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Ferguson Militia at Alexandria

## No. VI.

## A VOLUNTEER CORPS FROM VIRGINIA.

Washington, 5th September, 1856.

Dear Colonel,---In compliance with your suggestion, I give you a brief notice of some of the events coming under my personal observation forty-two years ago, in connection with the operations of the military of the District of Columbia. I write you on the anniversary of the battles at the White House and Indian Head, a day as nearly similar, in all respects, to the 5th of September, 1814, as it well could be.

The company of volunteer riflemen to which I belonged (though then a mere boy of less than eighteen years) was commanded by Captain George W. Humphreys, of Jefferson County, as gallant an officer and liberal gentleman as I have ever met with. On the afternoon of the 22d of August, 1814, a letter was received at Charlestown, by express, from Captain (afterward General) Henry St. George Tucker, advising that the British troops had been landed from the fleet at Nottingham, and were on their march to Washington. He invoked him to raise volunteers without delay, and come to the rescue. Thomas Griggs, Jun., an eminent lawyer and influential and popular citizen, mounted a block, and read the letter to the eager crowd who had been waiting for news. A shout, "To the rescue!" immediately went up after a brief address from Mr. Griggs; the drum and fife were sent through the streets to beat up volunteers, and before sunset a company of over fifty men was raised, although the county had then in service, at Norfolk, two or three companies of militia. There was no time to furnish ourselves with uniforms; knapsacks were speedily provided by the ladies of the town; and each man was on the ground at roll-call the next evening. On the 23d we marched to Harper's Ferry, eight miles distant, to procure arms and to increase our

forces. Here we found a company of about fifty of the armorers and citizens enrolled under the command of the superintendent of the armory (Colonel Stubblefield), and the two companies were consolidated into one, and furnished mostly with the short rifles then in the arsenal, a weapon at that time deemed sure and deadly in the hands of a good marksman. Early on the 24th of August we embarked upon two flour-boats down the Potomac, a stream then rugged and difficult of navigation; but we were in charge of two or three of the Striders, skilful boatmen and enterprising men in every thing they undertook. A few hours after starting we landed to have a regular election of officers, and concluded that the superintendent of the armory and some of his most skilful workmen should return to carry on the manufacture of arms, a duty equally as important as fighting. The following officers were then chosen: George W. Humphreys, captain; Thomas Griggs, James L. Ranson, Joseph Blackburn, and Samuel Russell, lieutenants.

We reached Seneca Creek on the evening of the 24th, hearing distinctly during the day the cannonading at the battle and the explosion at the navy-yard. We saw the light from the burning public buildings, and were satisfied the enemy had possession of the city. This idea was confirmed to us in the morning by somebody from the seat of war, and we forthwith set out on our march to join General Winder at Rockville. During our march we encountered that terrific storm so well remembered by the inhabitants of the District and by the survivors among the invaders.

Hearing that the enemy had gone to Baltimore, we set out in that direction, but soon received orders to join the forces at Washington under General Walter Smith, of whose command we found you (permit me to say) the energetic, skilful, and popular brigademajor. On our entry into Georgetown (and I shall never forget the impression made upon me by the first magnificent view from the heights) we were handsomely entertained by that hospitable

old-school gentleman, Washington Bowie, and welcomed by the citizens, our officers and some of the men being well-known to them.

After spending a day or two at Greenleaf's Point (the enemy then in possession of Alexandria), we were stationed, with the troops under General Smith, on Camp (now Observatory) Hill. From Camp Hill we were ordered to march, at 5 o'clock on the evening of Friday, the 2d of September, to join Commodore Porter at the White House, below Mount Vernon, where that gallant officer was busily engaged in erecting a temporary battery on a bluff, so as to command the channel of the Potomac, running within less than fifty yards of the Virginia shore.

The enemy had been lying at anchor for several days after leaving Alexandria, waiting a fair wind to enable him to pass with his prizes, consisting of twenty-one vessels laden with flour and other provisions. His fleet consisted of the frigates Sea-Horse and Euryalus, and five or six bomb ships. The scene was new and exciting to one who had seen so little of "the pomp and circumstance of war," and none of its realities. Our company contained many most expert riflemen---men who not only used, but constructed those deadly weapons with which we were armed; and the corps, though there had been but little time for drill in the field, felt something more than the confidence of raw militiamen, and, I may say, were "eager for the fray." That they did some execution upon the decks of the enemy's vessels the official account of Captain Gordon bears testimony.

Commodore Porter, in his dispatch to the Secretary of the Navy, dated the 7th September, 1814, giving an account of the affair near the White House, describes with some minuteness the operations of the enemy. Among other things he says:

"The two frigates anchored abreast (of the battery), the bombs,

sloops, and smaller vessels passed outside them, all pouring into the battery and neighboring woods a tremendous fire of every description of missiles. In the woods, on the left, a company of riflemen, from Jefferson County, Virginia, under Captain George W. Humphreys, greatly distinguished themselves by a well-directed fire on the enemy's decks, as did a company of militia, under the command of Captain Janney, who was posted by me on the right. The first company lost one man killed, and one sergeant and four privates wounded; the latter, two privates killed."

The private killed in Captain Humphrey's company was David Harris, of Shepherdstown, a most worthy young man, who left a mother and other relatives in that gallant town, celebrated for the quota of fighting men furnished in the Revolutionary era. Sergeant David Humphreys (a merchant of Charlestown, and long an efficient magistrate) had his right arm shattered with a grape-shot, and it was found necessary to have it amputated. Hugh M'Donald was shot through the body with a grape-shot, but survived. William Phielling was wounded in the fleshy part of the thigh; Thomas Stedman had one of his fingers injured, and Lieutenant Blackburn had his cheek grazed with a ball. There are now not fifteen survivors of the company within my recollection.

In his return of killed and wounded (during twenty-three days' operation in the Potomac), Captain Gordon mentions seven killed and thirty-five wounded on board his ships---a much greater loss than we suffered, notwithstanding our imperfect defences.

In commending Lieutenant King, of the Sea-Horse, who got out of his sick-hammock to command while passing the batteries, Captain Gordon states that the first two guns pointed by Lieutenant King disabled each a gun of the enemy. This is true. One of the guns was split to the touch-hole, and another had a wheel of the carriage shattered. The fire of grape and shells was incessant for more than two hours, while the riflemen of Captain Humphreys were down at the water's edge, aiming at the decks and rig-

ging as long as a man was to be seen on either.

My dear sir, I have made this hasty sketch much longer than I intended, but I was encouraged by you to hope that some of the incidents might be worth reciting. I am glad you have undertaken the task of vindicating the reputation of the troops engaged in the ill-fated field of Bladensburg. Better materials for gallant and efficient service than the volunteers and militia of the District I have never seen any where, and my opportunities have not been limited. Every impartial man, even of the enemy, will admit that the disaster was not to be attributed to the troops. They were not only ready, but eager for a more active participation in the field than was allowed them. The incredulity of General Armstrong, Secretary of War, as to the attempt of the British to make an attack upon Washington prevented the necessary precautions, and the disposition of the troops on the day of battle was any thing else than judicious. The actual commander was paralyzed by the presence of a superior who had taken none of the preliminary measures suggested by military experience.

With great respect, your friend,

JOHN S. GALLAHER,  
A private of Captain Humphreys's Riflemen.

Colonel John S. Williams, Washington.

House of Representatives Report.  
expulped - Madison + Winder.

Intelligence of the capture of Washington created intense excitement in Baltimore. It was believed that the victorious Ross would fall upon it immediately, either by land or water; and the veteran soldier of the Revolution, General Samuel Smith, renewed his exertions for the defense of the city, and Annapolis, the political capital of Maryland. That vigilant officer had been active ever since the first appearance of danger in the spring of 1813, when a British squadron appeared in the Chesapeake. It was well known that the enemy felt great exasperation toward the Baltimoreans because they had sent out so many swift "clipper-built" vessels and expert seamen to smite terribly the commerce of Great Britain on the high seas. "It is a doomed town," declared Vice-admiral Warren. "The American navy must be annihilated," said a London paper; his arsenals and dock-yards must be consumed, and the truculent inhabitants of Baltimore must be tamed with the weapons which shook the wooden turrets of Copenhagen."

So early as the 13th of April, 1813, the City Councils of Baltimore appropriated twenty thousand dollars to be used for the defense of the city, under the direction of the mayor, Edward Johnson, and seven other citizens, who were named as a Committee of Supply.<sup>1</sup> The governor of the State (Levin Winder) also called an extraordinary session of the Legislature, to meet at Annapolis on the third Monday in May. Meanwhile a rumor reached the city that the enemy were approach, and within a few hours at least five thousand armed men were found in their proper places, and several companies of militia from the country came pouring into Baltimore. Several persons were arrested as traitors and spies. These demonstrations of preparation and power undoubtedly saved the city from assault at that time. Very soon afterward, Stricker's brigade, and other military bodies in the city,

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1. These were James Mosher, Luke Tiernan, Henry Payson, Dr. J. C. White, James A. Buchannan, Samuel Sterett, and Thorndike Chase.

full five thousand strong, with forty pieces of artillery, were reviewed. At the beginning of June a battery was erected at Fort M'Henry for the marine artillery of Baltimore one hundred and sixty in number, under Captain George Stiles, and composed of masters and master's-mates of vessels there. It was armed with 42-pounders.<sup>2</sup>

In September (1813) the British fleet went to sea, and Baltimore enjoyed a season of repose. The blockaders, as we have observed, reappeared in the Chesapeake in the spring of 1814, and all the summer and early autumn infested its waters, during which time occurred the destructive invasion recorded in the preceding chapter, when every thing that could be done by vigilant men for the safety of Baltimore was accomplished. A Committee of Vigilance and Safety, of which Mayor Johnson was Chairman, and Theodore Bland was secretary, co-operated unceasingly with General Smith and the military. On the 27th of August, three days after the capture of Washington, that committee called upon the citizens to organize into working parties, and to contribute implements of labor for the purpose of increasing the strength of the city defenses. The city was divided into four sections, and the people of each labored alternately on the fortifications. The exempts from military service and free colored men were required to assemble for labor, with provisions for a day, at Hempstead Hill (equally well known as Loudenslager's Hill), on Sunday, the 28th of September; at Myer Garden on Monday; at Washington Square on Tuesday; and at the intersection of Eutaw and Market Streets on Wednesday. Each portion, comprising a section, was under the command of appointed superintendents. The response of the citizens in men and money

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2. This corps was celebrated for its gallantry. Dr. Martin says, in his MS. Reminiscences before me, that when he was at Bladensburg, the British officers, who were expecting re-enforcements for Winder from Baltimore, "were particularly anxious about the marine artillery---the material of which it was composed, the weight of metal, number of men, etc. I exaggerated the condition of its ability to do effective service," he said, "and I confidently believe that, had they been part of our force at Bladensburg, we would have succeeded in driving back the enemy, if not in capturing the whole force, for I never saw men so completely exhausted as were the foe."

was quick, cordial, and ample; and volunteers to work on the fortifications came from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia. By the 10th of September General Winder was in Baltimore, with all the forces of the Tenth Military District at his command.

The principal fortifications constructed by the people consisted of a long line on Hempstead, or Loudenslager's Hill, now on the site of Patterson Park. At proper distances several semicircular batteries were constructed, well mounted with cannon and ably manned, some of them by volunteer artillery companies of Baltimore, but chiefly by men-or-war's men, about twelve hundred in number, under the general command of Commodore Rodgers. The spaces between these batteries were filled with militia. One of the larger of these bastions, known as Rodger's Bastion, may now (1867) be seen, well preserved, on the harbor side of Patterson Park, and overlooking Fort M'Henry and the region about it. Four of the smaller batteries on this line were in charge of officers of the Guerriere and Erie, the former then lying in Baltimore Harbor.<sup>2</sup>

A brigade of Virginia Volunteers and of regular troops, including a corps of cavalry under Captain Bird, were placed under the command of General Winder; the City Brigade of Baltimore was commanded by General Stricker; and the general management of the entire military force destined for the defense of the city was intrusted to General Smith. Fort M'Henry was garrisoned by about one thousand men, volunteers and regulars, commanded by Major George Armistead. To the right of it, guarding the shores of the Patapsco, on the Ferry Branch, from the landing of troops who might endeavor to assail the city in the rear, were two redoubts, named respectively Fort Covington, and City,

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2. These were Lieutenant Gamble, the first of the Guerriere, Midshipman Field, Sailing-master Ramage, and Midshipman Salter, of the same vessel, and Sailing-master De la Roche, of the Erie.

or Babcock Battery. The former was manned by a detachment of seamen under Lieutenant Newcomb, and the latter---a 6-gun battery---by another detachment from Barney's flotilla under Sailing-master John A. Webster. In the rear of these, upon high ground, at the end of Light Street, near the present Fort Avenue, was an unfinished circular redoubt for seven guns, in charge of Lieutenant George Budd. On Lazaretto Point, across the entrance channel to Baltimore Harbor, opposite Fort M'Henry, was also a small battery, in charge of Lieutenant Rutter, of the flotilla. To these several batteries, and to Fort M'Henry, the citizens of Baltimore looked most confidently for defense.<sup>3</sup>

Such were the most important preparations for the reception of the enemy, when, on Sunday evening, the 11th of September, they were seen at the mouth of the Patapsco, in strong force, preparing to land at North Point, twelve miles from Baltimore by water, and fifteen miles by land. Off that point the fleet anchored that evening. The night was a delightful one. The air was balmy, and the full moon shone brightly in a cloudless sky. The earth was refreshed by the fall of a heavy dew. The fleet lay two miles from the shore. Brief repose was given to its people, for, at two o'clock in the morning, (September 12, 1814) the boats of every ship were lowered, and then the land troops and seamen went to the shore, under cover of several gun-brigs anchored within a cable's length of the beach. The boats went in divisions, and the leading one of each was armed with a carronade ready for action.

At about seven o'clock in the morning, General Ross and Admiral Cockburn were on shore, with a force nine thousand strong, composed of five thousand land troops, two thousand marines, and two thousand seamen, led by Captain E. Crofton. They were furnished with cooked provisions sufficient for three days. Each combatant bore eighty rounds of ammunition, and carried as little baggage

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3. Letter of Commodore Rodgers to the Secretary of the Navy, September 28, 1814; Letter of Sailing-master (now Captain) John A. Webster to Brantz Mayer, Esq., July 22, 1853.

as possible, for they were to march rapidly and take Baltimore by surprise, where Ross had boasted that he should eat his Sunday dinner. At the same time, a frigate was sent to try the depth and take the soundings of the channel leading to Baltimore, as the navy, under the immediate command of Captain Nourse, of Cockburn's flag-ship Severn, was to co-operate with the army. Intelligence of these movements produced great alarm in Baltimore. A large number of families, with portable articles of value, were sent into the interior of the country, and every inn, for almost a hundred miles northward of the city, was crowded with the refugees.

When it was known that the British fleet was anchored off North Point, General Smith, who had about nine thousand troops under his command, sent General Stricker with three thousand two hundred in that direction to watch the movements of the enemy and act as circumstances might warrant. He left the city toward evening, and just before sunset reached a meeting-house (yet standing) almost seven miles from the town, near the junction of the roads leading respectively to North Point and Bear Creek. Meanwhile Major Randall, of the Maryland militia, had been sent with a light corps from General Stansbury's brigade, and the Pennsylvania Volunteers, to the mouth of Bear Creek, to co-operate with Stricker, and to check the debarkation of the enemy, should it be attempted at that point.

Stricker's little army rested until morning at the meeting-house, not far from what was then called Long Log Lane (now the road to North Point), with the exception of a detachment of one hundred and forty horsemen under Lieutenant Colonel Biays, who were ordered forward, three miles, to Gorsuch's farm, and one hundred and fifty riflemen under Captain Dyer, who were directed to take position at a blacksmith's shop one mile in the rear of the cavalry. So they remained until the morning of the 12th, when information was received

from the vedettes that the enemy had landed at North Point, when Stricker immediately sent back his baggage under a strong guard, and disposed his troops for battle in three lines, stretching from a branch of Bear Creek on his right, to a swamp on the margin of a branch of Back River on his left. The several corps were posted as follows: the Fifth Baltimore Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Sterett, five hundred and fifty strong, were placed on the right, extending from Long Log Lane to a branch of Bear Creek; the Twenty-seventh Maryland Regiment, Lieutenant Colonel Long, numbering the same, were on the left of the Fifth, extending from the Lane to the swamp; and the Union Artillerymen of Baltimore, seventy-five in number, with six 4-pounders, under Captain Montgomery, then Attorney General of the State, were in the Lane. The Thirty-ninth Regiment, four hundred and fifty men, under Lieutenant Colonel Fowler, were posted three hundred yards in the rear of the Twenty-seventh and parallel with it; and on the right of the Thirty-ninth, at the same distance in the rear of the Fifth, were the Fifty-first Regiment, under Lieutenant Colonel Amey. These formed the second line. About half a mile in the rear of this line, near the site of the present (1867) Battle-ground House, was a reserve corps, consisting of the Sixth Regiment (six hundred and twenty men), under Lieutenant Colonel M'Donald. Thus judiciously posted, Stricker awaited the approach of Ross.

The British general disposed his troops as at Bladensburg. A corps composed of the light companies of the Fourth, Twenty-first, and Forty-fourth Regiments, the entire Eighty-fifth, a battalion of "disciplined negroes," and a company of marines, numbering in the aggregate about eleven hundred men, under Major Jones, were sent in advance. These were followed by six field-pieces and two howitzers drawn by horses; and the whole formed the first brigade. The second brigade, under Colonel Brooke, was composed of the Fourth and Forty-fourth Regiments, about fourteen hundred strong, and was followed by

more than a thousand sailors led by Captain Crofton. The rear, or third brigade, consisted of the Twenty-first Regiment, and a battalion of marines, numbering in all about fourteen hundred and fifty men, under Colonel Patterson. At the same time, the fleet moved toward Baltimore to attack Fort M'Henry.

Feeling confident of success, Ross and Cockburn rode gayly forward at the head of the troops for about an hour, when they halted at Gorsuch's farm, and spent another hour in resting and careless carousing. The American riflemen in the advance had fallen back in the mean time, with the impression that the British were landing on Back River or Bear Creek to cut them off, and they were placed on the right of Stricker's front line. When the general was informed of the exact position of the invaders, he sent forward to attack them the companies of Captains Levering and Howard from Sterett's Fifth, one hundred and fifty in number, under Major Richard K. Heath, and Asquith's and a few other riflemen, numbering about seventy, with a small piece of artillery and some cavalry under Lieutenant Stiles. They met the British advancing, and a skirmish ensued near the house occupied, when the writing visited the spot in 1861, by Samuel C. Cole as a store and dwelling, seven and a half miles from Baltimore, and about seven from the landing-place of the British. Ross was mortally wounded by one of two young men, natives of Maryland, belonging to Asquith's rifle corps, and who had both fought in the battle at Bladensburg. Their names were Daniel Wells and Henry C. M'Comas. They were concealed in a hollow, and fired the fatal shot when Ross appeared upon a little knoll near them. That commander died in the arms of his favorite aid, the now (1867) venerable Sir Duncan M'Dougall, of London, before his bearers reached the boats at North Point. "He lived only long enough," says Gleig, "to name his wife, and to commend his family to the protection of his country." In this skirmish Heath's horse was shot under him, and several Americans were killed or wounded. Among the slain were the two young men whose bullets brought Ross to the earth. The ad-

vancing British far outnumbered Heath's detachment, and he ordered them to fall back. Finding the companies of Levering and Howard too fatigued to engage efficiently in the impending battle, Stricker ordered them to the rear to attach themselves to the reserve.

On the fall of Ross the command of the British troops devolved on Colonel A. Brooke, of the Forty-fourth Regiment, and under his direction the entire invading force pressed vigorously forward. At about two o'clock in the afternoon they came within cannon-shot of the American line, and were immediately formed in battle order. Their first brigade, supported by the Forty-fourth Regiment, the seamen and marines, menaced the entire front of the Americans, and commenced the action by opening a brisk discharge of cannon and rockets upon them. The British Twenty-first remained in column as a reserve; and the Fourth made a circuitous march to turn the left flank of the Americans, against which also artillerists and rocketeers directed their missiles, and were replied to by Captain Montgomery's cannon. General Stricker instantly comprehended the meaning of the flank movement and artillery attack, and brought up the Thirty-ninth Regiment, with two field-pieces, to its support in a line with the Twenty-seventh, which was behaving most gallantly. He also ordered the Fifty-first, under Colonel Amey, to form in line at right angles with the first line, with its right resting on the left of the Thirty-ninth. This movement was productive of some confusion, but Stricker's sides, in the mean time, with Victory coquetting first with one and then with the other, and the armies swaying backward and forward with mutual pressure.

When the contest had been carried on for about two hours the enemy's right column fell upon and endeavored to turn the American left. The Fifty-first were suddenly struck with dismay, and, after firing a volley at random

broke, and fled in wild disorder, producing a like effect in the second batallion of the Thirty-ninth. All efforts to rally the fugitives were vain. But the remainder of the Thirty-ninth and the gallant Twenty-seventh (whose tattered battle-flag, now in the possession of its bearer in the fight, Captain Lester, of Baltimore, attests the severity of their conflict) bravely maintained their position. Finally, at about four o'clock, when the superior force of the enemy could no longer be kept in check, General Stricker ordered a retreat upon his reserved corps. This movement was performed in good order. Some of the wounded and two field-pieces were abandoned, Stricker reformed his brigade, and then fell back toward the city as far as Worthington's Mill, about half a mile in advance of the intrenchments cast up by the citizens. There he was joined by General Winder, with General Douglass's Virginia Brigade and Captain Bird's United States Dragoons, who took post on his left. The British bivouacked on the battle-field that night, after calling in some pursuers and collecting the stragglers.

While these movements were in operation on the land, the British fleet was preparing to perform a conspicuous part of the drama. Frigates, schooners, sloops, and bomb-ketches had entered the Patapsco early in the morning of the 12th, while Ross was moving from North Point, and anchored off Fort M'Henry (then about one half its present dimensions), beyond the reach of its guns, near the present Fort Carroll. During the day and evening the bomb and rocket vessels were so posted as to act upon the fortifications on the hill, commanded by Rodgers, as well as on Fort M'Henry, while the frigates were stationed farther outward, the water being so shallow that they could not approach nearer the city than four or five miles, nor the fort within two and a half miles. The Americans had already sunk some vessels, as we have observed, in the narrow channel at Fort M'Henry, which prevented any passage by the ships of

the enemy.<sup>2</sup> During the night of the 12th the fleet made full preparations for an attack on the fort and hill intrenchments on the morning of the 13th, when Brooke was to move on Baltimore with the British land force from the battlefield of the day before. The fleet prepared for action consisted of sixteen heavy vessels, five of them bomb-ships.

Fort M'Henry was commanded by a brave soldier, and defended by gallant companions. The latter were composed of one company of United States Artillery, under Captain Evans; two companies of Sea-fencibles, under Captains Bunbury and Addison; two companies of volunteers from the city, named respectively the "Washington Artillery" and the "Baltimore Independent Artillerists," the former commanded by Captain John Berry, and the latter by Lieutenant Commanding Charles Pennington; the "Baltimore Fencibles," a fine company of volunteer artillerists led by Judge Joseph H. Nicholson; a detachment of Barney's flotillamen, commanded by Lieutenant Redman; and detachments of regulars, in all six hundred men, furnished by General Winder from the Twelfth, Fourteenth, Thirty-sixth, and Thirty-eighth Regiments, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Stewart and Major Lane. The regular artillerists under Captain Evans, and the volunteers under Captain Nicholson, manned the bastions in the Star Fort. The commands of Bunbury, Addison, Redman, Berry, and Pennington were stationed in the lower works; and the infantry, under, under Stewart and Lane, were placed in the outer ditch, to meet the enemy at his landing, if he should attempt it.

The bomb-vessels opened a heavy fire upon the American works at sunrise on Tuesday morning, the 13th, at about seven o'clock, at a distance of two miles, and kept up a well-directed bombardment until three o'clock in the afternoon.

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2. General Smith, on the recommendation of Commodore Rodgers, caused twenty-four vessels then lying in the harbor to be sunk in the narrow channel between Fort M'Henry and Lazaretto Point. These were afterward raised at the expense of the United States. The aggregate amount of money paid to the owners afterward was about \$100,000.

Major Peter to Col. J. S. Williams

No. V.

FROM MAJOR GEORGE PETER TO COLONEL J. S. WILLIAMS.

Montanverd, May 24, 1854.

Dear Sir,---Your communication of the 18th instant has been duly received. After the unfortunate affair of Bladensburg I was called upon by Colonel R. M. Johnson, appointed chairman of a committee of Congress to investigate the capture of Washington. I declined making any communication. Cabinet ministers, rival candidates for the presidency (Monroe and Armstrong), generals, field-officers, captains, and subalterns, and citizens, had all made communications to the chairman and his committee, presenting such a variety of views and statements connected with the operations of the U.S. army, and the landing and advance of the British army under the command of General Ross, that I felt convinced it would be impossible for any committee to make such a report as would embrace a true statement of the military operations connected with the capture of Washington.

I still most reluctantly make any statements; and but for various publications, doing great injustice to many portions of the army, and misstatements of facts, I would not be induced, at this late period, to present my recollections of the operations of that day to you.

It is well-known to all connected with the army on that occasion, that the advance was under my immediate command, which gave me an opportunity of knowing as much connected with the operations as any other officer connected with the army. I was the first to meet the enemy, and the last piece of artillery fired at the battle of Bladensburg was from my battery, after I had received an order, through you, from General Smith to retreat.

To enter into all the details and movements would be more than I can undertake by letter; but if you can make it convenient to visit me, I would go more into general details, and relate many circumstances that are too voluminous for my letter-communication.

It is not my intention to impute blame or censure to any one. A want of military experience was the groundwork of all the errors committed in the military operations of that day. Winder and Armstrong were both loudly condemned and charged with things that both, in my opinion, were innocent of. The great defect was the want of military experience. From General Armstrong I received every equipment that was necessary to render my corps efficient in every respect, while many complained of their inability to procure such arms and equipments as were necessary to render them efficient; and I personally know that Stull's rifle corps were supplied with muskets instead of their proper arms.\* No sooner was it announced that the enemy had arrived at Benedict, than I was sent for by the Secretary of War, and was offered the appointment of colonel, and the command of volunteer corps in the District of Columbia. I was aware of the jealousy and heart-burning that it would create with the officers commanding militia regiments to have the volunteer companies of their several regiments taken from them at the moment that they expected to meet the enemy, and recommended things to be left as they were, and I would continue to command the artillery, and Stull and Davidson's companies, which had been with me on more occasions than one.

The first error committed was in detaining my artillery and other troops, which were in a state of readiness for moving, two days from the City of Washington, until the body of the militia could be furnished with the necessary equipments to take the field. You will recollect the nights of the 22d and 23d. My detachment

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\* It is personally known to the author that rifles were refused to this corps, which caused great excitement and indignation at the time.

was kept under order to move toward Nottingham. The order to march was given about sunrise on the morning of the 22d. Having halted for a few moments in advance of the "Wood Yard," to enable the troops to get water to drink, Captain Edward G. Williams, of the cavalry, approached in great haste, and said he "had been detached for the purpose of procuring axes to fell trees across the road to obstruct the advance of the enemy." In a moment my troops were in marching order. I proceeded but a short distance, when I met Colonel Tilghman or your brother, Lieutenant-colonel Otho H. Williams, commanding some two hundred cavalry, retiring to get on the road which led to Ranter's taver, General Winder being under the impression that the enemy contemplated an attack upon Fort Washington. This was the great error committed by General Winder on that day. I was also advised to fall back, but as my instructions were to advance until I met General Winder or the enemy, I continued on my course.

A short time afterward I met Lieutenant-colonel Wm. Scott at the head of the regular troops, also retiring. I told him what my orders were, and that I should continue to advance. He very promptly said he "was a young officer of but little experience, and would most cheerfully co-operate in any movements that I made. I continued to advance until I came in sight of Oden's house, where I found the enemy posted. There I made a disposition to meet the enemy: Stull and Davidson upon the right, my six pieces of artillery in the centre, guns loaded, matches lighted, and Scott, with the regulars, upon the left. I had occupied this position but a short time, when General Winder arrived, complimented me for the position I occupied, but considered we were not in sufficient force to meet the enemy, and advised that we should fall back and occupy a new position. We did so, General Winder accompanying us. We had hardly taken possession of the new position, when we heard the reports of the explosion of Barney's flotilla. If General Winder, instead of detaching the cavalry, had employed this regiment under Colonel Tilghman, the regiment of

infantry under Colonel Scott, my six pieces of artillery, and the two light companies of Stull and Davidson, and had marched and attacked their rear, I do not believe the enemy ever would have reached Washington. But the general had taken up the impression that the enemy first contemplated the capture of Fort Washington, to enable their fleet to pass up the Potomac, and the capture of Washington was contemplated by the joint operations of the fleet and army. This I looked upon as the great error of the campaign; for the troops composing the army of General Winder were better calculated to meet the enemy by detachments than in any general engagements, the most of them being militia, concentrated on the spur of the occasion, with little or no military experience. I was ordered to fall back and join the concentration of the army at "Long Old Fields." In returning, I saw where General Smith, in advance of the "Wood Yard," had occupied a position, calculating upon the advance of the enemy by that route. On my arrival at "Long Old Fields," in addition to Smith's brigade, I found the flotilla-men under Commodore Barney, with a battery of two eighteen-pounders, and the marines under the command of their gallant leader, Captain (late Colonel) Miller. You will recollect, during the nights of the 22d and 23d, the constant alarms by guns being fired by the sentinels during the night, always the result of an army composed principally of raw militia. During the morning of the 23d Mr. Madison and his cabinet arrived in camp. About 8 or 9 o'clock I was sent for by General Winder. The President and cabinet were with him, when he informed me that there were such various accounts of the position and movements of the enemy that it was impossible for him to decide how to act; that he wished I would take the detachment under my command, and proceed on the route to Marlborough until I could ascertain correctly the situation of the British army. Having advanced within a short distance of Marlborough, in the neighborhood of Magruder's house, I discovered the advanced picket guard of the enemy, and ascertained from Mr. Magruder or Mr. Tyler, who occupied the house, that some of the British officers had been with him a few moments before, and had informed him

that about the middle of the day they should take up their line of march for the City of Washington. I had forgotten to mention that, in addition to my own detachment, consisting of Stull and Davidson's corps, Captain Caldwell, commanding about a dozen of the city cavalry, accompanied me. I had advanced Lieutenant Wiley, of Stull's company, with a small detachment, to advise of the approach of the enemy. Occupying the high hill above Magruder's house, from whence I could overlook much of the country toward Marlborough, I made the following disposition. Davidson's company on the right, my battery of six pieces occupying the road, and Stull's company occupying the face of the hill on the left. I remained but a short time, when Lear and Wiley, with their detachments, returned, informing me that the enemy had taken up their line of march, and were entering the road I occupied. I took my position on the road with my artillery. At that moment Captain Luffborough, who commanded a company of "Orangemen" raised upon the spur of the occasion, arrived with a message from General Winder, saying "my artillery was too important an arm of his army; that he wished me to send it to the rear; and that, if an opportunity offered, I might feel the enemy with Stull's and Davidson's companies." I had hardly ordered the artillery to retire, when the British officers, General Ross being one of them, appeared upon the summit of the hill I had left. I ordered Captain Stull to give those red-coat gentlemen a shot, intending only a platoon to have fired, when the whole company leveled and fired,\* the officers retiring on the slope of the hill on the other side. At this moment the advance of the British commenced firing upon Stull's company. The company reloaded and fired, and fell back a short distance, when they advanced a second time in good order, fired another volley, and retired. By this time the enemy was advancing in large numbers. I immediately sent orders for two pieces of artillery to halt, and to form on a commanding

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\* Had this company been armed with rifles, those officers must have fallen, and with it the defeat of their project.

piece of ground in the rear. I gave orders to Captain Davidson to occupy a brush fence upon my left, but which order was misunderstood, and he continued to retire in good order. I was detained upon the ground a few moments to secure the safety of Stull's orderly sergeant (Nicholls), who was sun-struck, and with difficulty was saved from capture. I immediately joined the artillery, and by firing two or three discharges I caused the main body of the British army to halt, while they sent out large flanking parties to the right and to the left. Colonel Laval, of the regulars, with two troops of cavalry, joined me. I proposed to him to protect my flanks, while I could keep the enemy at arm's length with my artillery, for I found they were deficient in that arm. He excused himself by saying his horses were not trained, and that he could do nothing to assist me. I had been promised by General Winder that, in case of meeting with the enemy, I should be re-enforced; that he would order on the troops from Bladensburg, under the command of General Stansbury, to the scene of action. General Winder's correspondence with General Stansbury will account for the non-arrival of the troops under his command. Why General Winder did not order General Smith's brigade, with the marines and flotilla-men, I can not account. I retired to the camp after a fatiguing day's march, and found the troops there drawn up to receive the enemy.

General Ross, who had occupied Centreville, sent back to Marlborough during the night, and dragged up, with his sailors, some two or three pieces of light artillery, the only guns he brought with him to Bladensburg. Another error that my friend, General Winder, committed, was his forced march from "Long Old Fields" to Washington, for nothing was to be apprehended on the part of the British attempting an attack on the city by the only bridge that then crossed the Eastern Branch. His true course would have been to have broken up his army in detachments, and to have attacked the enemy in front and on both flanks; his superior command in cavalry, in artillery, and the grounds between Bladensburg and Centreville affording the opportunity for

the operation of those two important arms of his army. Smith's brigade, and the troops attached to that brigade, crossed the Eastern Branch Bridge during the night of the 23d. Being much exhausted and fatigued, I had lain down in my tent, when General Winder called upon me, and laid also upon my pallet. The conversation ensued, in which he referred to the failure of Stansbury to join me, and the inefficiency of the troops that he had to command. I was so exhausted with the fatigues of the day that I fell asleep. When I awoke the general was gone. The next morning I received an order to cover the approach of the bridge with twelve pieces of artillery, comprising my own six and Captain Burch's artillery. Having completed the order, I waited upon General Winder to tell him of the impossibility of any attempt on the part of the enemy to cross the bridge; that no military man would attempt to cross such a stream with an army, having no artillery to drive us from the occupation of the bridge. In a few moments a messenger arrived, announcing that the enemy were on the march to Bladensburg. I was ordered immediately to advance with the same detachment, and that the main body would follow immediately after. On my arrival on the ground which we occupied during the battle, a position was shown me by F. S. Key (acting aid to General Smith), difficult of access, being isolated by numerous and large ravines on one side and a stream on the other, as one of three positions I might occupy with my artillery. This being no position for light artillery, such as I commanded---for, if once placed there, it could not in any way be manoeuvred so as to be of any service---I selected a commanding spot on the left of Barney as the second best situation for artillery to command the road, which was reserved for Barney's heavier pieces, having posted Stull and Davidson at the head of a wooded ravine on my left.

The position of the various troops, perhaps, is better known to you than to me, arising from the duties pertaining to you as brigade-major. But, from my recollection (and you can

correct any errors), Colonel Cramer's detachment was on the extreme right, between the marines and Eastern Branch; Barney's artillery and Miller's marines occupied the ground from the road to the woods where Cramer was posted; Colonels Hood and Beall were upon the hill in the rear of Barney and Miller; Colonel Magruder's regiment was placed in support of the left flank of Barney's battery; Colonel Scott, with the regulars, Colonel Brent, with the 2d regiment of General Smith's brigade, and Major Warren, with a battalion of Maryland militia, in the rear of my guns; Stull and Davidson at the head of the ravine, on the extreme left.

The firing very soon commenced, after the troops had taken their positions, with Stansbury's brigade, which formed an advanced and separate division of the forces under General Winder, where had been concentrated the commander-in-chief and the several heads of departments. The action with this line continued but a short time, when I saw three or four detachments of the Baltimore volunteers maintaining, with great odds, a conflict with the enemy. They very soon had to yield, and from one of the wounded men who joined me, who said he belonged to Captain Warfield's company, I learned that it was Sterett's and Warfield's companies, with a detachment of riflemen, and perhaps others. By this time the enemy, in great force, had thrown themselves behind a large frame barn, which stood between them and the position occupied by my battery. I ordered six pieces of artillery, with round shot, to open upon the barn, which drove them from that position. They then marched toward the bridge that crossed a small branch on the road, when, coming within reach of Barney's position, his heavy guns (eighteen-pounders) opened most fatally upon the advancing column of the enemy, my guns keeping up a cross-fire at the same instant, which forced them to retire down the branch toward the woods, when they came in contact with Colonel Cramer's detachment, and, having driven him from the woods, they again occupied the plain

in front of Miller and Barney, where they met with the most formidable resistance they encountered during the day. I thought then, and am still of the same opinion, that if General Smith had ordered to the right, at that moment, a part of my battery, and the regulars under Colonel Scott, the advance of the enemy would have been repulsed. The great loss of the enemy in this conflict was sustained principally from Barney's and Miller's front-fire and the cross-fire of my artillery. There was a sufficient number of troops in the rear of my guns, if brought into relief of Barney and Miller, to have repulsed the enemy, killed and crippled as they were at that moment.

I visited the wounded British officers after my return to Washington. Colonel Thornton, who commanded the British advance, spoke of its being the heaviest fire from artillery that he had ever experienced. Colonels Thornton and Wood, and Major Browne, all of the 85th, being wounded in the action, were left behind, along with others, after the retreat of the British army. The latter informed me that he was detached to capture my artillery, but, on finding the head of the ravine guarded, he advised his men to lie down until he could be re-enforced. Immediately after, he received a severe wound from a canister-shot, and had no recollection of anything afterward.

Having retired from the field by orders received through you, after passing the turnpike gate, I was ordered to form the artillery; and Smith's brigade, Hood's and Beall's regiments, with many other troops, again presented a very respectable appearance. I omitted to mention that I brought from the field four of Barney's wounded men and one of the Baltimore volunteers on my guns. From this last position we were ordered to move to the Capitol. At the north gate, my artillery in advance, General Winder was in conversation with me, when Colonel Monroe and General Armstrong rode up. The latter inquired of General Winder "what he intended to do." General Winder very promptly replied "that the Baltimore troops had gone off in a different direction from Washington;

that Barney's guns were captured; and that he was not in a situation to meet the enemy, and that he should retire to the heights above Georgetown." Monroe and Armstrong both bowed and wheeled their horses, and the troops continued their line of march to the neighborhood of Tenleytown. I refer to the conversation there given, having been present, and retaining a distinct recollection of what was said on that occasion. General Armstrong, in his Memoirs relating to the War of 1812, says he advised General Winder to occupy the Capitol, with Barney's and Peter's artillery; Colonel Monroe concurred with General Winder in the retrograde movement. In justice to Winder and Monroe, I do not hesitate to say that no such recommendation from General Armstrong took place on that occasion. In justice to General Armstrong, I would say that every thing I required to render my corps efficient was furnished with cheerfulness and promptness; and from the commencement of the time he became Secretary of War to the close of the campaign at Bladensburg, he and Mr. Madison had shown great anxiety to organize the volunteers of the District of Columbia, including artillery, cavalry, infantry, and riflemen under my command, and had actually, at one time, made out the commissions. You know that my position in advance prevented me from knowing what arrangements and other matters relating to its movements were going on with the army. I can only speak of things that came within my own knowledge. There are many things and occurrences which are too voluminous for a letter communication. If your object is to write a history of that campaign, let me entreat of you to do justice to all, and those that are entitled to merit for honest and faithful services rendered upon that occasion to receive it. From your letter I fear you contemplate censure toward those troops under the command of Stansbury. I had but little opportunity of judging of their actions, and therefore can not speak advisedly upon the subject. I know that the whole cavalry force of the army, comprising five or six hundred men, well mounted, was with that wing of the army, and that they were never brought into action. The position selected to fight a battle was a most unfortunate

one for the American army; a good situation for skirmishing, and for detachments to have engaged in. But the strong arm of General Winder's army was artillery and cavalry, both of which the enemy was deficient in, and an open plain, of all others, ought to have been selected to have met the enemy, when artillery and cavalry could have been usefully employed.

I am laboring at this time under a painful indisposition, and have gone much farther into detail than I intended. Such statements as have come within your knowledge, and you know to be correct, you can adopt; any thing you believe I have stated to be erroneous, reject. I believe that great injustice was done both to Winder and Armstrong. That both were anxious for the success of our arms, I have no doubt, and that the great errors committed were owing to, perhaps, the conflicting views of the heads of departments and the commander-in-chief.

I do not pretend to speak of the operations of Stansbury's brigade, as but a part of it was in view from the position I occupied; and although the most of those appeared to make no resistance, still there were several companies or detachments that maintained their ground most gallantly, until compelled to retreat by superior force. This occurred before I commenced the action, on the right wing. Nor do I pretend to speak of other troops that were engaged, such as Magruder, Beall, and Hood's regiments, as my own engagements were of such a nature as to preclude my seeing any of the operations except those of Barney and Miller, and the action of my own guns being all occupied at the same time upon the principal body of the opposing troops. Again I must repeat that I have never been able to account for General Smith's not bringing into action the regular troops under Colonel Scott. Nor have I referred to the Vandal course pursued by the enemy: the destruction of the Capitol, President's house and public buildings, some few private buildings, and the destruction of Gales and Seaton's press and type, while they spared the

press and type of others within the city. They had a right to destroy the navy-yard and ships of war, the small fort and laboratory at Greenleaf's Point, cannon, and every thing of a naval and military character, and yet they failed to destroy almost the only foundry (Foxall's) at that time engaged in the manufacture of cannon for the army and navy. Another great error committed by my friend, General Winder, was the removal of the troops in the rear of Georgetown, instead of occupying the situation directly north of the city, from whence he would have been enabled to have acted offensively against the enemy; they, being without cavalry, could not have made any sudden inroad upon his army without being advised of it. Indeed, the organization and equipment of the enemy, totally without cavalry, and but two or three pieces of artillery, rendered their situation alarmingly precarious after they commenced their retreat from the City of Washington, provided the United States cavalry and other troops have been sufficiently near to have commenced operations against them.

I have already said so much, I must decline saying any thing more.

Very respectfully yours,

GEORGE PETER.

Colonel George Miron's Statement

## No. IV.

## COLONEL GEORGE MINOR'S STATEMENT

In answer to the several interrogatories made by Colonel R.M. Johnson, chairman of the committee of inquiry into the causes of the destruction of the public buildings in the City of Washington, as hereunto annexed, state as follows, viz.:

On Friday, the 19th of August last, was informed (not officially) of the collecting of the enemy's forces in our waters, namely, the Potomac and Patuxent. Immediately issued orders for the regiment under my command to assemble at Wren's tavern on the Tuesday following, it being the nearest point of the county of Fairfax to the city; and on Sunday, the 21st, received orders, through Brigadier-general Douglas, to repair with a detachment of ninety men, that had been previously placed in detail, to march at a moment's warning, to the aid of General Hungerford, whose head-quarters were in the counties of Westmoreland, King George, or Northumberland; and to make one othe requisition of one hundred and forty men, exclusive of officers, and order them to the aid of General Winder, City of Washington. And on Monday evening, the 22d, received a verbal message from the President, by Mr. John Graham, to hasten on the troops which had been ordered from my regiment, which will more fully appear by said Graham's letter to General Winder, to which I beg leave to refer the committee; and, after informing Mr. Graham the purport of the orders I had received, we both concluded it would be proper for him to return to Washington, and have the orders first alluded to countermanded, so as to justify me in marching with my whole force to the city, which consisted, as well as I can recollect, of six hundred infantry and about one hundred cavalry; and the said Graham returned to Wren's tavern on Tuesday evening, the 23d, with General Winder's orders, written on the same letter to which I have referred the committee, on the receipt of which I took up my line of march immediately, and arrived at the Capitol between sunset and dark,

and immediately made my way to the President and reported my arrival, when he referred me to General Armstrong, to whom I repaired, and informed him as to the strength of the troops, as well as to the want of arms, ammunition, etc., which made it as late as early candle-light, when I was informed by that gentleman the arms, etc., could not be had that night, and directed me to report myself next morning to Colonel Carberry, who would furnish me with arms, etc., which gentleman, from early next morning, I diligently sought for, until a late hour of the forenoon, without being able to find him, and then went in search of General Winder, whom I found near the Eastern Branch, when he gave an order to the armorer for the munitions wanting, with orders to return to the Capitol, there to await further orders.

On my arrival at the armory, found that department in the care of a very young man, who dealt out the stores cautiously, which went greatly to consume time; as, for instance, when flints were once counted by my officers, who showed every disposition to expedite the furnishing the men, the young man had to count them over again before they could be obtained; and at which place I met with Colonel Carberry, who introduced himself to me, and apologized for not being found when I was in search of him, stating he had left town the evening before, and had gone to his seat in the country. After getting the men equipped, I ordered them on to the Capitol, and waited myself to sign the receipts for the munitions furnished; and, on my arrival, was informed by Major Hunter, who commanded in my absence, orders had been given to march to Bladensburg, when we took up our march for that place, and met the retreating army on this side the turnpike gate; and was ordered by one of General Winder's aids to form the line of battle on a height near that place, and was soon after ordered by the general in person to throw back my regiment from that position into sections, and to wait until the retreating army had passed, and cover their retreat; and immediately after sent his aid to direct me to countermarch immediately, and come to the Capitol

After returning there, halted the troops to wait further orders, until General Winder directed me to march them on, without telling me where; of course I marched with the other troops until I came to the Six Buildings, where I took the left-hand road, leading to the foundry, and there occupied the nearest height to that place, and sent the adjutant to find where the general had made his rallying-point, and was informed at Tenleytown, where I marched that evening, and found the troops moving off to encamp at some convenient place on the river road, where I followed on until I saw two barns, where I made to, and rested for the night. Next morning sought for General Winder; met him on the road leading from Tenleytown to where my troops lay, when he ordered me to Montgomery Court House, and from thence to Baltimore.

Given under my hand, City of Washington, 30th of October, 1814.

GEORGE MINOR,  
Colonel-commandant 60th regiment Virginia militia.

General Walter Smith's Statement

## No. III.

## STATEMENT OF GENERAL WALTER SMITH.

Sir,---In compliance with the request contained in your favor of the 28th ult., inclosing a copy of a resolution of the honorable the House of Representatives of the United States, appointing a committee to investigate the causes which led to the success of the enemy in his late enterprise against this city, I have the honor respectfully to submit for the consideration of the committee the following detailed report as connected with the inquiry, and embracing, as you wish, a view of the numbers, the movements, the conduct, and disposition of the troops of Washington and Georgetown under my command, from the period they were called into service until the 24th of August, the disastrous day of battle at Bladensburg, together with such facts and circumstances relative to the subject as present themselves.

Late at night on the 18th of August, I received orders to call out the whole of the brigade under my command, to rendezvous on the evening of the following day on the banks of the Tiber, in Washington, and to report to General Winder, The troops assembled according to orders, but, being deficient in many essential supplies for actual service, were, after an inspection, dismissed until the ensuing morning, the 20th, when, every exertion on the part of the officers being made to perfect their equipment, they moved off from the Capitol about 3 P.M., crossed the Eastern Branch, and halted four miles therefrom on the road leading to Nottingham. They were here overtaken by the baggage, when it was ascertained there was a great deficiency of necessary camp equipage, the public stores being exhausted; many of the troops were compelled to lie out in the open field; and of the essential article of flints, upon a requisition of one thousand, only two hundred could be had. Means

were immediately adopted to supply the latter defect from private resources; the former was never accomplished. On the following morning, the 21st, the militia companies deficient in numbers were consolidated, and the supernumerary officers detached to bring up delinquents. The force on the ground amounted to about one thousand and seventy, comprised into two regiments, commanded by Colonels Magruder and Brent, and consisting of the following description of troops: two companies of artillery, twelve six-pounders, and two hundred and ten men; two companies of riflemen, nominally, but armed with muskets, the Secretary of War having declined or refused to furnish rifles, one hundred and seventy men; one company of grenadiers, forty men; and five companies of light infantry, about two hundred and fifty men: in all, about six hundred and seventy of volunteers, the residue common militia. Having here done all that could be done for the organization of the troops, and to enable them to move with celerity, they were, according to previous orders from General Winder, put in motion, and after a hot and fatiguing march, encamped that evening after dusk near the Wood Yard. At this place I found the United States 36th regiment, Lieutenant-colonel Scott, about three hundred and fifty strong, and a squadron of cavalry under the command of Lieutenant-colonel Tilghman; the latter soon after moved off to reconnoitre on the different roads between the Wood Yard, Marlborough, and Nottingham. While the troops were occupying the ground, I received a message from General Winder, then at the Wood Yard, requesting an interview at his quarters; after which I returned to camp at 9 o'clock, and again at his request joined him at 12, where Colonel Monroe soon after arrived with the intelligence of the arrival at Nottingham (distant about twelve miles) of the enemy in considerable force, both by land and water. I received orders immediately to return to camp, and hold the troops in readiness to march at the shortest notice, and was instructed by General Winder to direct Lieutenant-colonel Scott, of the 36th United States regiment, to get his men immediately under arms, and to march according to orders previously given him. I reached the camp about 2 o'clock A.M.; the troops

were roused, the tents struck, the baggage-wagons loaded, and the men got immediately under arms, and so remained until sunrise the 22d, when General Winder arrived and directed an advanced corps to be formed and march immediately, to consist of about three hundred men, artillerists and infantry. This was promptly done, and placed under the direction of Major Peter, consisting of his own artillery, Captain Davidson's light infantry, and Captain Stull's rifle corps, armed with muskets. They moved immediately on the road to Nottingham, and were soon after followed by the main body to support them. Major Peter, with the advance corps, moved on for four or five miles, when he fell in with Colonel Laval's cavalry, a part of Colonel Tilghman's, and the 36th United States regiment retiring. The troops were halted, and a position taken to repel the enemy, now rapidly approaching. General Winder here joined our troops, and soon after orders were given to fall back, which was done. The main body had meanwhile arrived at a position within two miles of the advance, where they found the marine corps, under the command of Captain Miller, with five pieces of heavy artillery, judiciously posted.

This position not being deemed favorable for the infantry, they were directed to rest on their arms, while I rode briskly forward to discover one more adapted to them; but none presented, except for light troops, a body of which was thrown in advance into the woods, and the residue of the troops disposed of to act according to circumstances. Here we received advice, about 11 o'clock, of the advance of the enemy and of the retiring of our advance troops, and, immediately after, orders from General Winder to send off the baggage from where it had been left in the morning to the "Long Old Fields," and for the troops to retire slowly upon the same road. About this time successive heavy explosions from the direction of Marlborough announced the destruction of Commodore Barney's flotilla, which was known to be in that vicinity, and also that this course would be adopted should the enemy approach in such force by land or water as to render resistance unavailing. It was hence inferred that the enemy had ascended the

Patuxent in force; that a column of troops had cooperated by taking the road in that direction, which was soon afterward confirmed; and, with the advices subsequently, that the whole of their army had filed off on that road, and taken possession of Marlborough. Our troops halted, and assembled at the fork of the roads on this side of the Wood Yard, one of which leads to Marlborough, the other to this place. We here fell in with Commodore Barney and his sailors, and, after a short rest, the whole moved on, and about 4 P.M. arrived at the Long Old Fields. Here, pursuant to directions from General Winder, I assumed the command of the assembled forces, those of Commodore Barney excepted, consisting now of the following troops, viz.: District volunteers and militia, one thousand seventy; Lieutenant-colonel Scott's 36th United States regiment, three hundred and fifty; Lieutenant-colonel Kramer's battalion of drafted militia, two hundred and forty; and Major Waring's battalion of Prince George's militia, about one hundred and fifty: total, about eighteen hundred men. An encampment was formed for the night, and such positions taken as were best calculated to resist a night attack; the cavalry being already stationed in advance on the different roads leading to Marlborough, with orders to keep patrolling parties constantly upon the enemy's quarters, and to advise of all his movements. The troops, being greatly fatigued, sought in sleep that repose they so much wanted. In this they were disappointed. An alarm gun aroused them about 2 o'clock in the morning of the 23d. They were quickly formed in the front of their encampment, and dispositions made to meet and repel the expected attack; but in a short time it was ascertained to be a false alarm, and the troops were dismissed, but with orders to hold themselves ready for their posts at a moment's warning. At daylight General Winder gave orders to have the tents struck and the baggage-wagons loaded, and that the whole should be ready to move in one hour. Those orders were complied with with all possible expedition. Shortly after the troops were got under arms, and were joined by another small detachment of Prince George's militia, under the command of Major Maynard, about one hundred and fifty. The whole

were held ready to move according to orders. About this time I received directions from General Winder to have formed an advance corps, constructed as the one of the preceding day, and be prepared to move as his subsequent orders should designate. Peter's, Davidson's, and Stull's companies were again selected for this purpose, and formed accordingly. The President of the United States, accompanied by the Secretary of War and others of his cabinet, now came upon the ground, and reviewed the troops. About 10 o'clock General Winder left the camp, accompanied by, and having under his command or direction, several troops of cavalry, intending to reconnoitre on the road leading from Marlborough to Bladensburg, as well as to be situated in a position where he might more conveniently communicate with the troops expected from Baltimore, leaving directions that I should report to him at the Cross Roads, it being the intersection of a road proceeding from the Old Fields, and crossing the before-mentioned road, about five miles distant. His orders were that the advance troops should move forward in the direction of Marlborough, reconnoitre the enemy, approach him as near as possible without running too much risk, and to annoy him either in his position or in his movements by all the means in their power, and that I should remain with the main body at the Old Fields, and act according to the intelligence I should receive of the movements of the enemy. If they moved upon Bladensburg by the road before-mentioned, that I should approach them by the intersecting road from the Old Fields, and attack their left flank, or if upon the road we now occupied, that we should make the best possible dispositions in our power, and receive him there, unless circumstances imperiously forbade; otherwise to retire by a road in our rear to Bladensburg or to Washington, as at the time should seem most advisable. In conformity with this arrangement, Major Peter, with the advance corps and with Captain Caldwell's cavalry, which had joined us, marched about 11 o'clock. About a quarter of a mile in front of our then camp the road forks, both leading to Marlborough, one on the main stage-road, by which the

distance was about eight miles, the other turning to the left, a more direct route, but not so good a road, about six miles. This last-mentioned road was taken by our advancing troops. The commander was instructed to report every hour. The residue of our troops were dismissed to refresh. From this period until 2 o'clock several deserters and prisoners were brought into camp, and I was engaged in examining them when intelligence was received from Major Peter that the enemy had left Marlborough, and were advancing rapidly upon the road which we then occupied in great force; that, according to his estimation of their column, and the best information he could obtain, their force was not less than six thousand men; that he had had a skirmish with them, in which they had endeavored to outflank him, and that he was then retiring before them. A part of Colonel Laval's cavalry, having then joined us, were immediately detached to cover the retreat, and the whole of our troops ordered under arms. Conferring with Commodore Barney on the subject, I proposed making a stand in our then position, with which, with his characteristic gallantry, he promptly acquiesced, professing his willingness to co-operate in any measures that might be deemed most advisable. The troops were immediately formed in order of battle, extending nearly a quarter of a mile on each side of the road; those of Commodore Barney, with his heavy artillery, the marines under Captain Miller, and the 36th United States regiment, being posted on the right of the road; the District troops, and the residue of those attached to them, on the left---our advanced troops, as they arrived, taking their stations in the line, and the artillery, in which it was ascertained we were greatly their superior, and for which the ground was admirably adapted, so posted as to have the best effect; indeed, so strong did we deem our position in front that we were apprehensive that the enemy, upon viewing us, would forbear to assail us by daylight, or that, availing of his numbers, he would endeavor to outflank us. To guard against this last, parties of light troops and cavalry were detached to cover both flanks. We remained thus two or three hours calmly awaiting the approach of the enemy, our vedettes successively announcing his continued

progress. About 5 P.M., General Winder, who had been apprised of the approach of the enemy, arrived in camp. He examined the different positions, and approved of them; but the day being now nearly spent, and it being ascertained that the enemy had not arrived within a distance in which he would now probably be able to make his attack while it lasted, and it being deemed unadvisable to receive a night attack there, when our advantage of artillery would be unavailing, he gave the orders to retire about sunset, and the whole of the troops, much wearied and exhausted, encamped late in the night within this city.

Thus terminated the four days of service of the troops of this District preceding the affair at Bladensburg. They had been under arms, with but little intermission, the whole of the time, both night and day; had traversed, during their different marches in advance and retreat, a considerable tract of country, exposed to the burning heat of a sultry sun by day, and many of them to the cold dews of the night, uncovered. They had, in this period, drawn but two rations, the requisition therefor, in the first instance, having been but partially complied with, and it being afterward almost impossible to procure the means of transportation, the wagons employed by our quartermaster for that purpose being constantly impounded by the government agents for the purpose of removing the public records when the enemy's approach was known, and some of them thus seized while proceeding to take in provisions for the army.

Those hardships and privations could not be but severely distressing to men, the greater part of whom possessed and enjoyed at home the means of comfortable living, and from their usual habits and pursuits in life but ill qualified to endure them. They, however, submitted without murmuring, evincing by their patience, their zeal, and the promptitude with which they obeyed every order, a magnanimity highly honorable to their character. Great as was their merit in this respect, it was no less so in the spirit

manifested whenever an order was given to march to meet the foe; and at the "Long Old Fields," where his attack was momentarily expected in overwhelming force, they displayed, in presence of many spectators, although scarcely any of them had ever been in action, a firmness, a resolution, and an intrepidity which, whatever might have been the result, did honor to their country.

On Wednesday morning, the 24th of August, at 11 A.M., I received orders from General Winder to detach one piece of artillery and one company of infantry to repair to the Eastern Branch Bridge, and there report to Colonel Wadsworth; and to proceed with the residue of the troops to Bladensburg, and take a position to support General Stansbury. This order was put in immediate execution, and the troops for Bladensburg moved off with all the expedition of which they were capable. Having put them in motion, I passed on ahead, in order that I might select my position against their arrival. I found General Stansbury posted on the west side of the Eastern Branch, his right resting on the main road, distant from the bridge at Bladensburg five or six hundred yards, and extending northeastwardly, his left approaching nearer to the creek. An extensive apple-orchard was in his front, and, one hundred to two hundred yards in advance, a work thrown up, commanding the bridge, occupied by a corps of artillerists with five or six pieces, and appeared to be supported by some rifle and light companies. In his rear, on the right, was a thick undergrowth of wood, and directly behind that a deep hollow or ravine, open or cleared, of about sixty yards in width, which the main road crosses. The ravine terminates on the left in a bold acclivity, about two hundred yards from the road; the rest of the ground in his rear was open, unbroken, and gradually ascending fields. Having hastily examined the grounds, and concluded on the dispositions I should make, I apprised General Stansbury of my views as to the troops under my command, suggesting that, if his line should be forced and he could again form on my left, the nature of the ground there would be favorable for a renewal of the action, which might then become general. By this time we re-

ceived advice that the enemy were near Bladensburg, and I left him to hasten the arrival of my troops. They moved rapidly on, notwithstanding the excessive heat of the day, covered with clouds of dust, and were promptly disposed of as follows: Lieutenant-colonel Scott, with the 36th U.S. regiment, was posted in a field on the left of the road, his right resting upon it, and commanding the road descending into the ravine before mentioned, in the rear of General Stansbury's right, and the rest of his line commanding the ascent from the ravine. This position was about one hundred and fifty yards in the rear of the front line, but extending to the right. In the same field, about one hundred yards in the rear of the 1st regiment of District militia, his right also resting upon the road, the left advanced, presenting a front obliquely to the road, and situated to cover and co-operate with the 36th regiment; Major Peter, with his artillery, six six-pounders; Captain Davidson's light infantry, and Captain Stull's rifle corps, armed with muskets, all of the same regiment, were ordered to take possession of the abrupt acclivity before mentioned, terminating the ravine. This was deemed a desirable position, because it commanded completely the ravine and the road crossing it, and a considerable extent of the ground over which the front line would necessarily retire if forced back; but, after a short space of time, report was made to me that broken grounds interrupted the approach to it with artillery but by a circuitous route that would consume much time, and that, in case of retreat, the ground in the rear was such as might endanger the safety of the guns. It was mentioned, at the same time, that near to it was a commanding position for artillery, and easy of access from and to the road. I yielded with reluctance to the abandonment of the position first ordered, but time did not admit of hesitation. Meanwhile I had posted Lieutenant-colonel Kramer, with his battalion of Maryland drafted militia, in the woods on the right of the road, and commanding the ravine which continued in that direction, with orders that, if forced, he should retire, by his right, through a body of woods in that direction, and rally and form with the troops stationed in the rear, on the extreme

right. Upon examining the position taken by Major Peter's battery, it was found that the range of his guns was principally through that part of the field occupied by the 36th regiment. To remove one or the other became necessary, and the difficulty of the ground for moving artillery, and the exigency of the movement, left no alternative. The 36th fell back about one hundred yards, losing, in some measure, the advantage of its elevated ground, and leaving the road. The position of the 1st regiment District militia, from this circumstance, was also necessarily changed. It fell back about the same distance, its right still resting on the road, and now formed nearly in line with the 36th. Of the 2d regiment District militia, two pieces of artillery and one company of riflemen, armed with muskets, were, by directions of General Winder, sent on to the front; with these he flanked the extreme left of the front line; two pieces more of artillery were posted in the road near the bridge at Bladensburg; the residue of that regiment, about three hundred and fifty strong, under the command of Colonel Brent, was formed as a reserve a short distance in the rear of Major Peter's battery, and so disposed as to act on the right, or left, or in front, as occasion might require. Near them was posted, in the same manner, Major Waring's Prince George's battalion of militia, about one hundred and fifty. Colonel William D. Beall, with a regiment of troops from Annapolis, passed through Bladensburg as our troops arrived, and took a position on the right of the road and nearly fronting it, at a distance of about two hundred and fifty yards. Previous to the arrival of the troops on the ground, General Winder came up from the city, and, being made acquainted with the intended dispositions of the troops, as well as the ground reserved for Commodore Barney and the marines, approved of and confirmed them.

About half past twelve o'clock, and while the troops were yet taking their different positions, innumerable rockets, thrown from the heights at Bladensburg, announced the arrival of the enemy

there; and at this period Commodore Barney's sailors and marines, in quick march, arrived, and took possession of the ground previously assigned them, his artillery being posted in and near the road upon its right, commanding the road and open field in front; and his infantry, together with the marines under Captain Miller, extending to the right, thus occupying the interval of ground between Colonel Magruder's 1st regiment District militia and Colonel Beall's Maryland regiment. The firing of artillery in front soon commenced, and immediately after that of musketry, in quick and rapid succession. In a few minutes the whole right and centre of the front line, with some small exceptions, were seen retiring in disorder and confusion. The firing still continued on the extreme left, but shortly after it also broke, and, although it retired in more order, yet none could be rallied so as to renew the action with effect, and also soon entirely quitted the field.

Meanwhile the left of the enemy, in heavy column, passed along the road crossing the ravine. They were here encountered by the troops of Colonel Kramer, posted in the woods on the edge of the ravine. These, after a short conflict, were compelled to retire, which they did principally under cover of the adjacent woods, and formed with the troops of Colonel Beall on the right. The enemy's column now displayed in the field on the right of the road. They here became exposed to the oblique fire of Major Peter's battery, which was kept up with great animation. Still pressing on to the front of our right, they came in contact with the heavy artillery of Commodore Barney, and of the troops posted there. Here the firing became tremendous. They were repulsed, again returned to the charge, succeeded in forcing the troops on the right, and finally carried the position of Commodore Barney.

The dispersion of the front line caused a dangerous opening on our left, of which the enemy in that quarter promptly availed. He advanced rapidly; then, wheeling on his left, soon gained, and was turning our left flank. To oppose this alarming movement, I directed Colonel Brent, with the 2d regiment of District militia,

to take a position still more to the left; and he was proceeding in the execution of this order, when orders came from General Winder for the whole of the troops to retreat. The efforts of the enemy had hitherto been directed principally against the right and left of our whole line of battle. The troops of this District, and a part of those attached to them, occupying positions mostly in the centre, and some of them difficult of access, were consequently but partially engaged, and this principally with light troops and skirmishers, now pressing forward, supported by a column of infantry.

I here beg leave to refer to the reports of Colonels Brent and Thompson, Nos. 1 and 2, showing the positions, and the part taken by their respective commands during the action.

The order to retreat was executed by regiments and corps, as they had been formed, and with as much order as the nature of the ground would permit. The first and second regiments halted and formed, after retreating five or six hundred paces, but were again ordered by General Winder to retire. At this moment I fell in with General Winder, and, after a short conference with him, was directed to move on and collect the troops, and prepare to make a stand on the heights westward of the turnpike gate. This was done as fast as the troops came up. A front was again presented toward the enemy, consisting principally of the troops of this District, a part of those who had been attached to them in the action, and a Virginia regiment of about four hundred men, under Colonel Minor, which met us at this place. While the line was yet forming, I received orders from General Winder to fall back to the Capitol, and there form for battle. I took the liberty of suggesting my impression of the preferable situation we then occupied; but, expecting that he might be joined there by some of the dispersed troops of the front line, he chose to make the stand there. Approaching the Capitol, I halted the troops, and requested his orders as to the formation of the line. We found no auxiliaries

there. He then conferred for a few moments with General Armstrong, who was a short distance from us, and then gave orders that the whole should retreat through Washington and Georgetown. It is impossible to do justice to the anguish evinced by the troops of Washington and Georgetown on the receiving of this order. The idea of leaving their families, their houses, and their homes at the mercy of an enraged enemy was insupportable. To preserve that order which was maintained during the retreat was now no longer practicable. As they retired through Washington and Georgetown, numbers were obtaining and taking leave to visit their homes, and then again rejoining; and with the ranks thus broken and scattered, they halted at night on the heights near Tenleytown, and on the ensuing day assembled at Montgomery Court House.

I have thus, sir, given a detailed, and what will, I apprehend, in many respects, be deemed too minute an account of the short tour of service of the District troops under my command which preceded the capture of this capital. I fear its length may trespass too much on the patience of your honorable committee. I thought it, however, due to the occasion, and conformable to the spirit and purport of your inquiries. I had another object. The troops of Washington and Georgetown have been assailed, in the public prints and elsewhere, with calumnies as unmerited as they are cruel and wanton. They have heard of them with indignant astonishment. Conscious that in no instance have they been wanting in the duty they owed to their country or to themselves, but, on the contrary, in obedience to the call of their government, have with alacrity obeyed its orders, and intrepidly fronted an enemy vastly their superior in force, and never yielded the ground to him but by orders emanating from superior authority, they can not restrain the feelings excited by such manifest, such unprovoked injustice. They have seen with satisfaction the resolution of Congress to inquire into this subject, and, persuaded of the justice and impartiality of your honorable committee, entertain a confident assurance that the result of your investi-

gation will afford relief to their injured feelings. Connected with this subject, I beg leave to refer to a letter of General Winder, No. 3, in answer to an inquiry made of him as to the general conduct of the brigade while under his command.

I have the honor to be, etc.,

W. SMITH,

Brigadier-general 1st Columbian brigade.

Hon. R. M. Johnson.

P.S.---I ought to have mentioned that parts of two companies of the United States 12th and 38th regiments were attached to the 36th regiment, under Lieutenant-colonel Scott. Previous to the march to Bladensburg, eighty men of his command had been stationed near the Eastern Branch Bridge, and did not join until after the action. His force then was less than three hundred men.

W.S.

General Stansbury's Statement

No. II.

## REPORT OF GENERAL STANSBURY.

Baltimore, November 15, 1814.

By general orders from the War Department of the 20th of April, 1814, Major-general Smith was directed to draft from his division, and hold in readiness to march at a moment's warning, two thousand men, officers included.

By Major-general Smith's division orders of the 29th of April, I was directed to furnish by draft from my brigade, as its quota, one thousand of this requisition, and hold them in readiness to march, at a moment's warning, to Baltimore for its defence. The 1st of May those orders were complied with, agreeably to a detail accompanying said orders.

On the 15th of July Major-general Smith issued division orders requiring the quota from my brigade, the 11th, and that from the 2d and 9th, to march and rendezvous at Baltimore. My orders were issued on the 19th; the troops began to assemble on the 24th, and were encamped about one and a half miles northward of the city, at a place called Camp Fairfield.

On the 21st of July, by Major-general Smith, I was directed to take charge of this brigade, and commenced preparing for their reception. Early in August, General Winder, being vested with the command of the 10th Military District, superseded General Smith in the command.