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1816

AN ENQUIRY RESPECTING  
THE CAPTURE OF WASHINGTON BY THE BRITISH  
on the 24th August, 1814;

WASHINGTON CITY, Printed,  
February, 1816.

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AN

ENQUIRY

RESPECTING

THE CAPTURE OF WASHINGTON

BY THE BRITISH,

ON THE 24TH AUGUST, 1814;

WITH AN

EXAMINATION

OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF  
INVESTIGATION APPOINTED BY CONGRESS.

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WASHINGTON CITY, PRINTED,

FEBRUARY, 1816.

*Handwritten signature or initials in cursive script, possibly "M. J. C."*

THE  
CAUSES  
OF THE  
*CAPTURE OF THE METROPOLIS, &c.*

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It has long been a subject of much perplexity to account for the causes of that diversity of opinion which men, having the same organs of perception, and with the same degree of evidence, have given of the same transaction, to which they were spectators. In some cases their accounts are directly opposite; in almost all they vary in particulars;—hence the origin of the common remark, that “one person’s story is good till another’s is told.” Whether this difference of opinion arises from some constitutional difference in our organs of perception, or from a bias of the mind, occasioned by education or interest, is not yet fully decided; all three, it is probable, may have their influence in warping the judgment.

It is said that the celebrated Sir Walter Raleigh, whilst one day looking out of his prison window, was witness to an affair in the street, which was so variously related next day in the public papers, by people who said they were eye-witnesses, that he threw the second volume of his “History of the World” into the fire; (which was prepared for the press) saying that if a simple event, of which he was himself

a witness, could be thus misrepresented, what dependence can be placed on the relation of events, at a great interval of time, and by persons who were not present.

The circumstances which led to the capture of the City of Washington by the British, one would suppose, must be perfectly clear to most of the inhabitants; yet perhaps there is no event in modern times so variously told, or so grossly misrepresented.

When once the public mind becomes completely darkened by falsehood, the innocent may be confounded with the guilty; the brave intripid soldier with the skulking poltroon; the patriot with the traitor; and the wise and good with the base and ignorant. There is no deception which may not be practised by the worthless, by means of a false medium.

As regards the subject of the following pages, we have no party feelings to gratify; no private friendship or self interest in view;—our object is TRUTH, pure and unbiassed by selfish motives; to give such a view of the capture of the metropolis, as will enable the future historian to transmit to posterity a faithful account of that event, and of the characters of those charged with the defence. The cause of truth demands free remarks and plain language. This we will try to fulfil. We will endeavour to place in a true point of view the character of a man which has been unjustly aspersed by the foulest means, and robbed of that reputation which was justly earned by a long series of important services to the republic, as a soldier and a statesman; the promoter and rewarder of merit; the man, who, in the late war, first gave order and system to the army, and selected officers who led it to victory over Europe's choicest troops; the man, who, while minister in France, boldly maintained his country's cause against the man who then kept the world in awe, before whose throne nearly all the crowned heads of Europe bowed. Who will hereafter be found to labour for honest fame, if he is liable to be robbed of it whenever party purposes demand it?

In our remarks on the report of the committee of investigation we have no intention to throw blame on any of its members, much less on its honourable chairman, Colonel JOHNSON, a gentleman justly esteemed by his country for his patriotism and bravery—the bravest amongst the brave.—The omissions and mistakes in their report must be attributed to the misrepresentations of those who, to screen their own faults, have placed them to the account of another; to those officers, who having suffered their city to be forever disgraced, would charge it to General ARMSTRONG, the only man, perhaps, who was able and willing to defend it to the last extremity. In proof of this assertion we invite the reader particularly to General ARMSTRONG and G. W. CAMPBELL's letters to the committee; wherein it is distinctly stated, that the President after having given him (Gen. A.) the command, afterwards deprived him of it on the field of battle. See also the account of his conduct when the troops had retreated to the Capitol. He wished to fill it with men, and defend it to the last. Who else, of all the officers of Government, was willing to have done the same? None. For this gallant conduct the only reward he met with, was to be driven from office by the importunities of a Georgetown faction.\*

\* A few days after the disgraceful affair of Bladensburg, a cabal, consisting chiefly of Georgetown militia officers, was raised against General ARMSTRONG. MESSRS. HANSON, (editor of the Fed. Republican,) WASHINGTON BOWIE, and THOMAS L. M'KENNEY, waited on the President, with a request that the General might be deprived of all authority, as far as regarded the defence of the District of Columbia. The President, who either saw or was informed of the deputation, and not liking the men, gave for answer that he was busy, and could not attend to them. The objection being understood, Mr. M'KENNEY, who is a reputed republican, waited on him alone, when the object of the mission was accomplished;—the Secretary was requested by the President to surrender this part of his authority, which, as might be expected, he indignantly refused; and retired from office altogether.

General WINDER, to whose misconduct, we believe, we ought chiefly to ascribe the disgrace of the city, has been tried and acquitted by a court martial. We summon him before a more impartial tribunal—his country;—by its decision his reputation must stand or fall. Here he will find no partial friends or bottle companions to shield him from the judgment of an offended nation.

The capture of the City of Washington, and the destruction of its public buildings, which took place on the 24th of August, 1814, demand a very detailed account; since in the hands of faction and federalism, they have been made the cause of much error and prejudice. The sources from which our information is drawn, are two—personal observation and public documents.

On the 26th of June, official advices were received of the pacification which had taken place in Europe; and on the 1st of July, a cabinet council was held, the result of which shews, that the administration were sufficiently attentive to this new state of things, and to the increased power and probable designs of the enemy arising therefrom. “It seemed (says Mr. MONROE, in his statement to the committee of investigation,) to be his (the President’s) object, that *some position* should be taken between the *Eastern Branch* and Patuxent with *two or three thousand men*; and that an additional force of *ten or twelve thousand*, (*including the militia of the District*) should be held in readiness, in the neighbouring states, to march when called on: the whole to be put under the command of an officer of the regular army.” “To the regular force (said Mr. JONES, late Secretary of the Navy) the President proposed to add *ten thousand militia, to be designated* and held in readiness, in such neighboring districts, as should be found to be most convenient.” The extent and character of these measures, were occasionally determined by provisions of a similar nature to be made for all other exposed parts of the Atlantic frontier; and in this view of the sub-



ject, no one can reasonably quarrel with the degree of force destined to the defence of district No. 10, viz: 1000 regular troops, and 10 or 12000 militia, with such volunteers, as the exigency would necessarily attract to the service.

In these two statements of Messieurs MONROE and JONES, we have the substance of the President's *plan* of defence, and the extent of measures deemed necessary thereto. Let us now see what were the measures taken to give execution to this plan.

On the 2d of July, (the day following that of the sitting of the cabinet) the Secretary of War, by a general order, created the new military district No. 10, (embracing the state of Maryland, the District of Columbia, and the northern section of the state of Virginia,) and the same day gave notice to brigadier general WINDER, that the President had selected him for the command thereof.

“ On the 4th of July (says the committee of Congress in  
 “ their report of the 29th of November, 1814,) a requisition  
 “ was made on certain states for a corps of 93,500 men,  
 “ designating the quota of each, with a request to the state  
 “ executives, to *detach and hold in readiness for immediate*  
 “ *service* their respective detachments, and recommending  
 “ also the expediency of fixing the places of rendezvous,  
 “ with a due regard to points, the importance or exposure  
 “ of which would most likely attract the views of the ene-  
 “ my. Of this requisition, 2000 effectives from the quota  
 “ of Virginia; 5000 from that of Pennsylvania; 6000 (the  
 “ whole Maryland quota) and 2000 the estimate number  
 “ of the militia of the District of Columbia, were put at the  
 “ disposition of the commanding general, (by letters from  
 “ the Secretary of War of the 12th and 17th of July) mak-  
 “ ing the aggregate number of *fifteen thousand* militia, ex-  
 “ clusive of the regular troops, viz: 36th regiment, 1st bat-  
 “ talion of the 38th, 2 troops of dragoons, 2 companies of  
 “ the 10th regiment, 1 company of the 12th and 2 compa-  
 “ nies of sea fencibles, supposed to amount to 1000, besides

“ the artillerists, composing the garrisons of Forts M’Henry  
“ and Washington.”

Here, then, is the most complete evidence, that by the 17th of July, five weeks before the attack upon Washington, *full execution* was given to the plan of the President by the War Department, so far as related to the quantum of force to be employed; and that to secure the number actually contemplated, the Secretary of that department had transcended the letter of his authority, and had called for 3000 more than was deemed necessary. Nor will it be objected to that department that a camp of two or 3000 men had not been promptly formed at some point between the Eastern Branch and Patuxent, when we advert to the following considerations, viz :

1st. That the preliminary measures (to be taken by the governors) of organizing the detachments, and appointing places of rendezvous, necessarily required *time*, and that between the 4th and the 12th of July, (the day on which the quota of Maryland was subjected to General WINDER’S authority, for the purpose of forming a central camp,) but *eight* days intervened, a period certainly not unreasonably long, for their preparatory measures.

2d. That the *location* of this central camp was committed to the commanding general, and that it was not till the 16th of July, that he reported on that subject. In his letter of that date he says, “ I reached this place (Upper “ Marlborough) last evening, in my tour of examining the “ country. From what I have seen and learned it appears “ to me, that there cannot be found a place of tolerable “ convenience, with *reference to the objects of defence*, for “ *an encampment, except in this neighborhood.*” Nor was this opinion of much duration, for in his letter of the 23d of July, he says, “ The Governor (of Maryland) has issued “ orders for calling out 3000 of the drafts, under the re- “ quisition of the 4th, and, at my suggestion, has appointed “ *Bladensburgh* as the place of rendezvous.”

3d. On the 12th of July, the whole quota of Maryland (6,000) was put at the General's disposition, with orders to draw therefrom, immediately, a force not greater than three nor less than two thousand men, for the purpose of forming a central camp, between Baltimore and Washington. And further (in the words of the committee) "at all times the "marines, flotilla men, and regular troops, including the "different garrisons, amounted to upwards of 1000 men; "the militia of the District of Columbia to 2000;—these "were always in a disposable state, and acknowledged by "General WINDER, in his letter of the 23d July, to be al- "most as effectual as if in active service. The disposable "force at Baltimore amounted to upwards of 2000 men."—

From these considerations, we think the Administration without blame, in this particular, and that if a central camp at Bladensburg, or elsewhere of 2 or 3000 men was not formed, under the Secretary's letter of the 12th of July, which put at the General's disposition the whole quota of Maryland militia, in addition to regulars and marines, and Washington and Georgetown volunteers, we must look for the cause somewhere else than in the President, or Secretary of War. Having shewn what were the intentions of the National Executive, and the measures taken by it to give execution to these, we now proceed to state the manner in which this branch of the Government was seconded by its own agents, and by the executives of the states on which it called for support. On the 15th of July, General WINDER was advised, by a letter from the Secretary of War, that the van of Admiral COCHRANE'S fleet had arrived in *Lynhaven* bay; and that two seventy-fours and two frigates had passed Point Look-out. On the 17th of July, he was further advised by the Secretary, that besides the whole quota of Maryland (6000 men) there was placed at his disposition, the militia of the District of Columbia, (2000) 2000 of the quota of Virginia, and 5000 of that of Pennsylvania. These facts lead us to enquire in what manner the

General availed himself of the *information* and *authority* given by these letters? Did he immediately apply to the states of Pennsylvania and Virginia for their quotas? or was he able so to quicken the movements of his aged relation, the Governor of Maryland, as to get from him the support of those national measures of defence with which he had been specially entrusted?

On the 16th of July, he states that the Governor and Council *had taken the necessary steps to comply immediately with the requisition of the general Government.*

On the 20th of July, *four* days after he had thus announced that the Governor and Council *had taken the necessary steps, &c.* he says "I have seized this moment to proceed to this place, (Annapolis) to *arrange the calling the Maryland militia*, demanded by the requisition of the 4th inst. "This *will be* immediately attended to by the Governor of "this State." The effect of this visit is seen in a subsequent letter of the General's, of the 23d of July. "The Governor *has* issued orders for calling out *three thousand* "of the drafts." On the 13th of August, twenty-one days after the Secretary of War had been thus informed, that the necessary steps had been taken by the Governor and Council, General WINDER advises him, that of the drafts, to form the camp at Bladensburgh, there would be nearly a total failure—"Instead," says he, "of three thousand, they will scarcely exceed as many hundreds;" and as an expedient the General suggests the taking "the *militia* drawn out under the *State authority*, and now assembled at Annapolis, "amounting to about 1000, as part of the requisition;" and what may be worthy of notice is, that this corps, taken immediately into service by the Secretary of War, did not reach Bladensburgh (its place of rendezvous) for *eleven* days after the date of this letter; nor more than thirty minutes before the action began on the 24th of August.

With regard to the General's efforts to get out the militia of Virginia and Pennsylvania, we regret that we have not

more cause for praise, or rather less cause for censure.— Though authorised to call for 2000 men from *Virginia*, he does not call for a man of this corps till the 19th of August— nor does he in his narrative, or elsewhere, assign any reason for this omission. This circumstance, important as it is, has escaped the notice of the investigating committee, who, like General WINDER, are perfectly silent on the subject.— Nor is, what they say in relation to the call of the Pennsylvania quota as clear or satisfactory as might have been expected. We shall repeat this, the better to make the public understand the force of our objection, and the conclusions against the General, which the facts undeniably furnish. “ On the “ 17th of July,” says the committee, “ the Secretary of “ War, by letter, authorised the commanding General to “ call on Pennsylvania for 5000 ; on Virginia for 2000, &c. “ as before stated. This letter was not received by General “ WINDER until about the 8th of August, (as appears by his “ correspondence with the Governor of Pennsylvania) after “ a lapse of about twenty-three days. In explaining the “ reason of this delay General WINDER says, it originated “ from his being in constant motion, and the letter had gone “ the circuit with him, without his having received it.” To say the least of this, the apology of the General, and the admission by the committee are both very extraordinary ; for in another part of the report, the committee, speaking of a letter of the 17th of July of the Secretary of War, say “ upon “ the receipt of this authority, General WINDER proceeded “ direct to Annapolis, and made the requisition upon the “ Governor of Maryland for the actual service of three thou- “ sand men ; and on the 23d of July, thirty-two days pre- “ vious to the battle of Bladensburgh, General WINDER in- “ forms the Secretary of War that arrangements for this “ force had been made.” General WINDER also, in his letter of the 20th of July, dated from Annapolis, has these words : “ Your letter of the 17th reached me on the 18th.” How then is this *contradiction* to be explained ? If the

letter in question, of the Secretary, was received on the 18th of July, how comes it that the General tells the Governor of Pennsylvania that it was not received till about the 8th of August, and would assign *this* to the committee as the reason for not sooner calling for the quota of Pennsylvania? Were there two letters of the 17th from the Secretary, and did one of these find the General in less than *twenty-four hours*, and the other in not less than *twenty-three days*? Why were not these two letters (if there were two) published by the committee? why should both be omitted? and why should not General WINDER have noticed this extraordinary delay, in the receipt of this very important dispatch, in any subsequent letter to the Secretary himself? Is our difficulty on this head lessened by recurring to the statement (made by the committee) of General WINDER's correspondence with Governor SNYDER? According to this, General WINDER first wrote to Governor SNYDER on the 6th of August, advising him that part of the quota of Pennsylvania was destined to serve under his command; and this second letter was of the 8th of that month, stating that since his letter of the 6th he had received a letter from the Secretary of War, of the 17th of July, advising that the Pennsylvania quota (5000) were put under his command, and wishing that *as many of them as possible might be riflemen*. In neither of these letters does he call any troops to his aid; nor was it till the 17th of August, that he deemed it necessary to require even *one* regiment. On these facts we ask, how came General WINDER to know on the 6th of August, and so to inform Governor SNYDER, that any portion of the Pennsylvania quota was destined to serve under him if the Secretary's letter of the 17th of July, making this designation of the troops, was not received till the 8th? or why, knowing this designation on the 6th and 8th, and wishing to supply the deficiencies of the State of Maryland, and apprised of the arrival of the van of the enemy's fleet, as early as the 15th of July, and neither calling nor expecting aid

from Virginia? why, we repeat, under all these circumstances, delay to require the march of any portion of the Pennsylvania quota? and even as late as the 17th of August, amid all the alarms of the moment, and demonstrations of the enemy, require only a *single regiment*? To us this conduct is inexplicable; but on one of two conjectures, neither of which is honourable to the General. Preferring that, however, which stigmatizes our species least, we charitably put the failure to the account, not of federalism or of faction, but to the incompetency of a head, puzzled and embarrassed with a mass of duties too various and complicated for it to discharge.

Having taken this view of the General's conduct in assembling the forces destined for his command, we proceed lastly to consider the use he made of those he actually had; and under this head, as honest chroniclers, we shall not omit noticing the merits or the faults of others.

We shall say nothing of the business, or the bustle, the marches and counter marches, "from Eling to Aeton, and "Aeton to Eling," which occupied the General and his troops from the 9th of July to the 18th of August.

On the latter of these days he received advice that the enemy's fleet had entered, and was ascending the Patuxent in force; and on the 19th gave information that he had called for "the militia of the District of Columbia, for WEST'S and WILLIAM'S, and the Baltimore brigades, en masse, and for 500 men each from all the brigades on the western shore of Maryland, and the counties which border the Potomac on the Virginia side, and for General HUNGERFORD'S corps from the northern neck of Virginia."

On this day the Secretary of War instructed him "to push his cavalry into the neighbourhood of the enemy, (if their movements indicated an attack on Washington,) for the purpose of driving off horses and cattle and removing all supplies of forage on their route." And on the

22d he advised the General that "the Baltimore brigade would be at Bladensburgh that day, and suggested a demonstration by BARNEY's corps and other troops, on the right of Nottingham, which should menace the enemy's rear and his communications with his shipping."

The former of these orders was feebly attempted by the militia cavalry under the command of Colonel TILGHMAN, and Captain CALDWELL; the latter was unfortunately not attempted at all. On this day (the 22d) the enemy held a position at and near Nottingham, his force estimated by Colonel BEALL at 4000, and by Colonel MONROE at 6000, but destitute of cavalry and nearly so of field artillery. A light corps was now organised, composed of the 36th and 38th regiments of the line, two troops of dragoons, and three companies of the Columbia militia. This corps was ordered to meet the enemy, while the main body took a position about one mile in advance of the Wood-yard, and on the route which the enemy was expected to move towards Washington.

Our cavalry meeting the enemy (who had now put himself in motion) retired before him, and the advanced corps was ordered to fall back to the main body. Instead of pursuing the direct route to Washington, the enemy marched to Upper Marlborough, upon which General WINDER, fell back to the *Battalion Old-fields*. There the army was reviewed by the President and heads of department, on the morning of the 23d, its force amounting to 3200 effectives, with 17 pieces of field artillery. A second order was now given to the light troops to advance and attack the enemy, probably under the suggestions of the Secretary of War, that "pushing our pickets frequently and freely upon those of the enemy, were the means best calculated for circumscribing his supplies, for gaining a knowledge of his strength (of which the accounts were various,) and for preventing a stolen march, which was to be suspected."



It is however among the unaccountable things of this disgraceful campaign, that at this critical moment, when our first experiment was to be made upon the enemy, the commanding General should, under any pretence, choose to abstract himself from the army, and with so little explanation, either of his motives for so doing, or of the route he was to travel, as to authorise the report made by Colonel MONROE to General STANSBURY, during the night of the 23d, that "he had been at the camp of General WINDER; that there was an alarming silence with regard to the General, who had gone out to reconnoitre the enemy, and had not been heard of; that it was feared he was taken; and that General SMITH had, by *persuasion*, taken the command."

This extraordinary movement of the General (which by his own narrative turns out to be a mere freak, to do, in *proprie persona*, what any other General would have done by an aid-de-camp or an express, (*viz*: the ordering of General STANSBURY and Colonel STERRET to effect a junction with the main army) was fortunately without any ill effect. The *expected* battle which was to have been fought in his *absence*, did not take place. A few rounds of a rifle company at long shot, satisfied the order, and the light troops retired to the main body, which without annoyance stood in battle array till *sun-set*, when the General, who having by this time returned, and thinking it mere chivalry to wait longer for the enemy's attack, and not meditating any of his own, decamped for *Washington*; and, according to the report of the committee of Congress, gained the Eastern Branch bridge, in the District of Columbia, *by an extremely rapid and precipitate march.*"

The next morning brought advices that the enemy, who had quietly reposed himself three miles distant from the position from which we had thus hastily escaped, was now in full march for Bladensburgh. The contingency on which he was permitted or ordered to attack the Capitol had arisen. Our demonstrations had been those, not of capacity but of fol-

ly; not of force, but of weakness ;—we had deserted and destroyed our own flotilla *without fighting* ;—we had permitted him to land and to march to Nottingham and Marlborough *without fighting* ;—we had left him undisturbed at every point and at all times ;—we had now shamefully abandoned to him all the approaches to the Capitol by *flight*, and had left him nothing to fear, with regard to a communication with his fleet. He therefore could no longer hesitate: he accordingly raised his camp early on the 24th, and by a forced march, without cavalry and without Artillery, (excepting 2 small pieces and one howitzer, and these dragged by seamen) presented himself by 12 o'clock on the heights of Bladensburgh. This place had been left to the defence of General STANSBURY, and part of STRICKER'S Baltimore Brigades ;—these corps had arrived there in succession, and much wearied, by their march on the 22d and 23d. On the night of the latter Colonel MONROE reached this corps from General WINDER'S camp at the Old-fields, and advised STANSBURY to take the western route to Marlborough and *throw himself on the rear of the enemy*.\*

\* This fact (among others which are to be related) shews the lawless interference of a civil officer, a Secretary of State, notoriously destitute of military knowledge and military character, with the arrangements of the commanding General. WINDER orders STANSBURY to stand fast at Bladensburgh, (see page 55 of the documents) and to defend that avenue to the city—MONROE does all he can to make him throw it open, by advising a circuitous march and night attack of the enemy's rear, without concert with the commanding General, or even without knowing where the enemy was!—yet has this meddler escaped public censure! The truth is, that the moment for pursuing the policy suggested by MONROE had passed by. STANSBURY and BARNEY should never have advanced beyond the neighborhood of Marlborough, and should have taken a position (as suggested by the Secretary at War, in his letter of the 22d July,) on the enemy's flank and rear.—This measure alone, would, in all probability, have saved the city ;—and, besides, was the only disposition which would have saved Baltimore, had that been the enemy's object.

STANSBURY however kept his position, obeying the order he had received from General WINDER, until hearing that the main army had retired to the Eastern Branch bridge, leaving his corps uncovered, he retreated towards the city. Another and positive order carried him back to the neighborhood of Bladensburgh, where WINDER, pushing forward SMITH's brigade, (but leaving BARNEY's and MINOR's corps, the one at the Navy-Yard and the other at the Capitol) arrived in time to fight a battle on dispositions, not made by himself but by STANSBURY and SMITH, and their assistants Colonel MONROE and Mr. F. S. KEY. Of these dispositions we need say nothing, as the gentlemen to whom they have been principally imputed, were both ashamed of them;\* and the enemy despised them too much to employ

\* STANSBURY, in his report, says "whose plan this was, I know not, as it was not mine; nor did it meet with my approbation."

Colonel STERRET tells us, that "the first line formed on the battle ground, was changed under the direction of Colonel Monroe, who on this occasion observed to me "although you see that I am active you will please to bear in mind that *this is not my plan.*" If neither STANSBURY's plan, nor MONROE's, whose plan was it? The General in his narrative says, "I left General SMITH to make a disposition of *his troops*, and hastened to the bridge, where I found Colonel BEALL, whom I directed to proceed agreeably to the instructions he had received. I then rode to the battery, and upon enquiry I learned that General STANSBURY was on a rising ground on the left of his line. I immediately rode thither, and found him and Colonel MONROE together. The latter gentleman informed me that he had been aiding General STANSBURY to post his command, and wished me to proceed to examine it." They were on the point of doing this when some one quizzed our commander with an account of a great victory gained by General IZZARD, a General who was perhaps alone remarkable for taking uncommon pains to avoid gaining victories. Some time was of course lost by this pantomime, when, resumes the General, "the head of the enemy's column appeared. Some pieces of artillery and a company of riflemen were drawn from General SMITH's command to support our advanced artillery. They were posted hastily, and this was barely accomplished, when I was obliged to give orders to our artillery to open upon the

any manœuvring against them. They even threw themselves forward in *open order*; advanced *singly*; passed the bridge and the creek, and gained both flanks of our advanced corps. The General now ordered this to be supported;—but his own words can best describe what followed:—“Our advanced riflemen,” (PINKNEY’S corps) says the General, “now began to fire, and continued it for *half a dozen of rounds*, when I observed them to *run back to an orchard*. “They halted there, and seemed for a moment about *re-turning* to their original position, but in a few minutes *entirely broke*, and retired to the left of STANSBURY’S line. The advanced artillery immediately followed the riflemen, and retired on the left of the 5th Baltimore regiment, which had been pushed forward to sustain them.”

“The first three or four rockets fired by the enemy, being much above the heads of STANSBURY’S line,” they stood those very manfully; but “the rockets having now taken a more horizontal direction, a *universal flight* of the *centre and left* of STANSBURY’S brigade was the consequence. The 5th regiment and the artillery still remained, and I hoped would prevent the enemy’s approach; but they (the enemy) advancing *singly*, their fire annoyed the 5th *considerably*, when I ordered it to *retire* for the purpose of *putting it out of the reach of the enemy*. This order was however immediately countermanded, from an *aversion to retire before the necessity became stronger*, and from a *hope that the enemy would issue in a body*, and enable us to act upon him *on terms of equality*.\*

enemy, who was descending the street towards the bridge;—all *farther* examination (of what Colonel MONROE and General STANSBURY had done) and movement was now impossible.” From this detail it is evident that WINDER did not make the dispositions which MONROE and STANSBURY disavow. The question again recurs, who did make those dispositions?

\* This narrative has no parallel in military writing. The General (according to this) first ordered the retreat to put the corps *out of*

“ But his fire *beginning* to annoy this corps (the 5th reg't.)  
 “ still more, by *wounding* several of them, and a strong  
 “ column passing up the road and deploying on its left, I  
 “ ordered them to retire :—their retreat became a flight of  
 “ *absolute and total disorder.*”

BEALL's regiment was posted “ on a height to the right  
 “ of the road, which commanded the whole ground occupied  
 “ by STANSBURY's brigade.” The story of this regiment is  
 soon told. “ It (says the General) gave *one or two ineffec-*  
 “ *tual* fires and fled.” This retreat completes the account  
 of the fortunes and the fate of the *front line*, which could  
 not be rallied ; and which displayed all its activity in mak-  
 ing its way *home*.

For the conduct of the *second line*, composed of SMITH's  
 militia brigade, the 36th regular regiment, one battalion of  
 the 38th, a detachment of the 12th and Barney's corps of  
 seamen and marines, and the whole of our cavalry, we  
 must hear others, the General not having had these under  
 his particular notice or observation. We shall accordingly  
 begin with Commodore BARNEY's letter of the 29th of Au-  
 gust, merely remarking that this officer, notwithstanding the

*reach of the enemy* ; which, no doubt, would have kept them out of  
 harm's way. But he countermanded this order from an *aversion to re-*  
*tire before it was necessary*, and from a *hope* that the enemy, instead of  
 advancing *singly*, and popping at him like cowards, would come out in  
 a *body*, and fight him on *equal terms* :—that is, by shewing as large a  
 mark as he did. Well, to indulge the General in this particular, they  
 did at length *so* come out, and began to deploy on his left ; when (in-  
 stead of accepting the *equal terms* for which he had panted) he again  
 ordered a *retreat*, which became a *flight of absolute and total disorder* !  
 Why, we may ask, did he permit them to approach him *singly* ? Why  
 at least not drive in their skirmishers ? why keep three or 400 cavalry  
 to look on ? why not charge this line of *open order* ? But “ the caval-  
 ry,” says the General, “ would do any thing but *charge* !” (See the  
 note to General ARMSTRONG's report.) If Jackson had not behaved  
 differently at New-Orleans, even his Kentucky and Tennessee men  
 would have been defeated.

pressure in front, had been unaccountably forgotten at the Eastern Branch bridge, (though the direction of the enemy's march was now known to be by Bladensburgh) and would have remained there much against his own opinions and wishes, if he had not accidentally met the President and Secretary at War, who advised him to hasten his march to Bladensburgh and join the army. "We came up (says the Commodore) at a trot. We took our position on the rising ground; (between SMITH's militia and BEALL's) posted our marines and seamen, and waited the approach of the enemy. During this period the engagement continued, the enemy advancing and our army *retreating*, apparently *in much disorder*. At length the enemy made his appearance before us and halted. After a few minutes I ordered an 18 pounder to fire upon him, which completely cleared the road. A second and third attempt of the same kind were made to come forward, but all were destroyed. They then crossed over into an open field, and attempted to flank us—There he was met by three 12 pounders, the marines and seamen acting as infantry, and was again totally cut up. *By this time not a vestige of the American army remained*, except a body of five or 600, on a height on my right, and from which I expected great support. The enemy now pushed up their sharp-shooters and began to outflank us on the right. Our guns were pointed that way, when he pushed up the hill towards the American corps, stationed as above described, who, to my great mortification, *made no resistance*, giving a fire or two and retired. Finding the enemy now in my rear, and no means of defence, I ordered my officers and men to retire."

General SMITH says "the dispersion of the front line caused a dangerous opening on our left, of which the enemy was availing himself, when I ordered Colonel BRENT with the second regiment to take a position still more to our left, and he was preparing to execute this order when

“orders came from General WINDER for the whole of the troops to retreat.”

Here ends the account of fighting—what remains of the story, is but a vexatious repetition of orders to halt and form, and counter orders to retire. When what was left of the army reached the Capitol the Secretary of War suggested the occupation of that building, and believed “that the 36th and 38th, (who had not fired a gun) with those of BARNEY’s corps that could be collected, would be sufficient to maintain it, *provided* that General WINDER could assure them of such exterior support as would be necessary to a supply of *bread, water and ammunition.*” The General answered peremptorily that he could not, and proposed to retire behind Georgetown,” this opinion Colonel MONROE warmly enforced by arguments which he has since employed in his report. The Secretary of War then assented to the measure which appeared to have been previously discussed and adopted by the General and the Secretary of State, and perceiving that no order was given to apprise the Navy Department of the determination to cross Rock Creek, and to prevent the capture of the Navy Yard, he despatched Major BELL to announce the retreat of the army.

The garrison of fort Washington was not more distinguished than their fellow labourers, probably less so—the fort was *destroyed and abandoned*, though *pressed by no enemy on either side*. It is true that the covering corps, was, against all military rules, removed to the Virginia side of the Potomac by an order from the President and General WINDER, (see General YOUNG’s report.)

It may be proper to add to this detail a statement of the force employed on this occasion on both sides. Our present lights with regard to the British army reduce it below Doctor CATLET’s estimate, which was 3540, and the fact is well established, that the *light brigade* alone, not exceeding 1500 men, defeated our army.

The strength of our several corps was as follows, viz :

*Dragoons.*

Dragoons of the United States,	140	
Maryland militia Dragoons,	260	
Columbia District,	40	
Virginia, (a company, Colonel Minor,)	100	
	<hr/>	540

*Regular Infantry and Marines.*

36th Reg't. 1 Battalion 38th, 1 Company 12th,	500	
Seamen and Marines,	600	
	<hr/>	1100

*Militia.*

Stansbury's Brigade,	1353	
Part of Stricker's,	956	
Smith's Brigade and Cramer's Battalion,	1800	
Young's Brigade,	450	
Beall's Regiment,	800	
Minor's Regiment,	600	
Sundry detachments of Volunteers and Militia,	450	
	<hr/>	6409

Total, 

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 8049

20 pieces of field Artillery of different calibers.

Our loss in killed and wounded was, Killed, 10

~~4~~ Wounded, 30

Total, 

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 40

BRITISH FORCES.

The following Brigade Orders, &c. belonging to Capt. Blanchard, of the Royal Engineers, were found near the exploded well at Greenleaf's Point.

*H. M. Ship Tonnant, August 17, 1814.*

D. O.

The Troops will be Brigaded as follows :

1st Brigade, Colonel Brooke, 44th Regiment,  
4th, or King's own,  
44th Regiment.

*An error 26 men under the care  
of 26*



2d Brigade, Colonel Patterson, 21st Regiment,  
 21st Royal Scots, Fusileers,  
 2d Battalion Royal Marines,  
 Detachment of Marines under Captain Robins.

Light Brigade, Colonel Thornton, 85th Regiment,  
 85th Light Infantry,

4 }  
 21 } Light Infantry Companies, Maj. Jones, 4th Regiment.  
 44 }

One Company of Marine Skirmishers under Lieut. Stevens,  
 Colonial Marines under Capt. Read,

The three pounder under Capt. Carmichail, Royal Artillery.

The whole amounting to about 3500.

Our deductions from the whole of this exposition are,

1st. That the force destined to this service was sufficient.

2d. That the measures taken by the President and War  
 Department were proper and seasonable.

3d. That the failure to collect a larger force was owing  
 to the remissness of the commanding General, and negli-  
 gence or apathy of the executive of Maryland.

4th. That the force actually collected was sufficient to  
 have beaten the enemy, but that it behaved badly\* and was  
 wretchedly commanded.

\* If farther proof of this fact be necessary we will refer to the fol-  
 lowing extracts, made from the documents collected by the investigat-  
 ing committee :

“Without all doubt (says General ARMSTRONG) the determining  
 cause of our disasters is to be found in that love of life, which, in many  
 of the corps, predominated over a love of country and of honour.”

“It, (the battle) says Mr. RUSH, Attorney General of the United  
 States, commenced in a very few minutes, and in not many more some  
 of our troops *began to break.*”

“The imposing front of the enemy (says Colonel STENNET) was never  
 disconcerted by the fire of the artillery or the riflemen, and the  
 brigade of General STANBURY was seen to *fly* as soon as the action be-  
 came serious. No second line of reserve appeared to support us, and  
 we *were outflanked and defeated in as short a time as such an operation  
 could well be performed.*”

## APPENDIX.

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*Letter of General Armstrong, late Secretary of War, to the  
Committee of Congress.*

LABERGORIE, 17th October, 1814.

SIR,

AN occasional absence from the place of my usual residence, prevented me from receiving the letter you did me the honor to write to me on the 5d instant, until this morning. I now hasten to fulfil the injunctions of the committee in giving to them "such information, views and remarks, as are deemed pertinent to the subject of their inquiry, and best calculated for an impartial investigation of the causes of the success of the enemy in his recent enterprises against the metropolis and the neighboring town of Alexandria."

"Of the *manner* in which the public buildings and other property were destroyed and of the *amount* thereof," I know nothing personally, nor have I recourse to any documents which would enable me to make a satisfactory communication on these points.

The enemy's success in his late enterprise against the city of Washington, &c. must necessarily be traced to one of two causes: the *incompetency* of the means projected and employed to repel his attack, or, the *mismanagement* or *misconduct* of these.

Under the *first* head may be noticed what was the force contemplated and ordered by the government as competent? What was that actually assembled and employed? And what other, or additional, means were at the disposal of the government?

The second head would furnish an inquiry strictly military, viz: Whether all was done, that was necessary and practicable, by the commanding general and the troops under his direction? For such an inquiry, I am not prepared, and what, under either head, I may be able to offer, will but be a detail of facts, coming within my official cognizance, without any admixture of opinions.

Early in the month of June last, a call was made on the war department for a general report of the numbers of regular troops and militia, employed by the United States, and the distribution which had been made of these, for the service of the present campaign. This statement was promptly rendered, and submitted by the president to the heads of departments. It is not recollected, that any alteration of the provisions exhibited by this document, was either made or suggested. A reference to it will shew, what was the force then deemed competent for the defence of military district No. 5, of which the city of Washington made part.\*

The better to secure the seat of government, &c. from the attacks of the enemy, and to relieve the war department from details not making part of its regular duties, and incident to district No. 5, as then constituted, a new military district, comprehending that portion of country lying between the Rappahannoc and Potomac rivers, the district of Columbia and the state of Maryland, was created on the 2d of July last, and placed under the command of brigadier general Winder, who had been specially assigned by the president to that service.

In an interview with this officer, soon after his appointment, his attention was invited to the state of the existing defences within the limits of his command; to an examination of the different routes by which the enemy might approach the capitol; to the selection of points best calculated to retard and to stop his movements, if directed thereto, and to the indication of such new defences, field or permanent, as he might deem necessary and practicable. The better to enable him to discharge these and other duties, a military staff, composed of an assistant adjutant general, an assistant inspector general and two assistant topographical engineers, were assigned to the district.

On the first of July a consultation of the heads of departments was had. The questions proposed for discussion were two:

1st. By what means can the seat of government and Baltimore be defended, in case the enemy should make these cities objects of attack?

2d. Should he select the former, will his approach be made by way of the Potomac, or by that of the Patuxent?

On these questions I took the liberty of offering the following statements and opinions:

\* This document is in the possession of the president. No copy of it was retained by me.

1st. That the principal defence to be relied upon, for either place, is militia; that besides the artillerists, composing the garrisons of forts M·Henry and Washington, about one thousand regular troops only can be collected, viz: the 36th regiment, one battalion of the 38th, two troops of dragoons, two companies of the 10th, ordered from North Carolina and believed to be on their march, one company of the 12th and two companies of sea-fencibles; that the number of militia called into service, should be proportioned to the known or probable strength of the enemy, and be taken from the states of Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania; that it is not believed that the enemy will hazard a blow at either place, with a force less than five thousand men; that to repel one of this extent, we should require at least double that number of militia; that these should be assembled at some intermediate point between Baltimore and the district of Columbia, leaving the sedentary, or undrafted militia of both places, an auxiliary force at the disposition of the commanding general, and that arms and ammunition were in depot and ready for their supply. (Under this head, the secretary of the navy stated, that the removal or destruction of the flotilla, would put at his disposition between six and eight hundred seamen, and that the marines then in barracks exceeded one hundred.)

2d. That the navigation of the Potomac is long and sinuous, and, if not doubtful as to practicability by large ships, is at least uncertain in relation to the time its ascent may occupy; while that of the Patuxent is short and safe, and may be calculated with sufficient precision for military purposes; that should the enemy ascend the former, his object is unmasked; he at once declares his destination, and of course leaves us at liberty to concentrate our whole force against him; that on the other hand, should he ascend the Patuxent, (or South river) his object is uncertain: it may be the flotilla, or Baltimore, or Washington; and that as long as his point of attack is unknown, so long must our force remain divided; that these considerations suggest the preference he will probably give to the Patuxent, but that this route is not without objections; that a separation from his fleet and a land march of twenty miles through a country covered with wood, and offering at every step strong positions for defence, becomes inevitable; that if these circumstances be turned to proper account against him, if he be not absolutely stopped, his march will be much retarded;

that this state of things, on which every wise general will calculate, renders necessary a provision train, or the establishment of small intermediate posts, to keep open his communication with his shipping; that the loss of these would make his situation perilous; and that should the main battle be given near Washington, and be to him disastrous, or even doubtful, his destruction is complete; that after all, believing he will not hazard the movement but with a very superior force, or one he thinks such, it is also believed that he will prefer this route.

Conformably to these opinions, an order was taken to assemble a corps and form a camp at such point between the city of Washington and Baltimore as might be selected by the commanding general.

On the 4th of July, the militia requisition of that date was issued; and of that requisition,

Two thousand effectives from the quota of Virginia; five thousand from that of Pennsylvania; six thousand, the whole quota of Maryland, and two thousand, the estimated number of the militia of the district, were put at the disposition of the commanding general. General Stewart's brigade was already in service, under the authority of the state, and had been supplied with arms, ammunition, tents, &c. by the war department.

At a later period, when discovered that the drafts could not be brought together but slowly and with difficulty, a call upon the militia en masse was suggested by the general and immediately authorised.

Of the force actually assembled and employed I cannot speak with precision, as no return of these troops had been made to the war department during my connection with it. In the letter of the commanding general of the 27th of August, he states the whole force assembled at Bladensburgh, on the 24th of that month, at five thousand men; a number less by two thirds than that which had been required. This amazing deficiency is thus accounted for by him: "the slow progress of draft, and the imperfect organization, with the ineffectiveness of the laws to compel them to turn out, rendered it impossible to procure more. The militia of this state and of the contiguous parts of Virginia and Pennsylvania were called en masse; but the former militia law of Pennsylvania had expired on the 1st of June or July, and the one adopted in its place is not to take effect, in organizing the militia, before October. No aid, therefore, has been received from that state."

The third and last point of inquiry under this head is, What other, or additional means of defence were within the reach of government.

Of *naval* means I am not a competent judge, nor do I know what, of this description, were actually employed, nor what it was possible to have superadded; but of those strictly military, I know none within the view of this question that were omitted. It may be supposed that permanent fortifications should have been multiplied; yet of works of this character but one was suggested from any quarter entitled to respect, and this was a committee of bankers, who thought a new work on the Potomac and below fort Washington, desirable. To this suggestion it was answered, that a small work would be unavailing, and that to erect one of sufficient size and strength was impracticable, for want of money. An offer was then made to supply that want by loaning to the United States \$200,000, on condition that this sum should be devoted to the special object of defending the district. An agreement to this effect was made, and the money promised to be paid into the treasury on the 24th of August. The events of that day put an end to the business, and at the same time furnished evidence of the fallibility of the plan, had it even been executed, by shewing that no works on the Potomac will, of themselves, be a sufficient defence for the seat of government. The considerations which governed my own opinion on this subject, and which may have governed that of others, were, that to put Washington hors d'insutte, by means of fortifications, would, from physical causes, among which is the remoteness from each other of the several points to be defended, have exhausted the treasury; that bayonets are known to form the most efficient barriers, and that there was no reason, in this case, to doubt beforehand the willingness of the treasury to defend itself.

In this brief statement you are presented with a view of the force contemplated and ordered by the government; of the means taken to assemble that force through the usual medium of the commanding general;\* of that actually assembled and employed, and lastly, of my impressions in relation to any other or additional means of defence.

\* His exertions were occasionally aided, and his authority enforced by the War Department; see Colonel Tayloe's letter enclosed, and let me pray that this gentleman may be examined on the subject of it by the committee.

I now proceed to the second subject of inquiry, the employment of the means we had and the conduct of the troops.

On the 19th of August, was received the first notice of the arrival of admiral Cochrane in the bay, and on the same day advices were brought, that he was entering and ascending the Patuxent. These facts were communicated to the general, and he was instructed to take a position near the enemy. On the 22d he was advised to hang on their rear and flank a heavy corps, while he opposed to them another in their front. My reasons for thus advising him were three: if Baltimore was the object of the enemy, this disposition interposed a corps between them and that city; if they aimed at Washington, it menaced their communication with their fleet and the security of their return, and was therefore most likely to hold them in check; and lastly, it did not forbid a concentration of force in their front, at a later period and by a forced march. On the evening of the 22d, I repaired to the army and found it at the *Old-fields*, six or eight miles distant from the enemy. A part of the corps, contemplated for the service mentioned in the preceding article, had joined general WINDER, and of the other part (under general Stansbury) no correct account could be given. I took this occasion to urge the necessity of a speedy concentration of our force, and of the usefulness of pushing our piquets frequently and freely upon those of the enemy, as the best means of circumscribing his supplies; of gaining a knowledge of his strength (of which the accounts were various) and of preventing a stolen march which was to be suspected. I was glad to find the general entertained similar views, and that they were in a train of execution.— In the afternoon of the 23d I returned to Washington, and during the night of that day the president transmitted to me the letter, of which that which follows is a copy:

“The enemy are advanced six miles on the road to the Wood-yard, and our troops retiring. Our troops were on the march to meet them, but in too small a body to engage. General Winder proposes to retire till he can collect them in a body. The enemy are in full march for Washington. Have the materials prepared to destroy the bridges.

JAMES MONROE.

“Tuesday, 9 o'clock. You had better remove the records.  
“*The President of the U. States.*”

On the morning of the 24th, I received a note from gen. Winder, informing me of his retreat and the approach of the enemy, and "asking counsel from me, or from the government." This letter was late in reaching me. It had been opened, and passed through other hands. The moment I received it, I hastened, with the late secretary of the treasury, to the general's quarters. We found there, the president, the secretary of the navy, and the attorney general. Gen. Winder was on the point of joining the troops at Bladensburg; whither, it was now understood, the enemy was also marching. I took for granted, that he had received the *counsel* he required; for to me, he neither stated doubt nor difficulty, nor plan of attack or of defence. This state of things gave occasion to a conversation, principally conducted by the president and the secretary of the treasury, which terminated in an understanding, that I should repair to the troops, and give such directions as were required by the urgency of the case. I lost not a moment in fulfilling this intention, and had barely time to reconnoitre the march of the enemy and to inform myself of our own arrangements, when I again met the president, who told me, that he had come to a new determination, and that *the military functionaries should be left to the discharge of their own duties, on their own responsibility.* I now became, of course, a mere spectator of the combat.

If our field combinations were not the most scientific, it ought to be recollected, that many of our troops were incapable of receiving those of the best form,\* and that circumstances had rendered the order of battle, on our part, nearly fortuitous. "Much the largest portion of our force," says the general, in his letter of the 27th of August, "arrived on the ground when the enemy were in sight, and were disposed of to support, in the best manner, the position which gen. Stansbury had taken—they had barely reached the ground before the action commenced."

These facts may also explain, why we had no guns in battery in the line of the bridge over which the enemy passed? why a brick house, which infiladed that bridge and was partially fortified, should not have been unroofed and occupied? and why a frame store house should have been left to cover

\* Upon my enquiring, why the dragoons had not been embodied, masked, and made to charge the right flank of the enemy, the general replied, that an officer of that corps had assured him, that his men could not be brought to a charge.



the head of the enemy's column and its subsequent display ? &c. &c.

If, also, the most efficient corps of the army was left out of the original arrangement, and but got into the line when other parts of it "were retreating and apparently in much disorder," it will not be forgotten, that this corps was distinct and independent, and that the general had no authority, of right, to command it. I witnessed the disquietude of the gallant officer who led this corps, at having been assigned to a duty which, in his own strong language, "but required a corporal and six men." The lateness with which he got into a post of more distinction, I consider as one of the causes of the disasters of the day : but without all doubt, the determining cause of these, is to be found in that love of life which, in many of the corps, predominated over a love of country and of honor. In illustration of this fact, I refer to the official reports of gen. Winder and of com. Barney, and shall close this letter by adopting the opinion of the former, "that the contest was not maintained as obstinately as could have been desired, but was by parts of the troops sustained with great spirit and prodigious effect; and had the whole of our force been equally firm, I am induced to believe, that the enemy would have been repulsed, notwithstanding all the disadvantages under which we fought."

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

With very great respect,

Your most obedient servant,

JOHN ARMSTRONG.

P. S.—On what may particularly relate to Alexandria, I beg leave to refer to my official letter to gen. Young, of the 24th of August, and to my note to capt. Dyson, and his reply, of the 29th. It may be, that no copy of the first was kept, in which case the original may be called for.

J. A.

*Hon. Col. Johnson, chairman, &c.*

*Extracts from Mr. G. W. Campbell's Letter to the investigating Committee.*

"When I inquired, whether the late movements of the troops were made pursuant to his (gen. ARMSTRONG'S) advice, or with his approbation, and what plan of operations

was determined on to oppose the further progress of the enemy; and also, whether our army would have the benefit of his suggestions and advice, in directing its future movements: he gave me to understand, that the movements which had taken place, were not in pursuance of any plan or advice given by him; that general Winder having been appointed to the command of the district, including the city, and the means assigned for its defence placed at his disposal, he was considered as having the direction of their application; and it was to be presumed he had formed such plan for defending the city, as he deemed best suited to the emergency and the means he possessed; and that interposing his opinion might be considered indelicate, and perhaps improper, unless he had the approbation of the executive for so doing; in which case any assistance that his suggestions or advice could render, should be afforded."

Mr. Campbell had suggested to the President that Mr. Armstrong, from a sense of delicacy, would not interfere with the arrangements of gen. Winder, without authority from him—"The president replied, as I understood him, that general Armstrong might have known, any proper order given by him, would readily meet with the executive sanction, and that there was no doubt, any suggestions from him would be duly attended to by general Winder. Upon my remarking, I had reason to believe, without his approbation, the secretary would not interpose his opinion, or take any part in the business of the day, the president observed, he would speak to him on the subject. The president, the secretary of war, and myself, were then on horseback. The president joined the secretary, and some conversation took place between them, the purport of which I did not hear.

"The president after parting from the secretary, observed to me, he had spoken to general Armstrong on the subject I had named to him, and that no difficulty, he presumed, would occur in the case; that any suggestions made by the secretary would, without doubt, receive due attention from the commanding general; and should any objection be made on the ground of authority, the matter might readily be adjusted, as he would not himself be far distant, and the secretary's order, (I presumed it was meant in writing,) given on the field, if necessary, would be considered as carrying with it the executive sanction.



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