

**BUFFALO
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THE CASE OF BRIG. GEN. ALEXANDER SMYTH

AS SHOWN BY HIS OWN WRITINGS, SOME OF
THEM NOW FIRST PUBLISHED

By FRANK H. SEVERANCE

A singular figure in the war operations of 1812 on the Niagara Frontier was Alexander Smyth, a Virginian, who at the outbreak of the war with England was an inspector general in the regular army of the United States. In September, 1812, he was assigned to the command of a brigade of regulars, to operate under Major General Van Rensselaer on the Niagara. Smyth is said to have aspired to the chief command in this quarter; and it was probably pique at being made second in command, and subordinate to a militia officer, that led him to assume from the first an insolent and at times insubordinate attitude towards his chief. If he was proud, he was also often ridiculous; and has been remembered for a century, chiefly because of certain bombastic proclamations which he issued during his short career in Buffalo and vicinity. Historians for a hundred years have written of him only in a vein of amused contempt. Lossing calls him "supercilious, dictatorial, impertinent." Samuel Williams, whose "Sketches of the War," published in 1815, is a trustworthy and temperate chronicle, characterizes Smyth as "indecisive, puerile and cowardly." One looks in vain through all the vast literature of the war of 1812 for any word in refutation of these

charges. The kindest utterance in regard to him that I have found is in the "Memoirs" of Gen. James Wilkinson (himself not beyond criticism, as students know), where one reads of Smyth: "Were I to hazard an opinion, it should be that his designs were patriotic, but that his ardor obscured his judgment, and that he was more indiscreet than culpable."¹

For some years the Buffalo Historical Society has owned a few of General Smyth's letters in the original manuscript. There lately came into its possession his own manuscript draft of his most famous "proclamation" to his soldiers. A resident of Buffalo who owns a long and interesting letter of General Smyth, not known to have been published, has kindly allowed the Historical Society to make use of it. From these and other sources—especially from the *Buffalo Gazette* of 1812—several of General Smyth's letters, and sundry facts regarding his activities in our region, are here brought together. With a desire to do all possible justice to General Smyth, we print his own words, so far as procurable. As for the rest, the reader will find it a not wholly undiverting chapter of events on the Niagara in the momentous year of 1812.

On arriving at Buffalo with his troops, Brigadier General Smyth wrote to Major General Van Rensselaer, whose headquarters were at Lewiston, as follows:

BUFFALO, 29th September, 1812.

SIR: I have been ordered by Major General Dearborn to Niagara, to take command of a brigade of the U. S. troops; and directed, on my arrival in the vicinity of your quarters, to report myself to you, which I now do. I intended to have reported myself personally; but the conclusions I have drawn as to the interests of the service,

1. "Memoirs," I., 581.

have determined me to stop at this place, for the present. From the description I have had of the river below the Falls, the view of the shore below Fort Erie, and the information received as to the preparations of the enemy, I am of opinion that our crossing should be effected between Fort Erie and Chippewa. It has therefore seemed to me proper to encamp the U. S. troops near Buffalo, there to prepare for offensive operations. Your instructions, or better information, may decide you to give me different orders, which I will await.

I have the honor [etc.],

ALEXANDER SMYTH.

Instead of rebuking his subordinate officer for failing to report in person at headquarters, and for offensively putting forward his own views before learning the views of his chief, the too-tolerant but ever-courteous Van Rensselaer replied at length, reminding Smyth that he (Van Rensselaer) had long been familiar with the banks of the Niagara and adjacent territory. "However willing I may be," he wrote, "as a citizen soldier, to surrender my opinion to a professional one, I can only make such surrender to an opinion deliberately formed upon a view of the whole ground." Stating his reasons and plan of campaign with dignity and patience, he adds: "I hope soon to have the pleasure of seeing you here."

What an exhibition of weakness in a commanding officer! Nothing could better illustrate the incapacity which made the campaign of 1812 a costly farce.

Unrebuked, and apparently without having taken the trouble to report in person to his chief, General Smyth wrote a few days later:

CAMP NEAR BUFFALO, Oct. 2, 1812.

SIR: I have had the honor to receive your letter of the 30th Sept., dated at Lewiston. The detachments of Col.

Winder and Col. Parker have arrived. They are recruits without clothing and with little instruction. Neither of them have medicine chests. Col. Winder's detachment is already encamped on an excellent piece of ground for exercise, where Col. Parker's will join it today. Col. Milton's detachment will also arrive today; and within a week I expect the other detachments. I have taken quarters at the place, and propose to devote six hours daily to their instruction, in discipline and evolutions.

The delay of a part until the whole arrive cannot possibly be injurious, and any order I may receive will be obeyed with alacrity.

There has been a mutiny in the 5th, and a general court martial has become necessary. Should you deem it proper to order one to be held at this camp, Col. Parker might preside, and the other members be detached by my Brigade Major.

I have the honour to be
Very Respectfully,

ALEXANDER SMYTH.

This letter shows a more proper spirit than the earlier one; but Smyth's utterances and his conduct are seldom in accord. October 6th, General Van Rensselaer summoned Major General Hall, Brigadier General Smyth, and other officers, to attend a conference; on the 10th we find General Hall writing to the commander-in-chief: "I saw General Smyth yesterday; he could not tell the day when he would attend at Niagara for the consultation." That day Van Rensselaer ordered Smyth to bring his command, "with all possible dispatch," to Lewiston. Smyth did not do so; and after the first attempt at Queenston had failed, he was ordered to remain at Buffalo. Had he hastened to the support of his chief at Lewiston, the result of the attempt of October 13th might have been different.

Smyth always had at easy command a fine-sounding phrase. On October 8th, on the eve of Lieut. Jesse D.

Elliott's capture of the British brigs *Detroit* and *Caledonia*, our brigadier wrote to that gallant officer as follows:

SIR: Mr. Prestman will bring you the aid we can give; he is a gallant young man, and I request he may be allowed to accompany you. The God who protects the brave guard you and give you success.

The day before the battle of Queenston Smyth wrote to Van Rensselaer as follows:

CAMP NEAR BUFFALO, 12th Oct., 1812.

SIR: I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your letter at ten o'clock p. m. The badness of the weather and roads harassed the troops yesterday more than can well be conceived. Tomorrow I expect their clothing, and they will wash; next day they might march, to the number of 1200 effective men,¹ but imperfectly disciplined. It is said the enemy are in considerable force opposite to Black Rock; and as Lt. Cols. Scott and Christie have arrived with you, the time for your attack is favorable—and may you conquer! is my prayer.

I have the honor to be, with great respect,
Your most obedient

ALEX. SMYTH,
Brig. General.

Major Gen. VAN RENSSELAER.

To General Sheaffe, who since the death of Brock had succeeded to the chief command in Upper Canada, Smyth sent the following, from Buffalo:

October 18, 1812.

. . . As I am averse to taking a single life or occasioning a single calamity without an object, I propose a further continuance of the armistice indefinitely, each party to have a right to terminate it, giving thirty hours' notice

1. Smyth had in camp at Buffalo at this time 1,650 regulars, according to a "return of troops" dated Oct. 12th.

to the other party, the armistice to extend along the frontier from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario.

Two days later he wrote to William Eustis, the Secretary of War:

NEAR BUFFALO, October 20, 1812.

SIR: On the 16th inst. General Van Rensselaer by a general order invested me with the command of the troops between the Lakes Erie and Ontario, with power to order general courts martial and exercise the authority of commander of a great military district.

On the 18th instant, I ordered Colonel Winder (an admirable officer) to Fort Niagara; on the 19th I broke up the camp at Lewiston, ordered the militia, such as had not deserted, and excepting the artillery, to Schlosser; the artillery were put under Colonel Winder's command, and would most of them take post on the mountain opposite Queenston. Colonel Parker, with the detachments of the 12th and 20th, will take post on a small creek near Black Rock and collect the boats. Colonel Schuyler, with the detachments of the 5th and 13th, will take a position near him. The volunteers will encamp near Buffalo.

In the small creek I mention, I wish to have one hundred boats that will carry across at once four thousand men, and twenty or thirty scows or flats to take over artillery or cavalry; and if you will increase my force to eight thousand men, with twenty pieces of light or field artillery and some troops of cavalry, I will enter Canada and leave the rest to Heaven.

Place no confidence in detached militia. They have disgraced the nation. Do not rely on the contractor for provisions. He has no salt meat and only damaged flour. If you have any compassion on the service send money either to Lieutenant Allison, my brigade quartermaster, or some other public agent, under my orders. Without it we cannot supply the contractors' deficiencies; we cannot get transportation by land, build boats, procure forage or any thing else wanted by the army. Give me here *a clear stage*, men and *money*, and I will retrieve your affairs or perish.

To General Dearborn he wrote as follows:

CAMP NEAR BUFFALO, Oct. 24th, 1812.

SIR: I have had the honor to receive your letter of the 21st instant, and shall fail in nothing in my power to retrieve the state of our affairs.

The affair at Queenston diminished our force 2000 men; one-half of which were killed, wounded and prisoners, and the other half deserted or were discharged, in consequence of some battalions being greatly reduced.

General Van Rensselaer transferred to me the command on the 15th and on the 16th, I broke up the camp at Lewiston, sent the 14th Infantry, under Colonel Winder, to Niagara, the militia artillery to a battery opposite the Heights of Queenston, the militia infantry and riflemen to Schlosser, and I returned with the 5th, 13th, 12th and 20th to my camp near Buffalo; the troops of the Light and 2nd Artillery are at Black Rock.

In a creek at Black Rock I am collecting boats, and there I propose to cross. The Canadian shore is easy of access from Erie to Chippewa. There are some batteries opposite Black Rock which I can have carried when I please.

Boats are wanting. I have sent to have those which Chrystie brought to Niagara carried to Schlosser; this will be a difficult work. Scows are wanting and essential. As yet I have no funds.

The reinforcement you mention I hope will encourage those under my command. It is said 500 soldiers have arrived at Fort George since the battle, that the Indians have gone home to gather their corn, and that three-fourths of the militia are called into service. As the enemy's regular troops and flankers amount to 3000 men, their militia, if called out as said, may swell their force to 10,000 men.

It has seemed to me, Sir, that the three armies should strike on the same day. If not, the command of the Lakes will enable the enemy to beat us in detail.

The sailors here will furnish me with excellent boatmen. I shall take the opinions of a few of my most enlightened officers at times, but I will decide.

There is some difficulty in giving Colonel Parker a brigade, as Schuyler contests his right to rank. Winder is an officer of the first class.

In consequence of the loss of five companies of the 13th, I consolidated the 5th and 13th, as was done by the Adjutant-General in the case of the 12th and 20th. In consequence, Milton asked and obtained a furlough. His regiment was badly governed and I found I had nothing to expect from him.

I do not expect the contractor to supply us with provisions. I received a number of returns at Lewiston; "unfit for duty for want of provisions."

We much want some cannon of large calibre, for the fort of Niagara and the batteries of Black Rock. A powerful battery at the latter place would protect our landing at noon-day.

The ship carpenters have gone off, which I much regret.

Colonel Porter will doubtless be of great service to us, but I should have preferred his coming to Black Rock.

I shall keep you advised of our progress.

Six days later he wrote again to General Dearborn:

CAMP NEAR BUFFALO, Oct. 30, 1812.

SIR: I have had the honor to receive today at 4 o'clock p. m. your letter of the 28th instant.

We may in a few days have together 70 boats that would carry over 3500 men, but we have no scows. I have set all the carpenters and some citizens to building of scows. We want tools and materials. The Deputy Quartermaster gives it as his opinion that we can have ten scows in twenty days.

I would cross in three days if I had the means; without them it would be an injustice to the nation and myself to attempt it. I must not be defeated.

The New York Greens and a troop of volunteer cavalry have arrived. The Twenty-third Regiment, the Pennsylvania Volunteers and those from Baltimore have not arrived.

The Deputy Quartermaster has brought on checks instead of money, and he is unable to make payments. His letter to the Quartermaster General is enclosed, and I request that money may be sent to him immediately.

If I can beat the enemy on the plains of Erie and take that place I will find means to get to Fort George, whatever may become of the bridge at Chippewa.

I have the honor to be [etc.],

ALEX. SMYTH.

Still another letter to General Dearborn may here follow :

CAMP NEAR BUFFALO, NOV. 9, 1812.

SIR: Colonel McFeely arrived on the 1st instant with about 180 men of the 22d. Captain Archer's company of artillery arrived on the 4th instant, and today Colonel Brown, with 190 infantry, and also the light artillery, arrived.

I have sent an officer to meet the Pennsylvanians. He had gone as far as Erie when I last heard of him without meeting them. They are volunteers to supply that State's quota of militia. Can they be forced to cross the line? I am told they will refuse.

One of the aids of the Governor of New York has been at Schlosser in the capacity of the Deputy Adjutant General, making a new organization of the militia there. I caused them to encamp by themselves—not a soldier within ten miles of them. One hundred of them deserted the next night after the Governor's aid left them.

What most disturbs me is the ill-health of the troops. The measles has affected many, and the want of salt meat, of ovens, and exposure to cold, until lately without winter clothing has produced dysenteries and other diseases. Our hospitals are filled with sick and wounded, and new cases of disease are occurring daily.

Colonel Winder of the 14th is coming to this place from Niagara. I shall trust the defence of it to two companies of artillery and Lieut.-Colonel McFeely's corps of infantry, which will march tomorrow.

The contractors have failed to supply, and I have ordered purchases of provisions for Fort Niagara.

Between the 20th and the 30th instant I shall be ready to cross the river with about 1300 regular infantry, 300 artillery, 600 volunteers and 70 cavalry (if you will allow me Captain Morgan's troop). In this estimate is not included the Pennsylvania and New York militia.

Two regiments will proceed on tomorrow to commence building huts. If we cannot stay on the other side, we shall have a shelter ready for the sick and wounded.

P. S. A district paymaster with money is necessary. The volunteers cannot be retained in service unless paid.

Lieutenant Gansevoort of the artillery, who states he was appointed district paymaster, was ordered to Albany more than three weeks since to procure funds. I have heard that he is sick. Colonel Brown's regiment mutinied at Manlius on account of their pay.

The following statement from General Smyth was also sent, November 9th, to his superior officer :

General Smyth conceives the following facts should be known and considered by the Secretary of War :

1. That the 5th Regiment at Utica, on its march, did mutiny for want of their pay.
2. That the 23d Regiment at Manlius did mutiny on account of their pay, which is still due.
3. That a company of volunteers at Buffalo did mutiny on account of their pay and clothing.
4. That the captain of another volunteer company, the best in the service, has stated that he believes his men will not cross into Canada without their pay and allowance for clothing.
5. That the Deputy Quartermaster General states himself to be without money.
6. That there is no district paymaster at Niagara supplied with money.
7. That Colonel Winder, commanding at Fort Niagara, reports, "We are literally starving on this end of the line,

for bread." In consequence of which the Deputy-Quarter-master has been ordered to purchase provisions.

8. That 1800 Pennsylvania volunteers will arrive next week.

9. That General Smyth will be ready in fifteen days to cross into Canada.

The military conditions on the Niagara frontier at this time are too well known to students of the war of 1812 to call for extended recital here. While General Smyth's utterances by no means give the whole situation, they clearly exhibit many striking features of the time. A deputation of Indians having waited on him, about November 9th, he was afforded an opportunity exactly to his liking; and made them the following speech:

BROTHERS: I thank you for the tender of your services in the defence of the United States which you have made, and in their name accept them in case the troops and the Indians of the British King should invade the United States which I expect they will not dare to attempt.

It is the desire of Your Great Father the President that you should take no part in the war between the United States and Great Britain, but remain at peace and take care of your wives and children.

The British nation is not able to maintain the contest against the United States on this great island without help. They ask the Indians for help, who have given it and will be ruined by doing so.

We are able to beat the British without help, and although we understand that you are willing to help us if we ask it yet we do not ask it. The quarrel is ours, not yours and we will fight our own battles.

Brothers! hold fast the chain of friendship between you and the United States, who are great, powerful, just and good and will vanquish all your enemies and protect all their friends.

After the disaster of Queenston, General Van Rensselaer resigned, and General Smyth succeeded him as chief in command on the Niagara. From his Buffalo camp, November 10th, he issued the following famous

PROCLAMATION.

TO THE MEN OF NEW YORK: For many years you have seen your country oppressed with numerous wrongs. Your Government, altho above all others devoted to peace, has been forced to draw the sword, and rely for redress of injuries on the valor of the American people.

That valor has been conspicuous. But the nation has been unfortunate in the election of some of those who have directed it. One army has been disgracefully surrendered and lost. Another has been sacrificed by a precipitated attempt to pass over at the strongest point of the enemies lines, with most incompetent means. The cause of these miscarriages is apparent. The commanders were popular men, "destitute alike of theory and experience" in the art of war.

In a few days the troops under my command will plant the American standard in Canada. They are men accustomed to obedience, silence and steadiness. They will conquer or they will die.

Will you stand by with your arms folded and look on this interesting struggle? Are you not related to the men who fought at Bennington and Saratoga? Has the race degenerated? Or have you under the baneful influence of contending factions forgot your country? Must I turn from you, and ask the men of the Six Nations to support the Government of the United States? Shall I imitate the officers of the British king—and suffer our ungathered laurels to be tarnished by ruthless deeds? Shame! where is thy blush? No—where I command, the vanquished and the peaceful man—the child, the maid and the matron shall be secured from wrong. If we conquer we will "Conquer but to save."

MEN OF NEW YORK: The present is the hour of renown. Have you not a wish for fame? Would you not choose in future times to be named as one who, imitating the heroes whom Montgomery led, have in spite of the sea-

sons, visited the tomb of the chief and conquered the country where he lies? Yes—You desire your share of fame. Then seize the present moment. If you do not you will regret it; and say “the valiant bled in vain”—the friends of my country fell and I was not there.

Advance then to our aid. I will wait for you a few days. I cannot give you the day of my departure. But come on, come in companies, half companies, or singly. Ride to this place, if the distance is far and send back your horses. But remember, that every man who accompanies us places himself under my command, and shall submit to the salutary restraints of discipline.

ALEXANDER SMYTH,
Brig. Gen.

Camp near Buffalo, 10th Nov., 1812.

This proclamation, which was intended to gather at Buffalo recruits from every part of New York State he could reach, accomplished little except to offend the Federalists, many of whom were in his ranks. A week later he issued another proclamation, as follows:

TO THE SOLDIERS OF THE ARMY OF THE
CENTRE.

COMPANIONS IN ARMS!

The time is at hand when you will cross the stream of Niagara, to conquer Canada, and to secure the peace of the American frontier.

You will enter a country that is to be one of the United States. You will arrive among a people who are to become your fellow-citizens. It is not against *them* that we come to make war. It is against that government which holds them as vassals.

You will make this war as little as possible distressful to the Canadian people. If they are peaceable, they are to be secure in their persons; and in their property, as far as our imperious necessities will allow.

Private plundering is absolutely forbidden. Any soldier who quits his rank to plunder on the field of battle, will be punished in the most exemplary manner.

But your just rights as soldiers will be maintained. Whatever is *booty* by the usages of war, you shall have. All horses belonging to artillery and cavalry; all waggons and teams in public service will be sold for the benefit of the captors. Public stores will be secured for the service of the United States. The Government will, with justice, pay you the value.

The horses drawing the light artillery of the enemy, are wanted for the service of the United States. I will order *two hundred dollars* for each, to be paid to the party who may take them.

I will also order *forty dollars* to be paid for the arms and spoils of each savage warrior who shall be killed.

Soldiers! You are amply provided for war. You are superior in number to the enemy. Your personal strength and activity are greater. Your weapons are longer. The regular soldiers of the enemy are generally old men, whose best years have been spent in the sickly climate of the West Indies. They will not be able to stand before you, when you charge with the bayonet.

You have seen Indians, such as those hired by the British to murder women and children, and kill and scalp the wounded. You have seen their dances and grimaces, and heard their yells. Can you fear *them*? No. You hold them in the utmost contempt.

VOLUNTEERS!

Disloyal and traitorous men have endeavored to dissuade you from doing your duty. Sometimes they say, if you enter Canada, you will be held to service for five years. At others, they say, that you will not be furnished with supplies. At other times they say, that if you are wounded, the Government will not provide for you by pensions.

The just and generous course pursued by the Government towards the volunteers who fought at Tippecanoe,

furnishes an answer to the last objection. The others are too absurd to deserve any.

VOLUNTEERS! I esteem your generous and patriotic motives. You have made sacrifices on the altar of your country. You will not suffer the enemies of your fame to mislead you from the path of duty and honor, and deprive you of the esteem of a grateful country. You will shun the *eternal infamy* that awaits the man, who having come within sight of the enemy, *basely* shrinks in the moment of trial.

SOLDIERS OF EVERY CORPS! It is in your power to retrieve the honor of your country; and to cover yourselves with glory. Every man who performs a gallant action, shall have his name made known to the nation. Rewards and honors await the brave. Infamy and contempt are reserved for cowards. Companions in arms! You came to vanquish a valliant foe. I know the choice you will make. Come on my heroes! And when you attack the enemy's batteries, let your rallying word be "*The cannon lost at Detroit—or death.*"

ALEX. SMYTH.

Brig. Gen. commanding.

CAMP, near Buffalo, Nov. 17, 1812.

Those amazing productions won for their valiant author the derision of friend and foe. He was dubbed "Alexander the Great" and "Napoleon the Second." A contributor to the *New York Evening Post* wrote:

"Just so! (and every wiser head
The likeness can discover),
We put a chestnut in the fire,
And pull the embers over;
And while it waxes hot and hotter,
And eke begins to hop,
And after much confounded pother
Explodes a mighty *Pop!!*"

Yet it was on a man of this calibre that the United States Government relied, for a time, in Buffalo and on the Niagara!

Smyth became very busy, but not at all secret, in planning his invasion of Canada. From his Buffalo camp he sent to many officers the following orders:¹

HEAD QUARTERS, 23d Nov. 1812.

SIR: Be pleased to attend in a council of War today at Landon's in Buffalo at 3 in the evening.

Very respectfully Yr most obt

ALEXANDER SMYTH,
Brig. Gen. com'g.

"Landon's" was the tavern at Buffalo, the most popular rendezvous on the frontier; but no letters which have been preserved, nor the incomplete files of the *Buffalo Gazette* afford a report of this "council of war." There was, soon enough, war between Smyth and Porter, the latter not endorsing Smyth's plans nor the duty of submitting to all his bizarre orders. One of them, preserved by the Buffalo Historical Society, runs as follows:

General Porter will please issue Provisions for a party of militia who will present this & commence organising them giving them tents, &c.

ALEXANDER SMYTH,
Brig. Gen'l com'g.

19th Nov. 1812.

On November 21st General Smyth wrote to Brigadier General Adamson Tannehill "to ascertain whether there are any companies in your brigade who will refuse to serve the United States in Canada," adding: "I deem it essential we should know on whom we may rely with confidence." General Tannehill, who was encamped at "Granger's Farm"—then some four miles northeast of Buffalo, now a pleasant residence section of the city, known as Parkside—replied, November 22d, that to learn the facts, he had con-

1. The original MS. of this order, preserved by the Buffalo Historical Society, is addressed to Brig. Gen. Peter B. Porter.

vened his field officers in camp: "The prevailing opinion appears to be that if an efficient force can be had to cross into Canada a very general embarkation of my brigade may be expected. If, on the contrary, it is difficult for me to say what number may be calculated on." A "return" of his force which he sent to General Smyth, though nominally of four regiments, showed only 413 officers and men "who have volunteered to cross the boundary line in the Province of Upper Canada to assist in establishing the American standard in that Province."

On November 15th several offending soldiers were court-martialed at Buffalo. Major Campbell was assigned to conduct the proceedings, but in the findings, the fine hand of "the General" appears. Some of the offenses were trivial. The most serious was the mutiny of 31 men on November 4th, for which Captain John Phillips was tried because "he did not use his utmost endeavor to suppress the same." The court acquitted Captain Phillips, but the report of the court-martial has the following appended:

"The General believing that the *mind* of Captain Phillips was not guilty, confirms the sentence of the court; and orders that he resume his sword, and return to his duty."

Few commanding officers in like cases, have shown such discrimination.

General Smyth's idea, from his first coming to Buffalo, had been to invade Canada at some point between Chipewewa and Fort Erie. His proclamations, although laughed at, had undoubtedly brought in many recruits. Porter himself had sent Smyth's "eloquent appeal," as he termed it, to the men of Ontario and Genesee counties. On November 25th Smyth issued orders for "the whole army to be ready to march at a moment's warning": "The tents will be left standing, officers will carry their knapsacks. The

baggage will follow in convenient time." His manuscript orders for this date contain the following directions for attack:

1. The artillery will spend some of their first shot on the enemy's artillery, and then aim at the infantry raking them where it is practicable.

2. The firing of musketry by wings or companies will begin at the distance of 200 yards, aiming at the middle and firing deliberately.

3. At 20 yards' distance the soldiers will be ordered to trail arms, advance with shouts, fire at five paces' distance, and charge bayonets.

4. The soldiers will be *silent* above all things, attentive at the word of command, load quick and well, and *aim low*.

By the 27th, everything was ready for the invasion. The troops gathered at Black Rock mustered about 4500, made up of Smyth's regulars, the Baltimore Volunteers under Colonel Winder, the Pennsylvania Volunteers under General Tannehill, and the New York Volunteers under General Porter. To this last-named officer General Smyth wrote, apparently on this day:¹

DR GEN'L: This day put forth your utmost exertions. Have 2 or 3 days provisions ready to send over the water. Let a faithfull party scour the bank from the mouth of Buffalo to Scarajocaty (*sic*) and gather every boat that will swim; there lies a very good one not far from your house.

Tell the brave men under your command not to be impatient. See what harm impatience did at Queenstown. Let them be firm, and they will succeed.

Very respectfully yr most obt

ALEXANDER SMYTH.

P.S. What do you think of a landing opposite the upper part of Grand Island?

[To Brig. Gen. Porter.]

1. Undated MS. owned by the Buffalo Historical Society.

The operations of the next two days were hopelessly bungled, a costly mistake. As the present purpose is less to trace events in detail, than to preserve General Smyth's writings, it may suffice to note that he had so long and loudly proclaimed his intentions of invading Canada, that the enemy were well prepared for him at any point above the Falls, although the British force, from Chippewa to Fort Erie, probably did not exceed 1000 men. Smyth, at Black Rock, had over 5000—some accounts say 8000. Before daybreak of the 28th, some 420 men in 21 boats crossed towards the Canada shore, five miles below Fort Erie. As they neared the shore they were warmly greeted by a volley of musketry, whereupon six of the boats returned to Black Rock. The small force that landed was hotly engaged; many were taken prisoners; six were killed and 22 wounded; the rest of the invading party recrossed the river.

Many things connected with General Smyth's conduct of affairs appear incredible, but nothing is more amazing than his behavior on this 28th of November. From sunrise to late afternoon his army was embarking—the enemy on the other side of the river, in constantly-increasing numbers, looking on as at a show. General Smyth did not appear at all, leaving all details to his subordinates. For hours the troops shivered in the boats, some of which, stranded on the shore, filled with snow and ice. Late in the day, when at length everything seemed ready for a grand movement across the stream, General Smyth issued the amazing order: "Disembark and dine"! Disgusted and angered, the whole force was on the point of rebellion. Porter led his volunteers to Buffalo, where, that evening, General Smyth issued the following:¹

1. Here printed from General Smyth's own manuscript, in the possession of the Buffalo Historical Society.

SMYTH TO HIS "HEARTS OF WAR."

HEADQUARTERS, CAMP NEAR BUFFALO,
29th November, 1812.

Tomorrow at 8 o'clock, all the corps of the Army will be at the Navy yard, ready to embark. Before 9 the embarkation will take place. The General will be on board. Neither rain, snow, or frost will prevent the embarkation.

It will be made with more order and silence than yesterday; boats will be allotted to the brave volunteers.

Fifty men will go in each red boat. Forty men in each white boat. A piece of Artillery and its caisson in each scow; the artillery men and about 20 men of some other corps.

Seats will be put in the boats today, and oars added to the long boats, each of which will carry 80 or 100 men. Ropes will be provided that boats may take the scows in tow.

A field officer from each corps will attend at the Navy yard today, to see preparations made, and the boats arranged in order. They will cause seats to be made, and every other preparation.

The cavalry will scour the fields from Black rock to the bridge, & suffer no idle spectators.

While embarking the music will play martial airs. *Yankee doodle* will be the signal to get under way.

The regiments will act together, but without being scrupulously attentive to keep their places in line.

When we pull for the opposite shore, every exertion will be made. The landing will be effected in despite of cannon. The whole army has seen that cannon is to be little dreaded.

The information brought by Capt. Gibson assures us victory: But the enemy are as brave as we are, and will fight.

Hearts of War! Tomorrow will be memorable in the annals of the United States.

ALEXANDER SMYTH,
Brig. Gen'l com'g.

This assurance held the forces from open mutiny, that night. The morning of the 29th came, but there was no embarkation. The enemy were so obviously prepared at the point where Smyth proposed to land, that all his officers

insisted on a change of plan. Porter urged that a landing be made December 1st, before daylight, a little below the upper end of Grand Island, with a view to taking Chipewewa, and to this plan Smyth reluctantly agreed; but on the day named, only 1500 embarked. The Pennsylvania brigade, and other troops, did not report for the embarkation, raising the old bugaboo, that they were not required to serve outside the State. The whole force was demoralized. Smyth with his rare gift for multiplying blunders, called a council of war, of regular army officers only, excluding all volunteers. From this council came presently the announcement that the invasion of Canada was abandoned. In his subsequent report to General Dearborn, Smyth stated that his orders were not to attempt the invasion with less than 3000 men. The volunteers were dismissed to their homes, and the regulars went into winter quarters at Buffalo and Williamsville.

Smyth was the object of execration throughout the State and country. The people of Western New York were so indignant at his conduct that they called on him for an explanation. To their committee, consisting of Messrs. George McClure, Lewis Birdsall, John Griffen and William B. Rochester, General Smyth addressed the following statement:

HEADQUARTERS, CAMP NEAR BUFFALO,
Dec. 3d, 1812.

GENTLEMEN: Your letter of the 2d December is before me; and I answer it in the following manner:

On the 26th October, I ordered that 20 scows should be prepared for the transportation of artillery and cavalry, and put the carpenters of the army upon that duty.

By the 26th of November, 10 scows were completed, and by bringing some boats from Lake Ontario, above the Falls of Niagara, the number was increased to 70.

I had on the 12th November, issued an address to the men of New York, and perhaps 300 had arrived at Buffalo. I presumed that the regular troops and the volunteers under Cols. Swift and McClure, would furnish 2300 men for duty; and of General Tannehill's brigade (from Pennsylvania) reporting a total of 1650, as many as 413 had volunteered to cross into Canada. My orders were to "cross with 3000 men at once." I deemed myself ready to fulfil them.

Preparatory thereto, on the night of the 27th November, I sent over two parties, one under Lt. Col. Boerstler, the other under Captain King, with whom Lieut. Angus of the Navy, at the head of a body of seamen, united. The first was to capture a guard and destroy a bridge about five miles below Fort Erie; the second party were to take and render useless the cannon of the enemy's batteries, and some pieces of light artillery. The first party failed to destroy the bridge; the second, after rendering unserviceable the light artillery, separated by some misapprehension. Lieut. Angus, the seaman, and a part of the troops, returned, with all the boats while Capt. King, Capt. Morgan, Capt. Sproule, Lieut. Houston and about 60 men remained. The party thus reduced, attacked, took and rendered unserviceable two of the enemy's batteries, captured 34 prisoners, found two boats, in which King sent the prisoners and about half his party with the other officers; he himself remaining with 30 men whom he would not abandon.

Orders had been given, that all the troops in the neighborhood should march at reveille, to the place of embarkation. A part of the detachment sent in the night having returned and excited apprehensions for the residue about 250 men, under the command of Col. Winder, suddenly put off in boats for the opposite shore; a part of this force had landed when a force deemed superior, with one piece of artillery, was discovered; a retreat was ordered; and Col. Winder's detachment suffered a loss of six killed and 19 wounded, besides some officers.

The general embarkation commenced as the troops arrived; but this being a first embarkation, the whole of the