

Connecticut's Reluctant Involvement in War of 1812

More than two hundred years have passed since our “Second War for Independence” which is better known as the War of 1812, yet the involvement of Connecticut soldiers is often passed over

Congress declared war in June 1812, and the war continued until the end of 1815. The war was very unpopular in New England in general, and in Connecticut in particular, due to the negative effects that it would have on the emerging manufacturing economy in the region.

In fact, the entire Connecticut congressional delegation voted against “Mr. Madison’s war.” Furthermore, New England Federalists gathered at Hartford in 1813-14 at what was known as the Hartford Convention to discuss ways of opposing the war. The topic of having New England secede from the Union did come up.

In a scathing editorial The Hartford Courant had this to say about the war: "The dreadful tidings have just reached us, that on Thursday last Congress declared War against Great-Britain."

When President Madison asked the governors for the use of their state militias in prosecuting the war, Gov. Griswold of Connecticut refused. **Nevertheless, more than 1,800 men from Connecticut were engaged early on with the nation’s regular army, especially in the invasion of British-held Canada — the principal military objective of the war.**

Between 3,000 to 4,000 more Connecticut soldiers and sailors would later be involved in the war as militiamen in defending their home state, particularly as a result of the British blockade of the Connecticut coast and their subsequent attacks on both Stonington and Essex.

Many of the Connecticut men who were involved with the regular army were part of the 25th Infantry Regiment, according to the adjutant general's report on the war. Interestingly, the adjutant general's report also shows that March was the most common month of enlistment for these men.

The 25th was actively engaged in the invasion of British-held Canada in an area referred to then as "Upper Canada." Today, that area is the province of Ontario. Some of the major battles for the 25th in the Canadian campaign included Stoney Creek, Niagara Falls, Chrysler's Field, and Chippawa (often misspelled as "Chippewa").

The British attacked an American force encamped at Stoney Creek on June 6, 1813. The surprise attack occurred at night against an American force that was five times larger. The fighting was very intense for about 45 minutes, often involving hand-to-hand combat.

The 25th got lucky in this battle as Capt. Ephraim Shaylor of East Granby did not approve of his unit's exposed position in the camp and had insisted that they relocate. Shaylor's action probably saved many lives, as the area previously occupied by the 25th was one of the first parts of the camp that was attacked. Nevertheless, four Connecticut soldiers were wounded in the action.

Sgt. Elijah Wells of Glastonbury was wounded and taken prisoner. He recovered from his wounds and was later part of a prisoner exchange on April 15, 1814. Pvt. David Matthews of Windsor suffered the exact same fate as Wells. He, too, was wounded at Stoney Creek, recovered, and was later exchanged, as were Privates John Lyndes of Hartford and John Littlefield of Windsor. Overall, 16 Americans were killed, 38 were wounded, and 100 were taken prisoner. Though the British suffered 159 casualties and had 52 men taken prisoner, they forced the Americans out of Stoney Creek.

As part of a campaign to capture Montreal known as the St. Lawrence Campaign, the 25th Regiment fought in an ill-coordinated battle at Crysler's Field. Hampered by bad supply lines, illness, and a very bad personal relationship between the two commanding generals — Wilkinson and Hampton — the vastly outnumbered British and Canadian forces soundly defeated the Americans at Crysler's Field on Nov. 11, 1813.

Sixteen Connecticut men were among the 102 killed, 237 wounded, and 120 captured during the engagement. Pvt. John Norton of Windsor was killed in action. Pvt. Samuel Lewis, also of Windsor, was among the wounded, as were Pvt. John Coone of Danbury, Pvt. Martin Corey of Tolland, Lt. James D. Brown, Pvt. John Smith of Hartford, Pvt. Warren Smith of Suffield, Pvt. Nathaniel Pierce of Litchfield, Cpl. Ephraim F. Nichols of Hartford, Maj. John Bates Murdock, Pvt. Samuel S. Page of Suffield and Pvt. Amos Robertson of Middletown. Privates Horatio Lord of Brookfield and John Hence of Suffield were taken as

prisoners during the fight. Privates Henry Smith of Hartford and Martin Walker of East Windsor were wounded in action and later died from their wounds.

The Battle of Niagara Falls was fought on July 25, 1814. (This battle includes what is sometimes called the Battle of Bridgewater and the Battle of Lundy's Lane.) The site is what is now called Niagara Falls, Ontario. It was one of the bloodiest battles of the war. The British suffered 878 casualties — 84 dead, 559 wounded, 169 captured, and 55 missing.