

THE PITTSBURGH BLUES

By

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(Continued from the April, 1921 number)

PART II**THE STORY OF FORT MEIGS**

General W. H. Harrison had set out early in 1813 to recover Michigan, which had been surrendered to the British by General Hull. General Winchester, with 800 volunteers, was sent to Frenchtown, on the river Raisin, 25 miles south of Detroit. He sent a detachment to engage the British and Indians. The British colonel, later general, Henry Proctor, advanced rapidly to Frenchtown with 1500 British and Indians, and surprised and defeated the Americans on January 22, 1813. General Winchester was captured, and fearing a general massacre ordered his successor, Colonel Madison, to surrender, under pledge of protection from the Indians. Colonel Proctor, under the pretext of fearing the advance of General Harrison, left Malden. The Indians attacked the wounded prisoners left behind, torturing and massacring them. The army of General Harrison, which included the Pennsylvania soldiers under command of Brigadier General Crooks, was marched northward to the Maumee River, during the month of January, 1813, where Fort Meigs was erected, the location being about eight miles out from the present city of Toledo.

Brevet Lieut.-Colonel Eleazer D. Wood, captain of the corps of engineers, of the United States Army, and in honor of whom Wood county, Ohio, was named, was with Gen. Harrison at Fort Meigs as constructing engineer. He continued with Harrison into Canada, and was finally killed at Erie. He has left a most interesting journal of the scenes and incidents in which he participated in the Northwestern campaign of 1812-1813. The student of history is much indebted to Brevet Major General George W. Cullum, colonel of the corps of engineers, for rescuing from oblivion and giving to the world the journal of this brave officer, from which

the following synopsis cannot fail to prove of interest:

Major General William H. Harrison, having been appointed to the command of the Northwestern army, arrived at Upper Sandusky early in January, 1813, with two brigades of militia, together with a few regulars and volunteers, in all about 1500 men. This force of raw troops was to be licked into shape and discipline. It was also necessary to await the arrival of the field battering train of artillery, the latter consisting of five 18-pounders, together with provisions, forage and ordnance stores. He remained at the portage from the 24th of January to the 1st of February, when the artillery and reinforcements having arrived the army returned to the Maumee.

There General Harrison, with his command, encamped on a beautiful ridge near the foot of the Rapids, on the right bank of the river and about 150 yards distant from it. The camp was situated about two miles above Fort Miami, and about three miles below the site on which General Wayne gave the Indians such a bitter drubbing in 1794. It was a wise choice made by General Harrison and Captains Gratiot and Wood of the engineers. Here lay the army with its rear to the river, covered by the considerable ravine in front, which extended around and communicated with another very deep and wide one, which passed the left and entirely secured it.

Here General Harrison directed that a camp for 2,000 men should be laid out and strongly fortified with block houses, batteries and palisades, in such manner as to withstand the test of British artillery. This work was continued in a state of progression, the lines of construction were at once designated, and a large portion of labor assigned among every corps or regiment in the army. Each brigade or regiment commenced that particular portion of work assigned it with patriotic vigor and spirit. A fine train of artillery, consisting of five 18-pounders, six 12-pounders, six 6-pounders and three howitzers, together with a small supply of ammunition, having arrived in camp, the little army brightened in appearance and began to feel encouraged.

The camp was about 2500 yards in circumference, which, with the exception of several small intervals, left for the block houses and batteries, was every foot picketed with timber, 15 feet long from ten to twelve inches in diameter,

and set three feet in the ground. To complete this picketing, to put up eight block houses of double timber, to elevate four large batteries, to build all the store houses and magazines required for the supplies of the army, together with the ordinary duties and fatigues of the camp, was an undertaking of no small magnitude. Aside from all this, an immense deal of labor was performed in excavating ditches, making abatis and clearing away the wood about the camp; and all this was done, too, when the weather was intensely cold, and the ground frozen so hard that it required the most strenuous labor to open it with spade and pick-axe.

It seemed that the use of axe, mattock and spade, comprised all the military knowledge of the army. The men continued to work and bury themselves as rapidly as possible, and still heard nothing of the expected army. At this time the army enjoyed a fair degree of health, and was well provided with food.

Toward the latter end of March it was learned through a trustworthy source that the British general, Proctor, had issued a proclamation directing his militia to assemble at Sandwich on the 7th of April, for the purpose of aiding in an expedition against Camp Meigs. It was further learned that the principal plan of attack was as follows: On arriving before the camp the Indians were to be immediately thrown in our rear, or rather they were to invest the camp, and cut off at once all communication, while the troops were to be employed on the opposite side of the river in preparing the batteries and mounting the guns in order to cannonade and bombard the camp; and that in a very few hours after the batteries were opened upon the Americans they would be compelled to seek safety by flying to the swamps, when the Indians would accomplish the rest of the engagement.

It was now the 1st of April, when all were convinced that in a very few days a visit might be expected from General Proctor, accompanied by the great Tecumseh and their retinue. On the 8th Lieut-Colonel Ball, with about 200 dragoons, arrived at the Rapids, and in fine time to afford the assistance, very much wanted, in the completion of the works. Soon afterwards General Harrison arrived with a small corps of regulars and militia. The whole number of troops in camp at this time was about 1200 or 1300, of which not more than 850 were reported fit for duty. They were better than half regulars and volunteers, and the

rest Kentucky and Ohio militia, who had just been drafted into service, and of course were quite ignorant of their duties.

Our block-houses, batteries, magazines and connecting lines of defense were now generally completed, and the appearance of the camp in its every feature was such as to inspire confidence in those who were to defend it against the assault of the invaders of our country. Fuel for the garrison and timber to repair breaches and to make bombproofs, should it be found necessary, were brought into camp in great abundance. Also, two or three wells were instantly commenced—in fact everything was done that possibly could be thought of to place the camp in the best situation to sustain a long siege.

On the 25th the combined British and Indian forces, consisting of 800 militia, 500 regulars and 1500 Indians, all under command of General Proctor, arrived at the mouth and landed on the left shore of the Maumee, and instantly a party of Indians was thrown across the river to observe and watch the conduct of our troops, should any of them be sent out to reconnoitre, as was the constant practice.

The following day Proctor's army was put in motion, keeping its left to the river, and arriving with the gun boats and batteries, in which were the artillery and ordnance stores, and advanced until it arrived on the 27th at old Fort Miami. The batteaux were at once unloaded and employed in conveying the balance of the Indians to our side of the river. The following night the enemy broke ground in four different places, and were very industriously employed until morning, when their works showed good progress. When these nocturnal works were discovered such of our guns as could be brought to bear opened upon them, and those works of the night were completely destroyed.

Understanding now the enemy's plan of attack, and where each of his batteries were to be located, and the particular object of each, and knowing that we should be greatly annoyed by his artillery in our present state, it became necessary to intrench the army entirely anew, which was done within the original lines of camp. Captain Wood commenced the new intrenchments on the morning of the 28th, when the whole army was set to work and continued in the trenches until tattoo, when their labors were suspended, and work in the trenches was resumed at break of

day with unflagging zeal. Never did men behave better on any similar occasion than did ours on this.

Unfortunately we had not been able to clear the wood away to a sufficient distance on our left, of which circumstance the Indians very readily availed themselves, and from the tops of the trees poured into our camps prodigious showers of musketry. The distance, however, was so great, that out of the numerous quantity of balls poured in, comparatively few took effect. A number of our men were wounded, notwithstanding, and rendered incapable of duty for some time.

After the first day's labor in the trenches, one-third of the troops only were kept in them constantly, who were relieved every three hours by fresh ones. In this way we continued our operations, while General Harrison, extremely active, was everywhere to be seen in the trenches, urging on the work, as well by example as precept. He slept but little, and was uncommonly vigilant and watchful through the night.

The first work commenced to shield the troops against cannon was a traverse of about 20 feet base, laid parallel with the river, on the most elevated ground, which was near the middle and running the whole length of the camp. It was from 10 to 15 feet high, and was completed early on the morning of the 1st of May, just as it was discovered that the enemy had finished three of his principal batteries, had his guns in, and was loading and bringing them to bear. Orders were now given for all our tents in front to be instantly struck and carried to the rear of the traverse. It was done in almost a moment, and the prospect of beating up our quarters, which but an instant before presented itself to the view of the eager artilleries, had now entirely fled, and in its place suddenly appeared an immense shield of earth, obscuring from the sight of the enemy every tent, every horse, of which there were 200, and every creature belonging to the camp.

At 11 o'clock A. M. the British batteries opened, and a most tremendous cannonading and bombardment was commenced and kept up, the former until dark and the latter until 11 o'clock at night, when all was again silent. Our loss was one or two men killed, and five or six wounded—the latter principally by the Indians. Our ammunition

being inadequate to the necessity of a long siege, we fired very little, contenting ourselves in safety and listening to the music furnished by the enemy.

On the 2nd at dawn the cannonade commenced again with great vigor, and the batteries continued to play with much briskness through the day, and with about the same effect as on the preceding day.

At 10 o'clock A. M. on the 3rd it was discovered that the enemy had crossed the river, and had three or four of his cannon on our left stuck on the edge of a small ravine. In the course of the third day we had two or three dragoons killed, several slightly wounded and a number of horses killed.

On the 4th, the enemy neither opened his batteries so early in the morning as he had been accustomed to, nor did he fire them with his usual vigor and activity. Firing almost ceased toward evening. It appeared as though the enemy was convinced that the attack from that side of the river was simply an immense waste of powder and ball and would ultimately prove of no avail.

The Indians were permitted by General Proctor to assemble upon the surrounding rampart, and there at their leisure amuse themselves by firing at the prisoners until at length they preferred slaughtering their wretched victims in a manner more suitable to their savage hatred. They laid aside their rifles, went into the slaughter pen, seized those they pleased, and leading them to the gateway tomahawked and scalped them without mercy and without restraint. Nine bodies were found lying in one pile near the gate at the Fort after General Proctor left the Maumee. Many were found in other places tomahawked and scalped, and their bodies mangled in the most inhuman and barbarous manner.

During the siege General Proctor had the audacity to summon General Harrison to surrender, and was very properly told that if he ever got possession of Fort Meigs it would be under such circumstances that would give him greater claims upon the gratitude of his country than he possibly could have by the Fort being surrendered—or words to that effect.

General Proctor without troubling us further, on the morning of the 9th, raised the siege and left for Malden.

The prisoners he had taken were carried down the Huron and there landed.

Having many sick and wounded after the close of the siege of many days and our force greatly impaired, such measures were taken as might tend to restore the army to health and vigor. The block-houses about the lines were cleared of guns and stores and converted into temporary hospitals. Tents were pitched with arbors about them, and such arrangements made to alleviate distress as the circumstances would admit. For some time, as might be expected, the camp exhibited a melancholy spectacle. But the brave men bore up most patiently under their anxiety and gloom with the consciousness of having faithfully done their duty.

Gen. Harrison said in his official report on the Fort Meigs's fight:

"The Pittsburgh Blues, led by Lieutenant Magee, in the illness of their gallant captain, sustained the reputation which they had acquired at Mississineway. That American regulars (although they were raw recruits) and such men as composed the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Petersburg, Virginia volunteers should behave well is not to be wondered at; but that a company of militia should maintain its ground against four times its numbers, as did Captain Sebres, of Kentucky, is truly astonishing."

The Pittsburgh Blues lost at Fort Meigs in killed: Newman, Richardson and McKee. The wounded were Williams, Dobbins, Willock, Walmendorf, Boss and Park. Jos. Dodd, who was wounded at Mississineway, died at Ft. Meigs, June 16, 1813.

Mr. G. P. Wilkinson, in letter dated Pittsburgh, August 13, 1846, says: "I will mention an incident, trivial in itself, but as it tends to show the character of an esteemed friend, and an excellent soldier, I will relate it.

"I had been in attendance on the sickbed of our captain, Butler, in one of the block-houses of Fort Meigs during the investment of that post, in the spring of 1813, and becoming hungry, started out (boy like) to endeavor to obtain some breakfast. Seeing Sergeant Troville cooking some coffee over a few coals I told him my errand and he told me to wait a few minutes and he would divide his cup of coffee with me. I took a seat, and a moment or two afterwards I heard a peculiar singing of an Indian rifle ball that had

entered the ground a short distance from where we were sitting.

"Hurrah," says I; "Sergeant, what does this mean?"

"He pointed to a tree at a considerable distance from the pickets, where I observed an Indian perched on one of the branches. He then said with great good humor:

"That rascal, George, has been firing at me ever since I commenced cooking my breakfast."

"I swallowed my tin-cup of coffee pretty expeditiously, during which, however, he fired once or twice more, and I told Trovillo I was not going to remain as a target for the yellow skins."

A letter from Jesse Lewis, one of the Pittsburgh Blues, under date of May 9, says: "In the sortie from the Fort by the Americans the Pittsburgh Blues acted with the courage of veterans, and were in the hottest part of the action."

In his dispatch of May 9, 1813, to the War Department, announcing abandonment by the enemy of the siege of Ft. Meigs, and awarding praise for gallant service, General Harrison says:

"The Pittsburgh Blues, led by Lieut. Magee, sustained the reputation which they had acquired at Mississineway, and their gallant associates, the Petersburg, Va. volunteers, and Lt. Drum's Greensburg Rifles, discovered equal intrepidity."

Later, on May 13, 1813, writing from Lower Sandusky, Gen. Harrison says:

"Having ascertained that the enemy (Indians as well as British) had entirely abandoned the neighborhood of the Rapids, I left the command of Camp Meigs with General Clay and came here last night. Two persons employed on British gunboats, (Americans by birth), deserted to us. The information they gave me was very interesting. They say that the Indians, of which there were 1600 to 2000, left the British the day before their departure in a high state of dissatisfaction, from the great loss which they sustained on the 5th, and the failure of the British promise to take the post. From the account given by these men, my opinion is confirmed of the great superiority of the enemy which were defeated by our troops in the two sallies made on the 5th inst.

"That led by Col. Miller did not exceed 350 men, and it is very certain that they defeated 200 regular British, 150

militia and 400 or 500 Indians. That American regulars, (although they were raw recruits) and such men as compose the Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Petersburg, Virginia volunteers, should behave well, is not to be wondered at. I am unable to form a correct estimate of the enemy's force. The prisoners vary much in their accounts. Those who made them least stated the regulars at 550, militia 800, Indians 1000 to 1200."

The Americans lost in all, killed 77, wounded 187, total, 264. Nine only were killed within the fort.

The Pennsylvania militia (about 1700 strong) with General Harrison, having been mustered in for six months, were many of them discharged in April, 1813, their time having expired, though they served fifteen days longer rather than leave the army weak before a strong and vigilant enemy, previous to the arrival of expected and overdue reinforcements from this state. These returned soldiers were warmly welcomed at Pittsburgh on their arrival in May. About 200 of them had re-enlisted in the Northwest, and there continued to serve. The Blues having enlisted for one year, remained with Harrison. They were destined still further to distinguish themselves.

On the 20th of July, at the solicitation of Tecumseh, General Proctor returned with a larger force, while General Harrison was at Lower Sandusky. It was to be attempted, according to Tecumseh's plan, to draw the garrison from the fort by a ruse, as it had proved too strong and well-equipped to be taken by assault. The force of the enemy that had ascended the Maumee under command of General Proctor and Tecumseh was 5000 men, while the number of Indians was greater than ever before assembled on any occasion during the war, while the defenders of Fort Meigs amounted to only a few hundred men under command of General Green Clay.

In the afternoon of the same day the British infantry were secreted in the ravine below the fort, and the cavalry in the woods above, while the Indians were stationed in the forest, on the Sandusky road, not far from the fort. About an hour before dark they began a sham battle among themselves, to deceive the Americans into the belief that a battle was going on between them and reinforcements for the fort, in the hope of enticing the garrison to the aid of their comrades. It was managed with so much skill that the garri-

son instantly flew to arms, impressed by the Indian yells, intermingled with the roar of musketry, that a severe battle was being fought and that the lives of the reinforcements were in danger. Some of the officers insisted on being suffered to march out to the rescue. General Clay satisfied the officers that no troops were to be sent out of Fort Meigs until there would be further necessity for it. But the men were highly indignant that they were prevented from going out to share the dangers, as they believed, of their commander-in-chief and their brother soldiers. A shower of rain ended this sham battle. The enemy remained around the fort but one day after this, when on the 28th they embarked with their stores and proceeded down the lake, and on to Fort Stephenson, where they met with such a terrible repulse. That fort was defended by one gun and 160 young men commanded by Major George Croghan.

The information was given out by a volunteer aid of General Clay, who was in Fort Meigs during the second siege, that preparations were made by General Clay to fire the magazine in case the enemy succeeded in the attempt to storm the fort, and thus involve all, friends and foe alike in one common fate. This terrible alternative was deemed far preferable to that of suffering the barbarities of their relentless foes, and finally to perish under the tomahawks and scalping knives of fiendish savages.

In 1815 the government removed the ordnance and stores and abandoned Fort Meigs.

On August 2, 1813, the British and Indians, under General Proctor and Colonel Elliott, attempted to storm Fort Stephenson, at Lower Sandusky, then commanded by Major George Croghan, twenty-one years of age, a nephew of General George Rogers Clarke. Major Croghan believed that when the British should attempt to storm the fort the attack would be through an available ditch. He ordered Sergeant Weaver of the Virginia volunteers, and six privates of the Pittsburgh Blues, to cover this point. Major Croghan had but one cannon in the fort, a six pounder, which was given in charge of Sergeant Weaver and his six men to handle.

When, late in the evening, the British storming column attacked the fort, Sergeant Weaver and his six Pittsburghers opened the masked port-hole, at which they stood around their six-pounder, and the piece was discharged at the assailants, then only thirty feet distant. Death and desola-

tion filled the ditch, into which the attacking force had leaped in their charge. Fifty men were instantly killed and wounded, and the attacking column fled in dismay; nor did they renew the attack; and at three o'clock that night Proctor and his men retreated. General Proctor, fearing the approach of General Harrison, gave up the siege and withdrew. The British lost, in killed and wounded, one hundred and twenty men, while only one man of the garrison was killed and several wounded.

The brilliant exploit of Major Croghan won for him a handsome sword from the ladies of Chillicothe, Ohio, while Congress voted him the thanks of the nation. A score of years later he was awarded a gold medal for his skill and bravery. A detail of the Pittsburgh Blues were a portion of the force with which Major Croghan has so valiantly defended Fort Stephenson, now Fremont, Ohio.

When Proctor had ordered Croghan to surrender, he accompanied the demand with the like threat he had used before, namely, that if Croghan refused he and his men would be massacred by his Indian allies.

Croghan spiritedly replied that such contingency was impossible, since should the fort surrender there would not be left any men to massacre.

Report of Maj. George Croghan: Fort Sandusky, Aug. 5, 1813. "The enemy attacked Fort Stephenson with a combined force of 500 regulars, and 700 or 800 Indians, under command of Gen. Proctor, who sent Col. Elliott and Maj. Chambers with a flag to demand surrender of the fort to save effusion of blood or they would reduce the fort by storm. Croghan refused to surrender. Fire was opened from the gunboats in the river and from a 5½ howitzer and 5-sixes on shore and from 3-sixes. Three hundred and fifty men advanced in the ditch and a fire of grape from a 6-pounder followed, together with musketry. Croghan's loss was one killed, seven wounded. Enemy's loss, one lieutenant-colonel, one lieutenant, and about 150 men. Seventy stand of arms and several braces of pistols were collected and a boat with military stores and clothing."

(To be continued)