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# Fort Meigs in the War of 1812

By

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FORT MEIGS was one of our most important military posts in the War of 1812. Named after Governor R. J. Meigs of Ohio, and the largest of several posts erected at various times in the strategic Maumee Valley, Fort Meigs well deserves conspicuous mention in the annals of our Republic. Because of its large historical importance and the proximity of its site, now fittingly marked, to Toledo, it is proper for the Historical Society of Northwestern Ohio to dedicate this Bulletin to Fort Meigs.

In the following narrative, the military situation which necessitated the construction of the fort, its description, and its successful defense against the British and Indians will be briefly presented. The story has been told before, but it deserves retelling—lest the present generation forget the patriotic devotion and the American valor symbolized by that towering shaft near Perrysburg.

The year 1813 opened with renewed hopes for military success on the frontier in our second struggle for independence. After years of futile effort to maintain our neutrality and self-respect, we had declared war on Great Britain, which power by persistently ignoring our maritime rights and impressing our seamen, had given us just grounds for fighting. Also, we had endured insults and great maritime losses at the hands of Napoleon against whom we might with equal propriety have waged war. It was another case of weaker neutrals suffering from powerful belligerents in a life and death struggle as England and France were then so engaged.

Unfortunately for us, we entered the war with a divided public sentiment.

Because she made money in spite of the harsh restraints imposed upon our foreign trade, commercial and Federalist New England had been inclined to favor England, and despise revolutionary France. And New England strongly opposed the Republican administrations of Jefferson and Madison—the so-called Virginia "dynasty" of presidents. But the non-commercial West and South felt otherwise. Especially on the frontier, in Ohio and Kentucky, was England strongly disliked. These Westeners had lost their patience and they demanded that this country take up arms and defend its rights against the "Mistress of the Seas." Moreover, the belief strongly persisted in these border states that British agents had long continued to incite the Indians to ravage frontier settlements, which outrageous treatment must now be avenged.

The Congress which assembled in December, 1811 contained some vigorous younger Western and Southern men, destined to be the leaders of a new generation. In this famous group were Henry Clay and Richard Johnson of Kentucky, Felix Grundy of Tennessee and John C. Calhoun of South Carolina.

In substance, these men and their kind declared it was time to quit dallying and fight. Since England refused to concede our rights on the ocean and refused to desist stirring up trouble with the Indians, we would and could whip her. And these sentiments were impressed sufficiently upon Congress to effect a declaration of war on June 18, 1812.

The American plan of action comprised four major attacks upon Canada: one at Montreal from Lake Champlain; one from Kingston at the east end of Lake Ontario; a third from Niagara; and finally a thrust at Western Ontario from Detroit. Of course it is with the Western campaign only that we are here concerned.

## The Military Problem in the West

SINCE the war spirit was so strong in the West it was in this section that formidable military action first began. Even before war was declared, General Hull was moving with a force of about two thousand men from Cincinnati to Detroit where he arrived early in the summer. On July 9th, he received orders to invade Canada and on the 12th he crossed the Detroit River. The sorry tale of his failure—of his foolish proclamation to the Canadians, of his stupid delay at Malden and subsequent withdrawal to Detroit which place he disgracefully surrendered on August 16th without a fight—all these details as to the loss of Hull's army have no place in this article. In fairness, however, it may be said that while Hull's cowardice must ever remain a stigma on American history, he had nevertheless a difficult problem to face, a problem which his abler and braver successors found hard to solve. Holding a very exposed position in the face of an advancing enemy, some two hundred fifty miles from his base on the Ohio River, Hull would at any rate soon have gotten into a precarious situation from which only a prudent and skillful retreat would have saved him, unless promptly and adequately reinforced. From a sound military standpoint, Hull's early advance to Detroit, largely in response to public clamor for action was premature and unjustified by existing conditions.

But Hull's army was now lost, abjectly surrendered to the enemy. Already had Fort Mackinac and its handful of defenders been taken. And in that same month Fort Dearborn, now Chicago, was surrendered and its garrison massacred by the savages. The frontier line of defense now became the Maumee and Wabash Rivers on which stood only two feeble defenses, Fort Wayne, and Fort Harrison near the present town of Terre Haute. The entire Northwest now seemed at the mercy of the Indians who, contemptuous because of our loss at Detroit, now boldly attacked Forts Harrison and Wayne and nearly succeeded in destroying the former. Many isolated settlements were destroyed by the savages. Had the energetic General Brock not been called east after Hull's surrender, he might easily have occupied the Maumee Valley, at least for a time. Fortunately for our war preparations on the Western front only a small force of British remained at Malden temporarily, after the capture of Detroit, which was soon to be heavily reinforced under Col. Proctor.

## General Harrison Placed in Command

THE task of defending the frontier now rested with Ohio and Kentucky, which states then had respectively about two hundred fifty thousand and four hundred thousand inhabitants. There now stepped forward a well-known leader, William Henry Harrison, Governor of Indiana Territory. On June 19th he had left the territorial capital, Vincennes, for Cincinnati. While Harrison has been overrated as a military man, he neverthless did have soldierly ability. He knew the West of that day and was conversant with frontier problems. As governor, his energy in opening large tracts of Indiana land for white settlement through numerous Indian treaties, and his interest in Congressional land legislation had made him popular in the West. And his success at Tippecanoe in November, 1811 had aroused confidence in his leadership. Harrison keenly sensed the danger that now threatened and he believed that a strong force must be organized to wipe out the stigma of defeat and to recover Detroit. At the suggestion of Governor Scott of Kentucky, Harrison was placed in charge of the military forces of that state. Then a sort of caucus boldly assumed the authority to direct military affairs. A small group of Kentuckians, Governor Scott, Governor-elect Shelby, Henry Clay, Speaker of the National House of Representatives, Justice Todd of the United States Supreme Court and other prominent men met

and voted to give Harrison the Commission of Major General and command of an army for the recapture of Detroit. Although Harrison was not a citizen of Kentucky, this action was strongly approved in that state.

Having thus been appointed in so irregular a manner a general of volunteer troops, the position of the new commander was awkward, for as yet his recognition and tenure depended wholly upon his popularity and his suspected ability. Also there was confusion since General Winchester of Tennessee outranked Harrison and had already been placed in command of the "Army of the Northwest" by Secretary of War Eustis, and Winchester had gone to the front. But when President Madison and Secretary Eustis learned that the Kentucky political leaders had selected Harrison, they yielded to local sentiment. They formally commissioned Harrison a Brigadier General and put him in charge of the Army of the Northwest in place of Winchester. The latter was given the option of being subordinate to Harrison or of joining the American forces at Niagara and he chose to remain in the West.

An ambitious man and confident of himself, General Harrison now had a splendid chance to demonstrate his worth. His army was to be ten thousand men, he was given a free hand as to raising supplies and recruiting soldiers, and he was hampered by no orders except to retake Detroit.

## An Autumn Campaign Attempted

ON September 25th, Harrison now at Piqua, wrote Scretary Eustis his plans for a fall campaign. He purposed to direct three columns from different points upon the Maumee Rapids as a preliminary to a sweeping advance upon Detroit. His right column was to be the Virginia and Pennsylvania troops who were to move by way of the Sandusky River. The center, comprising twelve hundred Ohio militia, was to advance from the South. While the left division which included four Kentucky regiments and the 17th United States Infantry was to go down the Auglaize River to Fort Defiance on the Maumee and then effect a juncture with the other columns at the not distant Rapids. Also, General Hopkins was to lead two thousand Kentucky volunteers up the Wabash Valley and destroy the Indian towns along the Wabash and Illinois Rivers.

These plans looked good on paper, but they involved a serious risk and that was the weather, of which Harrison was fully aware. On September 23d he wrote Eustis of his confident ability to retake Detroit that autumn—if the weather remained dry. In case of a rainy season he feared it would be necessary to wait at the Rapids until the River and Lake Erie were sufficiently frozen to permit an advance on the ice. Then, too, it should be observed that this grand plan of action was menaced by the same danger which confronted General Hull—operating at a long distance from a safe military base. Again, such a project stood no chance of success without adequate transportation, and the swampy nature of the country, especially in the Sandusky section, would make the co-ordination of advancing columns doubly difficult, if not impossible.

The weather did prove rainy and by late October, Harrison's movement was stalled. Only the left division under Winchester had reached the Maumee at Defiance where it remained until the end of the year without adequate food or shelter, conditions which ultimately created a spirit of mutiny among the men. The central column under General Tupper lingered at Urbana, one hundred miles from the Rapids, awaiting supplies. The Eastern Division had not even reached Sandusky. And by the end of this rainy October, the Wabash column had broken up for want of discipline and organization. Even General Hopkins had been obliged to go home in disgust.

Meanwhile General Harrison was busy riding back and forth between his three main divisions giving encouragement to his men and, incidentally, looking for any sort of ridges along which an advance might follow. Perhaps the greatest single obstacle to the success of the enterprise at that season was the terrible Sandusky swamp which made further advance of the Eastern Division for the time impossible.

So matters remained at a standstill in October and November, 1812, the army scattered, while desperate though vain efforts were being made with wagons and even packhorses to move supplies to the Maumee Rapids. Furthermore,

there were confusion and waste. No bills of lading were used and no accounts were kept of the vast quantity of supplies purchased. Countless wagon-loads of provisions were abandoned in the mud, while Winchester's army on the Maumee was half starved. It is said that these men subsisted through December mainly on bad beef and hickory nuts. To make matters worse dozens of them sickened and died.

Finally, on December 12th, General Harrison wrote James Monroe, who was now acting as Secretary of War, that unless political expediency dictated an early recovery of Michigan, it would be better for the government to concern itself with plans for getting control of Lake Erie and to defer serious military action until spring. So long as the British held Malden, little more than a seizure of Detroit could be expected that winter, and the possession of the town would also be precarious. An attack upon Malden would require thick ice for effective military maneuvers. And so the year ended on the Western front with nothing further accomplished, and millions of dollars wasted. But cold weather was as hand and with frozen roads and thick ice on the rivers, hopes were still alive for some definite military achievement.

Harrison's explanation of failure to that date showed that he had been victimized by his own enthusiasm. Writing on January 4th he said he had thought when he took command the previous September he could, by great exertion, win the campaign before winter came. But a few days' experience had shown him that adequate supplies could not be moved during a rainy autumn. Also, artillery was lacking, and so a winter campaign seemed the only alternative.

## The Winter Campaign

IT is the judgment of able historians that any further military advance from the Rapids of the Maumee was unwarranted except in overwhelming force or with an assured control of Lake Erie. But public opinion was hopeful and anxious. It still demanded action. Accordingly as the weather had turned cold in December, Harrison ordered Winchester to descend the Maumee to the Rapids and there make ready for a joint attack upon Malden, should the ice permit. With the ground at last frozen, supply trains and artillery had reached the Maumee. The Eastern Column arrived at Sandusky and the central division was advancing. In short, some six thousand troops were finally in motion. By January 12, 1813, General Harrison had decided to move his headquarters within a few days from Sandusky, to the Rapids, but meanwhile news reached him of one of the worst tragedies that ever befell an American army, the River Raisin disaster. Lack of space here forbids an account of how General Winchester unwisely advanced into an exposed position on the banks of this stream where, on January 22d, his little army of one thousand men was captured or destroyed by the British and Indians. Probably less than forty got back to the Rapids to tell the story. And so two American forces aggregating more than two thousand men had been lost within six months through having invaded Michigan. It was plainly up to Harrison to retrieve the failures of Hull and Winchester.

By the time he learned of the River Raisin disaster, General Harrison had assembled about nine hundred men, with artillery and supplies at the Rapids. Luckily for him, Proctor with his stronger force did not then try an advance. But in anticipation of an attack, Harrison decided to abandon his camp established by Winchester and retreat. Accordingly he burned the blockhouses and a quantity of provisions which the enemy might otherwise secure and fell back about eighteen miles to the Portage River where he fortified his camp and awaited reinforcements. Further action was now delayed by a heavy rain which started on the 24th and lasted several days. Finally on January 30th, General Leftwich reached the Portage with the Pennsylvania brigade and a quantity of artillery; and on February 1st, Harrison advanced to the Rapids with seventeen hundred men, which force was soon increased to two thousand by the arrival of Ohio and Kentucky militia. As many more scattered troops were potentially available.

General Harrison now decided to establish a strong base at the Rapids on the south bank of the river from which he still planned to project a winter campaign against Detroit and Malden. Work on the new camp, presently to be described, was started February 1st. But the weather continued unseasonable, warm and rainy. On the 9th a detachment started over the weak ice in pursuit of a band of Indians, but after an unsuccessful chase of more than twenty miles during which the weakened ice frequently gave way, this force returned on the 10th. On the following day in view of the hopeless weather conditions which had once more rendered the roads impassable for approaching supply and artillery trains, General Harrison seems to have definitely abandoned all further hope of attempting a winter campaign and to have centered his main attention upon defensive measures which resulted in the speedy erection of Fort Meigs. So far our military efforts in the Northwest had been an abject failure. Any sort of a winter expedition had proved unwise if not impossible of success. In a sense, local public opinion, which had incessantly demanded action in the West, was responsible for these failures. But Harrison too is to be criticized for his overabundant optimism and his excessive promises thus far to the people of Ohio and Kentucky. Familiar as he was with the topography and climate of the Maumee Valley, he must have been secretly aware that he made futile promises, which he practically admitted in his letter to the War Department on December 12th.

## The Construction of Fort Meigs

LET us now turn to the building of the new fort, which was at first called Camp Meigs in honor of the warlike Quaker governor of Ohio at that time. There were sound reasons for abandoning the fortifications started by Winchester and locating the new post on the south bank, for the original camp on the North bank was easy of access to the enemy. Should he advance to give siege, he would undoubtedly follow the North bank of the Maumee from Detroit.

The fort was erected mainly in February, 1813, under the direction of Capt. E. D. Wood of the Engineering Corps. While, as noted, the weather had at first been mild, it had turned severly cold late that month. We will use Capt. Wood's own personal account of the building operations:

> "So soon as the lines of the camp were designated, large portions of labor were assigned to each corps in the army, by which means a very laudable emulation was easily excited. Each brigade or regiment commenced the particular portion of work alloted to it with great spirit and vigor. The camp was about 2,500 yards in circumference the whole of which, with the exception of several small intervals left for batteries and blockhouses, was to be picketed with timber fifteen feet long, from two to twelve inches in diameter, and set three feet in the ground. Such were the instructions of the engineer. To complete this picketing, to put eight blockhouses of double timbers, to elevate four large batteries, to build all the storehouses and magazines required to contain the supplies of the army, together with the ordinary fatigues of the camp, was an undertaking of no small magnitude. Besides an immense deal of labor was likewise required in excavating ditches, making abatis and clearing away the wood about the camp; and all this was to be done, too, at a time when the weather was inclement, and the ground so hard frozen that it could be scarcely opened with the mattock and pick-axe. But in the use of the axe, mattock and spade consisted the chief military knowledge of our army; and even that knowledge, however trifling it may be supposed by some, is the utmost importance in many situations, and in ours was the salvation of the army." Quoted by McAfee, pp. 266-267.

It is therefore apparent that "Camp Meigs," to quote another of Harrison's officers, Robert McAfee, "was deemed the most eligible that could be selected for

the protection of the frontiers and the small posts in the rear of it. As a depot for the artillery, military stores and provisions, it was also indispensably necessary to maintain it, for it was now impossible to bring them away."

On the return of cold weather and the thickening of the ice, one more military effort, just a diversion, perhaps as a sop to public opinion, was attempted. A force of one hundred seventy volunteers from the various regiments at Camp Meigs under Major Langham, started across the lake in sleighs by way of Middle Sister and Bass Islands. The plan was to destroy the British vessels at Malden in a surprise attack. Harrison followed with a larger force only to meet Langham's men returning at the mouth of the Bay. They had found the main body of the lake open water and so had to give up the enterprise.

On receipt of Harrison's letter of February 11th, John Armstrong then Secretary of War, had written repeatedly urging the General to hold his position, and to take the defensive and make only demonstrations at Malden. The Secretary announced that a fleet was being constructed at Presque Isle—now Erie, Pennsylvania—with which the Government hoped to wrest control of Lake Erie from the British during the coming season.

The Army of the Northwest suffered meanwhile from the continuous depletion of its ranks due to the expiring of the militiamen's short term enlistments; and the War Department purposed to substitute regular troops so far as possible, for the state militia. But the raising of a strong force of regulars would take much time and it was probably fortunate that Harrison had already, before receipt of Armstrong's letter, called upon Ohio and Kentucky for militia reinforcements. Governor Meigs ordered two regiments to make ready, but the response was disappointing. On the other hand, Governor Shelby of Kentucky, in compliance with a law recently passed by his legislature, ordered the drafting of three thousand militia who were to be formed into four regiments under Colonels Boswell, Dudley, Cox, and Caldwell, with Brigadier General Green Clay in command of the entire force.

Realizing that no enemy attack might be expected before spring, and now committed to a defensive policy, Harrison had left Fort Meigs late in the winter to visit his family in Cincinnati and to stimulate recruiting. Captain Wood had been sent to Sandusky to direct the building of a fortification there. General Leftwich who had been placed in temporary command did nothing to further the work of completing the fort, and "this old phlegmatic Dutchman" even permitted the men to burn picketing timber for fuel rather than order them into the woods to procure their firewood. Leftwich and all but two hundred thirty of the Virginia and Pennsylvania troops now departed early in the spring, leaving Major Amos Stoddard, an excellent officer, in command.

In early April news began to arrive from the North that the British and Indians were preparing to advance on Fort Meigs. At this time Stoddard had but five hundred men with which to garrison a post designed for two thousand troops. Vigorous defensive measures were now urgent. On the 8th, Lieut. Col. Ball arrived with two hundred dragoons and on the 12th Harrison reached the fort with about three hundred militia, all that could be released from duty in the smaller posts along the Auglaize and St. Marys Rivers. Enroute he had written urgently to Governor Shelby to hurry along the Kentucky militia. While this was contrary to the orders of the Secretary of War, Harrison's action in calling for the militia in view of the supreme need of holding Fort Meigs in the face of impending danger seems justified. Preparations for a siege now went on at the fort. Scouts were constantly sent out to discern the approach of the enemy, and on April 19th, a party of these rangers brought in three Frenchmen from the River Raisin settlement who reported that Proctor had just been reinforced by six hundred warriors under Tecumseh from the region beyond the Wabash and that a heavy attack might soon be expected. It was evident that Proctor and his allies meant to take the fort as a further step in destroying the United States military posts in the Northwest. As it now appeared that the Indians would fight with the British, and that the posts and settlements of the Wabash and Upper Maumee River were not in danger, Harrison again wrote Governor Shelby to hold the militia which had just been requested. Meanwhile part of Boswell's regiment who travelled light had arrived; but Clay's force more heavily encumbered was still struggling forward and did not reach Defiance until May 3d.

## The First Siege

ON the 26th of April, small detachments of the enemy were seen near Maumee Bay, and on the 28th the British and Indians were discovered in full advance, but a few miles below the fort. Most, if not all, of the British came in small gunboats which carried siege guns, while the Indians travelled on land. General Harrison now despatched a messenger post haste to warn Clay to hurry, and he also sent letters to the Governors of Kentucky and Ohio informing them of the situation. It was fortunate that Harrison had returned to Fort Meigs before the siege began, as his great energies were sorely needed to get the place in condition to repel the enemy. On the morning of the 29th, he assembled his force and enlivened them with one of his characteristic speeches which began with these words: "Can the citizens of a free country who have taken arms to defend its rights, think of submitting to an army composed of mercenary soldiers, reluctant Canadians goaded to the field by the bayonet, and of wretched, naked savages? Can the breast of an American soldier when he casts his eyes to the opposite shore, the scene of his country' triumphs over the same fort, (Miami) be influenced by any other feelings than the hope of glory? Is not this army composed of the same materials with that which fought and conquered under the immortal Wayne?" Having served under General Wayne as a junior officer at Fallen Timbers, Harrison spoke well in referring to that famous battle which had been fought in 1794 just a few miles away.

The British established headquarters about two miles down the river and that same night they began the erection of three batteries, nearly opposite the fort and about three hundred yards from the shore line. Intervening was a level expanse of low ground, partly submerged, across which an attacking force could scarcely advance. Two of these batteries, each with four embrasures, comprised regular artillery, and the third was a bombing battery situated a little below the fort. As the British had not completed these works by daybreak, they were considerably annoyed by artillery fire from the fort which inflicted several casualties.

Under the immediate direction of Captain Wood, further protection within the fort from artillery fire was now hurriedly provided in the form of bomb-proof dugouts and huge earthworks, chief of which was a grand traverse or ridge twelve feet high which ran diagonally for some three hundred yards through the enclosure. This protection enabled the American forces to serve in three-hour relays which undoubtedly reduced losses and sustained morale. Yet the grand traverse had been concealed by army tents while under construction and when the British artillery opened with full strength, these tents were quickly struck, revealing to the enemy gunners a discomfiting target in the form of this ridge of earth. Numbers of the enemy, mostly Indians, had crossed the river and from behind stumps and fallen trees in the clearing kept up a sniping fire at any exposed defenders of the fort.

For three days, May 1st, 2d and 3d, Fort Meigs was pounded by artillery. Losses in the fort were numerically small, but one of the best officers, Major Amos Stoddard, was wounded by a shell fragment from which injury he died some ten days later. The enemy had one advantage in their 24 pounders, whereas the heaviest guns in the fort were only 18 pounders, and for these and the 12-pound cannon of the Americans, there was but a limited supply of cannon balls, only about three hundred sixty of each size. Since the British also fired 12 pounders, General Harrison is said to have offered one gill of whiskey for every cannon ball of this size recovered after being shot from the British guns. It is claimed that one thousand gills of liquor were thus earned during the siege. The Americans were thus handicapped by a shortage of artillery ammunition, and of this situation and the siege in general, Wood wrote—

> "With a plenty of ammunition, we should have been able to have blown John Bull almost from the Miami. . . . It was extremely diverting to see with what pleasure and delight the Indians would yell whenever in their opinion considerable damage was done in camp by the bursting of a shell. Their hanging about the camp and occasionally coming pretty near, kept our lines almost continually in a blaze of fire, for nothing can please a Kentuckian better than to get a shot at an Indian—and he must be indulged."

# The Dudley Disaster

ON May 4th, the defenders of Fort Meigs were thrilled with the news brought in by a courier that General Clay and his Kentucky troops, eleven hundred strong, had reached Defiance, whence they planned to leave for Fort Meigs with seventeen flat-boats at noon with the intention of arriving late that night or early the next morning. General Harrison now saw a chance to inflict a master stroke upon the enemy. He at once sent Captain Hamilton up river to meet Clay, who, by the time of Hamilton's arrival, was but five miles away. Through Captain Hamilton, Harrison ordered Clay to divert about eight hundred men across the river at a point a little more than one mile above Fort Meigs. Hamilton was then to lead this force to the British batteries and Harrison's final order was as follows: "The batteries must be taken, the cannon spiked, and carriages cut down; and the troops must then return to their boats and cross over to the fort. The balance of your men must land on the fort side of the river, opposite the first landing, and fight their way into the fort through the Indians. The route they must take will be pointed out by a subaltern officer now with me, (Hamilton), who will land the canoe on the right bank of the river, to point out the landing for the boats."

General Clay at once obeyed the order. He instructed Col. Dudley to land with his twelve front boats on the left bank, and directed the five remaining boats, including his own, to the right or south bank. Clay met a strong opposition from British and Indians in the vicinity of the fort, but after some confusion in landing and aided by reinforcements sent out by General Harrsion, shelter was gained after hard fighting and some losses. As a diversion in behalf of Dudley's enterprise, Harrison ordered another sortie to spike the British guns on the south bank. Under Col. John Miller, three hundred fifty men dashed upon the enemy, said to have numbered eight hundred fifty, spiked the cannon, inflicted heavy losses and captured fourteen prisoners. Miller's men, too, suffered numerous casualties, but they won a sharp skirmish and returned to the fort successful.

We turn now to Dudley, the story of whose fate is quite familiar. Leading his men in three columns for two miles along the north river bank, he directed a charge and took the coveted main batteries without the loss of a man. The guns were "spiked"—but unfortunately with wooden ramrods which the enemy afterward removed. So far so good. But success now depended upon an instant retreat to the boats and across the river to Fort Meigs. Yet, Dudley's men seemed in no hurry. They were curious to examine the British equipment and made little or no effort to destroy the gun carriages. Then as the yells of advancing Indians were heard, the Kentuckians rushed away to fight the savages and into the woods, a fatal move. There was terrible confusion and Dudley had completely lost control of the siutation when he was killed. When finally a retreat was attempted, less than two hundred men managed to reach the fort. Finding themselves in a hopeless situation, the survivors surrendered. The grewsome details of how General Proctor permitted a score or more of prisoners to be murdered by the savages at old Fort Miami, need not be repeated here. Likwise various anecdotes told by surviving prisoners, as to cruelties afterward endured, which have been related by numerous writers, need not concern this article. Suffice to say that Col. Dudley himself and his Kentuckians must bear the chief blame for this disaster. Had they obeyed General Harrison's orders and retreated after capturing the British guns, their losses would probably have been light. The Kentuckians paid a terrible penalty for their own rashness and lack of discipline.

Dudley and his Kentuckians who lost their lives were buried at Ft. Meigs, while about 350 of his men were captured by the British and paroled at the mouth of the Huron River.

## The Siege Lifted

LITTLE more fighting occurred after May 5th during the first siege of Fort Meigs. On that day, after the artillery fire stopped, General Proctor sent a Major Chambers to demand the surrender of Fort Meigs, which demand Harrison properly spurned. The Indians tired of the situation and seemingly convinced that the fort would not be taken, began to desert the British. Evidently convinced that his undertaking was futile and that more American reinforcements might soon endanger his army, Proctor therefore lifted the siege and departed on May 9th. According to McAfee, the leading historian of this phase of the War of 1812, the British forces at Fort Meigs aggregrated six hundred regulars, eight hundred militia and eighteen hundred Indians.* The same authority says that Harrison had scarely twelve hundred men and perhaps not more than one thousand effectives in defense of a fortification much too large for this number.

*Slocum in his History of the Maumee River Basin, page 326, puts these figures at 522 regulars, 461 militia and about 500 Indians.

The British losses were reported as fifteen killed, forty-seven wounded and forty-one prisoners. The Americans lost within the stockade and in the two sorties from the fort, a total of eighty-one killed and one hundred eighty-nine wounded. The number killed in the Dudley disaster seemed to have been about seventy. "All the soldiers engaged in the defense of Fort Meigs distinguished themselves by their unexampled good conduct," wrote one of their officers. These men, from Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania and Virginia seem to have worthily upheld the best military traditions of the United States.

On returning to Malden, Proctor remained inactive until about July 15th. On May 12th, Harrison had left Fort Meigs in charge of General Clay and shifted his headquarters at first to Sandusky and then Cleveland. He was now occupied with the problem of recruiting a larger force to cooperate in a new advance in conjunction with the American fleet nearing completion at Erie, Pennsylvania.

## The Second Siege

PROCTOR'S position at Malden was becoming difficult. To hold the military support of the Indian braves, he had to feed their families who were encamped in and about Malden. And while his supplies were getting desperately low, he still had to issue ten thousand daily rations to his barbarous allies. To make matters worse, Sir George Prevost, British Commander-in-chief in Canada, wrote Proctor on July 11th that the latter must capture his needed food supplies from the Americans on the south shore of the lake as Lower Canada could not spare supplies nor transportation facilities for the further relief of the force at Malden. This, too, was an effective way of getting the sluggish Proctor into action.

Therefore, on July 20th Proctor's combined force of British and Indians were seen ascending the river for a second attack upon Fort Meigs. Reports vary as to the numbers in this army. Probably there were about five hundred regulars and two thousand Indians, though some writers estimate the total force at as high as five thousand. It was, of course, quite impossible to keep an accurate account of the Indians attached to any expedition, since the savages were in the habit of coming and going almost at will.

The second siege was a rather tame affair. The fort was well prepared and Proctor seemed unwilling to take serious chances. General Clay had learned sound lessons of defensive strategy during the first siege and kept his men well in hand. Losses on either side were insignificant. The most notable episode, often related, was the strategem attempted by the enemy on the night of the 26th when the British infantry were hidden in the deep gully below the fort and the cavalry in the woods nearby, while the Indians took position under cover in the woods along the Lower Sandusky road about a half mile away. Then the savages started a big sham battle. The scheme was to create the

impression within the fort that an American relief column was being attacked and thus draw the garrison into the open. While the militiamen were deceived and urged to be permitted to go out and fight, their commander rightly thought otherwise, and so the ruse failed.

Finally on July 28th, Proctor once more raised the siege of Fort Meigs and loading his supplies and troopers into his boats, sailed down the river and along the south shore of Lake Erie to Sandusky whence followed in early August his failure to take Fort Stephenson, the defense of which post by Major George Croghan, constitutes a brilliant chapter in American frontier history. But that is properly a separate story.

## Summary

AFTER Proctor's repulse at Fort Stephenson, he again returned to Malden, his expedition a complete failure. Then on September 10th came Perry's great victory on Lake Erie. Having now lost control of the lake, there was nothing for the British to do but evacuate Malden and, of course, Detroit. Having organized an effective army for the invasion of Canada, Harrison and his force were now taken across the lake whereupon they gave chase to the retreating enemy. In the battle of the Thames, October 5, 1813, Proctor was totally defeated with a loss of more than five hundred killed, wounded or prisoners. The Indians too suffered heavily and their great Chief Tecumseh was among the slain. Thus was the Northwest saved and no further conflicts of importance took place in this section during that war. While Perry's naval victory, which carried control of Lake Erie, was the most significant event of the Northwestern campaign, Fort Meigs was of large importance. After the disasters at Detroit and the River Raisin, Fort Meigs remained our one dependable stronghold in the lower Maumee Valley against which the British onslaughts fell in vain. The successful defense of this fort enormously heartened the drooping spirits of the brave people of Ohio and Kentucky upon whom a heavy war burden rested. And because of this defense the ultimate task of organizing a force to pursue and finally to destroy or capture Proctor's army in Canada was greatly simplified.

It is therefore fitting to assert that Fort Meigs proved itself an important factor in the War of 1812.

The fort was finally abandoned by the military in the summer of 1815, the last occupants being Lieutenant Almon Gibbs and forty soldiers. In recent years this property has passed into the possession of the State and is governed by a State Commission under whose jurisdiction a beautiful shaft has been erected and many improvements have been made.

**Note**—Among various authorities consulted, the writer acknowledges his obligation to the following:

Ohio Archaeological and Hist. Pub., Vol. 10.
Howe Hist. Collections of Ohio, Vol. 2.
Randall & Ryan History of Ohio, Vol. 3.
McAfee History of the Late War in the Western Country, (1816).
Knapp History of the Maumee Valley.
Henry Adams, History of the United States.
The Fort Meigs Orderly Book—at least, in part.

A graduate study made by Mr. Lee Rynder for the Department of History, University of Toledo, also deserves commendation.