

CMH NEWSLETTER

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GROUND ACTION DURING THE WAR OF 1812

INTRODUCTION

To understand the ground action during the War of 1812, it is necessary to understand some of the background leading up to the war. Two acts, Jefferson's Embargo Act and the Non-Intercourse Act of 1809, had just about stopped American trade. This had turned New England against President Madison and the war. Upstate New York enjoyed a very prosperous trade with Canada, which of course was legally smuggling. Their main reaction to the war was mostly annoyance at the occasional interruption to this trade.

In the west, the situation was far different. The settlers on the frontier were engrossed with Indian problems. The Battle of Tippecanoe had been fought on 7 November, 1811, but this had not solved the problem. The settlers felt that the British were behind these problems. There was also a widespread feeling that Canada secretly yearned to become a part of the U.S. This was partially due to the large numbers of pioneers who had gone north into Canada from the U.S. for the free farms offered by the upper Canadian government.

In June 1812, the American Army consisted of 6,744 regulars and 5,000 recruits. They manned a series of forts along the Great Lakes--Michilimeckinac, Dearborn, Detroit, Buffalo, Niagara, Oswego, and Sacketts Harbor. In addition, almost 450,000 militia saw active service, about half at the front.

There were four types of forces available in Canada. The British had four regiments of line, the 8th, 41st, 49th, the 100th, and the 10 Royal Battalion. This was a total of 4000 troops. The Canadian regulars were the Canadian Fencibles, the Canadian Voltiguers, the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, the New Brunswick Regiment, and the Glengarry Light Infantry, this added up to approximately 300 troops. About 10,000 militia saw active duty. The fourth Canadian force were Indians. The largest number of Indians in the field at once was 3,500 at Thames River.

Objectives and Steps

The American Objective was simple: conquer Canada. A two-pronged attack was envisioned east from Detroit and north from Niagara. The natural invasion route through Lake Champlain and the Richelieu River was largely negated by the apathy of New Yorkers to the war and the hostility of the New Yorkers. During the first stage of the war, while Britain was occupied by another detail, the Americans were free to take the initiative and the Canadian objective was defense. From early 1813 to the beginning of 1814, the second stage of the war, Britain began to apply more pressure, particularly on the sea. The overall objectives were still the same but the Americans began to have more success. The third stage, 1814, was marked by the arrival of British regulars in large numbers. At this point, the British...

Their objectives was to force a quick advantages settlement of the war. Specifically, they wanted to seize New Orleans, Maine, and to set up a buffer state in the North West. American troops were largely on the defensive during this period but it did some of their finest fighting.

The end of the war was brought on primarily by Napoleon's return. On the face of it, nothing was changed, least of all by raise of a united Canada.

THE COMPAINS OPENING IN THE NORTHWEST

As soon as the war started, America made plans to invade C Canada Brig. Gen. William Hull, a dashing Revolutionary War figure grown old, and Governor of the Michigan Territory was given command of operations in that area. His force consisted of about 1,500 Ohio militiamen and 300 regulars of the 4th Infantry. He arrived at Ft. Detroit on 5 July 1812. Sir George Prevost, the G Governor in chief of the Canadas, was fortunate in having the services of Maj. Gen. Isaac Brock, who was to prove as able as Hull was onept. Brock had under his command 1000 men of the 41st regiment, 300 militia of uncertain loyalty, and about 150 Indians lead by Tecumseh, mostly at Ft. Maldon.

The opening battle was a American defeat. On 16-17 July Captain Charles Roberts, with 45 men of the 10th Royal Volteguers Battalion, 180 fur traders, 400 Indians, and two iron 6-lb cannon forced the surrender of Ft. Michilimackinac. Lieutenant Porter Menks of the Regular Artillery and his 60 men were paroled. Neither side suffered any casualties.

Hull, meanwhile, had crossed into Canada, but on hearing of Menks' surrender and of the reinforcement of Ft. Malden, he retreated 50 of the Royal New Foundland Regiment, 400 militia and 600 Indians had landed at Pring Wells below Detroit with 5 cannon. At this point, Brock throughly physed Hull. He dressed the militia in red coats, only 350 regulars and 250 militia remaine' in position on the heights, and they were beginning to run low in ammunition. Maj. Gen. Sheaffe had arrived from Ft. George with 300 men of the 41st foot and 250 militia. He circled around the American position and attacked from the left flank. The surprised Americans (now commanded by Lt-Col. Winfield Scott), were pushed against the river bank and forced to surrender. The losses were 958 captured (which gave Sheaffe more captives than troops) and 300 killed in action and wounded. Canadian losses were 14 KIA, 77 WIA, and 21 missing.

Van Rensselaer quit and the command was turned over to Smyth after a couple of half-hearted attempts at invasions, Smyth left the army, never to return.

1813 - THE NORTH WEST

The command of Northwestern army, which consisted of Kentucky militiamen was turned over to Brig. Gen. William Harrison. He had about 6,500 under his command and at the end of October 1812, he moved forward from Ft. Wayne. However, on 18 January

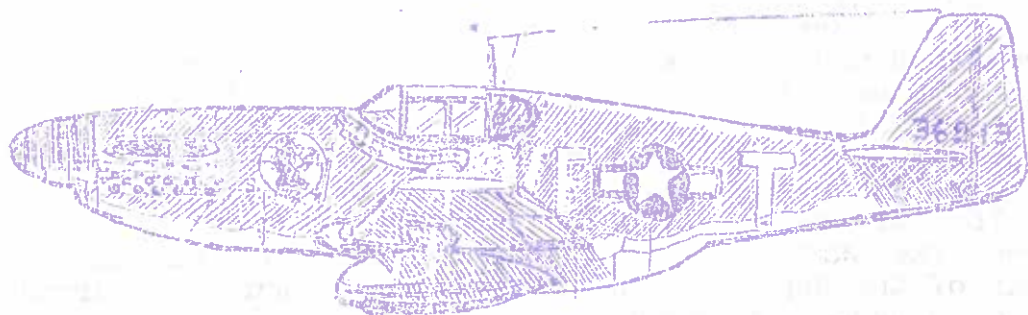
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Brig. Gen. Winchester with 900 men attacked an out post only 26 miles from Detroit. While he easily captured Frenchtown, he made no provisions and opened fire with the cannon, and "lost" a document referring to 5,000 ready to pounce on Detroit to Hull. On 16 August, Hull surrendered. Hull had sent orders to the small garrison (54 regulars, 12 militia 9 women, and 18 children) to withdraw. On 15 August, they left the fort and were almost immediately attacked by 400 Indians. In a massacre, 26 regulars 12 militia, 2 women and 12 children were killed.

OPENING CAMPAIGN - NIAGARA FRONTIER

After capturing Detroit, Brock hurried back to Niagara. A force of 2,300 poorly fed, ill-equipped, untrained New York Militiamen gathered at Lewiston. Brig Gen. Smyth at Buffalo had 1,650 regulars and 400 Militia. He refused to do anything at all however.

On 13 October 1812, Van Rensselaer attacked Queenstown, landing by 300 men of the 13th was pinned on the river banks. However, they found a unguarded path and stormed Queenstown. They held off a counterattack during which Gen. Brock was killed. 600 reinforcements were landed, but by afternoon for regulars, 61 fencibles, 212 Militia, 28 sailors, 606 Indians, and 3 or 4 3-pr. guns attacked. After brief resistance, the Americans surrendered on promise of protection for the Indians. However, the Indians got drunk and murdered between 30 and 400 wounded prisoners. This brought the total losses to 400. Harrison was stopped, and built Ft. Miesgo winter in.

In the spring, Proctor moved against Ft. Miesgo with 550 regulars (41st foot for the most part) and 1,200 Indians. Harrison's force had dwindled to about 1000 men. Between the 1st and 3rd of May, Proctor placed 3 batteries in place and opened ineffective fire. The fort was not completely cut off, and Harrison got word to 1,200 Kentucky militia on it's way to relieve him. The force was split, and 900 men attacked the fortifications on the left bank of the river. After initial success, they were eventually restrained by Tecumseh. The attack of the right bank was successful. Proctor was forced to lift his attack of 9 May.

On 20 July, Proctor tried again. With 300 regulars 3,000 Indians laid siege to Ft. Miesgo. After unsuccessful attempts to bombard the fort, and to entice the Americans force into the Croghen with 160 regulars and one piece of artillery, mowed down the men of the 41st at on 2 August. The British suffered 96 casualties, and Proctor was forced to withdraw.

After the Battle of Lake Erie, Proctor realized his position was untenable. Due to political problems with his Indian allies, it wasn't until 18 September that Proctor began the withdrawal. On 27 September, Morrison with 1,000 mounted volunteers and 3,000 foot soldiers marched into Amherstburg and found it a smoking ruin. The pursuit was repaid, as Proctor neglected to do such things as destroying bridges over the numerous small streams and

and rivers. On 5 October, American forces captured 2 gun boats with all the ammunition reserve of the British. The same day, Proctor drew up his troops about 2 miles west of Moravian Town. He deployed his troops in 2 lines with the river on his left and a swamp on his right. The Indians were in the swamp. Morrison made a brilliant move; he ordered Col. Johnson with the mounted troops to charge the British regulars. The 41st completely scattered, losing 634 men. The Indians, in the swamp stopped the mounted troops. They dismounted and after a fierce fight and following the killing of Tecumseh, drove the Indians off. American losses were 7 KIA, and 22 WIA. They also captured about 1 million dollars worth of equipment, including 3 cannon captured from Burgoyne in 1777 and lost by Hull.

With Proctor's defeat, the Northwest remained firmly in American hands.

1813 - NIAGARA FRONTIER

The command of the American army was in the hands of Maj. Gen. Henry Dearborn. Secretary of war John Armstrong developed a plan for the eventual capture of Montreal which called for the capture of Kingston. The way the orders went to Dearborn, however, a westward sweep was implied as Kingston was listed as 1st target, York as 2nd, and Forts George and Erie as the 3rd object, with no mention of Montreal. Dearborn and the Naval Commodore Isaac Chauncey decided on the basis of a rumor (false) that Kingston had been reinforced too strongly to take. They decided to take. They decided to attack York and then swing over and take Ft. George. On 27 April 1813, 1,700 regulars under the command of Brig. Gen. Zebulon M. Pike landed. Wind blew the landing boats four miles west of town. The defence, in the hands of Sir. Roger Sheaffe, 600 regulars of the Longue Pointe light infantry, and 8th regiment, plus 50 to 100 Indians got lost in the woods. The 8th finally stumbled upon the American forces and launched a bayonet attack. They were overwhelmed. Sheaffe rallied his force behind the Western Battery of the unfinished Ft. Toronto. The Americans soon pushed his back from this position, and Sheaffe withdrew East along the lake away from the fort. As the Americans entered the fort, the magazine blew up, scattering stores and killing many troops including Gen. Pike. After the victory, some looting took place and some of the parliament and government buildings were burned. After holding the town for a week, Dearborn embarked for the Ft. Niagara area.

This operation had left Sackett's Harbor defended by 400 regulars and 750 men. Luckily, the force was commanded by one of the few outstanding leaders of the war, Brig. Gen. Jacob Brown. He set up a defense to counter an expected British landing on Morse Island, which was connected to the mainland by a Lord. He patterned his defense on the Battle of Cowpens, with a line of militia screening the regulars in a fortified position with heavy artillery support. The British commander Col. Edward Baynes had 750 regulars, a grenadier company of the 100th foot, two companies of the 8th, four companies of the 104th, one company

of Glengarry Light Infantry, two companies of Canadian Voligeurs and two 6-pr. guns. Spear headed by the 100th Grenadiers, the British scattered most of the militia and pushed into the regulars on 29 May 1813. They stood fast and repulsed two attacks. Brown then rallied the militia and threatened Bayne's right flank. With no naval artillery support and facing a disciplined, well-fortified enemy threatening to cut him off, Baynes was left with no choice but to retreat. He lost 47 KIA, 154 WIA, and 16 missing. They did capture 154 men and forced (or panicked) a navy lieutenant to burn his stores.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the lake, Chauncey and Dearborn sailed up to Ft. George on 25 May, and opened fire. After intense naval bombardment, on 27 May, Col. Scott led an early morning assault on Ft. George with an army of 4000 men. Scott and Forsyth's Rifle corps ran into heavy opposition by American numbers and overwhelming artillery support pushed Brig. Gen John Vincent's army back. The defending forces consisted of 1,000 regulars from the 8th and 49th foot, Royal Newfoundland Fencibles, Glengarry Light Infantry, and 300 militia. The objective was not so much Ft. George, which was falling apart, but Vincent's force. Vincent managed to withdraw in good order and Dearborn failed to pursue. When finally got around to ordering pursuit on 1 June, he ordered Brig. Gen. William Winder's brigade of 1,000 men to pursue Vincent's 1,600 men. Winder's troops were joined by 2,000 men of Brig. Gen. John Chandler's brigade while they had a numerical edge, Chandler was completely incompetent as a commander. On 5 June, Chandler, Winder, and 2,000 men made a careless bivouac at Stoney Creek. The next morning, Lt. Col. John Harvey with 700 regulars of the 8th and 49th attacked. The initial stages went well, but orders of strict silence were broken and the surprised Americans found them selves infiltrated. They reacted quickly however, and the fighting became fierce and confused. While the Americans were eventually routed, they suffered only 55 killed or wounded and 100 missing while the British lost 23 KIA, 134 WIA, and 5 missing. Both Winder and Chandler were captured, which, considering their commend capabilities, may have been more of a blow to the British than the Americans.

Dearborn's health broke, and the command of the Army passed to Brig. Gen. John Boyde. His first act was to send Lt. Col. Charles Boerstler, 14th Infantry, with 600 regulars with artillery to attack a British out post at Decau's Farm. Boerstler's column was jumped at Beaver Dams by 400 Indians. The battle was a standoff when Lt. James Fitzgibbon arrived with 50 men of the 49th Infantry. Fitzgibbon was able to talk Boerstler to surrender.

At this point, both sides were hard-hit by disease and further fighting was broken off for the summer.

FALL, 1813 - ATTACK ON MONTREAL

Some of the greatest fiascoes in U.S. Military history have been attacks on Montreal, and this one was no exception. In the first place, the command was split between Maj. Gen. James Wilkinson at Sackett's Harbor and Maj. Gen. Wade Hampton (both Southerners) at Plattsburg. The two men were personal enemies, and they barely talked to each other. By early fall, Wilenson had 7,000 men and Hampton 4,000. Hampton moved up north to the Chateaugay River and

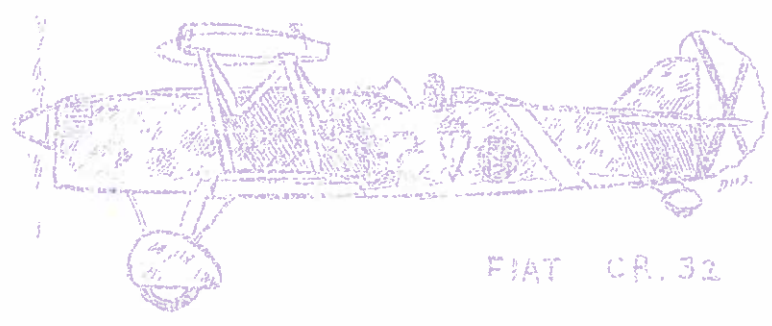
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tword spears in mid-October. On 25 October, they ran into the defence position of Lt. Col. Charles De Salaberry and 1,500 French-Canadian Indians. American reconnaissance reported the Canadian Flank could be easily turned by crossing the Chateauguay River, and Hamptonsent Col. Purdy with 1,500 men to do so. After b.undering about the woods all night, Purdy found to his surprise that the flank and crossing were defended, and that more-over, there were Canadians to his rear. He promptly retreated. Hampton decided that the campaign was a failure, and pulled back to Plattsburg.

Wilkinson also moved up the St. Lawrence in Mid-October. Predictably, they ran into bad weather. However, they continued up, reaching almost to the Long Sault Rapids by 10 November. The next day, after a night sleet stormy, contact was made. Wilkenson ord red Boyd to take 2,000 regulars in three columns, our flank the British, and crush Lt. Col. Morrison at Crysler's farm. Morrison had established his roughly 900 men of the 89th and 49th regiments on strong defensive positions and turned back the piece-real attacks of Boyde. Two days later, Wilkinson retreated into winter quarters at French Mills.

The British took advantage of the weakened American forces on the Niagara frontier to move against Ft. George and Ft. Niagara. Ft. George was under the command of Brig. Gen. McClure with 100 men. Vincent drove McClure out on 10 December. Before leaving, McClure burned Newark and most of Queenstown. On 19 December, Lt. Col. John Murray bayonet charge of Ft. Niagara and captured it. Between 19 December and 1 January, Maj. Gen. Riall with 1,500 regulars and Indians destroyed Lewistown, Black Rock, Buffalo and Ft. Schlosser.

1814 - STALEMATE AT NIAGARA

By 1814, The command in the American Army was in the hands of young, competent generals: Jackson in the South, Jacob Brown in the Niagara Frontier, George Izard on the Champlain Frontier. Winfred Scott has shaped up the army at Buffalo inot a disciplined, spitited, effective group of troops. The British, with the fall of Napoleon, began to send more regulars to North America; the 4th Battalion of the Royal Scots, the Nova Scotia Fencibles, the 90th regiment from the West Indies, and the 1/16th and the 1/82 from France. Moreover, the British had taken navel command of Lake Ontario. Accordingly, the First American offensive was finally decided for the Niagara Frontier, where the increased British strength was yet to be felt.

Scott had 65 officers and 1,319 men. Brig. Gen. Eleazer Rippe, had 1,027 officers and men, Brig. Gen. Peter Porter had 600 reasonably well-trained Penn. Militia, as well as 600 Indians, and there were also 327 regular artillery men. With this strength, Brown crossed the Niagara River on 3 July, took Ft. Erie, and advanced toward the Chippewa River 16 miles away. The British Commander Gen. Riall, had 1,500 regulars from the 100th Regiment, 1st Royal Scots, and the 8th Regiment, as well as some 300 militia and Indians. They made contact on 4 July, and the armies stood on opposite sides of the Chippewa River. On 5 July, Scott ordered a grand parade on the plain next to the river.

As it formed, however, they found that Riall had crossed the river with the 100th Regiment and the 1st Royal Scots and were drawn up behind a screen of trees at the river's edge. Porter's militia drove off the Canadian Militia, but were routed by the British, regulars. Brown ordered Scott to fight the British, and Scott deployed quickly. The 25th Infantry covered the flank in the woods, and the 11th, 9th, and 22nd Infantry formed a concave line to put the British in converging fire. Riall, who had been told that the Americans were amateurs, and further misled by their militia gray uniforms, rushed ahead with two columns. Artillery fire caused losses on both sides, but especially effective on the British. The American closed ranks and advanced about 70 yards apart, the lines halted and volleyed. The British line crumpled and broke. Scott ordered a bayonet charge, and the British led. Riall, who muttered the surprised words, "these are regulars, by God", lost 148 KIA, and 327 WIA and 46 missing. Scott lost 48 KIA, and 227 WIA. Riall, using the 8th to cover his withdrawal, crossed the Chippewa, but was out flanked by Brown and forced to withdraw to Ft. George. Brown followed as far as Queenstown, where he held waiting for Chauncey.

As Chauncey never showed, Brown was forced to retreat. The 89th Regiment had reached York and was moving toward the Niagara. On 24 July, Brown retreated to Chippawa. Riall with an advance of 1,000 regulars followed. At the same time, Lt. Gen. Drummond reached Ft. George with the 89th. Five hundred regulars and Indians were to be sent down the American side of the Niagara River toward Lewiston, while the 89th (600 strong) was to support Riall. The remaining 1,500 of Riall's troops had joined him at Lundy's Lane on the night of 24-25 July. The attack on Lewiston had been cancelled and many of these troops had also joined Riall. Brown, unaware of the cancellation of the attack, had ordered Scott to move against Queenstown to try and draw the British forces back to Canada. Scott was to proceed along Lundy's Lane.

Scott arrived late in the afternoon of 25 July. He made a reconnaissance and offered he was opposed by a force about equal his own deployed on the crest of a low hill. He deployed and ordered Jesup's 25th Infantry to attack the British left flank. Riall, thinking he was opposed by the entire American army, had started to withdraw. Drummond arrived with reinforcements at this point, so Riall held. The initial American attack turned the British left flank, and allowed the capture of the wounded Riall. Further advances were stopped by British artillery on the crest of the hill. By night fall, Canadian militia had driven Jesup back, and Scott's 1st Brigade had been shattered. Brown then arrived on the scene with the rest of the American army and ordered another attack. At about 9:00, James Miller's 21st Infantry rushed the British guns at the crest of the hill and cleared the hill with bayonets. Brown moved his army up and seemed on the verge of total victory. At this critical point, the rest of Drummond's force; 120 regulars and militia, arrived, and Drummond counter-attacked three times. From 10 until midnight the fighting went on at ranges of 10 to 15 yards. About midnight, the badly wounded Brown (as was Scott) ordered Ripley to withdraw for more ammunition

and water. The next morning, the two very tired armies looked at each other in about the same positions from which they had started. The Americans had lost 171 KIA, 572 WIA, 119 missing and British losses were 84 KIA, 559 WIA, 193 missing and 42 captured. Ripley, who couldn't expect reinforcements, was forced to withdraw as the British were expecting more troops. Brown ordered the withdrawal to be to Ft. Niagara. This ended the Battle of Lundy's Lane; the fight was a draw, but strategically, a British victory as Brown's invasion of Canada was stopped.

Drummond was reinforced by De Watteville's regiment of mercenaries and the 41st foot. On 13 August, he laid siege to Ft. Erie. Erie was defended by the remnants of the Canadian invasion force, 2,200 regulars. Drummond, with 3,000 regulars, attacked on 15 August, believing that two days of bombardment was enough to soften the defense. He attacked in three columns against the batteries at Snake Hill, Battery Douglas, and Ft. Erie itself. The attack on Snake Hill was smashed. The assault on the Northeast bastion of Ft. Erie. They were able to overrun a battery but were unable to go no further. American counter attacks failed to dislodge the British. At 500, about daylight, a British powder cache exploded in the center of the British line. The dazed attackers then withdrew. Drummond lost 57 KIA, 309 WIA, and 539 missing or captured nearly a third of his force. American losses were only 84 KIA or WIA. The siege raged on. On 17 September, a force of 1,000 militia and 600 regulars captured two of the siege works and spiked three of the six siege guns. Drummond suffered heavy casualties, 115 KIA, 176 WIA, and 315 missing. American losses were 79 KIA and 432 WIA or missing. On September 19, Drummond broke off the siege and withdrew. After a couple months of raiding, on 5 November, Ft. Erie was blown up and the Americans retreated to the U.S. In the end, the only thing that had been gained was some badly needed pride for the American Army.

CONTINUED IN NEXT ISSUE

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HISTORIANS SCUTTLEBUTT

Hats off to our new secretary, Tom Herman, who was elected at the October meeting. Now Tom Richards can return to peace and quiet!

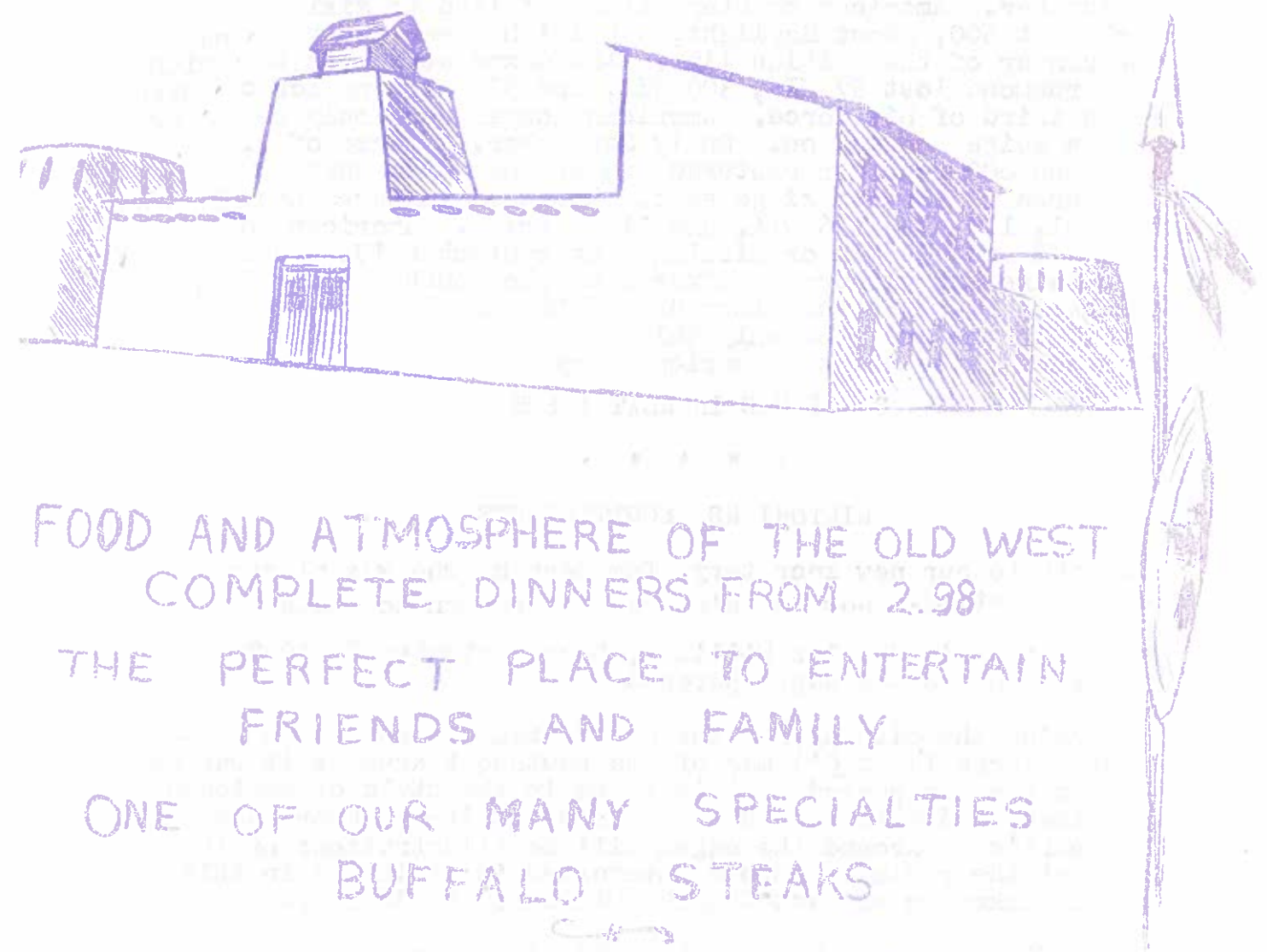
Welcome to Eric Charles Williams, born September 8, 1967, and congratulations to the happy parents.

Concerning the display for the Fort: Sam has suggested that we erect a large (4' x 6') map of the southwest area as it was during the Mexican War period. It is to be in the style of cartography used then, and will show all points of military importance during the conflict. Around the edges will be illustrations of the uniforms of the period. Anyone interested in assisting in this project is asked to contact Charles Williams at 238-2987.

PLEASE CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER!!!! If you don't, all the by-lines will be Jones!

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