

HENRY RUTTAN

ONE LOCAL MAN'S MILITIA AND WAR EXPERIENCE

At the time of this portrait, Henry Ruttan was accomplished in many careers and fields: author, inventor, businessman, politician, sheriff, and militia commander.

However, it is his words as a young lieutenant describing the bloodiest battle in Upper Canada's history that are repeatedly quoted in countless books and documentaries.

Ruttan's age and fitness took him from the sedentary militia to the more demanding flank company position. However, his willingness to serve led him to volunteer for the professional training and dangers of the Incorporated Militia of Upper Canada (I.M.U.C.).

On July 25th, 1814, Canadian and British forces blocked the American advance at Lundy's Lane. The result was a confused and extremely bloody battle that lasted into the night with units on the same side shooting at each other in the darkness, hand to hand fighting, and musket volleys that were delivered a few steps from the enemy.

Historians often quote Ruttan's eyewitness account; he not only survived his wounds but returned to duty before the war ended,

At this time, about 9 o'clock at night there was as if by common consent, a general cessation of firing. Although there was a moon, it was yet as dark as to prevent distinguishing our men from those of the Enemy. We could plainly see [the silhouette on the hilltop of] a line forming in our front and hear every order given. General Drummond, who was immediately behind my company called for an officer and 20 men to advance and ascertain whether we had a friend or foe in front. At this particular juncture of time I saw a mounted officer in front of our line but about a company distant on my right and heard him ask in a bold and commanding way "What regiment is this?" The answer was "Scot's Royals Sir:" He replied "Very Well, stand you fast Scottish Royals" and disappeared toward the enemy's line.

A good deal of confusion ensued upon the call of General Drummond from the superabundance of our men volunteering for the service. However, being of the opinion that one or two men would execute this order better than twenty, I took Corporal Ferguson, who happened to be next to me and quietly advanced under a cover of a fence and lying trees until I could discover long tailed coats turned up with white. I could not distinguish blue from scarlet cloth but heard the words "Forward, March" words never so combined with us and "Halt" and other indications, which convinced us that those in front of us were enemies.

Immediately after I turned to retire my steps, a field piece was "Let Off" from the [American] line when their firing at once became general. I fell in with a number of our men, some of whom never lived to return to our lines.



Portrait painted by Paul Kane of Cobourg

Providence however, protected the Corporal and me thus far, but I had but just taken my place in the ranks when I was shot through the right shoulder. I scarcely felt the shock, but was conscious that something unusual was the matter as I was involuntarily brought up on both feet (we were all on one knee) and turned quite around. I had gone but a few steps to the rear when I remembered nothing more until about 2 o'clock the next morning when I found myself lying on my back on the floor of a room being examined by a surgeon who promised me "Done For".

From Henry Ruttan, "Reminiscences of the Hon. Henry Ruttan: Loyalist Narratives from Upper Canada", Toronto, Champlain Society, 1946



Defending a Canadian Cannon at Lundy's Lane

C. W. Jefferys