

JUNE 6TH A DEFINING HERITAGE MOMENT

By Robert J. Williamson

When it comes to writing stories about our heritage, the month of June offers many history changing events for Canadians, such the D-Day invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944. Most people tend to overlook the fact that it coincides with another invasion right here in our own backyard, otherwise known as the Niagara Peninsula on June 6, 1813.

Because it happened 210 years ago in a primitive pioneer environment, the American invasion of Canada, tends to have a lack of clarity. Therefore, since we all know that “a picture is worth a thousand words”, I have used my military background and artistic skill to paint a clearer picture of the so called Battle of Stoney Creek.

It began as a desperate bid to buy time. Undertaking a night raid against a vastly superior American force encamped at Stoney Creek was a bold and dangerous tactic for those days in the pitch darkness but it achieved the goal. It ended three days later when the British naval squadron arrived with essential reinforcements and supplies.



THE BATTLE OF STONEY CREEK, THE REST OF THE STORY

Sketch by Robert Williamson

My sketch, looking west towards the Hamilton escarpment face in the distant background was created as I sat on the Grimsby shore reading my personal copy of the naval log book of HMS Wolfe, one of the larger ships shown behind the schooners. It illustrates the American re-supply bateaux arriving at the mouth of Forty Mile Creek from Niagara on June 8. The British ships having reached the head of the lake earlier in the day from Kingston, have unloaded troops, supplies and equipment after conferring with General Vincent at today's Hamilton beach. They are now sailing along the south shore of Lake Ontario to attack the American forward camp and troop concentrations on the higher ground

above the shore on the extreme left. There is a plaque there today describing the incident.

The smaller schooners with a shallower draft have been ordered to close up on the sand bar flats to bombard the American stores and equipment. Realizing that they had been outflanked and could easily be trapped and cut off by British land and naval forces, the American army, the largest enemy force ever seen in our neighborhood, abandoned everything and retreated quickly back to the Niagara River.

My painting depicts a DEFINING MOMENT IN CANADIAN HISTORY, one of the incidents, often overlooked, that helped win the war and pave the way to CONFEDERATION in 1867. It is a home grown June 6 D-Day if you like, two hundred and ten years ago. Now we finally have a pictorial image to illustrate it. Maybe it should be displayed in a museum or on Parliament Hill in Ottawa so that future generations of Canadians will have a better appreciation of the heritage found in their own backyard. To the pioneers in the Hamilton area long ago on June 6 to 8, 1813, it must have been their equivalent of the modern film version called “The Longest Day”.

Mountain Memories by award winning writer Robert Williamson of the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society appears monthly to preserve Hamilton's Local Heritage