

on the increase of the regular army at the Declaration of War, a Brigadier-General in the service of the United States. He was then fifty-three years of age and had not the slightest military education or experience, and as one of his associates remarked,

“the march from the anvil and the dram shop in the wane of life, to the dearest action of the tented field is not to be achieved in a single campaign.”

Winder, his second in command, had been an able and successful Lawyer in Baltimore. Once a warm Federalist, he had lately changed sides and his defection was at once rewarded by Commission as Lieutenant-Colonel of the 14th United States Infantry, then being recruited in Maryland. In November, 1812, he had directed the unsuccessful operations for the passage of the river below Fort Erie and acquitted himself creditably. During the winter he had been summoned to Washington to advise the Cabinet and was supposed to be intimately acquainted with the plan of campaign.

“Colonel Winder is here,” says a contemporary letter, “a kind of Secretary of War, and, like Bonaparte, has a room full of maps, plans, &c. &c., enveloped in which you can just see his little head, and of that little head much is expected.”

His aptitude and ability so strongly impressed even a veteran like Harvey that he declared that he possessed "more talent than all the rest of the Yankee generals put together." General Chandler asserted in his defence that he told Winder “if the enemy intended to fight them, he would commence the attack before morning, and with this expectation, arrangements were made.”

It was growing dark when the light troops were recalled. None of his men had eaten during the march, and were then ordered to build fires and cook some distance from the ground it was intended to occupy for the night, the light infantry and 25th Regiment in the meadow about 150 yards in front and the remainder on a high ridge in rear and to the left of the road. About eight hundred men, consisting of the 13th and 14th Regiments of Infantry and Archer's artillery company, were detached under Colonel Christie to take up a position near the mouth of the creek for the protection of a flotilla of boats conveying the baggage and supplies for the division which was expected to arrive there during the night. It was nearly midnight when the remainder of the force received orders to form their encampment, those in front being instructed to leave their fires burning, while the fires on the high ground were to be extinguished. The ground selected for the men to lie on was a piece of level upland, protected in front by a steep descent, along the brow of which ran a stout fence of logs and rails. On either side of this fence, a number of trees had been felled years before, but not cleared away, about which thorns and briars had grown up to form an almost impenetrable thicket in some places. The low, level meadows beneath were spongy with long, continued rain.

“On the left, the mountain and woods shut down so close upon the meadow as to render that flank quite secure, and the right was equally protected by a swamp, which approached it in that quarter.”