

Tales of the Battle of Stoney Creek

Part One: Shadows in the Mist

A fictional short story by Catherine Raby

June 6, 1813 Stoney Creek, Upper Canada

Silently we creep across the meadow towards the American encampment. A fine mist rises as our boots sink deep into the damp spongy earth. The dark moonless night sky casts an eerie sense of foreboding.

We reach the edge of the woods, and move into position. Being members of the light companies we prepare to take the advance pickets. No one dares utter a sound. If surprise is to be achieved then all must be silent. Everything hinges on that fact, and for that reason, we had been ordered to remove the flints from our muskets.

Surrounded by darkness I can only hope that all is going as planned—the American sentinels were to be quietly taken out so that our infantry could advance further into the encampment without notice.

An ear-piercing scream reverberates out into the night. The hairs on the back of my neck stick up like the quills of a porcupine. My heart pounds hard against my chest, I can hardly breathe. The scream is suddenly silenced.

Like a death knell the first musket shot rings out. A shiver scuttles up my spine and I close my eyes and pray, but my prayer is interrupted by the sudden cry of “Huzza,” followed by more cries of “Huzza”, intermixed with mock Indian war whoops.”

My heart sinks. I cannot believe our own men would be so foolish as to disobey Colonel Harvey’s orders and destroy our element of surprise.

“Do not take up the shout!” Lieutenant FitzGibbon instantly commands. I’m surprised all in our company are able to hear the order over the din and still remain invisible to the Americans.

I turn to see two flashes of light brighten the sky as artillery fire rips through our infantry lines.

“Take the guns!” Major Plenderleath shouts.

I and thirty others of the light Companies rally and prepare to charge the artillery, which holds the high ground. It seems suicidal but if we can take the American's guns it would give us a tremendous advantage.

With bayonets fixed we charge full tilt towards the guns. Two blasts are discharged over our heads. I follow along with the rest behind Sergeant-Major Alexander Fraser, who volunteered to lead. Afraid that at any moment the guns will discharge again and all will be for naught, I push forward.

By the time I reach the top of the ridge I can hear the cries of the gunners as they are quickly bayoneted by our men. I run into the fray and my weapon sinks deep into the gut of an enemy soldier. I slash at another and pray to god that it is foe I am killing and not friend. For it is black as pitch and difficult to tell who is who.

I step to the side as a bayonet jabs towards me. I thrust up with mine and it sinks deep into the flesh of the enemy. Blood soaks my uniform; my hands now wet and slick find it difficult to keep my musket in my grasp.

Mixed with the fog, gun smoke lays heavy in the air. The acrid smell of it burns and fills my lungs. Some of my comrades have now taken over the artillery, but we are now past and the American infantry are before us. Blood pumping through my veins I rush into the melee. Caught up in the bloodshed I become disoriented. My gut twists into a tight ball of dread the instant I realize I have been separated from my comrades.

The American infantry who we had just thrown ourselves into seem to have dispersed. I turn to find my bearings and slam hard into another soldier. The man is thrown off his feet and stumbles to the ground. I slam my boot down onto his back and pin him down. Not able to tell if he is friend or foe I kick him hard to flip him over. In that instant a bright light flashes in the sky. The soldier's identity is revealed—glaring defiantly up at me is a boy no more than thirteen or fourteen.

To Be Continued...

Note from the author:

The Battle at Stoney Creek was a brazen, hastily planned raid by the British. Though their numbers were inferior to the Americans, the British with a bit of luck and the skill of the soldiers, volunteers, militia and Mohawk allies that fought that day were able to make it a success. It was a gamble that paid off, but the cost was heavy with 23 killed, 136 wounded and fifty-five missing. The British victory at Stoney Creek and their

success at Beaver Dams several days later, virtually halted the American Invasion into Canada and pushed them back toward the border.

In order for the attack to be successful Colonel Harvey, who had been given command of the attack by General Vincent, had given the order for complete silence and that all muskets be unloaded and without flints. The plan was for the sentries to be neutralized so as to not be able to sound the alarm. The Light Companies on reaching the edge of the woods were to take out the remainder of the advance pickets.

However the plan was ruined when some of General Vincent's staff officer's heedless of Colonel Harvey's order for profound silence began to cheer. For the rest of British soldiers this was a great stress releaser and company by company they joined in. Lieutenant FitzGibbon of the 49th regiment managed to keep his company silent. His company included members of the Glengarry Light Infantry Fencibles.

"Light Infantry" were known as the "Advance Guard" and usually took the position of the left flank. During a retreat they formed at the rear guard. They were highly trained and very skilled. They worked as independent small groups in loose formation. They were in charge of protecting the main line of infantry and often performed this duty by "skirmishing". They were also in charge of reconnaissance.

In 1989-1999 an archaeological excavation was conducted by an archaeological firm on Smith's Knoll at Stoney Creek. Intact burials were not expected due to years of desecration and plundering. The remains that had been unearthed had indeed been disturbed and disarticulated human bones were removed from a trench on the east side of the knoll.

A study of the bone fragments found that some of the bones displayed wounds that could have been obtained by participation in close-quarter fighting. Though a lot of the battle was fought in the traditional way—standard military formations, a lot of the fighting was fought in confusion, and it was disorganized. The daring raid on the American Artillery by Major Plenderleath and his company was fought at close quarters.

To read the next installment of *Tales of the Battle of Stoney Creek* look for our next edition of *Subsoil* due out in May 2012