

Oswego's Role in the War of 1812

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Manlius, May 10
OSWEGO TAKE V.

The taking possession of this port by the enemy is but another item in the long catalogue of administration follies. Excepting Niagara, Oswego was perhaps, the most important upon the western frontier. Through this place was obliged to pass most of the ordinance, arms, ammunition, rigging and provisions for the equipment of our fleet at Sacket's Harbor, and for the support of our western army. Yet was this place left unprotected, undefended! We have not been able to obtain an official account of the transactions at that place, since the enemy took possession, but believe the following particulars to be correct, as they were related by gentlemen who were in Oswego village until after the enemy took possession of the Fort, upon the opposite side of the river.

On Thursday last, in the afternoon, the enemy's fleet appeared off Oswego, consisting of 7 square rigged vessels, besides gun boats. After coming near shore, and some manoeuvring a squall of wind, towards evening, drove them out. On Friday morning they again appeared in sight, making for the river. About 10 o'clock they formed a line, and came to anchor within gun shot distance of the village and fort. They were opposed by an old 3 pounder mounted on the point before the fort. After a considerable cannonading the enemy, to the number of from 1000 to 2000 commenced a landing in three divisions, and were opposed by about 300 regulars under command of Col. Mitchell, who happened to be at the place, on their march from the westward for Sacket's Harbor. Our troops, however, notwithstanding their determined bravery, could not long withstand the superior numbers of the enemy, and were obliged to retire. About two hours after the commencement of the contest, the

Ontario Repository, May 17, 1814, page 3.

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British flag was hoisted upon the fort, and a message sent by the British commander to the inhabitants of the village (who had fled for safety) that they might return to their houses unmolested. After destroying the barracks and other public property upon both sides of the river, the enemy evacuated the place on Saturday about 12 o'clock. Our loss is not yet fully ascertained, but variously stated at from 50 to 100 killed and wounded. The loss of property must have been immense. We understand the expedition was commanded by Maj. Gen. Drummond, who was wounded in the groin during the engagement. We have not heard that any private property was disturbed, or buildings burnt. Nothing could exceed the alacrity and spirit with which the militia turned out, in this and the adjoining towns, as soon as the alarm was given. In a few hours after the information was received, hundreds were on their march to repel the enemy; many of whom advanced as far as Three River Point on Sunday, where they were met by an express announcing that he had evacuated our territory. The enemy had in his fleet three new ships, one a double decker on which were counted 27 ports of a side. Several 68 lb. shot were picked up in the village after the battle, from which may be inferred their superiority, at least in weight of metal. Should the above hasty sketch prove to be incorrect, we hope to be able to give a full and correct account of the affair next week, together with an estimate of the loss sustained.

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General Sir Gordon Drummond. This image is in the public domain in the US and Canada, and other countries where the copyright term is the author's life plus 70 years or less.

From the Albany Register, May 20.

POSTSCRIPT.

THE BRITISH AGAIN AT OSWEGO.

After a part of our impression was struck off last evening, we had a conversation with a gentleman from Onondaga, who left there on Tuesday morning, and informed us, that an express arrived the evening before from Oswego, with the disagreeable intelligence that sixteen boats and other water craft belonging to the enemy had made their appearance again off Oswego about noon on that day—that they contained a very formidable British force which were about landing when the express came away—that Colonel Mitchell had left the Falls and marched towards Oswego—that reinforcements had been sent for from Onondaga and the adjacent country—that the greatest consternation prevailed—the bell at Onondaga was tolling when our informant left there—the bridge between Oswego and the Falls, where our stores were deposited, had been destroyed, and the people were felling trees in the road to prevent the approach of the enemy towards the Falls.

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THE ATTACK ON OSWEGO

Copy of a letter from Maj. Gen. Brown, to the Secretary of War, dated head Quarters, Sackets Harbor May 12, 1814.

Sir- Inclosed is an abstract from the report of lieut. col. Mitchell, of the affair at Oswego. Being well satisfied with the manner in which the col executed my orders, and with the evidence given of steady discipline and gallant conduct on the part of the troops I have notice them in general order, a copy of which is enclosed.

The enemy's object was the naval and military ? deposited at the Fall, 13 miles in rear of the fort. These were protected. — The ? at the fort and village were not important. I am, &c.

JACOB BROWN, Maj. Gen.

Hon. Secretary of War.

REPORT.

I informed you of my arrival at fort Oswego on the 30th ult. This post being but occasionally and not recently occupied by regular troops, was in a bad state of defence. — Of canon we had but five old guns, three of which had lost their trunions. What could be done in the way of repair was effected — new platforms were laid, the gun carriage put in order, and decayed pickets replaced — On the 5th ? the British naval force, consisting of 4 large ships, 3 brigs and a number of gun and other boats were ? at revile—beating about 7 miles from the fort. - Information was immediately given to captain Woolsey of the navy, who was at Oswego village, and to the neighboring militia. It being

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The Pilot, June 8, 1814, page 1.

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doubtful on what side of the river the enemy would attempt to land, and my force (290 ?) being too small to bear division, I ordered the tents in store to be pitched on the village side while I occupied the other with my whole force. It is probable that this artifice had its effect, and determined the enemy to attack where, from appearances, they expected the least opposition. About 1 o'clock the fleet approached. Fifteen boats large and crowded with troops, and a given signal, moved slowly to the shore. They were preceded by gun boats sent to rake the woods and cover the landing, while the larger vessels opened a fire upon the fort. Captain Boyle and lieut. Legate (so soon as the debarking boats got within range of our ?) opened upon them a very successful fire from the shore battery, and compelled them twice to retire. They at length returned to the ships, and the whole flood off from the shore for better anchorage. One of the enemy's boats which had been deserted, was taken up by us, and some others by the militia. The first mentioned was sixty feet long, carried thirty six oars and three sails, and could accommodate 150 men. She had received a ball through her bow, and was nearly filled with water.

Piquet guards were stationed at different points, and we lay on our arms during the night.

At day break on the 6th the fleet appeared, bearing up under early sail. The Wolf, &c. took a position directly against the fort and batteries, and for three hours kept up a heavy fire of grape, &c. Finding that the enemy had effected a landing, withdrew my small disposable force into the rear of fort, and batteries, and for three hours kept up a heavy fire of grape, &c. Finding that the

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Gen. Drummond and com. Yeo, were the land and naval commanders. They burned the old barracks and evacuated the fort about 3 o'clock in the morning of the 7th.

Our loss in killed is 6, in wounded 88 and in missing 25. That of the enemy is much greater. Deserters, and citizens of ours taken prisoners and afterwards released, state their killed at 64 and wounded in proportion - among these are several land and naval officers of merit.

I cannot close this dispatch without speaking of the dead and the living of my detachment. Lieut. Blaney a young man of much promise, was unfortunately killed. His conduct in the action was highly meritorious - Capt. Boyle and Lieut. Legate merit my highest approbation, and indeed I want language to express my admiration of their gallant conduct. The ? McComb and Newark, performed well their several parts.

It would be in justice were I not to acknowledge and report the zeal and patriotism evinced by the militia who arrived at a short notice and were anxious to be useful.

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The Pilot, June 8, 1814, page 1;
The Pilot was a newspaper in
Cazenovia, NY from 1808 to
1823.

Copy of a letter from M. T. Woolsey to commodore Chauncy. Sacket's Harbor 1st June.

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Sacket's Harbor 1st June.

Sir—I have already had the honor to inform you of the affair at Sandy creek on the 30th ult. but for want of time at that juncture I had it not in my power to give you the particulars, and as the most of my communications since measures were adopted for a push from Oswego Falls, to Sandy Creek, with the naval stores, having been made in great haste, I avail myself of a leisure moment to make a report in detail of my proceedings since that period. On the 17th, I dispatched Mr. Hugimin to Mexico to hire a number of ox teams and to engage a quantity of forage, &c. I also sent orders to Oswego Falls to have an additional number of large wheels made for transporting the guns and cables back across the portage, and caused reports to be circulated in every direction that I had received your orders to send all the naval stores to Oneida Lake, with all possible expedition. On the morning of the 28th, when these reports were well in circulation and when, (as I have heard from good authority) they had been faithfully detailed to Sir James, I had the honor to receive per express

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Commodore Isaac Chauncey

Commodore Isaac Chauncey, Commander of the US Navy forces on Lake Ontario during the War of 1812. Painting by Gilbert Stuart, c. 1818; US Naval Academy Museum Collection. This work is in the public domain in its country of origin and other countries and areas where the copyright

The Pilot, June 29, 1814, page 2.

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At Big Salmon we met the Oneidas whom I had dispatched the day previous, under the command of lieu. Hill, of the rifle regiment. As soon as they had taken up their line of march along the shore to Big Sandy Creek, I started with all the boats and arrived at noon at our place of destination about two miles up the creek. In this laborious and hazardous duty I feel much indebted to maj. Apling, his officers and men, for their exertions, having assisted my officers and seamen in rowing

the boats without a moment's rest, 42 hours and about half the time enveloped in darkness and deluged with rain—also, to some of the principal inhabitants of Oswego, who volunteered their services as pilots. At two A.M. on the 30th, I received your letter of the 29th, 8 P.M. per express, and agreeably to the orders contained therein, sent lieu. Pierce to look out as far as Stony Point; he returned having been pursued by a gun boat and three barges. The best possible disposition was made of the riflemen and Indians, about half a mile below our boats. About 8 A.M. a cannonading at long shot was commenced by the enemy, and believing (as I did) that no attempt would be made to land with their small force, I ordered lieu. Pierce to proceed in erecting shelters and making preparations to unlaid the boats; and as all the teams had retrograded in consequence of the cannonading, I sent in pursuit of them to return. About 9 o'clock capt. Harris, with a squadron of dragoons, and capt. Melvin with a company of light artillery and two six pounders arrived. Capt. Harris, the commanding officer, agreed with me that this reinforcement should halt, as the troops best calculated for a bush fight were already on the ground, where they could act to the greatest advantage, and that the enemy seeing a large reinforcement arrive would most probably retreat.—About ten, the enemy, paying landed and pushed up the creek with

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At about 5 P.M. after having buried, with the honors of war, Mr. Roare (a British midshipman) killed in the action, I was relieved by capt. Ridgely, whom you did me the honor to send to Sandy Creek for that

three gun-boats, three cutters and one gig—the riflemen, under that excellent officer, maj. Appling, rose from their concealment, and after a smart fire of about ten minutes, succeeded in capturing all the boats and their crews without one having escaped.

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The report of killed, wounded and prisoners and also the number and description of the captured boats, has been already remitted by capt. Ridgely and myself.

I have the honor to be &c.

(Signed) M. T. WOOLSEY.

Com. Isaac Chauncey,

Commanding U. S. Forces on the Lakes:

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Melencthon Taylor Woolsey

Portrait of Melencthon Taylor Woolsey, This image is a work of a sailor or employee of the US Navy, taken or made as part of that person's official duties. As a work of the US federal government, the image is in the public domain.

