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Battle of Ogdensburg

The city of Ogdensburg, New York located on the shores of the St. Lawrence River and parallel to the Canadian city of Prescott. Therefore it was certain that this would serve as an area of contention during the War of 1812. It was the site of a skirmish between British and American forces in 1813, as well as an area of high value to both forces. Despite a failed first attack in 1812, a new attack launched in 1813 against the town and the American troops stationed there ultimately led to a British victory and control.

The British first attempted to seize control of the town in October 1812. Stationed at Ogdensburg in late 1812 were Brigadier-General Jacob Brown and his militia, as well as Benjamin Forsyth and a company of riflemen, both of which travelled from Sackets Harbor.¹ Brown's objective in Ogdensburg revolved around attacking convoys sailing from Montreal along the St. Lawrence River.² The first inklings at a potential engagement occurred in October of 1812. Colonel Lethbridge and 600 militiamen were set to launch from Prescott in Canada against Ogdensburg but American shore batteries repelled their attack.³ Further attempts to attack the city in 1812 did not occur. Around December of 1812 with their six-month service agreement expiring, Brigadier-General Brown and his militia departed Ogdensburg, leaving Captain Forsyth and "his own regular company of riflemen, and a few volunteer gunners and some local militia" as the only American force protecting the town.⁴

¹ J. Mackay Hitsman, *The Incredible War of 1812: A Military History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965) 95.

² *Ibid.*, 96.

³ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 104.

The second attempt made by the British against Ogdensburg occurred in early 1813. This came as a response to American incursions into Canada that resulted in the taking of British prisoners on a number of occasions, including raid on Elizabethtown that netted the Americas 52 prisoners.⁵ The attack launched February 22, 1813 by the British was under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Macdonell. Operating under a previously devised plan, Macdonell sent Captain John Jenkins's company of Glengarry Light Infantry Fencibles, as well as 70 militiamen, to attack along the western edge of the town of Ogdensburg while Macdonell's main column would attack their flank across the river.⁶ In order to attack Ogdensburg, Macdonell required his troops to cross the frozen St. Lawrence River. The British force crossed the river more than halfway unscathed before the American shore batteries responded.⁷ According to historian J. Mackay Hitsman, the Americans initially mistook the approaching British force as a training force since the troops stationed in Prescott often utilized the ice for training and drills.⁸ Jenkin's troops battled with Forsyth's force stationed in the fort west of the town until the American troops withdrew out of fear of being cut off from escape routes by Macdonell's column.⁹ In the process, the British managed to inflict 20 casualties and captured an additional 70 American troops.¹⁰ With his forces depleted and unable to attempt to retake the town, Forsyth marched his troops back to Sackets Harbor.¹¹ The British now had free reign over the town. Before the team emptied the military stores in Ogdensburg and hauled the supplies over the river back to Prescott, they set fire to the American vessels frozen Ogdensburg's harbor.¹² Historian John Latimer states

⁵ John Latimer, *War With American* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) 125.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 118

⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹² *Ibid.*, 119.

that Ogdensburg then remained unoccupied for the remainder of the war.¹³ The only American response to losing Ogdensburg was Major General Henry Dearborn sending troops to reinforce Sackett's Harbor.¹⁴

¹³ Latimer, *War With America*, 126.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 126.

Bibliography

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