

Notes on the Ohio Militia during the War of 1812.
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The military policy of the United States during the post-Revolutionary period relied upon a small national army and a robust state militia force. The role of the militia, as spelled out in the Constitution, had a clearly defined function: suppress insurrection, enforce the laws of the Union, and repel invasion. As Peter Buell Porter noted, the army would be the sword of the Republic and the militia its shield.

Even before Ohio acquired statehood in 1803, the Territorial Legislature of the Northwest Territory published a law for “regulating and establishing the militia.” This law, passed 25 July 1788, provided that all male citizens between the ages of sixteen and fifty should perform military duty; report for drill armed with a musket and bayonet, cartridge box, or powder horn and bullet pouch; bring along one pound of powder and four pounds of lead; priming wire, brush and six flints. The law also stipulated that drill would be held on the first day of the week at 10:00 in the morning or whenever the Commander-in-Chief determined. Failure to appear for drill would result in fines and refusal to serve in case of invasion would be considered desertion and the offender court-martialed.¹ The Militia Acts of 1792 codified the federal standards for the militia and gave the president authority to call out the states’ militia for specified purposes, but usually for domestic reasons. A subsequent statute outlined the organization and administration of the militia. Each state, however, could call out the militia for any purpose.

Ohio’s militia laws generally followed these precedents, with the amount for fines, the frequency, time and date of drill varying, and the age limit for enrollment dropping to 45. In 1803, Quakers, Mennonites, and Dunkers were exempt from military duty in lieu of a three dollar annual payment. Ministers and jail keepers were also exempt. A training day was limited to six hours. Between 1808 and early 1815, Ohio passed four militia acts, but did little to enforce them. At the outbreak of the War of 1812, the law required just two musters a year, one in April and one in September.

The state constitution reaffirmed the militia requirement, outlined the procedure for appointing and commissioning officers, and noted that “standing armies in peacetime are dangerous to liberty.” The legislature divided the state into four military districts, each with its own militia division. The four military districts abutted the Indian lands of north central and north western Ohio. A major general, appointed by joint ballot of the state legislature, commanded each district. John S. Gano of Cincinnati commanded the First Division in the First District; Nathaniel Massie of Chillicothe commanded the Second Division in the Second District; Joseph Beall of Marietta commanded the Third Division in the Third District, and Elijah Wadsworth of Canfield commanded the Fourth Division of the Fourth District. The Ohio legislature created a fifth division in February, 1813, under Major General Benjamin Whiteman. Each division contained four or five brigades under the command of a brigadier general. The brigades were further broken down into regiments and then into companies. In less populated areas, companies were organized into a separate organization called the odd battalion and attached to the closest Division. The Ohio legislature also appointed the state quartermaster general.

In March 1812, the state adjutant general reported that the Ohio militia consisted of 4 divisions; 17 brigades; 48 regiments, each commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel; and 3 odd battalions, each commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel Commandant. The report further broke down the militia into companies: 445 infantry companies, 49 rifle companies, 23 cavalry troops, 10 light infantry companies, and 2 companies of artillery, equipped with a single 4-pounder each.²

The authorized strength of a militia company remained fairly constant throughout the war period. In April 1812, Brigadier General Gano ordered each company to consist of “a captain, a lieutenant, an ensign, two musicians, eight non-commissioned officers, and sixty-five rank and file”. Because population density fluctuated widely from town to town, Colonel McArthur decreed that a company could have between “fifty and eighty volunteers” with the appropriate number of officers.³ Governor Meigs apparently agreed with McArthur when he commented to Senator Worthington, “it requires a greater No of officers (than in regular discipline) by their authority and Influence to regulate the conduct of militia.”⁴ A month later, the state set the authorized strength of a company at three officers and sixty-four rank and file, including musicians and non-commissioned officers.⁵ In early 1813, the War Department directed that the organization and composition of a militia company reflect that of a company in the regular army. Ohio law, however, had no provisions for a second and third lieutenant. As a result, Ohio militia companies’ organization remained unchanged to maintain the proportion of officer to enlisted ranks.⁶

The soldiers elected their company officers who, in turn, voted for their regimental and brigade officers. The governor, as commander-in-chief, certified and issued commissions accordingly. Company commanders selected their non-commissioned officers.⁷ Just as a company could elect its officers, so, too, could it discharge them, if not by vote, then by deed. On the march to Detroit, Lieutenant Colonel Forbes related witnessing “some of the Ohio militia riding one of their officers on a rail”.⁸

Theoretically, during muster or times of emergency, each individual knew the company, regiment, brigade, and division he belonged to. But, many Ohioans did not enroll in the militia and suffered no penalty. Of those who did enroll, many did not attend the musters and, as a result, neither the governor nor the militia officers knew the effective strength of their units. In December 1812, for example, Governor Meigs complained that so much time was consumed in collecting and organizing militia men that it was often too late to meet an emergency.⁹ Failure to enforce the laws and collect the associated fines affected the militia in other ways as well. Money thus received was intended to purchase necessary items for the militia’s use: stands of colors for the regiments, drums and fifes for the companies and camp equipage for the soldiers.¹⁰

On paper, Ohio had a formidable force, but in reality it was a hollow one. Not only were the militia laws not enforced in the pre-war period, but most of those who enrolled lacked arms of any type. Fallen Timbers and Tippecanoe had significantly reduced the Indian threat to such an extent that many Ohioans did not even own weapons. Of those who owned a firearm, many were unserviceable, forcing the army to hire civilian gunsmiths

and organize a corps of artificers to repair faulty weapons.¹¹ When the war broke out, Chauncey Eggleston, a resident of Aurora, Ohio, recalled the period with dismay in his reminiscences, “We were poorly prepared for war, our discipline (training) was naught, and our arms but few and poor, some good rifles and good shooters, but we were farmers and our war arms, what there were, were wholly unfit for battle ... we were in some distress.”¹² Prominent citizens from many Ohio counties, and even some militia companies, petitioned the governor for arms and ammunition stating “[we] are entirely destitute of ammunition, such as lead, powder or flints and a very great number are destitute of arms.” Some civic leaders asked for a contingent of militia to be stationed in their towns and settlements.¹³

Lack of weapons was a common complaint during the first year of the war. In 1808, Congress had authorized the loan of 7,000 muskets for seven years to equip the Ohio militia.¹⁴ That same year, the Uniform Militia Act appropriated \$200,000 annually to provide arms and equipment to the individual states and territories. Each state received an annual allotment of weapons based upon the number of enrolled militia reported to the federal government. In 1811 Ohio reported 27,104 infantryman and 2,336 riflemen on the rolls, armed with a disproportionate number of rifles to muskets: 4,927 muskets and 9,746 rifles.¹⁵ By the end of December, 1812, the government had either issued or loaned an additional 5,000 weapons to the Ohio militia.¹⁶

As tensions increased between the United States and Great Britain, Congress, in February 1812, addressed the issue of militia mobilizations. Among the entitlements due a militia soldier upon mobilization into federal service was a provision allowing the soldier to retain the musket, bayonet, and equipment issued him and to receive both regular army pay and a clothing allowance equivalent to the cost of a soldier’s uniform.¹⁷ After the war began, the government rescinded the musket provision and, instead, provided the discharged soldier ten dollars upon receipt of his firearm and equipment, although many veterans opted to illegally retain their weapons.¹⁸ Recruits continued to receive \$34.07 as a clothing allowance, however.¹⁹

In April 1812, the federal government issued a quota for federalized volunteers who would serve for twelve months as an adjunct to the regular army. A wartime-only measure, these volunteers received many of the same benefits and allowances as those in the Army, but could elect their own officers. Unlike the non-federalized militia, such volunteers could serve in an expeditionary capacity. After the refusal of some non-federalized Ohio militiamen to cross into Canada, Lewis Cass urged the Secretary of War, to rely exclusively upon federal volunteers.²⁰

In his instructions to Meigs in April, 1812, Secretary of War Eustis directed the Ohio governor to issue “immediate orders for 1200 men, properly officered and under the command of a lieutenant colonel... to march to Detroit for the defense of that post in the event of war with Great Britain. Four hundred of them to be armed with their own rifles, the other eight hundred will bear arms furnished by the United States.”²¹

Upon receipt of Meigs' call, the division commanders immediately notified their subordinate commanders. Major General John Gano of the First Division published a circular directing his brigades to raise eight companies. "The following is the quote [sic] required from each brigade in my division: three companies from the first brigade, two companies from the second brigade, one company from the third brigade, one company from the fourth brigade, and one company from the fifth brigade."²² Meigs exempted the militia of Preble and Miami counties because of their proximity to the Indian lands.²³

Within a short time, 1200 men from the central and southern part of the state were organized into three regiments from the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Ohio Divisions respectively and, with Captain Sloan's Troop of Cincinnati Dragoons, rendezvoused at Dayton. Twenty companies made up the Army of Ohio; seven from the First Division, five from the Second Division, and five from the Third Division.²⁴ Although not part of the main body, the 4th Ohio Division also contributed three companies to Hull's army. Many who, because of age or gender, could not serve in the militia nonetheless supported the war. On several occasions, in response to requests for assistance, the citizenry responded by rolling cartridges, sewing shirts, or donating blankets.

Citing Ohio constitutional and legal issues, Governor Meigs disregarded the Secretary's instructions to give overall command of the three regiments to a lieutenant colonel and allowed Colonels Cass, McArthur, and Findley to each command a regiment. While this command arrangement acknowledged the importance of local politics and the primacy of state over federal militia law, it created difficulties for General Hull, the overall commander of the expedition. The three colonels outranked Lieutenant Colonel Miller of the regular army whose regiment accompanied Hull, complicating command and control within the Northwestern Army.²⁵

One of the first tasks facing the colonels was to organize the disparate companies and individuals into some semblance of order. The Ohio Militia Act of 1809 required each company commander to organize his company into eight classes. In the event of a mobilization, all the men in the first class would serve on the first tour of duty, with the other classes serving in a reserve capacity until called to active duty. Once notified to take the field with the required number of men, the alerted class had five days to fill their quotas, either by draft or contract.²⁶ Only a Surgeon's Certificate of Disability could exempt a soldier for illness. The men would muster at a pre-designated location where the company commander would forward these men to the place of rendezvous and mustering in.

Subsequent call ups would be handled the same way. If their services were needed, officers were detailed in the order of the dates of their commissions, and took with them their non-commissioned officers.²⁷ Once the men from several detachments assembled at the rendezvous point, the combined unit would elect a commander.²⁸ In April and May, 1812, this provision of the militia law created several problems and significant squabbling as individuals vied for leadership and command positions.²⁹

If, for some reason, a soldier could not serve his tour, he could hire a substitute to serve in his place. If a drafted man did not go or furnish a substitute he was subject to a fine. In 1813, substitutes in Stark County could receive as much as one hundred dollars.³⁰ In Guernsey county, local townspeople hired a substitute to ensure the blacksmith did not march to war. These provisions of the Militia Act effectively limited company commanders to the role of administrators rather than leaders and allowed some militia members to engage in bounty jumping.

In early 1812, support for the war was widespread. Ohioans throughout the state enthusiastically responded to the mobilization. Typical of the enthusiasm is the resolution of Captain Smith's Zanesville company, "... believing the only way to obtain a permanent and honourable peace, is to prosecute the War with vigour and carry home to the Enemy the vengeance they have so justly merited by a long list of unprovoked enormities ... and also determined to free our frontier settlements from the dreadful apprehension of the Tomahawk & Scalping knife in the hands of a barbarous Savage & British foe, [we] have formed ourselves into a volunteer Company ... and tender our services " ³¹

Popular poems and songs also expressed Ohioans' belief that the British instigated many of the Indian attacks and Meigs' call was a chance to seek retribution.

"Freemen, no longer bear such slaughter
Avenge your country's cruel woe,
Arouse and save your wives and daughters.
Arouse and expel the faithless foe
Chorus –
Scalps are bought at stated prices,
Malden pays the price in gold." ³²

Others, expressing more patriotic sentiments, proclaimed their desire to fight for the flag, described in one account as, "of thirteen stripes and seven stars – the last star being that of Ohio." ³³ Still others referred to the liberties won in the Revolution and warned of the consequences of not defending them. "Parents, could you see your children dragged from your presence, and bound in chains? Children, could you see your aged parents toiling in bondage? Husbands, could you see your wives forced into the embraces of a ruthless and brutal soldiery? Young Men, could you see the fair and blooming virgins with whom you are acquainted, prostrated at the feet of merciless savages? ³⁴

When the Cincinnati companies left for Dayton, Reverend Joshua Wilson urged them to perform their duties bravely and faithfully, but not engage in acts of outrage or cruelty. He also threatened "the curse of Heaven falling with a vengeance" on those who would be traitors and cowards and did not do their duty to the fullest. ³⁵ Other sermons condemned the faint-hearted. "Cursed be he that goeth not forth to battle, and cursed be he that keepeth back his hand from blood." ³⁶

Governor Meigs ordered the militia to rendezvous at Dayton at the end of April. Under Meigs' immediate supervision, the three regiments assembled at Cincinnati, Urbana and Franklinton and marched to Dayton where they rendezvoused with General Hull on 25 May. The First Division assembled at Hutchinson's Tavern in Cincinnati where Gano called for volunteers. A young observer described the event years later. "The division was drawn out in line and presented as motley an appearance as has ever been seen. Some of the men had rifles, but the greater part only sticks and corn stalks. As to uniform, there were all kinds of apparel, from hunting-shirts to butternut jackets ... When the call was made for volunteers, it seemed to me the whole division volunteered."³⁷

The enthusiasm may not have been as wide spread as suggested, however. Colonel Duncan McArthur described the composition of his unit to Senator Worthington, indicating that drafted men formed a large portion of his regiment. "Those from the first Division are a mixed multitude, 150 odd Volunteers for 12 months, something upwards of 200 for 6 months, and about 240 drafts making in all about 590."³⁸

Companies as well as individuals offered their services, organizing themselves and adopting such names as Captain James Steele's Troop of Light Dragoons, the Zanesville Light Horse Company, Womeldorf's Troop of Cavalry, the Chillicothe Guards, the Franklin Dragoons, the Cincinnati Rifle Company, and the Dayton Company of Infantry. Most companies, though, were simply known by the last name of their commander: Captain George Gibson's Company and Captain John Davidson's Company, for example.

Despite Eustis' assurance, serviceable arms and equipment for the militia were not available in sufficient quantities to equip the militia. "There were no rifles, no knapsacks, no bullets, no moulds; in fact, nothing but arms and cartridge boxes, many of which were good for nothing" wrote an observer in June 1812.³⁹ An aide to Governor Meigs inspected the weapons of the three divisions and reported that "many were condemned. And many of them proved very bad."⁴⁰

In late June, Governor Meigs ordered Brigadier General John Gano to inspect and accept 1500 arms from the arsenal at Newport. On July 1, Gano reported the results of his mission. "... 400 New Haven, 400 New Pattern Charlotteville, and 700 old stock. I am certain no more than $\frac{3}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ will pass inspection."⁴¹

Upon assuming command of the Northwestern Army, General Hull inspected the assembled troops of the Army of Ohio. He described what he saw in his *Memoirs*. "Their arms were totally unfit for use, the leather which covered their cartouche boxes was rotten and no better security to the cartridges than brown paper; many of the men were destitute of blankets, and other necessary clothing; no armourers were provided to prepare their arms, no means had been adopted to furnish clothing; and no powder in any of the magazines, fit for use ... or any measures adopted to supply them."⁴²

A return of ordnance stores captured at Detroit provides additional insight into the variety of equipment carried by the Northwestern Army: 2500 French bayonets; 21 wooden canteens; 2500 cartridge boxes with belts; 460 cartridge boxes without belts; 50 small

haversacks; 21 blue knapsacks; 210 red knapsacks; 20 horse or ox hide knapsacks; 100 boarding pikes; 17 swords with scabbards; 15 wall pieces; 500 rifles and 1900 muskets “stacked by the effective men of the 4th United States Regiment and the Ohio Volunteers upon the esplanade.”⁴³

In April, Congress authorized the President to “take effective measures to organize, arm, and equip, according to law, and hold in readiness to march at a moment’s notice, their respective portions of one hundred thousand militia, officers included”.⁴⁴ Ohio’s quota under this Act, five thousand men for six months, was in addition to the force bound for Detroit.

The state Adjutant General notified each of the four division commanders to “organize, arm, equip, and hold in readiness to march nine hundred seventy-nine men”. This “second army of Ohio” would not be considered in actual service until ordered to the field. These requirements further strained Ohio’s ability to field, equip, and support its militia forces.⁴⁵ On 29 July, Hull requested Governor Meigs provide an additional five hundred men of these men to reinforce the Northwestern Army at Detroit.⁴⁶

While most of the militia Ohio provided for the war effort was infantry, the state also contributed other, specialized units. The Secretary of War allowed Meigs to accept “one company of artillery” as part of the initial call up of 1200.⁴⁷ The pre-war militia acts authorized either one company of artillery or one company of cavalry per regiment and the state, in 1811, reported possessing five, unmounted 4- and 6-pounder cannon. Although an artillery company existed in Cincinnati in 1804, and two other companies were on the books in March 1812, there is scant evidence that these were viable units. Citizens from Cincinnati formed an artillery company only to disband within a week for lack of a field piece.⁴⁸ In August; another erstwhile cannon company under Captain Joseph Jenkinson rendezvoused in Lebanon, but marched off as infantry armed with muskets, their cannon “not a field piece, but a clumsy Navy piece that takes 2 lbs. of Powder for a load with only a temporary carriage.”⁴⁹ In the Western Reserve, James Hazelip briefly fielded an artillery company equipped with “one 8-pounder” and served with Simon Perkins’ brigade.⁵⁰

In late summer 1812, Captain Alexander Gibson organized an artillery company in Butler County equipped with an unmounted artillery piece provided by the state. “The Cannon from Chillicothe is arrived -- The wheels are ready to put together,” General Tupper notified Meigs from Urbana.⁵¹ Neither Tupper nor state officials addressed the issues of ammunition, equipment, transportation, and training for the artillerymen.

Like its predecessors, Gibson’s company was short lived. In early November, Gibson accompanied Tupper on his advance to the Rapids of the Maumee River only to abandon the gun at McArthur’s Blockhouse on the second day out from camp.⁵² Governor Meigs, in an address to the Ohio legislature in December 1812, noted that three of the five artillery pieces belonging to the state were “completely mounted and harnessed and now in actual service.”⁵³ In March 1813, the Ohio General Assembly petitioned Meigs to

request “the two six pounders at Zanesville and Marietta be mounted and equipped at the expense of the United States by applying to the War Office thereof for that purpose.”⁵⁴

William H. Harrison, commander of the Northwestern Army after Hull, appreciated the need for artillery, particularly for heavy caliber guns with which to conduct siege and garrison operations. In September 1812, Harrison wrote the Secretary of War emphasizing its importance to his operations. “In an army composed almost exclusively of Militia and operating in a Country where rivers are to be crossed in the presence of highly disciplined troops and Posts to be taken, it is all important that the Corps of Artillery should be respectable for the number and Knowledge of its duties.”⁵⁵

Eustis forwarded several cannon with carriages, equipment, and ammunition from the Pittsburg depot for Harrison’s use. Harrison set out for Mansfield to meet the overland column, but was disappointed in what he found. “I regret exceedingly that a Detachment from one of the Regular [Artillery] Regiments cannot be spared for the army. One or two [militia] companies have been formed, but they never had a field piece.”⁵⁶ He was also dissatisfied in the ordnance sent him. “I am much disappointed in the artillery which has been sent on. There are in all but twenty-eight pieces of which ten are sixes and ten are twelve’s; the former are nearly useless. I had five before and had I a hundred, I should only take three or four with me ... all the carriages for the Howitzers and eight out of ten of them for the twelve pounders are unfit for use.”⁵⁷ Daniel Cushing, a former brigadier general in the Ohio militia, accepted a regular army commission in the Second Artillery and recruited a company of artillery in Ohio. These cannoneers, under the tutelage of Major Amos Stoddard, eventually provided Harrison a nucleus of artillerymen, although local militiamen and regular infantry soldiers also served as artillerists at Fort Meigs.⁵⁸

Ohio similarly contributed two companies of rangers to the six companies Congress authorized to defend the frontiers of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Louisiana.⁵⁹ Under the command of Captain James Menary, also a former brigadier general in the Ohio militia and one-time Ohio legislator, and Captain William Perry, these companies, officially part of the regular army, were intended to serve as scouts, couriers, and, when necessary, conduct offensive probing operations. The Rangers retained their citizen soldier distinction and appearance. The Rangers received compensation in lieu of clothing, arms, rations, horses and forage.⁶⁰ Ohio’s two companies garrisoned blockhouses along the army’s route of march. Harrison had a low opinion of these rangers. “The conduct of Menary’s Company of Rangers has been such as to destroy all confidence in it... Both the companies raised in this state are entirely worthless because the officers are deficient in every quality which is necessary for their stations. Perry is a fool, a Coward and a Drunkard, Menary a poor old imbecile Creature ... The Companies have been uniformly recruited amongst their friends and neighbors and it is the principal object of their officers to screen them from duty.”⁶¹ Brigadier General Tupper echoed Harrison’s assessment. “It is well known that their scouting has been but a Mockery during this season”, he wrote Meigs.⁶² Harrison dismissed Menary’s company in March 1813. As a temporary measure, the general employed friendly Indians to scout the frontier until May 1813 when Captain John Hopkins’ company took over the patrolling duties. Captain

Samuel McCormick's company of rangers replaced William Perry's company in August, 1813.⁶³

Harrison frequently relied upon mounted riflemen to supplement the Northwestern Army. In preparation for an expedition to relieve Fort Wayne in September, 1812, General Harrison requested "any number of volunteers, mounted, and prepared for active service ... for twenty-five or thirty days ... with a good rifle and twenty or thirty days' provisions." To acquire the necessary horses for those who had none, he and Governor Meigs made an emotional appeal to the people of Ohio to provide mounts. "Patriots of the Revolution! You who are no longer able to give your assistance in the field, will you withhold from your countrymen the means of coming in contact with the enemy, to retrieve our late misfortunes, and wipe away the disgrace which our army have sustained? I cannot doubt but that every friend to his country, who can spare a horse, will aid us in this occasion." However, fully aware that patriotism could influence behavior only so much, Harrison added, "The terms are fifty cents a day for each horse and equipments (saddle and bridle), to be paid for by the United States should they be lost, or should the horses die by any other than a natural death. An appraisalment will take place upon the delivery of the horses, and every pain taken to prevent them from being abused."⁶⁴

In early August, Meigs ordered 1200 militia under Brigadier General Tupper, the senior brigade commander of the First Ohio Militia Division, to march towards the Rapids in support of Hull. In September, he called out the other divisions for six months in response to the President's order. With fewer resources to draw upon, it became almost impossible to equip and field this new force. The state Adjutant General, Thomas Van Horne, reported in September 1812 that the detachment under Colonel McConnell "are badly equipped, 18 Musquets with Bayonets only -- were left of the public arms, in my hands, which I delivered out & all the Cartouch Boxes Notwithstanding five or six armourers were constantly employed to repair, yet many of them are unfit for service and many are Marched without any arms at all -- we furnished them with a large proportion of the powder & all the lead on hand, all the tents we could get made about 22 or 3. Camp Kettles & [illeg] Flints, Axes &c of which I will render a Bill as soon as I can have it made out -- They went off much dissatisfied for want of a better supply."⁶⁵ Four weeks after responding to Meigs' summons, Brigadier General Tupper reported that many of his weapons remained unserviceable, "still 30 Rifles & 20 Muskets wanting repair", he wrote.⁶⁶

In April, the Secretary of War had authorized Governor Meigs to draw funds from the Bank of Ohio to advance each man \$16 on account for pay with an additional \$40 forthcoming for clothing. The War Department's assumption was that the militia members would use that money to purchase necessary items of clothing and equipment particularly blankets. As it turned out, with few items available for purchase on the frontier, most soldiers sent the money home and marched off with what they either carried or wore.⁶⁷ Those items that were available were sold at exorbitant prices, wrote one soldier, "at two or three prices, so that a soldiers pay for a month will not purchase a pr of Pantellons."⁶⁸

Aware of the supply difficulties, Ohio Major General John S. Gano recommended that “all troops should furnish themselves with knapsacks, blankets and tents, as there are none at the arsenal.”⁶⁹ In the Western Reserve, Brigadier General John Payne’s orders to the 4th Brigade, 4th Division stated that “[the men] are to furnish themselves with knapsacks and blankets, and they are to be furnished with arms and equipments by the public.”⁷⁰

General Elijah Wadsworth, commander of Ohio’s 4th Division, added to the demand for public supplies. After Hull’s surrender, uncontested British control of Lake Erie exposed the settlements along the lake coast to attack. General Wadsworth, in anticipation of Governor Meigs’ orders to take “energetic measures for defense” called out the brigades in his division in late August, numbering about 3,000 men.⁷¹ He established a 150-mile defensive line extending from Sandusky Bay to Cleveland, with headquarters at Old Portage near modern day Akron. Wadsworth ordered Brigadier General Simon Perkins’ brigade to establish a blockhouse on the east bank of the Huron River near modern day Milan (Camp Avery), and another blockhouse further west at the mouth of Pipe Creek. He ordered Brigadier General Reason Beall’s brigade to Mansfield via Wooster in support of General Perkins. Wadsworth directed Beall to erect blockhouses along his route. Wadsworth committed Brigadier General John Miller’s third brigade to garrisoning the settlement at Cleveland. Brigadier General Payne’s Fourth Brigade marched to Cleveland, only to be dismissed on 30 August with orders to “hold themselves in readiness.” In early September, Eustis ordered Wadsworth to march 1500 men to “the frontier” and report to General Winchester or the officer commanding the Northwestern Army.

In response to Wadsworth’s orders, Benjamin Tappan, “gave notice in town & sent orders that day to all parts of the Brigade for the drafts to repair to Steubenville, with arms & equipments ready for marching. The men came in, but without arms, accoutrements or camp equipage. I engaged in providing for them. I collected all the arms which could be got & employed all the gunsmiths in repairing them. I purchased sheet iron & set all the tinnerns at work making camp kettles.”⁷²

Wadsworth moved his headquarters from Cleveland to Portage, now Akron, Ohio. When Harrison assumed command of the Northwestern Army, command of the army’s right wing devolved upon Wadsworth. From his headquarters at Portage, Wadsworth oversaw not only the protection of the Western Reserve, but also facilitated the support and transit of soldiers and supplies destined for Harrison’s army: militia from Pennsylvania and Virginia, the artillery train from Pittsburgh, and supplies and equipment from Fort Fayette. Wadsworth summarized his activities to the Secretary of War in November 1812. “I have organized three Regiments from the Division under my command and have placed them under the command of Brig. Gen. Simon Perkins ... One regiment has advanced to the Sandusky Bay where they occupy the Fort ...” Wadsworth added that he expected the remainder of his force to shortly join Perkins at Sandusky Bay where he would transfer Perkins brigade to Harrison’s control.⁷³

Wadsworth also wrote Secretary of War Eustis asking for supplies. "I am destitute of everything needful for the use and support of an army", he wrote. "The troops are badly armed and clothed, with no provisions or camp equipment or the means of procuring any."⁷⁴ Eustis authorized Wadsworth to contract for provisions and eventually provided Wadsworth with "1500 stands of arms, equipment, ammunition, and camp equipment" from the public stores at Pittsburgh, a number that matched Wadsworth's quota under Meig's official call for militia the following month.⁷⁵ Wadsworth also asked the military storekeeper in Pittsburg for two dozen "bugle horns" telling him that "we calculate to leave our drums behind."⁷⁶

In fairness, much of the militia in the autumn of 1812 did not expect to serve for more than a short period; three months was usually the limit. Reason Beall, commander of the First Brigade in Elijah Wadsworth's Division wrote in September from Huron, "... there is not one man in twenty who has winter clothing with them. The idea was to repel invasion and protect the frontiers, until we would be relieved by the General Government with volunteers and regulars many of my detachment has no socks and a number entirely barefooted, all dressed in summer clothing,"⁷⁷

In the early months of the war, there were few centrally located issue points for supplies, equipment, and clothing from which the militia could draw. Contracting and supply officers issued equipment as it became available with units receiving items at different times and locations. It was not uncommon for companies to leave home or the rendezvous point with the hope that they would eventually receive the missing items. In October, for example, Captain James Flagg's company from Washington County received fifty muskets and bayonets, fifty cartridge boxes, one wagon, four sets of horse gear, four horses, two tents, two bags, and six axes. At Zanesville, the company was issued two more tents, eight pots, two kettles, powder and ball.⁷⁸

As the war progressed, Ohio attempted to alleviate supply matters by again requiring individual soldiers to report for duty with much of the necessary equipment already in hand. In addition to "a good musket and bayonet, fuse or rifle", he was also required to provide a "knapsack, blanket, canteen and two spare flints, a cartridge box to contain not less than twenty four cartridges suited to the bore of his musket or fuse, each cartridge to contain a proper quantity of powder and ball, a pouch and powder horn, with twenty-four balls suited to the bore of his rifle, and a quarter of a pound of powder."⁷⁹ The state, however, made no mention of where or how the soldier would acquire the necessary items, but did appraise individual arms and equipment for government reimbursement if lost or destroyed while on campaign.

As noted before, Governor Meigs could mobilize the militia as the need arose. He would routinely call out the militia for various reasons and, in the process, often by-pass the normal chain of command. These mobilizations, sometimes amounting to as few as a dozen soldiers, undermined both the internal organization and administration of the militia units as well as their officers' authority. General Gano complained to the state Adjutant General of this practice in September 1812. "The governor having ordered from time to time Companies and Detachments from the two Brigades Whitemans and

Mungers without my knowledge or having any returns has rendered my arrangements as to organizing three regiments very difficult and almost impractical.”⁸⁰

Gano again repeated his complaints four months later. “The governor ordering detachments out in small detailed parties without any return to the Major, Colonel, or Commandant of the Brigade, puts it out of the officer’s power, whose duty it is, to do justice to his command, as he does not and cannot know who is on duty and who has performed his tour, and it throws the whole into confusion.”⁸¹ The effect of the governor’s involvement also complicated matters by consuming those supplies that were still available. When told to hold a regiment in readiness, Gano wrote the governor’s aide in late summer 1813 expressing his frustration, “[I] am sorry to see the same confusion and irregularity still existing which has always attended a call for Militia. I am never informed as to arms, accoutrements, Camp equipage, provisions, &c, &c.”⁸²

In September 1812, General Tupper cautioned Meigs against calling out large numbers of soldiers. “I fear you will find that this raising en Masse will give you Much trouble”, he wrote.⁸³ Major General Gano echoed similar sentiments the next year when he recommended to Meigs the creation of a fifth division from his 4th and 5th brigades. Such a move, he wrote, would bring some semblance of order and discipline to “the bull work [sic] of the nation”⁸⁴ Undeterred, the governor called out another large contingent of the Ohio militia in May 1813 to relieve Fort Meigs. In June, Meigs issued a “Military Invitation to associations as well as individuals to join the Northwestern army as volunteers when the interesting crises of the approaching campaign should commence.” His invitation resulted in two divisions responding in July.⁸⁵

Meigs, however, was not the only one who could call out the militia. Ohio’s militia acts permitted commanders to alert their companies if they felt the need. In late summer 1813, in reaction to a small raid near Mansfield, the local commander, Major Watson, called out a detachment from his regiment. “Majr. Watson being very much indisposed, requests us to inform your Honour that immediately after the last alarm and depredation was committed at Mansfield, he order'd out from the Regiment 30 Men on a tour of 20 days to range the frontier -- and he further wishes instructions on the propriety of continueing men on the Frontier -- the maner by which they must be supply'd with provisions Amunition &c. -- the Men that are on duty have been supply'd with provisions on the Credit of the States, of which a regular return will be made.”⁸⁶ This provision of the militia law, intended to provide an immediate response force, had the unintended effect of further stretching an already strained system.

The frequent call ups and alerts were not only expensive and inefficient; they also affected the morale and welfare of the militia members and their families. Requests for deferments were common, with soldiers citing financial hardships, crop planting, business matters, and concern for their “defenseless” families’ safety as the basis for their requests. For example, once the scare from Hull’s surrender subsided, pressure began to build to discharge the soldiers. David Hudson of Portage County wrote General Wadsworth in late August 1812 recommending that he discharge some of the soldiers and allow them to return home. “We do not conceive the danger to be sufficiently pressing to

justify retaining all the Militia of this County in actual service especially at a time like this, as our future harvest depends on the present seed time, which requires more help, for the old men and boys who are left behind can hardly do the other necessary labor without meddling with the preparation for sowing.”⁸⁷ Samuel Phelps of Painesville added, “You may well suppose that men accustomed to laybour feel very unpleasant to see their crops going to decay without the possibility of securing them.”⁸⁸ Others wrote Senator Worthington sarcastically commenting about the hardships the call ups produced. “You can hardly imagine how joyful was the news of the laboring people of the state who are just beginning to Harvest, to have been compelled to March ... [it] must have ruined many families, and left the crops ungathered.”⁸⁹

Late pay was also a significant cause for complaint. Wadsworth wrote the Secretary of War chastising him for the neglect in paying soldiers. “The government have had our faithful service and [we] are yet without recompense or reward.”⁹⁰ Similarly, when Captain John Campbell’s company returned home on parole after Hull’s surrender, the government did not settle their claims until November 1814, two years after the capitulation.

In February 1813, John Armstrong became the Secretary of War. At the time, Governor Meigs estimated the number of Ohio militia assigned to the Northwestern Army at 2700.⁹¹ Opposed to the use of militia and concerned about the cost of the war in the west, Armstrong introduced a series of measures that limited Harrison’s ability to call upon the state governors for militia troops. Subsequent requisitions, he pointedly directed, must be officially authorized and sanctioned; call ups were to be for specific numbers of men, not necessarily distinct units. Once the requisite number of volunteers was raised, the men would be organized into companies that reflected the composition of a regular army company. And, in an effort to limit the overabundance of militia officers, he decreed that the proportion of officers to enlisted men in a company had to match those authorized for the regular army: one hundred enlisted men, eight non-commissioned officers, and five officers.⁹² Armstrong also urged Harrison to focus his efforts on recruiting for the six regular regiments allocated him for the invasion of Canada and the protection of the western territory: the under strength 17th, 19th and 24th Regiments of Infantry and the newly authorized 26th, 27th, and 28th Regiments.⁹³ Armstrong conceded that “shortages [of personnel] must necessarily be made up by militia and volunteers.”⁹⁴ Congress, to help with the recruiting effort and streamline the operational conduct of the war, divided the country into nine military districts of which Ohio belonged to the Eight District.

Having only marginal success recruiting the men needed for the regular army regiments and faced with the impending expiration of the militias’ terms of service in February, 1813, Harrison asked Meigs for two regiments to serve for six months, but relegated much of the Ohio militia to building roads, convoying supplies, and manning blockhouses, causing one Ohio officer to remark, “The militia of Ohio have been made pack horses and merely served as convenience for others to receive the honor and glory.”⁹⁵ Harrison also turned to Kentucky to augment his army. As a major general in the Kentucky militia, Harrison could, and did, ask for and receive two thousand Kentucky

volunteers under Governor Shelby. In a letter to the Secretary of War, Harrison confided that the replacement drafts from Ohio were “not to be depended on.”⁹⁶

In the summer of 1813, British forces again laid siege to Fort Meigs and attacked Fort Stephenson. In response to Harrison’s request, Governor Meigs called out two divisions of Ohio militia for forty days, numbering several thousand men. Despite some ill will over their perceived shabby treatment in May, the Ohio militia responded en masse and assembled on the open ground a few miles north of Upper Sandusky. There, under Meigs’ command, the militia established the “Grand Camp of the Ohio Militia”, also called Camp Ohio Freeman. “In a few days, the Sandusky plains were covered with nearly eight thousand men, mostly from the Scioto Valley, forming the grand camp of the Ohio militia”, wrote one observer. “Among the volunteers were judges, lawyers, merchants, farmers, and all sorts and conditions of men, as private soldier or officer.”⁹⁷

But by the time the men had assembled, the crisis had passed. Harrison asked Meigs to keep two brigades for “a short time to determine whether their services are wanted.”⁹⁸ The Ohio governor retained Lucas’ and Menary’s brigades and dismissed the rest. In August, unable to use the Ohio militia in an expeditionary capacity and aware that the militia’s terms of service were about to expire, Harrison, much to Meigs’ and his officers’ dismay, ordered the two brigades discharged.⁹⁹ In reaction, the militia officers then on active duty published a resolution questioning Harrison’s “inexplicable” handling of the Ohio militia. The *Niles Weekly Register* wrote sympathetically, “The patriotism and *patience* of these invaluable people have been sorely tested ...”¹⁰⁰ Meigs did what he could to mute the criticism, but the twin victories at Lake Erie and the Thames spoke louder than the governor ever could.

In September 1813, Harrison temporarily attached volunteers to serve with Master Commandant Oliver H. Perry on Lake Erie. A handful of Ohio militia fought in the battle of Lake Erie, serving as crewman with Perry’s fleet. Thomas Anderson of Union County claimed to have been one of the oarsmen who transferred Perry from the *Lawrence* to the *Niagara*. Later, Captain Howell’s Belmont County militia company formed part of the “musket fleet” that guarded the captured British vessels *Detroit* and *Queen Charlotte* at Put-in-Bay.¹⁰¹

After the battle of the Thames in October, 1813, the operational theater of war moved east. From then until the end of the war, Ohio periodically called out portions of the militia in response to various scares and threats, but seldom for more than thirty days. In December 1813, 2,000 Ohio militiamen were in service at Forts St. Mary’s, Amanda, Jennings, Winchester, McArthur, Findlay, Meigs, Upper Sandusky, Lower Sandusky, Portage, and Detroit.¹⁰² The largest commitment of Ohio militia after 1813 was to garrison the posts at Detroit and Fort Gratiot and participate in the attempts against Fort Machilimackinac. Those companies not in active service, however, mustered monthly.¹⁰³

During the war years, Ohio issued seventy-four call ups of the militia. At times the state announced several alerts in one day and sometimes several over consecutive days. All

told, Ohio contributed an estimated 18,000 men of all ranks to the war effort serving as infantry, mounted infantry, cavalry, artillery, riflemen, or scouts (spies).¹⁰⁴

The military record of the Ohio militia during the War of 1812 is uneven at best. Governmental neglect of the militia before the war was certainly a contributing factor. However, faintheartedness, lack of discipline, poor leadership, and a sense of entitlement also affected the militia's reputation and offset the operational successes at Fort Meigs, Fort Stephenson, and elsewhere. Many Ohioans of rank and many regular army officers vocally denigrated the Ohio militia, describing them as expensive, unreliable, poorly trained, undependable, and undisciplined. Lewis Cass had a more balanced opinion when he described the militia as "A force more respectable for its zeal and numbers than for its efficiency."¹⁰⁵ But, for all their faults, Ohio's militia may not have been the worst. Testifying at Brigadier General Hull's court martial in 1814, Captain Charles Fuller of the Fourth Infantry Regiment noted that the Ohioans at Detroit in 1812 were "as well disciplined as militia usually are, and better than the Indiana militia [at Tippecanoe had been] under General Harrison."¹⁰⁶

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