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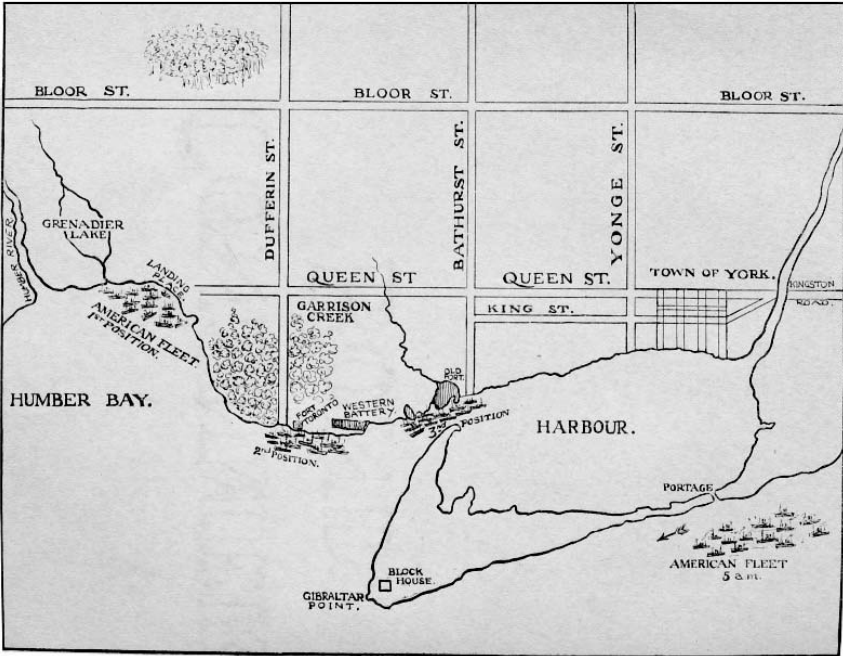
*Centennial Series  
War of 1812-15*

*The*  
**Battle of York**

*An Account of the Eight Hours' Battle from  
the Humber Bay to the Old Fort  
in Defence of York on  
April 27, 1813*



*Barlow Cumberland, M.A.*



MOVEMENTS OF THE AMERICAN FLEET ON 27TH APRIL, 1813.

CENTENNIAL SERIES, WAR OF 1812-15

# The Battle of York

AN ACCOUNT OF THE EIGHT HOURS' BATTLE  
FROM THE HUMBER BAY TO THE OLD  
FORT IN THE DEFENCE OF YORK  
ON 27th APRIL, 1813

BY  
BARLOW CUMBERLAND, M.A.

TORONTO  
WILLIAM BRIGGS  
1913

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## The Battle of York

It used to be said, and not so many years ago, that Canada was an unhistoric country, that it had no history. Perhaps this was because our peoples in these western parts, whose beginnings of occupation commenced but a little over one hundred years ago, have been so much occupied with clearing the forests and developing our resources that but little time has been given to the studying and recording of its earlier days. Our thoughts have been devoted more to what is called the practical, rather than to the reminiscent, to the future rather than to the past. Yet in this past is the potent formative power for creating the character of our people, the sources of patriot emulation and honour by which our progress is to be guided and governed. Much has been done of later years by our Historical Societies and devoted searchers in collecting and publishing material from original sources and personal memories which has greatly helped the writers of our History, so that instead of the dry and matter-of-fact collations from statistics which were laid before us in our early days has come the awakening of the memories of the devotion, valour, patriotism, and self-sacrifice of the men and the women who were the first comers, and founders of our country. The vivid history of the times when men lived and strove—and died for a noble cause, thinking more of their country than of themselves, for those who were to follow them than of their own gain.

The festival of the Tercentenary at Quebec brought more evidence to the public view of the romance and ideality of our Canadian History and of how marvellously our French and English-speaking peoples have, as Canadians, been intertwined.

An impulse has thus been given to interest in Historical research, the caring for and preservation of Historical Memorials. The ideal has at last touched the practical and the true value of Historical evidences and teachings are appreciated.

No better example of this can be given than that the City of Toronto has now undertaken the duty, on behalf of all Canada, of restoring and maintaining the old Fort of York as a national memorial.

For this there is indeed cause to rejoice, for in Ontario we have but few memorials to record the brave days of old. The statue of Brant at Brantford and that under way of Tecumseh in the Valley of the Thames tell of the loyalty and fortitude of the noble Indian tribes who fought side by side with our soldiers for the defence and maintenancy of our country against American invasions.

On the south shore of Lake Ontario the lofty shaft of Brock's monument erected by the Militia of Canada keeps fresh the memory of the glorious days of Queenston Heights and daily teaches the lessons of how our forefathers gladly laid down their lives on the 13th of October, 1812.

Away to the east, where the St. Lawrence runs beneath the ramparts of old Quebec, stands the honoured monument to the two heroes who died upon the fatal field—Wolfe and Montcalm, victor and vanquished, who in valour, in death, and in fame, were not divided.

Canadian history has lavished its records upon the surrounding neighbourhood and at "Wolfe's Cove" and the "Plains of Abraham," there is well known historic ground.

Yet we, too, nearer home, have an eventful and strangely parallel scene of strife.

In the neighbourhood of our city of Toronto, the "Humber Bay" is our "Wolfe's Cove," the "Garrison Common" our "Plains of Abraham"; over them in one long day a fierce battle raged, on them a victor died in the hour of victory.

As we pass along the westward of where the Humber Bay begins its graceful curve there will be found no memorial raised to do honour to whom honour is due.

As we enter the city of Toronto, we shall find no statue erected to the fallen, no inscription set up to record the deeds of the eventful

day, and at the Old Fort, the culminating point of the attack, not, as yet, any tribute paid to the memories of those gallant defenders who fought and died in the defence of York on the 27th April, 1813.

As there are no memorials, perhaps, by recalling the events and following the strife along the shore and the positions successively taken by the contestants, each spot will itself become to us a memorial and the whole shore an historic monument.

With the short space at our disposal this will only be a resumé of a longer publication to follow at a later date.

On the 13th of October, 1812, the Battle of Queenston Heights had been fought; General Sir Roger Sheaffe had succeeded to the command of the British Forces and on that eventful day had pressed forward his reserves and completed the victory. At the conclusion of the day an armistice for three days, asked for by the Americans, had been assented to, and while the body of Brock was being laid to rest in the bastion of Old Fort George, the Americans fired minute guns in token of respect to their victorious foe. Thereafter their forces on the east bank and the British on the west bank of the Niagara River watched one another without enjoying hostilities. The campaign of that year had closed with an unbroken series of British victories.

The Americans at the outset had considered, and Jefferson had written in August, 1812, that the acquisition of Canada would be but “a mere matter of marching” giving “an experience for the attack of the next year and the final expulsion of England from the American continent.” With such enormous preponderance in population and in armament this estimate was what might have been expected, but they did not reckon on the loyal and dogged valour of the Canadians in defence of their homes and liberties—a valour which still exists to-day.

During the winter of 1812-13 strenuous efforts were made by the American Government in forwarding stores and reinforcements to



their Ontario frontier. They massed these men in three divisions for the coming invasion of Canada. General Dearborn was placed in command of the Army of the Centre, and at the opening of the spring of 1813 had collected his forces, 3,000 at Buffalo, 3,300 on the Niagara frontier, and 4,000 at Sackett's Harbour. To the east 5,000 men had been concentrated at Lake Champlain, and to the west 2,000 men were in fortified camp under General Harrison, on the banks of the Miami, immediately to the south of Detroit.

Commodore Chauncey was in control of the naval operations with his headquarters at Sacketts' Harbour at the east end of Lake Ontario.

The close of navigation of 1812 had left both sides in about equal naval strength on Lake Ontario, and immense activity was executed by both in preparations for obtaining control of the lake in the spring. Guns and ammunition were being brought up on sleighs from Quebec, and 500 seamen under Commodore Sir James Yeo were on their way from Halifax overland across New Brunswick and along the lower St. Lawrence to man the British fleet, but did not arrive at Kingston until the 1st of May, while Kingston, where two new ships were under construction, was strongly fortified, York, where another was being built, was poorly provided, and the mistake made by the British in building their new ships in different places laid them open to the attack which followed.

The land forces on the Canadian side were 970 men and 1,200 Indians at Detroit and Amherstburg, General Vincent in command at Fort George with 1,700 men and 500 Indians distributed between Newark and along the Niagara River to Fort Erie. General Sheaffe 400 at Fort York, Sir George Prevost with, at the east end of the lake and in Lower Canada, 3,000 regulars, making about 7,700 in all, a small force with which to repel an invasion as was then impending by 17,000 men, but they were strong in determination and flushed with the victories which they had obtained in the campaign of the previous year.

The campaign of 1813 opened by the attack on Ogdensburg, 22nd February, when Lieut.-Colonel Macdonell, with his recently raised Glengarry Fencibles, the Companies of the 8th Regiment, then on their way to York, and the local militia crossed the river on the ice and captured eleven guns, a quantity of arms and ammunition, and a stand of colours, and the American flag of the garrison, which were subsequently sent to King George, and also burned the barracks and two armed schooners.

At the opening of the Spring, Chauncey's fleet, spurred by the enterprise at Ogdensburg, was ready to sail from Sackett's Harbour; the British fleet at Kingston was still shut in by ice, so it was determined to carry out the intention of attacking York.

The fact of York being the seat of Government of the Province of Upper Canada gave it an importance greater than it really merited, for it then consisted of only a small village of less than one thousand inhabitants, where houses were built mainly about the banks of the River Don. The Provincial Parliament, under Sir Roger Sheaffe, as administrator, had assembled on 25th February, in the Parliament Buildings,—two long one-storey wooden buildings erected near the foot of the street which still bears the name of Parliament Street.

The defences of the town, if indeed they can be properly so termed, were entirely inadequate.

In the summer of 1811 General Brock had sent a report to headquarters condemning them as deficient and proposing additions, but nothing had been done beyond building the stone magazine which played so tragic a part in one day's doings. The rear of the town was entirely without defences, the virgin pine forests with trees 180 to 200 feet high, came close down to the houses which extended beyond what is now known as the east end of Queen Street. On the skirts of the woods a contemporary letter says "the Five Nation Indians who have come down for the war are encamped and keep us alive with their war dances, and make the woods echo with their savage yells." At the east way, were a

blockhouse and *tête-du-pont*, or earthwork, on the Kingston Road, covering the bridge across the Don.

Two miles to the west of the town on a triangular knoll rising between the Garrison Creek and the shore of the lake, and commanding the entrance to the harbour was the earthwork and blockhouses constructed by Governor Simcoe, being the present Old Fort York, existing to-day very much in its outlines as it did in 1813. In this were the magazines, official residences and the barracks of the garrison.

This was then composed of the Regulars and the 3rd York Militia, in duty under the command of Colonel Chewett, and among whose officers at the time were Major Allan, Captain Stephen Heward, Lieutenants Richardson, Jarvis, and Robinson, and Sergeants Knott, Humberstone, Baird and Bridgeford, whose names through their descendants are still familiar.

This Regiment had been in active service on the frontier in the previous year, and it was in reference to it that Brock, when receiving his fatal wound at Queenston Heights, had given the order, "Push on the York Volunteers."

The armament of the fort was incomplete, the guns expected from Kingston not having arrived, but fortunately the *Duke of Gloucester* brig which was being converted into a troopship, was wintering in the harbour, and the six small six-pounders from her and some of the guns for the new gunship which was being built in the dockyard at the foot of Simcoe Street, of which eight 18-pound cannonades had arrived from Fort George, were available. The guns from the ships were distributed between the Western Battery, a small 18-pound battery, thrown up on the edge of the high bank on the shore, east of the site of the present Stanley Barracks, in the Half-Moon Battery, a semi-circular field work about 400 yards to the west of, and protecting the roadway to the garrison, and in the bastions of the old fort itself.

Away to the west in a wide clearing, were the remains of the old French fort, known as Fort Rouille, or Fort Toronto. Mention is made of three old 18-pounders without trunnions, having been brought into service by clamping them with iron hoops on pine logs, which thus served for gun carriages. These had been dug up, it was said, in the old French fort.

As a position of military strength, the place was not worthy of attack, but it was good policy on the part of the Americans to attempt the capture of the two vessels, the *Prince Regent*, 12 guns, and the *Gloucester*, which were known to be wintering in the harbour, and of the new 30-gunship which was almost completed, as their supremacy in the lake would thus be materially advanced.

General Sheaffe, who was acting as Administrator of the Province, had been detained by his own ill-health and the meeting of the Parliament was in command at York. The troops there under him on 26th April, consisted in all of six hundred men, Regulars and Militia, with one hundred Indians under Major Givens.

The Regulars consisted of one corps of the Glengarry Fencibles, a local Canadian regiment, which had been raised in the Scots settlements around Glengarry; fifty men of the Newfoundland Regiment, raised in their Island; 350 men of the 3rd York Militia, then in garrison, and the Grenadier Companies, about 100 men of the 8th, or King's Royal Regiment, which, with much good luck, had arrived on the 25th, in batteaux, on their way from Kingston, and were allowed to remain over at York to rest for a day after their long journey. It was, alas, a long rest for most of them. These, with the artificers and staff in the dockyard, made up 600 in all.

Chauncey's fleet at Sackett's Harbour, consisting of fourteen armed ships and two transports, with the *Madison* as flagship, were manned by 800 sailors and carried 112 guns, of which 40 were 32-pounders of longer range and throwing heavier shot than any of the guns at York.

The troops, consisting of 1,700 “picked soldiers,” had been embarked with Major-General Dearborn in command, on the 23rd April, but the weather being stormy, the fleet put back and remained in port on the 24th, collecting some more men, did not sail until the 25th. Before sailing, General Pike, who had been appointed to command the land forces, issued his orders for the landing and attack, and for a reminder and encouragement to his men added to his address: “It is expected that every corps will be mindful of the honour of the American name and the disgraces which have recently tarnished our arms, and endeavour by a cool and determined discharge of duty to support the one and wipe off the other.”

This clause thus frankly admitting the defeats at Detroit, Queenston Heights and Ogdensburg, was quite in accord with Pike’s character and record as an intrepid explorer, after whom Pike’s peak had been named, and a thorough and energetic soldier, devoted to his profession. Another clause appearing to have been inspired from higher quarters, reads: “The poor Canadians have been forced into this war and their property should be held sacred, but the commanding General assures the troops that should they capture a large quantity of public stores he will use his best endeavours to procure them a reward from their Government.”

It is strange to note how completely the Americans have always underestimated and mistaken the spirit of the Canadian peoples. It had been so in 1775, when they attacked the French-Canadians in Quebec, again in 1812, and yet again in 1866 when they really believed that the Canadians would flock to the side of the Fenians and gladly throw off the yoke of the monarchical form of Government under which they were considered to be held in bondage.

They forget that French and English tongues in Canada speak from Canadian-British hearts, and that the Union Jack, for which all three periods have fought, is the peoples’ happy flag of freedom.

Dearborn's men, incited to wipe out dishonour and obtain booty, were soon to find that the poor Canadians of 1812 could fight for the honour of their flag, without hope of reward, and gallantly die in defence of their country and their home.

With the British fleet at Kingston waiting for its sailors and safely blocked in by ice, Chauncey and his expedition sailed boldly out into the open lake.

Rumours had been heard all during the winter of the preparations which were being made on the American side. Yeo and his sailors were still struggling through the snow from Halifax. There were no telegraphs in those days, and but one road, the Kingston road, which wound its way through the forests and the scattered settlements which fringed the shores of the lake. News came slowly. It was a time of expectancy and all Canada was waiting for the attack.

It was known at York that the breaking up of the ice would be the signal for the sailing of the enemy's fleet. The ice had given way in the harbour and the *Prince Regent* warped down and sailed out into the lake on the 24th, to reconnoitre the position and so escaped the invasion. Videttes had been posted out upon the Scarborough Heights and along the eastern shores of the lake, to give earliest warning of any advance, and general activity prevailed. All men capable of bearing arms were being drilled, young Allan McNab (afterwards Sir Allan McNab), a lad of only 14, but stout and large for his years, stood in the ranks alongside his old weather-beaten and war-scarred father, and a general sense of cheerful readiness prevailed. The Parliament had but recently completed its sittings and festivities were still being maintained. A little girl of six narrated that her mother, Mrs. Grant Powell, had issued invitations for a party on the evening of the 26th, the supper table had been laid and she had been dressed to see the company arrive. Only one lady and no gentlemen came, when later on her father hurried in saying the American fleet had been sighted, and he and the other volunteers had been ordered under arms. Then may have

come the scene so graphically told by our poet, Charles Mair, in the stirring lines in his Drama of Tecumseh.

“What news afoot?  
Why every one’s afoot and coming here  
York’s citizens are turned to warriors  
The learned professions go a-soldiering  
And gentle hearts beat high for Canada.  
For, as you pass, on every hand you see  
Through the neglected openings of each house  
Through doorways, windows, our Canadian maids  
Strained by their parting lovers to their breasts,  
And loyal matrons busy round their lords  
Buckling their arms on, or, with tearful eyes  
Kissing them to the war.”

About 5 o’clock on Monday afternoon the 26th, some ten ships of the enemy were sighted from the Highlands of Scarborough about eight miles out on the lake, and steering apparently towards York. At full speed the vidette rode express to bring the news into town. The signal guns were fired, the single bell of the church was rung, and was promptly obeyed, as the call to arms. Every man who could hold a musket or secure a gun volunteered for service, Alexander Wood, Quetton St. George, and Beikie, with others unattached, fell into the ranks, and Donald MacLean, the Clerk of the House, throwing off his gown, brought out his gun, to die, alas, next morning, on the Humber beach, fighting alongside the 8th Grenadiers.

One Company was sent east to guard the Kingston Road, outworks were posted, and the rest of the forces held in readiness to move either to the east flank or the west flank, so soon as the direction of the attack should be learned. By 8 o’clock that evening General

Sheaffe, with his Adjutant of Militia, General Shaw, had completed their preparations.

Every man went out ready to his post, and through the night a close watch was kept to discover where the fleet which was known to be somewhere outside in the dark, would endeavour to make a landing.

At dawn, through the haze, it appeared as though the fleet, which had been lying to outside, were heading to land on the peninsula just opposite the town, to which access could be obtained by road. An outpost had been kept here on the narrow place called the "portage," for the lake had not then broken through the sandbar. A landing at this place would have avoided the forts at the entrance of the harbour and come direct at the town. A brisk breeze from the east, however, was springing up, and about 5 a.m. the fleet bore away to round the Gibraltar Point. It was a fine sight, as an eyewitness described, to see those sixteen armed vessels crowded with men, sailing in regular order, the flagship leading, the others following in a line, and each towing several large boats for the purpose of landing the troops. The intention had been to land at the large clearing where the old French fort had been, but the wind had strengthened, and so the vessels were carried farther around the point. Sail was then rapidly taken in and the ships rounded to and came to anchor at the eastern end of the Humber Bay.

It was now certain that the attack was to be made from the western end of the town, and Major Givens and his Indians were dispatched to distribute themselves in the wooded banks above the beach at the Humber Bay, with the Company of the Glengarry Regiment to act as support. Orders were given to recall the men from the east of the town and for the main body to concentrate on the ground to the west of the garrison.

The boats of the fleet were got out and manned by the sailors, the troops were promptly embarked and the landing began between 6 and 7 a.m., under the cover of the guns of the ships. Captain Forsyth with his companies of riflemen were to lead the van of



the American attack. As they neared the shore in two batteaux and came under a brisk fire from the Indians and Glengarries, who were concealed in the thickets, the Captain gave the orders: "Rest on your oars," "Prime." It is to be remembered that the arms then used were only flintlocks, requiring priming from powder horns and available only at short distances, the maximum effective range being about two hundred yards. It looked for a moment as though there was a hesitation on the part of the attack, due to the fire from the shore. Meantime the Canadian supports were being hurried forward from the town, and the Newfoundland Company and the Grenadiers of the 8th were sent forward. Major-General Shaw, with a detachment of the Glengarries and a gun, were sent out in the direction of the Dundas Road to protect the rear and take such steps as were necessary. Coming later into action and down from the highlands, the ponds in front of them had to be crossed. It was late in the month of April when the ice in the harbour had broken up and that in the inland ponds was rotten. Tradition tells that as the men were crossing over the frozen ponds the ice gave way and two Grenadiers having been drowned, the Grenadier pond thus gained its name. Let us trust that the name which perpetuates the memory of the gallant companies will ever be retained. It has been proposed to change the name to "Howard Lake," in recognition of the donor to the city of Toronto of the adjacent park. Let the park be called Howard Park, but the preserving of the name of Grenadier Lake is due to those who fought and died on this eventful day.

This Grenadier Lake then is an appropriate place for our first memorial. Notwithstanding the fire from the Indians and Fencibles, Forsyth effected a landing. MacLean was killed defending the beach. The shore and banks as far as the clearing of the old French fort were clad with brush and thick woods, into which the riflemen at once spread, and their boats, which had been landing more men, returned with further reinforcements.

General Pike had been watching the debarkation from the flagship *Madison*, he had noted the firing from the woods and the stopping

of the boats. Becoming impatient he said to one of his staff, "By G-- I can't stay here any longer. Come, jump into the boat"—a boat had been reserved for him alongside, and he at once started for the shore.

Pike was an impetuous young man at the age of 34 and a bold soldier. He was the son of an old soldier, and joining the American regular service when but a lad, had served with distinction upon the Indian frontiers and in the early western exploration of the Mississippi. To his great joy and at his own urgent request he had been appointed to the command of the brigade for the attack on York. A letter of his, written to his father the day before the expedition sailed, has been preserved, in which he writes:—

"I embark to-morrow in the fleet at Sackett's Harbour at the head of a column of choice troops on a secret expedition. Should I be the happy mortal destined to turn the scale of war, will you not rejoice, oh my father! May Heaven be propitious and smile on our cause, but if we are destined to fall, may my fall be like Wolfe's—to sleep in the hour of victory."

His letter, the events of the day proved to be almost prophetic. We cannot but admire such a spirit, even though it be in an enemy, nor fail to give every credit to so gallant a foe, a man of mettle and of valour, by whom it was almost a credit to have been defeated.

Covered by the broadside from the fleet which, firing over the heads of the boats, swept the banks, Major King and the 15th Battalion of American Infantry were landed in support of the riflemen, and in the contest which followed, Forsyth, as a writer says, "lost some men, but no credit."

Here, where the Americans landed and Donald MacLean fell defending the shore, is our second memorial.

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Opposed by these reinforcements, Major Givens, with his Indians and the Fencibles, had kept up a brisk fire among the trees and brushwood, fighting every inch of the way, but were driven back. The two Companies of the 8th had now come up from the clearing, and entering the wood, a gallant charge was made upon the advancing American column along the top of the bank, causing it partially to retire. In this the Grenadiers suffered severely, and Captain MacNeil, while valorously leading his men, was killed.

MacNeil was buried by the enemy near the spot where he fell, and afterwards, in 1829, the Loyalist paper of the 9th of May, says:

“The waters of the lake having lately made great inroads along the bank, and the grave being in danger of being washed away, the Commander of the 68th Regiment had the remains removed and placed on that day in the garrison burying-ground. A firing party and the band of the regiment attended on the occasion.”

This bank referred to is the high ground on the eastern end of the Humber Bay, where the Grand Trunk Railway now passes through a deep cutting.

Others of the gallant men, on both sides, who fell in the struggle along these lofty banks fringing the bay, were also buried on them, and from time to time, as the cliff has been worn away by the waters of the lake, military accoutrements, fragments of firearms and of skeletons have been exposed to view. This is indeed sacred ground. The open cliff, with its clay sides seamed by the rains, sloping to the lake, and its feet washed by the ceaseless waves, mutely says to the passerby, “Here MacNeil died.” One can stand upon its heights to-day and in imagination see the long line of ships at anchor, the boats making for the shore, hear the scream of the grapeshot, the pattering of the musket, the whoops of the Indians as they skirmished from tree to tree, and the hoarse cry of the red-coats when their leader fell. Then on another day sixteen years afterwards see his brothers standing with reversed

arms while the coffin was raised from its first grave, and follow the solemn procession winding over the garrison plain with mournful music and muffled drums to the military burying-ground, where the blank volleys fired in the air told that the hero had again been laid to rest. The thought of such scenes moves the pulses of the heart and emboldens the spirit to stand firm for native land.

Here on the high bank where MacNeil was killed would be the proper place for our third memorial.

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It was now past 9 o'clock. The landing-place having been left clear, the American reinforcements were fast pushed forward. Two hundred of the Militia and the Newfoundland Company had now arrived from the east end of the town, but our men were unable to sustain the contest against the superior and ever increasing numbers aided by the flank fire from the ships.

The American main body, having now been all landed, a general advance was ordered. General Pike in person led the first line, composed of the 6th, 15th, 16th and 21st regiments, with a detachment of light and heavy artillery. The second line was formed under command of General Pearce. The American advance was slow, for the ground, at all times wet and marshy, as it is in parts even to this day on the Garrison Commons, was made heavier by the melting snow. Lieut. Fanning, of the 3rd American Artillery, found great difficulty in dragging his field pieces through the woods and across the rivulets from which the bridges had been removed.

Our men were fighting behind every tree. An advance party of the Americans was sent forward to clear the woods, and stubbornly resisting, our men were pressed back by superior numbers. On reaching the open ground around the old French fort our men retired to the Western Battery. The men of the 8th, having been reduced by the loss of their Captain and half of their men killed or wounded, combined to man the guns.

Here at the old French Fort the monument of Fort Rouille already forms our fourth memorial.

The Americans now emerged upon the clearings. Fanning's guns were brought up and fire opened upon the battery. Pike ordered his buglers to sound the advance, and their blast, carried down by the breeze, was answered by cheers from the ships.

The light draught vessels beat up east and around the point and along the shore, and subjected our men to a heavy flank fire, and poured their broadsides into the batteries. This western battery had been manned with the 18-pound guns removed from the "*Gloucester*," but they were far inferior to the long 32's of the fleet which rained shot into them at a range which they could not meet. Pike sent out his aide-de-camp, Lieut. Fraser, with a sergeant, to the right of the battery to reconnoitre. They returned with the report that the men in the battery were spiking the guns toward the fleet.

The General immediately ordered the 16th Regiment to lead and make an assault. Captain Walworth and his men advanced with trailed arms under fire from the battery, whose grapeshot were whistling about them as they moved forward. Having covered a portion of the distance just as the 16th were about being steadied and ordered to charge, an explosion took place in the battery. One of our men, incautiously holding a port fire behind him had dropped the fuse into the cartridges for the guns which were in a movable magazine lying open behind his back. The explosion, besides killing and wounding a number of our men, seriously damaged the defences and dismounted another gun. Shattered by the fire from the ships, their number decimated, and their defences destroyed, the remnant then retired, but having first given the enemy another round and then spiked the guns.

All this had been taking place around the point on which the Stanley barracks now stand, and in the battery at a spot opposite the foot of Strachan Avenue. In 1867 there were still some remnants of

this western battery to be seen on the edge of the bank, but all have since been washed away or levelled.

Must we not admire these men of ours, attacked in front by a force admitted by their enemy to outnumber them three to one, stormed at by the shot from the fleet which had followed up along the shore, with inferior artillery and no good defensive works, yet making a courageous stand at every available spot, and retiring when overmastered, carrying with them their wounded and leaving to the victors only their dead, their dying and their spiked guns?

Here, at the position of the Western Battery, is our fifth memorial.

It was now about 12 o'clock. The fleet again bore up along the shore and poured in their fire upon the Halfmoon Battery. Pike and the first line again advanced towards this halfmoon, which was a small semi-circular earthwork without guns, thrown up across the road leading to the fort. The fleet, under Chauncey, tacked still further up and anchored within six hundred yards of the garrison. The schooners had been well handled, and our men suffered more from the flank fire from the guns of the fleet than they did from the men in front.

Sheaffe had now retired to his stronghold, the garrison, in the old fort. Pike, having advanced his men to within striking distance of the garrison, ordered a halt, making his men lie down and waiting for the six guns under Major Eustis to be brought up, while the garrison was silenced by the guns of the fleet.

It was now between half-past 1 and 2 o'clock, and there was a lull.

Pike concluded, and not unreasonably, that it was the preliminary to the making of proposals for a surrender, so advanced his men past the Halfmoon Battery and halting them about two hundred yards from the main battery, sent Lieut. Riddle forward with a party to reconnoitre. The road to the garrison here used to follow close along the bank, and as Pike, who, with his two aide-de-camps, had also gone forward, was sitting down in the act of

speaking to a Canadian militiaman named Joseph Shepherd, a deep tremor was felt, a sudden flash and roar, a column of smoke mingled with beams and huge stones shot up into the air. The magazine of the fort had been blown up. Pike was mortally crushed by the falling debris. As soon as the shock had subsided, the Americans, their leader having fallen, were for a time thrown into confusion, but after some delay entered in without further opposition and took possession of the fort from which, after arranging to destroy his fortress, Sheaffe had retired his men. The enemy had cracked the nut, but found the kernel empty.

There has been a great deal of discussion upon this event as to whether it was accidental or intentional, and some confusion has been caused by confounding this second explosion with the first one which had taken place just a little before in the western battery.

What had occurred was as follows: When General Brock had condemned a previous powder magazine, which was a small wooden shed only sixty yards from the King's or Government House, a new one had been constructed on the waterfront of the fort. A sketch by Lossing shows it as a low building below the parapet of the fort, close down by the waterside. All doubts as to its position have been cleared up by the discovery of the original plan of 1816, by Dr. Doughty, of the Archives of Ottawa, and published in the *Evening Telegram* by Mr. John Ross Robertson. In this the exact position is given and marked "Hollow left where the magazine was blown up on April 27th, 1813."

There was at that time a long ditch under the whole western face of the old fort below the ramparts and strengthened by sloping pickets, as shown on this plan of 1816. The road from the western battery followed along the bank until it reached this ditch when it turned northward, and turning to the right, crossed the ditch on a bridge to the entrance of the fort. The magazine was three hundred feet further to the east from the corner and on the water side below the south-western bastion. This magazine outside the fort was built of solid masonry, with a stone wall on the lake side,

and a small jetty for unloading boats. The roof, with heavy beams, was nearly level with the surface of the ground, and stone steps descended into its vaults. In these were stored five hundred barrels of gunpowder, and an immense quantity of ammunition, shot, and shell, which had been accumulated for the coming campaign. With such contents the explosion could not fail to be disastrous. In addition to General Pike, Captain Dyon, Captain Fox, and 250 of the American soldiers were wounded or killed by the far flung explosion, together with 40 of our own men who had not retired in time.

That this explosion was intentional and done by order of General Sheaffe there is no doubt. Major Givens sent an orderly to warn his family, telling them to seek safety as the Americans were victorious, and the British being obliged to retreat, were going to blow up the fort in the endeavour to reduce for the enemy the fruits of their victory. This was a policy quite in accord with that carried out by Sheaffe during the remaining hours of the day.

That it was intended, as has been alleged, to blow up the enemy as over a hidden mine, was not only improbable but impossible. The magazine was not inside the fort, and they could at no time march above it. Sergeant Marshall, who set fire to the fuse, said after the event that if he had thought that Sheaffe wished it he could have given ten minutes more port fire to the fuse. The intention was to destroy the ammunition, and the unintentional damage done to those who were in the neighbourhood was by the falling stones.

That the explosion was premature is beyond question, as shown by a number of our own men having been killed. Some have thrown doubt on this, and General Dearborn, writing from York on the following day, says: "The enemy set fire to their magazine too soon; they destroyed many of their own men." He also reports the number as being forty. That would include, no doubt, a number of the wounded who had been carried in from the western battery, whose condition, as seen by a bystander, when being carried in through the gate of the garrison is described as most terrible,



blackened and wounded by the explosion, particularly one poor fellow who was brought in on a wheelbarrow. Captain Loring, the aide-de-camp of General Sheaffe, who was superintending the retreat, was himself severely wounded and his horse killed under him. The annals of the Loyal and Patriotic Society record payments made to relatives of those who were killed by this second explosion. Both sides had suffered, for the effect was terrific. "The water," says Ingersoll, "shook as with an earthquake, and stones and rubbish were thrown as far as the decks of the vessels near the shore." Pike and Shepherd were both crushed by falling stones. The militiaman was carried away in the arms of his fellow soldier, Joseph Dennis, of Birchwood Western, and died a few hours afterwards. Pike, mortally crushed, was being carried to the shore, when hearing the shouts of the victors, asked what they meant, and being told "The British flag is down and the American flag is going up," he (with a sigh) expressed his satisfaction. He was taken on board the *Madison*, on which General Dearborn had remained during the day, and, with the British flag under his head, which he had begged might be placed there, Pike died as he had wished, "*like Wolfe, asleep in the hour of victory.*"

Dearborn was severely censured for his inactivity. If he had been at his post on shore perhaps more energetic steps might at once have been taken to follow up the retreating forces. Some officers were sent forward to demand a capitulation, but no further advance was made and Sheaffe was enabled to complete his plans.

After arranging to blow up the fort Sheaffe retired along the Garrison Road, which followed the shore toward the town. He halted his men in the ravine of Russell's Creek, a part of which is now seen as a part of the Lieutenant-Governor's garden at the south of the present Government House, destroyed the stores which were in the dockyard which was on the shore just below it, and set fire to the new warship, which was almost completed. Leaving Colonel Chewett and Major Allan, of the 3rd York, who were residents of the town, to arrange with General Dearborn for the

terms of capitulation, Sheaffe withdrew all the regulars along the Kingston Road, meeting, a few miles east of the Don, the two light Companies of the 8th Regiment, which were following up the Grenadier Companies on their way to Fort George. With these he retired to Kingston.

It is to be remembered that there were so few trained soldiers in the country that every regular and his equipment was of exceeding value, and that these same corps thus saved from being made prisoners did splendid service three weeks afterwards at Sackett's Harbour, and in other engagements during the next two years.

The terms made that evening were "that the resident Militia should surrender on parole, that all public stores should be delivered up, and that all private property should be guaranteed to the citizens of the town." Notwithstanding this, some of the private stores were next day plundered, the Parliament Buildings and the Court House burned, the church robbed and the town library pillaged.

Four days later, after burning some of the houses, some of the barracks and the Government House in the Garrison, the Americans sailed away, taking with them the *Duke of Gloucester*, which, however, was burned three weeks afterwards, by Sir James Yeo, when he attacked the Americans in Sackett's Harbour.

Here, then, at the old Fort York, is our sixth memorial.

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What more could men do than did these 600 heroes on our side that day against the 1,800 landed to attack them? On watch all night to see where the enemy would land, fighting every inch of the way for all the miles from the Humber Bay to the Garrison, stormed at by the hundred guns of the fleet, fighting from early dawn for eight hours against odds on land of three to one, battered by the guns of the fleet, manned by 800 more men, then, overborne, but not disgraced, with one man out of every three lying wounded or dead on the battlefield, they blew up their magazine, and the remnant withdrew, to be, as they afterwards proved, ready to fight another day.

Totleben, in 1856, did the same. After doing his best in the defence of Sebastopol, he blew up his magazine, sank his ships, marched out his men, and left the fortress empty in the hands of the enemy. Was he disgraced? Nay, it has been heralded as a notable feat of arms.

So, too, with our defenders of York in 1813—it was a defeat yet it was a victory, for it inspired our people to learn the duty of self-defence.

What of the noble 600 of Balaklava? They were beaten, they retired, yet “when shall their glory fade?”

So, too, with the 600 of our Humber Bay and old Fort York. Shall we forget their gallant deeds? Shall we not rise from the despicable slumber which has allowed this old fort of York to be a dumping-ground for refuse, a standing monument of forgetfulness.

After years of endeavour for its repair and preservation we have at length arrived at a period of repentance. The city of Toronto has been entrusted with the care of these sacred precincts, and has undertaken to fully restore the fort in accordance with these recorded plans of 1816, in which are contained buildings and ramparts as on our eventful day, and are to be maintained as a National Historical Memorial for ever. That this shall be amply done will be expected by the Dominion and the Province which have committed them to the city’s care.

The period of indecision is over, this old fort of York, the Memorial of our country’s defenders, will soon be restored, beautified and made a place of commanding interest.

May we not hope, too, that Memorials with appropriate and explanatory inscription may be placed at the principal points along this memorable battlefield of the Garrison Commons, our Upper Canada field of Abraham.

Here shall they stand as rallying points for our sons and daughters,  
teaching them the duty they owe in defence of their native land and  
as vivid memorials of the Brave Days of Old.

BARLOW CUMBERLAND.