

On Campaign: In Camp and Field with Ohio's Regulars and Militia in the War of 1812
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For most Ohio soldiers in the War of 1812, protection of long supply lines, monotonous garrison duty, back breaking construction projects, poor diet, sickness, and few, if any, combat actions typified their wartime service. Letters, diaries, and personal reminiscences of the period all touch on some of these aspects and, taken together, these accounts provide the context for understanding Brigadier General John Gano's assessment of the wartime experiences of many Ohioans: "The militia of Ohio have been made pack horses and merely served as convenience for others to receive the honor and glory."¹

There was a great deal of truth in Gano's appraisal and his remarks were applicable to the regulars as well as the militia. Materiel concerns dominated operational planning from before the beginning of the war. Brigadier General William Hull's surrender of Detroit, due in large measure to inadequate preparation, was the first in a series of mistakes, complaints, and accusations over support to the Northwestern Army. Major General William Henry Harrison – and Duncan McArthur after him - never completely solved their supply and logistics problems, and the never-ending need for provisions, camp equipage, clothing, and hospital stores dictated that many of the soldiers would serve as "pack horses".

Prior to his assumption of command of the Northwestern Army, Brigadier General William Hull advised the War Department that unless the United States controlled Lake Erie, efforts to reinforce the Michigan Territory by land would require the construction of roads and fortified supply points. Harrison echoed that assessment in a letter to Secretary of War Eustis. He noted that victory would require an army composed principally of infantry that "could penetrate into the country of the enemy and secure [its] possession by a chain of posts."²

The challenges associated with penetrating into the country and erecting a chain of posts were significant. The experiences of Generals Harmer, St. Clair, and Wayne in the Northwest Indian War fifteen years earlier were common knowledge and the lessons were not lost on Hull. Hull and, afterwards, Harrison knew three things had to happen simultaneously as they penetrated the wilderness: they had to construct a road to the Michigan Territory, they had to provide for the security of the army while on the march, and they had to protect their supply line.

Hull initially hoped to use the river network as much as possible and avoid the necessity of clearing roads and crossing the Black Swamp, a 1500 square mile area of wetlands and marshes in northwest Ohio. To avoid the area, Hull planned to travel from Dayton up the Miami River to Loramie's Fort, a trading post dating from before Wayne's campaign, where boats could be unloaded onto wagons and portaged to the Auglaize River. He could then float supplies downstream to the Rapids of the Miami of the Lake, now the Maumee River, while his troops marched along the river bank. Anthony Wayne had once

boasted that using this river route, “the whole of land transport is but eleven miles from Pittsburg to Detroit.”³

Low water halted Hull’s advance about twenty miles outside Dayton. Hull turned the column eastward towards Urbana where Lieutenant Colonel James Miller, in command of the 4th U.S. Infantry Regiment, joined him. At Urbana, the combined force headed north through the Black Swamp. To blaze the trail for the Army to follow, Hull hired Captain Thompson Maxwell, a 72 year old veteran of both the French and Indian War and the Revolution. As a civilian, Maxwell drove hogs from southern Ohio to Detroit.

The safety of his army was Hull’s first priority and early on he published a general order establishing security for his advance. “My order of march”, he later wrote, “[was] in two columns, with strong front and rear guards. The column flanked by the riflemen and cavalry ... the baggage, provisions, etc. between the columns ... The army had been practiced to form from the two columns into two lines, either in front, rear, or on either flank ... or to form a square facing outward.”⁴ Hull placed the regulars and mounted scouts at the head of the column and testified at his court martial that his order of march reflected his order of battle.

To prevent surprise, Hull had the army up before dawn and camped each night in the form of a hollow square. As Lieutenant Colonel James Miller recalled, “After we apprehended danger, we commonly formed a breastwork (by felling trees) and camped within it. No fires were permitted within the camp after sundown within the line.”⁵ By a general order, each line was to form in front of its tents, if attacked in camp.” Drum beats every morning before dawn called the soldiers to arms.⁶ Hull’s precautions were not only based upon common sense and historical precedent, they also reflected the practices outlined in contemporary tactical manuals.

Brigadier General Winchester followed the same security precautions during his advance to Fort Wayne a few months later. With fewer soldiers, Winchester relied upon scouts to reconnoiter his route, but ordered his spies to not pass beyond the sound of the pioneers’ axes. Brigade and regimental quartermasters were to mark off the encampment and to lead their regiments to their assigned locations.⁷ Just as Hull had done, Winchester’s army encamped each night in a hollow square, with a strong breastwork, guards placed at regular intervals; and the camp able to form into line of battle quickly.

The militia conducted their marches in a similar manner. A member of militia general Edward Tupper’s column wrote in his diary, “The guard took their distance on each side about 50 or 100 yard from the road, and the army in single file marched between the wagons and the guard – the whole taking care to regulate their movement to cover the ammunition and baggage wagons.”⁸

The Greenville Treaty lands lay north of Urbana. Here there were few roads worthy of the name and ambushes were possible. Hull detached Colonel McArthur’s regiment to advance from Manary’s Blockhouse (near modern Bellefontaine, twenty miles north of Urbana), to the south bank of the Scioto River and there build a stockade. “We marched

to Manary's Blockhouse where the road ended. The next morning we set out to open the road, and made a good wagon road to this place in three days through a very heavy timbered country. We began building a fort on the bank of the Scioto which is but a small stream at this place", wrote James Denny to his wife.⁹

McArthur's force served as a vanguard for the main body of Hull's army in addition to acting as pioneers. Hull arrived at Fort McArthur on June 19th and replaced McArthur's troops as road and blockhouse builders with Colonel Findlay's regiment. Findlay established Fort Necessity, also called Fort Mud, to store food, ammunition, and pack saddles sixteen miles beyond Fort McArthur. Findlay pushed on and established Fort Findlay on the south bank of the Blanchard River, at present day Findlay, Ohio. At Fort Findlay, road and fort construction passed to Colonel Cass who established Fort Portage, a blockhouse where the trail crossed the Portage River, about halfway between Findlay and the Maumee River.

When William Henry Harrison assumed command of the Northwestern Army, he faced many of the same conditions Hull had. Unlike Hull's use of a single axis of advance, Harrison divided his army into three wings with the intention of concentrating them at the Rapids of the Maumee River. He directed the right column, consisting of Pennsylvania and Virginia militia to rendezvous at Wooster, Ohio, and advance westward towards the Rapids by way of Mansfield and Upper Sandusky. The middle column of 1200 Ohio militia under Brigadier General Edward Tupper would follow Hull's Road northward from Dayton to Urbana and Fort Findlay. The left column, under General Winchester, consisting of the regulars and Kentucky militia, would proceed from Fort Wayne down the Maumee River to Fort Defiance. Harrison would use his mounted troops to strike at villages in the Indiana Territory to protect Winchester's western flank. Harrison's intention was to collect a million rations at the Rapids with additional stores at Fort Winchester, Fort McArthur, and Fort Seneca before he attempted to move against Detroit.

Harrison also wanted to use the river routes as much as possible. Water transportation was both cheaper and more efficient than transporting goods cross country, even though low water and frozen rivers could delay delivery. Supplies from Pittsburgh and elsewhere could be floated down the Ohio River, up the Scioto River to Franklinton, and then moved to various places of deposit by land. Supplies from Cincinnati could be rafted up the Miami River, portaged to the Auglaize River, floated down the Auglaize and the St. Mary's Rivers to Fort Wayne and from there down the Maumee River to the Rapids.

Harrison realized the existing road network in northwest and north central Ohio was non-existent at worst and poor at best. West bound travelers could follow the Ridge Road paralleling the Lake Erie shoreline from Pittsburgh to Detroit but the Royal Navy's presence on Lake Erie made that route too risky. Before the war, supplies destined for the Army's western posts were sent by way of two routes. Wagons and carts would transport materiel the 300 miles from Philadelphia to Pittsburg where they were transferred to flat boats for travel down the Ohio River. The other route also used both roads and waterways. Supplies from New York would pass through Albany, Schenectady, and

Niagara to Lake Erie. Government-owned schooners transported supplies to Detroit, Fort Dearborn, and Fort Mackinaw, but, again, the Royal Navy prevented that option. Alternate routes were much less direct. When the War Department sent artillery to Harrison, the artillery train consisting of twenty-eight cannon and six militia companies left Pittsburg and marched west to Canton and Mansfield, then south to Chillicothe, west to Franklinton, and north then to Delaware and the Rapids.

The Great Swamp was the primary barrier to transportation in northwestern Ohio. Captain Daniel Cushing, a native of Lebanon, Ohio, escorting the artillery train to Fort Meigs, described the difficulties crossing the Great Swamp in early 1813. "Wagons and sleds of every description [broke through the ice] - the water, mud and ice being from two to four feet deep. From the time I first entered the swamp until sundown, I did not leave the water, but was from knee deep to waist deep all day wading in mud, water and ice prying out sleds and wagons ..."¹⁰

Colonel James Morrison was the newly appointed Deputy Quartermaster to the Northwestern Army, and it was under his charge that two principal trails were cut: the Morrison Road from Delaware to Sandusky City; and the Harrison Trail from Franklinton to the upper Sandusky River and then along the Sandusky River to Fort Stephenson at Lower Sandusky. The Sandusky trail completed the much-needed, direct land route to Lake Erie. To protect this route, the army built a stockaded block house at Upper Sandusky (Fort Ferree) and rebuilt the government post at Sandusky Bay (Fort Stephenson). Between these forts, Colonel James V. Ball constructed Fort Seneca and Fort Ball to protect the road linking Upper and Lower Sandusky.

These road building activities gave Harrison two main north/south supply routes. The first route stretched from Franklinton to Lower Sandusky with Fort Seneca as the main depot. The other route generally followed Winchester's line of march along the Auglaize River with Fort Amanda as its terminus. This latter route allowed Harrison to use river transportation for both men and supplies from St. Mary's to the Rapids. Hull's road remained in use, but the difficulties transporting materiel overland downgraded its importance as a main supply route.

To complete the network, Harrison asked Joseph Badger, a preacher familiar with the Lake Erie shore area, to blaze another route westward from the Huron River to the Rapids.¹¹ Harrison used Simon Perkins' Ohio militia brigade to build a fifteen mile causeway from Upper Sandusky through the Black Swamp to the Maumee, thus providing a generally direct route from Cleveland to the Rapids.

Almost before they were finished, these military roads were choked with men and supplies. Captain John Robison wrote in his journal, "The different roads leading to the spot where the concentration of the armies was contemplated to take place were almost continuously filled with men marching with sleds hauling provisions, packhorses by the hundreds were seen moving towards the army [loaded] with provisions."¹² Pack trains of 450 horses and droves of 4,000 hogs were not uncommon. Travelers universally described the finished roads as "very bad" and "nearly impassable" because of the speed

with which the roads were built and the high volume of traffic they carried.¹³ Water transportation of supplies was equally heavy. “This day, Col. Mills arrived here [at Fort Meigs] with 100 men, came down the river in boats from St. Mary’s, fetched 700 bushels of forage, 10 barrels of whiskey, 500 barrels of flour, all in good order.”¹⁴

The security of these supply lines was as important to the Army’s success as the security of its troops on the march. As the army advanced, each wing of the army built a series of blockhouses to protect its communications, just as Hull had done. A small detachment under a subaltern garrisoned these posts. Built of logs, the blockhouses could either be protected by a stockade or erected as stand-alone buildings. These fortifications were relatively unsophisticated and did not require either special equipment or specialized training to design and construct. The structures provided sufficient protection against small arms fire. A few were designed to withstand artillery fire. To a large extent, these blockhouses were fortified stations where supplies not wanted for immediate use could be stored. Typically, a senior officer selected the sites for the posts.

General Elijah Wadsworth, commanding general of the Fourth Division, Ohio Militia, and responsible for the defense of northern Ohio after Hull’s surrender, established a string of blockhouses and supply points stretching from Cleveland to Lower Sandusky. His orders directing their construction are typical of other blockhouses. “You must build your block houses from twenty to 24 feet square of logs of tollerably [sic] large size and notched very close the lower story to have no window and but one door and the door of thick puncheons not penetrable by a musket ball strongly built and strongly barred—the second story must project at least three feet over the lower story on every side and both in the horizontal part of the projection and its sides must have numerous portholes, this second story may be covered with a common cabbin roof and will be the magazine ...”¹⁵

Fort Huntington in Cleveland included a stockade as part of its defense. The stockade wall “consisted of a large number of trees twelve to fifteen inches in diameter, twelve feet in length, sunk in the ground three or four feet ... The sides of the logs adjoining each other were hewed down for a few inches, so as to fit solidly together. The dirt was heaped up on the outside so as somewhat to deaden the effect of cannon balls. Next a large number of trees and brush were cut down, and the logs and brush piled together ... forming a long abates [sic], very difficult to climb over, and which would have exposed any assailing party who attempted to surmount it to a very destructive fire from the fort while doing so.”¹⁶

In the western portion of the state, General Winchester established three small forts to guard the supply route from Piqua to old Fort Defiance: Fort Barbee at St. Mary’s and Forts Amanda and Jennings along the Auglaize River. Near the site of Fort Defiance he established a larger picketed fort. The design and construction of Fort Winchester was more elaborate than the militia-built forts. The parallelogram fort included four blockhouses, one at each corner of the fort “... The logs to be cut 20 feet long for the lower story and 24 for the upper story, to be raised about 15 or 16 feet high; a store house and a hospital, each 18 by 24 feet, the former about 10 feet high, the latter 8; all of rough

logs, with cabin roofs; also to picket the lines between the bastions and build a watch house over the gate, and remove the brush in the vicinity of the fort.”¹⁷

With the roads built and the supply lines secure, Harrison could proceed with his plan to stockpile rations at the Rapids in preparation for a move on Detroit. Winchester moved to that location at the end of December, but Harrison suffered a setback when Winchester with the left wing of the army prematurely advanced from the Rapids to the River Raisin. Winchester’s defeat forced Harrison to temporarily fall back to the Portage River, destroying an estimated 24,000 pounds of flour and between 24 and 30,000 pounds of pork in the process.¹⁸

Harrison soon began construction of a post on the south bank of the Rapids of the Maumee when it became clear the British would not follow up on their success at the River Raisin. Fort Meigs, located on the portage between the upper and lower Maumee River, occupied a strategic location. The Maumee River from its mouth to the Rapids was navigable by large vessels. The rapids themselves extended about nine miles at which point the river again became navigable by smaller craft. With supplies for the invasion of Canada coming from upriver, Fort Meigs marked the point where supplies from Ohio and Indiana could be safely stored until trans-loaded onto lake going vessels and the invasion of Canada.

Unlike other Ohio forts, Fort Meigs was not only the Northwest Army’s largest supply depot, but its design benefitted from the expertise of trained engineers and surveyors. Captain Charles Gratiot and Captain Charles Wood, both West Point graduates, were trained military engineers. They were assisted by Lieutenant Joseph Larwill, Second Artillery, a surveyor in civilian life, who helped lay out the fort. Fort Meigs encompassed almost eight acres and included several blockhouses and twenty-eight pieces of artillery. Built at the Rapids of the Maumee, the fort could only be reached by land and its location on the river shielded it from the British fleet.

Captain Daniel Cushing described its construction. “The first thing after we arrived here was to put ourselves in a posture of Defense, two large and two Small batterys, was got under way, 8 large Block Houses two Large Houses for provisions, those Block Houses are on different angles of the Camp, at the same time we are Stockading our Camp ...”¹⁹

Harrison faced other logistics-related obstacles. He considered transportation the “great defect” in his operations and the immediate cause of many shortages. Wagons and pack animals were the primary means of hauling provisions to the field. “Almost all the fine teams ... have been worn down and discharged ... Pack horses are in the same situation. The roads are impassible for wagons,” he wrote the Secretary of War. On the army’s left wing, Harrison put soldiers to work building bateaux - flat bottomed cargo boats - to carry supplies down river. “At St. Mary’s and Defiance”, he wrote Eustis, “a Boat and some Pirogues have been prepared. Several Bateaux are in a considerable state of forwardness.”²⁰

Insufficient forage for the animals throughout the area of operations complicated matters. "The want of forage for our horses caused much murmuring, and we had to cut beech brush for them," wrote Allen Trimble to his wife.²¹ With little forage available along the way, teams had to carry their own food, reducing the amount of forage destined for the Rapids and significantly raising the financial cost. "We are now purchasing corn here (Chillicothe) to be transported to Upper Sandusky," wrote Harrison to Eustis. "Col. Morrison believes that it will require two Waggons [sic] with corn to support their own teams and one other with flour to that place and back again."²²

Although well aware of the failings of using contractors to supply rations, the War Department did not create a Subsistence Department during the war. Instead, the Administration chose to rely upon contractors, even though contractors for subsistence were not liable for losses or subject to military authority. When the war began, and the government contractor responsible for supplying rations for Hull's army failed to meet his obligations, General Hull appointed John H. Piatt, a Cincinnati merchant and banker as commissary agent to purchase rations for his army and arrange transportation for the items. At the same time, two other government contractors, James White and Ebenezer Denny, were responsible for subsistence for the army in the northern and southern portions of the state: White below the 41st Parallel and Denny above it.

Prior to assuming command of the Northwestern Army in September 1812, General Harrison knew too well about the inefficiencies of the contract system, and preferred to not rely on Washington for subsistence. Harrison wrote the Secretary of War, "I recollect that the Army was several times during General Wayne's command upon the point of starving from the difficulty of getting Provisions down the Ohio in the fall season after that had been procured at Pittsburg."²³

Harrison also felt that the Department's contract with Ebenezer Denny of Pittsburg for over a million rations was exorbitant and the rations could be gotten cheaper in Ohio. He reduced the order to 400,000 and engaged with John H. Piatt as his purchasing agent, whom Hull had used before him, to procure rations for the army. The result was that Denny and Piatt competed with each other in a variety of contracts to feed the army - with mills to grind grain into flour, with coopers to make barrels, and with teamsters to transport supplies. Compounding the matter, Denny had already engaged all mills east of the Scioto River forcing Piatt to purchase flour primarily in the area around Chillicothe.

For matters other than rations, Harrison selected (with War Department approval) James Morrison as Deputy Quarter Master General for the Northwestern Army who the War Department commissioned a lieutenant colonel. Morrison was responsible for purchasing supplies for the army and arranging for their transportation: acquiring wagons, buying pack animals, hiring teamsters, and building roads. Less than two weeks after Morrison's appointment, the Secretary of War sent out Captain William Piatt to also serve as Deputy Quarter Master for the Northwestern Army, with the same authority as Morrison. Not surprisingly, Captain Piatt's arrival only added to the confusion among the contractors, commissary agents, and quarter masters. Competition for supplies, rations, and transportation was fierce and costs increased significantly. Compounding the matter, both

militia and regular army officers also purchased items from farmers, merchants, and peddlers. Harrison admitted to the Secretary of War that he caused many of the duplicative efforts. "I have so many Engines in operation for forwarding supplies that I scarcely believe it a possibility of our not having a sufficiency."²⁴

A lack of hard currency and the disinclination of suppliers to accept paper money caused the price of rations to soar. John Piatt agreed to furnish rations at twenty cents, but within six months, the per unit price of a ration rose to forty-five cents. The government's credit was so bad that the Miami Exporting Company, the leading bank of Cincinnati, asked Harrison to guarantee that all drafts would be paid in specie. In 1814, Piatt obligated the government for \$210,000, but received just \$46,000 from Washington. To keep the army supplied, Piatt used his personal funds to purchase provisions for the army.

Transportation costs were the primary reasons affecting the price of rations. The cost per ration varied from seventeen cents to twenty-five cents depending upon where the rations were delivered. A barrel of flour cost \$6.00 in Cincinnati in November 1813; at Piqua, that same barrel cost \$8.00; at Fort Amanda, \$11.00; and at Fort Meigs, the most remote post, a barrel of flour was valued at \$15.00.²⁵ In the early months of the war, supplies, cattle, and hogs from southern Ohio and Kentucky were driven up Hull's Trace, but the Franklinton, Delaware, Norton, Upper Sandusky, and Lower Sandusky road soon became the preferred route. But, even with this more direct route, commissary stores remained expensive.

In March 1813, John Armstrong, who replaced William Eustis as Secretary of War, negotiated a contract with Orr and Greeley, a private firm, for army rations in the Northwest Theater. The amount of money Harrison had spent on provisions had alarmed the Secretary of War and his contract with Orr and Greeley limited Harrison to \$20,000 per month for subsistence. Unfortunately, Orr and Greeley were unable to meet Harrison's requirements, particularly for providing 300,000 rations upon the Army's landing in Canada. Still, despite this and other failures to deliver, rations remained the responsibility of civilian contractors.

And, as Harrison noted to the Secretary of War, corruption was rife among the different contractors. "... there has been more fraud and speculation practiced upon the public in this quarter since last fall than in any other army, that was ever found. With some exception, it has I believe been principally confined to Pack Horse and Waggon Masters. I had one confined at Chillicothe for selling public oxen and stealing others."²⁶

For the soldiers, though, the financial and transportation problems Morrison, Piatt, and others encountered were unimportant. Their interest was in the frequency, quality, and quantity of the rations they were issued. "The rations are seldom drawn in full", wrote Ohio militiaman John Robison, "Whiskey, candles, or some part is wanting almost every day". Robert Yost blamed his commander for the poor quality of the rations he received. "By the misConduct of our noble Commander there was nothing but whisky and drid [sic] beef and itspoilt so that a number of the men could not make any use of it."²⁷ Officers complained about contractors because of their unreliability and their adverse effect on

operations. Colonel Miller of the 19th Regiment criticized them to the Secretary of War, “I have found it to be the case that, when the Army was ready or about to move, the contractor runs short of provisions.”²⁸ A distrust of contractors, coupled with poor and inadequate provisions, prompted Ohio militia general John S. Gano to describe his situation at Lower Sandusky as “between hawk and buzzard – the contractors and the commissary”.²⁹

The quality of the rations issued was a common observation in official reports. Major C.S. Todd’s inspection report of Captain Joel Collins’ company of the 26th Regiment of Infantry at Detroit in October 1814 noted the “inferior quality” of the flour but added that the remaining part of the ration was “complete and wholesome”. A similar inspection of Captain Benjamin Desha’s Company of the Second Rifle Regiment at Chillicothe noted that the quantity of the rations were “sufficient, the flour was good, the meat not so, and a small part of the ration defective”.³⁰

A soldier’s daily ration included either one and a quarter pounds of beef or three quarters of a pound of salted pork; eighteen ounces of bread or flour; and one gill of rum, whiskey, or brandy. For every one hundred rations, the contractor provided two quarts of salt; four quarts of vinegar (to prevent scurvy); four pounds of soap; and one and one-half pounds of candles.³¹ When the soldiers received their rations, they were on their own to make something of them. For men not accustomed to preparing meals, cooking was a new experience and the army provided little guidance. Regulations only directed the soldier to learn to “wash his linens and cook his rations” but provided no other details. “Mostly did our volunteers lament the necessity which compelled them to become cooks,” wrote an Ohio militiaman.³²

The army discouraged fried meat, preferring the men make soups and stews with their meat ration, but according to a post-war report, if the soldier received fresh meat, he typically broiled it on the coals of a fire. If he received salted pork, he ate it raw. If he received salt beef, he boiled it.³³ Duncan McArthur proposed to Thomas Worthington that vegetables be added to the soldiers’ rations, recommending the addition of rice, barley, potatoes, or beans. He noted, also, that the soldiers had no means to bake bread from the flour they were issued and, as a result, it was generally “eaten raw and unwholesome.”³⁴

Not surprisingly, a few weeks of this diet, washed down with a gill of whiskey, sent many soldiers to the hospital with stomach and bowel complaints. It was not until after the war that the Army included messing in its Regulations and added a passage directing “the greatest care will be observed in scouring and washing utensils employed in cooking.”³⁵

The Army provided some implements for the soldiers to prepare their meals. Regulations authorized a sheet iron camp kettle and two tin pans for every six men. Captain John McElvoy’s militia company recruited in St. Clairsville, Ohio, were issued “nine ovens and two stew-kettles with lids.”³⁶ Other militia units from St. Clairsville received six

ovens.³⁷ James Hezlep's artillery company in Simon Perkins' militia brigade prepared their rations using seven camp kettles, one bake oven, and one pan.³⁸

It is unlikely that the eighteen ounces of bread a soldier in the Northwestern Army received was in the form of soft bread. Transportation of bread from Cincinnati, Dayton, Urbana, or elsewhere was out of the question; loaves were too liable to mold or suffer damage while in transit. Instead, the Army issued round, hard bread or biscuits – called hard tack in later wars – made of unleavened flour and water. Formed by hand and placed individually in an oven, the biscuits were baked to remove all moisture. This process produced crackers that were almost indestructible and almost inedible. Writing after the war, Winfield Scott, noted that a barrel of flour, weighing 196 pounds, would yield 171 pounds of double-baked biscuits.³⁹ After cooling, the biscuits were packed into barrels or sacks for shipping and storage. At posts where bake ovens existed, as at Fort Meigs, it is likely that the need for yeast precluded baking anything but hard biscuits.⁴⁰ On 21 August 1813, in preparation for the invasion of Canada, Harrison ordered the soldiers at Fort Meigs to commence “the baking of Biscuit to be carried on to the greatest possible amount and with the greatest expedition.”⁴¹

Militia private Samuel Williams of Ross County described how he and his messmates prepared their rations. "Our company is divided into messes of six men each. Our rations are delivered together to each mess when we encamp at night. This consists of flour, fat bacon, and salt. The flour is kneaded in a broad iron camp-kettle, and drawn out in long rolls the size of a man's wrist, and coiled around a smooth pole some three inches in diameter and five or six feet long, on which the dough is flattened so as to be half an inch or more in thickness. The pole, thus covered with dough, except a few inches at each end, is placed on two wooden forks driven into the ground in front of the camp-fire, and turned frequently, till it is baked, when it is cut off in pieces, and the pole covered again in the same manner and baked. Our meat is cooked thus: a branch of a tree having several twigs on it is cut, and the ends of the twigs sharpened; the fat bacon is cut in slices, and stuck on the twigs, leaving a little space between each, and then held in the blaze and smoked till cooked. Each man takes a piece of the pole-bread, and lays thereon a slice of bacon and with his knife cuts therefrom, and eats his meal with a good appetite. Enough is cooked each night to serve for the next day; each man stowing in his knapsack his own day's provisions."⁴²

Alfred Brunson, an orderly sergeant in the 27th Regiment of United States Infantry, a 12-month regiment recruited in Ohio, described similar efforts to prepare their rations. “We drew our pork and flour, but we had no camp equipage, not having yet reached our regiment. We kindled fires of drift-wood found on the beach. We took the flour, some on pieces of bark, and some in dirty pocket handkerchiefs. If we had cups, we ladled the water from the bay into the flour, and those who had no cups lifted the water with their two hands so arranged as to form a cup. The flour thus wet, without salt, yeast, or shortening, was baked, some on pieces of bark before the fire, hoe-cake or johnny-cake fashion; and some removed the fire and put the dough into the hot sand, wrapped in leaves or paper. Our pork we cooked in the blaze of the fire, on the points of sticks.”⁴³

Another Ohio militiaman recalled his messmates' attempts to roast potatoes. "Every person knows it requires hot ashes and coals, which we had not, and the method that some undertook was to put down leaves and ashes, and then build a fire over them. When it was thought they were roasted, they were taken out, and the skin found burnt as black as coal and the inside as raw as it ever was ... we went to parching corn for our dinner"⁴⁴

Field corn was a familiar and versatile staple. Period accounts describe it as a "small kind of corn, shallow grain, and very suitable for roasting ears."⁴⁵ When issued on cobs, the soldiers could boil, roast, or parch the corn. If boiled with a bag of hard wood ashes to soften and hull the corn, the soldiers could make hominy.⁴⁶ Frequently, the commissary issued the corn as meal which the soldiers either baked into bread or pones or made into mush.

As Harrison's force increased, so too did the demand for provisions. In December 1812, supplies became so scarce in the left wing of the army that after Winchester issued his last barrel of flour, his soldiers subsisted upon a poor diet of beef and hickory roots.⁴⁷

Soldiers on campaign had several options available to them to supplement their diet. Sutlers - merchants who followed the army - sold a wide range of foodstuffs and other commodities. Hunting and fishing were possible as was foraging. Many simply confiscated what they needed or wanted. At some posts, soldiers could plant gardens for fresh vegetables.

Sutler-supplied goods were an important adjunct to the issued rations. For the soldiers, they supplied items not available elsewhere. For the officers, who did not receive government rations, they were oftentimes the sole source of subsistence. Army-approved sutlers accompanied the army on the march and set up shop near the military cantonments. The Army expected soldiers to use their pay to purchase vegetables and other foodstuffs to supplement their rations. Four sections of the Articles of War defined the mutual responsibilities between the military and the sutlers. In order to sell goods to the soldiers, the army required sutlers to carry "good and wholesome provisions at reasonable prices", but sutlers also carried items that they knew would turn a profit. A list of sutler stores at Fort Meigs in April 1813 included: spirits, whiskey, rum, loaf sugar, maple sugar, brown sugar, tea, coffee, molasses, butter, candles, pepper, brandy, chocolate, soap, tobacco, vinegar, and bacon.⁴⁸

Merchants who wished to become sutlers for the army needed official permission from the immediate commander. When Alexander Smith requested permission to sell goods to the soldiers at either Fort Meigs or Fort Winchester, he sought letters of recommendation from John Trimble, cousin of David Trimble who was a brigade quartermaster at Fort Meigs and later one of Harrison's aides. "Mr. Smith wants to establish a grocery at Fort Meigs or Fort Winchester. Any favor which you can confer upon him will be very acceptable." Within a week, David Trimble received another letter from Mr. M. Harrison, no friend of Smith's. "If God Almighty permits him to get to Fort Meigs, I hope he will there be delivered up - together with his cargo to the Indians, & I will give \$100 for his scalp. I want you to inform Genl. Harrison, Genl. Clay, Major Mitchell and Johnson,

Captain Haskell and all the army of Smith [so] that his avarice may not be satiated this trip.”⁴⁹

Soldiers often complained about the sutlers’ prices. At each post where a sutler operated, a board of officers was established to protect the soldier from unscrupulous sutlers as much as possible. The board set maximum prices, ensured fair practices, and could put a sutler off limits. At Fort Winchester, a board established maximum prices for tobacco (fifty cents a pound), whiskey (fifty cents a quart), Hyson tea (two dollars a pound), and chocolate (seventy-five cents a pound).⁵⁰ In November 1813, General Cass directed his officers to “examine the prices of goods ... to ascertain who is willing to sell ... on fair and liberal terms.”⁵¹ In fairness to the sutlers, because soldiers’ pay was often in arrears, the sutler sold goods on credit. If the soldier died or deserted before he could settle his accounts, the sutler took the loss. As a result, the sutler’s high prices not only covered his risk, but also the expense he incurred by purchasing his wares on extended credit.⁵²

Sutlers were not the only merchants who interacted with the soldiers. Individual citizens often arrived at the camps with food to sell. For example, boats from Cleveland sailed to Fort Meigs loaded with dry goods and produce. One entrepreneur sold his cargo of butter, cheese, and pickles for \$1,500. At Detroit, Robert Yost complained about the prices charged at local markets. “I gave one dollar for one hundred apples ... at this place all nessasory norishments [sic] Came very high such as milk 25c per quart butter 75c per pound Cheese 37 1/2 c flower \$10 per hundred pork eight dollars per hundred and other things in perpotion.”⁵³ In response, the commander at Detroit placed those establishments that did not sell goods at “fair and liberal” prices off limits to the soldiers and officers.

Alcohol was likely the most popular item sutlers stocked, much to a commanders’ chagrin. John Jackson of Ross County, Ohio, recalled how soldiers at Fort McArthur circumvented General Tupper’s order prohibiting sutlers from selling whiskey without a verbal or written permit from a commissioned officer. Since many militia officers carried swords to distinguish themselves from the enlisted ranks, soldiers in Jackson’s company acquired a sword and “two or three of them would take the sword and canteen and go to the sutler and ask to buy a quart of whiskey – well where is your permit, - I have got none but here is our ensign. Ensign will you permit me to buy a quart of whiskey.” “Yes sir, let that man have a quart of whiskey.”⁵⁴

Hunting provided not only a break from the monotony of Army rations, but also a break from the monotony of Army life. Alexander Meek, an ensign in Cushing’s company of the Second Artillery wrote militia General John S. Gano of their hunting efforts. “Next day ... my companion Madiss killed a number of squirrels, partridges, pheasants, one pig, one cat, etc. The cat he cleaned and ... made a stylish fricassee & invited a number of friends to partake – some of which did so & I confess that I never eat [sic] a more delicious piece of meat in my life.”⁵⁵

The close proximity to rivers and lakes allowed soldiers to add fish to their diets. Captain Daniel Cushing noted in his diary that the Fort Meigs garrison “have a fine parcel of fish”

adding that two lieutenants caught 375 fish “with hooks” while other soldiers using a seine, were able to fill six barrels with salted fish.⁵⁶

Confiscation of private property was not an uncommon occurrence. A Steubenville soldier related an incident that happened on their journey to Fort Meigs. “We landed at what is now Johnson’s Island, where we found corn, turnips, potatoes, and about two hundred fat hogs. The owner had left all and had fled to Canada. Being as we learned, a Frenchman in sympathy with our enemies, we took possession of everything that would be of service to the army. The hogs we killed cleaned and salted.”⁵⁷

Foraging was common, but foraging had its risks. Lieutenant Allen of Kinsman, Ohio, wrote his wife about gathering apples along Sandusky Bay. “Landed at the orchard where they were very plenty, got as many as we could eat, and put up several barrels to bring to camp ... But we were ambuscaded by the Indians, and had to leave one of our number on the ground, a prey to savage brutality. The remainder escaped unhurt.”⁵⁸ One of Tupper’s men wrote from near the Rapids in November, “Some of our men carelessly left the lines and went in quest of Indian hogs, potatoes, etc. A party of Indians mounted on horseback, killed and scalped four ...”⁵⁹

At night and in inclement weather, inadequate shelter often added to the soldiers’ discomfort. Enlisted soldiers and federalized volunteers could expect to be issued tents large enough to sleep six men. These tents provided adequate shelter in good weather, but offered little protection in winter. “They [the men] are in common tents exposed to the cold and the ground upon which they lay is covered in water ...” wrote Colonel Miller of the 19th Regiment.⁶⁰ For the non-federalized militia, Ohio attempted with varying degrees of success to supply the militia with tents, but many soldiers were forced to improvise. John Campbell’s Portage County militia fabricated tents from linen bed sheets.⁶¹

There were times when shelter of any kind was simply not available and the soldiers had to do as best they could. “The men on Friday evening after a march until dark, through a storm of the greatest fall of rain for half a day ... rolled themselves in blankets which were as wet as if they had been dipped in a tub of water and stretched themselves upon the ground, without anything else to cover them,” wrote Colonel Cotgreave to General Wadsworth from Camp Huron.⁶²

Soldiers fortunate enough to be in garrison when cold weather arrived often built “huts” in which to spend the winter. John Jackson of Ross County described his cabin at Fort McArthur in the winter of 1812. “We at first lived in tents, but when the weather began to get cold, we built log huts covered in clapboards, some had chimneys and some had open fronts, with tent cloths hung up in front at night and in cold weather. Our hut was tolerably comfortable; we had a chimney and a door, we also chinked and daubed it, and laid a puncheon floor ... our bed was to lay one blanket and cover with two; we had to lay spoon fashion and if one wished to turn over we had to make a frolic of it and all turn at once.”⁶³

Many officers shared their men's hardships in the field, but some, particularly ranking officers were allotted individual tents. The officers in Cushing's artillery company were issued marquis tents and officers in Bateal Harrison's company of the 2d Rifle Regiment at Malden received wall tents.

After the Battle of the Thames, the situation in the Northwest stabilized. The likelihood of conventional combat operations lessened although sporadic raids and ambushes remained a threat. Purely military duties, patrolling, for example, became the exception rather than the rule. The soldiers were instead drovers and boat builders, wood cutters and bakers, carpenters, cooks, gardeners, hunters, and fishermen. Their officers and non-commissioned officers became foremen and supervisors. These labors and the hardships associated with maintaining long supply lines characterized the war experiences for those Ohioans who served in the garrisons of Fort Shelby, Fort Gratiot, and elsewhere. In a very real sense, these support operations shaped the course of the war in the Northwest more than tactics did. But the soldiers who occupied the posts in Ohio and the Michigan Territory or escorted supplies to Upper Canada probably neither realized nor understood that fact and felt that their role in the war lacked martial honor and glory. Regardless of their personal feelings, their collective participation was instrumental to Ohio's war effort.

ENDNOTES

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⁴Lieutenant Colonel James G. Forbes, *Report of the Trial of Brig. General William Hull, commanding the North-Western Army of the United States by a Court Martial held at Albany, on 3d January 1814 and Succeeding Days*, Appendix, (New York: Eastburn, Kirk and Company, 1814),72

⁵Forbes, Jonah Bacon testimony, 121.

⁶Forbes, Annex, 69

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<http://www.archive.org/stream/michiganhistoric31michuoft#page/n269/mode/2up>. Accessed 16 November 2009.

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⁹James Denny to Isabelle Denny, Fort McArthur, 16 June 1812, "Correspondence of Colonel James Denny", *Old Northwest Genealogical Society* 10 (October, 1907), 287.

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- ¹³Denny, 295; William Henry Harrison to Eustis, 15 November 1812, *Document Transcriptions*, Vol.1.
- ¹⁴Lindley, Fort Meigs and the War of 1812, Cushing Diary, 19 April, 1813, 114.
- ¹⁵Wadsworth to Perkins, Cleveland, 9 September 1812, "Northern Ohio in the War of 1812".
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- ⁵⁶ Lindley, *Fort Meigs and the War of 1812*, 25 March and 20 May, 1813
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