weeks.⁸⁶

Armstrong was not persuaded. Several times in the past his commanders had grossly overestimated the strength of the enemy, and he undoubtedly suspected that Izard was guilty of the same fault. In a letter to General Brown early in the summer he relayed these same sentiments. He asserted that the problem stemmed from wild reports from informants. “It is by duping animals of this kind and sending them to us that the British Army in Canada have done half their work and prevented us from doing a tenth part of our own.”⁸⁷ Thus Armstrong, despite Izard’s report, wrote confidently to General Duncan McArthur, commanding officer in Detroit, on 6 August, “The reports of great detachments having arrived from England are much exaggerated.”⁸⁸ He was wrong. British regulars, veterans of Wellington’s Army, and other experienced British units, were arriving almost daily.⁸⁹

Izard still believed that the British would attack to control Lake Champlain. He wrote to Armstrong on 20 August, and explained to him that against his better judgment he would comply though he could not begin to move until 25 August. He reiterated that under no circumstances was he responsible for the consequences that would befall his present position after his partial withdrawal.⁹⁰

General Izard reorganized his division into two brigades that he would take with him to Sackett's Harbor, and a third composite brigade that he would leave at Plattsburg under the command of his deputy, Brigadier Alexander Macomb. The two brigades with him would total roughly 4,000 men under the command of Brigadier Generals Thomas A. Smith and Daniel Bissell. Izard decided to leave all of the artillery behind for a few reasons. He thought it would speed up his division's march, and expected to pick up additional guns at Sackett's Harbor. Macomb's force would need every gun the command had if they were attacked, as he was left with approximately 1,500 men from a myriad of units to defend Plattsburg. Additionally he was left with a large number of sick and injured soldiers. On 29 August Izard's two-brigade division left Plattsburg, and headed southwest toward Schenectady.⁹¹

The Battle of Plattsburg

After a buildup of troops along the United States--Canada border, General Sir George Prevost, the governor-general of Canada, was ordered by London to take the offensive on 3 September 1814. Prevost's plan was to launch a combined army and navy attack south. The navy would destroy McDonough's small fleet, and secure Lake Champlain. The army of roughly 10,000 men would march down the western side of Lake Champlain in order to attack Plattsburg. His intention was not to hold the town, but to obtain a bargaining chip for the peace negotiations.⁹²

Even before the British approached, Macomb had converged his whole command into a tight defense around the village of Plattsburg. He abandoned the defense on the Cumberland Head, salvaged the guns, and ordered the completion of the three forts on the south side of Saranac Lake. He named the unfinished fort on the lakeshore Fort Scott,

and the one on the river, Fort Brown, in honor of the distinguished officers' efforts during the Niagara campaign. He also ordered the construction of two blockhouses with cannon to guard the river, and ravines on the northern approaches to the forts.⁹³

Macomb urged both New York and Vermont to provide more militia. New York sent 700 militia from the five surrounding counties. Vermont questioned whether they could legally send militia so instead put out a call for volunteers. The response to all of these calls was slow, leaving Macomb little time to organize the newcomers into anything close to resembling an effective fighting force. After manning the forts and blockhouses, Macomb divided up the remainder of his small army along likely avenues of approach. Macomb's plan would have to be improvised and somewhat reactive to British actions.

Meanwhile Prevost had ordered his men to attack the American positions (figure 3). Macomb sent out skirmishers, consisting mostly of militia, to slow down the British march, however these troops were simply brushed aside by the undaunted enemy. In his report Macomb claimed that the British did not even deploy during the small skirmishes, they just pressed on in column.⁹⁴ British troops under the command of General Sir Fredrick Robinson, one of the Duke of Wellington's former brigade commanders, crossed the Saranac River, and routed the militia there. Robinson's men paused for reinforcements, but just then General Prevost learned of the defeat of his Royal Navy Squadron on Lake Champlain by the American naval Captain Thomas McDonough. Fearing that his supply lines had been severed, Prevost ordered a general retreat. The withdrawal of British troops was so sudden that they were eight miles away before Macomb realized that they had abandoned the offensive. Because the land engagements

were mostly quick skirmishes casualties were light on both sides, roughly a 100 men each.⁹⁵

If the British had been successful, Armstrong would have held the largest share of criticism for the failure. His attention was obviously focused on offensive operations on the Niagara Peninsula. His failure to trust Izard's assessment of the enemy situation and the subsequent repositioning of troops to the Niagara Peninsula almost cost the Americans the war. Strategically it is ironic that Armstrong, who had recommended Montreal as a major objective in 1812 and Kingston in 1813, concentrated the American forces on the Niagara Peninsula in 1814. Somehow he lost sight of the fact that, unlike capturing Kingston or Montreal, American success on the Niagara Peninsula would have had little significant strategic impact on the war.

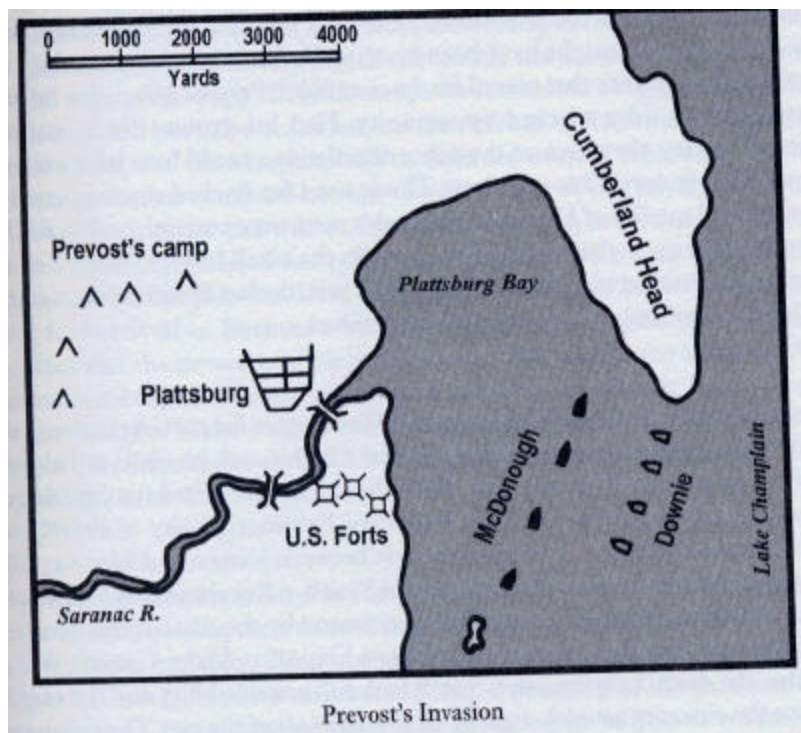


Figure 3. Battle of Plattsburg. Source: Barbuto, *Niagara*, 269.

Conclusions

Success on the battlefield within the Ninth Military District during the 1814 campaign season was a combination of good leadership, preparation, and luck. Accent leadership. The dynamic that influenced most aspects of military activity was the relationship of each division commander with his superior, Secretary of War John Armstrong.

Armstrong accepted a position in the President's cabinet knowing full well that Congress had not authorized a General in Chief position to exercise military command, thus allowing him to assume that position de facto. In fact it was probably furthest from Congress' intention to bestow upon a civil officer subordinate to the President the right to exercise military command.⁹⁶ That, however, was exactly what Armstrong sought from the position. His actions and manner as he conducted his business in this post further illustrated his quest for power, and the ability to thwart others that aspired to challenge it.

Armstrong's first method to solidify his position was to weed out the old incompetent generals he had inherited in 1813. Although his reasoning was valid, his recommendations for new major generals at the end of the 1813--campaign season illustrated his intentions were not completely altruistic. How else could he have passed over the two most successful brigadier generals to that point, Andrew Jackson and Jacob Brown? Of course, not recommending these two successful leaders depicted either a complete distrust of men with a militia background or a fear of promoting generals who possessed dominant, and charismatic personalities who might have challenged him for control. Luckily for the Americans, President Madison intervened on the most important decision that shaped the 1814 campaign.

Perhaps his experience dealing with a general he did not want in command in the Ninth District might explain Armstrong's decision not to replace General Wilkinson directly with either Brown or Izard. Rather, maintaining two separate commands at the division level, and directly reporting to him illustrates Armstrong's desire for total control. Even though he exhibited good administrative skills, Armstrong's lack of strategic planning ability and his distance from the theater of operations exacerbates this decision that almost cost the Americans dearly at a crucial juncture of the campaign.

Armstrong's deficiency in strategic level planning was illustrated when he did not establish a district campaign plan, but rather developed the left division's strategy, and subsequently the right division's strategy in a compartmentalized fashion. Luck prevailed in that General Izard had the forethought to use his local intelligence to make his own assessment of his area of operation, develop his own plan, and ignore Armstrong's orders when they finally did arrive. Armstrong, however, cannot be held completely culpable for the weak strategic plan. Some blame must also rest with President Madison. It had been the unrealistic plan to seize Kingston developed, and approved by Madison, that gave General Brown initial problems early in 1814.

The trouble with Armstrong's planning was that results often depended on happenstance. Armstrong's confusing deception plan had left Brown's division at the wrong place to launch its campaign, which allowed Armstrong to revert to the "strategy" he had wanted all along. Moreover, nowhere in the correspondence from Armstrong to his subordinate commanders can be found an accurate or even realistic suggestion of the War Department's perception of the enemy threat. Worse yet, local reports of enemy

size, and operations from General Izard were apparently disregarded. General Brown's reports of enemy strength were challenged as exaggerated.

The preparatory phase was executed by the resourceful newly promoted senior leaders who ensured that their troops would be as well prepared to meet with, and defeat a formidable British force. Leaders like Scott, Ripley, and Macomb were empowered by their respective division commanders to organize, train, and support their men to meet the challenges of the battlefield. Without these leaders, any success for the Ninth Military District during the 1814 campaign season would have been unlikely.

The execution of the operations phase allowed the newly trained American forces to perform admirably against the British in various tactical engagements in 1814. Had it not been for some luck on the battlefield, and assistance from the United States Navy, Armstrong's thin defensive posture in the right division's sector might have caused a complete collapse of the entire military district. This was due to a poor strategic plan that drew forces away from the Right Division's extensive defensive positions.

Success for the Americans can be attributed to strong leadership from the division commanders on down. This element more than any other was the key factor in the Ninth Military District that helped establish the foundations of the professional U.S. Army as it is known today.

¹Barbuto, *Niagara*, 104.

²It has been speculated that Armstrong's best interest in his recommendation rested not with the good of the army or country, but in self-interest. By not recommending the best suited for promotion he was eliminating what he saw as his competition for his object of desire -- the rank of Lieutenant General. Ibid., 105-106.

³Irving Brant, *James Madison: Commander in Chief, 1812-1836*, vol. 6 (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961), 253.

⁴ASP:MA, I, 387. Brown's division was headquartered at Sackett's Harbor, Izard's at Plattsburg. A minimum of two regiments (2000 men) formed a brigade and two or three brigades a division.

⁵Armstrong to Izard, 18 May 1814, *Letters Sent*, Roll 7.

⁶Madison to Armstrong, 27 July 1814 and Armstrong to Madison, 27 July 1814, in *Madison Letters*.

⁷Armstrong to Brown 28 February 1814, in Armstrong, *Notices of the War of 1812* (New York, 1840), vol. 2, 213.

⁸Armstrong to Maj. Gen. Wilkinson, 20 and 21 January 1814, in *Ibid.*, 64.

⁹Armstrong to Brown 28 February 1814, in *Ibid.*, 213.

¹⁰Armstrong to Brown 28 February 1814, in *Ibid.*, 213.

¹¹Brown to Armstrong, 4 March 1814, *Unregistered Letters Received*; Brown to Armstrong, 21, 24, 31 March 1814 and 8 April 1814, *Registered Letters Received*.

¹²Barbuto, *Niagara*, 111.

¹³Jeffery Kimball, "The Battle of Chippawa: Infantry Tactics in the War of 1812" *Military Affairs* 31, Winter 1967, 170.

¹⁴Armstrong to Brown, 20 March 1814, *Letters Sent*.

¹⁵Armstrong to Brown, 25 May 1814, *Ibid.*

¹⁶Armstrong to Brown, 7 May 1814, *Ibid.*

¹⁷Winfield Scott, *Memoirs* (New York, 1864), vol. I, 118.

¹⁸Timothy D. Johnson, *Winfield Scott -- Quest for Military Glory* (Lawrence: University Press, 1988), 36.

¹⁹John C. Fredriksen, *Officers of the War of 1812* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellon Press, 1989), 29.

²⁰Barbuto, *Niagara*, 116.

²¹Brown to Armstrong, 17 April 1814, Jacob Brown's Orderly Book, undated, Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society Manuscript Collection as cited in Barbuto, *Niagara*, 116.

²²Barbuto, *Niagara*, 116-117.

²³ “A Report of the Army, Its Strengths and Distribution,” in *ASP:MA*, 1:535; “Return of Enlistments,” in *ibid.*, 1:511.

²⁴ The Left Division consisted of the Ninth, Eleventh, Twenty-first, Twenty-third, and Twenty-fifth Infantry Regiments; the First Rifle Regiment; a troop from the Second Light Dragoons; and The Corps of Artillery, formed in May 1814 by consolidation of the First, Second and Third Regiments of Artillery, consisted of twelve battalions of four companies each. For more details about the composition and leadership of the regiments see Fredriksen, *Officers*, 53-54, 61-62, 65-66, 89-90, 93-95, 117-19 and 125-27; Barbuto, *Niagara*, 118-22; and Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army 1789-1903* (Washington, 1903; reprinted Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), vol. I, 52.

²⁵ Volunteer-militia were simply militiamen who volunteered to serve under an elected or politically appointed officers or for specific missions for a specified length of time. Kimball, “The Battle of Chippawa,” 175. Two other groups would round-out Brown’s Left Division, the volunteer-militia and the Canadian Volunteers. In March 1814 New York Governor, Daniel Tompkins, raised a force of 2,700 volunteers to supplement Brown’s regular army force with militia. The volunteers signed up for six months of service with a promise of the same pay and allowances as the federal troops. To command this outfit, Tompkins chose Peter B. Porter. Porter, formerly a War Hawk congressman, had no formal military education but was well respected, and intelligent. Serving with the volunteer-militia were about 300 Seneca Indians led by the venerable Seneca Chief, Red Jacket. Barbuto, *Niagara*, 120-1.

A small band of approximately 100 Canadian Volunteers was under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Willcocks. Based out of Erie, the Canadian Volunteers acted as spies working in the western portion of Upper Canada. Having knowledge of the surrounding area, the small group of volunteers would serve as scouts for the upcoming American invasion. Barbuto, *Niagara*, 121-2.

²⁶ William B. Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 114.

²⁷ Secretary of War to J. Eustis and Anthony Lamb, 16 March 1812; SW to Eustis, 19 March 1812; SW to Linnard, 28 April 1812, *Letters Sent*.

²⁸ Erna Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1989), 150.

²⁹ Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army*, 154.

³⁰ *ASP:MA*, I, 508-10.

³¹ Scott to Armstrong, 17 May 1814, *Registered Letters Received*.

³²Armstrong to Brown , 20 June 1814. *Letters Sent*; Brown to Armstrong, 26 June 1814, *Registered Letters Received*.

³³Kimball, "The Battle of Chippawa," 177.

³⁴Scott to Armstrong, 17 May 1814, *Registered Letters Received*.

³⁵Barbuto, *Niagara*, 134-5.

³⁶Secretary of War, James Monroe to the House of Representatives, 22 November 1814, ASP:MA, 1:523.

³⁷Smyth, *Regulations for the Field Exercises, Maneuvers, and Conduct of the Infantry of the United States* (Philadelphia, 1812), 67; Duane, *Hand Book for Infantry* (Philadelphia, 1813), 111.

³⁸Scott, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, 118-21. Although Scott only mentions the French System it is a widely held belief that he is in fact referring to *The French Ordinance Manual of 1791*.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 120-23.

⁴⁰Izard to Armstrong, 3 June 1814, *Registered Letters Received*.

⁴¹Armstrong to Izard, 11 June 1814, Izard, George. *Official Correspondence with the Department of War* (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1816), 33-34.

⁴²Izard to Armstrong, 10 June 1814, *Ibid.*, 26-30.

⁴³Izard to Armstrong, 25 June 1814, *Ibid.*, 35-40.

⁴⁴Totten to Izard, 11 July 1814, *Secretary of War Letters Received*, roll 62.

⁴⁵Roger J. Spiller, *Dictionary of American Military Biography*, vol. 2 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984), 515-7.

⁴⁶David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, editors. *Encyclopedia of the War of 1812* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 1997), 477-8; and Barbuto, *Niagara*, 286.

⁴⁷Barbuto, *Niagara*, 287.

⁴⁸Spiller, *Dictionary of American Military Biography*, 705-7.

⁴⁹Barbuto, *Niagara*, 287-8.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 287.

⁵¹Izard to Armstrong, 31 July 1814, *Secretary of War Letters Received*, roll 62.

⁵²The Fourth, Fifth, Tenth, Twelfth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, Sixteenth Infantry Regiments composed the Right Division initially in 1814. For more information see Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army*, vol. 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903), 87-90; and Barbuto, *Niagara*, 287-91.

⁵³William B. Skelton, *An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 114.

⁵⁴David G Fitz-Enz, *The Final Invasion* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2001), 77-8.

⁵⁵Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army*, 148-50.

⁵⁶ASP:MA, I, 508-10.

⁵⁷Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army*, 154.

⁵⁸Izard to Armstrong, *Letters Received*, 28 May 1814.

⁵⁹Armstrong to Izard, 25 May 1814, in Armstrong, *Notices*, vol. 2, 119.

⁶⁰Izard to Armstrong, 12 July 1814, *Ibid.*, 120.

⁶¹Allen S. Everest, *The Military Career of Alexander Macomb and Alexander Macomb at Plattsburgh* (Plattsburgh, New York: Clinton County Historical Association, 1989), 50.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 50-1.

⁶³Fitz-Enz, *The Final Invasion*, 73. Various sources cite different numbers of sick. The lowest estimate puts the number around 700 and the highest around 1,300. The assumed mean estimate, one thousand, reveals a significant number sick.

⁶⁴Fitz-Enz, *The Final Invasion*, 75.

⁶⁵Barbuto, *Niagara*, 202.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 155.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, 155.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 157.

⁶⁹“Strength of Major-General Brown’s Army, July 1, 1814” Henry Adams, *History of the United States of America During the Administration of James Madison* vol. 2 (New York: New Edition, 1930), 37.

⁷⁰Armstrong to Brown, 10 June 1814, *Letters Sent*; Brown to Armstrong, 26 June 1814, *Registered Letters Received*, RG 107. For Logistical argument see Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army*, 164-66.

⁷¹Fortescue, *History of the British Army*, vol. 10, 105.

⁷²Armstrong to Brown, 10 June 1814, *Letters Sent*; and Brown to Armstrong, 17 June 1814, *Registered Letters Received*.

⁷³Brown to Armstrong, 6 July 1814, *Registered Letters Received*, Reel 59.

⁷⁴Brown to Armstrong, 6 July 1814, *Ibid.*, Reel 59; and Armstrong, *Notices*, 85.

⁷⁵Brown to Armstrong, 7 July 1814, *Registered Letters Received*, Reel 59; and Armstrong, *Notices*, 85-8.

⁷⁶Mahon, *War of 1812*, 270.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 272-5.

⁷⁸Barbuto, *Niagara*, 247-52.

⁷⁹Edmund P. Gaines to Armstrong, 23 August 1814, *Letters Received*, roll 61.

⁸⁰Barbuto, *Niagara*, 252.

⁸¹Brown to Secretary of War, 29 September 1814, *Letters Received*, roll 59.

⁸²Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 189.

⁸³Armstrong to Izard, 11 June 1814, Izard, *Official Correspondence*, 33-34.

⁸⁴Armstrong to Izard, 2 August 1814, in Armstrong, *Notices*, 223.

⁸⁵Izard to Armstrong, 11 August 1814, *Letters Received*, roll 62.

⁸⁶Izard to Armstrong, 11 August 1814, *Ibid.*, roll 62.

⁸⁷Armstrong to Brown, 7 May 1814, *Ibid.*, roll 62.

⁸⁸Armstrong to McArthur, 6 August 1814, *Ibid.*, roll 62.

⁸⁹Graves, "The Redcoats are Coming," *Journal of the War of 1812*, 12.

⁹⁰Izard to Armstrong, 20 August 1814, *Letters Received*, roll 62.

⁹¹Barbuto, *Niagara*, 255.

⁹² Fitz-Enz, *The Final Invasion*, 54-5.

⁹³ Macomb to Secretary of War, 15 September 1814, *Registered Letters Received*, reel 64.

⁹⁴ Macomb to Secretary of War, 8 September 1814, *Ibid.*, reel 64.

⁹⁵ Macomb to Secretary of War, 15 September 1814, *Ibid.*, reel 64.

⁹⁶ Upton, *Policy*, 129.

CHAPTER 4

TENTH MILITARY DISTRICT, JULY 1814--SEPTEMBER 1814

By 1814 the British continued their harassing tactics, and maintained superiority on the Chesapeake waters. In July 1814 Admiral Cockburn with 500 men had penetrated ten miles inland, concluding that his detachments could go anywhere they chose in the bay area, and that all the American forces must be clustered around Washington, Annapolis and Baltimore.¹ Based on an apparent universal license to infiltrate he had savagely flaunted the prior year, Cockburn assumed the area's rivers would be once again be his to command.

The British started to encounter more resistance from state militias in 1814, and the engagements became larger in size, and scope. This would culminate in the battles to protect the nation's capital in the Battles of Bladensburg and Washington, when American regular, and militia forces fighting beside naval ground forces demonstrated a stronger resolve. In terms of wounded, killed, and captured in battle, however, the Americans prevailed over the British, although this was attributed to unimaginative British tactics.² The American forces employed combined arms successfully, but the problem of troops breaking ranks, and fleeing still haunted the American forces. The lack of solid training, and leadership were at the heart of the problem.

In September 1814 the British offensive against the Tenth Military District concluded with the Battle of North Point, and the attack on Fort McHenry, the sum of both equaling the attack on Baltimore. British ground forces disembarked their ships at North Point, and promptly moved out towards Baltimore. The plan called for a ground attack from the east supported by naval gunfire to seize the city of Baltimore.

The American forces, over 11,000 strong, were massed in defensive positions around the city, and along the anticipated British attack route along the North Point road. They were prepared, and well positioned due to a well thought out defensive plan. After two years of British terror raids along the Chesapeake concluded with the American victory at Baltimore, the campaign in the Tenth Military District ended in a stalemate. How were the United States forces able to overcome the odds against them?

This chapter examines how the Tenth Military District prepared to defend the important political, economic, and population centers against the impending invasion from a seasoned British force. The preparatory phase of this chapter focuses on what the senior command believed was the perceived threat. A description of how the military district was organized, and looking within the internal organization examines how the army raised, equipped, and trained its forces. After the preparatory phase, the fighting phase of this theater is presented. Finally, the chapter ends with analysis, and conclusions.

Preparatory Phase

The focus of American strategy for the Tenth Military District in late summer 1814 was defense of the capital region. The creation of the military district was based on President Madison's fear of increased enemy activity in the Chesapeake area during the early summer of 1814.³ Speculation as to where the British would attack along the Chesapeake varied amongst the American leadership. Armstrong was convinced that Washington would never be attacked. He was quoted as stating, "They (the British Fleet) certainly will not come here (Washington); what the devil will they do here? No, no! Baltimore is the place, sir; that is of so much more consequence."⁴ Armstrong also

believed that fortifications wasted money, and that bayonets were the most efficient barriers against an enemy.⁵

On 2 July 1814 the President created the Tenth Military District, and appointed General William Winder as the commander.⁶ Winder had the challenge of not only developing a strategy to defeat the impending British attack, but all the other administrative duties as well. Here his inexperience with high level command was shown. He spent much of his time traveling throughout the countryside inspecting the terrain, while his real work as district commander, planning strategy, and preparing defensive works, went undone. In fact he paid little attention to organizing his command. Not until 23 July did he designate Bladensburg, four miles north of Washington as the rendezvous for the Maryland militia because it was the junction of three major road networks. He did not even make time to inspect the regular troops, of the 36th and 38th Infantry Regiments, until after almost a month in command. He did not establish his headquarters in Washington until 1 August. Events and commitments of command quickly escalated for General Winder.⁷ The closest Winder came to planning was suggesting to Armstrong that 4,000 militia be called out, and be stationed in two areas, half the force between the South River, and Washington, and the other half in the vicinity of Baltimore.⁸

Armstrong did little to assist Winder in his new command, to include not even assigning him a staff. Initially, except for an aide and one assistant, Winder had no staff. On 16 August an assistant adjutant general was assigned, and on 19 August an assistant inspector general was named.⁹ It was apparent that Armstrong rendered assistance only when asked, and during the whole period he presumably offered no advice. This is all the

more remarkable when his past inclination to interfere with his commander's activities is recalled. Possibly he felt constrained by the knowledge that Madison was then investigating his conduct, which resulted in his reprimand on 13 August.

The Leadership

Other than the district commander, and the two regular regiment commanders, the majority of the leadership within the Tenth Military District was composed of militia officers. This aspect made the challenge of command even greater. Winder did, however, have a few outstanding leaders to help him thwart the British attack.

William Winder came into command with a very limited military background, and little experience. Prior to the outbreak of hostilities in 1812, Winder had acquired a reputation as one of the best attorneys in the Baltimore area.¹⁰ In the spring of 1812, Winder received a commission as a regular army lieutenant colonel, and shortly after the declaration of war was promoted to colonel as the army expanded in size, and sent to the Niagara Frontier. He served there under Brigadier General Alexander Smyth during the abortive invasion of Upper Canada. Subsequent to that Winder was promoted to brigadier general, and placed under the command of Brigadier General Morgan Lewis in March 1813.

Winder participated in General Dearborn's attack on Fort George in May 1813, and was sent by Lewis with 800 men in pursuit of the British as they retreated to Burlington Heights, Upper Canada. During the march a 500-man unit led by Brigadier General John Chandler joined Winder's force. The American army approached the British position at Burlington Heights on 5 June but decided to pull back to Stoney Creek

to plan its offensive. The British, sensing an attack, conducted a spoiling attack at dawn 6 June, and routed the Americans capturing both Winder and Chandler in the process.¹¹

For the next several months Winder was a prisoner of war. Upon his parole, in spring 1814, he served as Madison's negotiator for a prisoner exchange commission. When Madison became increasingly concerned with the security of the capital region, he decided to create the Tenth Military District to plan, and execute the defensive missions of the region. Madison decided that because of the importance of gaining militia support from Maryland he needed to appoint someone to command this new district that could gain the support of the Maryland government. Probably for this reason more than any consideration of military expertise did the President decide on Winder, a popular Maryland native, and the nephew of the incumbent Maryland governor.¹²

Winder did not have the opportunity to select his subordinate leaders. For the most part he inherited the militia leadership of the units that responded to the federal mobilization. Among the many leaders Winder had in his command three prominent figures, Tobias Stansbury, Joshua Barney, and Samuel Smith had substantial roles that helped shape the events in the district.

Brigadier General Tobias E. Stansbury, commander of the Maryland militia at Bladensburg, commanded approximately 2,000 men. A staunch Democratic--Republican, Stansbury was a perennial member of the Maryland State legislature prior to the start of the war. In the summer of 1812 Baltimore erupted in riots over the publication of Federalist Alexander Hanson's *Federal Republican*. Stansbury refused to call out his brigade even after he was informed that the rioters had broken into the jail.

Following the riots, the Maryland legislature criticized him for his conduct, which only endeared him to the largely Democratic Republican people of Baltimore.¹³

Commodore Joshua Barney, a naval officer, would also play a vital role under Winder's command. A lifelong seaman, Barney had a wealth of naval experience having served with distinction in the Revolutionary War both as a captain of privateers, and in the Continental Navy. Following the war he served as a French naval officer for six years.¹⁴

At the outbreak of war in 1812, Barney requested a command in the Navy but due to his loss of seniority while he was in French service, he settled on privateering. He had considerable success against the British in 1812, which prompted him to propose to the Secretary of Navy a comprehensive defensive scheme for the Chesapeake Bay area. By August 1813 he was in command of an upper Chesapeake Flotilla at Baltimore. By June 1814 his flotilla had fought several battles with the British but could not escape on the Patuxent River. A British advance by water, and land forced Barney to destroy his boats on 22 August. Following this he and his men then marched to Washington where this intrepid naval officer would gain his highest accolades in battle on land.¹⁵

Major General Samuel Smith, commander of the Maryland militia at Baltimore, was a seasoned soldier and statesman by 1814. Smith had started life as a Baltimore merchant like his father. At the outbreak of the American Revolution, he gained a commission as a captain in the Continental Army. Through courage and gallantry, he quickly rose through the ranks eventually becoming a lieutenant colonel. He participated in numerous battles throughout the war such as the defense of Fort Mifflin, and the engagements at Brandywine, and Monmouth. After the war he returned to Baltimore,

and served as a brigadier general in the Maryland militia. He was enormously popular in the city, and as a consequence was elected to The House of Representatives. In the Subsequent election he was elected as a United States Senator, a post he held for over twenty years. When the British threat heightened in late summer 1814, Senator Smith assumed command of the Baltimore's defense, by right of his rank as major general of the militia.¹⁶

Raising the Army

With the majority of the army already committed to the Central and Southern Theaters of war, Winder had to rely almost exclusively on militia to defend the district. To defend the district, Madison submitted a proposal to Congress in early July 1814 to call out 2,000 to 3,000 militia to be stationed in and near the capital. Additionally 10,000 to 12,000 militiamen from Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia, were to be ready to march at a moment's notice.¹⁷

Between 12, and 17 July, Winder was authorized to call out a total of 15,000 militiamen "in the case of actual or menaced invasion of the district under his command."¹⁸ The 15,000 men consisted of Maryland's entire quota of 6,000, 2,000 from Virginia, 5,000 from Pennsylvania, and 2,000 from the District of Columbia. In his correspondence to Winder, Armstrong was clear to point out that "the wish of the President [was] that not less than 2,000 nor more than 3,000 . . . should be embodied and encamped at some point between Baltimore and Washington."¹⁹

General Winder confronted many problems filling the authorizations he had been granted. The call out of militia was indeed a complicated matter. On 13 August Winder reported to Armstrong, that his request upon the Governor of Maryland for 3,000 men fall

short of the requirement because Maryland's position was that the 2,000 troops called out in April counted as part of the July quota. In the aftermath of this debacle, Winder attributed the inefficiency in collecting the militiamen to "the incredulity of the people on the danger of invasion", and "the perplexed, broken, and harassed state of the militia."²⁰

General Winder also intended to incorporate Pennsylvania militia into his command. On 23 July he proposed to Armstrong "might it not be expedient to draw from the remotest points, leaving that portion of the militia nearest the probable scene of action, to be called out on the spur of the occasion?"²¹ It was sound, rationalized, and prudent planning. Unfortunately, Winder never heard anything back on the subject.

While the politicians argued their respective sides for this militia call up, the enemy situation became clearer. On 18 August 1814 the British led by Major General Robert Ross landed at Benedict on the Patuxent River with a force of about 4,500 regulars. On 20 August Winder's call for the militia en mass was approved. Winder reported to Armstrong, "The result of all these operations will be certainly slow, and extremely doubtful as to the extent of force produced."²²

Organizing the Army

Organization of forces within the Tenth Military District was not attributed to a formal plan that Winder developed. Rather the heavy reliance on Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Washington, D.C., militias was organized in response to British actions. This was not Winder's initial plan of militia use. A major constraint upon Winder was the fiscal implications of calling out the militia. Armstrong was concerned about the expense, and was also convinced that the militiamen were not going to fight. He argued that militiamen could be used most advantageously "upon the spur of the occasion, and to

bring them to fight as soon as called out.” Winder insisted, to his credit, that if the enemy did attack his district, he would not have the proper time required to assemble a fighting force, and bring them to bear with the enemy. Regardless of the debate, Armstrong remained adamant against it. In a letter dated 12 July, he instructs Winder to call out the militiamen only, “in case of actual or menaced invasion of the District . . . [and to] proportion the call to the exigency.”²³

Although Winder did not initially agree with Armstrong’s policy, he quickly changed his thinking. On 17 July the British sent a harassing detachment down the Patuxent River. Winder immediately dispatched three militia companies toward them. About ten miles from Washington, the militia learned that the British had withdrawn. Winder, despite earlier protests about needing to have militiamen readily available, dismissed the militia rather than retain them to prepare defenses. In fact, he wrote to Armstrong stating that “The facility with which they can turn out and proceed to any point, renders them nearly as effective as if they were actually kept in the field . . . [which] decides me, even in doubt of the enemy’s probable movement, to give this order.”²⁴

Equipping the Army

Unlike the Ninth Military District, the force structure of the Tenth was comprised almost entirely of militia. The problems experienced in other military districts throughout the war were multiplied exponentially by the number of different states’ militia units. The militia from each state varied to some degree but on the whole the supply organization of quartermasters, commissaries, and contractors was in shambles. All items were in short supply for the militia units especially clothing, and ammunition.

In some of the states in and around the Tenth District, there was a shortage of powder, ball, and cartridge boxes.²⁵

One Virginia militia unit led by Lieutenant Colonel George Minor arrived in Washington on the evening of 23 August with no arms or ammunition. Further complicating matters, the supply issuing system took much longer than it should have with the result that Minor's men were marching to the battle of Bladensburg while the other militia units were passing them in retreat.²⁶

Training the Army

Unlike generals Brown and Izard in the Ninth District, Winder did not get the opportunity to train his forces prior to their 1814 campaign. Winder did not even have the simple luxury to even assemble his forces prior to their initial battle. His command consisted of come-as-you-are militia force, which unfortunately had very few trained or experienced leaders. On 24 August the army that had been mustered from the various state militia assigned to the Tenth District numbered roughly 5,400 men. Of that 400 were regulars, 600 marines, and the remainder militia and volunteers. The district commander later described the army as suddenly assembled without organization, discipline, or officers with the least knowledge of military service.²⁷

The Battles of Bladensburg and Washington

On 18 August 1814 the British led by Major General Robert Ross landed at Benedict on the Patuxent River with a force of about 4,500 regulars. The event caused the militiamen of the Tenth Military District to be called out en masse, and dispatches were sent to Maryland and Virginia for additional militiamen. Winder predicted to

Armstrong, “The result of all these operations will be certainly slow, and extremely doubtful as to the extent of force produced.”²⁸

Confusion and ineptness showed in the district commander. After a month of being exceedingly reticent about giving his subordinate advice, Armstrong now urged Winder to obstruct the march of the enemy, and to “drive off all horses and cattle, and remove all supplies of forage, and etc., on their route.” He further recommended placing a force at the rear of the British to threaten their communications, or alternatively, withdraw forces to the Capital, and place artillery to induce them to engage in a siege operation, for which they were unprepared.²⁹

By 23 August, General Ross had marched his troops, virtually unscathed, to within nine miles of the Eastern Branch Bridge leading into Washington. Winder withdrew to the bridge with about 2,500 men. From this point, he explained later to a congressional investigative committee, he could harass the enemy if it moved toward Fort Washington; or could follow the enemy if it reversed its march, and moved toward Annapolis; or he could rush to Bladensburg, five miles to the north if the enemy moved there.

Realizing that the capital was in peril, Winder assessed the city’s vulnerabilities, and ordered most of the bridges from the northeast destroyed. There was, however, no attempt to harass or obstruct the British on their approach, which brought them through a thick forest area. In one of the strangest incidents of the campaign, Secretary of State, James Monroe volunteered to serve as a cavalry scout. Although his intentions were genuine, the information he relayed was not vital to the outcome of the battle. Instead he

came dangerously close to being captured several times, and his presence further added to the confusion of command for Winder.³⁰

As soon as Winder received positive information that the enemy was on the march toward Bladensburg, he hastened there with his troops. Once Winder's forces arrived, they amounted to perhaps 7,000 men, while the British numbered no more than 4,500. Although superior in number, the quality of the American force, and the vast difference in leadership of the two forces played a large part in the outcome. The situation at Bladensburg when Winder arrived was that no one was really in charge. Brigadier General Tobias Stansbury, commander of the Maryland militia, was nominally in charge, and he made the initial deployment of troops facing the British. Secretary Monroe however redeployed the troops without Stansbury's knowledge or authority in such a way that the second line could not support the first.³¹ This action more than anything clearly demonstrated the lack of unity of command at a critical juncture of the battle.

Winder arrived, just before the British began their attack, leaving himself little time to inspect the emplacement of troops. His leadership on the field hardly inspired confidence. Instead, he instructed the troops that when--not if--they retreated, they should do so by the Georgetown road. The battle began when the British light infantry moved across a small bridge over the eastern branch of the Potomac. American artillery and infantry contested their movement, but the British quickly flanked them, and forced them to retreat. General Stansbury's Maryland militia, about 400 yards to the rear, rather than closing in, recoiled from the British rocket fire. When Stansbury's right flank, exposed by Monroe's repositioning, gave way, the two regiments' general flight

threatened to precipitate a rout. The first line stood tall, but Winder ordered them to retreat, and reform in the rear. Instead of reforming they broke into a disorderly mob, and in the confusion and panic the soldiers ran in three different directions: some towards Washington; some toward Tenleytown; and some toward Georgetown.³²

Stansbury's second line, although positioned too far away to assist the first, was prepared to hold their ground, but Winder ordered the line to retreat, and reform a mile back. When they did so, a battalion of Virginia militia joined them. After this line was formed, Winder gave the order to retire back to Capitol Hill. Upon completion of this order, Winder consulted with Monroe and Armstrong on Capitol Hill to advocate a further retreat back to Georgetown. Given the diminished size of Winder's force, and the overall general confusion, the two secretaries agreed with Winder's recommendation to withdraw. This last order to withdraw ended any semblance of discipline remaining in Winder's force. Washington was left defenseless before the advancing enemy.³³

The only serious resistance that the British met came from Commodore Joshua Barney's sailors. Barney's flotilla, had been the original objective of the British. When he blew up his gunboats rather than allow them to fall into the hands of the enemy, the British altered their objective to assault Washington. Barney and his sailors joined Winder, and followed him to Bladensburg. The sailors' guns delivered a devastating punishment to the British before they were eventually outflanked, and Barney was captured. The British, largely due to Barney's sailors, suffered greater casualties than the Americans, approximately 250 to 70.³⁴

The British entered Washington early in the evening of 24 August, and burned the public buildings, including the Capitol and the White House. Most of the public records

had been removed to safety, and Dolley Madison had hastily removed many valuable articles from the White House. As prearranged, Madison and his Cabinet scattered to various countryside locations. The British evacuated Washington on the evening of 25 August.

The Battle of Baltimore

In early September the British decided to follow up on their success at Washington by attacking the large commercial center, and base port for a large number of privateers, Baltimore. Maryland militia Major General Samuel Smith had been working since 1813 on the defense of Baltimore. In this capacity he had raised a force of nearly 15,000 militiamen, and developed a defensive plan for the city that included earthworks, and reinforcement of existing forts.³⁵ Even though Baltimore clearly lay within the Tenth Military District, Winder acquiesced command of the Baltimore defense to General Smith, and took a nominative backup position during the fighting. There were several reasons for this decision. Winder had lost any measure of confidence in his ability after Bladensburg. General Smith had been working on the defensive plans for Baltimore for over a year, and to replace him would have diminished the work to date. The militia forces of Maryland, especially Baltimore would not follow the orders of Winder. General Smith, being the dynamic leader that he was, more or less told Winder his junior in age, and experience, that he, Smith, was the commander. The truth was a combination of all four reasons.³⁶

On 10 September a few small British ships were noted scouting the mouth of the Patapsco River. By midday on 11 September, the emergence of men-of-war escorting troop transports, marked the beginning of the British attack. General Smith ordered a

small detachment to reinforce the light forces he had already had emplaced on the south side of the Patapsco, and, correctly judging the enemy's fleet's deployment meant landings at North Point, he began his Patapsco Neck contingency plan.³⁷

Smith's Patapsco Neck plan consisted of mobilizing the Baltimore city militia Third Brigade, led by Brigadier General John Stricker, to positions along Bear Creek on the Patapsco Neck. Stricker's brigade was the best-trained unit in the city. He himself was an experienced veteran of the Revolutionary War as a company officer in infantry and artillery units. He remained active in the militia since the revolution, and had participated in various call-outs to include the 1794 Whiskey Rebellion. By sending Stricker to Bear Creek, General Smith adopted an active defense, unlike the passive performance of General Winder during the Battle of Bladensburg. The seizing of initiative was good for morale, and bound to make it more difficult for the British.³⁸

At 3 A.M. on 12 September, General Ross led his 4,500 man British force ashore at North Point (figure 4). Five hours later they began their march to Baltimore, some fourteen miles away. About half way to the city they ran into Stricker's brigade of about 3,000 militiamen. The British forces deployed using effective artillery fire against the Maryland militiamen. Not until they launched a frontal assault did they force the Americans to retreat. Stricker's brigade fought extremely well, holding off a numerically superior force by sniping, harassing, and ambushing throughout the British's advance march. Although they eventually withdrew, it was not without a significant loss to the British of 340 men, including General Ross, compared to the American 215.³⁹

The British resumed their march to Baltimore after the Battle of North Point with Colonel Arthur Brooke assuming command of ground forces after the death of General

Ross. On 13 September after spending a miserable night on the battlefield in heavy rain, he brought his forces within sight of the city's defenses. Emerging from the forest into a cleared field on the Philadelphia Road just south of its junction with Long Log Lane, the scale of the American defenses stunned the British. Brooke had assumed Stickler's command was the main enemy force. He established his headquarters south of the road junction, and tried to form an attack plan.

Smith had cleared the area between the two forces, offering little cover or concealment. Brooke headed west toward the Harford and York Roads where he hoped to make his turning movement. Earlier, Stricker and Winder had formed their brigades in line with trenches, and skillfully advanced to form a line on high ground west of Bel Air Road, and perpendicular to the main American position. This compelled Brooke to turn around and regroup opposite Smith's center. Unable to lure the Americans out from behind their impressive defensive works, and without the support of naval fire support, Brooke decided against an attack. He pulled his forces back the next morning.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, Admiral Cochrane was leading the second part of the British attack on Baltimore against Fort McHenry. Cochrane hoped to silence the guns of the fort so that he could bring his lighter ships into Baltimore Harbor to bombard the American defensive lines. He anticipated the quick reduction of Fort McHenry followed by a thrust into the harbor to intimidate the city itself while dominating the water flank of the American defenses, allowing the army to defeat Smith's defenders, and occupy the city. Fort McHenry was the first objective, but could not be approached by the larger ships because of the river's depth.⁴¹

Over a twenty-five hour period from 13 to 14 September, the British fired more than 1,500 rounds at the fort. About 400 of these rounds hit the target and the damage to the fort was minimal, and Cochrane called off the attack. Only four Americans were killed and twenty-four wounded.⁴²

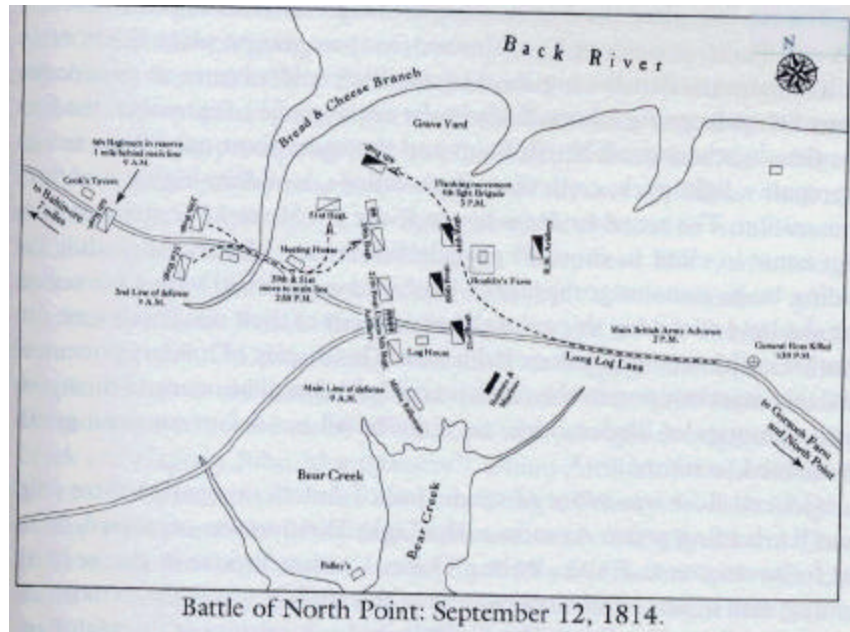


Figure 4. Battle of North Point. Source: Whitehorn, *The Battle for Baltimore 1814*, 177.

Conclusion

It is beyond doubt that the Tenth Military District was a difficult command. From the outset General Winder was fighting more than just the British. In his first months he had to deal with political undercurrents, assistance, and advice which added to this already confusing period.

Winder's dealings with his superior, Secretary of War Armstrong, were tenuous at best. Only upon the landing of the first British force at Benedict, did Armstrong rouse

himself from his lethargy regarding the affairs of the Tenth District. Prior to that he had largely ignored General Winder. This was perhaps due to the political squabbling between Armstrong and the President. After all, the President had selected Winder without as much as even consulting Armstrong. Then to make matters worse, the President had dictated affairs in the Tenth District diminishing Armstrong's position. Perhaps it was because Madison concluded his months-long investigation into Armstrong's conduct in office resulting in a chastisement for exceeding his authority, and failing to consult the President before exercising the powers of his office.⁴³ Of course it could be that Armstrong did not respect Winder. Upon Winder's selection as district commander, Armstrong stated it was based "not on the ground of distinguished professional service or knowledge" but simply on a presumption that, "being a native of Maryland, and a relative of the governor, Brigadier Winder would be useful in mitigating the opposition to the war, and in giving an increased efficiency to national measures within the limits of the state." ⁴⁴

Armstrong's judgment of Winder's ability might not have been too far off base. In the opening day of the campaign, Winder was totally perplexed by the movement of the British. As a commander he was indecisive and unable to devise any plan to oppose the British march. Difficult as it is to believe, Winder seemed to have had no conception of the enemy threat. His inability to decide early on the enemy's most probable course of action cost his forces valuable preparation time.⁴⁵ The fact that he had no plan for the two regular infantry regiments assigned to him nor any semblance of a reconnaissance or surveillance plan, even though all intelligence indicated that a British attack was imminent, further illustrated his inability to command.⁴⁶

Winder's challenges in command were vast. In his statement to the congressional investigations committee, he complained of having to work with "raw, undisciplined, inexperienced, and unknown officers and men."⁴⁷ Although the militia system failed miserably during the Battle of Bladensburg, the blame must ultimately rest on the almost total incompetence of General Winder. Besides the obvious distractions of having the President, and his entire cabinet not only working and living in his district but actually present on the battlefield, there were numerous other debilitating factors.

The biggest factor was General Winder's tactical incompetence. Throughout the Battle of Bladensburg, he continuously showed his inexperience with tactical situations. His first error occurred prior to the actual fighting by not establishing a reliable active reconnaissance, and surveillance plan to track the British movements from their boats. Once the British committed to an attack, their ground route to Washington took them through densely wooded areas making them easily susceptible to harassment fires or ambush. Winder, due to his poor planning, conducted neither, and he missed a great opportunity to delay or stop the British attack. Throughout the course of the battle Winder thought only of retreat. Every time the lines were reformed, he called for a further retreat, completely breaking any resolve the militia had to fight. It is difficult not to conclude that if the Americans had had a general who was willing to fight that day, they could have repulsed the British, who were, after all, taking a considerable risk by extending themselves deep into enemy country without sufficient supporting naval gunfire.

Had General Smith or Stricker been elevated to district command in time or had one of the Ninth District generals, Brown, Izard, Scott, Gaines, Ripley, or Macomb been

transferred to lead the Tenth District, it is highly probable that in the Washington--Baltimore area of operations, the enemy situation, and threat would have been carefully analyzed. Better-trained American troops would have been appropriately positioned for battle based on concurrent battlefield intelligence, and accordingly would have engaged the enemy with more positive results. By appointing Winder, President Madison fell prey to the same mistakes that he made at the beginning of the war. An appointment of field commanders based on political affiliation not ability does not work.

¹Mahon, *The War of 1812*, 291.

²Joseph A. Whitehorn, *The Battle for Baltimore 1814* (Baltimore: The Nautical AND Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1997), 132.

³Armstrong, *Notices*, 128.

⁴Armstrong quoted, in John Van Ness statement, *Annals*, 13th Cong., 3rd sess., 1688, in *ASP:MA*.

⁵Armstrong to Johnson, 17 October 1814, in *ASP:MA*, 1:539.

⁶General Order of 2 July 1814, *Ibid.*, 1:549.

⁷Winder to Armstrong, 23 July 1814 Winder Statements, *Annals*, 13th Cong., 3d sess., 1603, in *ASP:MA*.

⁸Winder to Armstrong, in *ASP:MA*, 1:543.

⁹Winder to Armstrong, 23 July 1814 Winder Statements, *Annals*, 13th Cong., 3rd sess., 1607, in *ASP:MA*.

¹⁰Anthony S. Pitch, *The Burning of Washington -- The British Invasion of 1814* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1998), 18.

¹¹Mahon, *The War of 1812*, 149-150.

¹²Armstrong, *Notices*, Vol. 2, 128.

¹³Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 66-68.

¹⁴Mahon, *The War of 1812*, 289-90.

- ¹⁵Pitch, *The Burning of Washington*, 51-52.
- ¹⁶Charles J. Peterson, *The Military Heroes of the War of 1812* (Philadelphia: James B. Smith AND Co., 1852), 191-193.
- ¹⁷From a Report of the Committee of the House of Representatives, *ASP:MA*, 1:524.
- ¹⁸Armstrong to Winder, 12 July 1814, *Ibid.*, 1:524-525.
- ¹⁹Armstrong to Winder, 17 July 1814, *Ibid.*, 1:524-525.
- ²⁰Winder to Armstrong, 13 August 1814 Winder Statements, *Annals*, 13th Cong., 3rd sess., 1586, in *ASP:MA*; *Ibid.*, 1606.
- ²¹Winder to Armstrong, 23 July 1814 Winder Statements, *Ibid.*, 1581.
- ²²Winder to Armstrong, 19 August 1814 Winder Statements, *Ibid.*, 1588.
- ²³Armstrong to Winder, 12 July 1814, as quoted in Edward D. Ingraham, *A Sketch of the Events which preceded the Capture of Washington by the British on the twenty-fourth of August, 1814* (Philadelphia, 1849), 149.
- ²⁴Winder to Armstrong, July 23, 1814 Winder Statements, *Annals*, 13th Cong., 3rd sess., 1582, in *ASP:MA*.
- ²⁵Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army*, 176.
- ²⁶Minor's Statement, found in *ASP:MA*, 1:568.
- ²⁷Armstrong, *Notices*, vol. 2, 152.
- ²⁸Winder to Armstrong, 19 August 1814 Winder Statements, *Annals*, 13th Cong., 3d sess., 1588, in *ASP:MA*.
- ²⁹Armstrong, *Notices*, App. 29, Vol. 2, 232-236.
- ³⁰Statement of James Monroe, 13 November 1814, in *ASP:MA*, 1:536.
- ³¹Winder Statements, *Annals*, 13th Cong., 3rd sess., 1614, in *ASP:MA*.
- ³²Congressional Committee Report, Document 137, in *ASP:MA*, 1:529.
- ³³*Ibid.*, 1:529-530.
- ³⁴Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 198.

³⁵Frank A. Cassell, "Baltimore in 1813: A Study of Urban Defense in the War of 1812." *Military Affairs*, December 1969, 349-350.

³⁶Peterson, *The Military Heroes*, 191-193.

³⁷John L. Sanford, "The Battle of North Point." *Maryland Historical Magazine* vol. 24, No. 4, 1929, 356-7.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 357.

³⁹Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 203.

⁴⁰Joseph A. Whitehorn, *The Battle for Baltimore 1814* (Baltimore: Nautical AND Aviation Pub. Co. of America, 1997), 184-5.

⁴¹Mahon, *The War of 1812*, 326.

⁴²Hickey, *The War of 1812*, 203.

⁴³Mahon, *The War of 1812*, 305.

⁴⁴Armstrong, *Notices*, vol. 2, 140.

⁴⁵Winder Statements, *Annals*, 13th Cong., 3rd sess., 1609-10, in *ASP:MA*.

⁴⁶The author could not find any documentation regarding plans for the use of the 36th or 38th Infantry Regiments nor a deliberate active recon and surveillance plan imposed by Winder to track the British movements. There were, however, many passive and non-planned active intelligence sources that were collected and disseminated.

⁴⁷Winder Statements, *Annals*, 13th Cong., 3rd sess., 1614, in *ASP:MA*.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND ANALYSIS

The preparatory and fighting phases of the 1814 campaign season in both the Ninth and Tenth Military Districts ended much in the same way, a draw. However, both districts prepared for that campaign season differently. There was no universal standard operating procedure within the army. This is quite understandable for a period when the country was in its infancy, and trust in a standing professional military often wavered. In fact, to the ardent post Revolutionary War libertarians, (fortunately few though vocal) a standing army itself symbolized oppressive government, something to be dreaded by nature.

The approaches taken by two distinct military districts fighting the same enemy, in the same campaign season, and reporting to the same headquarters, at two distinctly different locations 1,500 miles apart, demonstrated numerous similarities and differences. This was due in some part to strategic planning, leader involvement, troops available, and an understanding of the enemy situation.

This concluding chapter reviews the actions within the two military districts, highlighting the important facets of command, actions taken, and interaction with the district commander's superior--the secretary of war. This comparison reveals the similarities and differences, and the significance each had on meeting the danger of enemy invasion. Finally, this study examines relevant issues that apply to the contemporary operational environment that were addressed, and handled by the United States during the War of 1812.

The Ninth Military District

The American Ninth Military District, arguably the most significant theater of the war, changed senior leadership early in 1814 following another disastrous expedition into Lower Canada. As a part of this replacement, the secretary of war decided not to appoint a military district commander but rather maintained two separate, but equal, division commanders reporting directly to him. I believe this decision by Secretary of War Armstrong was made regardless of strategic imperative but because of personal ambition for greater power. By doing this, he not only hampered the Ninth Military District's chance for overwhelming success, but also actually placed the district in jeopardy of being defeated.

The lack of unity of command compounded a fractured campaign strategy that did not utilize both divisions to their utmost capabilities. To work, the system depended upon nonexistent, intratheater communications between the two division commanders. Valuable intelligence on enemy strength, composition, and disposition was delayed in reaching the field commanders because of this communication deficit. To make matters even worse, Armstrong in some instances did not pass along information about the enemy to the corresponding division commander because he felt that the originating reports were grossly overestimated.

By the summer of 1814 the Ninth Military District's two divisions had improved to such a point that they could have, given a strategic plan of merit, decisively defeated the British. The leadership of both divisions had learned from their past experiences, trained their respective armies, and were well prepared logistically for a campaign

season. Unfortunately for the Americans, too many limiting factors and the ego of the secretary of war denied them their strategic victory.

What success the Americans experienced can be attributed to strong leadership from the division commanders on down. This attribute more than any other was what held the line in the Ninth Military District, and helped to establish the foundations of the professional U.S. Army as it is known today.

The Tenth Military District

The appointment of General Winder as commander of the Tenth Military District was flawed from its inception. The political backdrop between the President, and Secretary of War that coincided with this appointment was equally as important to the outcome of the war as the fighting within the district. President Madison's investigation of Secretary Armstrong's performance limited Armstrong's abilities, while also distressing him so much that he failed to perform his duties when they were most needed. After all, Winder was selected for command more for his political connections than for his martial abilities. Armstrong's support and advice were crucial to Winder in preparing the district for impending attack. That support was almost non-existent and the advice only came in the eleventh hour. Armstrong knew all too well that Winder was tactically incompetent. Petulant and sulking from personal pressure by the White House, Armstrong did nothing to prevent a British victory at Blandensburg. One may speculate this was his way of getting back at the President for his perceived mistreatment.

Blame for failure in the Tenth Military District cannot rest with Armstrong alone. Winder must share in the blame, for he lacked the leadership ability to adequately prepare the district as well as for command during the Battle of Bladensburg. Though the

command situation was difficult due to the proximity of his superiors, that alone does not excuse him for his terrible leadership in battle.

The Tenth Military District's performance was a direct result of political interference, tactical incompetence during the Battle of Bladensburg, and tactical competence on the part of the militia leadership during the Battle of Baltimore. Had one of the more capable brigadier generals of the Ninth District, such as Scott, Gaines, Ripley or Macomb, been elevated to district command in time to lead the Tenth District, it is highly probable that in the Washington--Baltimore area of operations would have ended with better results. With a more capable leader the enemy situation may have been more carefully analyzed. Additionally, better-trained American troops may have been appropriately positioned for battle based on concurrent battlefield intelligence, and accordingly would have engaged the enemy with more positive results. By appointing Winder, President Madison fell prey to the same mistakes that he made at the beginning of the war. An appointment of field commanders based on political affiliation--not ability--does not work.

Comparisons

By analyzing the Ninth and Tenth Military Districts a number of comparisons can be drawn. From these comparisons come the similarities and differences between the two districts, and the significance each had on the outcome of the war.

Surprisingly enough, there are not that many similarities between the two district armies. As we have noted, the United States was in its infancy. Its "Army" was literally newborn. There was no standard operating procedure throughout the army. Scott used a French manual of arms. Most other troop trainers, when and if they trained, reiterated

skills they had learned or heard about during the Revolutionary engagements of the past generation or perhaps a more recent Indian skirmish. State militias similarly had no shared standards for training or resources.

The greatest similarity the two districts shared was that they were both reporting to the same superior, Secretary of War John Armstrong. Although that is a common denominator, Armstrong's actions towards each district were often dissimilar. In dealing with the Ninth Military District, Armstrong was controlling, power hungry, and opinionated. He more than anyone else shaped how the campaign was conducted. By the time the Tenth Military District was formed, Armstrong was in trouble with the President. Hence his influence or lack thereof, was sorely missed by the Tenth District in its preparation for upcoming battles. His inaction and neglect, regardless of rationale, had a somewhat greater impact on how the campaign would be conducted in the Tenth than in the Ninth where perceived bad ideas were conveniently ignored. In both districts the same result rings true. Armstrong's command influence had a negative impact on the military district commanders, and consequently their campaigns in 1814. Perhaps Armstrong should have applied his command style in a converse fashion, micro-manage the Tenth District, and allow the Ninth commanders freedom to act as they saw fit.

Although the two military districts were preparing, and fighting during a few weeks of each other, the differences between them were vast. With each difference there comes a second, and sometimes third order effect that also had a significant impact on the handling of the war within that district.

The first and most profound difference was the quality of leadership. By 1814 the Ninth had an abundance of quality leaders from the two division commanders down

through many regimental commanders. Men who had gained valuable experience from two hard years of fighting were prepared for the campaign season. Had the leadership not been as talented, the Ninth would not have achieved a fraction of the success it did.

The Ninth's leaders were in charge of predominately regular army units, which comprised the backbone of the district's army. The Tenth was just the opposite, and was composed almost entirely of militia units. The differences between regular and militia units were drastic. The regular units by 1814 had battle experienced soldiers who were well trained in discipline with a firearm, and properly equipped for the upcoming campaign. The militia units had little training, were poorly equipped, and generally (but most importantly) lacked quality leadership. There are notable exceptions such as Samuel Smith and John Stricker, but they were clearly the extraordinary. The comparative significance of regular versus militia units was multi-faceted, and turned on one singular, consistent, and undeniable concept. With a regular force a commander has more confidence that his unit would not break and run upon first contact with the enemy. Conversely, the enemy had greater respect for regular units than militia. This in turn would motivate a British force knowingly facing a militia unit to become more aggressive in the hopes of breaking them all the more quickly. This also, as we have seen, worked to their disadvantage when the British mistook to their detriment Scott's gray-clad warriors for militia.

As the two district twin-pronged campaigns developed in 1814, the Ninth became the strategic main effort while the Tenth was relegated to almost an after thought due to an early perception of significant enemy threat in the respective districts. Fear of imminent overland invasion from Canada tipped the balance of the threat in the direction

of the Ninth Military District. Resources were prioritized accordingly. The end results showed that the Ninth was adequately stocked in most items, and the Tenth was short on critical items such as powder. The significance is obvious; The Ninth was set up for success while the Tenth was not.

The enemy situation itself differed between the two districts. The Ninth faced two different enemy situations between its two divisions. The Left Division faced a defensive force postured primarily in fixed sites. The Right Division faced an offensive formation preparing for an assault via land. In contrast the Tenth prepared for an attack that was complemented by an amphibious assault and naval bombardment. Both enemy situations had significance on how the Americans prosecuted the war. For the Ninth it was a strategic race against the British employing their veteran army. For the Tenth it was a struggle for survival by inexperienced, and frequently on-the-job-trainees.

Lastly, the proximity of where the district lay in regard to the higher headquarters was a major difference. The Tenth District encompassed the capital region giving the district commander immediate access to his superiors. Of course, that in itself is a double-edged sword because the president and his secretary of war can micromanage activities within the district. The Ninth had no such situation, being over 1,500 miles away from the capital. However, it suffered from the time delay in communication associated with the distance. This time-distance relationship had a large impact on how the two division commanders of the Ninth District operated. From a tactical perspective, they enjoyed complete autonomy. Not until strategic guidance was necessary did they run into trouble, and even then when they disagreed with what the secretary of war was instructing them, they could choose to ignore or delay the execution of those instructions.

How did the United States Army manage to thwart the Napoleonic War veteran British Army during the last year (1814) of the American War of 1812? Bullet answers crack in response: good leadership such as General Jacob Brown's, successful planning by Generals George Izard and Samuel Smith at Plattsburg, and Baltimore respectively, and luck. The combination of those, and various other aspects such as training, equipping, and supporting the force along with the enemy's actions merged at the right time and place to allow the then infant United States Army to earn military stalemates in both the Ninth, and Tenth Military Districts against the world's ranking superpower of the day.

A few lasting imperatives may be gained from the study of the War of 1812. It was recognized by the conflict's final Secretary of War, James Monroe, and approved by Congress that a uniform system of discipline for training be established, and standardized throughout the army.¹ From the war came a better appreciation for the need for a professional standing army. The inefficiency of the militia system, especially the federalization process, required a review of the 1792 Militia Act. Contrary to expectations, whether intended or not, the Army Reduction Act of 1815 was a positive step toward a professional army. The militia was relegated to a secondary role in national defense.²

Relevant Issues

The United States is presently reeling from terrorist attacks against its home soil that occurred on 11 September 2001, the likes of which have not been seen since the War of 1812³. A revisit to that war should be undertaken to help understand, and gain insights from history about how to initiate Homeland Defense today.

In the summer of 1813, British Admiral Cockburn initiated a campaign of armed incursion, and destruction along the Chesapeake, which was nothing short of terrorism. The early harassment raids along the Chesapeake saw the British forces rout, plunder, and burn the towns of Havre de Grace, Fredrickstown, and Georgetown. Cockburn's goal at the end of the twelve day mission had been to fearfully shake the morale and confidence of the population along the Chesapeake. He succeeded. Additionally, the British Navy continued to conduct raids along the Atlantic seaboard from Maine to South Carolina.⁴

In order to combat these terrorists acts the individual states allocated militia units for the defense of the coastline. A debate over whether the federal government was to pay for the call out ensued. In the end the federal government declined to pay the states due to fiscal constraints.⁵ This however did not alleviate the problem of British Naval raiders, nor reassure the populace that they were safe and protected.

A similar situation could be extracted from the experience of the War of 1812 and superimposed on modern day America. Today, the populace needs reassurance in the face of terrorism that everything that can be done is being done. This is what is commonly referred to as the Homeland Defense Plan. How the United States pursues policies for the Homeland Defense can be gleaned from lessons learned from the War of 1812. In 1814, both the Ninth, and Tenth Military Districts faced homeland defense threats. The ninth promoted leadership based on merit. Generals' Brown and Izard understood team building and unit effectiveness, and they successfully met the challenges presented to them. An incompetent political appointee in contrast commanded the Tenth

District, and as a result failed in its homeland defense. The learnable lesson is to avoid politically motivated decisions when dealing with homeland defense.

An additional lesson dealt with how the strategic leadership during the War of 1812 handled the threat of terror attacks. The personal interactions and relationship of the presidential cabinet played a large role in how the preparations for the imminent British attacks in the tenth district were handled. Armstrong, for personal reasons gave Winder less than his full effort, precisely at a time when Winder most needed him. Present and future strategic leadership need to remember how important their interactions are, and personal differences may lead to potentially serious consequences.

Of course, the complexity of the modern day operating environment, with the advent of aircraft, ballistic missiles, and chemical and biological warfare, is ten-fold that of 1813 and 1814. The Homeland Defense plan initiated in 1813 called for the local state militias to be mustered at critical junctures along the coastline. The coastline provided the most likely and easiest avenue of approach for nineteenth century attack. Twenty-first century attack could come from land, sea, air or space. How then can the United States cover all likely terrorist avenues of approach? For how long can we maintain this vigil? These are the kinds of questions that beg for answers.

Even though our nineteenth century forebears from the War of 1812 could narrow the potential terrorist avenues of attack, they still lacked sufficient resources, namely men, and munitions, to cover all potential attack routes. The same is true today. There are far too many potential terrorist avenues of attack to guard or protect against. The cost of such a force would be prohibitive. How long can the United States afford to fly Combat Air Patrols over major population centers? What else can be done? During the

War of 1812, the terror attacks ceased once the British forces operating in the Atlantic Theater were met in battle by a better-experienced force. Does that apply to contemporary America? Only time will tell whether Operation Enduring Freedom against the Taliban in Afghanistan, and other subsequent campaigns will be successful.

The War of 1812 suggests that ultimately American security is best predicated when her enemies are forced to confront, “face-to-face” U.S. military might that is wrapped in wrath, resources, and resolve.

¹*New American State Papers: Military Affairs*, 152.

²C. Edward Skeen, *Citizen Soldiers in the War of 1812* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 178.

³The attack on Pearl Harbor was purely a military target and not a terrorist attack.

⁴Skeen, *Citizen Soldiers*, 126-8.

⁵*Ibid.*, 128.

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