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Military Affairs.

GENERAL WILKINSON'S APPEAL.

Washington, July, 28th, 1814.

Messrs. GALES AND SEATON,

Gentlemen—I have read in your Gazette of the 10th of April, an Editorial paragraph attached to my Report of the affair at La Cole Mill, made on the 31st of March to the Hon. John Armstrong, Secretary of War; which was obviously designed to implicate my veracity, to tarnish my honor, to excite popular odium against me, and prepare the public mind for the favorable reception of the denunciations which were soon to follow.

The offensive paragraph alluded to, to which I have just cause of exception, clothed as it was in an almost official garb, is couched in the following language:

"We are authorized to state that General Wilkinson's late movement, was not pursuant to the views of the War Department; those views, (or orders) advised him to seize and hold a given position on Lake Champlain, and admonished him against an incursion into Canada."

The peculiarity of my situation, and my repugnance to obtrude my personal concerns on the public attention, added to my continued ill health, have induced me hitherto to treat this aspersion with silence; and now, when the prospect of an opportunity to vindicate my character and conduct is very distant, I yield to the solicitations of many respectable friends, and address this note to you for publication, together with the papers which accompany it. These documents numbered from 1 to 10, will, I trust, explain satisfactorily the following points, viz.

1st. What were the views of the "War Department," or more properly the Secretary of War, in relation to my movement into Lower Canada on the 30th of March last.

2d. Whether the views or orders of the "War Department," or Secretary of War, "advised me to seize and hold a given position on Lake Champlain," or

3d. Whether the "War Department," or Secretary of War, "admonished me against an incursion into Canada."

The same documents will also expose the motives which induced me to enter Lower Canada at the time I did, and on those motives I shall be content to rest my military reputation, so far as it can be affected by that operation; independent of sanction or shelter from the War Department, which it was not my intention to seek, by my letter of the 31st of March, as may, I conceive, be fairly inferred from my letter of the 5th of April, which, I understand has not been published, although it contained a return of killed and wounded.

Respectfully, I am, Gentlemen, your obedient servant,

J. WILKINSON.

Extract of a letter from Maj. General Wilkinson to the Secretary of War, dated

Head-Quarters, Malone, Military District,

No. 9, 29th November, 1813.

"By a confidential intelligence from Cornwall, I am authorized to inform you that the enemy is making forced marches for Kingston with about 2500 regular troops, including those who descended the river after me; the coast opposite to me is confided to the defence of the militia. I shall advise the commanding officer at Sackett's Harbor, Commodore Chauncey and General Harrison of these movements of the enemy."

A true copy,

CHARLES J. NOURSE,

Aid de Camp.

War Department, January 1st, 1814.

SIR—Your letter of the 29th November was received yesterday. The detachment you mentioned may be destined, in conjunction with the garrison of Kingston, to an attack on Sackett's Harbor; or it may be that portion of the garrison of Kingston and Prescott, which followed you returning to their posts for the winter; or it may be a corps destined to the west, either (by itself) to re-establish the British force on the Thames, or to replace corps at Kingston and York, which they have already moved with a view to that object. * If it be a positive abstraction from Prevost's force at Montreal, that place must be very badly defended, and the fact well ascertained, you may profit by it. Some activity on our part is the surest method of keeping down their enterprises. Inform yourself well as to the Isle aux Noix, and of the time and manner of best approaching it.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your most obedient servant,

J. ARMSTRONG.

Major General Wilkinson.

A true copy.

CHARLES J. NOURSE, A. D. C.

Extract of a letter from the Secretary of War, dated 31st January, 1814.

"The objections which now occur to yourself against the operations suggested in your

* Here the Secretary appears to have squinted a little at "incursions" into Lower Canada.

J. WILKINSON.

letter of the 7th; were anticipated here, as was also the necessity of reinforcing Sackett's Harbor; considerations connected with this last subject produced my order of the 20th inst. which supercedes your measure of calling out militia, and which will not interfere with any well digested project for attacking the enemy's posts at Kingston, Prescott or elsewhere during the winter, or early part of the spring.

1st. The force ordered to the harbor was not from its number calculated to produce a counter movement on the part of the enemy, it being thought barely sufficient to protect that place against his attacks.

2d. If it did produce the effect of a counter movement and carried up an equal or greater force of the enemy, his defenses below were necessarily much weakened.

"In the first case General Brown may avail himself of the ice, and with the aid of Commodore Chauncey carry Kingston by a coup de main. This is Chauncey's opinion.

"In the other case you may inflict blows of much importance below."

A true copy,

CHARLES J. NOURSE,

Aid de camp.

Note.—The allusions of the Secretary in the above letter, to be clearly understood, must be explained. My letter of the 7th Jan. proposed a general attack of the enemy's dispersed cantonments in front of Montreal, between the rivers Saguenay and St. Lawrence, by a combined operation of 4000 men, marching in two columns of equal strength from Plattsburgh and the Four Corners, and by strict concert to form a junction at St. Pierre, and from thence to attack St. Philippe, L'Acadie and St. Johns, and having beaten, routed or captured the detachments at those detached cantonments, to occupy their quarters, in all the country, and reduce the Isle aux Noix or return to our cantonments. Simultaneous with these movements, a column from the Frederic Mills was to cross the St. Lawrence to Cornwall, to beat and disperse the enemy at that place and to fortify and hold it, effectually to cut off the intercourse between the two provinces. The objections to this enterprise, made by the Secretary, arose out of a defect of provisions, occasioned by an improper interference with my requisitions to the contractor. The communication on which the Secretary grounds his remark, but does not explicitly acknowledge, was written the 10th of January, in which I proposed to him, as a substitute to the plan of the 7th of January, to take Prescott by a Coup de Main, which could have been easily effected, as the garrison had been reduced to 200 men; and by this stroke we should have cut off all communication between Montreal and Kingston, and been enabled, with the co-operation of Governor Tompkins, who favored the enterprise, to have reduced Kingston; but the Secretary paid no more attention to my proposition than it is to be seen in his letter of the 31st January. On my part, after a conference with Governor Tompkins, I was so forcibly impressed with the importance of the plan, that I determined to make it without waiting for the Secretary's answer. Orders had been accordingly issued to Gen. Brown and Col. Bissell, and I should have marched in two days; when the Secretary's order of the 29th January came to hand, peremptorily commanding the abandonment of our quarters at the French Mills, and ordering 3000 men to Sackett's Harbor and the residue to Plattsburgh. In this letter the Secretary's "views" to the attack of the posts of the enemy appear manifest, else how was it to "inflict blows of importance below?"

J. WILKINSON.

Extract of a letter from Maj. General Wilkinson to the Secretary of War, dated

Plattsburgh, February 27, 1813.

"I have received satisfactory information that there is about four miles above the Isle aux Noix, on the west bank of the river, a contracted spot of high ground surrounded by swampy low lands, inaccessible to artillery in the vernal and summer seasons, and that from the narrowness of the river at that place, a heavy battery there would effectually command it. The possession and maintenance of that spot would render the British flotilla on the waters of Lake Champlain useless, and it would secure to our army and its attirail, a safe landing within sixteen miles of St. Johns. This would facilitate the early invasion of Canada from this quarter, and would oblige the enemy to weaken every other point, in order to concentrate his force for the protection of Montreal. I am ready to take the position and act defensively, or to make an offensive incursion, and at least break up the enemy's quarters at St. Johns, L'Acadie and Chambree; but I wait orders from my government, which to be effectual must reach me before the ice fails."

A true copy,

CHARLES J. NOURSE,

Aid de Camp.

Extract of a letter from the Secretary of War, to General Wilkinson, dated.

War Department, March 12th, 1814.

"A position which shall have the effect of keeping the enemy out of Lake Champlain, and of approaching us within striking distance of St. Johns, would be desirable and ought to be seized and held. We ought however to be well assured that our batteries would command the strait. Common report, or the opinion of men founded merely on a coup d'œil, are uncertain guides. Has the width of the strait been measured? The last moments of the frost, will furnish the best time for executing the project. Of what material do you propose to make your defenses in the first instance, and how cover your troops? In choosing between this and a mere desultory march, ending where it begins and exposing your troops to peril and hardship, without equivalent or use, there can be no hesitancy."

A true copy,

CHARLES J. NOURSE,

Aid de camp.

Note.—This is an answer direct to my letter of the 27th of February, which is not acknowledged, and certainly indicates, with all its caution, certain "views" of the Secretary.

Extract of a letter from Major General Wilkinson to the Secretary of War, dated

Plattsburgh, March 25th, 1814.

"I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 12th inst. in answer to which would appear to mine of the 27th ultimo, which has not been acknowledged.

"Having received authentic information from

* This is about ten or twelve miles north of the line of national demarcation.

J. WILKINSON.

Judge Richards, the collector of Oswego, and other persons to be relied on, that the enemy continue to reinforce the Upper Province, and as late as the 13th and 17th inst. marched up at least eleven hundred regular troops, in view of Hamilton, on the St. Lawrence. I consider it my indispensable duty to employ all the means in my power to press him in this quarter, and should our comparative strength warrant it, to attack him at St. Johns and put him in fear for Montreal, in order to compel him to withdraw a part of his force from above to give security to Montreal, and cover his posts between the Sorrell and the St. Lawrence. I am the more strongly inclined to this measure as one of solemn obligation, by the information I have received of the movement of Major General Brown to Niagara, and the weak state in which I understand Sackett's Harbor has been left, should the weather favor me, I shall march to-morrow or the next day, with my main body, and shall form a junction near the line with the troops now at Chazy and St. Armands, at which last place Brigadier General Macomb has been on post with Colonel Clark for some days; the morning after I shall drive the enemy from Odie town and La Cole, and from thence shall endeavour to reconnoitre routes and feel his force in my front, by which my posterior movement will be governed.

"It is my intention to seize and hold a position on the Sorrell, effectually to lock up the British squadron at St. Johns, should the ordnance and ammunition required of Major Balfour arrive in season. But pardon me, sir, for observing that this is the only time for executing such a project, the weather being temperate and the ice strong: If we wait until the last moments of the frost, every thing becomes precarious, a sudden thaw may break up the ice, the road may become nearly impassable, and the vessels of the enemy enter the Lake. The position at Whiteman's, three or four miles above the Isle aux Noix, is reported to be the best; that at House's point, I have examined in company with Major Totten, and in addition to his letter on the subject heretofore forwarded, I now send you his plan of that site; my fortifications will be of earth and wood, and the troops employed on this service will be billeted in adjacent houses, or sheltered with boards and kept warm with large fires at their feet.

"With respect to desultory movements, I beg leave to observe, they can be no further useful than to disconcert the plans of the enemy, or effect salutary diversions; on these grounds they are not only justifiable but commendable, and for such objects only should they be made."

A true copy,

CHARLES J. NOURSE,

Aid de camp.

Note.—In this letter the motives and objects of my movement into Canada are avowed, and it will be found that the objects submitted to the Secretary of War, in my letter of the 27th February, had become a secondary consideration with me, a diversion in favor of our post on Lake Ontario, being the first. Under the information I received from Judge Richards and others, that I sat still at Plattsburgh, I could not have justified my conduct to my profession, my country or my conscience.

J. W.

Plattsburgh, 23d March, 1814.

Dear Sir,—I think it my duty to inform you that two detachments of British troops have lately passed up the St. Lawrence River, the first on Sunday the 13th, supposed near 400, and on Wednesday the 16th, the other supposed not less than 700, said to be the longest string of men seen to go up the present season—they passed Hamilton the days above mentioned.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

(Signed) ALEX. RICHARDS.

Major General J. Wilkinson,

Commanding U. S. Troops in District No. 9,

Champlain, 27th March, 1814.

PRIVATE.

Dear General—I send information which may be considered important.

La Cole Mill has lately been reinforced by the 13th Regt. As a proof that there are many men there, all the houses up to Brihan's and down below Whiteman's on the Lake, and up the road which leads to Odietown, 1-2 miles are occupied. The Post at Sgr. Odell's will has been reinforced.

Iste aux Noix. The 40th de Meuron and Voltigeur Regiments arrived on Thursday last, one of those Regiments only, not known which, was counted and consisted of 400 rank and file. One galley has been up to La Cole, two will be rigged and up to-morrow, two new galleys are building, the ice is good yet, along shore even to St. Johns.

St. Johns. Only 300 men.

Chambree. Very few troops, and those incorporated militia Sir George has not yet left Quebec, unless since Thursday.

A Major who was some time at La Cole, (of the marines) has gone against Macomb.

The intentions of the Enemy to attack him were declared and manifest; all the disposable force has been or will be sent against him.

The foregoing was just now communicated by your agent; and he declares, unless it be true, he can never be able to procure intelligence; he reposes perfect trust in the man from whom it was received.

Major Forsyth has given me intelligence, derived from another source, which very nearly confirms what I have written. I shall do myself the honor to see you to-morrow, and communicate other important information, with plans, &c.

I have the honor to be, sir, with great respect,

your obedient servant,

JOSEPH G. TOTTON,

Capt. Engr. Brevet Major.

Major-General Wilkinson,

Commanding U. S. Army.

Extract of a letter from Major Gen. Wilkinson to the Secretary of War, dated

Champlain, 24th March, 1814.

I wrote you on the 31st ult. from Odietown, and have now the honor to transmit a return of our killed and wounded in the affair of the 30th, which we have not been able to ascertain with accuracy sooner. You will perceive the number exceeds my estimate, which was founded on the verbal report of officers commanding corps; but I have the satisfaction of informing you, that the surgeons represent very few of the cases to be dangerous. Neither the real force nor the loss of the enemy can be ascertained, rumours are as usual various—but we have ground for belief, that nearly two companies of the marines were cut off, and three officers killed and wounded. I understand that corps made the last gallant charge on our battery, who were met by about 230 men of the right of Brig. Gen. Bissell, and under his eye repulsed them, after a contest of two or three minutes.

Inclosed you have a memorandum of the enemy's force I expected to meet when I entered Canada, and which, independent of the natives heretofore submitted to you, it was my duty to drive back from their near approach to our settlements. We could not, from the comparative strength of their walls, and the weight of our artillery, force their fortification—and of consequence the garrison escaped, and anterior objects could not be carried into execution, as it blocked up the only practicable road to St. Johns. I trust a fair interpretation will be put on my motives, while my personal and professional conduct, during this little operation, in leading on, in fighting, and bringing off the troops, is open to scrutiny.

But before I dismiss the subject, it is incumbent on me to say, much of our loss was sustained in a rash charge of our advance on the enemy's work, where I have discovered six of our men fell so near to it, they could not be brought off. Nothing can test the courage of men more than a stationary position, under a galling fire, which cannot be returned with any prospect of effect; and to cover our battery, which became the indispensable duty of Brig. Gen. Smith's and Brig. Gen. Bissell's corps, for more than two hours—during which time every man stood firm, and a pallid cheek was not to be discovered from right to left.

I shall hold this point, to cover our frontier; and, from its proximity to the enemy, keep him in check, and prevent his sending more reinforcements to Upper Canada. But I am constrained to make detachments to my rear by causes beyond my control.

1st. A sudden and continued thaw has opened the rivers, rendered the lake impassable, and in a few days must free it of ice.

2d. The enemy's squadron from all the information I could collect, will be ready for operation in a week.

3d. Our squadron, from the best information I possess, will not be equal for service before the next month.

Under these circumstances, had (the enemy) might by a sudden movement up the Lake, with 300 or 1000 men, should our whole force be kept there, put our depots in danger, and make an attempt upon our squadron in dock.

In this situation, I have not hesitated for the course to be pursued. Brig. Gen. Macomb marched on the 3d inst. with a detachment to resume his position at Burlington for its protection, and another detachment marched yesterday to Plattsburgh, for the defence of that place, under Col. Smith. Brig. Gens. Smith and Bissell, with the rifle corps and a party of Dragoons, still occupy this position.

The troops continue healthy and in good spirits, and if I had at my disposal the necessary cannon, I would still form a battery at House's Point to command the Sorrell; but the obstruction of all prompt conveyance, by the unexpected relaxation of the season, has interposed the impediments suggested in my letter from Plattsburgh.

J. WILKINSON.

Minutes of a Council of War, holden at Champlain, April 2d, 1814.

PRESENT Brigadiers General Macomb, Smith and Bissell.

Major General Wilkinson submits to the Council the following remarks:—The rapid and continued thaw has opened the river, and must in a few days, from the opinions of old inhabitants of respectability, break up the Lake. The larger portion of the enemy's flotilla is near House's point, prepared to enter the Lake, and the whole will be ready for operation in a few days; they may anticipate our own flotilla, and in such case, should we hold possession of this point, the enemy, by a rapid water movement with a detachment of eight hundred or one thousand men may reach Plattsburgh and destroy our depot: under these circumstances the Major General requests the opinion of the Council, on the expediency of maintaining this position, or falling back to cover our magazines. It is the opinion of the Council that we should cover our magazines at Plattsburgh.

ALEX. MACOMB, Brig. Gen.

T. A. SMITH, Brig. Gen.

D. BISSELL, Brig. Gen.

Note.—It will be seen from this document that in defending my repeated attacks on Lower Canada, there was of my general officers were with me.

J. WILKINSON.

* MEMORANDUM—Force reported by a confidential agent, and believed to be in the vicinity of La Cole—1st Regt. Royal Marines, 550; 3d Regt. 450; 2d Regt. 400; regt. of Murray, 600; Voltigeurs, 400; Fusiliers, 120; Total 2350.

The Secretary of War transmitted me the following estimate of these corps—1st. 1st. Bat. Royal Marines, 750; 1st. 1st. 400; 2d. 350; regt. of Meuron 700; Voltigeurs, 150; Fusiliers, 500—Total 3350.

+ See Letter of the 25th of March.