

THE BATTLE OF STONEY CREEK

Generations have wondered about its implausibility!

For two hundred years, historians, lacking military training, have written about the June 6, 1813 Battle of Stoney Creek but they have overlooked the need to clearly establish the "big picture" that helps people understand why this chaotic fight took place and what military thinking was at play by the British leaders. Because of missing story elements, generations of Canadians have wondered about the implausibility of such a disproportionate struggle. Until now, no one has described the engagement in military terms for what it really was; **a raid, a delaying action, a desperate play for time**. This year, as the June 8th anniversary date approaches, it will be our bicentennial legacy to ensure that future generations have a better understanding of this important piece of local history.

To truly understand the "Battle of Stoney Creek", we must appreciate what was going on in the mind of General Vincent, commander of the British forces at the head of Lake Ontario, on June 5, 1813. He was holding a key defensive position on Burlington Heights (Dundurn Park), which controlled access to either Governor's Road or the Ancaster Mohawk Trail linked to Long Point on Lake Erie, the supply routes to the British army and navy on the Detroit frontier. If the Americans captured Vincent's position, then the entire British force on the western frontier and Tecumseh's Indians, would be cut off and forced to surrender. Eventually all of Upper Canada, west of Kingston, would be lost.



Brigadier General John Vincent, 1764-1848, was Irish born and posted to Canada in 1802 for garrison duty.

Photo courtesy Trustees of Muckross House, Killarney, Ireland

Regrettably, Vincent's fortifications on Burlington Heights were under construction and incapable of withstanding a major attack by a vastly superior force now camped on his doorstep at Stoney Creek. However, he knew that on June 3rd, the King's 8th Regiment of Foot infantry and desperately requested supplies, had set sail from Kingston with Commodore Yeo's fleet and were due to arrive in a few days. **The problem was that the British needed to stall for time.**

As Vincent sat with his senior officers in his Burlington Heights headquarters on June 5, Lieutenant Colonel Harvey convinced them that to buy time they must **make a daring night raid** on the American camp, hoping to create enough mayhem and confusion to delay the American advance on Burlington Heights. The impromptu raiding plan worked. The Americans withdrew to their advanced base at Forty Mile Creek (Grimsby) to regroup and resupply. They were ready to continue their advance to Burlington Heights on June 8 when the British fleet showed up, "like the cavalry in a western movie". The British gamble had paid off, and the American army with their right flank exposed to the British fleet and in danger of being trapped, abandoned all their supplies, making a hasty withdrawal to the Niagara River.

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