
The Pittsburgh Blues and The War of 1812: The Memoir of Private Nathaniel Vernon

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INTRODUCTION

Federalist New England has been generally viewed as the region most hostile to the War of 1812. It is not always appreciated, however, that the mid-Atlantic states also evinced strong opposition to the administration of James Madison. The important state of New York generally supported the war, but here Republican efforts were hindered by acute factionalism. One clique, resentful of southern domination of party politics, nominated DeWitt Clinton to oppose Madison in the fall 1812 election.¹ Though unsuccessful, the Clintonians came close to denying Madison his party's nomination. There were tremors in nominally Republican New Jersey as well. As a result of popular opposition to war with England, Federalists recaptured the state for the first time in a decade.² Delaware had been firmly in the Federalist camp since the 1790s, and remained so during the war years.³ Of all the states in the mid-Atlantic region, it fell upon Pennsylvania to shore up flagging Republican fortunes.

Pennsylvania's support for Republican economic and military policies was achieved with a remarkable degree of consensus.⁴ Between 1807 and 1812, the state's congressional delegation was outspoken on behalf of measures to counter British depredations on the high seas. When war was declared in June, 1812, Pennsylvania's sixteen votes in Congress constituted not only the largest single bloc in favor of conflict, but also the highest percentage of any of the larger delegations. Governor Simon Snyder was a vocal proponent of the war, and cooperated closely with the national government.⁵ But it was in the fall election of 1812 that Pennsylvania's influence was most felt. By supporting Madison against Clinton, Pennsylvanians were the decisive factor in thwarting this challenge to Virginian hegemony. Pennsylvania remained a staunch political supporter of Madison during the war with Great Britain.⁶

While Pennsylvania was not the only state to favor war with Great Britain, few were as willing to support the war effort in terms of military mobilization. Three distinguished regiments were recruited for the regular army establishment, and over 100,000 militia enlisted for state service. Pennsylvania was unique among northern states in providing volunteer militia regiments for federal service outside state borders. Notable among these was the Pittsburgh Blues, whose War of 1812 career occupies a conspicuous position in the military annals of the

Keystone state.⁷ Established in 1807, this company-sized formation was among the first to respond to Governor Snyder's call for troops to serve in the Old Northwest. And in a war notorious for militia-related disasters, the Pittsburgh Blues compiled a military record which most regular army units would envy.

The Pittsburgh Blues experienced their baptism of fire during the Mississinewa campaign of November-December, 1812.⁸ This was a winter offensive in the Indiana Territory taken to break a concentration of hostile tribesmen which threatened American lines of communication. Indian resistance was severe, but during a surprise assault on the American camp, the Pittsburgh Blues saved the army from destruction. They then endured a grueling march back to friendly territory in the face of sub-freezing weather. Several weeks of recuperation were necessary before the unit engaged in defensive preparations at Fort Meigs in May, 1813.⁹ A detachment was also present in the celebrated battle of Fort Stephenson in August.¹⁰ Inevitably, losses, sickness and exhaustion prevented the Pittsburgh Blues from accompanying the final invasion of Canada which culminated in the decisive American victory at the Thames, in October 1813. But this unit, alongside its equally distinguished stablemate, Fenton's Pennsylvania Volunteers, emerged as one of the most accomplished militia formations of the period.¹¹ In concert with the state forces of Kentucky and Tennessee, the Pittsburgh Blues helped preserve the ideals of citizen-soldiery in the American military tradition.

The most recent account of the Pittsburgh Blues to surface is the memoir of Private Nathaniel Vernon. It is a significant contribution to our knowledge of the War of 1812 in the Old Northwest for several reasons. First, Vernon proffers new and previously unknown information concerning a number of obscure military operations. His rendition of Mississinewa refutes previous assumptions about that battle. The author is alone among contemporary writers in denouncing both its mishandling and atrocities committed against helpless Indians. Vernon's memoir also sheds operational light on the successful American sortie from Fort Meigs, which has received far less attention than the disastrous attempt on the lower bank of the Maumee River. Finally, the document offers insight on the character of Vernon himself. Vernon was apparently writing in his later years, but he obviously relished relating the drama of military life to a younger generation. His adventures, lucidly drawn and vividly rendered, lend additional luster to the reputation of the Pittsburgh Blues.

The memoir of Nathaniel Vernon is housed at Yale University Library. While the provenance of the document is not known, writing on its cover indicates it was once in possession of William H. Egle, a noted nineteenth century scholar of Pennsylvania history. Several of Vernon's footnotes accompany the text, and these are so noted in the current editor's citations.

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VERNON'S MEMOIR

It has been said that as a man advances toward the last stage of his life, he becomes garrulous, and annoying to those around him: who are in youthful manhood, or medium life; whose minds are rather fixed upon their present and future prospects in life, than any reminiscence of the past.

But behold the hoary pilgrim of life, whose feeble limbs have scarcely bourne him to the easy seat, placed for his comfort, by his kind and youthful friends. He has attained to second childhood. He delights in the company of his youthful friends. See! with what affection they cluster around him. How eagerly they pluck each little reminiscence from his aged lips, and embody it into a legendary tale, for the amusement and instruction, of their companions in childhood, just commencing to ascend the hill of science.

For half a century I have been engaged in imparting instruction to the youthful mind; and seldom have I seen the youthful pupil grow weary with the teacher's lectures, when occasionally interlarded with a reminiscence of his youthful days.

With what earnest attention would they listen when endeavoring to instill into their youthful minds the great principle of love and duty to God; to their country; and to their parents.

It has been asked, "Does the soldier in his eagerness for blood and carnage, ever think of his home and parents?" The soldier, however reckless, seldom forgets his home and friends; and as I firmly believe, his mother never. Often it has been noticed on the battlefield, as the mangled victim of ruthless war, lay struggling in the last agonies of death, blood oozing from each ghastly wound, breathing scarcely perceptible, the last feeble, low utterance was, "My Mother!" I had a mother once, a loving second mother, for when but three days old, I lost the one who gave me birth. This second mother I also lost whilst still a youth. I was debarred from witnessing her last moments. I was ill myself and they feared I should be infected with the terrible fever which carried her off. How intensely I loved that mother! She was a Quakeress. She loved not the scenes of blood and carnage. How often have I thought her pure spirit was hovering over the battlefield, and warding off the whistling balls from the breast of her reckless boy.

My reminiscence for the present is connected with as gallant a company of heroes as ever breasted the storm of war; or contended with a malignant and merciless foe.

On Sept. 10, 1812, the Pittsburgh Blues under the command of Capt. James R. Butler, after having tendered their services to the United States government for a twelve month's campaign, and been accepted, crossed the Alleghany river, and encamped; where Alleghany City now stands.¹²

About the beginning of September 21st, they were joined by the Greenburgh Riflemen, under the command of Captain Alexander; and with them as an

escort, to General [William] Clark who was on his way to the West with some Indian chiefs, they descended the Ohio to Cincinnati.¹³ From this after a brief stay, they were ordered to Franklinton. Here again, after being inspected with some others by Gen. [William Henry] Harrison, they in conjunction with the others were ordered to Dayton to join a detachment about to move against some hostile tribes in Indiana.¹⁴ The detachment, after some delay, being organized (amounting as said to 600 though probably not more than 550 effective men) were ordered across the river at Dayton.

The next day we took up our line of march for the Indian town situated on the Mississinewa. Not knowing whether the people were friends or foes, our orders were to steal a march upon them, surround their town; and bring the inhabitants in as prisoners. The night previous to reaching their settlement, we marched all night. The next morning, Dec. 16, when within five miles of their settlement, our scouts came riding back; and informed our commander, Col. [John B.] Campbell, they feared from appearances we were discovered.¹⁵ Without stopping to consult with the officers of the detachment, or to ascertain whether they might not be deceived, a captain of one of the cavalry companies raised the yell, and was joined by our commander in this unfortunate demonstration; then fiercely spurring their horses, set off at full speed, followed by the detachment in the greatest disorder. What few warriors there were in the town made their escape; leaving the old and feeble, with the women and children to fall into our hands. Being in the extreme rear and wishing to get up with the advance, I mounted a pack horse; but the saddle being rather uncomfortable, I was compelled to dismount and run on foot.¹⁶ Having come within sight of the town, and hearing the firing and yelling, also perceiving some horses lying on the ground, apparently wounded and struggling to rise, I was led to believe there had been a warm contest, and asked one of my companions, after having taken my place in rank, whether there had been much of a contest. Not at all, he replied. Those horses you see struggling to rise have been exhausted by the race. What was all the firing about? Oh! That was caused by a poor devil of an Indian, who had crossed the river, and was unwilling to leave without showing his gratitude. He stood on the opposite shore, without cover; and fought [James] Simmerall's whole regiment until pierced by several balls; when he drew his blanket around him, laid down and expired.¹⁷ I think he acted very unwisely; though brave as Cassar, for there was a large tree he might have used as shelter. He must have felt very bitter. Perhaps he was a relative to the old Indian killed by one of these heroes at our first entrance. He first wounded him; when the poor old soul fell upon his knees pleading for mercy; declaring he was a Delaware. But it did not avail; our hero drew another pistol, and put an end to his pleading, then coolly dismounted and took his scalp. Several others joined in the scalping party, and there he lies, without any skin on his head. Do you not think we shall immortalize ourselves by such feats of bravery and magnanimity? Major [James Vincent]

Ball, the second in command, a brave old Revolutionary veteran, was very indignant at the disorderly conduct of our troops.¹⁸ I heard him remark to Captain Butler, "We shall suffer for this, we have not seen the end."

A detachment of cavalry was sent some distance further down the river, to destroy some other towns; but the inhabitants had fled. After burning their houses, the detachment returned.¹⁹ We now encamped for the night.

Our encampment formed a hollow square; with the front upon the river which ran here from southeast to northwest. The front was occupied by Alexander's Rifles on the left, the Blues in the center, Elliot's Infantry of the 19th Regiment Regulars on the right, extending a little round on the right line. The remainder of the right line with part of the rear was occupied by Major Ball's squadron, consisting of cavalry under the command of Captain Markell of Pennsylvania, Cornet Lee of Michigan, Lieut. Warren of Ohio, Capt. Pearce of Ohio, Capt. Garrard of Kentucky and Capt. Hopkins, U.S. Light Dragoons, occupying the right of the rear line. The left of the rear line with the whole of the left line was occupied by Col. Simmeral's regiment of cavalry from Kentucky. We had four guard stations; the one on the west commanded by Capt. Garrard; the north by Capt. Pearce; the east by Capt. Smith; and on the south by Capt. Butler. I was on guard at Butler's station, and towards morning, observing an unusual quantity of dogs running about, remarked to Capt. Butler that I suspected the Indians were coming in force. He gave the order to keep a sharp look out.

A few moments after, we were aroused by a shot from the sentinel posted at the southeastern angle, near the bank of the river, who declared he had fired at the head of an Indian, who was peeping over the bank.

The camp was now aroused; the Reveille beaten; and those not on duty were permitted to prepare breakfast. The moon had set; and it was near an hour to daybreak when Mr. I. Davis and myself, who were posted on the river before our quarters, were speaking of the possibility of an Indian attack; he was in a very ill humor, and remarked we have marched a hundred miles into the wilderness, through snow and sleet, half leg deep, in the bleak month of December, with nothing but what we have carried on our backs; and now, what is worse, we shall have to march back without any fight at all. Scarcely had he ended his remarks, when a ball whistled over our heads; and the next instant a yell pervaded the forest as if all the fiends of the lower regions had been loosed upon us. "There they are now!" was his exultant exclamation, and the next moment we were forming in line.

It appeared that the Indians in force had made a sudden and furious attack upon Major Ball's command. Capt. Pearce was killed at his post; and his guard had to make a hasty retreat. A sentinel hearing someone approach, it being after reveille beat, challenged, "Who comes there!" "Pottawatamie, God Damn you!" was the reply in good English, with a shot aimed at him, which missed. The sentinel returned the shot with effect, and made his escape into the camp.

We had scarcely formed in line when Col. Campbell came riding up in great alarm; and calling on Butler For God's sake to move his company to the right rear angle, or the Indians would be in and all would be lost.²⁰ He was immediately followed by Major Ball; who in a soldierly tone of voice commanded Butler to move his company to the right rear angle, as the Indians were playing Hell there. Butler merely asked for the direction, when Campbell told him to follow Major Ball, and rode off in the direction of Simmeral's regiment. Capt. Butler did not take time to countermarch; but ordered us to right about face, and preceded by Major Ball we marched hastily and took up position on the same ground from which the U.S. Light Dragoons had just been driven. Our Captain, waving his sword, gave a hearty, "Hurrah for the Pittsburgh Blues!" which was answered by the company, with a simultaneous and terrible fire upon the enemy. After this the enemy fell back; and ensconced behind trees.

When Butler cheered for the Blues, the enemy directed their shot towards him. One of our men, named Louson, standing near Butler, was shot in the breast. He pitched forward and fell a few steps in advance of the line. An Indian sprang forward to secure his scalp but was shot instantly by our men; both bodies were found lying together. Capt. Garrard, who was at the right of his company, turned round and shook Butler warmly by the hand exclaiming "Butler! You have saved us!" "Yes!" added his lieutenant, "I was never more relieved in my life. I was just on the point of ordering the prisoners to be put to death. I thought we were lost." Capt. Markell, on hearing the report of our musketry, exclaimed, "By Heavens, Boys, there is Butler giving it to them!" Major Ball came riding along our line complimenting the Blues with, "Young men you have done honor to yourselves and deserve well of your country."²¹

On our march home the detachment shewed us the greatest respect. When preparing for our march in the morning, Captain Garrard would be seen riding in front of our quarters with the enquiry, "How is Captain Butler and his young men this morning?"

The firing was now kept up at intervals; it being dark, we could only fire at the flash of their guns. As the day began to break the fire slackened; and the order was given to prepare for a charge. The enemy began to retreat; and the order was given for the cavalry to mount and pursue. I am sorry to say but few obeyed the order. Captain Markell with fifteen of his men; [John] Johnson and [George] Trotter with three or four of theirs, were all that joined in the pursuit.²²

The Indians, with the exception of one poor wounded fellow, killed by Markell, made good their retreat. And yet, in Col. Campbell's official report, Captain Trotter is mentioned as making a gallant charge followed by Captain Johnson; whilst the brave, gallant Markell is scarcely mentioned.²³ In fact, the whole of Major Ball's squadron, who bore the brunt of the action, were, with the exception of Captain Garrard's company from Kentucky, but slightly mentioned.

Whilst on the contrary Col. Simmeral's men, who, with the exception of Johnson, Trotter, and three or four of their men, were at no time in the action, were mentioned as the heroes of the battle; descending even to waggoners and privates.²⁴

The Pittsburgh Blues had one mentioned, Captain Butler; and that was rather as a passing notice. The number of killed and wounded on each side I never knew with certainty. It was reported the Indians had lost forty seven killed, with seventy five wounded. The loss on our side, I do not recollect. I saw some ten or twelve lying on the ground; either dead or dying. We brought into the settlement on litters seventeen badly wounded, a number more were slightly wounded.

Having buried our dead, and made arrangements for the transportation of our wounded, we took up our line of march for the settlement. Previous to our march, a message had been sent to the enemy, by one of the prisoners, that should we be attacked on our route, the prisoners held by us should be put to death.

Thus ended the battle of Mississinewa, but not so the campaign.²⁵ Our trials had just commenced. Our provisions were nearly expended; our ammunition nearly expended; our ammunition would not serve five rounds to a man; even our thirst had to be quenched by the melting of snow in our mouths as we marched. Half the men on guard, every other night; the night not on guard up till near twelve o'clock building a breastwork, the remainder of the night unable to rest, from constant alarms. On our march we were frequently compelled to halt to adjust the wounded in their imperfect litters. They being merely two poles with blankets stretched across; the ends strapped upon two horses; one before the other, the hinder one unable to see where to step. At every halt the sock would freeze next to the foot; and so remain, until the friction of the foot and the moccasin would again thaw it. Of 550 men, 350 were frostbitten. Of the fifteen in our company who reported fit for duty I was one, with hands and feet frost bitten.²⁶ Our men were very much annoyed by the frequent alarms supposing them to be false alarms. But we were informed, after our return to the settlement by an Indian Agent, that 1000 Indians had been in close pursuit on our trail; and were prevented from making an attack by our breastworks. It was reported that the young warriors were eager for an attack, but restrained by the old warriors, who were fearful of our putting our prisoners to death, as had been threatened by our commander. They were also in hopes we would neglect the breastwork when they would rush in; secure the prisoners, and then overwhelm us with superior numbers.

The day previous to our reaching Greenville they gave over the pursuit. This was fortunate for us; as that night, after having with much labor and difficulty prepared the logs for the breastwork, we were unable to man men enough to raise it. The men in despair threw down their broken axes, declaring they would fight to the last; but as to completing the breastwork, it was utterly impossible.²⁷ The next day we reached Greenville, where we received a supply of provisions;

and continued our march to Dayton. Here we rested a few days; and then continued our march to Franklinton.²⁸

At Franklinton we were permitted to remain a few weeks; in order to regain our health and strength after our severe campaign. We were ordered to Fort Meigs, which fort we assisted in completing.

At Fort Meigs we were joined by the Petersburg Volunteers under the command of Captain McRae.²⁹ This company, with the Greensburg Rifles, and the Blues, formed the Independent Battalion under the command of Major Alexander. The Petersburg Volunteers, amounting at first to about 130 fine, healthy-looking men, were so reduced by sickness and casualties, that at the crossing of Harrison to Canada, they had but little over 30 men left to cross with them. Never have I seen a company of finer looking men, but the climate and hardships of the campaign were too much for them; and they were cut down as by a pestilence. In fact after the first siege of Fort Meigs, the deaths in the garrison were so frequent that Harrison had to stop the funeral processions, fearing the effect it might have upon the sick and wounded. We were now busily employed in finishing the fortifications of the fort; and skirmishing with the enemy, who would approach within rifleshot, fire at our sentinels, and then make their retreat. Parties would be sent out in pursuit, but they never succeeded in overtaking them.

The last party was commanded by Lieut. Magee, who declared he would overtake them if he had to follow them to the lake. But after pursuing them a considerable distance, their trails began to increase; and hearing firing in several directions, our Indian guides and scouts refused to go further, declaring the enemy far outnumbered us, and were collecting their forces. We therefore

Courtesy Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection.



An engraving of the siege of Fort Meigs, unusual in its depiction of the American sortie described by Vernon.

retraced our steps, but halted within a mile of the fort, in order to enter it under cover of night, agreeably to Harrison's orders. When within a short distance of the fort we were hailed from one of our batteries by General Harrison himself with "Is that you, Magee?" Being answered in the affirmative, he sprang from the battery and opened the gate himself; seized Magee by the hand, exclaiming, "I am glad to see you all safe. I was fearful you had been captured as we had the enemy in force on the other side of the river today." The next day a party was sent out, who returned with the intelligence that a large force had followed on our trail. Again on the following day a party consisting of a few men belonging to the cavalry were sent out to observe the position of the enemy. But hardly had they entered the wood before they were fired upon by the enemy; and came scampering back; one of the men having his arm fractured by a ball. The siege now commenced in good earnest.

Having erected their batteries, the enemy would throw shot and shell at us throughout the day; and continue the bombardment through the night. They also threw shells from their largest cannon, timing them to explode over the fort. We on our part added to our defenses by throwing up traverses in different directions throughout the fort. Thus, the balls would either lodge in the traverse, or if elevated sufficiently to clear the traverse, would pass over the fort. On the morning of the fifth of May, a courier arrived at the fort with the intelligence that General [Green] Clay was rapidly descending the river with a reinforcement of 1300 men.³⁰ General Harrison immediately sent an order for him to divide his force, by sending Col. Dudley with 800 men down the other side of the river, with the order to drive the British from their batteries, spike their cannon (spikes being provided for that purpose) and retire immediately to the edge of the river under the protection of our guns in order to be crossed over to our side. Intending to attack and defeat them on this side, and then cross over and defeat them in detail, the remaining five hundred were ordered to proceed to the fort on this side, our troops being ordered to make a sortie; in order to cover their march into the fort.³¹ Having performed this duty, 300 of us were ordered to make another sortie in the rear of the fort; in order to keep the enemy in check, whilst Dudley stormed the batteries on the other side of the river.

Our fort fronted on the Maumee, which here ran from southwest to northeast. It enclosed about nine acres. We were well defended by batteries and block-houses on all sides of the fort. Our enemy could not approach on either side without receiving our first fire in several directions. After having formed on the outside of the fort, our battalion on the right, [John] Miller's infantry on the left, we were joined by a Kentucky company who, having no position assigned to them, were placed on our right.³² We were now ordered to advance and fight the enemy in the outskirts of the wood, but having received a pretty severe fire in crossing the space between the fort and the wood, which was not returned (our orders being not to fire until we reached the wood) our men became excited, and charged fiercely into the wood, driving the enemy, who precipitately fell back

upwards of a mile. We now fell back to the edge of the wood followed by the enemy. Again we charged; and again fell back. This alternate charging and retreating continued until we were finally ordered into the fort. On our left Lieut. Campbell with about forty men captured from the British forty privates and two lieutenants who were in the act of crossing the river. Of the three hundred who left the fort, eighty three were either killed or wounded. The company on our right, which marched out eighty strong, returned with twenty effective men.³³

On the other side of the river, after having driven the enemy from their batteries, the men not having received their spikes which were sent them, thrust the ends of their bayonets into the touch holes, snapped them off, and drove them down with their tomahawks. One of the men proposed to run them down to the river and overturn them, where they would be under the cover of our guns. But Dudley ordered him to desist, declaring that the day was their own, then leaving a hundred men to guard the batteries, proceeded with the remainder in pursuit of the Indians, who were retiring into the wood. When the Indians, who are the most wily people upon earth, had sufficiently allured them into the wood, they attacked them on all sides, with an overwhelming force, and those brave fellows amounting to seven hundred, were all either killed, wounded, or taken prisoners.³⁴

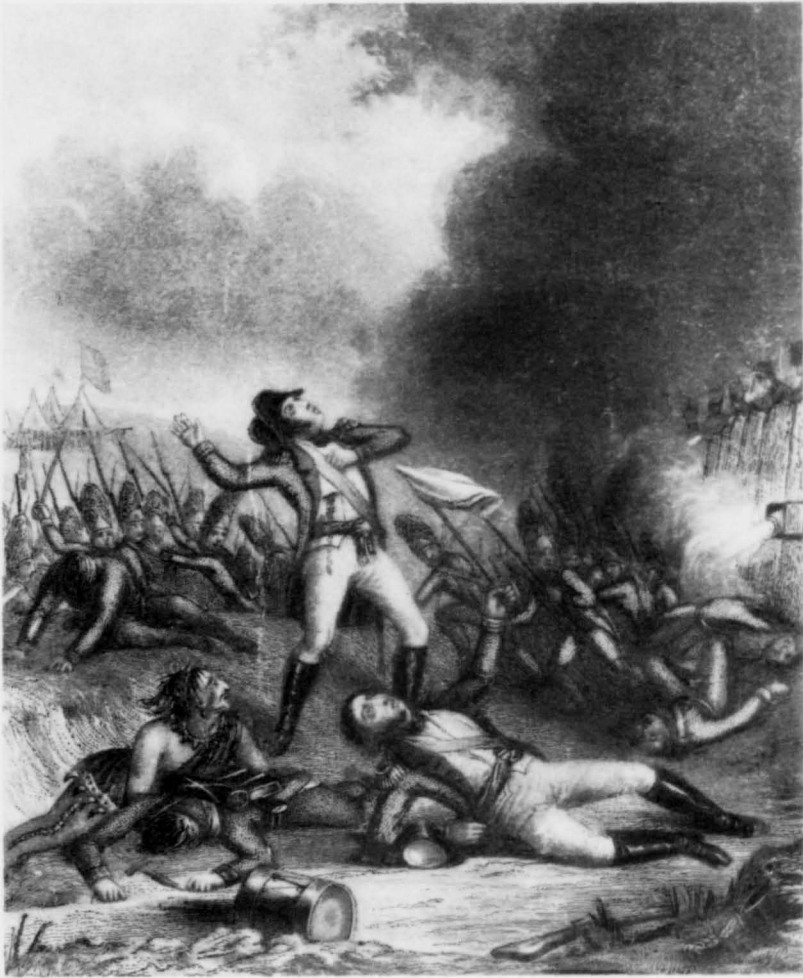
Thus were the plans of General Harrison defeated, not through want of military skill in himself, nor the want of bravery in his men, but through the disobedience and insubordination of Dudley. Had he retreated to the river, and crossed to our side, we should have defeated and dispersed the enemy on this side; then crossed the river and defeated them in detail. The hundred men who were left to guard the batteries were driven off by the enemy. They crossed the river and joined us in the fort. After the action, a flag of truce was sent in by [Henry] Proctor, demanding a surrender of the fort.³⁵ To this demand Harrison replied that as the General he had sat down before the fort, and commenced an attack without previously demanding a surrender, he must have been under the impression that General Harrison intended to hold his position at all hazards. And now, having received reinforcements and being fully able to maintain his position, he considered the demand preposterous. They next proposed an exchange of prisoners. To this Gen. Harrison assented, and we received in exchange for the forty two British regulars, over three hundred of Dudley's poor fellows who had escaped the tomahawk.

After this exchange, Proctor raised the siege and returned to Malden. Gen. Harrison, leaving Gen. Clay in command at Fort Meigs, returned to the settlement in order to hurry our supplies. Proctor again paid us another visit at Fort Meigs (but owing to the discrepant accounts of the War of 1812, I am unable to designate even the month in which it occurred).³⁶ Sufficient to say but finding us too well prepared, he withdrew his forces; and some time after proceeded to Fort Stephenson, to attack that place now under the command of Major [George] Croghan.³⁶

Having landed and planted his batteries, he demanded a surrender of the fort, accompanied with his usual menace that, if the place was taken by assault, they would all be put to death, as they could not restrain the Indians. In his reply to this, the Major gave him to understand if he was very anxious to have the fort, he must come and get it. As to his savage allies, they would be very careful to keep at a respectful distance. The garrison consisted of 160 men, well supplied with arms and ammunition. They also had a small cannon which carried a six pound ball. This cannon was at first stationed in the blockhouse, occupying the northeast corner of the fort. But it was after two or three fires moved to another blockhouse which commanded the ditch where the attack was afterwards made. After its removal the enemy threw a ball through the shutter of the port hole: and not hearing it again, supposed they had dismounted it. A fatal mistake for them; for this little cannon proved the safety of the fort. The force of the enemy, as stated, amounted to 1300 men, consisting of 500 regulars and 800 Indians. One of our company, George McFall, who had been home on furlough, and was returning, was detained by the Major, with, "George, we expect to be attacked every hour, you must stay and help us, I will make it alright with Butler." He was placed with some others in charge of the cannon. Proctor, who had been cannonading the fort for some two days, was now determined to storm the pickets. McFall, who was on top of the blockhouse looking out, heard the blast of a trumpet, and the next moment perceived the enemy advancing in close column. He notified the Major, who immediately ordered the men to the pickets.

It appeared that the enemy were provided with wedges and hatchets in order to scale the pickets. But the pickets they never reached. Our men opened up upon them such a tremendous fire that the plain was strewn with the dead and dying. Those who had reached the ditch were mown down by the six pounder. It is said as they reached the ditch, Col. [William C.] Short gave the order to "push on and show the dam'd Yankees no quarter!" McFall said he did not hear him give that order, but he heard him tell his men to push on, there was no danger. Be that as it may, he was the next moment holding up his white handkerchief in token of surrender. But it was too late; the little cannon, charged with grapeshot, swept the ditch the third time. The Col. and most of his men lay still in death.³⁸ In the meantime our men kept up such a destructive fire that the enemy, unable to breast the storm, broke and fled in the wildest confusion. The enemy now abandoned the siege, his loss amounted to upwards of 150. The garrison had one killed and seven wounded.

Proctor, now deeply mortified at his repulse, embarked his regulars and returned to Malden, leaving his Indian allies to take care of themselves. He returned no more to Ohio; and nothing further of note occurred, excepting a slight skirmish by Major Ball with a party of Indians who attacked him whilst on his way to lower Sandusky with a part of his battalion. The Major charged on them, and but one escaped. He, falling over a log, was trampled by one of their horses. The troop, supposing him dead, passed on, and he escaped.³⁹ About the



The death of Col. Short outside the ramparts of Fort Stephenson.

middle of August our company and the Greensburgh Riflemen took leave of the Petersburg Volunteers, and crossed the Black Swamp to Seneca, where General Harrison, at that time, had his headquarters. [Oliver Hazard] Perry not having fully equipped his fleet, and the General being unable to give us any information as to what time he would cross to Canada, we on the 28th of August, 1813, received our discharge; and started for Pittsburgh.⁴⁰ Whilst passing out and giving our General the last military salute, he turned with much emotion to one of his officers and remarked, "I would rather see five hundred militia leaving my camp, than that one company; they have been the most subordinate and best disciplined company in the Northwestern Army."⁴¹ At Lower Sandusky, the most of the men took a small vessel for Cleveland. At Cleveland we were joined by our companion, who had travelled by land. We now proceeded to Pittsburgh; which

we reached the beginning of September, and were received by our friends with open arms and warm hearts.

[Vernon concludes his footnotes with this poem]

The muffled drum's sad roll has beat
 The soldier's last tatoo
 No more on life's parade shall meet
 The brave and daring few
 On Fame's eternal camping ground
 Their silent tents are spread
 And glory guards with solemn round
 The bivouac of the dead.

Notes

1. New York's political difficulties are discussed at length in Dixon R. Fox, *The Decline of the Aristocracy in the Politics of New York, 1801-1840* (New York, 1919). For more on Clinton's abortive effort consult Steven E. Siry, "Spokesman For A New Political Economy: A Biography of DeWitt Clinton, 1769-1828," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 1986.
2. See Harvey Strum, "New Jersey Politics and the War of 1812," *New Jersey History*, 105 (Fall/Winter, 1985): 37-70.
3. John H. Munroe, *Federalist Delaware, 1775-1815* (New Brunswick, 1954).
4. Victor Sapio, *Pennsylvania and the War of 1812* (Lexington, 1970), and Martin Kaufman, "War Sentiment in Western Pennsylvania, 1812," *Pennsylvania History*, 31 (October, 1964): 436-448.
5. A good study of this influential Republican figure is Emerson L. Durr, "Simon Snyder, Governor of Pennsylvania, 1808-1817," Ph. D. dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University, 1960.
6. See Sanford W. Higginbotham, *The Keystone State In the Democratic Arch, 1801-1816* (Harrisburg, 1952), pp. 260-269.
7. The only detailed history is John R. Niebaum, "The Pittsburgh Blues," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, 4 (April-October, 1921): 110-22, 175-85, 259-70; 5 (January, 1922): 244-50.
8. An excellent discourse on this campaign is Murray Holiday, *The Battle of Mississinewa, 1812* (Marion, Ind., 1964).
9. The most recent treatment of this engagement is Larry L. Nelson, *Men of Patriotism, Courage and Enterprise! Fort Meigs in the War of 1812* (Canton, OH., 1985). See also Rex L. Spencer, "The Gibraltar of the Maumee: Fort Meigs in the War of 1812," Ph.D. Dissertation, Ball State University, 1988.
10. By far the best account of the western theater remains Alec R. Gilpin, *The War in the Old Northwest* (East Lansing, MI., 1958). A survey of the contest from an ethnological perspective is Helen Tanner, *Atlas of Great Lakes Indian History* (Norman, OK., 1987).
11. See John C. Fredriksen, ed., "The Pennsylvania Volunteers in the War of 1812: An Anonymous Journal of Service for the Year 1814," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, 70 (April, 1987): 123-158.
12. James R. Butler (d. 1842) was a son of the famous General Richard Butler, who was killed in the disastrous St. Clair's defeat, November 4, 1791. Four of his brothers were also military officers. See John B. Linn, "The Butler Family and the Pennsylvania Line," *Pennsylvania*

nia Magazine of History and Biography, 7 (April, 1883): 1-10.

13. William Clark (1770-1838) of Lewis and Clark fame. Clark was at this time serving as governor of the Missouri Territory. See Jerome O. Steffen, *William Clark: Jeffersonian Man on the Frontier* (Norman, OK., 1977).

14. William Henry Harrison (1773-1840), whose victories in the Northwest presaged his election as president. There is no adequate biography of this important figure; the latest remains James A. Green, *William Henry Harrison: His Life and Times* (Richmond, 1942).

15. John B. Campbell (d. 1814) of Virginia and Kentucky, whose 1814 depredations at Port Dover, Ontario, led directly to the British decision to burn Washington, D.C. Harrison noted of Campbell, "He has not military experience, but is brave, sensible & judicious, and will be ably seconded by the talents & experiences of Major Ball." Harrison to Eustis, November 15, 1812, in Logan Esarey, ed., *Messages and Letters of William Henry Harrison*. 2 Vols. (Indianapolis, 1922), 2: 211.

16. According to one participant, "Here a scene of tumult and confusion ensued. Every man put spurs to his horse, the yell was raised by the whole army, the ranks were broken, and we entered the town in the utmost confusion and disorder. . . . Had we entered the town in regular order, every Indian might have been taken prisoner without firing a gun." Letter in *Pittsburgh Gazette*, January 22, 1813, quoted in Niebaum, "The Pittsburgh Blues," p. 116.

17. James Simrall (1781-1823) of Virginia and Kentucky. An enterprising businessman, Simrall represented Shelby County in the Kentucky State Legislature for many years, and was a sponsor of the Louisville and Portland canal.

18. James Vincent Ball (d. 1818), who was also present at the battle of Fallen Timbers, 1794, in a cavalry troop commanded by then Lieutenant William Henry Harrison. For an account of his subsequent difficulties, see his *A Refutation of Sundry Charges by Officers of the Late Regiment of Light Dragoons Against Colonel James V. Ball* (Winchester, VA., 1815).

19. The Indians were especially resentful of

Campbell's action, for these branches of the Miami and Delaware Indians had been at peace with the United States since the Greenville Treaty of 1795. See Bert Anson, *The Miami Indians* (Norman, OK., 1970), pp. 168-171. According to the only surviving Indian account of Mississinewa, Campbell's attack was totally unjustified: "It was understood that he was not to kill Indians unless he found those guilty of committing depredations. But Col. Campbell, like most of his kind, thought that he likely could make a name for himself as an Indian fighter. . . . This village of Indians consisted of a few old men, women, children and a few cripples and that the warriors belonging to the village were out hunting. Col. Campbell asked no questions and neither did he make an investigation as to whom they were, but began to shoot them up and killed and wounded a number of them." "The Battle of Mississinewa . . . The Traditional Story as Handed Down by the Indians and Related by Clarence James Godfrey," Manuscript Department, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.

20. William B. Northcutt, a soldier in Captain Garrard's company, testifies to the intensity of the action: "When we left our first formation to get behind our horses, the Indians made a charge on us and some of them were killed at our fires that we had left. They fought with desperation, yelling all the time like so many fiends. Our watch word was FIGHT ON and we repeated it all the time, when a hoarse voice from their side bawled out FIGHT ON and be dam to you. Our company had to stand the brunt of the fight. We had two killed dead and a great many wounded. My right hand man was shot through the head and fell flat on his back with his gun cocked across his breast, and my left hand man had his right arm broken close to his right shoulder, and I had four mess mates badly wounded and how I escaped is a mystery to me and always will be for I was right in the thickest of the fight and never got a scratch." G. Glenn Clift, ed., "The War of 1812 Diary of William B. Northcutt, Part II," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, 56 (July, 1958): 260.

21. One soldier was extremely proud of the regiment. He wrote, "In the action our Pitts-

burgh boys behaved with the greatest courage. It is impossible to say too much in their praise. On the first alarm they were formed with the greatest alacrity and marched to the ground with the coolness and intrepidity of veterans, and although two of the men were wounded in the commencement of the action they refused to leave the ranks but fought until the action was over. In short, our company contributed more than any other to decide the fate of the day. They were in the hottest of the action for a considerable time, yet there was not the smallest indication of fear discernible in a single man." Niebaum, "The Pittsburgh Blues," p. 118.

22. George Trotter (1779-1815). Trotter subsequently commanded a brigade of Kentucky Volunteers at the climactic victory of the Thames in 1813. See "General Trotter's Tomb," *Kentucky Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, 1 (May, 1899): 21-25.

23. Vernon here makes the following inaccurate observation: "This Capt. Johnson was Richard M. Johnson, Vice President during General Andrew Jackson's second term," and goes on to detail his alleged slaying of Tecumseh at the Thames. This soldier in question is actually John Johnson of Kentucky, and no relation to his famous namesake. Campbell's official report may be read in John Brannon, *Official Letters of the Military and Naval Officers of the United States During the War With Great Britain* (Washington, D.C., 1823), pp. 110-117.

24. Vernon's observation is not entirely impartial and, like many contemporaries, he seems to resent the Kentuckians for all the attention they received. In accounting for the difficulties experienced during this charge, Northcutt noted how "Trotter went out and formed his line in order to make one fire on them. Before he made his charge on them and while he was doing that the party of Indians that stayed back to cover their retreat fired on his men. They being on horses and the Indians behind trees, they cut his company all to pieces, and rendered his charge to no avail." Clift, "Diary of William B. Northcutt," p. 260.

25. Chief Godfrey offered a different perspective: "Some of the Indians began to imitate

owls, night birds, and different kinds of animals as signals between themselves, but at last the army realized they were surrounded by Indians and began to shoot their guns in the treetops believing the Indians there, and also shooting in different directions, not seeing the Indians, and after the pale faces had emptied their guns the warriors began to holler and yell and shooting their guns into the enemy and then the army began to retreat and ran in all directions. Near this point along the river in places the bank of the Mississinewa is twenty to thirty-five feet high and many of the soldiers ran over the bank and were killed and crippled and broke through the ice as they ran through river." James Clarence Godfrey, "The Battle of Mississinewa," Indiana State Library.

26. Others viewed the cold as a mixed blessing: "Fortune favored us with respect to weather, which was extremely cold. Had it been otherwise, the difficulties from the number of creeks and the great swamps we had to cross would have rendered it impossible." Niebaum, "The Pittsburgh Blues," p. 119.

27. Most of Campbell's difficulties were self-induced, owing to the rashness of his initial attack: "The men were not only unable to perform labor with dispatch, but were really without tools to perform it with. So great was the imposition on the government that out of the fifty axes provided . . . not more than ten stood more than a day, but broke and were all battered to pieces in performing ordinary service. . . . The scarcity of provisions was measurably owing to its being lost on the evening of the first attack upon the town, the troops having charged at full speed for nearly a mile through the woods." Letter, undated, in the *National Intelligencer*, January 14, 1813.

28. Despite this adversity, the American troops, particularly the Kentuckians, were still full of fight. Vernon records how during the retreat, "It was reported [the Indians] contemplated making an attack while we were passing a defile some 12 or 18 feet wide; but it is doubtful whether they would have accomplished their object; as there was a very open wood on each side, favorable for a cavalry charge; and our Kentucky cavalry, being in their own estimation half horse, half alligator, and a little

tipped with the wild cat, might have proved rather too much for them."

29. The best history of this unit is Lee A. Wallace, "The Petersburg Volunteers, 1812-1813," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 82 (October, 1974): 458-485.

30. Green Clay (1757-1826) was a cousin of Henry Clay. A large collection of his papers relative to Fort Meigs is in the Manuscript Division, New York Public Library. See also the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

31. Vernon comments: "The Independent Battalion was ordered out to cover their entry into the fort, which was effected with some loss to the Kentucky troops."

32. John Miller (1781-1846), colonel of the 19th U.S. Infantry. He was subsequently governor of Missouri.

33. Captain Butler missed the sortie owing to illness, but a humorous anecdote concerning his aide-de-camp has survived: "I had been in attendance on Capt. Butler, lying sick in one of the blockhouses of Fort Meigs during its siege, and starting out one morning to procure some breakfast, saw Sergt. Trovillo cooking coffee over some coals. I told him my errand, and he told me to wait a few minutes and he would divide his coffee with me. I took a seat, and in a minute or two heard the peculiar singing of an Indian bullet that entered the ground a short distance from where we were sitting. "Hurrah!" said I, "Sergeant, what does that mean?" He pointed to a tree at considerable distance from the pickets, where I observed an Indian perched in one of the branches. He said with great humor: "That rascal, George, has been firing at me ever since I commenced cooking my breakfast." I swallowed up my tin cup of coffee, pretty expeditiously, during which, however, I think he fired once or twice, and told Trovillo I was not going to remain a target for the yellowskins." *History of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania* (2 vols.; Chicago, 1889), 1: 176-177.

34. For a graphic description of this massacre, consult Thomas Christian, "Campaign on the Ohio River: Sortie at Fort Meigs, May, 1813," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, 67

(July, 1969): 260-268. Vernon is correct in his characterization of the Indians as wily, for the tactics of the woodland tribes were extremely sophisticated. For insight into this little-appreciated facet of military history, see two articles by Leroy V. Eid: "Their Rules of War": the Validity of James Smith's Summary of Indian Woodland War," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, 86 (Winter, 1988): 4-23; and "A Kind of Running Fight": Indian battlefield tactics in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, 71 (April, 1988): 147-172.

35. Henry Procter (1769-1822), one of the most vilified figures of the War of 1812. An impartial and balanced view of this maligned figure is Sandor Antal, "Myths and Facts Concerning General Procter," *Ontario History*, 79 (September, 1987): 251-262.

36. The second siege of Fort Meigs commenced July 25th and ended July 30th without any tangible gains for the British. In fact, Procter had been pushed into the affair at the urging of Tecumseh, whose warriors were growing desperate for a victory over the Americans.

37. George Croghan (1791-1849), subsequently Inspector General of the Army. See Samuel W. Thomas, *The Croghan Papers*. (Louisville, 1967). Vernon makes the following notation: "Major Croghan received an order from General Harrison that should the British approach in force with cannon, and they should be discovered in time to retreat, he should do so immediately, destroying all the public stores. This the Major refused or neglected to do. His answer to Gen. Harrison was, "We have determined to maintain this place and by Heaven we can." The Major was arrested, taken to head quarters to undergo examination by a court of inquiry, honorably acquitted, and sent back to the same night to take command of the fort."

38. Lieutenant William Charles Short, 41st Regiment, who was an impressive figure even in death: "There was one of those dead British the most daring looking fellow that I ever saw even as a corps[e]. He had a flask of brandy fastened to his belt to drink King George the Third's health, when he got into the fort. His

name was Colonel Short and George Croghan made short work of him." Clift, "Diary of William B. Northcutt," p. 335.

39. This was a brief but savage skirmish: "The first thing the Indians new [sic] of the Squadron they were right under our broad swords and we made their heads rattle like old gords [sic]. They caught their guns in both hands and held them over their heads and gabbered something—Something I suppose about quarters, but we were Kentuckians and did not understand one word about the Indian language, and we gobbled them up right on the spot." Clift, "Diary of William B. Northcutt," p. 332. This obscure encounter earned its own memorial. See Emilius O. Randall. "The Harrison Table Rock and Ball's Battlefield," *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Publications*, 19 (October, 1910): 360–369.

40. Oliver Hazard Perry (1785–1819). It was not until September 10, 1813, that Perry fully equipped his fleet, engaged and defeated the British squadron in memorable battle. Harrison thereafter crossed Lake Erie into Canada, and defeated the combined British-Indian force at the Thames River. The entire issue of *The Journal of Erie Studies*, 17 (Fall, 1988), is devoted to various aspects of this struggle. See also Gerry T. Altoff, "Oliver Hazard Perry and

the Battle of Lake Erie," *Michigan Historical Review*, 14 (Fall 1988): 25–58.

41. Several years later, General Harrison repeated this assessment to Governor James Hiester of Pennsylvania: "It is no disparagement to other corps of this description to say that none that ever came under my notice could at all compare with them in point of discipline, nor was their conduct in any respect in camp or in the field, in battle, or in those still more trying and difficult situations to which they were exposed, inferior to that of any other corps, regular or irregular." Esarey, *Messages and Letters*, 2: 225. Vernon, in contrast, closes his narrative with this observation about Harrison: "It was said that General Harrison should have reinforced Major Croghan, and had General Jackson been in General Harrison's place, he would have done so; but it must be remembered that General Harrison at that time had but 700 men under his command; and that had he been defeated the Northwestern part of Ohio would have been open to the enemy. General Harrison was a cautious general, though personally a brave man. Jackson, on the contrary was daring, I will not say rash, but bold to temerity; yet all his plans, though rapidly conceived, were well digested. So implicitly confident were his men in his bravery and ability, that they would have followed him to the death."